

Teacher Professional Preparedness to Support Learners with Special Needs in the Inclusive Education Project Schools

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Abstract

Globally, there is evidence that teachers' skills are of paramount importance in the implementation of inclusive education so as to unlock the potential of learners with disabilities. The Government of Kenya's re-introduction of the Free Primary Education programme in 2003 saw an influx of learners to schools, including those with disabilities. However, learners with special needs soon dropped out due to lack of support (MOEST 2003), as teachers did not know what to do with these learners in their classrooms. In 2010, through constitution of Kenya (Republic of Kenya 2010), the Government committed itself to provide free and compulsory basic education to all learners. However, the education and training policy for learners and trainees with disabilities (MOE 2018a) notes that dropout rates of learners with disabilities are high in regular schools due to the insufficiently trained teachers. This paper presents findings of a study carried out in Nairobi and Homabay counties in Kenya with regard to teacher professional preparedness to support learners with special needs in inclusive project schools sponsored by Sight Savers and Leonard Cheshire Disability (LCD) in Kenya. The study sample comprised of 8 schools from urban and rural focusing on learners in standard 4 to 8 in Nairobi city and Homabay counties. A total of 160 learners in inclusive public primary schools, 8 head teachers, 80 teachers, 2 sponsors and 2 coordinators were involved in the study. Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews schedules and focus group discussions. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, which were computed in frequencies and percentages and presented in frequency tables and graphs. At the same time, qualitative data were analyzed using thematic approach in line with the study objectives. The study findings revealed that teacher's college training prepared them to teach regular learners, hence they were not prepared to teach in inclusive classrooms. Teachers not only revealed that they had difficulties identifying the specific needs of learners, they also confirmed their inability to support them in the inclusive classrooms. The findings further revealed that most of the head teachers who are in charge of the curriculum implementation in schools did not have any training in special needs education. To fill these training gaps, the project sponsors (Sight Savers International and Leonard Cheshire Disability) were implementing regular in-house training to enable teachers support learners with disabilities. These organizations also had coordinators, resource persons and patron teachers who were mentoring teachers at the school level on teaching-learning resources to confirm their relevancy. This was meant to bring about changes of attitude on disability, effective use of learner-centred approach in the classroom, developing Individualised Education Programme (IEP), lesson planning and reporting on quarterly basis.

Keywords: Teacher professional preparedness, inclusive project schools and learners with special needs.

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Introduction

Evidence shows that inclusive education systems not only provide a better quality education for all learners, but they are critical in changing discriminatory attitudes, thus enhancing respect for learners of diverse abilities and backgrounds as they play, socialize, and learn together. This is in consistent with global evidence which shows that the teacher is of critical importance in any reform designed to improve the quality of education and inclusion (Forlin, 2010; UNESCO, 2009; Barber and Mourshed, 2007).

In their study on the impact of curriculum modification on access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities, Lee, Wehmeyer, Soukup and Palmer (2010) raised concerns over the effectiveness of inclusive education. They warned that inclusion may not be successful if teachers do not have skills in management techniques, instructional strategies and curriculum adaptations to enable them develop appropriate accommodation based on specific needs. Other studies have recommended that teacher-education programmes

(both pre-service and in-service) should be re-oriented and aligned to inclusive education approaches in order to give teachers the pedagogical capacities necessary to make diversity work in the classroom (Forlin, 2010); UNESCO, 2009; Barber and Mourshed, 2007). Reviews on ways of enhancing inclusive education for children with disability by Forlin (2012) indicate that ongoing training has the potential to address knowledge gaps, upgrade and reinforce acquired skills. When teachers are trained to consider disability-related issues, they look upon inclusion of children with disabilities more positively (UNICEF, 2013; USAID, 2010).

In a study on implementation of strategies for reducing dropout rates of learners with mild intellectual disabilities in inclusive primary schools in Bugesera District, Rwanda, Mutezigai study (2015) found that no teacher had specialized in learning disabilities and intellectual disability. The study recommended that special education courses be introduced in teacher training colleges and among all practicing teachers.

