

Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities in the Ethiopian School System

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Abstract- The government of Ethiopia has been concerned to make education accessible for all irrespective of their disability, gender, language, socio-economic status, religion, and other differences. This concern is manifested through the moves and efforts made to realize the principle of education for all in the country. A major factor influencing the movement towards education for all in Ethiopia is the adoption of various international legal and policy frameworks, conventions, declarations, framework of actions, and forums. Following the adoptions of international treaties, education has been considered as a human right approach within the country's policy, strategy, program and plan documents. In those documents, due emphasis is given to the education of children and youth with disabilities with the intention of creating equal access. The focus of this study is to review extant literature and empirical studies accumulated in relation to the educational experiences of children and youth with disabilities in the Ethiopian school system. Its' intention is to identify existing practices and gaps in contributing to policy, practice, and research in the field. The study begins with an overview of policy framework documents of the country which ranges from 1994 to 2019. These include Constitution, Education and Training Policy, Higher Education Proclamation, Education Sector Development Programs, Growth and Transformation Plans, National Plan of Action of Persons with Disabilities, Master Plan for Inclusive Education, Education Statistics Annual Abstract, and allied strategies and guidelines. Then, different journal articles have been reviewed. All of these journal articles were conducted across pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary schools levels in Ethiopia. They mainly cover the period from 2009 to 2018 and were studied by employing both qualitative and quantitative methods. The articles have been accessed using various websites. The comprehensive analysis of this study showed that the government of Ethiopia has shown its willingness to create accessible education for all people in its pertinent documents; however, there is a huge gap between policies and their implementation. The study also proved that a number of variables deterred the promotion of access, equity, inclusion, and quality in the education system. Those variables include lack of adaptive educational materials, facilities, qualified teachers, flexible curriculum, awareness, collaborative effort, and commitment. Besides, it revealed that enrollment of children and youth with disabilities to schools was found extremely low. And, those few enrolled have been experiencing barriers in learning. Implication of this study

indicated that the practical realization of accessible inclusive school setting which accommodates all learners at all level of the education system is crucially essential. This necessitates the true implementation of policy frameworks into action.

Index Terms- Disability, Education, Learners with Disabilities, Inclusion

I. INTRODUCTION

Children and youth with disabilities have traditionally been marginalized within or excluded from schools globally. Even though many of them were able to attend schools without any program modification; they may be educated in residential schools, separate classes, and/or regular classes with support service providers of special needs teachers because of their disabilities (Taylor, 2007). However, the adoption of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education in 1994 has resulted in inclusion of all children in educational settings becoming a primary service option throughout the world (Chireshe, 2013). With social justice at the forefront of educational agendas, the inclusion of all children in education has propelled a worldwide political and philosophical movement (Peebles & Mendaglio, 2014). This movement has been gradually building (Pantic & Florian, 2015) and its principle that has piqued the interest of educators, legislators and parents at the beginning, has now been placed firmly on the social change agenda in order to ensure participation of all regardless of the individual differences and to eliminate exclusion in the society (Cologon, 2013).

Nowadays, education systems are going through major reforms and changes in the developed and developing world towards inclusion of all in education (Malak, 2013). Many countries have become committed to recognize the learning needs of children and youth with disabilities within their education systems (Suleymanov, 2015). Over a period of time, therefore, the number of children with diverse unique needs, particularly children and youth with disabilities who are included and being educated in regular classrooms is significantly increasing in several countries (Pantic & Florian, 2015; Adoyo & Odeny, 2015).

In alignment with the international world, the government of Ethiopia has been developed and adopted legal and policies frameworks, which strongly support the education of all regardless of their disability, gender, language, socio-economic status, religion, and other differences (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2017a; MoE, 2015a; MoE, 2012a; MoE, 2010; MoE, 2006; MoE, 1994). This indicated that the country has been working for the realization of the right to education. As the government of Ethiopia strive to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all (MoE, 2017a), it is important to study whether the learning needs of children and youth with disabilities are addressed in the school system of the country and they are benefited from the education sector or not.

The overall objective of this study is, therefore, to investigate the educational experiences of children and youth with disabilities in the Ethiopian school system. In particular, it tries to identify:

- Existing practices and opportunities in place for the learning of children and youth with disabilities
- Major gaps and factors that hinder the involvement and achievement of children and youth with disabilities from schooling

Hence, this study is anticipated to be significant to schools, individuals, stakeholders, organizations, institutions, and government in Ethiopia and elsewhere with respect to policy, practice and research in the field. Also, the implications derived from this study could serve as inputs to make informed decisions in reforming schooling practice for children and youth with disabilities.

