

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF THE HEADTEACHER

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Introduction

Uganda is a signatory to the universal declaration on EDUCATION FOR ALL which recognizes that the main objective of education is to provide quality education for ALL children. This provision enables the children to attain their full potential so as to meaningfully participate in community activities throughout their life. It also provides for their contribution for personal, family and national development.

The success of this is done through Special Needs Education provided from an inclusive setting. Special Needs Education is a learner centered, flexible and adjustable programme aimed at meeting the individual needs and potentials. It is meant to provide adjusted quality education not only to children with visual, hearing, developmental (mental retardation), motor (physical) impairment but to all children who, due to many reasons, may have a temporary or permanent need that require adjusted education.

These include :

- Learners with social and emotional problems
- Learners with autism
- Learners who are not fluent in the language the teacher uses for instruction and/or in the language they read and write in
- Children who have never been enrolled in school
- Children who are abused
- Street children
- Children heading families
- Orphans
- Children who are culturally or geographically isolated
- Children who are affected by or suffering from HIV/AIDS or other illness
- Children who have dropped out of school
- Children with difficulty learning how to read
- Children with epilepsy
- Children who are specially gifted or talented

While some of these children have permanent needs others have temporary need for educational adjustment.

The Rationale for Inclusive Education

Inclusive Education is the process of addressing all learners' needs within the mainstream using the available resources and creativity for a successful learning and development opportunities.

Inclusive education emphasizes the changing of attitudes, behavior, teaching methods, curriculum, environment and allocation of human and financial resources to meet the needs of all learners. We should understand that all children can learn but at different pace, with a different support level. Learning, which is a life long experience, require involvement in all aspects of life which includes education, information, health services, decision making and politics, cultural activities, community and domestic activities, and employment.

Inclusive education calls for:

- Having opportunity for relevant and quality basic education
- Being accepted
- Respect and care for all learners no matter their potentials and background
- Equal opportunity for all learners to experience and participate in all school activities
- A flexible curriculum, classroom and school management system
- Recognition of individual difference. To see differences as challenges and not problems that should enrich your experiences as a manager
- Support to learners with special needs to be planned as an integral part of the school system

In other words, the school administration, teachers and the curriculum should be seen as for the learners and must be adjusted according to the reality, interest and needs of all for a quality EDUCATION FOR ALL.

Characteristics of an Inclusive School

It is important that schools are open to all. Inclusive schools aim at maximizing and increasing the participation of all learners. This implies changed attitudes of school managers, head teachers, teachers, pupils, parents and other staff towards children with special needs and those with any barrier identified that affect the learning and development of children in the school.

Inclusive schools should be welcoming. A welcoming school calls for flexibility in curriculum and modification of methods used to meet the needs of all learners.

The following are some of the characteristics of an inclusive school:

- All persons are viewed as members of the **s**ame group without segregation
- Members take consideration of each others' needs
- Learners help each other to learn and perform other activities
- Members accept that there are individual differences, and that they can perform things differently
- The organization of activities is differentiated in accordance to the varying potentials.
- School environment is accessible to all learners
- All teachers are prepared and ready to support all learners
- Instructional(teaching /learning) materials are prepared with regard to all learners ability and interest
- Parents and other stakeholders are involved in planning and implementing school and learning activities.

A good inclusive programme must have the four qualities below:

- Reflect the academic and social progress of the learners
- Enable learners with special needs to make at least as much academic and social progress as they would in a separate class
- Ensures that teachers are supported as they make the necessary classroom adjustment and adaptations to meet the needs of learners so as to have them actively involved in their leaning process. This should reflect itself in the extent to which the teacher is supported to perform
- Reflect the concept of normalization that is the daily activities of all learners is closely the same.

Working with the community

In order for inclusive education to succeed, the community must be actively involved. The members of the community that take part in includes the teachers, pupils, parents, local leaders and all professionals in education, health, gender, labour and social development, legislators and non governmental organizations.

Teacher preparation is almost the first step in the preparation for successful inclusive education. The teacher should be given an early awareness, training and preparation to enhance positive attitude, build self confidence and professional satisfaction.

Meanwhile before children are included in an educational setting there is need to prepare them to meet each other. There is need for learners without special needs to know about the nature of their peers with special needs and vice versa. This will foster child-to-child interaction, help them to influence the attitude of the adults, and to accept to work together.

In order for children to interact independently, freely and yet in a friendly manner, there should be special environmental modification. This call for the contribution of different stakeholders to finance, provide technical skills and labour. Community leaders can contribute towards fund raising, skill and unskilled labour and provision of play materials.

Teachers in inclusive settings need a lot of support form other qualified personnel so as to help the learners better. This support can come from special needs teachers at the SNE/EARS inspectorate office, SNECO's, Itinerant teachers, community based workers, Disabled persons organizations, medical officers and so on. These personnel work in collaboration to support teachers and pupils who need their services. Their active involvement should be at the time of preparation and ^{implementation} monitoring of the inclusive programme. Factors such as assessment of learning needs, transporting children, medical treatment, guidance and counseling, training and supply of equipment and materials are their responsibility.

The Role of the Head teacher in fostering a successful Inclusive Education

A welcoming school will depend very much on the administration. The head teacher is the chief public relations officer for inclusive education. You accept the pupils, guide the teachers, advise other pupils and parents, publicize the school, invite the authorities and partners in education to visit and support you and solicit for technical and financial support.

The head teacher should therefore:

- Inform the community that all children are welcome to school because all children can learn
- Support the teachers to appreciate that their roles have changed from deliverer of knowledge to promoting the overall development and guide to the learners
- Ensure that expenses related to the education of learners with special needs are included in the budget
- Identify and appoint a teacher in charge of special needs to coordinate all the teachers and pupils needs in all committees
- Recognize the diversity of learners and their achievements in the community and school
- Develop a clear understanding about learners rights to education in an inclusive setting and in the community and home
- As frequently as possible organize training for teacher so as to build their capacity to work with all children with varying abilities and needs
- Organize teachers into relevant working teams
- Ensure barrier free environment within the school and its immediate environment
- Promote respectful attitudes among staff and all members of the school community through sharing information about special needs, inclusive education, disability and UPE.