In Kenya, studies have shown that teachers are not adequately trained in special needs education to educate learners with disabilities in mainstream schools (Mwangi, 2013; and Namwaki, 2013). The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights study on the right education for children with disabilities as well as the *Class 3 Learning Assessment* by Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) found that most teachers are not trained to facilitate learners with special needs and disabilities (KNCHR 2007 and KNEC 2016). At the same time, the study by KNHCR further reported that teachers trained at the Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE) were reportedly using the additional training as a spring board for promotions, with no interest on special needs education. In concurrence with KNHCR, the *Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2019* (MOE 2019) observes that teachers who undertake the SNE training programme may not have the passion to facilitate learners with special needs, as they are instead driven by financial gains. However, in a study on teachers' perceptions towards inclusion of children with special educational needs into mainstream classrooms in Kenya, Mulinge (2016) found that teachers who are already trained for inclusive schools cast doubts on the implementation of full inclusion of children with special educational needs into mainstream classrooms.

The *Global Education Monitoring report 2016* observed the importance of monitoring educators' preparedness to address the needs of learners with disabilities. The report further stated that the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* cannot be achieved unless teachers are empowered to be agents of change in the lives of the students they teach (UNESCO, 2016). This was one of the motivations to conduct a study on "Approaches used in the implementation of inclusive education programmes by Sight Savers International and Leonard Cheshire Disability in Kenya". The other motivation was the reported alarming drop-out rates of learners with disabilities in regular schools due to the insufficiently trained teachers (MOE 2018a).

This paper presents findings of a study on teacher professional preparedness to support learners with special needs in inclusive project schools.

2. Objective of the study

This study sought to assess teacher professional preparedness to support learners with special needs in inclusive project schools.

3. Methodology

The study used mixed methods to collect quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were collected from teachers using questionnaires while qualitative data were collected from head teachers, sponsors, coordinators, and learners using, interview schedules and focus group discussions. The study targeted 8 inclusive public primary project schools, focusing on learners in standard 4 to 8 in Nairobi city and Homabay counties. A total of 160 learners in inclusive public primary schools, 8 head teachers, 80 teachers, 2 sponsors and 2 coordinators one each from the selected inclusive education programmes were sampled. Quantitative data from questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, which were computed in frequencies and percentages and presented in frequency tables and graphs. Excel and Statistical package for Social Sciences was used to analyze quantitative data. As recommended by Johnson & Christensen (2014), all qualitative research data audio recorded were transcribed and typed into word processing files. Then, all qualitative data from open ended questions in questionnaires, interview schedules and focus group discussions were consolidated as per the themes and analyzed through thematic approach and verbatim narration. The ENVIVO qualitative software was used to analyze qualitative. This paper presents the findings, interpretations and discussions of the study.

4. Results and discussions

To establish their professional readiness to support learners with special needs in inclusion project schools, teachers' questionnaires head teachers and Sponsor's interview schedules. Teachers were asked to respond to the following items: adequacy of their professional preparation in teaching inclusive classrooms, any further training, name of trainer, duration of training and areas covered, support services received and the provider, and suggestion on ways could make teachers more effective in supporting learners with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. The findings are presented in the following section.

4.1 Adequacy of Teacher Professional Training to Teach in Inclusive Classrooms

Teachers were asked to state adequacy of their professional training to teach in inclusive classrooms. To answer this question Teachers were presented with these choices to pick their answers from; Very adequate, adequate, inadequate and very inadequate. The teachers' results are indicated in Figure 1.

