Disability Lense: Television Framing of Intellectual Disability and Inclusive Education Engagement in Kenya

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Crossref

Abstract

Purpose: The study examined how the framing of intellectual disability in television influenced the level of involvement of learners with intellectual disability in inclusive education in Kenya.

Methodology: The study which was guided by the framing theory utilized the descriptive cross-sectional research design. A sample of 10 teachers in inclusive education schools, 10 Sub-County Education Officers, three television stations, three television producers and five key informants from the Kenya Association of the Intellectually Handicapped was drawn. Data was gathered through questionnaires, interview guides and code sheets. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics while thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data.

Findings: The study found that TV programmes aired disability thematic frames that did not support the mainstreaming of intellectual disability in education. The correlation between intellectual disability thematic frames in television and the involvement of learners in inclusive education was not statistically significant.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The study recommends that representation of disability in media should be more meaningful and TV producers need orientation for the production of disability friendly content for inclusion in TV. Further, there is a need of expanding journalists' capacity to report on pertinent issues that are deemed important by Persons with Disabilities, community in-depth news stories and reports with the objective of raising public awareness about issues important to disability communities. Regarding policy, media regulatory bodies like the Communications Authority of Kenya and the Media Council of Kenya can enforce the existing policies related to disability mainstreaming in the media.

Keywords: *Thematic Frames, Inclusive Education, Intellectual Disability*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, inclusive education has emerged as a crucial topic of debate in the development of educational policies and practices worldwide (Farrell & Ainscow, 2002). In many countries, providing education for children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities has become a key policy objective (Lindsay, 2007). The United States was one of the pioneers in this regard, with the introduction of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975, subsequently amended as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 1990 and 1997, to encourage a "whole-school" approach to inclusion (Evans & Lunt, 2002). Currently, all EU countries have established legislation to promote or mandate inclusion. Inclusive education has been referred to as a "global agenda" by some experts (Pijl et al., 1997).

Since the passage of laws on universal access to education in Kenya, disability activists and parents of children with disabilities have emphasized the need for inclusive education. While the Kenyan government has achieved a primary net enrollment increase from 75% in 2006 to 83% in 2012 (World Bank Group, 2012), the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development places renewed emphasis on leaving no one behind, particularly those who remain the most marginalized.

In Kenya, disabled children face significant barriers to education, with only one in six estimated to attend school (National Coordinating Agency for Population and Development & Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2008). Those who do attend school encounter familiar obstacles, including exclusion, stigmatization, inadequate curricula, poorly equipped schools, and insufficiently trained teachers (Global Education for All, 2016). Currently, there are 1.3 million people living with disabilities in Kenya, but only 39% of them have attended mainstream primary schools and a mere 9% have attended high school (Kenya National Survey for Persons with Disabilities, 2008). Approximately one-third of the expected number of learners with special needs are enrolled in special institutions and units, with a total enrollment of 102,749 students, 21,050 of whom are in special schools and 81,649 enrolled in integrated special units at primary and secondary levels (Republic of Kenya, 2012). The exclusion of disabled children from education perpetuates the cycle of disability and poverty (Ndavula & Lidubwi, 2022).

Kenya has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which aims to protect the rights of disabled people. By ratifying the convention, the Kenyan government has committed itself to ensuring the rights of disabled people and holding itself accountable for this commitment. The Constitution of Kenya 2010 contains a Bill of Rights that emphasizes the principles of equality and non-discrimination, and prohibits discrimination on various grounds, including disability. These legal instruments support the provision of education to everyone including children with disabilities. By agreeing to undertake the obligations of the Convention, the Kenya government committed to protecting and ensuring children's rights and has agreed to hold itself accountable for this commitment before the international community.

Further, the Kenyan government has enacted several laws and policies to recognize and protect the rights of persons with disabilities in the country. The Persons with Disability Act 2004 acknowledges the discrimination faced by persons with disabilities and mandates the government to take measures to ensure their rights are realized. The Education Act 2013 also emphasizes the importance of increasing access, enhancing retention, improving quality and relevance of education, and ensuring equal opportunities in education for children with disabilities. However, while these policies mention the need to consider special needs education, there is still a lack of focus on implementing inclusive education in the Kenyan

education system. Despite these challenges, the government is making efforts to promote inclusive education and ensure that every child has equal access to quality education.

