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THE INFLUENCE OF GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND TEACHER TRAINING ON THE TEACHING OF SPECIAL NEEDS LEARNERS IN KENYA'S PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Governments devote considerable amounts of budgetary allocation to education globally. One area which receives considerable attention is teacher training. However, for special needs education, there is often a lack of specialised training for teachers, which can have a significant impact on the quality of education and support provided to learners with special needs. It is from this perspective that this study was designed to assess how government support and teacher training influence the teaching of learners with special needs in public primary schools in Kenya. The article is an extract of a study that was conducted in the Machakos Sub-County of Kenya in 2022. The study was based on Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory and used a descriptive survey research method. The target population was 71 head teachers, 802 teachers, and one curriculum support officer for special needs. The study had a sample size of 80 teachers, three head teachers, and one curriculum support officer for special needs. Data was collected through the use of questionnaires for the teachers, an interview schedule for head teachers, and one curriculum support officer for special needs education. The results show that financial government support for special needs education is inadequate and untimely. The Constituency Development Fund contribution was deemed the most impactful. The study concluded that most facilities in public primary schools were not suitable for use by learners with special needs. The study also concludes that there is a training gap among teachers on SNE. The study thus recommended that the government review SNE policies on funding and SNE teacher training as well as reconsider the capitation for learners with special needs. Further, the study recommends that the Teachers Service Commission to increase the number of SNE teachers in all the schools in order to ensure better teaching and learning outcomes for learners with special needs.

Keywords: Government Support, Teacher Training, Special Needs Education

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INTRODUCTION

Government support and teacher training are key aspects of teaching learners with special needs across the world. Government support can take many forms, such as funding for special education programmes and services, legislation to protect the rights of students with disabilities, and policies to ensure accessibility and inclusion in schools. This support is crucial to ensuring that all students have access to the education they need and deserve. Teacher training is also critical to supporting learners with special needs. Teachers who work with students with disabilities require specialised knowledge and skills to effectively address their unique needs. According to Carrol *et al* (2017), the British policy on special needs education is informed by the fact that around 12% of pupils in primary school and 10% of pupils in secondary school are on SNE support. Unlike Britain, Germany has a special education system based on the identification of students as having one or more disabilities and which promotes distinct special needs schooling. In the United States, there are established classrooms for learners with special needs within regular school setups (Powell, 2015). These studies emphasize the importance of a clear government policy and support structures in SNE.

Kauffman *et al.* (2014) noted that government support for special needs education was facing headwinds due to the withdrawal of social welfare programmes. This meant lower funding, which in turn affected inclusiveness in education. Chiner and Cardona (2013), in their study based in Spain, argue that the availability of teaching and learning resources for learners with special needs in Spain was a key concern that suffered from limited government interventions. Yamamoto and Moriwaki (2019), in their study based in Japan, illustrate the importance of proper government support. They found that special needs learners, when in school, were easier to reach out to even with medical interventions, thus improving their school-based experiences.

Dalton, Mckenzie, and Kahonde (2012), based on a

South African study, also underscored the need for well-structured government support for successful inclusive education. Thus, the study noted that government interventions need to be anchored in clear policies on funding, teacher training, and the provision of materials. In another study based in South Africa, Vincent and Chiwandire (2017) also noted the need for government support in ensuring compliance with policies for special needs facilities such as access to buildings, walkways, and toilets in inclusive education setups. In Ghana, Opuko *et al.* (2021) identified the issue of teacher training as a key predictor of better interactions and boosted confidence when teaching learners with special needs. In Zimbabwe, Cheelo (2016) identified a number of challenges facing inclusive education, including the lack of clear government policy, stigma as well as lack of knowledge and skills by lecturers in teachers' training colleges.

In 1986, the government of Kenya enhanced teacher training in primary teacher colleges. This training is mostly for learners without special needs. As recognised by the National Special Needs Education Policy Framework, the Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE) was established (MOEST, 2009). This was to build the capacity of Special Needs Education (SNE) service providers through teacher training, and research. This implies that although KISE trains teachers who are expected to teach learners with special needs, there is no explicit teacher training college designed to train teachers to teach learners with special needs. This is because KISE only enhances and works on capacity building.