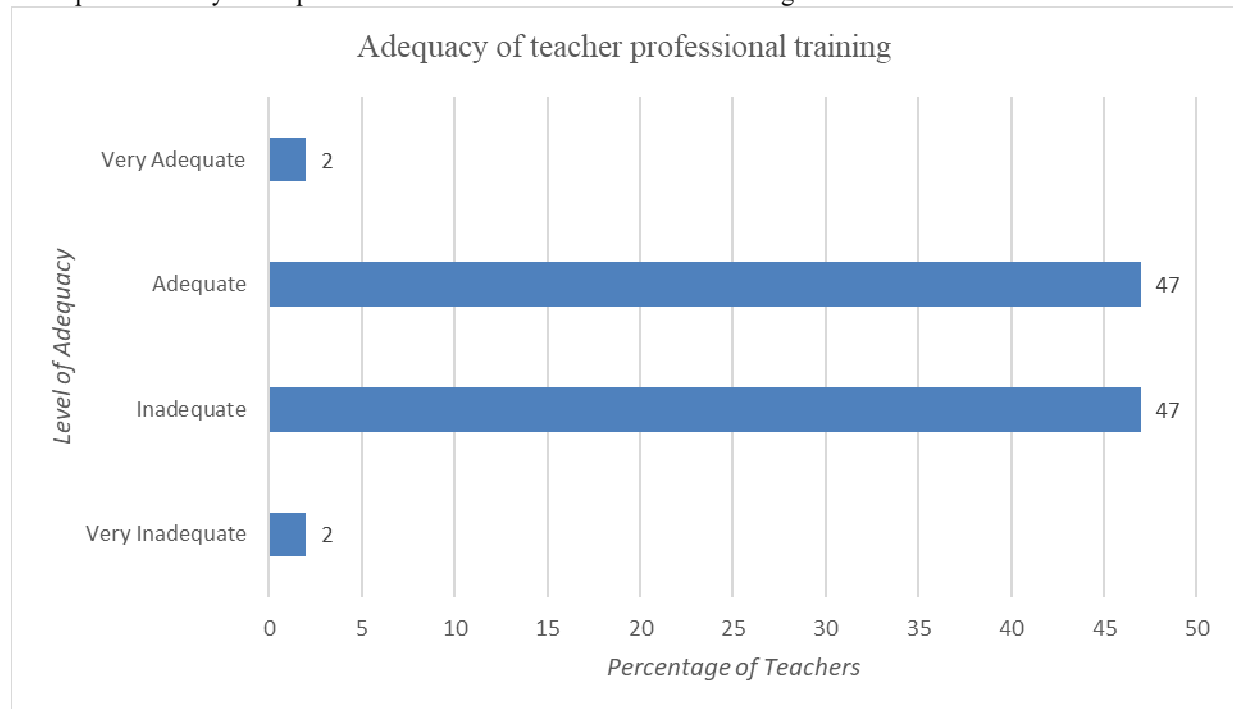


Figure 1: Adequacy of teacher professional training to teach in inclusive classrooms

Figure 1 shows that out of the 58 teachers who participated in the study, 27 (47%) had not received adequate training while another 27 (47%) indicated that they had received adequate training. Very adequate training was reported by a minority number 2 (3%) with a similar number 2 (3%) indicating very inadequate training on inclusion. The findings indicated parity between adequacy and inadequacy.

4.2 Reasons for adequacy or inadequacy in professional preparedness in teaching inclusive classrooms

Further, teachers were asked to give reasons for their adequacy or inadequacy in professional training in teaching inclusive classrooms. The findings are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Teachers 'Reasons for adequacy or inadequacy in professional training

Specific reason for adequacy or inadequacy	Frequency	Percentage
Trained on regular teacher curriculum which had Inadequate inclusive content	20	34.5
Teacher training content included sections for learners with disability	14	24.1
School has in-service programme for inclusive training with project sponsors	10	17.2

The study results show that 14 (24%) of the teachers had adequate training because teacher training curriculum content included sections for learners with disabilities. Less than a quarter 10 (17%) of the teachers indicated that they had in-service programme for inclusive training with project sponsors. More than a quarter 20 (34 %) of the teachers indicated that they had inadequate professional training because they were trained using regular curriculum with inadequate inclusive content. These teachers further revealed that they had difficult identifying what each learner with special needs exactly needed or how each had to be handled in the inclusive classroom. This was pointed out by a learner with a disability in one of the schools who said:

“Our teachers are willing to teach us but they clearly have not been taught how to do many things with us. So, you find that they want to help but they cannot help us correctly, making it look like they cannot help”.

These findings were in agreement with other studies, which found that most teachers are not trained to educate learners with special needs and disabilities (KNHCR 2007 and KNEC 2016). Inadequacies of teachers trained to work with learners with special needs in Kenyan schools were reported by KISE & MOE (2018). Additionally, KNHCR (2007) and MOE (2019) reported that teachers who undertake the special needs education (SNE) training may not have the passion to facilitate learners with special needs, as they are instead driven by financial gains. Teachers have been trained but their impact is not felt on the ground, thus, affirming evidences that teachers trained in SNE are driven by financial gains (KNHCR, 2007; and MOE, 2019). However, the findings are in contrast to the study by M’rithi (2014), which found that teacher professional training does not influence implementation of inclusive education but review of policy in special needs education policy to embrace inclusive education.

