INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: DEVELOPMENTS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT: *The engagement of countries within Sub-Saharan Africa in various measures to raise and equalise enrolment of boys and girls in schools demonstrates their commitment to include. However, developments reflect the challenges some national education systems in the region encounter to practice inclusive education. Educators within the region appear to be grappling with the notion of inclusivity and that is having effects on the provisioning of education that is indeed for all primary age children in local community schools within the context. The insistence to preserve existing local cultures and emphasis on competence based curriculum constrains efforts of practitioners to ensure the mainstreaming of presence, participation and achievement of all pupils at school. Some pupils consequently leave school without positive outcomes. Inclusive education as an approach to reposition education for all implies the adoption of curriculum of differentiation to be able to reach out to all pupils, including those who feel dissatisfied with existing school practices as well as those who seem distant in the context.*

KEY WORDS: *Inclusion, pupil, presence, participation, achievement, Sub-Saharan Africa*

INTRODUCTION

The effort to ensure access to education for primary age children within Sub-Saharan Africa is rather hindered. Developments among countries within the context indicate the challenges they face to move provisions forward towards an inclusive kind of education. Available provisions in education tend not to respond to the diversity of primary age children who live in those places. Existing cultures reflect societies that foster local beliefs, values, norms and ideas that are resistant to change. Perceptions among some educators in Sub-Saharan Africa presumably regard the notion of inclusion as intently having a colonising effect to attenuate existing social order within local communities. Such unyielding stance within education systems in the region against inclusivity suggests a struggle to protect indigenous identities, histories, policies and practices.

Research in Sub-Saharan Africa paints a picture of the way Africans understand and respond to inclusion as an Education for All movement. Work from African authors and researchers demonstrate critical analyses of the concept taking into account the prevailing cultural milieu across the region. For instance, writing on the challenges of inclusive schooling in Africa, using a case study of Ghana, Dei (2005:268), conceived inclusive education as 'education that responds to the concerns, aspirations and interests of a diverse body politic, and draws on the accumulated knowledge, creativity and resourcefulness of local peoples. Commenting further, he pointed out that a school is inclusive to the extent that every learner is able to identify and connect with his/her social environment, culture, population and history. Eleweke & Rodda (2002) and Ajuwon (2008) also shared their views to affirm Dei's.

These definitions, particularly Dei's, echoed those already made in Europe and America on the issue. It aligned with the popular principle that educational systems have to restructure to welcome all children in a general school. The variation in the stance, however, is that it considered the ways in which the local people manufactured identity in the manner they conducted their affairs. What that means is that the people try to guide against mindless application of inclusivity within local contexts. Rather, they keep in check the colonising influence of inclusion so that it does not completely distort indigenous cultures and practices (Ewa, 2015). A vague allusion inherent in the argument is in the sense that this form of education varies from community to community and the differences are partly due to geophysical environment, history, economy, social mores and interaction with neighbours (Kisanji, 1998). The differentiation in approach gives the indication showing certain aspects of
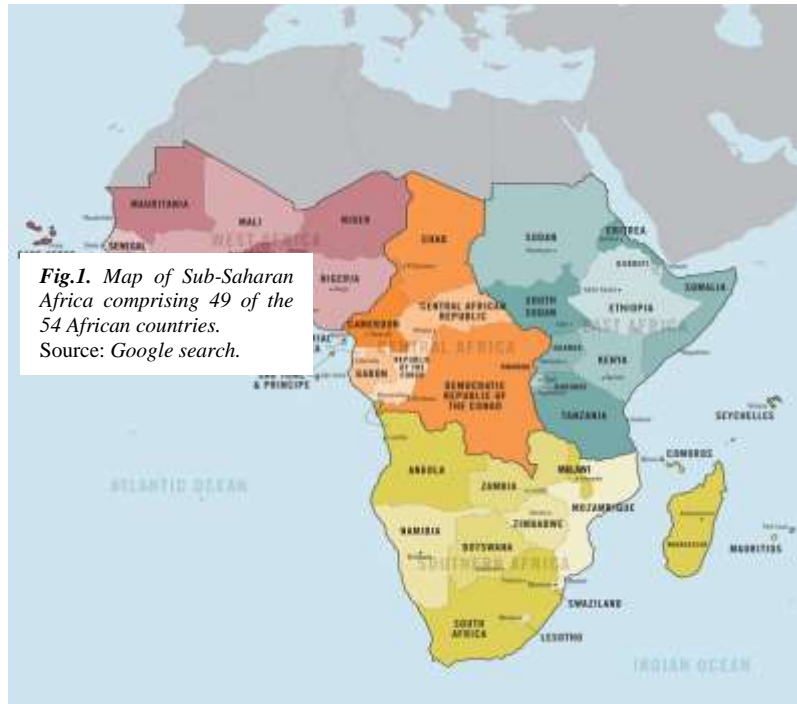
Fig.1. Map of Sub-Saharan Africa comprising 49 of the 54 African countries. Source: *Google search.*

particular communities as being resistant to or unable to cope with the inclusive banner. Apart from concerns about the relevance of inclusive education to local cultures, the apprehension presumably is also that this model of education requires that fundamental alterations would have to take place in local customs, belief systems, values and norms in relation to education of children to attenuate existing social order. As painful as it seemed to compromise local cultures and traditions, it nonetheless cannot be equated with the way the disposition can exert negative effects on the entitlements of all children to education. Abuse of the rights of children to education implies that some children would be exposed to the risk of exclusion and marginalisation in order to save the face of local cultures. Inclusive education, on the other hand, does not entail the erosion of valued customs and norms, but an articulation of thoughts and actions in ways that promote practices to genuinely support engagement of all children all through the process of schooling (Ewa, 2015). Thus, the paper will now examine how far primary age children are in/excluded in school in Sub-Saharan Africa, in terms of pupil presence, participation and achievement within the context.

