



RESEARCH ARTICLE

TEACHER BASED OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES INFLUENCING EDUCATION FOR THE MENTALLY CHALLENGED LEARNERS: A STUDY ACROSS SPECIAL SCHOOLS IN HOMA BAY COUNTY, KENYA

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 24th November, 2021
Received in revised form
15th December, 2021
Accepted 20th January, 2022
Published online 25th February, 2022

Keywords:

Teacher Based Opportunities,
Challenges Influencing Education,
Mentally Challenged Learners:
study Across Special Schools, Homa
Bay County.

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ABSTRACT

The right to education is globally acknowledged as a basic human right. Education is regarded as the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized persons can break vicious cycle of poverty. In Kenya, the right to education is provided for in article 53(b) of Kenya Constitution, which advocates for the right to free and compulsory basic education for every child. Article 54 of the Constitution of Kenya emphasizes the need to enhance education for persons with disabilities. The Government of Kenya recognizes the importance of Special Needs Education as a crucial sub sector for accelerating the attainment of Education For All, Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals. The objective of the study was to establish teacher based opportunities and challenges influencing education for the mentally challenged learners. The study established that teacher-based opportunities influencing education for the mentally challenged learners are: qualified teachers, teacher's attitude, special school allowance for teachers, teacher-pupil ratio, teachers' skill, motivation, gender and teachers' experience. Teacher-based challenges include: level of retardation of learners, availability of qualified teachers, teacher's attitude, special school allowance for teachers, teacher-pupil ratio, teachers' skill, motivation, teachers' experience. It was concluded that learners are accorded various opportunities to participate in learning but there was an array of challenges too. The study recommended that school management and the ministry of education should establish strategies to ensure that learners and teachers are motivated and facilitated to foster quality education for the mentally challenged. This information is valuable to policy makers with regard to promotion of special education in Kenya.

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Citation: Ruth Anyango Onywany, Enose M.W. Simatwa and Rosemary Ogada. "Teacher Based Opportunities and Challenges Influencing Education for the Mentally Challenged Learners: A study across special schools in Homa bay county , Kenya", 2022. *International Journal of Current Research*, 14, (02), 20683-20695.

INTRODUCTION

The right to education has been globally acknowledged as a basic human right. Education is regarded as the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized persons can break vicious circle of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities (UNICEF, 2007). It has the potential to not only bring significant benefits to individuals and society but to also enhance skills and improve the individual's social status (OECD, 2013). This explains why education is high on the international community's agenda and is affirmed in various treaties as a right falling under the category of Economic Social and Cultural rights (ECOSOC, 1996). In Kenya, the right to education is explicitly provided for in Article 53(b) of the Kenya Constitution (Government of Kenya, 2010), which advocates for the right to free and compulsory basic education for every child.

Article 54 of the Constitution emphasizes the need to enhance education for persons with disabilities and provides that persons with disability have a right to access educational institutions and facilities that are integrated into society to the extent compatible with their interests and needs (Government of Kenya, 2010). The Government of Kenya recognizes the importance of Special Needs Education as a crucial subsector for accelerating the attainment of Education for All, Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals. Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 on "A Policy Framework for Education, Training and Research" outlines the vision of Kenya's education sector as a major enabler of youth development. This vision will be achieved through the provision of quality education that is accessible and relevant to the lives of all children including those with Special Needs.

Global statistics indicate that approximately one billion people have some form of disability with over four in every five persons living in developing countries (UNICEF, 2010). The prevalence rate varies significantly across the World: (United States, 19.4%; United Kingdom, 12.2%; Mexico, 2.3%; Egypt, 4.4%; India, 2.1%; China, 5%; Kenya, 10.7%; Spain 15 % of the total population). Of these, 93 million are children under the age of 14 living with moderate or severe disability (UNESCO, 2015). The statistics provided indicate that there are persons with disabilities among youth who deserve education. However, it is not clear as to the existence of mentally challenged persons with disability.

SYNTHESIS OF LITERATURE ON TEACHER BASED OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES INFLUENCING EDUCATION FOR THE MENTALLY CHALLENGED LEARNERS

Alquraini (2012) examined teachers' perspectives regarding the inclusion of students with severe intellectual disabilities in Riyadh, Saudi using a quantitative approach. Three hundred and three teachers responded to the Opinions Relative to inclusion of Students with Disabilities (ORI: Arabic version) survey, including 161 males and 139 females, and three non-specified gender. A two-way analysis of covariance a one-way analysis of variance and an independent t-test were used to answer the research questions. The findings of the study indicate that teachers have slightly negative perspectives towards the inclusive education of students with severe intellectual disabilities. Significant factors regarding teachers' perspectives towards the inclusion of this group of students included their current teaching position, previous teaching experience with students who had any kind of disability in inclusive settings and the teacher's gender. Studies have indicated that it is impossible in practice to include students with severe intellectual disabilities in regular schools (Brown et al., 1989; Brown et al., 1999; Downing, 2005; Cannella-Malone et al., 2011; Ayres, Mechling & Sansosti, 2013). The best option is either to place them in special units or in special school where they can receive special attention (Mechling & Sansosti, 2013). Besides, the study focused on teachers' perspectives on inclusion of learners with severe intellectual disabilities using a quantitative approach while the current study focused on teacher based opportunities and challenges influencing education for the mentally challenged learners using mixed methodological approach to add more data to the existing body of knowledge.