The emphasis on equal right to education for all children in education policy documents has not translated into inclusive education for children with disabilities in Kenya. This study aims to investigate the role of the media in promoting the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education programs. Inclusive education aims to ensure the presence, participation, and achievement of all learners in education, including special needs children such as those with autism, Down Syndrome, cerebral palsy, loco-motor impairment, maladjustment, multiple handicaps, and gifted and talented learners in public schools (SENP, 2009). Achieving inclusion requires the transformation of structures, systems, policies, practices, and cultures in educational institutions and the wider society.

Problem Statement

In Kenya, national frameworks and policies like the Constitution of Kenya, 2010, Persons with Disabilities Act, 2003, Special Needs Education policy and the Education plan 2013 – 2018, and Education Act 2013 advocate for inclusion. The idea of inclusion presents a paradigm shift in education in Kenya. For inclusion to succeed, it requires a concerted effort of all agencies of change, including the media. Despite efforts to promote inclusive education, learners with intellectual disabilities still face barriers to learning and participation in Kenya. The impact of thematic frames portraying individuals with intellectual disabilities on the involvement of learners in inclusive education remains understudied. This study aims to investigate the influence of intellectual disability thematic frames in television on the involvement of learners in inclusive education, in order to identify potential strategies for promoting inclusive education and enhancing the learning experiences of students with intellectual disabilities. The paper will analyze thematic frames under the categories of participation, marginalization, and stereotypes.

Theoretical Review

Representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language (Hall, Evans & Nixon 1997, 17). The media do not offer us a transparent window on the world, but a mediated version of the world. Further, they don't just present reality; they re-present it (Bennet, Kendall and McDougall 2011, 55). Goffman (as cited by Ytreberg 2010, 481-497) posits that media elaborate and reinforce certain representations. Media text is edited to highlight only the most meaningful actions and these actions inadvertently teach or reinforce social cues that could have serious consequences.

Baran and Davis (2014) further argue that the representations learned from the media have long-term consequences on audiences. From this standpoint, media are powerful cultural forces that produce stable, resistant and widely shared assumptions, images, values and concepts. They cultivate a mainstream view of what issues are important and what the world is like. Moreover, it cultivates specific value systems, ideologies and perspectives, for instance towards persons with disabilities. Applied to this study, the representation theory provides a framework on which to analyse media representation of intellectual disabilities on television. Media producers edit content relating to intellectual disabilities highlighting what they consider as the most meaningful actions and these actions inadvertently reinforce perceptions about learners with intellectual disabilities.

Lidubwi (2017) conducted a study on representation of disability in Kenyan Media. The study gave a general view of media coverage of group perceived to be disadvantaged and marginalized. The present study presents a more specific investigation into the influence of

television framing of intellectual disabilities and inclusive education for learners with engagement.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the descriptive cross-sectional research design. The study sample comprised of stakeholders in inclusive education in Nairobi County who included 10 teachers in inclusive education schools and 10 Sub-County Education Officers three television producers and five key informants from the Kenya Association of the Intellectually Handicapped (KAIH). In addition, television programmes aired by The Kenya Broadcasting Corporation Television (KBC-TV), Kenya Television Network News (KTN News) and Signs TV were sampled for a period of six months. The study used primary data that was obtained through structured questionnaires, interview guides and a code sheet. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics while thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data.

