

A Critical Analysis on Primary Schools Preparedness for the Transition of Autistic Children in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Autistic children, characterized by impaired social interactions, impaired communication, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviors, are also entitled to education just like the other children in the society. It is therefore important that primary schools in Kenya get prepared so that the children are able to transit to schools from their homes in order that upon their landing in schools, they find a soft and friendly environment. Transition to school will enable the autistic children also to realize their full potential in life. This study focused on the primary schools preparedness in terms of; infrastructure, specialized curriculum, policy knowhow, stakeholders and trained personnel towards the transition of autistic children in Kenya. The researchers decided to use qualitative research method and a critical analysis design. The literature used was analyzed through thematic analysis and content analysis. The study finally came up with possible recommendations to be undertaken by various educational and school stakeholders as follows; every primary school in Kenya should have the autistic child friendly infrastructure so that the autistic children get their education in the integrated mainstream set-up along with their non-disabled peers and their brothers and sisters. Curriculum developers should come up with enriched curriculum to balance the need of autistic children as it also strives to his/her non-disabled peers. Ministry of education needs to avail new policies specifically for the education of the autistic children. The researchers recommend that parents and caretakers of the autistic children should be given thorough training similar to that given to the teachers to ease the transition as they will be able to handle the autistic children professionally even from home. The researchers are of the opinion that it will be a good thing if all the primary school administrators will be trained in special needs especial on how to handle the autistic children. They recommend that a further research be conducted on other areas of preparedness primary schools need to focus on in order to enhance smooth transition of autistic children from home to school.

Key words: School preparedness, Transition, Autistic children, Infrastructure, Specialized curriculum, Policy knowhow, Stakeholders.

1.0 Introduction

There has been an alarming rise of autism globally since the children found to be autistic are currently twice the number of those that existed more than 10 years ago. The incidence of autism in the early 1990's was just one in every 10,000; while in 2000 the prevalence rose to six in every one thousand (Cobbe and Ngugi, 2008) hence autism ranks as the greatest childhood developmental disorder in America. In the U.K it's noted, autism affects approximately 535,000 individuals which is about 1 in every 110 (Batten et al, 2006). In the developing countries presently, there is no clear data on the prevalence of autism. Since no researcher has come up with such a data. However, in Kenya for example, the autism Society of Kenya (2005) has estimated an existence of more than 300 children with autism just in Nairobi, the capital city, alone (Cobbe and Ngugi 2008). This threat on the spread of autism urgently calls for primary schools in Kenya to put in place some form of preparedness in form of infrastructure, specialized curriculum, policy knowhow, stakeholders' preparedness and trained personnel. Being a newly recognized area of disability, previously the autistic children used to be educated alongside the other peers who are mentally challenged, in Kenya today children with autism attend special schools and special units although the exact figures are not known. This is why the researchers set out to critically analyze the primary schools preparedness for the transition of the autistic children in Kenya and propose possible recommendations that could help see all the primary schools in Kenya capable of handling any autistic child as this might increase the enrolment of such children into schools. The autistic children equally deserve education just like the "normal" children.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

It is indeed very sad to notice that after fifty years of independence, Kenyan Primary Schools are yet to get fully prepared for the transition of the autistic children. In Kenya today, there are very few schools for the autistic children despite the fact that the government of Kenya after the World Conference declared education for all even for persons with disability. A school in Nairobi, Kenya (City Primary) has been found to be the only primary school which is today well equipped with a unit and facilities that educates autistic children (Ariaro, 2011). In rural areas, there are a few special units allocated in the primary school with only a few trained teachers in special needs and with just about 30-40 autistic children lacking individual attention due to lack of

preparedness in terms of infrastructure, curriculum, policy and teacher training (Ariaro, 2011). This lack of preparedness has resulted into a barrier for the process of transition from home to Kenyan Primary Schools and this is why the researchers in this study sort to critically analyze on primary schools preparedness for the transition of autistic children in Kenya.

3.0 Purpose of the Study

The researchers sought to critically analyze the primary schools' preparedness for the transition of autistic children in Kenya. This followed the objectives which focused on the primary schools preparedness for the transition of the autistic children in Kenya.

