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for Knowledge and Impact

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CHAPTER 9

Barriers and enablers of educational inclusion of children in street situations in Uganda

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Introduction

Children in street situations pose a complex global challenge. They represent one of the most difficult-to-reach groups, facing exclusion from mainstream schools due to societal and health barriers (Uthayakumar & Vlamings, 2019). The United Nations' 2030 Agenda strives to ensure education for all, leaving no one behind. Despite global progress in primary school (estimated at 91% enrolment), information on the status of children in street situations remains largely unaccounted (Uthayakumar & Vlamings, 2019).

Children in street situations in Uganda, as elsewhere, need to be integrated into formal education if they are to benefit from 'education for all' frameworks. This requires a complex approach, exploring the perspectives of children in street situations and stakeholders involved in their lives regarding inclusion in education. Recognising the importance of barriers to the success of inclusive education programmes (Mutungi & Nderitu, 2014), this research seeks to shed light on the expectations of this marginalised group and other interested groups, in order to provide insights into how education can be leveraged to their advantage.

The challenges faced by children living in street situations, highlighted by Uthayakumar and Vlamings (2019), significantly impede their enrolment in formal education. Factors such as attitude, lack of a permanent address and legal identification contribute to these challenges. Even among those who manage to enrol, discrimination, stigmatisation, and marginalisation from both peers and teachers frequently disrupt their attendance and performance in class. Furthermore, the vulnerability of these children is compounded by exploitation, neglect, physical, and sexual abuse, which detrimentally affect their psychological development and overall health.

Children in street situations, like all other children, possess a fundamental right to education, a right guaranteed by various international declarations and inclusive education guidelines. For instance, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) emphasises universal access to education for all children, including those in challenging circumstances. This commitment is echoed in ongoing initiatives such as UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development, which advocates for

educational policies addressing the needs of vulnerable and marginalised groups, including children in street situations.

However, despite these frameworks, the Ugandan government's contribution remains insufficient, with most children in street situations in Uganda not attending school (Retrak – Hope for Justice, 2017). Additionally, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child emphasises the right to education for all children, a principle further reiterated in the African Union's Agenda 2063, envisioning accessible, inclusive, and high-quality education for all citizens. Despite Uganda's endorsement of these agendas, there is a dearth of information regarding the country's progress toward implementing SDG 4 (Initiative for Social and Economic Rights, 2019). Achieving equitable access to relevant and high-quality education and training at all levels is one of Uganda's goals outlined in the 2017–2020 Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP), aligning with the objectives of the 2008 Education Act, which aims for universal primary education.

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) emphasises the achievement of inclusive, equitable, and quality education, along with lifelong learning opportunities by 2030. Uganda has ratified this goal, as reflected in the Education and Sports Sector Development Plan (2017) and the Uganda Education Act (2008). UNESCO (2017) underscores the necessity of safe, non-violent, and inclusive educational environments, stressing the responsibility of member states to address exclusion, disparity, vulnerability, marginalisation, and inequality in education.

Despite the existence of national and international laws, children in street situations receive minimal attention in inclusive education efforts. An estimated 80% to 30% of children living and working on the streets of Kampala are excluded from education (Retrak – Hope for Justice, 2017), and another 16 new children join them every day (Nabulya, 2013). Previous research has primarily focused on providing basic educational opportunities, yet there is a noticeable gap in understanding the expectations and rights of children in street situations concerning education (Nouri & Karimi, 2019).

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping fulfilling childhoods and improving economic prospects as adults. Inclusive education involves various stakeholders, but implementation challenges arise from unclear attitudes and perceptions (Okech et al., 2021). Cummings (2006) highlights a policy gap and inadequate response from educational authorities regarding the education of children in street situations. In contrast to developed countries like the United States, where the education of these children is a socio-economic and educational concern, many African countries lack investment in inclusive education, resulting in persistent vulnerability.

