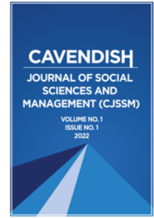

Does Inclusion Mean Inclusion: The Reality Nexus for Disabled Children in Ugandan Schools?

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Abstract
Inclusion of children with disabilities (CWDs) in school education is high on the education agenda since the universal declaration of Education for All. There is a shift from education provisioning through specified schools that are segregated according to the impairment of the child. The concern for this qualitative study is to find out if the disabled children studying in regular schools socialize in ways that build their confidence and esteem to foster meaningful participation and holistic benefits from the schooling system. In-depth interviews were undertaken with 17 participants, with lived experiences of disability from 5 schools in Kampala. It reveals that Ugandan schools have achieved at increasing access to schooling for CWDs but have limited capacity to effectively provide avenues to socialize. I argue for friendly conditions to be created for them to adapt, integrate and belong. I suggest concerted and purposeful effort of the teachers, parents and other stakeholders engaged in the education and socialization for disabled children to create welcoming and friendly spaces that reduce stereotypes and stigma so that CWDs can explore their potential. The Study is important to the Ugandan community where little is documented on socialization of disabled children.

Keywords: *Inclusion, socialization, Stigma, disabled children, Uganda*

Introduction

Inclusive education is the major impetus for the education agenda worldwide as stipulated by UNESCO (2012). Guided by the perspectives of social justice, human rights and equity, inclusive education aids not only individuals with disabilities but also diverse learners including those at risk (Francisco et al, 2020; Wabule, 2020). It has received much attention in education policy documents as a way of narrowing the attainment gap between children (Black-Hawkins et al, 2007; Precy and Mazurkeiwicz, 2012). Globally, the process of inclusion for CDWs for most countries in the north went through three phases (Boutbal and Yahi, 2018). Firstly, from the perception where disability was equated to dependency and the philosophy that people with disability should be separated from normal people and denied propagation (Francisco et al 2020). Thus, resulting in 'institutionalization', where separate institutions were built to educate CWDs. Their education was seen as a philanthropic, provided mainly by religious groups, following a charity model of service to society, and offered a differentiated curriculum from normal public schools. The stigma associated with isolation and separation of individuals with disabilities from the rest of society led to the' education movement of the 1970's (Boutebal and Yahi, 2018; Francisco et al, 2020), leading to an evolution from institutionalization to 'segregated integration', in the 1980's (Wah, 2010). Subsequently, classes were established in the same school buildings as regular classes, but the CWDs continued to be taught separately. A final shift led to normalisation, main streaming and lastly inclusion. This was due to the policies such as the Least Restriction Environment policy (LRE) in the United States that advocated for educating CWDs with regular children in a regular classroom environment (Francisco et al, 2020). Since then, inclusive education as an instrument for securing economic progress, democracy and social stability in many countries has achieved significant attention (Francisco et al, 2020). While it remains an ongoing developmental process due to the many challenges (Wah, 2010), focus for many countries is on delivering equality of opportunity in schools through integrated school support systems that respond to the needs of disadvantaged learners (Precy and Mazurkeiwicz, 2012; Francisco et al, 2020). Emphasise on nondiscrimination of children for most countries is intended to fight for equality and quality education as a right for every child (UNESCO, 2012).

This article is concerned with children with disabilities (CWDs) in Uganda who study in normal school systems as instituted by the Universal Primary Education Programme (UPE). The Ugandan education system (MoE&S, 2018), points to policies that put special needs and inclusive education high on the education agenda. The government affirms to this commitment by subscribing to the goals of Education for All (EFA), and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG4) that recognise the need to offer an education for children and youth with special needs within a regular education system. Moreover, the 2030 agenda for sustainable development advocates for creating enabling environments by, for and with persons with disabilities. Guided by the national policy on disability (2006), focus on inclusion in Uganda, like elsewhere has shifted from institutionalisation and segregation. However, the form of inclusion seems to mainly concentrate on access to the general education curriculum and classroom. Concerns on how the children are socialised to establish their identities and belonging are rarely reported. Studies have shown that preparing children with disabilities to accept a place in society as normal or natural happens through socialisation (Maria et al, 2019). Hence, teaching

disabled children with the 'normal' children would mean paying specific attention to their diverse needs and giving them special attention (Maria et al, 2019). Key to the socialisation process is the ability to understand their beliefs, perceptions, and ideologies that they hold about themselves in relation to others within the social environment (Maria et al, 2019). According to Precy and Mazurkeiwicz (2012) granting rights for disabled children access to normal schools, should be accompanied with an education that is good and relevant for them. The intention of this study was to establish the actual school-based practices that enhance inclusion. Specifically, by looking at the socialisation processes and how disabled children are treated in the schools by their peers, the teachers and even the parents or guardians.