A study by Mutuku (2013) on the challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education in primary schools in Yatta Division found that Machakos County was facing disproportionate challenges in ensuring inclusive education. The challenges include lack of robust teacher training and lack of physical facilities to cater for special needs pupils. Another study by Kasoo (2014) on school factors affecting head teachers' provision of special needs education in public primary schools in

Kangundo sub-county established that financing special education still remains a major challenge for the government. This study was thus conceived to assess the influence of government support and instructional materials on the teaching of learners with special needs in public primary schools in Machakos Sub-County.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Albert Bandura's social learning theory, which he first proposed in 1977, served as the foundation for this research. The theory of social learning holds that teaching and learning are determined by various environmental factors. The social learning approach takes thought processes into account and acknowledges the role that they play in deciding if learning occurs. The social learning theory therefore provides a more comprehensive explanation of human learning by recognizing the role of mediational processes (McLeod, 2016). The social learning theory is important for learners with special needs. The social learning theory embraces inclusiveness in society as it takes care of a variety of needs. These needs include the various challenges learners with special needs encounter in a learning situation (Hornby, 2014). This theory is therefore appropriate when studying issues such as government support and teacher training for special needs education in public primary schools.

In the context of special needs education, teachers may observe and learn from other teachers who have successfully implemented effective strategies for working with students with special needs. They may also model behaviors that are conducive to creating a positive and inclusive learning environment for all students. Furthermore, government support and policies can play a significant role in shaping the behavior of teachers and schools, through incentives, funding, and guidelines for best practices.

Empirical Review

Education is one of the areas heavily invested in by governments across the world. Countries in the

world have gradually moved towards inclusive education, as it is covered in the Salamanca Declaration, where every child has a right to inclusive education and benefits from all other opportunities in an inclusive setting together with the other children (UNESCO, 1994). Fincher (2007), who conducted an extensive literature review on how government supports education across the world, found that the key government concern in supporting and investing in education is driven by the need to enhance the value and usefulness of individuals in view of competitiveness in global nations.

In another study, Kauffman et al. (2014) also used a literature review on the historical developments in government involvement in special needs education in the USA. The study observed that though federal laws required government support for special education in the USA, there were challenges due to the withdrawal of governmental social welfare programmes. While this study focused on federal laws and how they guide government involvement in special education, this study will take a different approach by having four variables in addition to government support.

In a study based in Japan, Yamamoto and Moriwaki (2019) studied the systems in place to support special education for children with disabilities. The study's target population was municipal employees in the education departments in Yokohama City and Toyonaka City. Two employees from Yokohama City and one employee from Toyonaka City were interviewed in May and October 2018. The study found that the education departments are responsible for assessing and enrolling students with special needs in Japan. The two cities also provide medical care to students with special needs who need such support. This study is instructive in showing that government support can extend to medical care.

Subba et al. (2019) conducted research on supporting students with disabilities in schools in Bhutan. The study used a qualitative approach, where 14 Bhutanese principals responded to

questions regarding inclusive practices in their schools. Subba et al. (2019) state that the principals described barriers such as a lack of specialised teachers, inadequate resources and facilities, and a lack of holistic inclusion as some of the reasons the government should support special needs education. The study emphasized the need for government involvement in providing space, resources, and training in mainstream schools so that children with and without disabilities can learn alongside each other and that educators have the required resources and are comfortable while providing education.

Dalton et al. (2012) conducted a study on the implementation of inclusive education in South Africa. The study reports findings from a workshop that included 13 participants who were teachers and therapists working with learners experiencing barriers to learning. The study found that the teachers and therapists receive government support and are a link between the special needs students and the government. The study found that South Africa has a clear policy on special needs learners that keeps being reviewed and improved. This study further reinforces the importance of government support for successful special education for learners with special needs.

In Kenya, government support for inclusive education requires a critical look to enable stakeholders to understand how the support is contributing to the teaching of learners with special needs in inclusive public primary schools. Kasoo (2014) asserts that head teachers in Kangundo Sub-County, Machakos County, Kenya, face challenges in the provision of special needs education among pupils with special needs in their schools and that they continue to drop out of school since their educational needs are not addressed. According to Kasoo, the school heads need enough physical facilities, teaching and learning resources, teachers trained in special needs education (SNE), and financial resources. This, in essence, according to Kasoo (2014), will strongly enhance the provision of inclusive education in public primary schools in

Kenya.