Mtaita (2015) reports that children in street situations face difficulties attending regular primary schools due to their preference for independence and engagement in street activities over formal education. Their unique values, shaped by their circumstances, pose challenges for enrolment and retention in school. Perceptions

of these children emphasise their distinct needs, necessitating a shift in attitudes among stakeholders.

The influence of dysfunctional families and economic hardships, as highlighted by Kugaradze (2010), often leads to children dropping out of school. Initiatives like the Future Families Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) programme in South Africa focus on supporting parents in stress management, parenting skills, and economic strengthening to promote stable families essential for children's access to education (Kris & David, 2020).

Mtaita (2015) emphasises that the self-perceptions of children in street situations shape their decisions regarding education. Strategies to address negative perceptions must be developed before their enrolment in schools. While researchers and scholars have emphasised inclusive education for children with disabilities and other special needs, educational inclusion for children in street situations has been neglected, resulting in scant empirical literature at both national and international levels. Overall, these insights underscore the multifaceted challenges faced by children in street situations and emphasise the need for comprehensive, targeted interventions to facilitate their access to education. This justifies the main research question for this chapter: 'What are the barriers and enablers of educational inclusion for children in street situations in Uganda?'

Design and methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Drawing on the work of various authors on the subject, including Creswell and Creswell (2017), Sharma (2020), Shakouri (2014), and Padilla-Díaz (2015), the qualitative approach was chosen for its capacity to delve deeply into how participants interpret experiences related to the phenomenon. Specifically, the approach aimed at addressing the main question; that is, 'What are the barriers and enablers of educational inclusion of children in street situations in Uganda?'

This qualitative method allowed the researchers to gather the perspectives of children who had dropped out of school but expressed an interest in re-enrolling, as well as insights from government and non-governmental officials directly involved with children in street situations. By obtaining multiple perspectives, the study aimed to gain a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with the inclusion of children in street situations in mainstream education.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Uganda Christian University Research Ethics Committee. Further permissions were secured from the Commissioner of Youth and Children Affairs at the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development, which is responsible for the welfare of children in street situations. Given the study's focus on the Kampala District, additional clearance

was sought from the Director of Education and Social Services at Kampala Capital City Authority and to guard against breaching the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, all the names mentioned in the results section are pseudonyms which were used to eliminate identifiers of the participants.

As noted earlier, the study was conducted in Kampala District, central Uganda, encompassing the five divisions of Rubaga, Kawempe, Makindye, Kampala Central, and Nakawa. A purposive sampling method was employed, resulting in the selection of 14 participants, including nine children in street situations, two government officials, and three non-governmental officials. Kampala District was chosen because of its high concentration of children on the street compared to other areas in Uganda in accordance with the enumeration report by Retrak – Hope for Justice (2017), where it was found that over 2,600 children were living on the streets of Kampala, 80% of whom were not attending school. Representative NGOs, acting in accordance with child protection policies, granted consent on behalf of the children and provided guidance to locate them in their respective retreats and safe places.

Semi-structured interviews were used to generate data in this study. Interviews with children in street situations were administered first and 9 children were interviewed one at a time in a local language with a guide tailored to their understanding. Questions regarding their school experience, factors that led to their drop-out, whether they preferred school or street, how they valued education, and their expectations from the school, government and the rest of the community were asked to gain insights into what the children perceived as barriers and enablers for their inclusion in mainstream education.

Research with children in street situations tends to raise ethical concerns because of their vulnerability. The present study guarded against this by contacting the Commissioner for Youth and Children Affairs under the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development who guided on permissions for the children's participation and identified relevant bodies that could provide consent on behalf of the children to guard against breaching confidentiality, privacy and other ethical issues regarding the use of vulnerable persons in research. Two supporting NGOs provided assent on behalf of the children as well as consent forms for the children upon signing child protection policies.