Objectives of the study

The major objective of the study is to establish how children with disabilities socialise in normal schools in Uganda that could enhance belonging.
The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Find out the children's social needs and which mechanisms are in place to cater for them
2. Find out the challenges faced by the children, the teachers and the parents in ensuring the social and emotional needs of children with disabilities are met
3. To discuss schools-based strategies that may be helpful for improving school socialisation for disabled children

2.0 Literature review

Inclusion of children with disabilities in normal schooling systems is a new phenomenon in most countries across the globe (Maria et al, 2019; Elena et al, 2016). Information on educational needs of children with disabilities is traditionally grouped on nomenclatures such as physical, mental, cripples, visual impairment physically handicapped, hearing impairment, speech impairment, mental disability, multiple disabilities (WHO, 2004). Other categorisations such as mental retardation neurological and developmental delays, disabilities of cognition, hearing disability, language acquisition problems and resultant speech formation difficulties, visual disability, and other overlapping disabilities of rare types also surface (Byskov et al, 2004). The main concern of this study was the children who fell in the categories of physical impairment, activity deviation and participation restrictions. That is to say, the children who face difficulties executing tasks within life circumstances (Bamwesigye and Hlavackova, 2014). Until the universal declaration of Education for All (EFA), the majority of the children who fell under these categories were taken to be either ''ineducable'', or severely educationally sub-normal'', and, were to attend schools specially established for them (Pollard et al, 2014; Elena, 2016; Francisco et al, 2020).

Inclusion and Inclusive education: what are the children's needs?

Inclusion for CWDs was a concept specifically chosen after the Jomtien 'Education for All' conference of 1990 as a better will to put an end to the separation and discrimination that prevailed (Boutebal and Yahi, 2018). While open to a range of understandings, depending on historical, geographical and theoretical contexts (Byskov et al, 2004), inclusion interpreted

generally, would mean the process of increasing the number of children attaining mainstream school, who previously would have been hindered from doing so due to their recognised special needs (Black-Hawkins et al, 2007; Pollard et al, 2014). According to UNESCO, inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach to all learners. UNESCO's broadened concept of inclusion in education, like the Salamanca statement 28, declares inclusive education as a leading guide in serving children with special educational needs. This according to Black-Hawkins and others (2007) can be achieved through all schools working towards combating discriminatory attitudes and creating welcoming classrooms for all children regardless of gender, race or socioeconomic background. Black-Hawkins and other (2007) perceive inclusive education as both the means for and consequence of school systems attempting to address issues of inequality by widening access and participation. Significant in the definitions lies in meaningful inclusion of all children in national curricular, systems of assessment and how their participation is judged. Emphasis is on the notions of equality, equity and social justice (Precy and Mazurkeiwicz, 2012; Black-Hawkins et al, 2007; Pollard et al, 2014).

This article sought to look at inclusion not only from the perspective of equal access, but from the actual conditions within the school system that foster meaningful socialisation for the disabled children. It is based on the right for people with disabilities to participate in social life (Boutebal and Yahi, 2018). Socialisation is this paper is taken to mean the ability for the disabled children to navigate in the school environment while copying with certain rules and standards of behavior, and developing their social competences (Boutebal and Yahi, 2018; Vygotsikii and Tsukerman, 2000). Socialisation according to Yılmaz and Soyer (2018) prepares children for adult life by learning social behavior and unique cultural values of society. Literature raises pertinent questions on what inclusion is all about. Pollard and others (2014) have raised questions relating to which forms of education should be provided to which children. Also, who is to be included where and when. Finally, how might inclusion support or limit the child's achievement for the disabled. Such questions are specifically relevant for the disabled if schools are to respond to their need to receive an all-round education that facilitate attainment of the skills needed of the 21st century education product (Elena et al, 2016).