The issue of teacher training has been the subject of several studies in different contexts. These studies have emphasized that for teachers to be effective, they must be qualified and trained in various aspects of their work. Rice (2003) undertook a literature review on the attributes and effectiveness of teachers in the United States of America. The study found that teachers must have a positive attitude, go through proper training, and acquire a proper grade. Rice, in the same study, gives five attributes of teachers. These are attributes that appear to contribute to teachers' quality: experience preparation programmes and degrees, type of certification, coursework taken in preparation for the profession, and teachers' own test scores. This study took a different approach by adopting a descriptive survey using quantitative and qualitative data from teachers, head teachers, and a curriculum officer in Machakos County.

In another study, Merz-Atalik and Beuse (2016) undertook a comparative study at the University of North Carolina (Charlotte, USA) and the University of Education (Ludwigsburg, Germany) on the preparedness of teacher trainees towards teaching learners with special needs. The study sampled 277 teacher trainees from the University of North Carolina and 131 teaching students from the University of Education. The study found that there were insignificant differences between teachers' trainees in the US and Germany on how they perceived special needs education. The study found that the trainings in the two countries were able to prepare the teaching students to meet the needs of learners with special needs. The current study relied on teachers who are already practising in Machakos Subcounty.

In Britain, Esposito and Carroll (2019) examined 100 assignment abstracts from 50 Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) submitted as part of the postgraduate qualification delivered at one university in England between 2015 and 2017. The data were analysed using thematic analysis in Nvivo. The study found that advice by SENCOs to

teachers and school administrators on how to address the learning needs of all learners, maintain the schools' special educational needs register, and contribute to the in-service training of the teachers was helpful in enhancing inclusiveness for special needs learners.

In another study based in England during COVID, Warnes, Done, and Knowler (2021) undertook a survey on how teachers' expertise and experience affected inclusive education. An online survey involving 93 respondents who included teachers, SENDCO, and heads of departments in inclusive primary and secondary schools. The results showed that the teachers were having an added workload, including counselling, and this affected the teaching aspect. This study was based in Machakos Subcounty and expressly addressed the issue of teachers' training.

Gilmour and Wehby (2020) conducted a study on the association between teaching students with disabilities and teacher training in Canada. The authors applied multilevel logistic regression models to a large state administrative dataset in order to examine the influence of teacher training on the teaching of learners with special needs. The study found that more students with disabilities are being educated in general education classrooms than ever before, resulting in higher expectations for the abilities of general education teachers to meet special educational needs. The suggested cause of the mixture in the common classroom is a shortage of training students in training institutions. The time spent learning extra skills has been found to be one of the main reasons why there is a shortage of teachers in this field. Most of the teachers' trainees do not want to spend more time in college studying; rather, they want to graduate in the shortest time possible.

Raguindin et al. (2020) studied inclusive teaching practices in Thailand and the Philippines. The study adopted a cross sectional survey in which 300 Thai and 125 Filipino teachers were sampled. The data revealed that Filipino teachers have a generally higher level of positive attitudes, efficacy, and

intentions for inclusive practices than their Thai counterparts. The study also showed that both Filipino and Thai participants exhibited a positive correlation of their efficacy, attitudes, and intentions for inclusive practices.

Tungaraza (2014) studied the challenges of training special needs teachers in Tanzania. Fifteen special education teachers, were interviewed. The study found that the challenges range from a lack of teaching and learning materials to a few trained teachers, teacher attrition, negative attitudes, barriers to information, and an inaccessible environment (Tungaraza, 2014). Tungaraza suggested that teachers in Tanzania require professional support in service and motivation in order to continuously provide services in teaching. Muyungu (2015), in their study on the needs of preservice special needs teachers in Tanzania, also confirmed the existence of these challenges.