II. METHODOLOGY

Systematic review of extant literature and empirical studies accumulated in relation to the educational experiences of children and youth with disabilities in the Ethiopian school system was conducted. Accordingly, relevant legal and policy framework documents of the country have been assessed. The documents are range from the year 1994 to 2019. These are Education Statistics Annual Abstract (MoE, 2019), Master Plan for Inclusive Education (MoE, 2017a), General Education Quality Improvement Program (World Bank, 2017); Growth and Transformation Plan II (National Planning Commission, 2016); Education Sector Development Program V (MoE, 2015a); Guideline for Establishing and Managing Inclusive Education Resource Centers (MoE, 2015b); National Plan of Action of Persons with Disabilities (Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, 2012); Special Needs/Inclusive Education Strategy (MoE, 2012a); National School Health and Nutrition Strategy (MoE, 2012b); Special Needs Education Guide for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (MoE, 2012c); National Policy Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education in Ethiopia (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health & Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2010); Growth and Transformation Plan I (Ministry of Finance and Economic

Development, 2010); Education Sector Development Program IV (MoE, 2010); Higher Education Proclamation (FDRE, 2009); Education Sector Development Program III (MoE, 2005); Special Needs Education Program Strategy (MoE, 2006); Constitution (FDRE, 1995); and Education and Training Policy (MoE, 1994).

Furthermore, 14 journal articles have been reviewed in this study, all regarding the educational experiences of children and youth with disabilities. These journal articles were conducted across pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary school levels of the Ethiopian school context. They mainly cover the period from 2009 to 2018 and were studied by employing both qualitative and quantitative methods. Almost the scopes of all the journal articles were schools in different regions of the country which are included children and youth with disabilities. The journal articles result reflects more on barriers and gaps that need to be addressed. Twelve journal article authors' were based in Ethiopia, while the remaining 2 were co-authored by Ethiopian and non-Ethiopians who reside inside the country and abroad. With the exception of 1 journal article published locally, the rest of them were published in foreign-based professional journals. The articles have been accessed using various websites and were selected based on their congruence with the objective of this study. They were compiled from International Journal of Special Education; International Journal of Physical Education, Sports and Health; International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications; International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education; Journal of Education and Practice; Journal of Teacher Education and Educators; American Journal of Sports Science; Asian Journal of Humanity, Art and Literature; Global Journal of Human Social Science; International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies; The Ethiopian Journal of Education; Research in Pedagogy; and Sociology and Anthropology.

1. LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS RELATED TO EDUCATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

The government of Ethiopia has been committed to creating equal educational opportunities for all following the philosophy of inclusive education. This commitment is manifested in ratifying and adapting various international legal and policy frameworks, conventions, declarations, framework of actions, and forums in relation to inclusive education. These include, for example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons (1975); the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Person with Disabilities (1983); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); the World Declaration on Education For All (1990); the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994); the World Education Forum (2000); the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006); the Millennium Development Goals (2000); and the Sustainable Development Goals (2015). Thus, these

international treaties influenced the country to recognize education as a fundamental human right that should be accessible to all citizens.

Moreover, the country's policy, strategy, program and plan documents (MoE, 2017a; MoE, 2015a; MoE, 2012a; MoE, 2010; MoE, 2006; MoE, 1994) considered human right approach to education. Consequently, inclusion of all, particularly the inclusion of children and youth with disabilities to education is vividly articulated in the legal and policy framework documents of the country. The following presents this fact.

1.1. Constitution

The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) is a supreme law of the country. It declared that all international agreements ratified by the country are an integral part of the law of the land. All legislative, executive and judicial organs have the responsibility to respect and enforce the law in conformity with human rights considerations. The Constitution clearly ensured the right to equal access to publicly funded social services including the education sector. Also, it affirmed that the State has the obligation to allocate ever-increasing resources to provide education and other social services for people with disabilities, orphan children, and the aged (FDRE, 1995).

Hence, the Ethiopian Constitution mandated the universal right to education and the availability of equal educational access for all people. Also, it strongly agreed on the idea of ensuring equity in the education system and the commitment of support provision to accommodate the needs of children and youth with disabilities. Since Ethiopia has ratified numerous international and regional treaties, education has been considered as a human right approach within the country's policy, strategy, program, and plan documents.

1.2. Policy

The Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia forwarded the highest and general policy direction of the education sector. It stipulated the expansion of basic education and training for all people; and the development of physical and mental potential and problem-solving capacity of individuals including children and youth with disabilities in accordance with their potential needs. The policy has shown its commitment to address the needs of all children by appreciating diversity. It also confirmed that special education and training will be provided for children and youth with disabilities. Besides, it emphasized the importance of the preparation and utilization of support inputs for special needs education (MoE, 1994).

In general, the Education and Training Policy has laid the ground for the development of the education sector in the country as a whole. In particular, it recognized that the realization of basic education is both a necessity and a fundamental human right for all. In addition, it addressed on

expanding access to educational opportunities, and it recognized the right of children and youth with disabilities and gifted learners to education so as to enable them based on their learning pace.