Individual interviews with other five relevant stakeholders were later conducted in English with an alternative guide to supplement on the technical questions of the problem under investigation. Questions regarding their views towards including children in street situations in education; policy guidelines for educational inclusion of such children; their relationship, communication and collaboration with relevant stakeholders in including the children in education were asked. Interviews were only used to unveil the experiences of the children themselves as well gather views from relevant stakeholders to inform the problem since there was scant literature on inclusion of children in street situations in education. Collected data were recorded

both in writing and using an audio recorder, with consent from the participants, and later transcribed for data processing, analysis, and reporting.

This study was limited by scant empirical literature relevant to inclusive education of children in street situations both at national and international level. In this case, the researchers reviewed literature related to inclusion but with other categories of children, especially those with disabilities, which explains the relatively brief discussion of findings. Moreover, the children interviewed in this study were between the ages of 6-12 which limited the study from capturing responses from older children. Some children did not respond to the interview questions and, of the data generated, the researchers only picked extracts which were relevant to the research objective.

Data in this study were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006), six-phase framework for doing thematic analysis. The Braun and Clarke framework is a widely used, flexible, and transparent approach to conducting thematic analysis, a qualitative research method for identifying and analysing patterns of meaning within qualitative data. The following is a breakdown of the framework and its application.

1. *Familiarization with data*: the researchers listened constantly to the recorded data to build a deep understanding of the recorded content and be prepared for coding.
2. *Initial coding*: words and phrases that were relevant to the perceptions (views and experiences) of the children and selected stakeholders in relation to the educational inclusion of street children in education were identified and labelled.
3. *Searching for themes*: identified and labelled codes were later grouped according to shared meaning.
4. *Reviewing themes*: mainly the perceptions revealed the barriers that hindered the children from being included in mainstream education and what could enable them to re-join.
5. *Defining and naming themes*: after refining, two main themes, barriers to inclusion and enablers to inclusion, were identified as broader themes.
6. *Reporting of findings*: findings were reported with supporting evidence such as quotations from transcripts, and at the end of each quotation, in brackets, the researchers indicated the type of interview that was administered, affiliation of the participant, name (pseudonyms), page of the transcript, line numbers of the transcript, and the date the interview was conducted. Below are the themes, supporting data, and interpretations.

Results

The children in street situations showed a strong preference for joining mainstream education. However, they mentioned barriers that hindered them from being included

in education. The rest of the officials from government and non-governmental organizations also mentioned barriers and enablers for including children in street situations in mainstream education. The mentioned barriers were categorised as social, financial, environmental and inter-personal barriers whereas the enablers to inclusion in education were categorised as rehabilitation, reintegration and retention.

The children in street situations who were interviewed expressed a strong desire to enrol in mainstream education, despite identifying various barriers that hindered their inclusion in the educational system. Government and non-governmental organization officials also acknowledged both barriers and facilitators for incorporating children in street situations into mainstream education. These barriers were classified into social, financial, environmental, and interpersonal categories. The factors facilitating inclusion in education were categorized as rehabilitation, reintegration, and retention.

Barriers to inclusion

Social barriers

Children in street situations revealed that the community perception held towards them is negative. Children on the street are regarded as children with no morals originating from failed homes. Some children on the street attempt pickpocketing and use abusive language towards their peers. A few children on the street who are privileged to attend school expressed feelings of being marginalised by their teachers and fellow learners. This jeopardizes the chance of these children joining mainstream schools due to loss of confidence and self-esteem as well as suffering from depression. One of them said:

“Teachers don’t like us because they think we don’t have the knowledge and skills to study, they think we are spoilt children. Even our fellow learners don’t like associating with us, police and other people harass us because they think we have bad behaviours but not all of us are like that and that’s why we don’t like being at school.” (Individual interview, street child, Keith, p. 18, line 1-3, 2022-01-28)

This kind of discrimination towards children from the street was validated by Anoline who revealed that it is a big challenge for children in vulnerable circumstances to access social services like health and education. Anoline works for Children at Risk Action Network (CRANE), which is a network of Christian organizations working together to support at-risk children in the greater Kampala region. In terms of joining mainstream education, Anoline revealed that children from the street have no responsible caregivers to register them at school, who are accountable for a child’s well-being both at home and at school. She was quoted saying:

