

# Theoretical Analysis of Challenges of Training and Adjudicating Special Needs Education Presentations at the Kenya Music Festivals

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## Abstract

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in its effort to tap, nature and develop talent in the youth has organized co-curricular activities alongside classroom learning with a view to developing all rounded students. The co- objective of the Ministry is a holistic human resource development in terms of socio-cultural, physical, moral and spiritual growth. The core- mandate of the Kenya Music Festival is to effectively rally, monitor, manage and instill morality in the society. This in essence is expressed to enhance willingness, to shape and provide national identity and patriotism. It serves to critique and validate the policy systems of the Kenyan nation. Music brings together musicians and other artists from within Kenya and outside thus fostering national unity and integration. In these festivities, learners and trainers from all Kenyan educational institutions right from Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE), Primary, Secondary, Special schools, Tertiary institutions as well as universities converge together to expose their talents regardless of their social background thus rendering them equal. The Kenya Music Festival has been in existence for the last eighty eight (88) years and has been on the forefront in raising awareness of the social-cultural challenges and emerging issues that directly affect the Kenyan society with the youth at the centre stage. The study utilized a qualitative study based on a critical analysis method. Through this method, criticism was a positive evaluation of ideas. The critical issue of challenges of training and adjudicating special needs education presentations at the Kenya Music Festival in light of holistic human resource development were critically analyzed and a healthy judgment that rapidly offered remedial measures perpetuated as socio-cultural, physical, moral and spiritual growth conclusions were deducted.

**Keywords:** Kenya Music Festival, Adjudicating, Special Needs Education (SNE)

## 1. Introduction

To adjudicate means to pass value judgment. Adjudication is a process where a neutral person, usually empowered by an agency to make binding decisions, is given the task of and rendering a decision judgment. An adjudicator must therefore exercise high levels of competence for the value judgment to be credible. An adjudicator is presented with a number of items by different groups or individuals and is tasked with making the crucial decision on who emerges the winner of the specific category. Since there is no formal training of adjudicators, it is their experience and exposure that determines the competence level of their value judgment. The core- mandate of the Kenya Music Festival is to effectively rally, monitor, manage and instill morality in the society. This in essence is expressed to enhance willingness, to shape and provide national identity and patriotism. It serves to critique and validate the policy systems of the Kenyan nation. Music brings together musicians and other artists from within Kenya and outside thus fostering national unity and integration.

In these festivities, learners and trainers from all Kenyan educational institutions right from ECDE, Primary, Secondary, Special schools, Tertiary institutions as well as universities converge together to expose their talents regardless of their social background thus rendering them equal. The Kenya Music Festival which has been in existence for the last eighty eight (88) years has been on the forefront in raising awareness of the social-cultural challenges and emerging issues that directly affect the Kenyan society with the youth at the centre stage.

## 2. Problem Statement

The Kenya Music Festival involves both students with special needs and non-disabled students. The adjudicators are therefore expected to offer special accommodations to the adjudication of the special needs students. The music festival brings together adjudicators with different levels of experience and from all corners of the country. Since there is no formal training of adjudicators, it is their experience and exposure that determines the competence level of their value judgment. The adjudicators are therefore expected to offer special accommodations to the adjudication of the special needs students, which is not easy since they have no formal training. This prompted the need for a theoretical analysis on critical challenges of training and adjudicating special needs education presentations at the Kenya Music Festival

### 3. Research Objectives

1. A theoretical analysis on the categories of special education learners at the Kenya Music Festival
2. A theoretical analysis on the items presented by learners with SNE during the Kenya Music Festival
3. A theoretical analysis on the challenges of training performances of learners with SNE at the Kenya Music Festival
4. A theoretical analysis on challenges in adjudication of performances of learners with SNE at the Kenya Music Festival

### 4. Research Methodology

The study utilized a qualitative study based on a critical analysis method. According to this method, criticism is a positive evaluation of ideas. It is the judgment of things in the light of clear and distinct ideas. The researcher institutes and perpetuates more enduring and extensive values until he or she reaches the clarification of the issues in question. Critical issues are normally resolved against a background of competing and even conflicting but intelligible stand points. The method seeks justification of all claims and practices. The Critical method has an interrogative outlook on issues, explanations and problems with a view to widen the scope of their interpretations and understanding. The critical issue on challenges of training and adjudicating special needs education presentations at the Kenya Music Festival in light of holistic human resource development were critically analyzed and a healthy judgment that rapidly offered remedial measures perpetuated as socio-cultural, physical, moral and spiritual growth conclusions were deduced.