1.3. Proclamation

Since the stage of development of the country's higher education required legal direction and guidance to enable it to become efficacious to ensure and promote its positive contributions through relevant and quality education; the government of Ethiopia has declared Higher Education Proclamation No. 650/2009. This proclamation indicated necessary and feasible academic assistance and guidance to be provided for all learners. Also, it assured that support through sign language, amenable facilities and programs, relocated classes and accessible environments, alternative testing procedures, and educational auxiliary aids shall be provided to the learners with disabilities (FDRE, 2009). Hence, the Proclamation has considered the needs and learning interests of all learners at the higher education instruction level.

1.4. Programs

The Government of Ethiopia embarked in 1997 on a 20-year program of education reform called 'Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP)'. Due attention was given to the expansion of educational opportunities for children and youth with disabilities from ESDP III (2005/06–2010/11). ESDP III emphasized the expansion of educational opportunities for children and youth with disabilities in order to achieve the Education For All goals. It considered special needs education as a cross-cutting issue in the education system. It also focused on the need for special needs education to be included in planning, budgeting and reporting from federal to school level (MoE, 2005). Hence, ESDP III has created a way for the start of the inclusion of all children in the education system.

ESDP IV (2010/11–2014/15) clearly indicated special needs education as providing services for the individual child; and inclusive education as a change of the whole system and of the school environment to the need of the individual child. It focused on enhancing the number of special needs educators; increasing enrollment of learners with disabilities; and improving the institutional capacity of schools in addressing the academic and social needs of the learners (MoE, 2010). ESDP IV, therefore, contributed its share to ensure access and quality education for children and youth with disabilities.

ESDP V (2015/16–2019/20) ensured that special needs and inclusive education will be fully mainstreamed under cross-cutting issues within the priority programs to ensure joint responsibility of all implementing bodies. It assigned a priority equal opportunities and participation for all children with special attention to disadvantaged groups; and the delivery of quality education that meets the diverse learning needs of all children, youth and adults. It also stated clear targets to the

establishment of special needs and inclusive education support systems to include children and youth with disabilities (MoE, 2015a). This indicates that ESDP V directs implementation and development towards inclusive education for all people.

Since 2009, the government of Ethiopia has started designing and implementing a program called “General Education Quality Improvement Program” in collaboration with multiple donors to strengthen the education system and to realize it for all people. Particularly, the 2017–2022 General Education Quality Improvement Program introduced equity as one of its main result areas. The equity result area aimed to move more holistic and programmatic planning and implementation of inclusive education across the country. The program envisaged supporting the creation of adequate learning conditions for all learners through allocating school grants for the establishment of inclusive education resource centers in the country. The allocated grants have planned to be used to organize awareness-raising and training events; purchase reference materials on special needs, equipment for assessing needs, and educational resources for children with special needs; and ensure accessible learning environment (World Bank, 2017). So, this program targeted to reduce barriers in schools and to create a welcoming school environment for the benefit of children and youth with disabilities.

1.5. Plans

There are a number of plans in Ethiopia which are designed by the government to support the education sector. For example, Growth and Transformation Plan I (2010/11–2014/15) is a national five-year developmental plan which was designed to improve the country's economic well-being and work towards eradicating poverty. This plan intended to ensure the quality of education and achieve Millennium Development Goals in the social sectors. It placed an important priority on the quality, equity, and efficiency of education at all levels. Also, it clearly stated that an education strategy would be implemented to meet the learning needs of children and youth with disabilities (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, 2010). Growth and Transformation Plan II (2015/16–2019/20) is a continued plan of I. The plan has aimed to give special attention and assistance to children and youth with disabilities to help them start and continue schooling. Its goal is to take measures to minimize barriers to the movement of children and youth with disabilities at schools (National planning Commission, 2016). Hence, the Growth and Transformation Plans have dedicated to transforming the education sector as one of the directions, and this implies that children and youth with disabilities considered to be benefited.

Also, the National Plan of Action of Persons with Disabilities (2012–2021) has designed to create an inclusive Ethiopian society in which people with disabilities are accepted, valued, recognized, and protected. It addressed the needs of people with disabilities in the country for a comprehensive rehabilitation services, equal opportunities for education, skills training and work, and full participation in the life of their

families, communities and the nation. In particular, it focused on how to provide the best possible education and vocational skills training available to children and youth with disabilities (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2012). It is clear that the plan has shown its intention noticeably to avoid discrimination from education.

In 2016, the Ministry of Education of Ethiopia has introduced a ten years plan called “Master Plan for Special Needs Education/Inclusive Education in Ethiopia (2016–2025)”. The plan is a complete policy to guide the provision of special needs and inclusive education. It aimed to give more visibility to special needs and inclusive education; and strengthen the structures and environment enabling inclusive education. It is built on six major strategic pillars which form the basis for inclusive education until 2025 in the country (MoE, 2017a). The preparation of this plan indicates the commitment of the country for the move towards the development of inclusive education to actualize lifelong learning opportunities for all.

