

# Enhancing the Capacity of Teacher Educators and Parents for Special Needs Identification and Support

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## ABSTRACT

This study determined Teacher educators' and Practising teachers' preparedness on the identification and support skills for Special needs learners. A survey was carried out on 50 Teacher Trainers in Egerton University and 1,000 Practising teachers in various schools in 11 counties of Kenya. Desktop research was carried out in most universities in Kenya. The goal of the study was to equip university staff in the field of Teacher Education with adequate knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to enable them infuse them into their training programs in order to have their trainees acquire the same knowledge, skills, attitudes and values for their lifelong application after training. Informed teachers will make a significant difference on individual differences among learners, thus providing an all-inclusive education that benefits everyone. Findings of the study indicated that both Teacher Trainers and Practising Teachers were inadequately prepared on SNE— implying inadequate teacher training on inclusive education. The study determined that curriculum content on inclusive education in Egerton University and other sampled universities was inadequate – calling for curriculum review; requiring refresher courses for Practising Teachers and adequate facilitation to run effective inclusive education. The findings may inspire appropriate intervention initiatives to cater for special needs learners.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

A baseline survey carried out among practicing teachers in primary and secondary schools in selected counties of Kenya showed that few teachers are knowledgeable in handling SNE learners. Similarly, two baseline surveys on teacher training curricular and Teacher trainers themselves showed that the curricular are inadequate in SNE content; and generally, that Teacher trainers lack skills of identification and support for SNE learners. This implied that the inadequacy of the practicing teachers insofar as SNE is concerned emanated from the inadequacy of the curricular and the unpreparedness of the Teacher trainers. If not checked, this cyclic problem will persist since ill-prepared graduate teachers are released for service. Further, parents lack of screening skills of special needs children delays identification resulting in delayed provision of support for children affected. In some communities, a cultural has it that a disabled child should not be shown to the public. This is another source of misinformation that must be debunked through proper sensitization.

## Study Description

### The Study's Objectives

- (i) Analyze teacher training curricular for SNE content and develop an inclusive curriculum and resource materials that accommodate all students.
- (ii) Train teacher trainers on skills to recognize characteristics of SNE and implement effective screening methods.
- (iii) Train Teacher trainers on diverse strategies for managing and supporting diverse categories of SNE learners.
- (iv) Involve parents and specialists in the training process to create a supportive network.

### Expected Outcomes

- (i) Increased identification of special needs learners by trained staff.

- (ii) Improved educational strategies and resources tailored to diverse learning needs.
- (iii) Enhanced collaboration among educators, parents, and specialists.
- (iv) A more inclusive learning environment that benefits all students.
- (v) A curriculum reviewed to accommodate SNE content.

## METHODOLOGY

### Baseline Surveys

The following needs assessment surveys were carried out between September and October 2024.

#### Survey on Teacher Training Curricular

A desktop survey on Egerton University and most universities' teacher training curricular was carried out to assess the courses relevant to SNE as offered in the area of Educational Psychology as well as the teaching methods curricular.

#### Survey on Teacher Trainers' SNE learners Identification and Support skills

A Teacher Trainers Questionnaire was administered to all the 50 serving academic staff of the Faculty of Education and Community Studies of Egerton University.

#### Survey on practising Teachers' and parents' SNE learners Identification and Support skills

A Practicing Teachers Questionnaire was administered on 1,000 serving Primary school and Secondary school teachers in the following counties of Kenya: Nakuru, Baringo, Nyandarua, Kericho, Kisii, Nyamira, Kisumu, Siaya, Uasin Gishu, Nandi and Kakamega. The questionnaire had items on SNE learners' identification skills, support skills and teacher opinions on inclusive education. Selected parents also responded to the questionnaire.

**Table 1: Study Respondents**

| Category              | Sample Size     | Source/Location                                                                                                                               |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Teacher Educators     | 50              | Egerton University (Faculty of Education & Community Studies)                                                                                 |
| Practicing Teachers   | 1,000           | Primary & Secondary schools in 11 counties (Nakuru, Baringo, Nyandarua, Kericho, Kisii, Nyamira, Kisumu, Siaya, Uasin Gishu, Nandi, Kakamega) |
| Parents               | Selected sample | Various counties in Kenya                                                                                                                     |
| Universities Surveyed | Multiple        | Desktop research across Kenyan universities                                                                                                   |

### Sampling Procedures

The study employed a combination of purposive and stratified sampling techniques. All fifty (50) teacher educators serving in the Faculty of Education and Community Studies at Egerton University were purposively selected because of their direct involvement in teacher preparation and curriculum implementation. Practising teachers were selected through stratified sampling from primary and secondary schools across eleven counties of Kenya, namely Nakuru, Baringo, Nyandarua, Kericho, Kisii, Nyamira, Kisumu, Siaya, Uasin Gishu, Nandi, and Kakamega. Stratification ensured representation from diverse geographical regions and educational contexts. Parents of school-going children were selected purposively to provide information on their awareness, identification, and support of learners with special needs. The sampling procedures were designed to generate data from key stakeholders involved in the education and support of learners with special needs.