“If a child from the street went to Mulago hospital to access health services, he or she would be automatically chased away because of how they looked like. Likewise, if a

street child went to a public school to be enrolled, he or she would not be welcomed because of the vulnerable status depicted by the child. Here in Kampala, teachers chase away children with no school uniform and other scholastic materials. This leaves a street child unable to continue learning with the rest of the children in mainstream education.” (Individual interview, CRANE, Anoline, p. 7, line 33-37, 2022-02-12)

The above findings concur with the findings of Niboye (2013), and Friberg and Martinsson (2017) who reported that the community perceives children in street situations as dangerous and potential criminals. This leaves them traumatized and underprivileged in terms of interaction and social contact which is caused by shortcomings in their nurturing (Kuparadze, 2010). A few who can enrol in formal education often face unfairness, inequity, and stigmatisation by their teachers and peers which accelerates psychological health threats among the children, hence hindering their academic attainment and enrolment in schools (Uthayakumar, & Vlamings, 2019). This requires awareness to reduce discrimination (Bannink, 2016) and school’s preparedness to play a major role in caring for them. In order to end social exclusion, the social pillar must work to create a clean, safe, and just society with social equality. It should also make sure that everyone has equal opportunity to engage in society, notwithstanding disparities in personal characteristics (Adoyo & Odeny, 2015).

Financial barriers

Children in street situations reported a range of financial barriers that hinder them from meaningful inclusion in mainstream schools, mainly reflected in the scarcity of financial and economic resources like scholastic materials, school fees, food, shelter, clothing, health care, among others, to survive. Both government and non-governmental representatives in this study revealed that Universal Primary Education in Uganda is not entirely as free as it is claimed, and public primary schools leave Parent and Teacher Association and development fees to be paid by learners. A high percentage of them revealed that children with or without families often cannot afford to pay school fees, which, along with scholastic materials and other demands of the school, are not affordable. Honest, a child on the street, was quoted saying:

“My mother did not have money to pay for my school fees and they kept chasing me at school. At home, we have no money to buy food so I come to the street to make some money so that I can give it to my mother and we buy food. If I get a sponsor to pay for my school fees, I can go back to school and study.” (Individual interview, street child, Honest, p. 20, line 22-24, 2022-01-28)

The Global Citizenship Report (International Paper, 2019) asserts that, despite the abolition of school fees by many governments following the United Nations (UN)

declaration of human rights, education costs remain too high for many of the least fortunate families, so kids have to stay at home and do household work themselves. Families remain locked in a cycle of poverty that goes on for generations. Education is free to the point of being theoretically available within most African countries. In practice, parents are being charged formal fees to buy essential items such as uniforms, books, pens, additional trainings, or money for maintaining the school buildings. In some places, parents are left with no choice but to send their children to private schools because of the lack of government support for public schools. The poorest families, who risk losing their lives in their efforts to improve their children's lives through education, are not even able to afford these schools, even if they are low cost.

Children in street situations mentioned the poor economic situation of their parents /caregivers as a barrier to inclusion in education. This was also reaffirmed by other respondents who acknowledged that the majority of the families of these children are below the poverty line and hence cannot provide adequate care to their children while at home and also meet the school requirements. The Global Citizen Report (2019) notes that children living in poverty lack funding for education and learning materials, which leads to their exclusion from education, particularly, those with disabilities. This means children in street situations attract little attention, not only on the side of the government, but also by scholars and researchers.

Children in street situations have unique financial needs depending on their lifestyles. In neighbouring Kenya, Kisirkoi and Mse (2016) assert that, despite children in street situations having been part of a category of orphans that benefitted from the government's policy on universal access to education, they were just enrolled in schools together with other children who live normal lives under the protection of adults. This is because their specific learning needs were not sufficiently addressed in order for them to be able to acquire the necessary skills, competences and attitudes that enable them to participate actively in societal activities they need to be made available.