PUPIL PRESENCE

Studies conducted by Miller-Grandvaux & Yoder (2002) in Zambia and that involving Humphreys & Crawfurd (2014) on basic education in Nigeria perceive the concept of pupil presence in terms of access. Explanation about access is made in the light of 'enrolment' and 'attendance' of children in school (*cf.* Andrew & Orodho, 2014). Also, it involves the existence of all pupils without absenteeism or risk to absenteeism at school (Ewa, 2015). Thus,

subsequent examination on pupil presence will be based on enrolment and attendance of children at school.

Enrolment

Part of the issues discussed at the Dakar Education Forum in 2000 was to encourage African countries to make substantial provisions to scale up access of children to schools by 2005 (UNESCO, 2012; Ewa, 2015). Since the Dakar Forum, African countries have been actively striving to establish regional norms and standards to accelerate access to education beyond 2015. A recent development effort was the re-assessment of the Africa EFA coordination mechanism that occasioned the convention of the sub-Saharan Africa Regional Education for All (EFA) coordination meeting in October, 2012 in Johannesburg. At the meeting members resolved, among other things, to use the existing structures of the regional economic communities and African Union for coordination (UNESCO, 2012). The introduction of the poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSP) and enhanced highly indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative are other areas of significant progress by which higher budgetary allocations for education received huge priority and endorsement by national governments (Anyanwu & Erhijakpor, 2007). Due to that, public expenditure as part of policy apparatus for providing primary education for all children has seemingly increased in many African countries. Expanding access to education became a means to reduce poverty and increase human development in the countries.

Subsequent revision in national educational policies occasioned the introduction of universal basic education (UBE) programme in Nigeria in 2004 (Federal Republic of Nigeria – FRN, 2004; Universal Basic Education Commission - UBEC, 2004; Humphreys & Crawfurd 2014), free primary education in Kenya in 2003 (Republic of Kenya, 2004a; Ogola, 2010), in Malawi in 1994 and Zambia in 2002 (Riddell, 2003). That fostered a rapid expansion in primary enrolment rates and gender equality. Consequently, the gross enrolment rates (GER) for primary age children in 2008/9, for example, in Nigeria stood at 0.88 per cent, Central African Republic 0.71 per cent, Uganda 0.94 per cent, South Africa 0.96 per cent and Somalia 0.55 per cent (UNESCO, 2011).

The statistics are, however, indicative that some children were still out of school due to various factors. A body of literature, for example, Morgan, Petrosino & Fronius (2014), Iscan, Rosenblum & Tinker (2015) and UNESCO (2015) documented on school fees and access to primary education in developing countries (DCs). Evidence from these writers showed school fees as being a commonplace issue in sub-Saharan Africa as some countries were constrained by funding in their effort to effectively enhance their educational system. Sharing that perspective, Kattan & Burnett (2004) stated that fees represented up to 30 per cent expenditure in Africa. These taxes come in form of tuition fees, Parents Teachers Association (PTA) levies, charges on textbooks, uniforms, sports, community development and fees paid for construction of school buildings (School Fee Abolition Initiative, 2009). As efforts intensify to achieve progress in the EFA to include a greater number of the out-of-school population, several African countries such as Nigeria and Kenya moved their policies towards school fees abolition, particularly tuition fees, and there was a concomitant surge in primary enrolment.

Kattan & Burnett (2004) pointed that when tuition fees were abolished in Malawi in 1994, enrolment rose to 51 per cent, in Uganda in 1996 pupil enrolment increased to 70 per cent, in

Cameroon in 1999, gross enrolment grew from 88 to 105 per cent, in Tanzania in 2001, net enrolment improved from 57 to 85 per cent and as fees were removed in Kenya, the following year the number of pupils soared to 1.2 million in primary schools (*cf*. United States Agency for International Development - USAID, 2010). This means school fee is one factor that disincentives some poor children from accessing school (*see* UNESCO, 2015). Many of them were children who were excluded or vulnerable, including girls, children living in remote rural communities, child labourers, children in conflicts and children with impairments (World Bank, 2009). The no-fee school policy helped reduce the cost of educating children for many rural households in Africa.

While remarkable progress is noticed following abolition of school charges, education, however, is not entirely free as policy stipulates. The collection of school charges is persistent in some rural locations in a third of the countries in contrast to official policy against the practice (Kattan, 2006). Because public finance is inadequate to cover for direct and indirect cost of schools, the definition of free education in practical terms is reduced to 'fee free' education (Tomasevski, 2006). As opposed to free education, which is about learning without paying any levy, fee free education implied that, though tax relief in tuition fee may apply, payment of other school-based charges are left at the discretion of the local education authorities, school administrators and teachers. So, the statement that education is absolutely free is a misleading propaganda as the real experience in the field demonstrates that the propaganda is more of a political gimmick than a statement of good intention (Adesina, 2000). Some of these schools are actually public fee schools. Parents incur different financial expenses on the items listed above for their children to augment the budgetary allocations government provides schools.

Rapid population growth in school as a result of free education forms a basis to examine classroom accommodation and overcrowding. Increased enrolment implies a higher demand for schools to raise their capacity in terms of infrastructure and equipment to accommodate more children (Benbow, Mizrachi, Oliver & Said-Moshiro, 2007). As such, according to Bategeka & Okurut (2006) the Ugandan government pooled more resources to acquire textbooks, construct classroom buildings and procure furniture for pupils to use. In addition to these provisions, the location of schools close to children's homes or parental workplaces has the tendency to reduce their concerns about distance and safety (*cf*. Lafon, 2009). A considerable number of African schools mostly in rural locations nevertheless have overcrowded classrooms, many buildings are dilapidated and other facilities are insufficient. Sabates, Akyeampong, Westbrook & Hunt (2010) found these factors to also account for decrease in access and school dropout among the children.

Research on girl child education in Africa conducted by Grout-Smith, Tanner, Postles & O'Reilly (2012) found that as a result of the provision of free education, 54 million children had places in primary schools from 1999 – 2008 and within the same period girls' primary enrolment rose from 54 per cent to 74 per cent. Despite the achievement, 29 million children in the region are out of school among which 54 per cent of them are girls. Sabates et al. (2010) attributed the problem to gendered practices within households, communities and schools that creates distinct patterns of access for boys and girls in Africa. Low income families tend to engage some children in paid or unpaid jobs in agriculture and commerce so as to assist parents

settle family bills and that affects registration in school for boys and girls. But, the situation is worse for girls.