Scholars who argue along this line view inclusion as when children have access to an education that is appropriate and relevant to CWDs needs. An education that is transformative, inspirational and brings positive experience for all (Precy and Mazurkeiwicz, 2012; Elena et al, 2016). By the fact that inclusion celebrates diversity, this means that the schools not only aim to promote social equality, but also ensure that each individual learner is provided with opportunities to escape from the limitations in which they are born. Besides the centricity of developing the individual leaner, inclusive education is about promoting a fair and just education system that respects the interests of all stakeholders such as the parents/ guardians, the teachers, and the school leadership (Ross 2008, cited in Precy and Mazurkeiwicz, 2012). Parallel from this rhetoric, education is commonly structured in ways that privilege those that are considered capable of high achievement. As pointed out by Francisco and others (2020), the way inclusive education is structured, falls short of paving a way to equality. Those who struggle because of their learning needs are often not properly addressed, are marginalised in school or leave education at the earliest opportunity (Black- Hawkins et al 2007; Elena et al, 2016; Wabule, 2022; Maria et al, 2022).

Challenges faced by the children, the teachers and the parents in meeting the social and emotional needs of children with disabilities

Studies expose systemic vulnerabilities that are reinforced and perpetuated through schooling, thus excluding vulnerable children from mainstream entitlements that are availed to others (Black- Hawkins et al, 2007; Pollard et al, 2014; Bamwesigye and Hlavackova, 2014). For instance, the tendencies of ("othering") children with disabilities as strange often subjects them to bullying and harassment (Devries et al, 2014; Swart et al, 2001). Subsequently, causing negative environments that create discomfort for them to stay in school. Often treated as 'invisible', the school retention for children with disabilities is hampered by un-supportive school environments where they are neglected, ignored and subjected to teasing and ridicule by peers (Elena et al, 2016; Devries et al, 2014; Bamwesigye and Hlavackova, 2014). The level of social and academic integration, including, the way in which children feel comfortable in the school, thus remain critical to the children's achievement. School socialisation according to Elena and others (2016) would mean inclusion of all the children in social relations and enabling them feel accepted by their normal counterparts. Providing strategies for protection against peer bullying becomes a necessary socialisation element. In Uganda, country level legislations provide mechanisms for service delivery as relates to children with disabilities (MoE&S, 2018). Public and private efforts to disseminate information and raising awareness about educational needs of CWDs as well as discussion on funding by both government and private entities on disabled children are addressed (MoE&S, 2018). However, the legal framework for inclusive education seems to be curtailed by the cultural and social milieu that create constraints to full inclusion of children with disabilities in many contexts.

For instance, while trained and motivated teachers are critical to provision of a quality education for all students, and especially for those with disabilities. There is scarcity of skilled teachers to respond to the needs of disabled children (Bamwesigye and Hlavackova, 2014). This coupled with the perception that children with disabilities are challenging to instruct, lead to low academic achievements (Bamwesigye and Hlavackova, 2014). Meaningful participation is also worsened by a shortage of adequate facilities. In many least developed countries, teachers face difficulties serving disabled children in limiting school circumstance (United Nations Children's Fund UNICEF, 2013). In Uganda, although the government, has a clearly stipulated policy on inclusion in education, no resources have been committed to ensure that children with disabilities achieve meaningfully from mainstream schools (Otyola et al. 2017).

Another hurdle lies with the failure of, the parents who would be central in socialising the children prior to joining school having tendencies to perceive children with disabilities as a burden, a shame or even a curse (Byskov, 2004; Bamwesigye and Hlavackova, 2014). The stigma and negative biases not only influence the parent's decision to take the child to school but also biases them in providing the necessary materials and learning equipment. As victims of a vicious cycle of stereotyping, CWDs access to an adequate education is curtailed. Subsequently, a failure for them to acquire life skills that are necessary for their livelihoods and survival (Elena et al, 2016). The abuses from immediate circles of influence engrain the children in negative stigma, isolation and lonely lives that impact their self-esteem and lead to poor school performance. These factors combined lead to a lifelong cycle of poverty, dependency, discrimination and the self-fulfilling prophesy of "hopelessness".