Relevant agencies are unable to implement inclusive education in any meaningful way without funding. School administrators are often easily overwhelmed by the burden of implementation (Adoyo & Odeny, 2015), therefore, Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports should assume responsibility for these duties to go forward, rather than leaving them solely in the hands of teachers and school administrators. That being said, the funding allocated to Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports was cut which has left some of its programmes stagnant (BMAU, 2018).

Environmental barriers

In this study, the children showed that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed them to the street because of challenges that came alongside the pandemic and government's guidelines for limiting transmission. Many children in street situations lost street jobs that were earning them a living which forced them to drop out of school. The children also revealed that they had no homes which is a big challenge for them

especially when they are attending school. They cannot bathe and wash their clothes after school and also, they encounter feeding challenges, hence some children arrive unprepared to learn (World Bank, 2018). Kato was quoted saying:

“We don’t have a house and sometimes sleep in pipes when we go to school, no one cooks food for us to eat and we have no money to buy soap to wash our clothes and bathe. At school, is not like the street where you can be shirtless or even wear your dirty shirt because if you go with dirty clothes, other children will not sit with you and also teachers will push you out of class.” (Individual interview, street child, Kato, p. 18, line 21–24, 2022-01-28)

Children in street situations showed that the school environment is also unfriendly to them, and sometimes the subjects taught there are irrelevant to them. In other circumstances, children are below academic achievement by one or two or even more years, and they find joining lower classes at their older age inconvenient. They revealed how they do not fit into the school environment. Abdullah et al. (2018) acknowledge a conducive environment as a major determinant of academic achievement of such vulnerable learners. This was later confirmed by Fredrick, a government officer in the Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC), the official representative of young people in the Commonwealth. In this capacity, he has observed how teachers are not trained to handle children from vulnerable circumstances, therefore, they are not responsible for how a child from the street should fit in the mainstream class. Fredrick was quoted saying:

“Teachers are trained to handle children from normal circumstances not lampoons of the street and therefore the teacher’s attitude towards children from the street is expected to be negative because accordingly, this teacher is risking the progress of the rest of the children because of one child and if at all children from the street are to be included in mainstream education, they should be rehabilitated first and teachers should be given adequate training on how to handle these kinds of children.” (Individual interview, CYC, Fredrick, p. 6, line 14-19, 2022-02-21)

Considering the above findings, Jamidulin et al. (2018) affirm that some children in street situations consider school as a waste of time and does not benefit them compared to street life. Nevertheless, they also had future aspirations of becoming teachers, doctors, engineers, among other professions. But they held that they lacked enough support to pursue the education that could lead them into such careers. Kisirkoi and Mse (2016) recommend development and implementation of a suitable curriculum for this category of vulnerable children. The curriculum should be flexible enough to make it possible for young people to take a non-formal approach to it that allows access to formal education systems and addresses their needs in terms of employment.

Interpersonal barriers

The children reported differing school preferences, including those who preferred vocational schooling to regular schooling. Some children preferred boarding to day schooling. Other children preferred being at school, whereas others prefer being on the street, and some children preferred learning with fellow children in mainstream classes, whereas others did not like learning at all. All this was reported based on the different circumstances of a child that exposed them to certain choices, dynamics that have to be understood in planning for the inclusion of children in street situation in education. Kisirkoi and Mse (2016) recommend that all children in street situations should be interviewed first to identify their varied categories as regards their health status, family links and to find out the level of psychosocial damage street life has wrought on each of them. It is necessary to treat each case individually.