4.3 Further Training after College Training

Teachers were asked to indicate whether they had received any further training on inclusion after their college training. If the answer was a yes, teachers were expected to name the trainer, the duration of training and the areas covered. The results are indicated in Figures 2, 3 and 4.

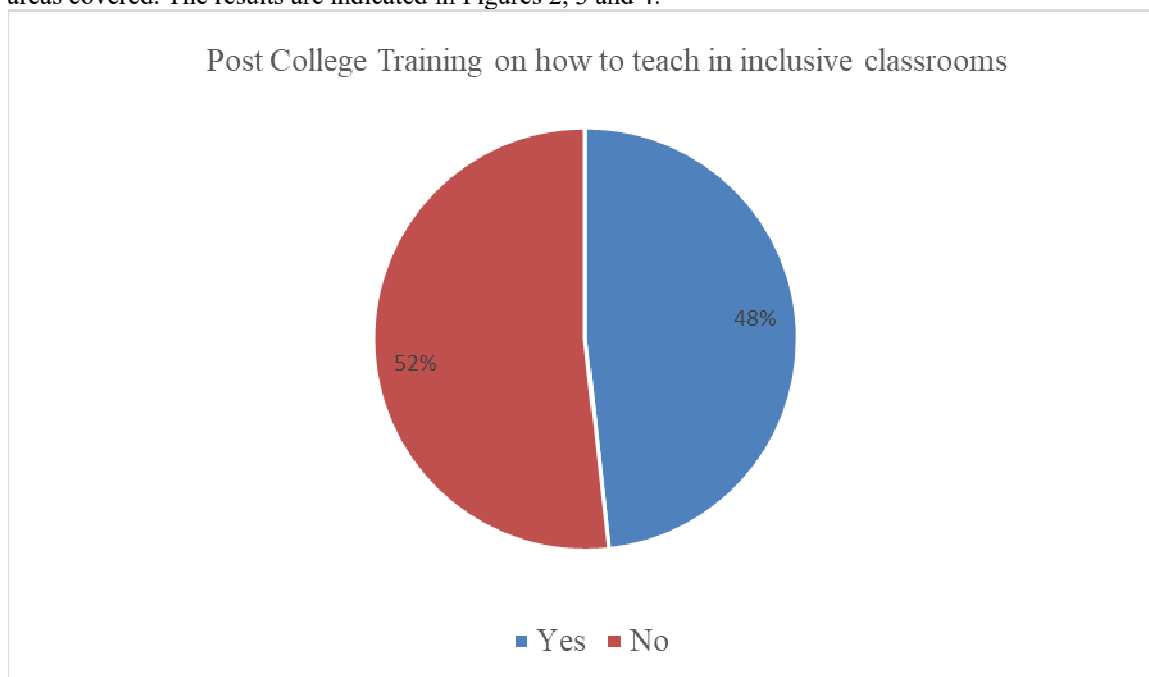


Figure 2: Post-College Training on how to teach in inclusive classrooms

As can be seen in Figure 2, whereas 30 (52%) of the teachers had not been trained on how to teach in inclusive classrooms after college training, 28 (48%) of the teachers indicated that they had been trained on how to teach in inclusive classrooms. Figure 3 shows results of post-college trainers.