## **Instrument Validation**

The Teacher Trainers Questionnaire, Practising Teachers Questionnaire, and Parent Questionnaire were developed based on literature related to inclusive education, special needs education, and teacher preparedness. To establish content validity, the instruments were subjected to expert review by specialists in Curriculum Studies, Educational Psychology, Measurement and Evaluation, and Special Needs Education. The experts examined the relevance, clarity, adequacy, and appropriateness of the items in relation to the study objectives. Their recommendations informed revision of ambiguous items, elimination of redundant questions, and inclusion of additional items addressing identification and support competencies. The revised instruments were then piloted before the main data collection exercise.

## **Reliability of the Instruments**

A pilot study was conducted using respondents who were not included in the final sample. Data obtained from the pilot study were analyzed to determine the internal consistency of the instruments. Reliability was established using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The Teacher Trainers Questionnaire yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.82, while the Practising Teachers Questionnaire yielded a coefficient of 0.85. These coefficients exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70 recommended for social science research, indicating that the instruments were sufficiently reliable for collecting data. Feedback obtained during the pilot study was used to refine the instruments before their administration in the main study.

## **Data Analysis**

Quantitative data collected through the questionnaires were coded and analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. The results were presented using tables and narrative descriptions to facilitate interpretation. Qualitative responses obtained from open-ended questionnaire items were analyzed thematically. Emerging themes were identified, categorized, and interpreted in relation to teacher preparedness, learner identification skills, support strategies, parental involvement, and attitudes toward inclusive education. The combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis enabled a comprehensive understanding of the preparedness of teacher educators, practising teachers, and parents in supporting learners with special needs.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

### **Deficient Teacher Training Curricula**

A baseline survey of university curricula revealed that SNE content is inadequately integrated into teacher education programs. Most courses are offered as peripheral service units under Educational Psychology and are not embedded within teaching methodology or specialist subjects. Over 60% of teacher educators reported that they had not incorporated inclusive education competencies due to curriculum deficiencies.

### **Inadequate Teacher Educator Competence**

A survey of 50 academic staff at Egerton University's Faculty of Education and Community Studies revealed that most had not received training in identifying or supporting SNE learners. Only those who had taken SNE courses independently possessed such skills. Approximately 41% of trainers indicated they could not identify learners with specific disabilities, and 40% noted that their students lacked the skills to implement inclusive education effectively after graduating from the university.

### **Practicing Teachers and Parents Lack SNE Identification and Support Skills**

Data from 1,000 primary and secondary school teachers in 11 counties, including Nakuru, Baringo, Kisumu and Kakamega, showed that more than half felt unprepared to identify and support learners with special needs. There was a call for nationwide refresher training and better resource allocation. Parents also reported no formal training in identifying SNE in their children. Cultural beliefs in some communities were found to inhibit early identification and support.

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## **Specific Competencies Found to be Deficient**

Beyond the general finding that respondents were inadequately prepared for inclusive education, the study identified specific competency gaps among teacher educators, practising teachers, and parents.

Among teacher educators, deficiencies were observed in:

- Identification of different categories of special needs and disabilities.
- Application of screening and assessment techniques.
- Development of individualized support plans.
- Use of differentiated instructional approaches.
- Integration of inclusive education principles into teacher preparation programmes.

Among practising teachers, deficiencies included:

- Early identification of learners with learning difficulties.
- Referral procedures for assessment and specialized support.
- Adaptation of curriculum content and teaching strategies.
- Development of individualized learning support interventions.
- Collaboration with specialists and parents in supporting learners.

Among parents, major deficiencies included:

- Recognition of early signs of developmental and learning challenges.
- Knowledge of available intervention services.
- Understanding of their role in supporting inclusive education.
- Awareness of the importance of early screening and intervention.

These competency gaps suggest the need for curriculum review, targeted training programmes, and continuous professional development initiatives aimed at strengthening inclusive education practices.