1.6. Strategies

Although the special needs education program has been tried to be implemented in Ethiopia until 2005, it was conducted in a fragmented and arbitrary manner. This was primarily due to the absence of a nationally governing strategy for the program. By way of addressing this problem, the Ministry of Education of Ethiopia has been launched the first Special Needs Education Program Strategy in 2006 based on the country's Constitution and Education and Training Policy (MoE, 2012a). The strategy was focused on the promotion of inclusive education to meet the Millennium Development and Education For All goals. Also, it was aimed at an education system open to all children; and stated that all children can learn and many of them needed some form of support in learning (MoE, 2006). Hence, this strategy clearly indicated the future directions of special needs education in Ethiopia, which have been targeted until 2011. Besides, the strategy triggered major development of special needs education in the country.

In 2012 another strategy document called “Special Needs/Inclusive Education Strategy” has been introduced in the country that encompassed more on the philosophy of inclusive education. This strategy acknowledged education as a human right, accepted in the principle of Universal Primary Education and Education For All goals by 2015 to which Ethiopia was committed. Its overall objective was to build an inclusive education system that would provide quality, relevant and equitable education and training to all children, youth and adults with special needs and ultimately enable them to fully participate in the socio-economic development of the country (MoE, 2012a). This strategy has been instrumental in mainstreaming inclusive education issues at all levels of the education system.

In the same year, the Ministry of Education of Ethiopia has introduced a new strategy document called “National School Health and Nutrition Strategy”. It recognized that all children

have a right to education. It stated that systems shall be put in place to provide a conducive, fully accessible, and inclusive environment for all children. Appropriate mechanisms shall be put in place for ensuring the safety and security of physically and mentally ill children; and teachers shall receive adequate training and acquire skills (MoE, 2012b). The document comprised ideal strategies to provide support for children and youth with disabilities in education.

1.7. Guidelines and frameworks

A lot of guidelines and framework documents have been prepared by the government of Ethiopia to realize the issue of education for all people. For instance, in 2010, the National Policy Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education has been launched. Its intention is to ensure and safeguard the rights and welfare of all children. Also, it aimed at promotion and support development of accessible, equitable, and quality educational services for all children particularly for children and youth with disabilities, vulnerable and marginalized people (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health & Ministry of Women’s Affairs, 2010). In the same year, Special Needs Education Guide for Technical and Vocational Education and Training has been introduced. It focused to enhance the development of inclusive education in technical and vocational education and training institutions. And, it showed an effort to translate into practice of the human right aspects and improvement of education and training (MoE, 2012c). Moreover, in 2015, Guideline for Establishing and Managing Inclusive Education Resource Centers has been commenced. Its goal is to establish and manage functional inclusive education resource centers across the country so as to give support for children and youth with disabilities to increase

access for them and reduce dropout and repetition rates (MoE, 2015b). All the above guidelines and framework documents have highly concerned about the expansion of educational opportunities for all learners in the education system.

2. ENROLMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

Though the government of Ethiopia shows commitment to inclusion of all people to education, ensuring enrolment of children and youth with disabilities is a big question for the education sector so far. It is clear that actualizing inclusive education should not be limited to establishing legal and policy frameworks alone rather it requires strong commitment and action. In Ethiopia, however, the enrolment of children and youth with disabilities to school is enormously low (Fantahun, 2018). This is because of legal and policy frameworks’ implementation gaps (Dano, 2018; Malle, Pirttimaa & Saloviita, 2015) and school-related barriers (Temesgen, 2018b; Kassaw, Abir, Ejigu & Mesfin, 2017). Also, there are lots of misconceptions about disability in the families and communities that keep children and youth with disabilities away from schools (Tefera, Admas & Mulatie, 2015). In addition to the reviewed journal articles, recently (October 2019) published Education Statistics Annual Abstract of Ethiopia confirmed that the majority of school-age children with disabilities are left behind from the education service (MoE, 2019). The following table clearly shows this fact.

Table 1: Enrolment of school-age children with disabilities in 2019

School Level	Population of school-age children with disabilities			Age	Enrolment of school-age children with disabilities			Gross enrolment ratio (%) of school-age children with disabilities		
	Male	Female	Total		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Pre-primary	600,546	583,728	1,184,274	4-6	9,081	6,863	15,944	1.5	1.2	1.3
Primary (Grade 1-8)	1,453,828	1,419,780	2,873,608	7-14	178,535	137,736	316,271	12.3	9.7	11.0
Secondary (Grade, 9-12)	669,263	651,631	1,320,894	15-18	21,545	15,923	37,468	3.2	2.4	2.8

2.1. Pre-primary level

According to the Education Statistics Annual Abstract, the population of school-age children with disabilities of 4 to 6 year-olds is 1,184,274 (600,546 male and 583,728 female). Out of them, 15,944 (9,081 male and 6,863 female) are being enrolled in the pre-primary school level. The gross enrolment ratio is 1.3% (1.5% male and 1.2% female). This indicates that 98.7% (98.5% male and 98.8% female) of school-age children with disabilities are out of pre-primary school.