Mackle et-al (2017) conducted a study on teaching of children who are mentally challenged and identified that, the teachers teaching the mentally challenged pupils should be skilled in methods of observation of the child during the learning and to know how to allow adequate time for each phase, developing concepts slowly, simply and in sequential order over an extended period of time. Furthermore they added that teachers must know how to make the experiences of the children concrete and meaningful through the use of audio-visual materials and use of methods that are related to the interest and social behavior of the challenged. The study employed qualitative design and collected data through interviews and observation. This observation reveals that teachers teaching mentally challenged learners must be competent in methods of observation of the child during the learning. The reviewed study is similar to the current study as it investigated the teaching of children who are mentally impaired, however, did

not employ questionnaire to gather in depth data. A study on teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of children with disabilities in rural El Salvador by Sabella (2015) was a mixed method case study of the rural schools of one municipality, a published survey and interviews on teachers was used to investigate their attitudes regarding inclusion. The study explored the needs and challenges which exist in creating inclusive schools across the country. The study revealed the following; some children with disabilities are not in schools and those with mild disabilities are not always getting needed services. Teachers agreed with the philosophy of inclusion, but believed that some children with disabilities would receive a better education in special schools. They were not concerned about classroom management. Teachers desired more training on disability and inclusion. They believed that lack of resources, including materials and personnel, was a major barrier to inclusion. Teachers' attitudes were consistent regardless of family and professional experience with disability or amount of inclusion training. They were concerned about the role of family support for children with disabilities. The reviewed study is similar to the present study as it focused on teachers' challenges but on inclusive education. The current study added more data to existing knowledge by examining teacher based opportunities and challenges influencing education for the mentally challenged learners in special schools in Kenya: A study across special schools in Homa bay County.

Chimwaza (2016) explored the challenges faced in the implementation of inclusive education in Malawi. An exploratory qualitative case study research design was adopted for the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to pick on the study sites as well as the research participants. Montfort Special Needs Education College and a few selected primary schools formed the cases for the study. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion were used to collect data and results analyzed using themes with a clear focus on the research questions. The findings of the study indicated that teacher training is one of the main intervention measures used by Montfort Special Needs Education College in promoting inclusive education learning environments. The challenges identified included inadequate trained teachers. The reviewed study studied challenges in implementing inclusive education and data collected from Special Needs Education colleges and a few selected primary schools, the current study however filled the existing gap by collecting data from teachers in special primary schools while determining teacher based opportunities and challenges influencing education for the mentally challenged learners in special schools in Kenya. A study across special schools in Kenya. Chhetri (2015) aimed at investigating the concerns and experiences of teachers in Bhutan regarding the inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs in inclusive and special schools. This study used a mixed method research design in order to gain an understanding of teacher's concerns and experiences when working with children with SEN in Bhutan. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to identify the key concerns and experiences of teachers when teaching these students. The study reveals that these schools face many challenges, including lack of professional development opportunities for teachers, lack of public awareness, a policy on inclusion and resources (both human resources and infrastructure resources). The study focused on two school types, inclusive and special schools and it expected that study would shed more light on the opportunities and challenges in each type of

school. However, the results were not segregated making it difficult to make conclusion which of the school types is suitable for learners with special needs. This study will therefore be specific on special schools and will examine teacher based opportunities and challenges influencing education for the mentally challenged learners in special schools in Kenya, a study across special schools in Homa bay County, to fill the existing gap in literature. Barbra and Joyline (2014) focused on teachers' perceptions towards the inclusion of learners with mental disabilities in schools in Zimbabwe. The study adopted survey design. The study employed questionnaires as instruments to gather data which was presented in graphs, pie charts and tables. The total population for the current study was 85 teachers drawn from five schools. Out of the total population, fifty respondents were chosen into the sample. Results show that while teachers can define the concept of inclusion, they have scanty knowledge of the issues concerning special needs education more so in inclusion of learners with mental disabilities. In spite of the scanty knowledge, most teachers agree with the idea that inclusive education is the ideal placement for learners with mental disabilities. In their study, the small sample size should necessitate the use of saturated sampling technique. However, the study purposively sampled 55 respondents. The authors also indicated that teachers supported the idea of inclusivity yet they did not reveal what opportunities and challenges as far as teachers are concerned in education of learners with mental disabilities.