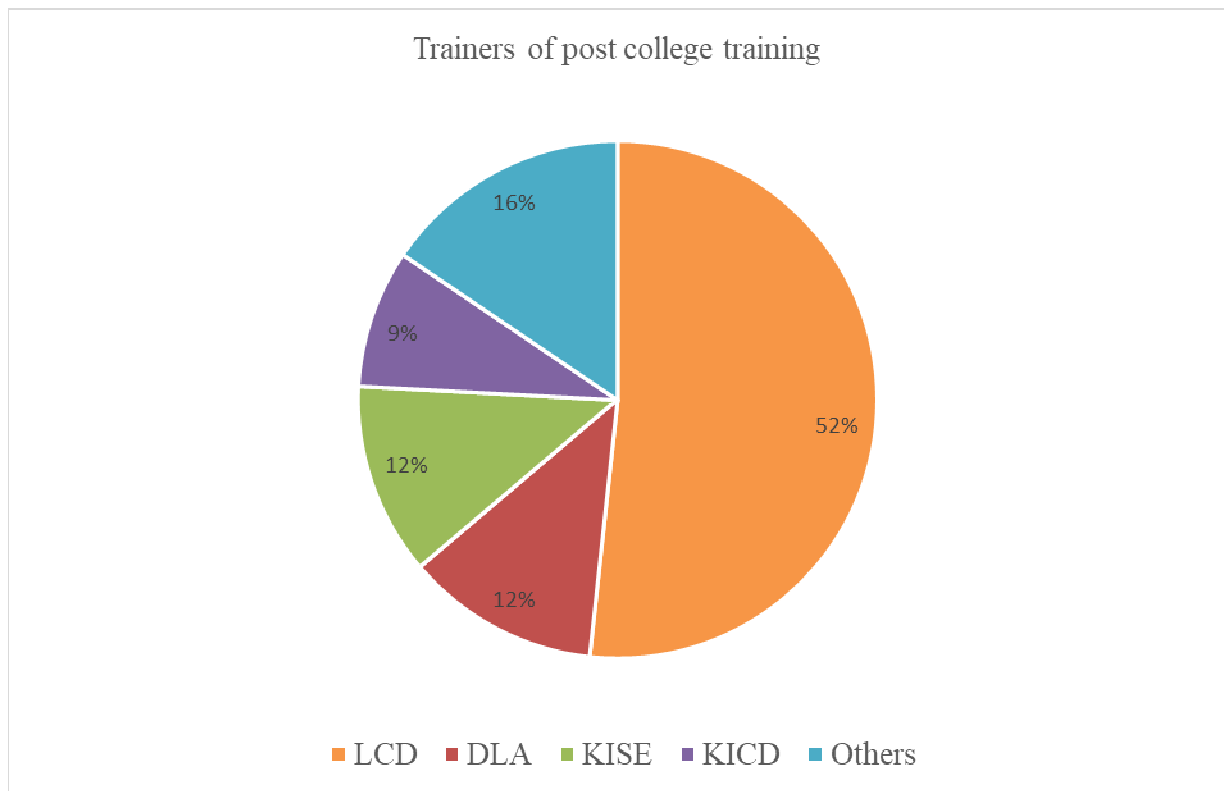


Figure 3: Trainers of post college training

Figure 3 shows that 30 (52%) of the teachers were trained by Leonard Cheshire Disability (LCD), 9 (16%) were trained by other trainers including universities, 7(12%) were trained by Discovery Learning Alliance (DLA) and Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE) respectively while 5 (9%) of the teachers were trained by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD). This finding indicates a gap in teacher professional training that was being filled in a duration of two weeks to four years while in practice. This is consistent with studies that have shown that high quality training and professional development is vital for equipping teachers with the pedagogical capacities necessary to make diversity work in the classroom (Forlin, 2010; UNESCO, 2009 and Barber and Mourshed, 2007).

Teacher’s responses on areas covered in their post college training are summarized in Figure 4.