Deep-seated local cultures and perceptions about girls as home carers, potential brides and mothers affect the investment, which parents make on their education and life chances, compared to boys. Thus, a report by UNESCO (2003) and Gibson (2004) illustrated girls in West Africa as experiencing the widest gender inequality. According to these authors, when national figures are disaggregated by other vital measures such as rural vs urban, poor vs not poor family, wider gaps are evident. For example, female gross enrolment was 125 per cent in Bamako, capital city of Mali and just 20 per cent female GER in remote Mali. Women traditionally dominate the teaching profession in primary schools (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development - OECD, 1998, 2004). That gives some parents the impression that the job is an extension of the social role ascribed to females as child carers.

Further assessment of the background of other children indicates how the school in South Africa took a measure to respect the religion and culture to which pupils belong. The school ensured the resources available and uniform policy or dress code reflects value for the requirements associated with their religions and cultures (de Waal, Mestry & Russo, 2011). However, with regards to Orstby & Urdal (2010) comments on inequality-conflict in education, some of the children experienced what these writers term as systematic inequality. For them, systematic inequality is conceptualised as inter-group conflicts that affect children's enrolment due to differences in religion, tribe and language. Groups of children who tend to experience these disadvantages more are the minorities and that is linked to prejudice – unjustified hatred and dislike against members of minority groups on account of differences in tribe, religion etc. (Brown, 1995). Prejudice has been a social problem in countries with diverse populations. Prejudice among primary school children is a reproduction of the community attitudes and values, which they have learned from adults (Kinder & Sears, 1981).

Nigeria reflects this situation within its diverse population with attendant challenges on its educational system. For example, the country's population is divided into majority tribes to include Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa having dominant locations in the southeast, southwest and north of the country respectively. A considerable number of minority tribes are also spread all over the country. In terms of religion, the country is split into Muslim majority in the north and Christian majority in the south (Roberts, Odumosu & Nabofa, 2009) while a few practitioners of both religions intersperse between them on either side of the geopolitical divide. But, sometimes members of the majority groups may assume the minority status when living and schooling outside their dominant territories. For instance, a group of Islamic *Hausa/Fulanis* that internally migrates southwards can be subordinated under the counterpart Christian non-*Hausa/Fulani* tribes in whose territories they may be residing.

Religious conflicts driven by the quest for power, value, control of scarce resources (Otite & Olawale, 1999), and very recently, the anti-western education ideology, terrorist attacks and abduction of school children by members of the *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad* (popularly called Boko Haram), meaning people committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and jihad (Adesoji, 2010; Jones & Naylor, 2014; Amnesty International, 2014; UNESCO, 2015), has stoked reprisals and hatred between Christian and Muslim adherents in Nigeria and neighbouring Cameroun, Republic of Niger, Republic of Benin and Republic of

Chad. Mutual suspicion and feelings of insecurity ensuing from these crises have spread to primary schools to affect enrolment of children from either side of the divide (*cf.* Ushie, 2012). The spate of violence involving members of the armed Islamist Boko Haram has 'ethnicised' terrorism, particularly, in Nigeria (Oladunjoye & Omemu, 2013).

Muslim children living in the rural south of the country face stereotypes and grim experiences in terms of access to school due to the persistent terrorist attacks on non-Muslims and schools by the insurgents. The effects also disadvantage other non-Islamic tribes resident in the South for the reason that they are widely viewed by members of the majority population as having originated from the North of the country. It is linked to the exclusionary issues associated with faith based schools. This is causing imbalance in educational development between Christians and Muslims in the country. As the politicisation of education grows, it also occasions preferential access to school for children along tribal patterns to disfavour the minority groups (Alwy & Schech, 2004). On the other hand, Bangsbo (2008) and Namukwaya & Kibirigwe (2014), argued that pupil presence can also be hampered when parents perceive the school to impart values that are strange to the peoples own values.

Apart from that, the age of the child is found to be significant in non-enrolment of children (Burke & Beegle, 2004). A study conducted by these researchers in Tanzania reported how some parents feel worried that their children aged seven to nine are too young to register in school. Even 65 per cent of 10-12-year-olds were viewed as being too young to enrol at school. On the other hand, overaged children can feel concerned to enrol in primary school with younger children. Primary education for some adolescents is considered as a decision that can attenuate adult-child power relations, especially as it involves having to stay in the same classroom to learn with persons chronologically younger than them. Children in foster care can be more disadvantaged when the resources needed to place them in school are controlled by foster parents. Their peers who lost one or both their parents can be particularly prone to non-enrolment. Children who live with their biological parents may face different experiences compared to foster children (Burke & Beegle, 2004). The opportunity cost of keeping foster children in school increases as the need for parents to enrol their biological children rises. Motivated by competition for higher social status and relevance, parents may prefer to delay access for foster children in favour of their own children so that the latter could have better life chances.

Writing on the issue of language as a factor in educational access in South African, Lafon (2009) said many African parents want their children to be in schools where English is the medium of instruction (MoI) given that the language is a defining feature of western education. Commenting on the Nigerian's experience, Humphreys & Crawfurd (2014) viewed the use of English, as MoI, as a significant barrier to schooling because parents would want their children to first have a strong foundation in their local languages. At times schools where English is the major MoI have low pupil population. Nevertheless, regardless of the global provision for free and universal primary education, there are concerns about access of children with impairments in ordinary primary schools in rural location in Africa (*see* Eleweke & Rodda, 2002; Avoke, 2002 & Dart, Nkanotsang, Chizwe, & Kowa, 2010).