### 5. Literature review

#### 5.1. Learners with Special Needs in Education.

The term learners with Special Needs in Education has in the past been used to refer to mainly four categories of persons with disabilities, namely; those with Hearing impairments, those with Mental challenges, those with Visual impairments and those with Physical handicaps. Education to these learners was mainly offered in special schools until the 1970s when units and integrated programmes were initiated. (Ndurumo 1987). Special Needs Education has continued to expand and currently includes learners with: Hearing impairments, Visual Impairments, Physical Impairments, Cerebral Palsy, Epilepsy, Mental challenges, Downs Syndrome, Autism, Emotional and Behavior disorders, Learning disabilities, Speech and Language disorders, Multiple handicaps, Gifted and talented, Deaf blind, Heading households, Orphaned, Abused and children Living in the streets (Ndurumo 1987)

#### 5.2 Learners with Special Needs in Education who present items in the Kenya Music Festival.

**Learners with Hearing Impairments** – this category comprises of learners who are totally deaf and Hard of Hearing. Their main challenge is communication both receptive and expressive. Learners use Sign Language as their main mode of communication.

**Learners with Visual Impairments** – these include learners who are totally blind and those with low Vision. Their main challenge is sight. Their primary sense is auditory supported by tactile stimulus.

**Learners with Mental Challenges** – these are learners with significantly sub average general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior .They have problems with understanding and perception.

**Learners with Physical Impairments** – these are learners with physical, neurological and chronic health impairments. Their main challenge being mobility and performing one or more motor activities due to muscular-skeletal disorders. Some of them have deformed upper or lower limbs while others lack the upper or lower limbs completely. Most of them move with support such as crutches and wheelchairs while some move without aid but their movement may be awkward due to deformity or absence of limbs.

**Learners with Cerebral Palsy** – this is a condition that occurs as a result of damage to the brain in the part that controls movement. This damage occurs mainly during birth or immediately after birth and is caused by a number of factors among them the behavior of the mother during pregnancy and the birth process among others. The main challenge with these learners is un-coordinated body movement, uncontrolled reflexes that interfere with speech and drooling among others.

**Learners who are Deaf Blind-** these are learners who are both deaf and blind. Their main mode of communication is touch.

#### 5.3 Items presented by learners with Special Needs in Education during the Kenya Music Festival

For a number of years, learners with Special Needs and especially those with Hearing Impairments (HI), Visual Impairments (VI), Physical Challenges (P C) and Mental Challenges (M C) have had a chance to present their items during the Kenya Music Festival. However recent years have witnessed increased participation of more categories of learners with Special Needs in Education. The list is now wider and learners with Cerebral Palsy

are now also included in the festival. Learners who are Deaf Blind participated for the first time in the 2014 Kenya Music Festival. The Festival syllabus (2014) has set aside 'African traditional folksong and dance' classes for the hearing Impaired, Visually Impaired, Mentally challenged and 'arrangement/adaptation', 'zilizopendwa' and 'instrumental' remain open for participation by any interested group of participants. Such items are adjudicated by any adjudicator without necessarily having background training in Special Needs Education. In the past there have been challenges of adjudication for learners with Special Needs presentations at the Kenya Music Festivals due to lack of basic adjudication training let alone the special training to deal with special needs learners presentations. This challenge is expected to continue and to become even more complex with the increase of the special needs categories that require even more accommodations both in training and adjudication.

## **6. Challenges in training performance of learners with SNE at the Kenya Music Festivals**

- 1) Time constraint. Given the above conditions of the learners, it is clear that training them to take part in any item in the Kenya Music Festival be it a set piece, dance or verse takes much more time than it takes "normal" learners.
- 2) Stress and anger may be expressed by some learners in the course of training. This is mainly due to frustration of the learner not being able to perform as well as they would wish to due to the limitation caused by the different disabling conditions. This may be the case of a learner with Physical challenges who may wish to dance as per the required dance style but is not able to do so or a learner who is V I who is limited in sight and is therefore not able to see the demonstration of the dancing style required.
- 3) Age of the learners which is a requirement for qualification to participate in the Kenya Music Festival. Most learners in all the above discussed areas may not meet the age requirements as recommended by the Kenya Music Festival. Due to the various disabling conditions, onset of disability and societal attitudes towards disability, most learners with SNE join school when they are already advanced in age.
- 4) In the case of learners with V.I the trainer experiences difficulties in the sense that these learners may not be able to use gestures or appropriate facial expressions as may be the requirement of the item being presented. Also, mastery of stage for these learners is an issue and they are likely to wobble from side to side. The trainer has no choice but to involve the use of 'touch' widely which is both time consuming and exhausting.
- 5) For learners with Physical challenges, movement is a problem and so the trainer has difficulties in having them make the recommended movements due to their disabling conditions. In most cases, this may not be achieved and the learners end up having different body movements as dictated by their conditions hence affecting uniformity of the dance movement.
- 6) Learners with Cerebral Palsy have distorted speech and so the challenge of pronunciation is experienced during training and actual presentation. The words in the music or dance do not come out clearly.
- 7) Learners with Hearing Impairments have problems with speech. They are allowed to use Kenya Sign Language as their mode of communication. The main problem experienced during training is having them use correct and uniform signs and having them have the same understanding of the signs being used by the interpreter.
- 8) Learners with Intellectual Difficulties have problems with understanding and perception. They may therefore have problems with mastery of content, relating meaning with performance and concentration on the task as their concentration span is also low coupled with forgetfulness.
- 9) Deaf Blind- since they cannot hear nor see, the challenge of training becomes quite obvious.