Apart from differing preferences, children in street situations also reported that peer influence is the greatest vice on the street. It was indicated that some children will drop out of school because their friends dropped out of school. More so, even 'spoilt' children on the street influence others to behave contrary to societal norms and expectations. This leaves them with no chance of (re-)joining regular education because the community thinks it is useless to educate such children. A child was quoted saying:

"Some children drop out of school because they see their fellows are not attending school." (Individual interview, street child, Elen, p. 19, line 23-26, 2022-01-28)

Another interpersonal barrier that hinders children from joining mainstream education is the lack of parental support. NGO representatives reported that there is a lot of negligence and lack of accountability among parents or caregivers of children on the street. Jamiludin et al. (2018) acknowledge parental negligence, negative parent perception of education and broken families denying children in street situations a chance to attend education. This was also confirmed by some children, who shared that their high level of absenteeism from school was because of their caregivers forcing them to stay at home to help them with work. After missing enough school work, they end up being left behind in class which then ultimately leads to them leaving school for the street. This is evidenced in the extract below:

"My Aunty tells me to remain at home as she goes to the market. Sometimes she sends me on the street to beg for money from people on the street so that we can get what to eat." (Individual interview, street child, Rashid, p. 22, line 20-22, 2022-01-28)

Government representatives further revealed that caregivers neglect the responsibility of taking care of their children to the extent of sending them to do child labour in the streets which limits their opportunities of joining mainstream schooling. Accordingly, bad parenting, such as exposure to violence in homes, misbehaviour of parents, and societal neglect, influence children to leave their homes, drop out of

school and opt for the streets. This is in accord with Sharma (2020), who mentions family-related problems as prime causes for pushing young children into the streets. Families are responsible for providing for the basic needs of a child's academic and social development.

In this study, both the children and their representatives also expressed their views and experiences on the way forward to the inclusion of children in street situations in mainstream education. This was after acknowledging the view that children in street situations should be included in mainstream education regardless of their challenges. They expressed their views on facilitators of educational inclusion of children in street situations and below is the main theme that emerged, labelled 'enablers to inclusion', where categories such as rehabilitation, re-integration and retention of children in street situations in schools were identified to explain the main theme.

Enablers of inclusion

Rehabilitation of children in street situations

In this study, participants perceived the NGO representatives of children in street situations as a key step before including children in street situations in mainstream education. According to representatives of the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), children in street situations are subject to vulnerable conditions which result in low self-esteem and confidence, anxiety, and depression. On the street, the children are exposed to diverse behaviours that deviate from the norm, therefore, it would be imperative to consider their rehabilitation first. It was revealed that during this process of rehabilitation, the children are offered guidance and counselling, and adequate psychosocial support necessary for providing coping mechanisms to reintegrate back into normal social settings. This was evident in the ensuing below:

"It is impossible to grab a child from the street and plant them in the mainstream class because it becomes a challenge to the teacher and poses a threat to other learners in a classroom since their behaviour can influence other learners." (Individual interview, PO- KCCA, Deborah, p. 13, line 3-5, 2022-02-25)

"Rehabilitation of children from the street is very important before they join mainstream education. This is because teachers are trained to handle children from normal circumstances and normal family situations not lampoons of the street." (Individual interview, CYC, Fredrick, p. 6, line 2-6, 2022-02-21)

It would be necessary to rehabilitate all children in street situations in hygiene, games, sports, athletics, drama, basic numeracy and literacy, skills development, life skills, values acquisition, drug abuse and HIV/AIDS messaging; and religious education could be part of the rehabilitation course (Kisirkoi & Mse, 2016). The duration of this phase should be determined by the learners' needs. If the child is able to adjust to the

learning environment, he or she should be moved to the next stage, where he or she should be ready for the development of academic and business skills.

Reintegration of children in street situations

NGO representatives reported that it is better to reintegrate children with their families because family is the best place for the child to grow and develop. For instance, for those who are homeless, it was reported that a safe space should be provided for them and they should be given options to choose what is good for their lives. It was revealed that at this point of reintegration, the need for sponsorship in terms of school fees and well-being is necessary so that children from the street are prepared for a life away from the streets. This was evident in the ensuing:

“Reintegration of a street child first is what we take to be necessary here. We take children after rehabilitation to reunite them with their families whereas those who wish to join either mainstream education or vocational studies are given a chance to choose their interest and depending on the capacity of a child.” (Individual interview, Education Officer, Brendah, p. 10, line 12-14, 2022-02-7)

“In some other countries, children who are homeless are provided with a safe space where they sleep, bathe and wash which is not the case in Uganda.” (Individual interview, CRANE, Anoline, p. 7, line 34-36, 2022-02-12)

Before effective education can be provided, therefore, relevant questions concerning the unique experiences of children in street situations need to be addressed. They are seeking a specialised curriculum that supports rehabilitation without relying on a formal approach, allowing students to transition in and out of traditional schools. The curriculum should be flexible and incorporate trade skills to help students build sustainable livelihoods (Kisirkoi & Mse, 2016).