The National education policy of Nigeria leaned more towards integration – placement of the children in special provisions within general primary schools (FRN, 2004). Akin to the special

educational needs perspective, Mba (1995) perceived that this policy stipulation for the children are informed by the belief that meeting the needs of children with special educational needs is expensive, hence government concentrates on addressing the needs of the typical children (individuals with no identifiable impairments) before giving consideration to the needs of children with impairments who are in the minority, and ignorance about the potentials of children with impairments make some stakeholders to think that expenditure on children with special educational needs is a waste of resources. These perceptions are seemingly influenced by myths and obstinate ideologies emanating from local community enactments to regard education of this class of children as occurring outside societal norm. Moving on now to examine the way the children attend school.

Attendance
Following the declaration of the EFA, United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) undertook a study in 18 Sub-Saharan African countries on child labour and school attendance. The study revealed overall 60 per cent attendance among school children (UNICEF, 2005). Other researchers e.g. Oketch & Rolleston (2007), World Bank (2009) and UNESCO (2015) have also indicated a positive correlation between abolition of school fees and improvement in school attendance, especially for pupils from poor households, around the region. Olaniyan (2011) has research documentation in support of the views based on the Nigerian context. Taking the analysis further, Evans, Kremer & Ngatia (2009) added that the gift of free school uniforms is another factor that helped reduce school absenteeism among pupils by 6.4 per cent points (43%) from a base of 15 per cent in Kenya. Contributing from the medical perspective, Tomlinson (2007) found free school feeding also as an enhancer of the nutritional status of pupils and an incentive to boost school attendance among them. As government and agencies exempt children from incurring both direct and indirect cost of schooling it helps to motivate them to attend school without absenteeism. Regular stay at school increases their chances to participate in school programmes and reduces dropout.

Nonetheless, despite the resolve from the government and agencies to keep children more often at school, Sackey (2007), in a research on the *Determinant of school attendance and attainment in Ghana: a gender perspective*, produced findings that indicated attendance level still vary considerably among schools and are more often low in rural areas, especially during the farming season and on market days. It is an issue connected to the disadvantages of traditional education. Parents/carers in Nigeria engage these children in crop cultivation, especially during the planting season. They are employed in market places as street vendors (64%), car washers/watchers (6%), scavengers (4%), feet washers (8%) and beggars and shoe shiners (4%). Children who beg in the north of the country are referred to as 'almajir' (Ikwuyatum, 2010). Issues such as this echo International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2010b) work on child labour and education in developing regions including Africa (*also see* Blume & Breyer, 2011). Child work is seen as an ethical aspect of most cultures in Nigeria, serving as a way of making the children learn occupational skills (Ikwuyatum, 2010). A considerable number of children combine school with work in Nigeria, and funds raised from working sometimes constitute part of family income. The involvement of children in labour declines their rate of school attendance. It means parents sometimes condone (unauthorised) absence from school and rather place them in work so as to earn more income to pay family bills. It implies that older children are compelled to assist in taking the responsibility to finance and manage the home at the expense of going to school. More so, the more young children a family has means the lower

number of days and hours the older children would spend at school in the context (Ewa, 2015). Much of the time would be committed to caring for their siblings at home to relief parents/guardians of that role. Also, childhood is burdened by other domestic duties such as fetching firewood from the bush, grazing cattle, washing household equipment and so on.

Substantial gender gaps exist in school attendance among the children as a consequence of poor parental education in rural communities. Elaborating on the issue even from the Moroccan standpoint in the Maghrebean Africa, Khandker, Lavy & Filmer (1994) stated that the rate of ever attending school for children from families where heads have no education is 62 per cent for rural boys and 29 per cent for rural girls. Some uneducated parents have firm beliefs in traditions that differentially attach females to domesticity and males to roles that can raise their prospects to fend for the family including the girls in the future. Other literature in the gender-based exclusion in education category include Aikman & Unterhalter (2005), Dunne & Leach (2005), Lewis & Lockheed (2007), O'connor (2010), Unterhalter & Heslop (2011), Joseph (2012), Unterhalter, North, Arnot, Lloyd, Moletsane, Murphy-Graham, Parkes & Saito (2014). Unlike the boys, the opportunity cost of keeping girls at school rises as their value as potential brides appreciates and as their domestic chores increases (Gibson, 2004). With this attitude, girls fare worse in terms of attendance compared to boys.

Other factors such as fees also militate against school attendance. Writing about school fees in sub-Saharan Africa, Iscan, Rosenblum & Tinker (2015) portrayed school fees as a repressive taxation that have a negative impact on pupil attendance at school. Many schools temporarily exclude some children by asking them to go home to get their fees thereby reduce the amount of time they stay at school. Work by Nishimura, Yamano & Sasaoka (2005) in Uganda, mentioned that prior to the introduction of the universal primary education (UPE) in the country; primary education was under-funded by government. Pupils' parents pay more than 80 per cent of the total direct cost of public primary schooling while the government pay the rest. Even at the adoption of the free and universal primary education, state budgetary allocation to primary schooling is declining. Children still pay levies such as the ones mentioned earlier to boost the funds allotted to schools by the state in direct contrast to the policy abolishing such charges (Kattan, 2006). Often times these charges occur in schools sited in rural locations where it is possible for collectors to evade public inquiry. The persistence of the charges in obscure locations also suggests poor understanding about the policy on free education by teachers and parents. Or, maybe the schools compel children to pay the fees in order for the practitioners to enrich themselves by illegitimate means.

Poor attendance among children is also due to concerns about distance to school and safety. Gibson (2004) found the most extreme example of security barrier to schooling in Ethiopia where the kidnapping of young brides demotivated some adolescent girls from attending school. Ahlport, Linnan, Vaughn, Evenson & Ward (2008) found poor attendance of children to be linked to risk of attack by predators when they engage in non-motorised traveling along bushy paths. Bad weather is another variable that can pose adverse impacts on non-motorised travels by children to minimise their attendance at school. Furthermore, insufficient school facilities e.g. toilets, ramps, good water etc. decline attendance rate among boys, girls and their peers with impairments. Gibson (2004:8) also drew attention to the effect that female "menstruation in the absence of appropriate facilities and supplies can contribute to significant

absenteeism". Some girls are deterred from attending schools while others are encouraged to dropout due to inadequate school toilet facilities (Lidonde 2004; WaterAid, 2005).