2.2. Primary level

The Education Statistics Annual Abstract showed that the population of school-age children with disabilities of 7 to 14 year-olds is 2,873,608 (1,453,828 male and 1,419,780 female). Out of them, 316,271 (178,535 male and 137,736 female) are being enrolled at the primary school level. The gross enrolment ratio is 11.0% (12.3% male and 9.7% female). Hence, this confirms that 89.0% (87.7% male and 90.3% female) of school-age children with disabilities are out of primary school.

2.3. Secondary level

Based on the Education Statistics Annual Abstract, the population of school-age children with disabilities of 15 to 18 year-olds is 1,320,894 (669,263 male and 651,631 female). Out of them, 37,468 (21,545 male and 15,923 female) are being enrolled at the secondary school level. The gross enrolment ratio is 2.8% (3.2% male and 2.4% female). This proves that 97.2% (96.8% male and 97.6% female) of school-age children with disabilities are out of secondary school.

2.4. Tertiary level

These days, the number of higher education institutions is being increased in Ethiopia. Consequently, the enrolment of students is also increasing from time to time. Nevertheless, study results revealed that the number of learners with disabilities in the higher education institutions level is still very low (Temesgen, 2018b; Zelelew, 2018). Those who joined have experienced challenges of different types ranging from academic to social (Mulugeta & Mekuriaw, 2017; Malle, Pirttimaa & Saloviita, 2015). At the national level, there is no exact and clear data that show the enrolment of learners with disabilities at technical and vocational education and training institutions and universities level.

3. IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

It is understandable that prior to educational support provision, identification and assessment should take place for learners. For this reason, there is a need for a valid and reliable tool. In the Ethiopian school system, there are an assessment and support toolkits prepared for learners with special educational needs at pre-primary and primary level. The purpose of these toolkits is to empower teachers in identifying learners' strengths and learning needs so that learners with special needs get the opportunity for appropriate education and become successful. Overall, the toolkits premeditated to contribute to high-quality educational provision, increase attendance and participation, and decrease dropout and repetition of learners with special needs in education (MoE, 2017b; MoE, 2017c).

In Ethiopia, however, schools have a lack of ability in identifying and assessing learners with disabilities for educational support (Hankebo, 2018). There is no multidisciplinary team organized for this purpose at the school level (Mitiku, Alemu & Mengsitu, 2014). There are no process engaged identifications and special assessment procedures for learners with disabilities (Tefera, Admas & Mulatie, 2015). In general, there is no comprehensive assessment trend to address the needs, identify the abilities, and design educational support procedures (Admas, 2009). Most of the time, simple disability-related observation used to identify learners at schools (MoE, 2017a). Hence, learners with disabilities cannot be recognized and supported as per their learning needs properly by their teachers.

4. THE PRACTICE OF SCHOOLING FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

In the Ethiopian school system, there are three types of schooling practices for children and youth with disabilities. These are special schools, special units, and regular schools. Special schools are schools specialized in one particular type of disability and most of the time they provide educational service for a similar group of learners with disabilities at primary school level. These schools are called special schools for the blind and special schools for the deaf (MoE, 2017a). These schools admit a little number of children and youth with disabilities because the number of schools is very limited in the country. Usually, children and youth with disabilities who have got a chance to be admitted to these schools obliged to leave their parents and villages because the schools are based in a few towns. The schools admit children and youth with disabilities in the form of boarding or non-boarding. Study result shows that special schools in Ethiopia are often overcrowded, ill-equipped with insufficient human and material resources, and generally concentrated in urban areas (Tefera, Admas & Mulatie, 2015).

The other schooling practice for children and youth with disabilities in Ethiopia is special units. These units are attached to regular primary schools, and few classrooms or blocks are reserved for learners with disabilities. Most of the time, some students with severe physical disability, intellectual disability, deaf-blindness, autism spectrum disorder, and others are considered for educational intervention (MoE, 2017a). Though special units are found in regular primary schools, all of the regular primary schools in the country do not contain special units. As a result, the number of special units is limited. Study result reveals that learners with disabilities have been experiencing segregation in the special units. Also, they are not benefited well from the education system because of school-related and attitudinal barriers (Temesgen, Z, 2018b).

Regular schools are also other types of schooling practices for children and youth with disabilities focus at pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels. In these schools learners with and without disabilities learn together in the same classrooms (MoE, 2017a). Even though regular schools are numerous in the country, study results indicate that the majority of them do not provide appropriate educational support that suites the learning pace and ability of learners with disabilities. Consequently, a lot of learners with disabilities have been experiencing barriers in learning (Mulugeta & Mekuriaw, 2017; Mitiku, Alemu & Mengsitu, 2014).