Retention of children in street situations in education

Different studies have shown that with the introduction of Universal Primary Education, there was a significant increase in primary school enrolment, and among the children who were enrolled in primary schools were children in street situations. But in short order, these children drop out of school and are once again on the streets. The relevant authorities in this study were of the view that concrete actions be taken to ensure that children withdrawn from the street are retained in schools. One participant was quoted saying:

“KCCA has always withdrawn those children from the street forcefully but they again re-appear on streets in a short while and as NGOs we also make some efforts to include some in school but when root causes are not addressed, we again lose these children to the streets.” (Individual interview, Education Officer, Brendah, p. 10, line 15-17, 2022-02-7)

Among the actions that were suggested by government representatives, training both pre- and in-service teachers on how to handle this category of learners, providing activities that are socially attractive, designing flexible timetables to adopt several teaching strategies that facilitate individual differences, adequate staffing, and a flexible curriculum design for children in street situations that takes into account non-formal perspectives and learner needs for livelihoods were included. The ministry must assess instructors' readiness to instruct a diverse group of students in a single classroom before tackling implementation difficulties at the school level. Teachers must receive comprehensive training programmes in areas where they lack skills (Adoyo & Odeny, 2015).

To retain children in mainstream schools, Ainscow (2020) suggests that education departments should take the lead in promoting inclusion and equity as guiding principles for teachers across all schools. Policies should incorporate the knowledge and experience of all those involved in children's lives, including the children themselves. Definitions of inclusion and equity that are broadly accepted should serve as the foundation for policy. There should be a focus on whole-school approaches that help teachers in promoting inclusive practices. Strategies should be informed by evidence regarding the impact of current practices on the presence, engagement, and achievement of all children.

Discussion

The study identified various barriers to the inclusion of children in street situations in mainstream education, including social, financial, environmental, and interpersonal barriers. Social barriers, such as negative community perceptions and discrimination by teachers and peers, significantly hindered these children's access to education. Financial barriers, including the inability to afford school fees and essential materials, further exacerbated their exclusion. Environmental challenges, such as homelessness and unfriendly school environments, also contributed to the difficulty these children faced in attending school. Interpersonal barriers, such as peer influence and lack of parental support, further complicated their educational inclusion.

The findings align with existing literature highlighting the complex challenges faced by children in street situations regarding education. Similar studies have documented the negative attitudes of communities towards these children, the financial constraints they encounter, and the lack of appropriate support systems. Moreover, environmental factors such as homelessness and inadequate school facilities have been identified as significant obstacles to their education.

To address these barriers and facilitate the inclusion of children in street situations in mainstream education, several enablers were identified. Rehabilitation programmes aimed at addressing the psychological and social needs of these

children were highlighted as essential first steps. Additionally, reintegration efforts to reunite children with their families and provide them with necessary support were deemed crucial. Finally, strategies to retain children in schools, such as teacher training and flexible curriculum design, were emphasised as necessary for sustained educational inclusion.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study underscores the multifaceted challenges faced by children in street situations regarding their education. Social, financial, environmental, and interpersonal barriers collectively hinder their access to mainstream education. Addressing these barriers requires comprehensive strategies, including rehabilitation, reintegration, and retention efforts. By implementing these enablers, policymakers, educators, and relevant stakeholders can work towards creating inclusive educational environments that cater to the needs of children in street situations. Ultimately, ensuring the educational inclusion of these children is essential for promoting their well-being, fostering their development, and breaking the cycle of poverty and marginalisation.

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