A cross-sectional case study conducted about bullying and school attendance in Ghana, Dunne, Bosumtwi-Sam, Sabates & Owusu (2010), established a positive relationship between boys and girls who were absent with bullying either via verbal abuse or corporal punishment at school. Longitudinal studies on gender-based violence e.g. Raditloaneng (2013), Badri (2014) and Leach, Dunne & Salvi (2014) concurred in reporting a consistent pattern in school violence against pupils with negative impacts on their attendance. However, Badri (2014) and Leach et al. (2014) went further to report that there is large-scale sexual abuse of girls in sub-Saharan African schools. Outcomes from the various researchers nonetheless blamed community members, parents, other school children and teachers for the offences. Raditloaneng (2013) viewed gender-based violence as a descriptor of male oppression over females at home and in the society. From the point of view of Badri (2014), school-based aggression occurs as a result of disagreements, conflicts and war experiences. Whilst corroborating the perspectives of Raditloaneng (2013), Badri (2014) also attributed violence against girls to tolerant attitudes towards extra-marital sex, unequal gender relations, teachers demand for sexual favours from the girls in exchange for good grades in exams, exemption from corporal punishment, promises of money or marriage, special attention in the classroom etc. Besides, violence against pupils occur as a strategy for teachers to lord their authority over the learners, especially when they feel frustrated due to inability to find appropriate approach to deliver lessons (*see* Humphreys & Crawfurd, 2014). Children experience both psychological (shame, depression, fear, inferiority complex) and physical pains (body injuries, scars) owing to aggression and the challenge often result in a significant decline in pupil attendance.

Teacher absenteeism can serve as a predictor of pupil attendance. A teacher not showing up for classroom lessons as officially scheduled is a strong deterrent for some children from attending school because teacher absenteeism can disrupt learning (*cf.* Ejere, 2010). Many pupils can in consequence model teachers' negative attitude towards work by regarding regular attendance as being unnecessary and sometimes schooling unimportant.

However, the provision of more primary schools for communities would help check the problem of distance and accommodation for all primary age children within the communities. The physical built of the school has to be designed to enable it respond to diversity. It implies that the usual lookalike architectural design of primary schools prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa have to give way to distinct buildings that are adapted to particular local contexts to also meet environmental sustainability and health and safety requirements. However, whatever the physical structure of the school, there should be ramps, steps and handrails, and classroom equipment should have adjustable seats and interactive boards for the children. This will enhance school enrolment, attendance of children and flexible seating organisation in the classrooms.

At-risk learners are more likely to be consistent in attendance, engage in school activities and less likely to drop out when the school does not have a rigid enforcement of rules (Finn & Voelkl, 1993), also when they know that the school has a fair and flexible disciplinary policy (Rumberger, 1995; Willms, 2003). Apart from that, the introduction of a strong legal instrument can go a long way to protecting the rights of all children to be included in general

school settings in all contexts. When there is available law to promote inclusion in access and engagement, it is likely for achievements for a considerable number of pupils to also increase at school.

Free school meal serves as a catalyst for attracting children to school in poor rural communities. There is therefore the need to engage in that practice to make food programme part of school experience for children. Having such provisions for schools might not pose much challenge in rural zones. A considerable number of the locals in rural Nigeria are farmers (Akinola, 2007; International Fund for Agricultural Development - IFAD, 2012). One possible strategy is to use the parents' teachers association (PTA) to mobilise its members to implement the food programme. It is a school-community mobilisation of which purpose is to ensure no child goes to school on empty stomach. Food served to the children has to be sourced locally and sufficient in nutritional value to cater for the health needs of children. Food can be served to the children in-school as breakfast or as take-home ration (Del Rosso, 1999; Tomlinson, 2007; Adelman, Gilligan & Lehrer, 2008; World Food Programme, 2013). The school can start by serving every pupil food once every week and progress later to feed them on daily basis as the capacity improves. Free school meal is a measure aimed at ensuring food aid reaches the child most in need of food. Also, it helps them to increase enrolment, attendance and to concentrate in learning rather than being distracted at school due to hunger or malnutrition. Furthermore, the food programme will relieve very poor families of the financial cost of schooling for their children.

PUPIL PARTICIPATION
Pupil participation emphasises the engagement of children in virtually all aspects of school programmes (Willms, 2003; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges & Hayek, 2007; Trowler, 2010; Taylor & Parsons, 2011), interacting with peers and teachers and making inputs to school reforms. Engagement of pupils involves allowing children to actively take responsibility in school matters in ways that can make them feel valued and recognised (Goodenow, 1993b; Willms, 2003). A bi-directional advantage is implicit in these ideas regarding pupil engagement. Pupil engagement is portrayed as having the capacity to create benefits for the children in terms of school outcomes as well as the school with regards to admiration for the school by other children and stakeholders in education. These gains may discernibly become unachievable when pupils are disengaged in school.

Pupil disengagement
The sharp increase in pupil enrolment under the universal free primary education brought with it increase diversity in pupil population and challenges to engage all of them at school. Even after the dawn of the EFA, there seems to be insignificant change in existing school practices in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa to be able to engage the learners gainfully in a multicultural classroom. Working within the context of an overcrowded classrooms and examination-based curriculum, many teachers would feel huge pressure to modify, change or differentiate their instructional procedures and objectives to meet the needs of the children in their care. For instance, a study which Majanga, Nasongo & Sylvia (2011) conducted in Kenya revealed a disproportionate rise in teacher and pupil population following the introduction of free primary education by the government. The mean total of teachers from four sampled schools used in the study remained the same at 25.25 from 2000 to 2006 while that of pupils rose to 996 across the same schools within the same period.   Pupil time-on-task in class assignments would

reduce when in large class size (Blatchford & Mortimore, 1994). In larger classrooms children will engage in more off task behaviour reflecting particularly in distracted and passive forms of behaviour (Blatchford, Bassett & Brown, 2011).