Subban and Sharma (2016) aimed at investigating, comparing and analyzing Greek and Swedish primary school teachers' attitudes on inclusive education for children with mental disabilities, as well as their experiences concerning the impact students' environment has on their efficient inclusion and development. To this end, interviews with them have been employed for data collection in this cross-cultural qualitative research. The findings of the study show that teachers in Greece try to give a clear definition of the educational needs of children with special mental abilities, whereas Swedish teachers assert that every student should be treated in a special way inside the classroom. The study was comparative between two European countries with divergent results. From Swedish results, the argument is that teachers should personalize their teaching approach in inclusive classroom which is impossible in developing countries such as Kenya. Like majority of the studies, the study was conducted in inclusive classroom therefore, necessitating a study to be conducted in special schools in Kenya to add more data to the existing body of knowledge. This study therefore sought to find out teacher based opportunities and challenges in special schools for the mentally challenged learners in Kenya, Homa Bay County.

Thwala (2015) sought to identify challenges encountered by teachers in managing inclusive classrooms in Swaziland. The study employed qualitative methods in which Focus Group Discussions were utilized and Thirty five (N=35) teachers were purposively sampled from primary schools in the Manzini region. Results revealed that mainstream teachers generally lacked confidence as they attempted to include students with disabilities into classes. In this study, the study was purely qualitative therefore; the sample sized was too small to support this study methodology. Furthermore, the study targeted inclusive classroom and there was no mentioning of mentally challenged learners. Therefore, by undertaking this study, it shaded more light on the challenges

and opportunities of teachers in special schools in Kenya, Homa bay County, using both qualitative and quantitative design to fill the gap in literature. A study conducted in Tanzania by Mbwambo (2015) on Teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education in regular primary schools used a qualitative study design aimed at exploring regular primary school teachers' knowledge and understanding of the concept of inclusive education; examined regular primary school teachers' feelings towards teaching students who face barriers to learning and participation in regular schools and investigated regular primary school teachers' ability to create inclusive cultures and evolve inclusive practices in the regular school. Purposive sampling was used to select two regular primary schools from one of the administrative regions in Northern Tanzania. The sample included 10 regular primary school teachers (five teachers from each school). Data was gathered through personal interviews and non-participant observation methods. Thematic analysis was used. The study found that primary school teachers who participated in the study have limited knowledge about inclusive education; regular teachers have negative feelings towards teaching students who face barriers to learning and participation; regular primary school teachers have low ability to create inclusive practices in the regular setting and regular primary school teachers who participated in the study have negative attitudes towards inclusive education. The findings further revealed that lack of inclusive training, low salaries, lack of motivation, shortage of teachers, lack of enough teaching and learning materials, lack of government support and poor support from parents and community at large contribute to regular teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. The reviewed study is similar to this study as it focused on teachers but was specific on their attitudes towards inclusive education.

Kirui (2014) investigated the challenges facing the effective implementation of inclusive education in selected regular and special schools in Lang'ata District of Nairobi County. Descriptive survey research design was used in the study. The population for the study was primary schools in Lang'ata district. Simple Purposive sampling technique was used to sample schools practicing inclusive Education, head teachers and pupils with special needs while simple random sampling was used to sample the pupils without special needs and teachers. A total of 85 respondents were therefore targeted by the study (including 5 head teachers, 40 teachers and forty pupils). The study used questionnaires to collect data from teachers while interview schedules were used to collect data from head teachers. Focus group discussions were used to collect data from pupils. The study concluded that teachers academically and professionally prepared in handling special education in schools even though they require additional training on special education. From the study, there are a number of weaknesses. First, the study failed to indicate the number of special schools and inclusive schools that were targeted. Secondly, the study failed to separate findings from special schools and inclusive schools. Therefore, there was need to carry out a study on teacher based opportunities and challenges influencing education in special schools for learners with mentally challenges in Kenya to fill the existing gap in knowledge. Mwaimba (2014) investigated teacher factors influencing implementation of inclusive education in public primary schools in Nyangala Division, Taita Taveta County, Kenya. The study used descriptive survey design. The target was 8 head teachers, 82 teachers and 352 pupils. The researcher purposively sampled 8 head teachers, randomly

selected 64 teachers and used both purposive and simple random sampling techniques to select 196 pupils. Teachers completed questionnaires while pupils participated in focus group discussions. The study findings were that teachers' experience positively influenced implementation of inclusive education in public primary schools; teaching styles negatively influenced implementation of inclusive education in public primary schools thus contributing to learners' dropout and perception of teachers towards inclusive education was negative and thus an impediment towards implementation of inclusive education. In view of these findings, the researcher concluded that teachers in Taita Taveta County have negative attitude on inclusivity. Therefore, there was need to explore challenges and opportunities in special schools influencing education for the mentally challenged learners in Kenya, Homa bay County, to fill the existing gap

Research Objective: The research objective was to establish teacher based opportunities and challenges influencing education for the mentally challenged learners.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) was developed in the study to postulate the opportunities and challenges in education of the mentally challenged learners in special schools in Homa Bay County, Kenya. The conceptual framework presents the independent and dependent variables that guided the study. The independent variable include teacher based challenges and opportunities. The dependent variable is education for the mentally challenged learners in special schools which was measured using enrolment, retention of learners, and completion of primary school as well as transition to secondary schools.