On the other hand, in order to enhance the capacity of the schools in addressing the needs of learners with disabilities, the Ministry of Education has recognized that schools should be equipped with specific educational materials and assistive devices, as well as staffed with professionals. This schools' capacity building activity called establishing an inclusive education resource center (MoE, 2012a). Accordingly, these

schools are expected to offer educational opportunities and support for learners with disabilities to reach their full academic potential and to develop into independent citizens, valued in their communities. Besides, the schools are anticipated to support learners with disabilities to get into, stay and achieve successfully (MoE, 2015b). A study result which conducted by the Ministry of Education shows that schools those who considered establishing inclusive education resource centers in their compound have been practicing inclusion of learners with disabilities better than other schools that do not establish (MoE, 2017d).

5. PROMISING PROGRESS RELATED WITH THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

Since the education system is going through major reforms in the world towards the inclusion of all, achievements are also expected with regard to the education of children and youth with disabilities. In Ethiopia, there is some promising progress in the school system albeit it is going very slow. Schools have little opportunities and these opportunities did not pave the way to effectively succeed the education of children and youth with disabilities (Mitiku, Alemu & Mengsitu, 2014). Consequently, achievements have been limited (Tefera, Admas & Mulatie, 2015). The result of majorities of the reviewed journal articles in this study have noticeably showed barriers rather than achievements in relation to the education children and youth with disabilities (Dano, 2018; Zelelew, 2018; Temesgen, 2018a; Temesgen, 2018b; Tefera, Schippers, Engen & Klink, 2018; Hankebo, 2018; Bekele, 2017; Mulugeta & Mekuriaw, 2017; Kassaw, Abir, Ejigu & Mesfin, 2017; Malle, Pirttimaa & Saloviita, 2015). Though this is the actual fact the following points could be mentioned as promising progress.

5.1. Promoting various legal and policy frameworks

The government of Ethiopia has been committed to realize education for all since education is a universally recognized fundamental human right. In view of this fact, the Ethiopian Constitution accepts the international conventions, declarations, framework of actions, forums, statements, and resolutions; and declares education as a human right. Also, legally, the country has shown commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, Education For All Goals, and Sustainable Development Goals (Tefera, Admas & Mulatie, 2015). The national policy, strategy, program, and plan documents vividly articulated the inclusion of all to education; and clearly accentuated to learn in accordance with their full potentials and needs (Zelelew, 2018; Mitiku, Alemu & Mengsitu, 2014). Hence, the legal and policy frameworks and all the prevailing efforts arising from them have attributed to equal educational opportunities for all with emphasizing to children and youth with disabilities, even though their effective implementation is another issue.

5.2. Mainstreaming issues related to inclusive education in school improvement programs

As educating children and youth with disabilities requires reforming the schools' environment, inclusive education related issues have been mainstreaming in school improvement programs in the Ethiopian school system. For instance, inclusive education resource centers are being established at schools level (Hankebo, 2018); support directions for children and youth with disabilities are being included in the schools plans (Zelelew, 2018; Kassaw, Abir, Ejigu & Mesfin, 2017); and some capacity building programs aimed at addressing the issue of inclusion are being provided for school communities (Dano, 2018; Admas, 2009). Besides, a more recent approach to the education of children and youth with disabilities that increasingly made its appearance in the stock of educational vocabulary in the country is the term inclusive education (Tefera, Admas & Mulatie, 2015).

5.3. Encouraging children and youth with disabilities to learn

Inclusion of all to education relies on widespread acceptance of the rights of children and youth with disabilities to be educated in regular classrooms and to receive equitable support services. This approach is being practiced in the Ethiopian school system although the pace is slow. For example, tutorial classes have been organized (Hankebo, 2018); guidance and counseling services have been given (Zelelew, 2018); and teachers' approach and interaction in the classrooms have been stimulating for children and youth with disabilities (Dano, 2018). Furthermore, schools have been networked with non-governmental organizations and educational stakeholders to meet the learning needs of children and youth with disabilities (Fantahun, 2018).

6. CHALLENGES HINDER EDUCATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

Even though the government of Ethiopia has shown its commitment to making education accessible for all citizens in its legal, policy, strategy, program and plan documents; there is still a huge gap in terms of actualizing into reality. All of the reviewed journal articles result indicated that a number of variables deterred promotion of access, equity, inclusion, and quality in the education system. Those variables include lack of adaptive educational materials, facilities, qualified teachers, flexible curriculum, awareness, collaborative effort, and commitment. Hence, the variables limit the full participation of children and youth with disabilities in pre-primary, primary, secondary, and tertiary schools.