Strategies to improve learning for disabled children

Responding to the numerous needs of young disabled children in the process of getting an education can start in almost every sector (UNICEF, 2013, Wah. 2010). According to Wah (2010), strategies differ according to the context. However, a strong political will that advocates for equal opportunity and the rights of CWDs, is key to inclusiveness. According to UNESCO 2013, interest of any policy strategy should consider the education processes that attempt to respond to all pupils as individuals. Further, UNESCO advocates for, reconsidering and restructuring curriculum organisations and allocating resources to enhance equality of opportunity, as well as disbanding the lifelong reliance on NGOs as major supports for the disabled (UNESCO, 2013). Efforts need t be geared towards finding policy programmes that oblige education systems and the schools to elaborate an anti-segregation plan (Pantic et al, 2010). A move towards introducing the quota system, as well as improving coordination between non-government and government institutions are critical to identifying and addressing the needs of CWDs. A policy to offer incentives such as snacks or a meal according to Harris (2008) is a powerful tool for enrollment and participation in school for a child with a disability, more especially for children who come from poor households.
Additionally, committing resources into the training of teachers, equipping them with the skills in handling the children with special needs is key to promoting access and retention. An inclusive school system according to Panic and others (2010) can be facilitated by imparting knowledge on generic approaches to inclusive practices, as a way of creating highly motivated, skillful, dynamic, dedicated and flexible teachers who are committed to the student's educational progress and social inclusion. Similar views are shared by Wah (2010) who advocates for provision of external resources in support of classroom instruction, a focus on change of the teacher's attitudes, in-service development of skills and creating discrete relations between special educators and regular teachers in providing inclusive education in their school as crucial. Thus, enhancing teacher's competences by equipping them with knowledge and expertise in handling the pedagogical and social challenges of disabled children is central (Wah, 2010). This enables them to embrace teaching practices that give meaning to the concept of inclusion regardless of challenges within the school. When teachers are willing to learn and adopt new skills, they accept new challenges and improve on how to work with existing challenges (Elena et al, 2016)). Such teachers are more likely to create supportive learning environments that enhance learner's achievement by for instance, respecting, working and collaborating with both the children, their families and the wider circles of influence in creating scaffolds for the learning (Pantic et al, 2010). Understanding the children's backgrounds by the teachers creates a friendly atmosphere in class, by for instance, providing counselling and guidance to children that boosts their self-esteem and ego. Moreover, feelings of inclusion and higher rates of retention could be achieved by the schools' providing services that cater for the psycho social needs of disabled children (WHO/WB, 2011; NUDIPU, 2018), and treating all children in a similar way.
The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) provides another wide range of written and unwritten principles of education. For instance, opportunities for both formal and informal contacts with fellow students, lecturers, tutors, student counsellors

and learning networks are useful. Pantic and others (2010) point to the importance of schools forming academic and social integration structures, and mechanisms that promote interactive learning methodologies (Pantic et al, 2010). These resonate with Mitchell (2013) who pointed to 27 strategies for successful inclusion. Accordingly, cooperate group teaching, peer teaching and peer influence, social skills training, collaborative teaching, parental involvement, cognitive behavior therapy and behavioral approaches to control antecedes and consequences are among the helpful ways of connecting with diverse learning communities for support and shared learning.

Raising awareness of the need to send the CWDs to school through media campaigns according to Kabasakal (2020), has been a significant strategy for creating a vibrant and cordial school environment. This is more important in the communities like Uganda so that the CWDs are not looked at as a burden by the parents, teachers, schools' heads and their peers. Besides, Harris (2008) points to the important role of community involvement in identification and screening of children with disabilities. Accordingly, this breaks the stigma and silence that the parents could shoulder in disclosing the status of their children (Harris, 2008). Combining awareness and conducting research about disabled children according Byskov and others (2004) is key to establishing the actual educational needs and addressing them.

