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**TELEVISION STORY ANGLE AND THE INVOLVEMENT ON LEARNERS WITH  
INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN KENYA**

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**Television Story Angle and the Involvement on  
Learners with Intellectual Disability in Inclusive  
Education in Kenya**

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**Abstract**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this paper was to examine the influence of television story angle and the involvement on learners with intellectual disability in inclusive education in Kenya. The paper was guided by the framing theory.

**Methodology:** The study utilized the descriptive cross-sectional research design. A sample of 40 inclusive education schools, 16 Sub-County Education Officers, three television stations, 72 television programmes, 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 established that while television stations have aired stories about inclusive education, the content aired seemed to portray people with disabilities as objects of pity, curiosity, evil, laughable, and burdensome. These qualities were repugnant to inclusion of learners with disabilities in education and were therefore counterproductive to inclusive education.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and**

**Policy:** The study recommends that the framing of disability in the Kenyan media should be viewed from more progressive frames. 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:** *Story Angles, Framing, Inclusive Education, Intellectual Disability*

## INTRODUCTION

The paper examines the influence of television story angle and the involvement on learners with intellectual disability in inclusive education in Kenya. Inclusive education involves welcoming all students in all schools in age-appropriate, regular classes and are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school. Inclusive education is about the development and design of our schools, classrooms, programs and activities so that all students learn and participate together. The mainstream media – television, radio, newspapers – can play an important role in influencing societal attitudes towards children with intellectual disability (Happer & Philo, 2013). This in turn can potentially influence the inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities in the education system. How children with disability are portrayed and the frequency with which they appear in the media has an enormous impact on how they are regarded in society (ILO, 2015). Portraying people with disability with dignity and respect in the media can help promote more inclusive and tolerant societies.

The language used to describe disability both shapes public attitudes and reflects prevailing assumptions about disability. Studies have shown that variations in language and terminology can elicit significant differences in non-disabled people's perceptions of, and reactions to, persons with disabilities (Auslander & Gold, 1999). In this sense, the language used in the news media has the potential to both reproduce and challenge existing stereotypes about disability (Jones & Harwood, 2008).

People with disabilities make up 10% of the total population of Kenya, approximately 3.5 million people (WHO, 2006). This group of people have become marginalised and are highly discriminated in all the levels of the society. They experience numerous barriers in mainstream education due to their disabilities or needs. Therefore, they suffer from unequal access to quality education (SENP, 2009).

Although children with disability constitute more than one-third of the approximately 67 million children who are not currently enrolled in primary school (UNESCO, 2006), the implementation of Free Primary Education (FPE) led to an influx and inclusion of new categories of Special Needs Children such as autistic children, those with down syndrome, cerebral palsy, loco-motor impairment, maladjusted children, multiple handicapped children and gifted and talented learners in public schools (SENP, 2009). Without a positive mindset towards learners with intellectual disabilities, their inclusion into the education system would be a challenge.

Historically, disability stories hardly get featured in the media, yet people in most cultures depend on the media to get information about disability. When television features disability stories, it is often not a true representation of disability hence entrenching stigma towards people with disability. Haller (2010) corroborates this assertion when she posits that, historically in western culture, people seek information about people with disabilities basically from the media because several factors such as stigma and barriers in physical environments and people's attitudes shut them out of society.

Story angle (media frame) is looked at as a central organizing idea or storyline that provides meaning to unfolding strip of events (Scheufele, 1999; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Story angle

also serves as guidelines to journalists who recognize and categorize information and they can package it and effectively relay it to the masses. The way a news story is packaged or framed can affect how audiences end up understanding the news item. Frames aid audiences to decide what to attend to and what to ignore. Disability has largely been framed from the inspirational point of view. This has greatly impacted our understanding of disability as a limitation that one ought to overcome.

According to Elliot and Byrd (1982), the representation of disability in the contemporary media have been influenced from the printed media, especially classical and modern literature. Disabled people for long have been depicted in literature as either hero or evil and not in between. This dichotomy in the portrayal is based of two Christian beliefs; one that bearing pain makes man more precious and the second that the physical flaws are the consequences of wrongdoings (remind the growing nose of Pinocchio when he lies) (Thompson; 1980, cited in Elliot & Byrd, 1982). Rene (2015) pins this on the Medical or Individual model of disability. This model sees people with disabilities as patients or sick people who need help and can't survive without the help of able-bodied people. It also sees disability as an individual problem that needs to be cured by the individual himself.