This occurs partly because teachers lack the skills and knowledge to include all of them by way of performing close observation of individual participation in classroom work. Furthermore, barriers to engagement of the children emanate because teachers teach to test, an issue linked to competence-based curricular. So, huge amount of time and concentration is invested to ensure children are able to pass examination to be able to progress and to enable the teacher give a good account of his or her performance to government. The curriculum is a problematic issue in relation to participation of some categories of children. Reviewing the issue, Westbrook, Durrani, Brown, Orr, Pryor, Boddy & Salvi (2013), stated that despite curriculum reforms in some DCs, it was still irrelevant to particular population of pupils, especially rural or marginalised children, as the curriculum is seen as too difficult and overloaded, shortening teacher preparation time and increasing lesson pace as teachers felt impelled to cover it to avoid sanctions. With the pressure in mind teachers can (either unconsciously or intentionally) ignore the need to devote more time to have a close relationship with the children. In the perspective of Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson & Salovey (2011:28), 'learners who report experiencing inadequate relationship with their teachers may feel disconnected and alienated and learner who feel alienated from school are more likely to engage in antisocial and delinquent behaviours and to fail academically'.

Apart from that, considerable aspects of educational systems in Sub-Saharan Africa are patterned by cultures, norms and traditions existing within local communities (*cf.* Hoadley, 2010). Education rather seems to be teacher-centred as much of the traditional educational practices allow adults to direct almost every activity that involves child education. Practices such as these arise owing to underestimation of the abilities of children to co-create knowledge and partner with adults to impart knowledge and contribute to community development.

Corporal punishment becomes one method used to subject children to abuse and silencing, thus consolidate the authoritarian norm in favour of the teacher at school (Jotial & Boikhutso, 2012). Although this disciplinary measure is purposed to eliminate unwanted behaviour from children, it has however become a common tool to unleash violence against them at school. A survey undertaken by Save the Children (2005) on a sample of 410 school children in South Africa indicated a significant number of instances where pupils have been subjected to corporal punishment. Often you see teachers armed with sticks, shoes, belts, board dusters and whips inside and outside the classrooms and using them to hit children even for minor offences. For example, the teacher can use the cane or beat pupils for failing to complete required assignments, talking to a classmate during lesson and coming late to school (Jotial, 2008). Sometimes the teachers would resort to calling the children names for similar and other wrongdoings (*see* Humphreys & Crawfurd, 2014).

Teachers that are under legal constraint to apply corporal punishment on children can send notes to pupil homes to call on parents to beat the children for offences committed at school. Consequent upon that, children feel physical pains, become afraid, intimidated and uncomfortable, and are likely to become demotivated from taking part in school activities. Of particular note is that the application of corporal punishment violates the rights of the children

and degrades their dignity as humans. The situation makes it difficult to reach out to children who would want some support to be able to enhance their school experiences. Children who experience learning difficulties become frustrated when there is no effective support for them. Quite a number of children would become disengaged at lesson (UNESCO, 2004).

Olweus (1996) and Popoola (2005) have documented on peer victimisation as part of school-based violence that makes the school unsafe for children. Peer victimisation is aggression among pupils. Other researchers e.g. McLeod & Fettes (2007) and Christine, Totura, Karver & Gesten (2014) demonstrated the correlation between peer victimisation and children engagement at school from the psychological stance. They found pupils who experience distress as a result of bullying to have poorer learner engagement compared to their psychologically stable peers. Explicitly, Gumora & Arsenio (2002) found children who are psychologically and emotionally traumatised to have less interest in and able to concentrate in classroom tasks. In a study on aggression carried out in Nigeria, Ojedokun, Ogungbamila & Kehinde (2013) stated that peer victimisation is a factor for exclusion of children - both victim and perpetrator, from friendships at school. For instance, a child could keep his or her distance from a peer who is aggressive or tell the colleague outright that they have ceased to be friends. Interpersonal distance is an antithesis of children desire to bond with each other. It is a negative reaction of children towards colleagues who have either become dominant, aggressive or both. School-based violence not only undermines the engagement of children in curricular activities, it also imprisons them behind a dictatorial and hostile school wall.

However, schools are often expected to provide academic curriculum in conjunction with co-curricular (sometimes called extra-curricular) programmes for all learners. Most times practices in schools tend to make the former overshadow the latter in response to budget cuts and concerns to raise academic test scores (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2007). Children who are averse to academics are then deprived of the opportunity to engage in leisure events like sports, music, drama etc. Disengagement of the children from such school programmes can lead to dissatisfaction because there is no chance for them to express their bottled-up talents and express their identity (*cf.* Adeyemo, 2010). And the non-existence of co-curricular events weakens collaboration and co-operation among children, and by extension, making it challenging for peer tutoring to thrive even inside the classroom. Some of the children would develop apathy towards learning and rather engage in oppositional interaction against each other (Liu, Joy & Griffiths, 2010).

A number of children with impairments tend to have experiences that make them vulnerable to disengagement in school activities due to negative perceptions towards impairments. Teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa are predisposed to underestimate the children because they tend to construct the impairment as a condition that in itself diminishes the ability of the affected children from participating in classroom programmes. It is a case that is related to the special educational needs view about inclusion. Consequently, teachers would place low expectations on the children resulting in them having fewer chances and low motivation to actively take part in challenging classroom activities compared to the typical children (Goodenow, 1992; Grossman, 2004). In some cases, the teachers may in a subtle way ignore them altogether while classroom lessons are in progress. Other children could replicate adult behaviour by acting in the same manner against their peers with impairments at lesson and at play. Implicitly, others measure the abilities of children with impairments by what they think they can do; not what they have seen them actually doing.

