

Teacher perspectives on disability-inclusive pre-school learning environments for children with disabilities in Kenya

Sheru W. Muuo¹, Julia de Kadt², Lydia Kairanya³, Sapana Basnet², Charles Odol¹, George Maina³, Erick Otieno¹, Elena Schmidt²

1. Sightsavers, Kenya 2. Sightsavers, UK 3. Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE), Kenya

Background

Access to early childhood education (ECE) is critical for children with disabilities. Kenyan policy supports two years of free, mandatory pre-school for all children, but creating quality, disability-inclusive learning environments remains a challenge for most mainstream public schools.

The Brief Education Quality Inventory (BEQI) is an internationally validated ECE learning environment assessment system, structured around four evidence-based practices: play-based learning, learning through conversation, promoting strong relationships, and stimulating and safe environments.¹ We use these practices as a framework to document teachers' perspectives and efforts to create more inclusive learning environments.

Methods

Qualitative and visual data were collected in August and September 2024 as part of a study to strengthen assessment of disability-inclusive ECE learning environments, within the Schools2030 programme.²

| | Focus group discussions (FGDs) | In-depth interviews | Documentary photography |
|----------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Homa Bay | 2 FGDs with 12 teachers | 3 teachers-in-charge of pre-schools | 12 teachers |
| Mombasa | 2 FGDs with 14 teachers | 3 heads of institution | 6 teachers |

Deductive thematic analysis was applied to data.

Conclusion

Using multiple forms of data collection generated greater depth and nuance. Images and quotations reflect teachers' first-hand experiences, and support wide, non-technical audiences in understanding disability-inclusion in ECE learning environments.

Findings will inform collaborative work with teachers, parents and stakeholders to better integrate disability considerations into ECE learning environment assessments. They also support understanding of how teachers currently approach disability inclusion and help identify areas where additional support is required.

Findings

1 Play-based learning: while play did not feature strongly in the qualitative data, opportunities and limitations around play were prominent in the documentary photography. Images highlight play materials and areas, and how these have been made more inclusive.



"Teacher improvised a handball to help learners with disabilities develop their fine motor skills."
Teacher, Homa Bay



"Play and learning materials assisting learning and development."
Teacher, Homa Bay

2 Learning through conversation: there was relatively limited engagement with theme across the data. Teachers emphasised challenges in communicating with some children with disabilities, and their efforts to support and strengthen communication.

"We had a child who was unable to communicate things like what they have drunk, what their problem is. You ask a question, the child fails to understand. I had a child like that, and I placed him near me, but he could not hear me. I still have a challenge with what signs to use for communication."
Teacher, FGD, Homa Bay

"I have a boy in my class who has a speech problem... as you teach, everyone is looking at the boy. He gets scared that maybe he hasn't said the right thing... When I put them in groups ... I'm always around, and we work together... otherwise, they'll end up not interacting..."
Teacher, FGD, Homa Bay

3 Strong relationships: teachers highlighted the importance of relationships between children with disabilities and their peers, as well as with teachers and parents. They also described the impact of stigma and discrimination on inclusion.



"The desk that the rest of the learners as well as the girl with special needs use as they learn, work together and share ideas thus helping her to develop self esteem and communication skills."
Teacher, Mombasa

"I mean the stigma is not only from learners or the colleagues around them but also from the parents outside. They discourage their kids from associating with that kind of a learner."
Teacher, FGD, Mombasa

4 Safe and stimulating environment: photography data was strongly skewed towards this domain. Images focused on infrastructure and resources limitations, and highlighted efforts to improve the accessibility of the environment.



"The teachers have made sure that the school compound is well levelled to allow the child on a wheelchair move easily"
Teacher, Homa Bay



"Bold numbers assist learners who cannot see small letters at a distance making it easier for them to read"
Teacher, Mombasa

References

- Brief Early Childhood Quality Inventory (BEQI) Together in Practice Toolkit www.ecdmeasure.org/beqi
- Schools2030, a movement that seeks to improve quality teaching and holistic learning and foster education systems globally through teacher agency www.schools2030.org



For more information:
Email: smuuo@sightsavers.org



Kenya Institute of Special Education



Sightsavers

* Preliminary results of ongoing work