Methodology

The qualitative study was interested in children with disabilities in Primary schools in Uganda. The intention was to explore the mechanisms that are in place to facilitate their meaningful socialisation, specifically, in ways that could cultivate a positive change in attitudes, perceptions and thinking about their interactions within the school environment and fellow learners (Kemmis, 2007). A total of 17 participants, 10 pupils, 4 parents and 3 teachers participated in the study. These were purposively selected from 5 schools in Makindye division, Kampala city, because of easy access and proximity to the researcher. The researcher facilitated contacts with the schools by securing collaboration with the school head teachers and the teachers that were knew through prior formal networks. Children were recruited from Primary two to six in the range of 6 to 16 years of age. It was considered that both males and females participate in the study to ascertain the experiences of both gender learners. The interest was to establish the schooling experiences of such children and how they navigate through an inclusive environment. The teachers and parents of the children too, participated in the study to ascertain their experiences and contributions towards the socialisation of CWDs. Strictly CWDs, their parents and the teachers were purposively selected because they have a lived experience and could provide in-depth understanding of the problem from their own perspective (Hennink et al, 2011). The schools were selected based on the prior relationship established with the school management. Meanwhile, different strategies such as snowball sampling were used to identify CWDs (Lune and Berg, 2017). Consequently, snowballing would enable identifying of subjects with the required attributes. All other protocols that are necessary for accessing participants such as seeking permission from relevant authorities were observed before gaining entry into the schools and gaining access to the children. Verbal consent was sought from the parents, the children, the school leaders and the teachers.

In-depth interviews (Creswell, 2012) were conducted with the CWDs and all the other participants in the study. The intention was to give voice to the participants to share their own

experiences but also to ensure that the results reflect multiple perspective and give maximum variation (Krueger, 1998; Brigitte, 2017). Semi-structured interviews provided unique opportunities for probing and gaining deeper insights into the subjective experiences of the participants (Lune and Berg, 2017). Research indicates that interviews yield trustworthy and detailed stories, thus leading to knowledge often not generated by proxies (Lune and Berg, 2017). The researcher also observed the schooling conditions and took notes to cross check the information from interviews. Observation according to scholars is instrumental in investigating diverse human experiences and activities (Hennink et al, 2011). By watching, listening, reflecting and engaging in conversation, the researcher was able to ascertain the divide between what participants say are the practices and what actually is done. Combining observation and interviews was effective for checking non-verbal expressions, naturalistic behaviors, interactions and activities in their school settings. This is what Brigitte (2017) refers to as 'rigor' for ascertaining truth, authenticity, integrity and credibility in naturalistic inquiry.
Topical guides with interview questions were used. These were pre-tested with a smaller group of participants to ensure their relevance and validity (Creswell, 2012). The interview guides were mainly unstructured to allow participants to freely give the narratives of their stories in their own way. English and Luganda were used because these are the most commonly spoken languages in the region. Relevant data was captured through the use of both video and audio records after full consent of the participants (Flick, 2018). This was intended to ensure that detailed qualitative data is captured and stored in its original form without any distortions. Data was transcribed verbatim and analysed by the aid of the computer software Atlas TI, which enabled establishing codes and themes that are relevant to the topic. Pseudemys are used to conceal the participants' identities.

Findings

The dynamic of inclusion and exclusion of CWDs in mainstream education in Ugandan primary schools is presented from the contexts of despair, anxiety and even frustration for the children, their teachers and parents. Key in the findings is that growing up with a disability in society means that a child experiences exclusion not only from the social environment, but also by people's attitudes and from institutions.

Generally, disability in Ugandan schools was found to manifest in multiple identities, namely, locomotor/physical, cognitive and learning disorder, which though some forms are not explicitly visible impact cognitive learning.

One major constraint to socialisation for the disabled children was the issue of identity in the process of negotiating space in normal schools. The social cultural scheme that shapes the ways in which people viewed a normal body seemed to affect the ways in which the children constructed own meanings to disability**.** The common construction of a normal body from a social context, is that one should be strong, upright without any deformations (Swart et al, 2001). Subsequently, an ableist attitude of society created a common perception that not having a normal physical body was depraved as shared by Nina, a lame girl:

> ...at first most girls did not notice my disability. But one day as we were doing house work, this girl looked at me and then said… you girl… your hand looks shorter than the

> other… it was the first time. Then she said put them together and I see… This is when I started being guilty… (Nina 20th July 2022)

Feelings of guilty as expressed by Nina suggests a multilayered culture of disappointment, despair and stigma for the disabled. It is sufficed to say, guilt goes with shame, a low self-esteem, lack of confidence and negative feelings which cause undue pain. And because emotions shape how people think about what people can do with their bodies, when CWDs harbor negative feelings about their bodies, they develop negative appraisal of the self and fall back into emotions of being underprivilege, less capable and inadequate.