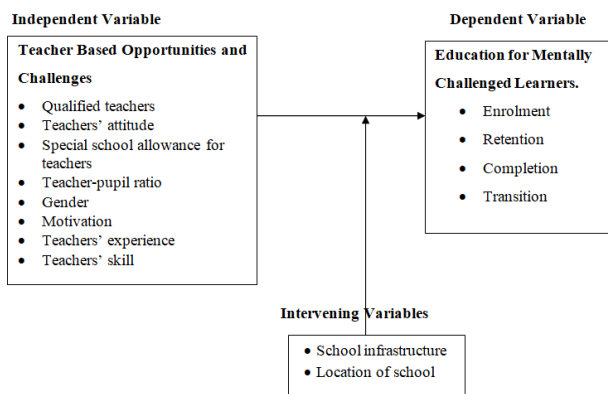


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework showing Opportunities and Challenges Influencing Education for the Mentally Challenged Learners

Figure 1 shows the relationship between independent and dependent variables. The opportunities and challenges was conceptualized into teacher based based opportunities and challenges. It is worthy to note that, learning cannot take place without the learners and therefore, this important variable will be included in the study. The challenges and opportunities that are inherent with mentally challenged learners will act as a barrier or an access to their education in special schools as compared to other education set-up. These include their attitude, ability and interest to learn in special schools. In any educational set-up, teachers are important resource as they

determine the performance of learners. In this case, the study will be interested in finding out whether the attitude of teachers in special schools would have any significant impact in education of the mentally challenged learners. Other important aspect of teachers is their motivation toward mentally challenged learners in special schools. This would affect the retention and high performance. The study will also examine teacher training in relation to mentally challenged learners as some teachers in special schools have different level and specialization in special education. Successful education for the needs of children with special needs and/or disabilities require a positive socio-cultural view of disability, emphasizing empowerment of individual skills instead of disorders according to Lev Vygotsky's social constructionist theory of learning as advanced by Rodina (2007). According to Vygotsky, development of higher mental functions and processes are not independently constructed by children in early ontogenesis, but "rather mediated by adults in the context of social interactions" (Karpov 2005, p.10). Lev Vygotsky's concept of mediations is "the process and method by which members construct the learning environments, tasks, identities and contexts" (Thorne 2005, p. 339). Focusing on primary reasons for disability implies ignoring the developmental processes.

"The psychological makeup of a disabled person arises not primarily from the handicap itself but secondarily as a result of social consequences of the defect" (Vygotsky 1993, p.63). Primary disorders; visual and hearing, language and speech - related disorders, motor and central nervous system related impairment lead to the child's exclusion from the social - cultural traditional and educational environment, in turn causing secondary (socio - cultural) disability. Due to primary disorders, the child displays a distorted connection to culture as a resource for development of higher mental functions, which is vital for education (Vygotsky, 1993). According to Vygotsky's theory, the potential for cognitive development depends upon the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD); a level of development attained when children engage in social behavior. Full development of ZPD depends upon full social interaction. (Rodina, 2007). The teachers' main responsibility is to lead the child into the general culture in education. This has been recognized in the practice of special education in USA and has become the theoretical basis for inclusive education in Norway and South Africa (Rodina, 2007).

Lev Vygotsky's theory is perceived relevant to the current study because it focuses on mediations as the process and method by which pupils construct the learning environments, tasks and identities. In this process, the teacher plays a central role, informing the reason why this study is exploring the opportunities and challenges in education for the mentally challenged learners in special schools in Kenya. Additionally, the theory stresses the role of society and its cultures as resource for development of higher mental processes in children. The teacher, though a professional in school, represents the society and its culture. It is common practice that most teachers in primary schools in Kenya actually work in their local communities and therefore their views are likely to reflect those of the society. The intervening variables were parental socio-economic status and cultural factors. These variables were controlled by making assumptions that all other factors were held constant and also through random sampling of the population which ensured that the positive and negative effects of intervening variables are neutralized.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The target population of this study comprised of 60 teachers, 6 head teachers and 3 EARCC officers from 6 special primary schools under study in Homa Bay County. The sample size for the study was 57 teachers, 4 Head Teachers and 3 Educational Assessment Resource Centre Coordinator officers. Instruments for data collection were interview schedule and questionnaire. The instruments for data collection were validated and reliability determined before use. Quantitative data was analyzed by use of frequency counts, percentages, means and t-test.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents: The demographic data for respondents were as shown in Tables 1 and 2. From Table 1, it can be noted that most teachers were male 28(50%) and female were 27(48.2%). Though gender balance is almost attained, the slight unequal representation may be attributed to cultural factors where the society educates males more than females. This is because most teachers in Homa Bay County are male. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this study the representation was sufficient to guard against biases based on male chauvinism. With respect to highest qualification, most teachers were Bachelor's degree holders, 20(35.7%). 7(12.5%) had Ph.D. qualification, and those with Diploma and Masters were also relatively few, 11(19.6%) and 10(17.9%) respectively. This implies that most teachers were qualified to teach in Homa Bay County and therefore their responses were considered authoritative from experts in this area of specialization. With respect to professional training in Special Needs Education, most teachers were trained up to Diploma level, 35(62.5%) and only 1(1.8%) had a certificate training in Special Needs Education,. A relatively good number of teachers had a training on inclusive education, 11(19.6%) and some had a Bachelor's degree in SNE, 7(12.5%). This means that teachers involved were competent and able to give accurate and well thought information.