4.0 Objectives

1. To explore the primary schools' infrastructure preparedness for the transition of autistic children in Kenya.
2. To critically analyze primary schools' preparedness with specialized curriculum for the transition of the autistic children in Kenya.
3. To critically analyze the primary schools' preparedness with policy know-how towards the transition of autistic children in Kenya.
4. To explore the primary schools 'stakeholders' preparedness towards the transition of autistic children in Kenya.
5. To critically analyze the primary schools' preparedness with trained personnel for the transition of autistic children in Kenya.

5.0 Research Questions

1. To what extent are the primary schools prepared with the infrastructure for the transition of autistic children in Kenya?
2. How are the primary schools prepared with the specialized curriculum for the transition of the autistic children in Kenya?
3. To what extent are the primary schools prepared with the policy know how towards the transition of the autistic children in Kenya?
4. How are the stakeholders of the primary schools prepared for the transition of autistic children in Kenya?
5. To what extent are the primary schools prepared with the trained personnel for the transition of the autistic children in Kenya?

6.0 Significance Of The Study

This research might be of great benefit to the stakeholders in the education of autistic children. The stakeholders in this case who might benefit from the study include: autistic children, teachers and parents of the autistic children, teacher trainers, ministry of education and even the school administrators. This study may assist those charged with the responsibility of providing the infrastructure in schools to do so in order to assist the autistic children. The government is called upon to provide additional funding to the schools in order to undertake this. When all the provision are put in place and the schools become child friendly for the autistic children, parents are going to minimize the act of locking up their autistic children in their rooms at home and they may start taking them to schools hence the transition rate of the autistic children from their homes to schools is going to increase.

7.0 Research Methodology

The research methodology the researchers have used in this article is a critical analysis employed on a qualitative research design method. The scholars looked into the observed literature through the desk and content analysis. In this study, the researchers extend their critique on the primary schools' preparedness towards the transition of autistic children in Kenya. The researchers sought to come up with recommendations on what should be put in place to ensure that schools are prepared for the transition of autistic children to enable these learners also face life with equal chance.

8.0 Theoretical Framework

8.1. Preparedness Theory

Helios Education Foundation in their common belief has a theory on preparedness in education that can change the living status and improvements of the communities. They believe that Primary schools are crucial for students as they acquire knowledge and skills that sets stage for them to succeed in their future career. The Helios Education Foundation theory on preparedness focuses on improving academics to all the school going pupils. This theory believes that pupils get access to an intensive, relevant and a tight curriculum which is more

challenging. For schools to avail a well prepared environment for pupils, it requires well qualified teachers in all the classrooms, have pupil centered classrooms where teachers are able to engage their pupils by guiding them to critically think and adopt an interdisciplinary approach to learning. (Peter et al 2005). Preparedness according to the Helios Education Foundation also requires teachers to develop an embedded teaching skills which are full of professionalism and good administrative skills. This theory also focuses on counseling as another very important aspect on schools preparedness as it is a vital part that when put in place, may assist pupils with various behavioral and academic difficulties adopt to new environments and situations.

8.2. Transition Theory

Transition is an occurrence of activities that produce outcomes to the assumption and difference about an individual within its environment hence resulting into a corresponding change in an individual's behavior and relationship (Schlossberg 1981). Transition Theory according to Schlossberg focuses on individuals 'transition in life. It gives procedures always put in place at the times of transition to enable the adolescence move from one stage to the other. It focuses on the ability of an individual to cope with transition. Schlossberg's Transition Theory model attempts to expose framework where all forms of transitions can be examined and possible solutions put in place. This theory describes highly complicated truths about human beings and how they tend to put up with challenges facing them in life. Schlossberg in his view about transition process, argues that "the process of transition requires very keen and steady study of peoples characteristics and their environmental interactions. Schlossberg says that transition requires new ways of how individuals are supposed to see themselves. Changes during transition are not necessarily connected to the individual's chronological age as some people go through the transition faster than others. Other individual get stagnated at one stage and totally fails to move on (Erikson 1950). This stage of an arrest is characterized by an ego that needs to be fully resolved in order to allow an individual to move on. Schlossberg Transition Theory model displays three major pillars influencing adaptation to transition, the first one is the feature displayed by the people facing the transition. The second one being the feature of the environment in which transition is taking place and lastly is the feature of the particular transition. These three major sets of factors interact during transition hence producing either an adaptation to the new situation or failure adapt to the new situation.