A well-sensitized media has the potential to change the way the society treats learners with intellectual disabilities. The media can increase awareness about the situation of persons with disabilities, and promote positive attitudes towards children, youth, women and men with disabilities. The media can support the human rights of persons with disabilities including the rights to education by including and interviewing persons with disabilities in news and topical reporting, portraying them as part of the public (Ndavula & Lidubwi, 2016).

### **Problem Statement**

Globally, inclusion of learners with intellectual disabilities is supported by UNESCO Convention on the Rights of the Child and UN Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities. 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. The media has been at the forefront of societal change. How children with disability are portrayed and the frequency with which they appear in the media has an enormous impact on how they are regarded in society (ILO, 2015). According to Happer and Philo (2013), the media can potentially shift societal attitudes towards learners with intellectual disability and accelerate their inclusion into mainstream schools. Aghan (2007) conducted a study on media coverage of gender and disability in Kenya. The study gave a general view of media coverage of groups perceived to be disadvantaged and marginalized. This paper presents a more specific investigation into the influence of intellectual disability story angle in television on involvement of learners in Inclusive education in Kenya.

Although television holds much potential for changing attitudes towards learners with intellectual disability, it is not clear what kind of representation exists for intellectual disability in television

in Kenya. Given the central position that television plays in social construction of disability in the society, this study sought to investigate the influence intellectual disability story angle in television on involvement of learners in inclusive education in Kenya in schools in Kenya.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper was informed by the framing theory. According to the framing theory advanced by Goffman (1986), media elaborate and reinforce certain representations which in turn creates frames through which opinions about issues are shaped. In this way then, the media play an important role in distributing ideology primarily through framing. Framing involves selecting pieces of information and organizing them to produce stories for an audience. The essence of framing, therefore, is selection to prioritize some facts, images, or developments over others, thereby unconsciously promoting one particular interpretation of events (Cohen & Wolfsfeld, 1993).

Reese (2007) explains that frames are organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world. Indeed, over time some frames become conventional in the media, and they provide contextual cues. They give meaning and order to complex problems, actions, and events, by slotting the new into familiar categories or storylines. Ironically, once conventional frames become pervasive, the media believe that they are portraying factual information in the tradition of objective and balanced reporting, as they are unaware of the way that the broader frame shapes their story narratives.

It follows that conventional frames for reporting disability reinforce stereotypical perceptions of mental disability. According to Hunt (1991) there are 10 stereotypes that the media use to portray disability. These include: i) the disabled person as pitiable or pathetic, ii) an object of curiosity or violence, iii) sinister or evil, iv) the super cripple, v) as atmosphere, vi) laughable, vii) his/her own worst enemy, viii) as a burden, ix) as non-sexual, x) being unable to participate in daily life. Where these conventional frames are adopted, media stories are often not a true representation of disability.

Applied to this study, the framing 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.

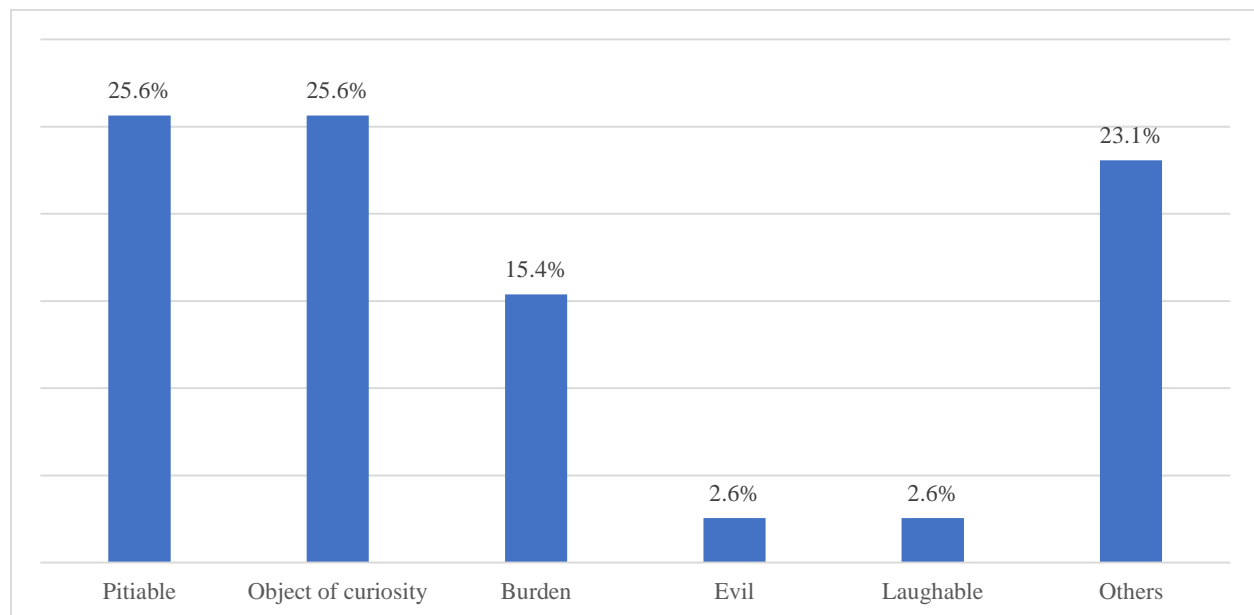
### **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted the descriptive cross-sectional research design. The target population comprised of stakeholders in inclusive education in Nairobi County who included school curriculum implementers, TV broadcasting actors, and the champions of education for children with special needs. A sample size of 40 inclusive education schools, 16 Sub-County Education Officers, three television stations, 72 television programmes, three television producers and five key informants from the Kenya Association of the Intellectually Handicapped were sampled. Television programmes aired by the sampled stations for a period of six months were accessed and analysed by the use of a coding sheet. The television stations were: The Kenya Broadcasting