In terms of experience in other schools, the largest number of teachers at 19 (34.2%) had been in the teaching profession for a range of 1-5years followed by a range of 11-15 years at 15 (25%), 6-10 years at 13 (23.4%) and 16-20 years at 2(3.6%). This shows that teachers' experiences in handling special pupils was significant to the success of the mentally challenged learners and thus were able to give authentic data on challenges and opportunities for learners with mental challenges. With respect to experience in the current school, the largest number of respondents at 59.4% had been in the teaching profession for a range of 1-5years followed by a range of 6-10 years at 25.2%, 11-15 years at 3.6% and 16-20 years at 1.8%. With respect to area of specialization, the findings reveal that majority (46.4%) of the teachers were specialized in PH while ECDE, IE/HI, MH/PH/IE had the least teachers specialized in them at (1.8%) each. Teachers specialized in Certificate, EBD, IE and MH constituted a relatively high percentage of users at 10.7%, 10.7%, 16.1% and 7.1% respectively. These results suggest that most teachers are not specialized to handle mentally challenged learners but have a good background in handling learners with special cases.

From Table 2, it can be noted that all head teachers who responded were male. This shows that females are not in leadership positions. For the purpose of this study, the head teachers were from the few special schools for the mentally handicapped and hence the chances of obtaining different gender were inevitable. With respect to highest qualification, most head teachers were either Master's degree holders (75%) or Diploma holders (25%). This implies that all the head teachers were capable of giving credible information as pertaining to opportunities and challenges that learners with mental challenge face. All the head teachers (100%) had an experience of more than 10 years in other schools and in their current schools. Therefore, they were considered to have been in the teaching profession especially in special schools for long to give credible information with relation to the topic under investigation. Also, it was established that the schools had more boys (55.6%) enrolled than Girls (44.4%). This could be attributed to cultural factors although the difference is not big enough to cause for alarm. In the case of teachers, most of them were male (51.2%) though females (48.2%) were close enough to almost strike a gender balance. With respect to area of specialization, the findings reveals that majority (50%) of the head teachers were specialized in EBD/IE while MH/IE and MH/PH/IE had the least teachers specialized in them at (1.8%) each. Teachers specialized in Certificate, EBD, IE and MH constituted a relatively high percentage of users at 10.7%, 10.7%, 16.1% and 7.1% respectively. These results suggest that most head teachers are not specialized to handle mentally challenged learners but have a good background in handling learners with special cases. Also, most learners were found to be from the local community that is, Homa Bay County 17 (30.4%) while the rest were from neighboring communities and counties. Also, the head teachers indicated that they do receive funding from Community manpower support, National Council for the disabled, community support, NGOs, Community support, World Vision, Safaricom, National council for the Disabled and World Vision.

Research Objective: The research objective was to examine the teacher-based opportunities and challenges in education for mentally challenged learners. From Table 3 above, it can be observed that Head Teachers rated qualified teachers as often an opportunity with a mean rating of 3.50. Also, teachers rated it as sometimes an opportunity with a mean rating of 3.14. These mean ratings were not significantly different ($t(59) = -0.48, p > .05$). Teacher's attitude was rated as sometimes an opportunity by teachers at 3.25 and non-teaching staff at 3.25. These mean ratings were not significantly different ($t(59) = -0.008, p > .05$). This means that both teachers and Head Teachers concurred that teacher's attitude was sometimes an opportunity. Special school allowance for teachers was rated as sometimes an opportunity by teachers with a mean rating of 3.12 and often an opportunity by head teachers at 3.75. These mean ratings were not significantly different ($t(59) = -0.99, p > .05$). This implies that both teachers and Head teachers concurred. The mean ratings for Teacher-Pupil ratio were 3.44 by Teachers and 3.00 by head teachers. These mean ratings were not significantly different ($t(57) = 0.68, p > .05$). This means that both teachers and head teachers concurred that teacher-pupil ration was sometimes an opportunity. This emanates from the fact that a teacher-pupil ratio of 1: 10 is universally recommended as the optimum one at which the teacher can help the learners achieve better results.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Teachers