### **6.1 Challenges of adjudication of SNE items during the Kenya Music Festival**

Currently, adjudication of items presented by students with Special Needs in Education is done by adjudicators who also adjudicate in items presented by other learners without Special Needs. It is only items presented by learners with Hearing Impairments that are adjudicated by adjudicators with Special Needs Education training background and with knowledge of Kenyan Sign Language. The following have been some of the challenges experienced in adjudication of performance of learners with Special Needs Education.

- 1) Lack of adjudication guidelines for items presented by learners with Special Needs in Education. The guidelines have not been adapted to suit learners with special needs and therefore the judgment of their performances may not be fairly done since their special needs may not put into consideration depending on who the adjudicator is.
- 2) Lack of specialized training on how to adjudicate items presented by learners with special needs. Adjudicators do not undergo any special training where details and technicalities to do with every area of disability that is represented during the Kenya Music Festival are discussed. Lack of knowledge about some technical issues which may affect performances by some of the SNE learners may lead to a

misinformed judgment.

- 3) There are certain set criteria for adjudication of various items which an adjudicator puts into consideration before judging the performance. For example in adjudication of Musical compositions, certain issues such as the composition, satisfying the festival criteria, whether the composition meets the festival standards among many others are put into consideration. In judging a dance, an adjudicator may have to look at issues like co-ordination in singing, movements, stage entry, etc. While adjudicating the same for learners with SNE, a number of these considerations may not apply given the limitations of these learners. It would take time for an adjudicator to master the various limitations for the different SNE groups presenting. Sometimes, depending on the level of exposure of an adjudicator, he/she may mistake between what one disability group is able/not able to do as opposed to the other and therefore make misinformed judgment.
- 4) Attitude of some adjudicators that items presented by learners with Special Needs should be adjudicated by 'specialist' adjudicators i.e. those trained in SNE. In some cases, due to lack of knowledge, adjudicators do guide a certain SNE groups upon entering the stage to a Hall where SNE specialists may be adjudicating.
- 5) In open classes for example 'open choral singing' where learners with Physical Challenges and those with Visual Impairments compete against their able counterparts, some adjudicators due to lack of exposure on issues to do with disability use 'lack of uniformity' of movement against such learners.
- 6) Due to lack of exposure to SNE issues, an adjudicator may unknowingly make comments that may be abusive to a group e.g. criticizing learners with VI or PH due to lack of uniformity in their movements.
- 7) Some adjudicators depending on the level of exposure to issues of disability are carried away by emotions of pity and sympathy depending on the SNE group presenting on stage. Such feelings may affect their judgment.
- 8) Subjectivity and Biasness. In adjudication of items presented by learners with SNE and in the absence of prescriptive guidelines specific to this group, this cannot be avoided.

## 7. Conclusion

The entire Kenya Music Festival fraternity should be applauded for the spirit of inclusiveness that has seen learners with Special Needs in Education participate and compete favorably alongside their able bodied counterparts in the festivals thereby granting them equal opportunities as provided for in the constitution of Kenya (2010) and Basic Education Act (2013). However, lack of adequate appropriate knowledge in terms of adjudication process continue to be witnessed, and this undermines the entire adjudication process via subjectivity and biases which can be avoided through training and exposure. Provision of adjudication guidelines to be used specifically when learners with Special Needs are presenting items would go a long way in eliminating the biases witnessed.

## 8. Recommendations

1. The Executive Committee should consider having 'specialist' and 'adapted' adjudication guidelines' for use by the very special groups and the other categories of learners with SNE that present items in the Kenya Music Festival.
2. All adjudicators should undergo some specialized training on adjudication of SNE items so that as they adjudicate they have one mind set and therefore are able to make uniform or near uniform judgments.
3. Teachers trained in SNE already teaching in special and inclusive schools should as much as possible be trained and used to adjudicate items presented by learners with SNE during the music festivals.

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