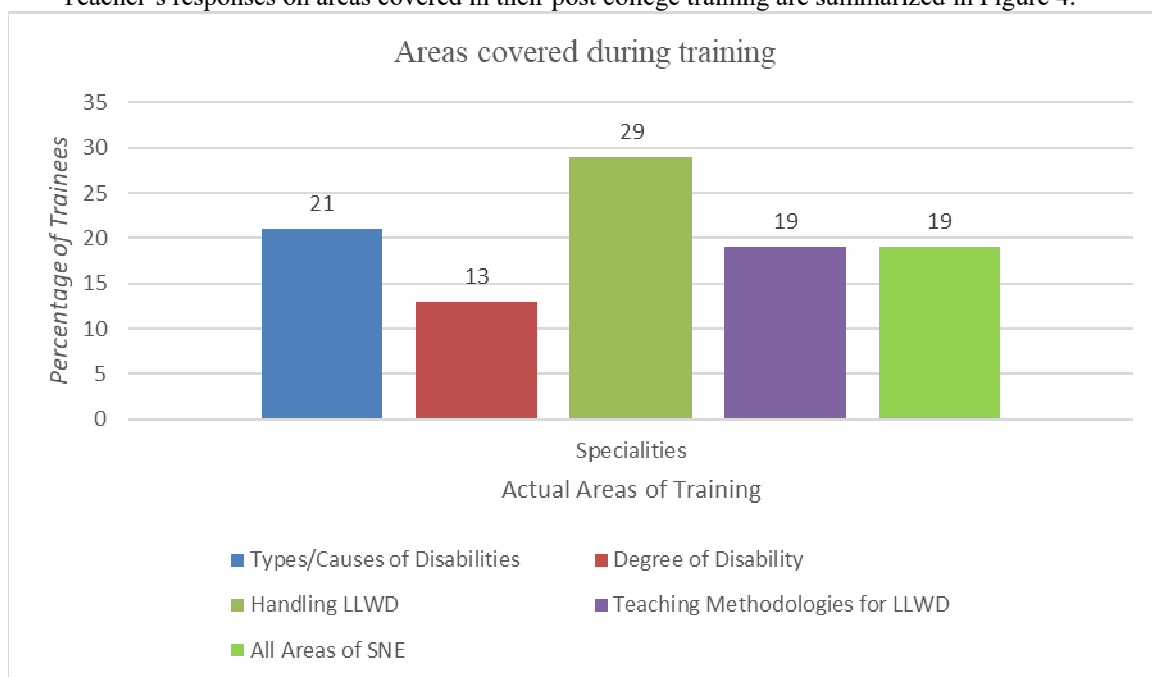


Figure 4: Areas covered during training

Figure 4. indicates that 17 (29%) of the teachers were trained on how to support learners living with disabilities (LLWD), 12 (21%) of the teachers were trained on the types and causes of disabilities, 11 (19%) were trained in teaching methodologies for LLWD and a similar number 11 (19%) was trained in all areas of SNE. At the same time, 7 (13%) of the teachers had a Bachelor's degree in special needs. These findings indicate that majority of the teacher were taken through short courses to enable them handle learners with disabilities in their classrooms.

4.4 Support services received and the provider while teaching in inclusive classrooms

The responses of teachers on the support received while teaching in inclusive classrooms are indicated in Figure 5.