Opuko et al. (2021) studied predictors of attitudes among preservice teachers towards teaching students with Down syndrome in Ghana. The study collected data using questionnaires from 855 preservice teachers recruited from three colleges of education (n = 524) and two campuses of a public university (n = 331). The study found that the training led to better interactions and boosted confidence when teaching students with Down syndrome. However, the study found a gender disparity issue where female respondents indicated they were not as confident as their male counterparts when handling students with Down syndrome.

In Kenya, Kahuthia (2007) studied the attitudes of preschool teachers towards the inclusion of visually impaired children in Thika. The study sampled 66 preschool teachers in the four zones of Thika Municipality who were administered with questionnaires. The study found that the preschool teachers were able to effectively include visually impaired children in their classes without difficulty. Being the focus of classroom instructional activity and curriculum delivery, the teacher is a critical determinant of the quality of education offered. It is

absolutely imperative for the investigators to specify the type of special needs because teachers' attitudes have been found to vary with the type of disability and the extent of instructional adaptations required to accommodate such students.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework depicts a scenario where, if government support for SNE is adequate in the inclusive public primary schools in Kenya, then the teaching of learners with special needs is

effective. On the contrary, if the government's support for SNE in the inclusive public primary schools in Kenya is inadequate, then the teaching of learners with special needs is ineffective.

Secondly, if teachers are well trained for special needs teaching, then the teaching of learners with special needs is effective. Contrarily to this, if teachers are not well trained for special needs teaching, then the teaching of learners with special needs is ineffective.

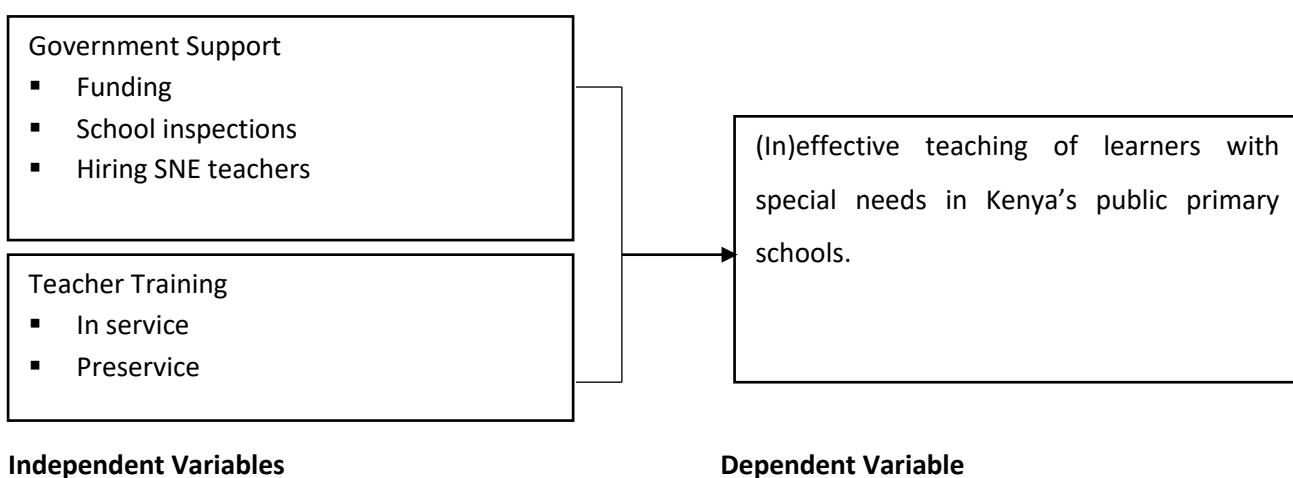


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

The research was a descriptive survey of 71 primary schools in Machakos Sub County. The target population was 71 head teachers, 802 teachers, and one curriculum support officer for special needs. Using proportional and random sampling, 80 teachers, three principals, and one curriculum support officer for special needs were selected as the sample size. Questionnaires were used to obtain quantitative data from teachers, while interviews with three head teachers and one curriculum support officer for special needs education were used to acquire qualitative data. The quantitative data gathered from the questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores. Qualitative data from interviews was

recorded and analyzed based on the themes as per the study's research questions.