Moreso, most schools in Uganda, as also revealed by the literature search operated from the ableist context, thus, making holistic learning in terms of physical access and interaction not easily accessed by learners with disability. It was found that due to negative biases, the schools were still reluctant to welcome CWDs. Consequently, despite acceptance, perhaps due to policy requirement, CWDs were still excluded and isolated from most social and extracurricular activities that would foster holistic development. Indeed, most of the schools visited revealed that they conducted only activities and had facilities for the able-bodied children. The limiting schooling conditions meant that the children cannot ably participate in physical and recreational activities which according to Mehmet and others (2018) are useful means of contributing to the integration and socialisation of disabled children. The missing links hinder effective exposure of the children to future career streams suitable to individual needs and passion (Mehmet et al, 2018). This was expressed by a teacher during interactions at one school:

> ...while for us teachers we would wish that children with disabilities also participate in say extracurricular activities, we do not have facilities for them… our activities are those that do not need money… so at times we feel pity for them… Ryan a teacher (20th July 2022)

In reality CWDs have very few options in terms of socialisation that create hopelessness when they fail to connect with the peers. In this case teacher Ryan expresses pity for CWDs. And because they are not exposed to any activity, they end up being stereotyped as 'un able', propagating the affirmative model of disability. Activities that help discover the learners' abilities according to their own positive experiences would enhance the creation of a critical pedagogy and narrative of hope.

Besides, teaching from the perspective of being able bodied as practiced in most of the schools was found to be causing enormous tension, impacting on academic performance and progression. For instance, most of the visited schools did not apply special assessment for CWDs as lamented by another teacher:

> You see for us, the requirement is academic performance at the end… what the school and parents will ask is how many first grades, how many second grades and any failures will be blamed on the teacher… we can't give them extra time, we are already overwhelmed, and it is a system that cares about results… for you, you will not explain that this child was a slow learner was having an impairment… (Timothy teacher, July 2022)

While Nathan another teacher lamented:

> ...Schools much as we try to be accommodative, what do you do when you are supposed to teach within a fixed time… Co-curricular activities, now… for the disabled. which activities, you are monitoring this group, you are running after this… so, what do you do… let them just stay there and watch… or even stay in class because they cannot run around… (July 2022)

Navigating the ablest environment and curriculum of schools for the disabled works against them. The teacher may show concern but like mentioned by Timothy, the limitations of big numbers and perhaps a lack of adequate facilities imply that the CWDs are left behind. This confirms a report by UNICEF (2014), which indicates that only 5% of the children with disabilities are able to study in a regular normal school setting while the majority would require special schools and annexes. In Uganda, a decline in education sector financing by the government leads to even more deprivation for CWDs who demand more than a normal child. Inability of schools to meet the accessibility requirements results into inadequate participation of disabled children.

Another factor was found to be the poor attitude of teachers on CWDs and subsequent stereotypes or indirect discrimination as hindrance to adequate socialisation. Some teachers lack adequate training to sufficiently develop child friendly classes that can accommodate the diversity among learners. This is worsened by the social cognitive nature of inequality and cultural schemes which associate disability with bad luck. Stigma and negative biases are also held by the parents who live in self-denial, self-pity and self- blame for fathering or mothering disabled children. Stereotyping and misinterpretation of the children's actions and feelings tarnishes the self-image and becomes a huge crisis to belonging or being accepted. Moreover, the remarks by members in the community about the disabled children seemed to torment the parents and brought shame as testified by Rita a mother with a mentally retarded daughter:

> …Then this is this woman, the people in society, they gossip about it, they laugh, its painful… there is this woman in the neighborhood. For her, she did not bother to gossip but just threw it direct at me. She said why does this man waste all the money on this child. Doesn't the man have other children to spend on… I used to cry… the question was always, why me, why me… and then there is a time I wanted to run away and leave her behind to go outside the country… (Rita, July 2022)

Crying and asking why me, Rita, expresses feelings of torment and guilt. Being told that the man should not waste money on a disabled child ruins the psychological stability of the parents. And the thought of wanting to run away confirms the possible shame that comes with parenting a disabled child.

Language is an important way of socialising and recognising diversity, as it has an element of power and positioning. When community perceives educating children with disability and use words like a 'waste' as in the case of Rita's experience above destroys hope. Relatedly, the language used by the parents, teachers and peers was found to be having negative implications on the inclusion of CWDs. The children shared experiences that range from

sympathetic, demeaning, demoralising of even abusive language used on them in the socialisation process. While teachers and parents need to understand what treatment a child with disabilities deserved, majority of them are not adequately attentive to the interests and problems of the children. It was revealed that the parents and teachers continually used words associated with pity, sympathy and sometimes negative judgement for CWDs. This in the long run killed the self-esteem and lessened the opportunities for the children to venture into activities that would lead to self-discovery.