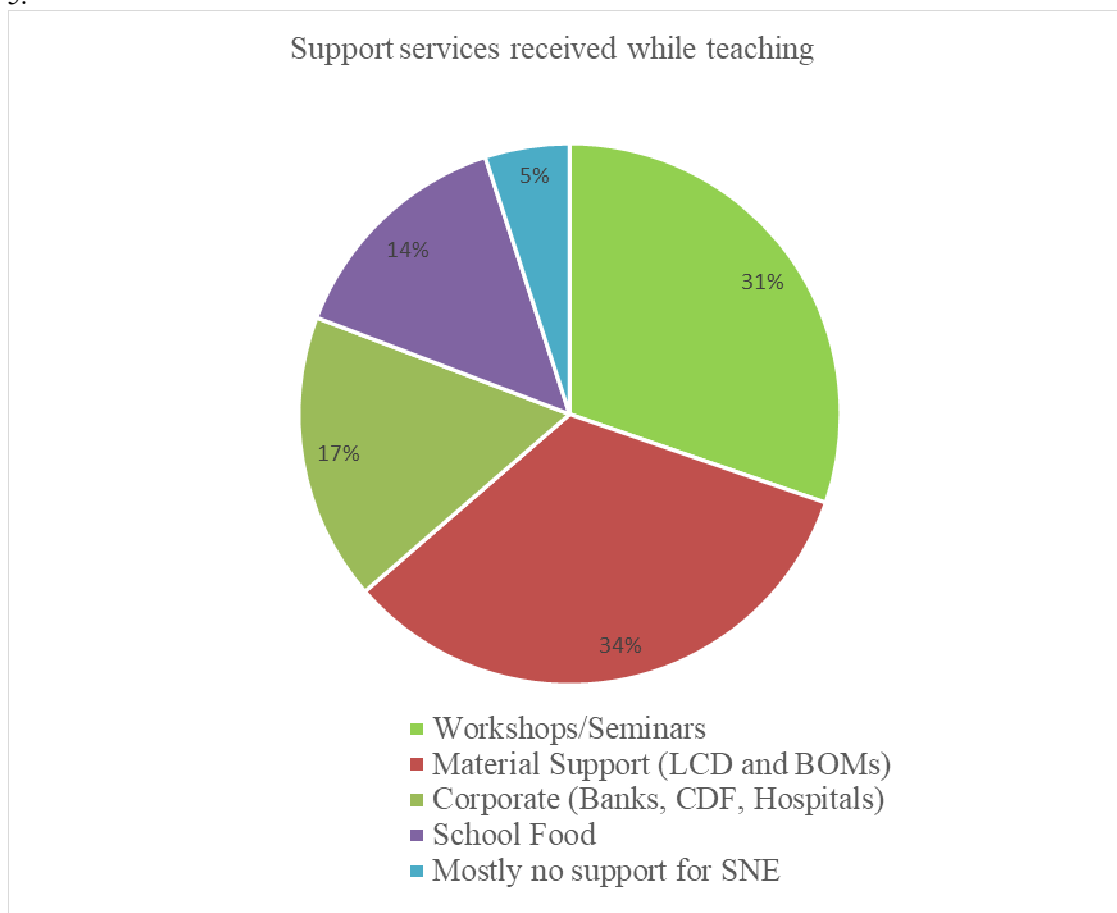


Figure 5: Support services received while teaching in inclusive classroom

Figure 5 shows that 19 (33%) of the teachers had received material support particularly from LCD and BOMs of the schools (which included items such as material for development of learning aids, solar lamps for learners with sight issues, pens, mosquito nets, uniforms, school bags, pants, bedsheets, blankets, t-shirts to the very vulnerable children). At the same time, 18 (31%) of the teachers had received support through workshops/seminars by SNE related training colleges, 10 (17%) of teachers got support from banks in form of cash, Constituency Development Fund (CDF), which constructed toilets and some classrooms and hospitals so as to give service to learners with disabilities. Another 8 (14%) and 3 (5%) teachers received food to support learners with disabilities and no support respectively.

4.5 Ways that would make teachers more effective in supporting learners with disabilities in inclusive classrooms

To answer this question, teachers were presented with alternative ways of enhancing teachers' capacity to support learners. The choices included the following: regular in-servicing on special education methods, teacher curriculum to include more special education units, hire specialists in schools, involving parents in the management of learners with special needs, and any other ways not included. The results are presented in Figure 6.