6.1. Lack of adaptive educational materials

Successful inclusion of children and youth with disabilities depends on the availability of adequate teaching-learning materials at the school level. However, in Ethiopia lack of adaptive educational materials are among the frontiers of the challenge to include and provide educational support for

learners with disabilities. For instance, textbooks and reference materials are not available in Braille (Tefera, Admas & Mulatie, 2015). Wheelchair, crutches, slates, stylus, cane, tape/voice recorder, hearing aid, and related assistive devices are not adequate at schools (Tefera, Schippers, Engen & Klink, 2018; Mitiku, Alemu & Mengsitu, 2014). Computer-supported learning materials are not obtainable (Hankebo, 2018). Classrooms are not aesthetically pleasing and materials in the classrooms are not arranged to meet the learning needs of the learners (Dano, 2018). Also, there is a shortage of sport equipment and those few available are highly uncomfortable. So, learners with disabilities are almost out of physical education practical classes (Bekele, 2017; Kassaw, Abir, Ejigu & Mesfin, 2017). In addition, the non-availability of adaptive training technology and machinery limited the participation of learners with disabilities in technical and vocational education and training (Malle, Pirttimaa & Saloviita, 2015).

6.2. Lack of facilities and friendly school environment

In Ethiopia, the lack of accessible facilities and a friendly school environment has affected the participation and achievement of children and youth with disabilities in education. The majority of pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary schools are poorly designed and not well equipped to meet the learning needs of all learners (Bekele, 2017; Mitiku, Alemu & Mengsitu, 2014). The outdoor and indoor environments of schools are not conducive and friendly enough (Dano, 2018). Facilities such as modified toilets, modified seats, adequate space for wheelchairs, ramps, signage, water supply, and playgrounds are inaccessible (Tefera, Admas & Mulatie, 2015). Most pathways are cliffy, ridge, and sloppy (Temesgen, 2018b). Classrooms are narrow with a high number of learners (Fentahun, 2018) and with a lack of adequate light (Hankebo, 2018). Hence, this has a significant impact to accommodate and benefit all learners in the teaching-learning process.

6.3. Insufficient qualified teachers

Though teachers are considered the primary recourses in supporting inclusion of all learners in the classroom activities, they have found it difficult to accommodate and support the learners' needs because of their inadequate preparation in pre-service and/or in-service programs. Some of the pedagogical challenges facing teachers who are teaching within the regular classrooms are, for instance, they have no adequate knowledge and skills to make teaching individualized and interesting (Hankebo, 2018). They dominantly use rigid lesson plans and teaching methods; rigid curricula and inappropriate teaching strategies; and teacher-centered classroom methods. As a result, individualized teaching is not in the picture at all (Tefera, Admas & Mulatie, 2015). Besides, they have no trends and practices to prepare to individualize educational plans for learners with special educational needs, and also, they have no consideration of differentiated educational support for the learners' needs (Mitiku, Alemu, & Mengsitu, 2014). Physical education teachers do not give much attention

to explaining and demonstrating practical activities for learners with different disabilities (Kassaw, Abir, Ejigu, & Mesfin, 2017). Furthermore, there is an extreme shortage of special educators and assistance professionals in pre-primary, primary and secondary schools (Dano, 2018; Temesgen, 2018a).

6.4. Lack of flexible curriculum

Even though the curriculum must take into consideration the need and different abilities of all learners, the teaching-learning process is characterized by a highly rigid curriculum in Ethiopia. Because of its rigidity nature, teachers have difficulty to modify it (Mitiku, Alemu, & Mengsitu, 2014). For example, lack of adjustment and adaptation to instructional strategies and assessment are found to be a major challenge for teachers in regular classrooms (Zezelew, 2018:7). Consequently, it has become very challenging for teachers to welcome and to accommodate all learners in accordance with their learning potential and need (Dano, 2018). Hence, the rigidity of the school curriculum is one of the main factors that have hamstrung the learners' progress in learning (Zezelew, 2018).

6.5. Lack of awareness

One of the determinant factors that affect the inclusion of learners with disabilities in Ethiopian schools is a lack of awareness of the school community towards disability and inclusion. The majority of the pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary school teachers and principals lack awareness and competence in how to deal with instruction of learners with disabilities (Mulugeta & Mekuriaw, 2017; Mitiku, Alemu & Mengsitu, 2014; Admas, 2009). The attitude of the schools' community is not changed about the education of learners with disabilities resulted in the negative expectations of parents, teachers, and their peers about the benefit and academic achievement they can gain from education (Hankebo, 2018). Also, the existing understanding and reaction of university instructors' towards the inclusion of learners with disabilities are informed by the philosophy of the medical model rather than the social model of disability (Zezelew, 2018). In general, the effort made to create positive attitude on the education of children and youth with disabilities is so limited that widespread misconceptions are still prevalent at all educational levels, among stakeholders and the society at large (Temesgen, 2018a; Temesgen, 2018b; Tefera, Admas & Mulatie, 2015).