Corporation Television (KBC-TV), Kenya Television Network News (KTN News) and Signs TV. The study used primary data that was obtained through structured questionnaires, interview guides and a code sheet. The structured questionnaires were issued to inclusive education teachers. Interview guides were issued to sub-county education officers, TV producers and members of the Kenya Association of Intellectual Handicapped. A coding sheet was used to collect quantitative data from television programmes from the selected stations. The coding sheet contained the parameters of analysis of television framing of inclusive education for Learners with Intellectual Disabilities. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics while thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data. The data was presented using graphs and tables.

## FINDINGS

Television programmes aired by the sampled stations for a period of six months were accessed and analysed by the use of a coding sheet. Results were as summarised in Figure 1.



*Figure 1: Intellectual Disability Story Angles*

Findings show that 25.6% of the stories over the period were pitiable, 25.6% were objects of curiosity, 15.4% took the burden angle, 2.6% had evil angle, 2.6% were laughable while 23.1% took other angles. The findings seem to suggest that more than 75% of the programmes aired themes that did not support the mainstreaming of intellectual disability in education.

The teachers were asked to state the presence of disability story angle themes in television programmes. Results indicate that 35% of the teachers disagreed and another 40% strongly disagreed that Television programmes that portray themes on pity for children with intellectual disabilities encourage their involvement in inclusive education. However, 15.5% of the teachers

agreed and another 2.5% strongly agreed. The findings imply that pitiable stories on people living with disabilities did not encourage their inclusion and mainstreaming into the education system.

Further, 20% of the teachers disagreed and another 42.5% strongly disagreed that Television programmes that portray children with intellectual disabilities as objects of curiosity encourage their participation in inclusive education. However, 10% of the teachers agreed and another 17.5% strongly agreed. The findings imply that treating disabilities as objects of curiosity did not encourage the integration and mainstreaming of learners with disabilities in into the education system.

Results indicate that 2.5% of the teachers disagreed and another 80% strongly disagreed that Television programmes that portray children with intellectual disabilities as evil encourage their participation in inclusive education. However, 7.5% of the teachers agreed and another 2.5% strongly agreed. The findings imply that treating disabilities as evil did not encourage the integration of learners with disabilities into the education system.

Findings indicate that 7.5% of the teachers disagreed and another 62.5% strongly disagreed that Television programmes that portray children with intellectual disabilities as laughable encourage their participation in inclusive education. However, 10% of the teachers agreed and another 10% strongly agreed. The findings imply that treating disabilities as laughable did not encourage the integration of learners with disabilities into the education system.

Findings indicate that 2.5% of the teachers disagreed and another 77.5% strongly disagreed that Television programmes that portray children with intellectual disabilities as burdensome encourage their participation in inclusive education. However, 2.5% of the teachers agreed and another 7.5% strongly agreed. The findings imply that treating disabilities as burdensome did not encourage the integration of learners with disabilities into the education system.