FINDINGS

The first specific objective of the study was regarding the government support offered when teaching learners with special needs. The study began by asking the teachers to rate the extent to which they receive listed assistance from the government to teach in a school with learners with special needs. A five point Likert scale where 5 represented 'very great extent' and 1 represented 'not at all'. A mean score of more than 3 was interpreted to mean that the government support was notable while a mean score of less than 3 was interpreted to imply that the assistance was not felt by the teachers.

Table 1: Nature of Government Support for Special Needs Education

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
The financial support for special needs education is adequate	1.51	0.57
Government policies are supportive of special needs education	2.26	0.746
There is adequate medical support for SNE learners	1.65	0.661
The government support is timely	2.01	0.730

The results in Table 1 showed that the financial support for special needs education was inadequate, as shown by a mean score of 1.51. A mean score of 2.26 also indicated that the government's policies were not supportive of special needs education. The results show that there is minimal medical support for SNE learners, as indicated by a mean score of 1.65. The results also show that the government's support was untimely, as shown by a mean score of 2.01. The head teachers indicated that in the inclusive setting, there was a lack of data to enable tracking the specific funds allocated to special needs pupils.

The results showed that the financial support for special needs education is inadequate and untimely. These findings are in line with Kauffman et al. (2014), who in their study in the USA found

challenges with government support for special needs education. While in the USA the challenges in government support are due to opposition to welfare programs, in Kenya this is attributed to lack of prioritization of SNE, and as explained by the head teachers, in the inclusive setting there was a lack of data to enable tracking the specific monies allocated to special needs pupils. The results also showed that government policies were also deemed not supportive of special needs education.

The study then sought to determine the extent to which the teachers felt satisfied with the support offered by listed government players in teaching learners with special needs in an inclusive setting. The results were interpreted using the analysis in Table 2.

Table 2: Satisfaction with Government Support for Special Needs Education

Source of Government Support	Mean	Std. Deviation
National Government	2.03	0.882
Teachers Service Commission	1.83	0.828
Teachers' unions	1.77	0.663
County Governments	1.60	0.543
Constituency Development Fund	3.18	1.054
Local politicians	1.85	0.626

A mean score of 3.18 in the results demonstrates that the teachers were satisfied with the Constituency Development Fund's (CDF) support. A mean score of less than 3 indicated that teachers were not satisfied with other government actors. A mean score of 1.60 indicated that the respondents were the most dissatisfied with the teachers' union's support. The head teachers confirmed these results as they revealed that CDF was useful in maintaining classes and buying special equipment

for the learners with special needs.

The results also showed that the support from the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) was impressive. The results also showed that the national and county governments were not deemed to be doing much for SNE in Machakos Sub County. These results are contrary to the findings by Yamamoto and Moriwaki (2019) in Japan, who found that municipal governments were instrumental in offering medical support for SNE

learners. The difference in government support can be attributed to the existing legal frameworks, which allocate resources to different government agencies, which is contrary to Dalton et al. (2012), who found clear policies in place in South Africa. This may be due to a lack of awareness among

Kenyan SNE stakeholders about the existing SNE policies.

The study then asked the teachers to indicate the extent to which they felt government support determined the teaching of learners with special needs in the listed areas. Table 3 shows the results.

Table 3: Extent to Which Government Support Influences Special Needs Teaching

Teaching Area	Mean	Std. Deviation
Attention	1.90	0.656
Communication	1.64	0.683
Interactions	1.55	0.501
Writing	1.73	0.475
Numeracy	1.83	0.386
Extracurricular Activities	1.28	0.453

The results show that the teachers felt that the contribution of government support was not felt to the extent of determining the teaching of special needs pupils, as all the teaching areas posted mean scores less than three. A mean score of 1.28 indicated that the government's support contribution to the extracurricular activities was insignificant. The head teachers interviewed agreed with the results, as they indicated that the inadequate government support meant teachers did not have resources to dedicate to the special needs pupils.

The results showed that the contribution of government support is not felt in the teaching of special needs pupils in the SNE teaching areas. This is in line with findings by Subba et al. (2019) and Dalton et al. (2012), who emphasized the need for

enhanced government support for better SNE learning outcomes.