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	
Gender	Male	28	50
	Female	27	48.2
	Nil response	2	1.8
	Total	57	100
Highest qualification	Ph.D.	7	12.5
	Masters	10	17.9
	Bachelors	20	35.7
	Diploma	11	19.6
	Nil response	7	12.3
	Total	57	100
Professional Training in SNE	Bachelor in SNE	7	12.8
	Certificate in Sign Language	1	1.8
	Diploma in SNE	35	62.5
	EBD	1	1.8
	Inclusive Education	11	19.6
	MI	1	1.8
	Total	57	100
Teaching Experience in other schools	1-5 yrs.	19	34.2
	6-10 yrs.	13	23.4
	11-15 yrs.	15	27
	16-20 yrs.	2	3.6
	Nil response	8	22.5
	Total	57	100
Teaching Experience in current school	1-5 yrs.	33	59.4
	6-10 yrs.	14	25.2
	11-15 yrs.	2	3.6
	16-20 yrs.	1	1.8
	Above 20 yrs.	0	0
	Nil response	7	10.7
	Total	57	100
Area of Specialization	Certificate	6	10.7
	EBD	6	10.7
	ECDE	1	1.8
	HI	2	3.6
	IE	9	16.1
	IE, HI	1	1.8
	MH	4	7.1
	MH, PH, IE	1	1.8
	PH	26	46.4
	Total	57	100
Catchment Area for Students	Homa Bay	17	30.4
	Homa Bay-Kisumu	3	5.4
	Homa Bay-Migori	3	5.4
	Homa Bay-Siaya	1	1.8
	Homa Bay-Siaya-Kisumu	1	1.8
	Kakamega	1	1.8
	Kisumu	6	10.7
	Kisumu-Homa Bay	2	3.6
	Kisumu-Migori	1	1.8
	Migori	5	8.9
	Migori-Homa Bay	1	1.8
	Nyahururu	1	1.8
	Nyandarua	1	1.8
	Nyanza	9	16.1
	Nyanza Region	2	3.6
	Vihiga	2	3.6
Total	57	100	

Teachers' Skills also emerged as sometimes an opportunity with a mean rating of 3.21 by teachers and 3.25 by head teachers. The difference between these means was found not to be statistically significant as established by ($t(59) = -0.058, p > 0.05$). This resonated well with the fact learners with special needs require exclusive teaching by specially trained teachers to help them realize their highest potential and strive to progress beyond their limitations. Both teachers and head teachers rated motivation as sometimes an opportunity by mean ratings of 3.18 and 2.75 respectively. These mean ratings were statistically not different as established by ($t(59) = 0.75, P > 0.05$). Gender was rated by both teachers (MR=3.05) and Head Teachers (MR=3.00) as being sometimes an opportunity.

The difference between the means was not statistically significant ($t(59) = 0.96, p > 0.05$) implying that both teachers and head teachers were in agreement that gender of teachers sometimes presented itself as an opportunity for the education of mentally challenged learners. This is true considering that Teacher ideologies about gender or education may set limits to what appears acceptable. Teachers' experience was rated by teachers (MR=3.77) as often being an opportunity to access of education and by head teachers (MR=3.00) as being an opportunity to access of education sometimes. These means were found not to be statistically significant ($t(58) = 1.24, P > 0.05$) implying that both teachers and head teachers were in agreement that teachers experience sometimes and often presents itself as an opportunity for the mentally challenged learners.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Head teachers

Demographic Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	4	100
	Female	0	0
	Total	4	100
Highest qualification	Ph.D.	0	0
	Masters	3	75
	Bachelors	0	0
	Diploma	1	25
	Total	4	100
Experience in other schools	1-10	1	25
	11-20 yrs.	1	25
	20-30 yrs.	0	0
	Above 30 yrs.	0	0
	Total	2	50
Experience in current school	11-20 yrs.	2	50
	20-30 yrs.	0	0
	Above 30 yrs.	0	0
	Total	2	50
School enrollment	Boys	158	55.6
	Girls	126	44.4
	Total	284	100
Area of Specialization	EBD, IE	2	50.0
	MH, IE	1	25.0
	MH, PH, HI, IE	1	25.0
	Total	4	100
Catchment Area for Students	Homa Bay-Migori	2	50
	Homa Bay-Migori-Kisumu	1	25
	Vihiga	1	25
	Total	4	100
Non-Governmental Support	Community manpower support, National Council for the Disabled	1	25
	Community support, NGOs	1	25
	Community support, World Vision, Safaricom	1	25
	National council for the Disabled, World Vision	1	25
	Total	4	100

Table 3. Teacher Based Opportunities influencing Education for the Mentally Challenged Learners in Special Schools in Kenya

Opportunity	Respondents	N	MR	Std. Deviation	T-Test
Qualified teachers	Teachers	57	3.14	1.47	t(59) = -0.480, P = 0.63
	Head Teachers	4	3.50	1.00	
Teacher's attitude	Teachers	57	3.24	1.10	t(59) = -0.008, P = 0.99
	Head Teachers	4	3.25	0.50	
Special school allowance for teachers	Teachers	57	3.12	1.25	t(59) = -0.99, P = 0.33
	Head Teachers	4	3.75	0.50	
Teacher-Pupil ratio	Teachers	57	3.44	1.24	t(57) = 0.68, P = 0.499
	Head Teachers	4	3.00	1.15	
Teachers' Skill	Teachers	57	3.21	1.33	t(59) = -0.06, P = 0.95
	Head Teachers	4	3.25	0.96	
Motivation	Teachers	57	3.18	1.12	t(59) = 0.750, P = 0.46
	Head Teachers		2.75	0.50	
Gender	Teachers	4	3.05	1.23	t(59) = 0.96, P = 0.93
	Head Teachers		3.00	1.15	
Teachers' experience	Teachers	57	3.77	1.07	t(58) = 1.24, P = 0.22
	Head Teachers	3	3.00	0.00	
Overall	Teachers	57	3.28	0.87	t(59) = 0.22, P = .83
	Head Teachers	4	3.18	0.32	

KEY: n = Sample; MR=Mean Rating; OMR = Overall Mean Rating.