9.0 Critique Literature Review

9.1 Schools Preparedness

Careful preparations need to be put in place in order to make transition to schools as smooth as possible as education is the primary tool for developing the autistic children so as to make them become independent and as useful citizens as possible. It is a big challenge educating children with autism for parents, teachers and educational authorities (Manga, 2007). It is important for all the educational stakeholders to ensure that all primary schools in Kenya are prepared for the transition of the autistic children.

It is important for primary schools to provide a helping hand to the children with autism together with their parents at a time of transition by letting them understand the changes expectations and also to adjust to their feelings and requirements within a learning environment. Schools need to work together by exercising collaboration amongst various stakeholders in order to develop a better preparation for transition of children with autism. The stakeholders in this case include caretakers, parents, teachers and the government (Manga, 2007). When designing an intervention for supporting the preparedness of schools, it is important to note that Adults have got important role in education of their children. It is the schools that have to strive to be ready to receive children during transition and not children striving to fit in school. Schools termed to be fully prepared for transition "ready schools" are known to have flexible, adaptable, supportive environment, strong leadership, positive relationships, and connected to the community (Dockett & Perry, 2008).

9.2 Transition of Autistic Children

A child's preparedness for school depends entirely several intrinsic factors that most leads the Autistic children always to find adjustment for transition difficult and stressful. Some researchers studied the factors influencing the transition of children to school and concluded that they involve; age, gender, care experiences, social and emotional competences (Barnett and Taylor 2009). Male students have difficulties during transition to school than the female pupils. They also found out that children from poor families and those with special needs poorly adjust to new environments (Barnett and Taylor 2009). Children find it very difficult to begin schooling when they are still young. This calls now for all the stakeholders to come out and handle some of the complicated situations that might hinder the smooth transition of the autistic children into the primary schools.

9.3. Critical Analysis on Primary Schools' Infrastructure Preparedness for the Transition of Autistic Children in Kenya.

Autistic children, due to the nature of their disability need well established Basic facilities, installations and

services so as to create for them an autistic child friendly environment. Autistic children by their nature are very rigid and mostly prove to be resistant to change. (Manga, 2007). Autistic children according to Manga may want to use a particular type of toilet, drink from a particular type of cup, sit in a particular type of chair or sit in a particular type of classroom calls for a great care during transition by adapting the school environment according to their rigidity and resistance.

(Manga, 2007) explains that some autistic children may be affected with allergic and sensitivity problems like some get allergic to large sounds as others are so sensitive to bright light. He further indicated that some autistic children are so sensitive to particular fragrance or even dust from chalk particulars and so Manga advises relevant school stakeholders to acquire specific knowledge on the best infrastructure required for educating the autistic children. One other very important infrastructure (Manga, 2007) suggests that should be availed for autistic children in schools is an essential resource room with all the facilities available for ease in education and adjustments. The buildings within the school like the classrooms and other learning areas in the school need to be well prepared and quite structured in order to make the autistic children comfortable.

9.4 Critical Analysis on Primary Schools Preparedness with Specialized Curriculum for the Transition of the Autistic Children in Kenya

(Kilei&Mburu 2007) defines specialized curriculum as a curriculum where the regular curriculum is exhaustively and significantly modified to suit the target group of children like the “autistic” in this study. Curriculum developers according to Kilei&Mburu (2007) need to modify the regular curriculum by over 60% as autism are generally a severe disability. Kilei suggests areas of the regular that requires modification as; presentation materials, teaching methods, evaluation materials, teaching methods, evaluation procedures and use of specialized materials and equipment. On the other hand, Manga (2007) argues that the autistic children just like the non-disabled peers should follow the same curriculum (the regular curriculum) as they also need the all-round development of their personality and preparation for the future life. It calls for the curriculum developers to come up with an enriched curriculum that can balance the needs of an autistic child and also strives to put the child at par with the non-disabled children. This might enable autistic child to be able to compete fairly with the other children in the current and competitive job market

9.5 Critical Analysis on the Primary Schools’ Preparedness with Policy Know-How towards the Transition of Autistic Children in Kenya.

Teachers handling autistic children need to equip themselves with the policy knowhow in order to be relevant;

9.5.1. Organizational Behavior Policies

Ong’era (2009) points out that organizational behavior policies are those that are concerned with the smooth running of the school as they give descriptions on how students should move around the school, how schools should respond to lateness, procedures of completion of assignments, how both the teachers and pupils should dress while in school, health and safety issues and the promotion of healthy study skills.