The second objective of the study sought to determine the contribution of teacher training to the teaching of learners with special needs in Machakos Sub County. The study first enquired whether the teachers have received training in SNE. The results in Figure 2 show that 73% of the teachers have been trained in SNE while 23% indicated they had not teacher training in SNE. The curriculum support officer noted that the Ministry of Education had introduced mandatory training of SNE in teachers training Colleges since 2018 though there were no clear guidelines on teachers who were in service and those who had graduated before the introduction of the mandatory SNE trainings.

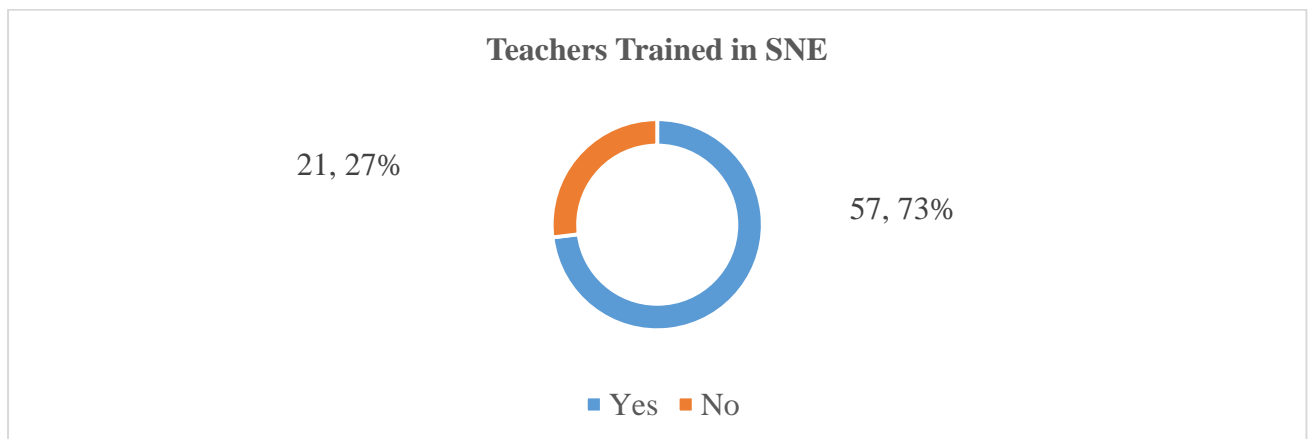


Figure 2: Teachers Trained in SNE

The teachers who underwent training were asked to rate the adequacy of the training in handling

special needs learners. Figure 3 shows the results.