Interpretation of Mean ratings

- 1.00-1.44 Not an opportunity
- 1.45 -2.44 Rarely an opportunity
- 2.45 -3.44 Sometimes an opportunity
- 3.45 -4.44 Often an opportunity
- 4.45 -5.00 Always an opportunity

From Table 4. above, it can be observed that teachers rated level of challenge as often a challenge with a mean rating of 4.25. Also, head teachers rated level of challenge as sometimes a challenge with a mean rating of 3.07. These mean ratings were not significantly different ($t(58) = -1.62, p > .05$). This is indeed true as some learners are severely challenged and their ability to grasp concepts is weak or are a bit slow to pick up on what is being taught.

It demoralizes teachers to discover that the learners are not getting what you are teaching. Even syllabus coverage and time management become a big problem if that the case. Equally, teachers' attitude was rated by both teachers (MR=3.11) and Head Teachers (MR=3.25) as being sometimes a challenge to participate in learning. The difference between the means was not statistically significant ($t(58) = -0.27, p > 0.05$) implying that both teachers and head teachers were in

Table 4. Teacher Based Challenges influencing Education for the Mentally Challenged Learners in Special Schools in Kenya: A study across special schools in Homa Bay County

Challenge	Respondents	N	MR	Std. Deviation	T-Test
Level of Challenge	Teachers	56	3.07	1.44	t(58) = -1.62, P = 0.11
	Head Teachers	4	4.25	.50	
Teachers' attitude	Teachers	56	3.10	1.06	t(58) = -0.27, P = 0.79
	Head Teachers	4	3.25	.50	
Terms & Conditions of service	Teachers	55	3.07	1.27	t(57) = 0.11, P = 0.91
	Head Teachers	4	3.00	.82	
Pedagogical skills	Teachers	56	3.46	1.06	t(58) = 0.39, P = 0.7
	Head Teachers	4	3.25	.96	
Gender	Teachers	56	3.34	1.31	t(58) = -0.53, P = 0.55
	Head Teachers	4	3.75	1.26	
Motivation	Teachers	54	3.65	1.12	t(56) = 1.15, P = 0.26
	Head Teachers	4	3.00	.00	
Teachers' experience	Teachers	52	3.40	1.38	t(54) = -0.86, P = 0.39
	Head Teachers	4	4.00	.00	
Overall	Teachers	57	3.24	0.99	t(59) = 0.22, P = .83
	Head Teachers	4	3.50	0.3	

KEY: n = Sample; MR=Mean Rating; OMR = Overall Mean Rating.

Interpretation of Mean ratings

1.00-1.44 Not a challenge

1.45 -2.44 Rarely a challenge

2.45 -3.44 Sometimes a challenge

3.45 -4.44 Often a challenge

4.45 -5.00 Always a challenge

agreement that teachers' attitude sometimes presented itself as a challenge for the education of mentally challenged learners. Both teachers and head teachers agreed that Terms and Conditions of service were sometimes a challenge as indicated by mean ratings of 3.07 and 3.00 respectively. These mean ratings were statistically not different as established by ($t(57) = 0.11, P > 0.05$). Indeed, it is true that teacher's terms and conditions of service such as promotions, career progression, and space for personal development and even motivation can serve as a hindrance to effective teaching. Teacher Pedagogical skills was rated as often a challenge by teachers (MR=3.46) and as sometimes a challenge by head teachers (MR=3.25). The difference between the means was not statistically significant ($t(58) = -0.27, p > 0.05$) implying that both teachers and head teachers concurred that teacher pedagogical skills was a challenge to the education of mentally challenged learners. This is true considering that the employer of teachers is skeptical in capacity building for teachers through workshops and seminars on new skills and trends of effective handling of these learners.

The mean ratings for Gender of teachers in the schools was 3.339 by Teachers indicating it as sometimes a challenge and 3.75 by head teachers indicating it as often being a challenge. These mean ratings were not significantly different ($t(57) = 0.68, p > 0.05$). This means that both teachers and head teachers concurred that teacher-pupil ratio of 1:10 was a challenge for the education for the mentally challenged learners. The gender of teachers could be a challenge especially if there is gender imbalance in the recruitment of teachers to the special schools. This creates an impression of lack of mentorship or gender stereotypes which consequently has negative impact on learner performance. Motivation was rated by teachers as often being a challenge by a mean rating of 3.65 while head teachers' rating was 3.00 indicating it as sometimes a challenge. The difference between these means was not found to be statistically significant as established by ($t(56) = 1.15, p > 0.05$).