Relatedly, another issue was over protection by the parents which sometimes extended to the schools. Whereas schools have an objective of preparing children for an independent life as also mentioned by Tsukerman and Vygotsikii (2000), many parents perceived their disabled children as incapable of performing certain duties on their own. Although the majority of them largely intended this for their safety, it creates some form of exclusion because it limits children from interacting and speaking to their peers (Tsukerman and Vygotsikii, 2000). Schools too, provide little voice for the CWDs to talk about the self, sharing different views and experiences around issues that may be of concern. Denial or limited voice and opportunities to explore for self-discovery impairs the children by limiting their visibility. A failure to acquire social norms roles and functions of decisive importance trigger feelings of failure, thus, minimising their struggle for achievement.

Subsequently, the emotions harbored by the children too, affected the way they relate with their peers, the teachers and to their parents. Where the children felt inadequate in performing certain duties, they expected a lot of attention from the parents, more especially if the parents are over protective. Self-pity and negativity feelings demeans them - a feeling that they cannot do anything for themselves, which eventually breeds melancholy. Such children expected the same treatment from the teachers and their peers in the school, which actually was not possible. A failure to realise their expectations becomes a factor to disliking school by CWDs, unless well guided. Cissy, a care taker of Teddy, a six year old disables child narrated:

> This girl, when she is at home, because the mother takes her to be so unable… so vulnerable, she cannot make any effort to do anything by herself… she will call you to attend to the simplest thing, even that which she can do for herself … she has been brought up to think that there is nothing she can do… (Cissy, July 2022)

Appreciating CWDs for who they are, helping them learn how to acknowledge difference and not judging or stereotyping them enables both the CWDs and other children understand that they are all humans. It also minimises the prejudices, the preconceived notions of dependency and sympathy.

Strategies to improve inclusion of CWDs

Parental psychosocial support was found to be a fundamental factor in helping parents with disabled children cope with the stigma. Because children's disabilities differed from one child to another, the parents had different experiences raising up their children. This study suggests creating a forum where the parents can meet, share experiences and encourage one another. Learning about others helped the parents develop a better understanding and

appreciation of the challenges they go through naturing disabled children. Nita a parent of Sara shared how she was encouraged:

> …There is this woman, she says at least you. If mine was like yours, I would be better. Because with hers, she just carries her… like that small jerrican in and out of the house. She soils herself. They just use diapers; they have to change… buy her new bedsheets at all times. And the other bit of it, being a girl, she also gets into her monthly periods. If only that would not happen. She also gets her periods and the mother has to clear her, pad her and put her there… (Nita, July 2022)

It was found to be even better if the parents and other family members accepted and encouraged each other in the process of raising the child as declared by Rita:

> And my husband told his mother, my mother-in-law about my plans to run away to go out and leave her... and she asked me, what are you going out for? To make money… aren't those women out there not working to get money for their children. Now for you, you are going to make money and leave her to die. What are you working for?...

Another parent, Anne shared how her husband's support and counsel encouraged her to gradually accept the 'burden' of caring for their disabled daughter

> …But each time my husband instead of being the one to complain, he would say… look this is our cross, we have to carry our cross… (Anne, July 2022)

Accepting to carry the 'cross' confirms the pain of taking responsibility to parent a CWDs, which in most cases requires more effort.

Further, giving the children some level of independence, much as they need help and exposure to different experiences would enhance different copying skills in navigating through the good and hard moments. Voice and freedom for exploration would help understand the meaning they attach to certain things and vice versa. They should not be perceived as unable to do certain things as shared by Anne a mother of her daughter after joining school:

> At school, the teachers say she is doing very well. She is very active and takes up leadership among her colleagues. I am very happy now… I feel very lucky. My child is very lucky…

Additionally, the schools and the entire community should appreciate and acknowledge difference so that they can have a positive attitude to children with disabilities. This in turn enables the disabled children to accept themselves and to develop a positive attitude to life. This can break the ignorance, labeling, stereotyping and misinterpretation. Whereas their status deters them from adequate socialisation, it is just as important for the children to be sensitised about the importance of ignoring individuals who may want to make their lives even more challenging.