FINDINGS

The study sought to find out the influence of intellectual disability thematic frames on involvement of learners in inclusive education in Kenya. The results from content analysis of disability thematic frames in television programmes were as summarised in Figure 1. According to the results presented in Figure 1, 12.3% of the reviewed programs featured a participation thematic frame, 43.6% featured marginalization, 37.2% featured stereotypes, and 7.8% featured other themes related to intellectual disability. These findings imply that the majority of the programs analyzed depicted disability thematic frames that were not conducive to the integration of individuals with intellectual disabilities into mainstream education.
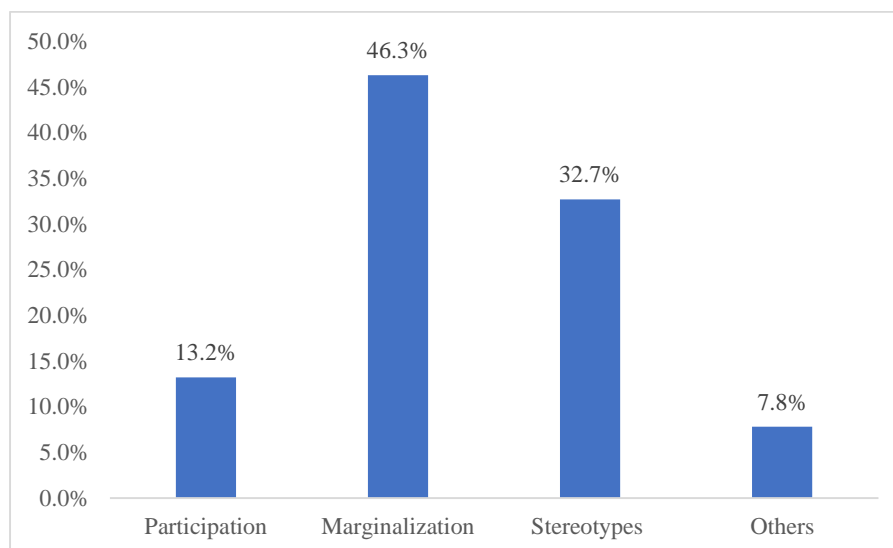

Figure 1: Disability Thematic Frames in Television Programmes

The teachers were asked to state the presence of disability story angle themes in television programmes and the results were as summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Disability Story Angle Themes in Television Programmes

Disability thematic frame themes	Response	Frequency	Percent
Television programmes that portray active participation of children with intellectual disability encourage their participation in inclusive education.	Strongly Disagree	2	5.0%
	Disagree	0	0.0%
	Neutral	4	10.0%
	Agree	7	17.5%
	Strongly Agree	27	67.5%
	Total	**40**	**100.0%**
Television programmes that portray marginalization of children with intellectual disability encourage their participation in inclusive education.	Strongly Disagree	15	37.5%
	Disagree	3	7.5%
	Neutral	3	7.5%
	Agree	9	22.5%
	Strongly Agree	8	20.0%
	Non response	2	5.0%
	Total	**40**	**100.0%**
Television programmes that stereotype children with intellectual disability encourage their participation in inclusive education.	Strongly Disagree	12	30.0%
	Disagree	9	22.5%
	Neutral	4	10.0%
	Agree	5	12.5%
	Strongly Agree	7	17.5%
	Non response	3	7.5%
	Total	**40**	**100.0%**

Results in Table 1 show that 17.5% of the teachers agree and 67.5% strongly agree that Television programmes that portray active participation of children with intellectual disability encourage their participation in inclusive education. However, 5% of the teachers disagreed while 10% were neutral. These results suggest that active participation plays a significant role in promoting inclusive education for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Table 1 also shows that 22.5% of the teachers agree and 20% strongly agree that Television programmes that portray marginalization of children with intellectual disability encourage their participation in inclusive education. However, to the contrary 7.5% of the teachers disagreed and 37.5% strongly disagreed while % were neutral. The findings suggest that there were mixed perceptions among the teachers regarding the impact of marginalization on inclusive education. Half of the teachers were supportive of it, while the other half opposed it. These results imply that marginalization was being employed by the teachers in both positive and negative ways within the context of inclusive education.

Findings in Table 1 also show that 12.5% of the teachers agree and 17.5% strongly agree that Television programmes that stereotype children with intellectual disability encourage their participation in inclusive education. However, to the contrary 22.5% of the teachers disagreed and 30% strongly disagreed while 10% were neutral. The finding suggests mixed perceptions amongst the teachers on the influence of stereotyping on inclusive education where slightly more than half of the teachers were in support while the slightly less than half opposed. The finding implied that stereotyping was being used by the teachers both positively and negatively in inclusive education.