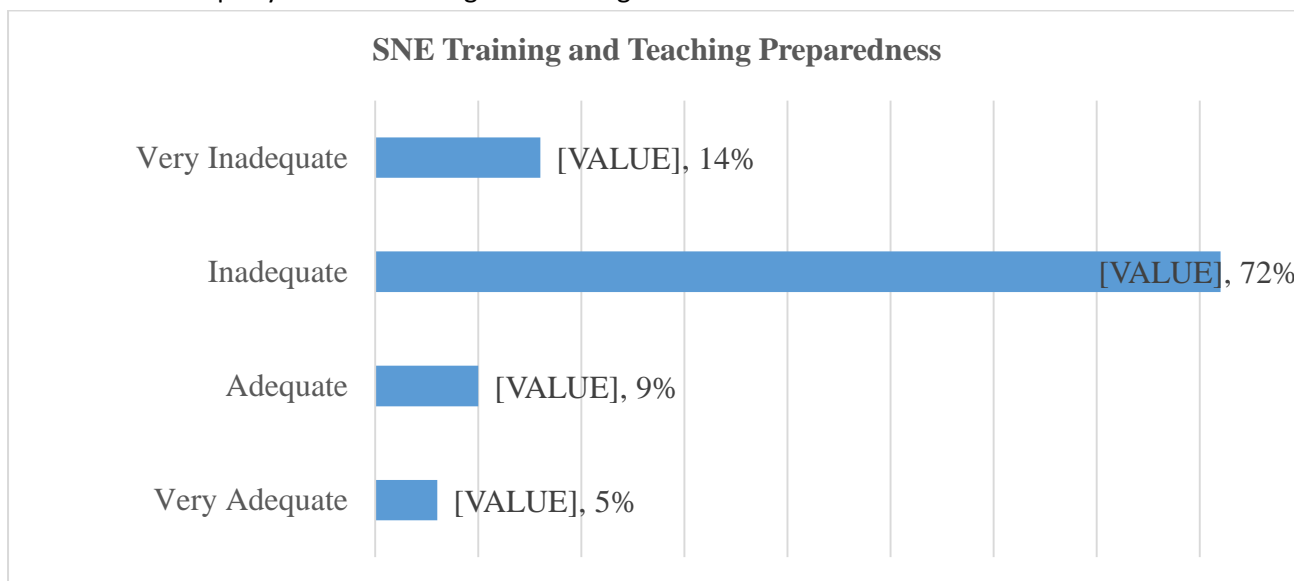


Figure 3: SNE Training and Teaching Preparedness

The results show that the majority (86%) of the teachers felt that the SNE training they had received did not adequately prepare them for teaching learners with special needs. The head teachers indicated that this situation was mainly because the in-service SNE training was mainly voluntary, a sentiment that was shared by the curriculum support officer. This is in disagreement with various authors (including Merz-Atalik and Beuse, 2016 in the USA, and Esposito & Carroll, 2019 in Britain), who found that there were

elaborate training programs for SNE across the world. The difference can be explained by limited resources allocated to special needs education teacher training as well as the fact that mandatory training on SNE was introduced in 2018 despite the existence of inclusive learning environment policies.

The study then asked the teachers to indicate the extent to which SNE training among teachers' influences the teaching of learners with special needs in the listed areas. Table 4 shows the results.

Table 4: Extent to Which SNE Training Determines Special Needs Teaching

Teaching Area	Mean	Std. Deviation
Attention	3.31	1.132
Communication	3.10	1.180
Interactions	3.36	1.248
Writing	3.03	1.081
Numeracy	2.83	0.973
Extracurricular Activities	2.69	0.971

The results showed that the teachers surveyed felt that the contribution of teacher training determines the teaching of special needs pupils in attention, communication, interactions, and writing teaching areas, which posted mean scores above three. The contribution of teacher training was felt most for interactions and attention, as indicated by mean

scores of 3.36 and 3.31. The head teachers interviewed agreed with the results, as they indicated that the training is very critical to the way the teachers handle and interact with special needs pupils. The head teachers indicated that there was a marked difference in the way SNE trained teachers taught learners with special needs compared to the

untrained teachers' ways of teaching. The head teachers further explained that for the untrained teachers the influence would be negative on the teaching areas while for the trained teachers the influence of SNE training is positive.

This finding is in contrast to findings by various authors (including Merz-Atalik and Beuse, 2016 in the USA; Esposito and Carroll, 2019 in Britain; and Raguindin et al., 2020 in Thailand), who found that SNE teachers' training improves the classroom experience through better attitudes, efficacy, interactions, and enhanced ability to meet special needs learners' requirements. While this group of studies indicates a positive influence of teachers' training, the situation in Kenya may be negative, as explained by Warnes, Done, and Knowler (2021), who found that teachers get an added workload, including counselling, which affects the teaching aspect.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The first specific objective of the study was regarding the government support offered when teaching learners with special needs. The study concludes that government support in the form of financial support for special needs education is

inadequate and untimely. There is also lack of awareness of the SNE policies among teachers and other stakeholders. This has led to a situation where government support does not influence the teaching outcomes of learners with special needs.

The second objective of the study sought to find out the contribution of teacher training towards the teaching of learners with special needs in Machakos Sub County. The study concludes that there is a training gap among teachers on SNE. This has in turn led to a situation where the benefits of teachers' training on SNE have not been fully realized in the classroom, especially by learners with special needs.

The study recommends that there is need to review SNE policies, practices, and procedures based on the experience of inclusive learning across Kenya. Such policy reviews should seek ways to increase funding for SNE and accelerate the rate of SNE teacher training. The study suggests that the capitation for special needs learners needs to be increased. The Teachers Service Commission should also increase the number of SNE teachers in all the schools in order to ensure better teaching and learning outcomes for learners with special needs.

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