9.5.2. Development and Maintenance of Constructive Relationships within Members of the School Community Policy.

Teachers and other educational stakeholders need to be aware of this policy as it is based on equal opportunities. This policy according to Ong’era (2007) specifies expectations of interactions between students and staff; sexism, bullying behavior and it also specifies ways of integrating students with special educational needs, like the autistic children, into the mainstream of the school setting.

Teachers and educational stakeholders should learn effective transition policies in order to support the autistic children throughout their education as these policies when well-practiced during transition to school will provide good and better understanding among the Parents, teachers and care takers that will eventually enable the teachers to give a lot of support to the children.

9.6 Critical Analysis on the Primary Schools ‘Stakeholders’ Preparedness towards the Transition of Autistic Children in Kenya.

The most stressing lifetime for all the school stakeholders is the transition of autistic children from their homes to school. It is in order for these education stakeholders to join hands by getting well prepared for the education of the autistic children. The autistic children families, caretakers and educators being the major stakeholders need to get well prepared for the transition since they are solely responsible for this cause having in mind that these children have additional challenges that they are yet to face in life as they grow from childhood to adulthood (N.C.B 2005)

9.6.1. Parents as Stakeholders – Preparedness

Great preparation for the transition of autistic children is expected from parents. This is why parents must be involved in their children’s education and as Fox, Dunlap, & Cushing (2002) puts it from their research, “parents are more likely to invest a lot of energy and finances in their children’s’ acquisition of knowledge by

collaborating with other stakeholders while their children are still young education by collaborating with professionals while their children are still young.

9.6.2. Caretakers as Stakeholders'- Preparedness

Autistic children especially during transitions to primary schools greatly need caretakers. This is because no transition can occur without involving them. This calls for all caretakers to get prepared as it is only easier for the transition to occur when the caretakers are fully involved (Dockett and Perry, 2006)

9.7 Critical Analysis on the Primary Schools' Preparedness with Trained Personnel for the Transition of Autistic Children in Kenya.

It is very important for the teachers and the school managers to be prepared with good training before the transition of an autistic child is done to any primary school. The curriculum developers should also ensure that there are teachers for all new subjects introduced in the curriculum, like those for the autistic children. They should also prepare the teachers on the teaching and learning strategies on how to use teaching learning resources, how to allocate time required for each and every subject in the curriculum and how to evaluate each subject (Kilei&Mburu 2007).According to Kilei&Mburu 2007), good training to the teachers teaching special needs learners will enable them get equipped with the professional skills for handling the learning materials modifying the environment and adapting the curriculum to enable learners with disabilities to access the curriculum.

10.0Conclusions

Transition from home to school requires proper preparedness especially for the transition of the autistic children. This study has confirmed from the reviewed literature that the schools infrastructure needs adaptation and great modification same as to the regular curriculum that needs to be modified into a specialized curriculum so that the autistic children might get accommodated. The study further reveals that teachers need to acquire effective transition policy knowhow that are put in place for the educators in order to get well prepared by acquiring relevant skills and training for the transition and education of autistic children. Stakeholders like the parents and the caretakers together with all the other personnel require relevant and proper training on how to handle autistic children. It is in order that more researchers come up with clear validated research on the key preparations that primary schools in Kenya should put in place so that transition of the autistic children becomes fast, making great strides in the overall research.

11.0. Recommendations

Five recommendations were made by the researchers after a critical review on the primary schools preparedness for the transition of the autistic children in Kenya;

- i. Every primary school in Kenya should have the autistic child friendly infrastructure so that the autistic children get their education in the integrated mainstream set-up along with their non-disabled peers and their brothers and sisters.
- ii. Curriculum developers should come up with enriched curriculum to balance the needs of autistic children as it also strives to his/her non-disabled peers.
- iii. Ministry of education need to avail new policies specifically for the education of the autistic children.
- iv. The researchers recommend that parents and caretakers of the autistic children should be given thorough training similar to that given to the teachers to ease the transition as they will be able to handle the autistic children professionally even from home.
- v. The researchers are of the opinion that it will be a good thing if all the primary school administrators will be trained in special needs especial on how to handle the autistic children.
- vi. They recommend that a further research be conducted on other areas of preparedness primary schools need to focus on in order to enhance smooth transition of autistic children from home to school.

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