Classroom programmes require adaptation of instructional procedures to be able to reach out to every child. It is what UNESCO (2004) referred to as changing teaching practices using curriculum differentiation to respond to learner diversity. It is a reform in pedagogy that shows that the traditional teaching-at-the-front method and rote learning is not enough to motivate children to participate at lesson. The inclusive teaching involves identifying and acknowledging the needs of all learners; not only those who can adjust to the usual didactic instructional strategy or the most outspoken and confident ones in the classroom. It is about having passion and sustaining the commitment to develop instructional objectives, materials and procedures so that no child is ignored in the learning process. This idea brings to the forefront the importance of getting to know ones pupils (UNESCO, 2004) and patterning classroom practices in flexible ways to stimulate the enthusiasm of the learner to take part. The right to speak in the classroom has to shift from the pre-allocation of turns by the teacher to self-selection by the learners so that the pupils now take control of the management of turn taking of classroom air time to address each other and teachers directly whilst the teacher serves as a moderator (Cadzen, 1988, 2001; Ewa, 2015).

Schools need to extend themselves to the locals moving forward to establish a robust partnership and together explore spaces that can consolidate inclusive practices in and out of the school. This implies that the management of the school has to adopt a democratic approach to engage different persons in and outside the school e.g. teachers, parents and community members, in debates, negotiations and discussions on how the school can best serve the diverse children living within the local communities in an inclusive way (*cf.* Riehl, 2000). It is a method that provides opportunity for the schools to utilise localised knowledge and resources in varied ways to resolve threats e.g. local traditions, gendered practices, language barriers, child labour, domesticity, peer victimisation, religious attitudes, ethnic prejudices and teacher performance to inclusion of children.

PUPIL ACHIEVEMENT

Pupil achievement is about the performance of children at school. It involves the way pupils learn and their social development (Dyson, Farrell, Polat, Hutcheson & Gallannaugh 2004), as well as their performance on tests. Wallace (2010) used the notion of achievement to mean the outcome that reflects the extent of learning in children. Issues relating to pupil presence and participation have consequences to children performances at school. As pupil population soar under the universal free primary education policy, the number of children in the classrooms increases as well and their achievements become an issue. Examinations receive huge attention in school practices in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. Focus on examination means that academic activities are prioritised over the development of social skills in the learners. Perhaps because, unlike the academic aspects, the social needs of the children are not examinable.

Examinations

Many schools in the Sub-Saharan Africa use examinations to ascertain how much of the objectives of the specific learning tasks pupils have been able to achieve (Uduh, 2009). It is closely linked to the standard agenda mentioned previously. Pupils in primary schools in Nigeria, for example, usually take the internal and external examinations (Ajayi & Osalusi, 2013). The former is developed and administered via teacher made tests. Teacher-made tests often constitute examinations the pupils take at the end of each academic semester/terms

(usually three semesters) and the test instruments sometimes reflect the contents, which have been covered in the syllabus. The examinations pupils take in the first and second terms provide feedback for both learner and teacher about their performances, thus helping them to better prepare for subsequent tests. At the third semester, all learners take a single promotion examination and, like the two examinations taken previously, it enables the school determine whether the children are eligible to progress to the next year/higher grade. All three tests form part of the formative evaluation of pupil academic performance and they do not constitute basis for the final certification of children. One crucial advantage of the test is that, in constructing it, teachers can draw on their experiences about the multiple backgrounds of the pupils with whom they are working, making sure the contents of the examination are derived from the units of lesson, which children have learnt and the needs of the children are also taken into consideration.

On the other side, the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Nigeria is the institution entitled by law to centrally prepare the external examination for all schools under its jurisdiction using a uniform standard of administration and assessment (Ajayi & Osalusi, 2013). The test is called first school leaving certificate and common entrance examination. It forms the criterion to perform a summative evaluation of the performances of children and to issue them final certificates. It follows that the measurement of the academic competences of all children would have to be subject to standardised conditions. Pupils usually take the examination at the final grade – primary 6, in the school. Common entrance is a pathway for them to officially complete and leave primary education as well as transit to post-primary education or start other career choices. Given that examination is the major condition for learners to demonstrate academic achievements and progress at school, many of them would feel impelled to devote more effort to learn. Children, who are learning, arguably, are those who are able to pass examination.

As a result, teachers rush during delivery of classroom instruction so as to be able to cover the units of lesson outlined in the syllabi. In doing so, they could pay attention to some children, particularly those who are providing positive responses to their question at lessons, and ignore others thereby creating disparities in the way all of them are learning. Humphreys & Crawfurd (2014) noted that English as the MoI in Nigeria is one impediment to teaching and learning and low learning outcomes as exams and textbooks are in English. Besides, poor outcomes in learning and low academic achievements among children are also attributed to lack of resourcefulness in teaching methods, inability to complete the syllabi, poor financial support, lack of interest in school programmes, psychological and emotional trauma (Ajayi & Ekundayo, 2010; Asikhia, 2010), poor interpersonal relationships (Aremu & Sokan, 2003), poor school attendance, less interest in children's understanding of the lesson and inadequate instructional materials (Etsey, 2005). Other studies by Yara (2010) and Owoeye & Yara (2011) have shown negative relationship between large pupil population and academic achievement. Due to these circumstances, it is possible that many children would experience difficulties to meet examination requirements. Assumedly, the children who are unsuccessful in examinations may be asked to repeat grades.

Grade repetition
Grade repetition or retention in school is prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa. In a literature review about the concept in the context, Ndaruhutse, Brannelly, Latham & Penson (2008) defined it as the practice of making children who have not mastered the curriculum or meet certain

academic requirements to repeat the year while their peers are promoted to the next year or higher grade. A comparative study carried out by Brophy (2006) in developing and developed countries showed that other factors account for grade retention in addition to the need for learners to pass examinations. Brophy stated that when repetition takes place due to decisions made by the learners or their parents, it is considered as serving the best interests of the pupils. One such voluntary decision occurs in rural areas, especially in situations where children have no access to schools that offer the next higher grade.