The media producers were asked to explain their use of thematic frames such as participation, marginalization, and stereotypes in their television programs. They responded by stating that their intention was to raise disability awareness and, as a result, did not have a specific approach in their programming. The underlying themes were therefore not deliberate but purely coincidental.

When asked if they had any partnerships with organizations that work with persons with disabilities in Kenya, none of the media producers agreed. This implies that media houses do not collaborate with such organizations. The responses regarding whether they rely on press releases and statements varied, with some agreeing that they do, while others said they rarely use them. Regarding whether they receive feedback on their shows, the media producers noted that some organizations offer assistance once the story is aired. Since some producers focus on highlighting schools that admit persons with disabilities, the feedback from the audience is often positive as they are interested in learning more about these schools.

Stakeholders were asked about how television stories on barriers to participation impact the involvement of learners with intellectual disabilities in inclusive education. Some stakeholders expressed that such stories help to demonstrate the importance of including individuals with intellectual disabilities, while others believed that such stories are effective in highlighting the negative effects of exclusion. However, some respondents held the opinion that these stories may reinforce the stereotype that learners with intellectual disabilities are only suited for certain types of schools. One disability stakeholder stated:

They stereotype in the sense that learners with intellectual disabilities are best fit in segregated schools. – Stakeholder 1

Other stakeholders expressed that the language used in television programs is often too complex for individuals with intellectual disabilities to comprehend. They emphasized the need for a change in language to ensure that the programs aired on television can be understood by individuals with intellectual disabilities. A disability stakeholder stated:

Television programmes have high level languages which many people with disability might not understand, especially those with intellectual disabilities. This makes it difficult for them to follow interviews on television because they can't understand much. These shows should use terms and words that easy to comprehend. There are less visual on television to enable them

follow programmes. People who are deaf depend on visuals, and they would like them to be displayed enough for them to understand and follow programmes. – Stakeholder 2

The stakeholders were also asked how television stories on disability awareness impact the involvement of learners with intellectual disabilities in inclusive education. Some stakeholders emphasized that such stories bring attention to cases of exclusion, thereby encouraging inclusion. However, the stakeholders expressed that the majority of learners with intellectual disabilities are rarely involved in inclusive education, and in most cases, their parents or guardians speak on their behalf. A disability stakeholder stated:

Rarely do learners with intellectual disability get involved on inclusive education, sometimes families do speak on behalf of the learners which is important because the role of families is very critical, but it will be important if we also have self-advocates also speak up for themselves. – Stakeholder 1

Another stakeholder pointed out the fact that there are very few stories on disabilities on television in general, urging that more needs to be done to remedy the situation. The stakeholder further pointed out the inequality in the way even the different disabled sub-groups are covered in the media, with the deaf and blind being given more priority than the rest of the disabled, such as the mentally disabled. A disability stakeholder said:

First, there are few stories on disabilities on television, and something needs to be done to involve learners with intellectual disability. Secondly, there are many schools with learners with mental disability but they are given less coverage with the deaf and blind given priority or covered more. – Stakeholder 2.

The stakeholders were further asked how television stories on inclusion influence involvement of learners with intellectual disability in inclusive education. Some of the respondents were of the opinion that such stories rarely influence the involvement of intellectually disabled learners. A disability stakeholder stated:

In my opinion they rarely don't, it's the other way round celebrating what is being done in segregated schools. – Stakeholder 1.

Others felt that such stories influence their involvement by encouraging their inclusion as the stories usually highlight the success stories elsewhere. A disability stakeholder stated:

They encourage their inclusion by showing where it has been successful. – Stakeholder 3

According to the Kenya Association for the Intellectually Handicapped (KAIH), stories on inclusive education can be effective in demonstrating the importance of including individuals with intellectual disabilities. Similarly, stories that highlight the negative effects of exclusion can also be impactful in promoting inclusion. The exposure of cases of exclusion can encourage greater inclusion. However, there were divergent opinions on the extent to which such stories influence the involvement of learners with intellectual disabilities. While some stakeholders expressed that these stories rarely have a significant impact, others believed that such stories can encourage involvement by highlighting success stories from other areas.

