

Expert's thoughts

SARAH AYESIGA, AG ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER FOR SPECIAL NEEDS AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE EDUCATION MINISTRY

"Sometimes teachers do not consider students with special needs. They mostly concentrate on the normal ones and this greatly hinders their performance. However, the community needs to know that students with special needs can do the same things as normal students and if well attended to, can become important people in future."



POLICY/PRACTICE

ESSENTIALS AND ALTERNATIVE IDEAS

Inclusive education can break stigma on special needs children

Students with special needs are usually excluded in the Ugandan education curriculum in terms of teaching and infrastructure. Implementation of the policy on inclusive education can make it easy for children with special needs to learn with normal ones.

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Sustainable Development Goal number four provides for a sure inclusive and equitable quality education for promoting life-long learning opportunities for all. Inclusive education happens when children with or without disabilities participate and learn together in the same classes.

According to Robert Stuart Oyesigye, the general secretary of the Association of Special Needs Education Teachers in Uganda, students with special needs currently have special education programmes which are designed for those who are mentally, physically, socially and emotionally delayed.

However, he notes that when a child with disabilities attends classes alongside peers who do not have disabilities it breaks all barriers that exist between them.

"In Uganda currently, students with special needs are trained in separate institutions. They only associate with their peers who also have special needs. They are rarely, if at all, given the opportunity to interact with normal students. This, in a way, keeps them segregated by a big part of the community that perceives them as unable to perform," he says.

Oyesigye says inclusion incorporates basic values that promote participation, friendship, and interaction. He believes that if the policy of inclusion is implemented students with special needs will get involved in all activities.

"Students with special needs should be in a normal learning environment, associate with normal students such that they can also try out the challenges that normal students are undertaking. This will give them hope and they overcome self-pity," he explains.

Implementation in offing

According to Sarah Ayesiga, the Ag assistant commissioner for Special needs and Inclusive Education in the



Education ministry, true inclusion in education happens only when a whole school embraces diversity and creates an environment where everyone belongs.

"The government has done much in regards to betterment of life for students with special needs but more can still be done. There are several drafts that have been tabled in Parliament about students with special needs but they have not been implemented mostly because of financial constraints. However, last year we agreed that we should again table the Uganda National Development of Inclusive Education Policy (UNIEP) whose main aim will be to advocate for inclusive education," she says.

Ayesiga says that they have observed that students with special needs are still being excluded in the Ugandan education curriculum in terms of enrollment, attendance, participation, attainment and progression.

"Some students with special needs are enrolled in schools but they are not catered for in terms of infrastructure and scholastic materials which limits their participation," she says.

Break the stigma

Amos Iyeko Odongo a Kyambogo University Bachelor's of Education in Special Needs student, says inclusive education will create an atmosphere where children with special needs are accepted in the community.

He says some people in the community still "do not know the challenges of people with special needs because they rarely get the chance to interact with them."

"When students with special needs learn in the same environment with normal students they will be accepted and probably the normal ones will sensitise the community about them," he says.

He, however, notes that inclusive education will only succeed if the government provides learning materials such as braille machines (to help blind students) and hearing aids that will enable special needs students to compete favourably.

He also notes that Uganda still has few sign language teachers whom he thinks are essential in effecting the inclusive education policy if it is to start.

EXPERT COMMENT

Inclusive education should be implemented



"I am deaf but that has not stopped me from doing my work. I am currently a trainer for students with disabilities."

BONNY BUSINGYE, A TRAINER FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AT KYAMBOGO UNIVERSITY



"You cannot say there is fair education for all when the structures only favour normal students. It is still difficult for students

with special needs to access learning facilities."

EDNAH MPIREIRWE, BACHELOR'S IN TEACHERS EDUCATION WITH SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENT

Students with special needs are still excluded in the curriculum in terms of teaching aids and infrastructure. PHOTO BY RACHEL MABALA

NUMBERS

According to the Situation Analysis of Children in Uganda Report 2015 by UNICEF, Uganda has about 2.5 million children with some form of disability and of these; only 5 per cent are able to access education within an inclusive setting in regular schools while only 10 per cent access education through special schools and annexes.

The report adds that many schools supposed to provide inclusive education are poorly equipped to assess or meet the various needs of children with disabilities and that as a result; several children with disabilities are not attending formal education in these schools and the few that join and end up dropping out before completing the primary cycle.