Other voluntary repetition, according to Brophy, happens when families believe that their children did not learn many concepts in the curriculum in the previous year. Thirdly, children are made to repeat when the language of instruction at school, particularly in the early grades, is different from home language. Parents initiate repetition for children to have another opportunity to achieve appreciable communication skills in the MoI to facilitate learning and advancement to higher grades in future. The other form of repetition is involuntary as it is imposed by the school. In this case, the school asks learners to repeat for failure to meet the benchmark for classroom attendance to be qualified to progress to a higher grade. Although this kind of retention is viewed to be common in developed countries, it is also arguably fast becoming part of the assessment criteria of pupil performance in schools in Sub-Saharan Africa (Brophy, 2006). A stronger argument in favour of grade retention is found in the work of Jacob & Lars (2009) and Manacorda (2010). These authors stated that the practice is perceived to serve to prevent poor attendance and academic performance at school. Penalising underperformers by mandating them to re-do extra year/s in the same grade, according to Jacob & Lars (2009), motivates them to raise efforts. The consequences of repeating a grade acts as incentives for repeaters to strive to ensure the experience do not recur. This reason might be a common feature in a plethora of pro-grade repetition literature, but convincing evidence as regards the practice is very limited.

Rather, literature provides overwhelming evidence about how problematic the practice is and the adverse impact on children education. Fredriksen (2005) reported that while about 93 per cent of primary age children entered school in 2001 in Sub-Saharan Africa, only two third completed the full primary cycle. The rest either repeated or dropped out. Corroborating, Naschold (2002) and Ndaruhutse et al. (2008) stated that Africa faces a huge challenge of realising the universal primary education as almost a third of the primary age children never complete the full primary school cycle. Furthermore, Ndaruhutse and colleagues identified children who are most at risk of repeating and dropping out from school to include children living in remote and rural areas, girls, nomadic and ethnic minorities, children affected by conflicts and natural disasters, internally displaced children, children from the poorest homes, working children and children with impairments.

Making pupils to repeat classrooms raises the cost of their education. Families and government would incur more expenses to enable children spend extra years to learn in a particular grade. Parents are likely to regard children who repeat grades as wasting their resources. The practice does not consider the needs of overaged children, especially girls, as they are being delayed to spend longer time in school. Grade repetition also contributes to overcrowd the classrooms, thus increase the tendency of further repetition for some children. Repeaters could regard themselves as failures otherwise they would have progressed to another year at the same time with their peers. As such, they may develop less self-esteem and lose the belief in their abilities

to perform better in learning. It is possible for repeaters to feel bored when they have to learn concepts they have already learnt. Also, the policy exacerbates the situation for children with learning difficulties as well as those who do not have much interest in academics. Grade retention is significant in the exclusion of children because it reduces the number of children that complete primary school. Some pupils who have repeated often go on to dropout from school (Ndaruhutse et al., 2008) and they are more likely to dropout once they have become old enough to do so (Brophy, 2006).

Automatic promotion

Automatic promotion (Brophy, 2006, Ndaruhutse et al. 2008), as a strategy to resolve the competence based curriculum in the inclusive direction, constitute the means for enabling achievement and progress of all children at school. Automatic promotion (sometimes referred to as social promotion) is a no-child-left-behind measure that is opposed to the counterproductive effects of grade repetition on the educational system. The practice involves moving a learner to the next grade irrespective of whether s/he meets qualification requirements in order to keep the person at par with the their peers at school (Hernandez-Tutop, 2012). Assessment of children has to move from the practice where the expectation is for children to provide specific answers to specific questions to that where they are guided to research, analyse, criticise, discuss and understand simple concepts. This will demonstrate that the educational system is beginning to change to include, affecting the school. According to (Hernandez-Tutop, 2012:3), it is a change from: (1) a stress on merit to a stress on efficiency; (2) a focus on individual to group learning; (3) a belief in different capability to equal capability; (4) a move from adjusting pupils to school to adjusting the school to the pupil; and (5) a focus on the best pupils to the average pupils. It is a progressive reform from merit promotion (Hernandez-Tutop, 2012) and seeks to institutionalise automatic promotion of children so that children are generally promoted (Ndaruhutse et al. 2008). However, to recommend application of social promotion in a non-consolidated inclusive context in Sub-Saharan Africa implies that repetition needs to be limited to a few special cases where there are demonstrable grounds supported by objective evidence for believing that a child's educational well-being would be better served by retention (Ndaruhutse et al. 2008). This approach can help to lower the rate of dropout among disaffected pupils at school and promote inclusive schooling within the context.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATION

Inclusive education is the central idea of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a new way forward for providing education for all in the future globally (UNESCO, 2002, 2008, 2009). This comes as a reaction to UNESCO's findings about the millions of primary age children who are out of school and/or underperforming due to social-cultural practices in different parts of sub-Sahara Africa that are resistant to change in the inclusive direction (UNESCO, 2013, 2015). Research from some prominent authors in the west within the realm of inclusive education such as Mittler (2000), Riehl (2000), Dyson & Millward (2000), Farrell (2003), Peters (2004), Ainscow (2005) and Ainscow, Both & Dyson (2006) have also produced documents highlighting on the notion of inclusive education as an approach of dealing with exclusion and marginalization in education, thus enabling all children the right to access and succeed at school. This is an indication of a shift from the status quo in the ways children receive education to now create opportunities for them to more actively

engage with the school programmes that matter to them. The analyses from the different authors anchor on the notion of social inclusion which emphasizes equality of access to and success in education, among primary age children disadvantaged on the basis of their identities in the society (World Bank, 2013). The inclusive philosophy is a strategy to genuinely remove social differences, thus creating an educational environment where all children can feel valued and recognised regardless of background, and to achieve.

CONCLUSION

Provisions within national educational systems have demonstrated the difficulties educators face to guarantee inclusive education in Sub-Saharan Africa. The need to preserve local cultures and standard agenda raise contentions against the inclusive banner. Perceptions among actors in education tend to look at inclusion as an idea that presumably has the capacity to displace local norms, values and belief systems in relation to the way children are allowed to engage in school. Such uncompromising position limits the rights of all children to education in general settings. The implication of that became manifest in the extent to which every child accesses, participates and achieves in school in the region. Inclusive education, as to be a core philosophy for educating all children in general schools in the region, requires educators to adopt a curriculum that can differentially serve the diverse needs of children and to enable all of them leave school with positive outcomes.

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