Influence of Intellectual Disability Thematic Frames on Involvement of Learners in Inclusive Education

The study sought to determine the Influence of intellectual disability thematic frames in television on involvement of learners in inclusive education. To achieve this, correlation techniques were employed as summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlation between Intellectual Disability Thematic Frames and Involvement of Learners in Inclusive Education

	Television programmes in Kenya encourage the involvement of children with intellectual disabilities in inclusive education.		
	N	Spearman's rho Coefficient	Sig. (1-tailed)
Television programmes that portray active participation of children with intellectual disability encourage their participation in inclusive education.	40	.025	.899
Television programmes that portray marginalization of children with intellectual disability encourage their participation in inclusive education.	38	.150	.464
Television programmes that stereotype children with intellectual disability encourage their participation in inclusive education.	37	.219	.282

Correlation Statistics in Table 2 show that there was a weak positive corelation (r= 0.025, Sig>0.05) between television programmes that portray active participation of children with intellectual disabilities and the use of Television programmes in inclusive education. However, the correlation was not statistically significant, leading to the conclusion that an increase in television programmes with active participation of children with intellectual disabilities did not lead to an increase in the use of television in inclusive education.

Table 2 also show that there was a weak positive correlation (r= 0.150, Sig>0.05) between television programmes that portray marginalisation of children with intellectual disabilities and the use of Television programmes to encourage the involvement of children with intellectual disabilities in inclusive education. However, the correlation was not statistically significant, leading to the conclusion that an increase in television programmes with marginalisation of children with intellectual disabilities did not lead to an increase in the use of Television in inclusive education.

Findings in Table 2 also show a weak positive correlation (r= 0.219, Sig>0.05) between television programmes that portray stereotyping of children with intellectual disabilities and the use of Television in inclusive education. However, the correlation was not statistically significant, leading to the conclusion that an increase in stereotyping of children with intellectual disabilities did not lead to an increase in the use of Television to encourage the involvement of children with intellectual disabilities in inclusive education.

Discussion

The overall, findings in this paper were that there was no influence of intellectual disability thematic frames on involvement of learners in inclusive education. The finding that the theme

of marginalization was highlighted by television programmes are in tandem with findings from a study by Abwao (2019). Abwao found out the marginalization frame was a widely used frame in Kenyan media. The current study did yield similar results. Where cases of stigmatization were still reported in the representation of PWD in the articles featured in the study. In the study marginalization frame had a high frequency. The findings also agree with Samsel and Perepa's (2013) study which found that the media tend to sensationalize disability, perpetuate stereotypes and lack appropriate representation of people with disability in general.

The findings also agree with a study conducted by Samsel and Perepa (2013) which found a link between media portrayal of disabilities and teachers' perceptions of their students. The teachers within the sample also acknowledged media as impacting their understanding, awareness and knowledge of disabilities and approaches, but they did not see it as impacting their teaching practices directly. Studies have shown repeatedly the need for reporting criteria around disability; without it, the media can reinforce misconceptions and contribute to disability stigma through negatively biased and sensational reports about persons with disabilities (Werner & Scior, 2016; Mostert, 2016; DSPD, 2016).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study found that the majority of TV programs focused on disability thematic frames that did not support the mainstreaming of intellectual disability in education. However, the study also found that there was no statistically significant correlation between the intellectual disability thematic frames in television and the involvement of learners in inclusive education. As such, it was concluded that there is no clear evidence to support the idea that these thematic frames have a significant influence on the involvement of learners with intellectual disabilities in inclusive education.

Recommendation

The study recommends that Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), should deliberately amplify their voices and perspectives through the media. They should participate as news sources and resource persons in order to ensure accurate and balanced portrayals of disability in the media. In addition, their involvement in media would help to raise awareness about disability issues, dispel negative stereotypes, and counter stigma and misinformation. OPDs should facilitate Persons with Disabilities to tell their own stories through the media. In addition, OPDs can support Persons with Disabilities and encouraged them to join the media profession in order to increase the diversity of the newsroom.

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