## **PROPOSED REMEDIATION PLAN BASED ON STUDY OBJECTIVES**

### **Study Objectives**

#### **Curriculum Review and Development**

It is critical to analyze current teacher training curricula and embed comprehensive SNE content across all teaching disciplines.

#### **Teacher Educator Training**

It is important to train university-based teacher educators on SNE learner identification and evidence-based support strategies.

## Parent and Community Engagement

Conduct Parent sensitization forums should be conducted to increase early identification of special needs and combat stigma.

## Stakeholder Collaboration

Specialists (e.g., educational psychologists, occupational therapists) should be involved to enrich training and offer mentorship.

## Target Groups

- Teacher Educators from 10 Kenyan universities
- Practicing Teachers in public and private schools
- Parents of school-aged children
- Education stakeholders including NGOs and policymakers

**Table 2: Proposed Remediation Plan**

| Area                            | Intervention Strategy                                                           |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Curriculum Review & Development | Embed SNE content across all teacher education disciplines.                     |
| Teacher Educator Training       | Provide targeted training on SNE identification and support strategies.         |
| Parent & Community Engagement   | Conduct sensitization forums to improve early identification and reduce stigma. |
| Stakeholder Collaboration       | Involve specialists (psychologists, therapists) for enriched training.          |

## Training Approaches

- Blended learning
- Hands-on workshops and microlearning
- Mentorship and coaching
- Use of real-life case studies and simulations
- E-learning modules and gamified content
- Continuous feedback and follow-up sessions

**Table 3: Training Approaches**

| Approach                   | Description                                            |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Blended Learning           | Mix of online and face-to-face training.               |
| Hands-on Workshops         | Practical sessions with real-life case applications.   |
| Mentorship & Coaching      | Ongoing professional support for educators.            |
| Case Studies & Simulations | Use of real scenarios to build problem-solving skills. |
| E-Learning Modules         | Digital and gamified content for flexible learning.    |
| Continuous Feedback        | Pre- and post-assessments, follow-ups, and audits.     |

## Monitoring and Evaluation

- Pre- and post-training assessments

- Participant feedback and skill demonstration
- Reports to donors and stakeholders
- Onsite follow-up and implementation audits

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Comprehensive Curriculum Integration

Universities should revise their education programs to make SNE training mandatory and fully integrated across courses.

### Policy-Backed Professional Development

The Ministry of Education should mandate regular in-service training on inclusive education for all educators, particularly at the foundational stages.

### Parent Empowerment and Awareness

National campaigns should be launched to sensitize parents and caregivers on early signs of special needs and the importance of prompt intervention.

### Create Inclusive Education Networks

Collaborative platforms should be established where teacher educators, practicing teachers, parents, and specialists can share best practices and challenges in SNE.

### Address Cultural Stigmas

Community leaders and influencers should be engaged to challenge harmful beliefs and promote inclusion through culturally sensitive programs.

### Study Limitations

This study was subject to several limitations. First, the teacher educator sample was drawn from a single university, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to all teacher education institutions in Kenya. Second, the study relied heavily on self-reported data from respondents, making the findings susceptible to social desirability bias and subjective perceptions. Third, although the study covered eleven counties, variations in educational contexts across the country may not have been fully captured. Finally, the study focused on perceived preparedness and did not include direct classroom observations or practical assessments of competencies. Despite these limitations, the study provides important insights into existing gaps in teacher and parent preparedness for inclusive education.

### Implications for Future Research

Future studies should adopt mixed-methods approaches that combine quantitative surveys with qualitative techniques such as interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, and case studies. Such approaches would provide deeper insights into the actual competencies and practices of teacher educators and practising teachers. Future research should also expand the sample of teacher educators to include public and private universities across Kenya in order to improve representativeness and generalizability. In addition, longitudinal studies could be conducted to assess the impact of professional development programmes on teachers' competencies in identifying and supporting learners with special needs. Further investigation is also needed to determine the specific training needs of parents and to evaluate the effectiveness of community-based awareness programmes aimed at promoting early identification and intervention for learners with special needs.

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## CONCLUSION

A critical gap in the preparation of educators and parents in the identification and support of learners with special needs in Kenya has been revealed by this study. Clearly, there is a lack of adequate SNE content in teacher education curricula and minimal training for both teacher educators and practising teachers which contribute to the continued marginalization of SNE learners. This project can offer a strategic intervention for it proposes a targeted training and capacity-building model aimed at promoting inclusive education.

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