### **Television Programs and Framing of Intellectual Disability**

Media producers were asked how they produced features on intellectual disability. In their responses, media producers stated that they used production techniques such as television studio interviews and on-air stories. The producers further stated that they interviewed children with intellectual disability and key stakeholders in the disability sector such as teachers, parents and caregivers of children with intellectual disability.

The media producers were also asked about the issues that make up intellectual disability content. From their responses, the issues include their right to education, role of government, the civil society and the community on inclusive education. Others focus on the real time stories such as the challenges they face in learning. Other producers focus on specific diseases such as cerebral palsy, epilepsy, ADHD, and autism spectrum disorder while others focus on the stigma and discrimination.

On the angles the programmes take on inclusive education, the media producers noted that they focus on stories that highlight the provision of equal opportunities for those with intellectual disabilities. Some producers focus on the rights of persons with disabilities, their inclusivity, and

the challenges of persons living with disabilities. Other producers profile schools that offer inclusive education. As one media producer notes:

*We profile schools offering this inclusive education and also point out the need from time to time when we get people who have knowledge on these matters.* – Media Producer 4.

On what determines the allocation of time, some producers pointed out the uniqueness of the story, the length of the story, public interest, the intensity of the story, the human-interest angle in the story, relatability, or the impact the story is likely to have.

The stakeholders interviewed were asked whether they watched television. All of them responded in the affirmative. Most of them only watched the news bulletin and nothing else on TV. When asked about the messages that should be emphasized on inclusive education, some of the respondents were of the opinion that it is important to embrace diversity. Others noted that the key messages should centre around awareness creation of intellectual disability and good practices when offering education to learners with intellectual disability. One stakeholder said as follows:

*That all learners with all their diversities and intersectionality's have a right to inclusive and quality education. The diversities include and not limited to gender, race, ethnic communities, disability, religious affiliations, economic backgrounds, from rural or urban etc.* – Stakeholder 1

Other respondents were of the opinion that the attitudes of people towards the disabled people require more focus. This needs to be checked right from the young population at home and in schools. This can be done by avoiding any communication of negative messages about the disabled people. Thus, enough resources should be provided in schools in terms of reading materials, teachers and means of transport for the disabled. In the words of one of the stakeholders:

*Attitudes of non-disabled people towards the disabled people should be looked into, especially young kids in school, their peers, school staff and parents should treat them right without discriminating or disrespecting them. Negative messages or demeaning messages should not be communicated at all. There should be reasonable accommodation with facilities structured in a way that people with disabilities can move around easily and in a comfortable manner. There should be enough qualified teachers, enough books and trained staff, with timely and accommodative means of transport provided.* – Stakeholder 2

The stakeholders were also asked whether television stations were effective in advocating for inclusive education. While some of the respondents said they were not, others felt that there are a few programmes that advocate for inclusive education. Others felt that while a few programmes are available, they could do more to improve the situation. One stakeholder noted as follows:

*There are few programmes on TV that talk about disability. I feel that more programmes should be included for people with disability to feel included and considered. TV stations do not have people with disabilities as presenters, news anchors. Politics has included people with disabilities, and I feel the same should be done in Journalism. Disability advocacy programmes should be given airtime, with talk shows inviting Disability advocates from time to time. Prime time news should give more airtime to disability news as they give to politics.* – Stakeholder 3



The stakeholders were also asked the extent to which television stations raised awareness on inclusive education. The majority view was that the television stations have done very minimal in raising awareness on inclusive education. In the words of one stakeholder:

*They have not done enough. They only do so occasionally, especially on Disability Day. Sign interpreters are only on news programmes not on other shows thus discriminating against people with disabilities. Most shows do not have disabled anchors, and a few shows like "Able Differently" are the only shows with disabled anchors.* – Stakeholder 4

### **Correlation between Intellectual Disability Story Angle and Involvement of Learners in Inclusive Education**

The study sought to determine the influence of intellectual disability story angle in television on involvement of learners in inclusive education. To achieve this, correlation techniques were employed as summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1: Correlation between Intellectual Disability Story Angle 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 themes on pity for children with intellectual disabilities encourage their involvement in inclusive education.	38	.104	.306
Television programmes that portray children with intellectual disabilities as objects of curiosity encourage their participation in inclusive education.	40	.193	.163
Television programmes that portray children with intellectual disabilities as evil encourage their participation in inclusive education.	40	.227	.123
Television programmes that portray children with intellectual disabilities as laughable encourage their participation in inclusive education.	40	.248	.102
Television programmes that portray children with intellectual disabilities as burdensome encourage their participation in inclusive education.	39	.191	.170

Correlation Statistics in Table 1 show that there was a weak positive correlation ( $r = 0.104$ ,  $\text{Sig} > 0.05$ ) between television programmes that portray themes on pity for children with intellectual disabilities and the use of television 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 pitiable themes for children with intellectual disabilities did not lead to an increase in the use of television programmes to encourage the involvement of children with intellectual disabilities in inclusive education.