As mentioned earlier, negative self-construction and negative perceptions by family caused stigma, negative identity and self-doubt. Providing psychosocial support to children with disabilities and constant reassurance from the parents, their teachers and the peers is vital. This

could be exercised through being non-judgmental and passionate about CWDs. Encouraging them overtime nurtures children to nurse their frustration and cope with the school environment which would otherwise not be very friendly to them. Dora a teacher of a disabled boy shared how positive socialisation led to acceptance of a child by peers in the learning environment:

> At first the classmates used to fear touching his hand... they feared him. But he is very friendly, very active. In fact, he is very bright… would freely mix and play. So, with time the friends got used to him. Now everyone wants his company because he is so jolly… (Dora, July 2022)

Teacher Dora above, recognised the strengths in the boy by highlighting his intellectual and social abilities. This could have helped her appreciate the child, thus helping him integrate rather than concentrating on the initial fears by the friends.

Finally, construction of the self-image is very crucial in helping CWDs to devise copying mechanisms. Each individual child has unique copying strategies which enable them fit in the school environment if given opportunity to explore. Exposing the children to activities that facilitate exploration and self-discovery is helpful for the children to discover and construct their own identifies and belonging in the process of socialisation. Of much importance also is that the parents should actively participate in the child's upbringing in preparation for a life of independence when they join school. Exposure to cultural norms, cultural values and skills of interaction are vital first steps in the socialisation process.

Conclusion

This study has shed light on challenges, opportunities and strategies for socialising disabled children in normal schools in Uganda. It is important to the Ugandan community where little is documented on socialisation of disabled children after opening doors for access. The study findings show that inclusion for children with disabilities in mainstream schooling systems has been embraced by most education systems, since the universal declaration of education for all (EFA). Thus, more children have gained access to schools, as also seen in the study by Bamwesigye and Hlavackova (2018). Despite this milestone, our findings show that, schools are not fully equipped to embrace CWDs. Limitations such as inadequate resources and facilities, lack of skills among the teachers and cultural schemas that lead to stereotypes and negative perceptions of disability were found to hinder effective socialisation. Also as pointed out by other studies (Devries, 2014, Elena et al, 2014), meaningful participation is hampered by peer bullying, insufficient parenting styles that lead to low esteem and wrong attitudes in the children. The schools should therefore be inclusive in a broader sense by cultivating a change in perception in the school community that disabled children can equally, fully participate in mainstream school activities like their counterparts. As indicated by Precy and Mazurkeiwicz (2012), CWDs need an education that is good and relevant for them. This study shows that with proper socialisation, children can find their feet in schools. Critical to the socialisation process as pointed out by Maria and others (2019) is by understanding their beliefs, perceptions, and ideologies about themselves and others within the social environment. This could be achieved by giving voice to the children to openly share their concerns with the care takers.

The author fully acknowledges the complexity of changing and developing inclusive schools environments in resource constrained Uganda. School based strategies such as a child centered pedagogy, mentorship, change in teachers' attitudes and establishing, networks among the children with disabilities, but also among the parents of the disabled children are useful mechanisms for sharing experiences and copying strategies (Mitchell, 2013). The findings of this study shows that interactions among parents of disabled children provided a form of counsel for each other. This implies that schools should structure the curriculum in ways that transform and inspire positive experiences not only for the children but perhaps in ways that encourage constant interactions between parents and the schools. Helping each individual learner to escape from their limitations as observed by Elena and others (2016) can also be achieved by equipping children with life skills that are important for their livelihoods and survival. Understanding that the children's needs differ according to the nature of inability, providing them relevant support, and empowering them with appropriate life skills as a pinnacle to escaping from the stereotypes, stigma, hopelessness and isolation that characterise most children with disabilities. Finally, I borrow from Vygotskii and Tsukerman (2000) and Wah (2010), to advocate for collaboration, concerted and purposeful effort of teachers, parents and every other stakeholder who is engaged in the education and socialisation for disabled children to recognise and appreciate them for who they are. Identifying and building on their strengths and abilities is key to building their esteem, constructing their image (Pantic et al, 2010), and subsequently, cultivating in them the skills that could enable them integrate better.

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