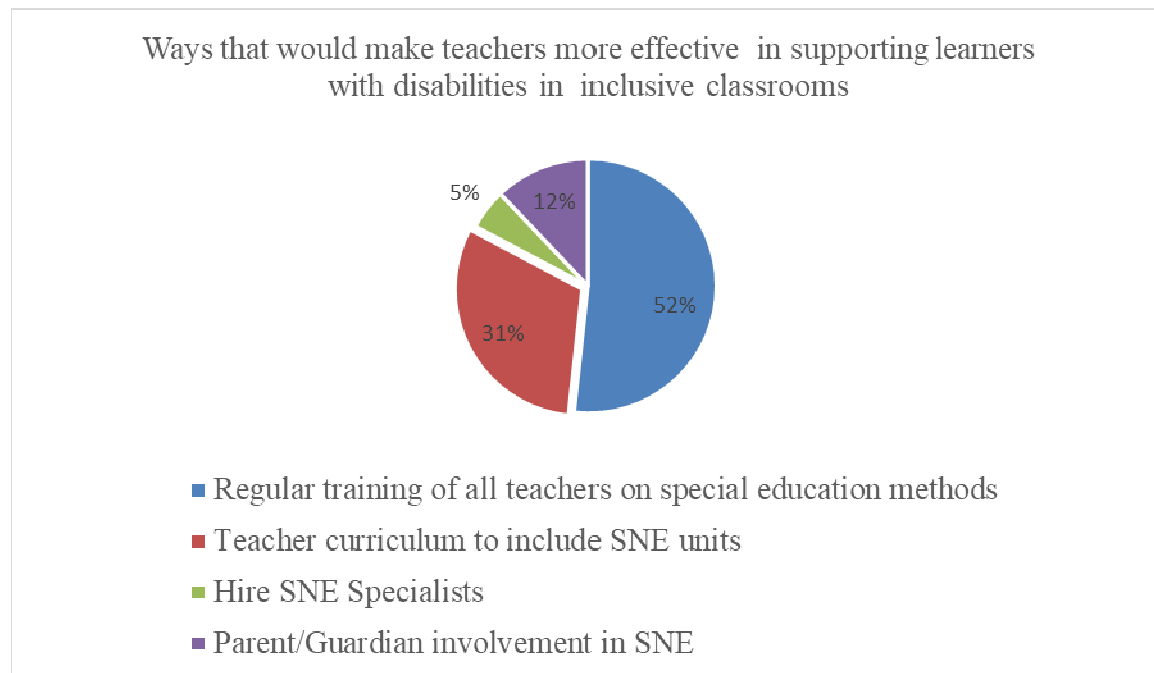


Figure 6: Ways that would make teachers more effective in supporting learners with disabilities in inclusive classrooms

Figure 6 shows that 30 (52%) of the teachers indicated regular in-service training on special needs methods, 18 (31%) teachers indicated that teacher curriculum include SNE units, 7 (12%) number of teachers indicated parental/guardian involvement while 3 (5%) indicated hiring of SNE specialists in schools. The study findings are supported by (Forlin, 2010; UNESCO, 2009; Barber and Mourshed, 2007) who recommend that teacher-education programmes (both pre-service and in-service) should be reoriented and aligned to inclusive education approaches in order to give teachers the pedagogical capacities necessary to make diversity work in the classroom. The findings are in line with the UNESCO (2016) report, which observed that the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* cannot be achieved unless teachers are empowered to be agents of change in the lives of the students they teach.

To triangulate findings from teachers, interview schedules for head teachers and sponsors of the inclusive project schools. From the head teachers interview schedule 3 (38%) of the head teachers indicated that very few of their teachers had received inclusive classroom training, a similar number 3 (38%) also revealed that their teachers had received some on-job training sponsored by NGOs and other stakeholders. None of the teachers not having any training for inclusive classrooms was reported by 2 (25%) of the head teachers This finding agrees with the teachers' responses whereby 30 (52%) of them revealed that they had not received any training on teaching inclusive classrooms after teacher training college. Majority of the head teachers 6 (75%) indicated that they had not been trained in special needs education (SNE), 2 (25%) of the head teachers indicated that they had been trained in SNE. The responses of majority head teachers that they had not been trained in SNE are in consistence with the national survey KISE & MOE (2018), which established that 77 percent of the head teachers of integrated primary schools did not have specialized training in special needs education.

The findings from sponsors of the inclusive project schools revealed that they had a tailor-made training that prepared teachers to teach in inclusive classrooms. The trainings were regularly conducted through short courses in form of specific workshops on the job training taking one to four weeks (1-4 weeks), training on specific areas of disability. Teachers trained were continuously visited and supported by project coordinators, resource and patron teachers at school level. The training took a holistic approach whereby not only teachers were trained but all other stake holders forming the school community including but not limited to head teachers, Board of Management, parents, regular children to accept and see how to work with this child. The projects partnered with hospitals for correctional surgery and assistive devices, NGOs, teachers trained by KISE already practicing, MOE through quality assurance and standards officers for quality assurance, Curriculum support officers for follow up of educational assessment for learning progress at school level.

Conclusion

The study concluded that majority of teachers were not adequately prepared to teach in inclusive classrooms a factor that compelled sponsors to mount on the job training as a stop-gap measure to implement the projects. This calls for retooling of teachers in the field and reviewing of existing training curriculum to ensure that all

teaches learn special needs education and appropriate pedagogy for learners with special needs for provision of the needed support. Also, the study found out that most teachers who take special needs education do it for remuneration incentive and not for the benefit of a child with disability. The study recommends development of a suitability tool to identify teachers who can work with learners with disabilities.

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