Results also shows that there was a weak positive correlation ( $r= 0.193$ ,  $\text{Sig}>0.05$ ) between television programmes that portray children with intellectual disabilities as objects of curiosity and the use of 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 disability as objects of curiosity did not lead to an increase in the use of television programmes to encourage the involvement of children with intellectual disabilities in inclusive education.

Correlation statistics also show that there was a weak positive correlation ( $r= 0.227$ ,  $\text{Sig}>0.05$ ) between programmes that portray children with intellectual disabilities as evil and the use of television 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 disability as evil did not lead to an increase in the use of television programmes to encourage the involvement of children with intellectual disabilities in inclusive education.

Correlation statistics also show that there was a weak positive correlation ( $r= 0.248$ ,  $\text{Sig}>0.05$ ) between programmes that portray children with intellectual disabilities as laughable and the use of television 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 disability as laughable did not lead to an increase in the use of television programmes to encourage the involvement of children with intellectual disabilities in inclusive education.

Correlation statistics also show that there was a weak positive correlation ( $r= 0.191$ ,  $\text{Sig}>0.05$ ) between programmes that portray children with intellectual disabilities as burdensome and the use of Television 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 disability as burdensome did not lead to an increase in the use of television programmes to encourage the involvement of children with intellectual disabilities in inclusive education.

In absence of significant relationships between the dependent variable and the independent variables, in the correlation analysis above, the conditions for employing regression modelling for further analysis are not fulfilled and therefore the model collapses.

## **Discussion**

The study established a divergence between TV programming and inclusive education. The content aired seemed to portray people with disabilities as objects of pity, curiosity, evil, laughable and burdensome. These qualities were repugnant to the inclusion of learners with disabilities in education. These findings further imply that TV programmes were counterproductive concerning

inclusive education. Media producers lack support and relevant training so that they can increase and improve their coverage of disability issues, presenting disability issues in a way that promotes the dignity of Persons with Disabilities as well as amplifies their voices and perspectives. Media reports and news coverage of these issues is not only essential to ensure accurate and balanced portrayals of disability, but also to raise awareness, dispel negative stereotypes, and counter stigma and misinformation

The study established that there was no influence of intellectual disability story angle in television on involvement of learners in inclusive education. The finding that some television programmes framed people with intellectual disability as evil, are in tandem with a study by Bernes (1992) who found that movie creators have been known to frame characters with intellectual disability as evil. A study by Zalkauskaite (2012) concluded that people with intellectual disability were presented in the media as threatening the society, and therefore should be isolated from the society and who require institutionalization.

The finding that television programmes in Kenya framed people with intellectual disabilities as laughable are in tandem with findings from a study by Elizabeth (2019) which concluded that television comedy mock and create jokes out of disabled people from mimicking how they walk and talk. Therefore, framing people with intellectual disability in negative terms impacts how children with disabilities are viewed in the society.

Scholars agree that how disability is framed largely impacts our understanding of disability (Scheufele, 1999; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Our findings indicate that framing of intellectual disability is negative, excluding and problematic. This kind of framing, if repeated so many times without questioning their validity or consequences, can lead to negative outcomes for children with intellectual disabilities. The misleading portrayal of disabled people has had far reaching consequences on the disability community. The negative reporting comes from media personnel who are not well informed in terms of the language to use, how to frame their stories and create characters in a way that is enabling (Ndavula & Lidubwi 2016).

## **Conclusion**

The study concludes that while the television stations have aired stories about inclusive education, the content aired seemed to portray people with disabilities as objects of pity, curiosity, evil, laughable and burdensome. These qualities were repugnant to inclusion of learners with disabilities in education and were therefore counterproductive to inclusive education. However, the correlation between intellectual disability story angle in television and the involvement of learners in inclusive education was not statistically significant. The study recommends that the framing of disability in the Kenyan media should be viewed from more progressive frames. 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.

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