6.6. Lack of collaboration

In order to include children and youth with disabilities and make them benefited from education, collaborative effort among educational stakeholders is one of the essential actions. Nevertheless, lack of collaboration among stakeholders in education, such as teachers, school administrators and community members as a whole obstructed the inclusion of learners with disabilities in the system, in Ethiopia (Temesgen,

2018b). Schools do not organize and coordinate for the education of all children in synergic a manner that makes inclusion successful. Also, there is an absence of school nurses, therapists, counselors, and well trained special needs educators specific to different disability areas (Hankebo, 2018). Moreover, schools and the local community come together rarely to discuss issues of learners with disabilities. The Education and training board at the district administration level seems to ignore the issue of learners with disabilities (Dano, 2018).

6.7. Lack of commitment

It is true that the inclusion of all children to school is not a soft process and requires a commitment to overcome different barriers that hinder its effectiveness. However, the lack of commitment by the implementers is one of the challenges in Ethiopia (Hankebo, 2018). School leaders, teachers, parents, and other school communities do not show a strong commitment to the effective inclusion of children and youth with disabilities (Mitiku, Alemu & Mengsitu, 2014). This is manifested in their reluctance to create an accessible and friendly school environment that can accommodate the needs of these learners (Kassaw, Abir, Ejigu & Mesfin, 2017). Taken as a whole, it is revealed in their disinclination to mainstream the issue of inclusion, participation, and achievement of all children in their school yearly plans (Bekele, 2017; Malle, Pirttimaa & Saloviita, 2015).

III. CONCLUSION

The objective of this study is to investigate the educational experiences of children and youth with disabilities in the Ethiopian school system. The comprehensive analysis of extant literature and empirical studies revealed that the government of Ethiopia has shown its willingness to create accessible education for all by ratifying various international legal and policy frameworks, conventions, declarations, framework of actions, and forums. In line with the international treaties, inclusion of all to education has been vividly articulated in the country's education-related policy, strategy, program and plan documents. These legal and policy framework documents establish the universal right to education; emphasize the need to allocate resources; and indicate the availability of educational support provision as well as assistance to children and youth with disabilities.

In this study, the promotion of various legal and policy frameworks, mainstreaming issues related to inclusive education in school improvement programs, and encouraging children and youth with disabilities to learn have been considered as promising progress in relation to the education of children and youth with disabilities in the Ethiopian school system.

Conversely, the availability of inclusive education related legal and policy frameworks alone could not maintain significant achievements. Currently, the majority of children

and youth with disabilities are left behind from the education service in the country. From the total of school-age children with disabilities only 1.3% enrolled at the pre-primary school level; 11%, enrolled at the primary school level, and 2.8% enrolled at the secondary school level. This affirmed that 98.7%, 89.0%, and 97.2% school-age children with disabilities at pre-primary, primary and secondary levels respectively are out of school. At technical and vocational education and training institutions and universities level, there is no exact and clear data that show the enrolment of learners with disabilities.

On the other hand, the quality of educational service provision to enrolled children and youth with disabilities in special schools, special units, and regular schools is in a question. This is because there is no process engaged identifications and special assessment procedures for them. The majority of them cannot be recognized and supported as per their learning needs properly by their teachers. Hence, they are mainly left without sufficient educational support which leads them to poor achievement in education.

Besides, this study has proved that a number of variables deterred promotion of access, equity, inclusion, and quality in the education system particularly for children and youth with disabilities. The majority of pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary schools lack accessible facilities and a friendly school environment. There is a shortage of adequate teaching-learning materials in the schools. Teachers have found it difficult to accommodate and support the learners' needs because of their inadequate preparation in the pre-service and/or in-service programs. The classroom teaching-learning process is characterized by a highly rigid curriculum. There is a lack of awareness of the school community towards disability and inclusion. Also, lack of collaboration and strong commitment among stakeholders in education, such as school leaders, teachers, and community members as a whole obstructed the inclusion of children and youth with disabilities in education. In general, this study has confirmed that though there are legal and policy frameworks in Ethiopia that support inclusion of all, the realization of its implementation is far from reality so far.

IV. IMPLICATION

In order to realize access, equity, inclusion, and quality in the Ethiopian education system; it requires strengthening and transforming the capacity of the schools. Particularly, to educate children and youth with disabilities, schools need to be capacitated on how to promote a barrier-free learning environment for all learners regardless of ability and disability differences. Also, they need to be staffed with adequate and trained professionals, as well as equipped with sufficient teaching-learning aids and adaptive materials. The implication of this study, therefore, indicates that practical realization of accessible inclusive school setting which accommodates all learners at all level of the education system is crucially essential. This necessitates the true implementation of legal

and policy frameworks into action. To do so, it demands maintaining functional structures across the hierarchies of the education sector. Moreover, all the actors need to be aware and responsible for ensuring the execution of legal and policy frameworks in their planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and support activities.

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