DISCUSSION

Actually, availability of qualified teachers is supposed to be an opportunity considering that they are specifically technically qualified to handle learners with special needs. Qualified teachers will handle mentally challenged learners with their slow speed of learning since it is a challenge, they are cognizant of and trained to handle. Most teachers posted to special schools nowadays are degree holders, diploma holders or professionally trained to handle the various disabilities. Interview findings were in agreement as asserted by EARCC1: "My teachers are well trained and up to the task. This has helped sustain the education of a good number of mentally challenged learners. They are often taken to in-service training to acquaint themselves to the current methods of promoting the education of learners with special needs. The trainings do help the teachers a lot." These findings concur with those of Ambussaidi and Yang (2019) in their study on The Impact of Mathematics Teacher Quality on Student Achievement in Oman and Taiwan. The results show that teacher quality indicators in Oman and Taiwan have a positive impact on eighth-graders' mathematics achievement. The findings indicate that availability of qualified teachers is a recipe for positive learner achievement therefore upholding the findings in this study. At present most teachers are exceptionally trained to handle these types of learners and their attitude is shaped towards that.

This indeed serves as an opportunity for learners since content delivery is seamless because the teachers understand their job and what it entails unlike the common teachers. Also, whenever they face challenges in the course of content delivery, they seem patient to even repeat concepts more so in the case of mentally challenged learners. Interview findings supported these findings that teacher's attitude is sometimes an opportunity especially positive attitude. In this respect Education Assessments and Resource Centre Coordinators (EARCCs) highlighted: "The teachers had the training in SNE and so they place themselves at the level of the children, dance with them, tell stories, cook and eat with them which promote the learners' education. The children enjoy activities and the

activities arouse their interests. These children with special needs prefer such activities and they understand better.” Teachers teaching learners with mental challenged learners like in all other disability categories get paid their monthly salaries and an additional special school allowance of Kshs. 10,000 effective from 1st July, 2013. Before then, teachers used to be paid a 10% special allowance of their basic salary which was not commensurate with the extra duties that teachers used to perform (Kochung Report, 2003). This has greatly motivated teachers to work hard in their noble duty of delivering content to learners with special needs. It is therefore a great opportunity to learners when they are taught by adequately funded and trained teachers. This is supported by interview findings as asserted by EARCC3: “The Kshs. 10,000 packages for teachers in special schools is very motivating and so most teachers who are trained in special needs education strive to join special schools or units so as to get this extra 10,000 in their slips. As a result, the teachers must just work in those schools and handle the learners with special needs with love and care, fearing that any negative report about them will lead to their removal from the special schools. The training that these teachers received helps them and so equips them in handling the learners”. Due to low enrollments in special schools and the special attention given to them, the ratio is easily achievable and hence the learners have an opportunity to be attended by the teacher personally. Interview findings supported this result as highlighted by EARCC3: “The government incentives and support has seen the teacher-pupil ratio improve.

Teachers in special schools are provided with lunch and given access to seminars which sometimes earns them allowances. Also, the notion that specializing in special needs education gets you a job quickly has seen an increase in the teachers opting to specialize in SNE. This in the end ensures that there are enough teachers just like in the regular category and thus, enough teachers to give these learners individualized care.” A survey by the Government of Kenya (2008) revealed that the variation in pupil teacher ratio across the country had a negative impact on national examination performance in public primary schools. A study carried by Majanga, Nasongo and Sylvia (2010) in Nakuru County-Kenya, noted that due to over-enrolment in Kenya leading to high Pupil-Teacher ratio, general performance in most of the schools’ subjects continued to decline. For example, learning of core subjects like mathematics and English which require frequent teacher interaction could not be well managed and performed. This implies under a manageable number of pupils; teaching becomes more efficient as there is increased teacher-pupil interaction as a result. Teachers with special needs education certification generally know more methods of managing difficult behaviors than their colleagues without certification. Interview findings revealed that indeed some teachers are well skilled and experienced in the field as asserted by EARCC2: “Some teachers are very resourceful as they possess exemplary skills and experience in special needs education. Some teachers have masters and PhDs and have done considerable research and knowledge development in the field. When they combine these skills with their passion in teaching end up enticing the learners to pursue education further.” Indeed, motivating teachers through such initiatives as housing, special school allowance, school meals and tea breaks sponsored by donors and the government makes the teachers motivated and determined to handle learners with special needs. The findings aforementioned are in conformity with Herzberg’s two factor

model which says that basic factors like safety and salary need to be met to prevent dissatisfaction at work, but that another set of higher order motivating factors like autonomy and recognition are required to create actual happiness at work. Conditions under which teachers work may not be conducive to enthusiastic innovation. As such, learners may develop ideas or notions which are neither progressive nor in line with the expected outcomes from formal education. Gender balance amongst teachers also serves as role modelling for the learners that despite their gender, they can still attain successful careers. The attitude of the teacher when negative acts as a deterrent to effective teaching and instructional leadership. This is supported by interviews of EARCC officers. EARCC1 noted that: “These teachers undergo a lot. At times they lack even the language to express themselves when it comes to educating our learners with special needs. They also have all sorts of disabilities in the classroom, be it mental, physical, mental, and visual. This makes it a bit too difficult for our teachers to manage all these. Though I them for the strong hearts but a few of the teachers do not have the children at heart.” EARCC2 highlighted the following; “The difference is in their severity. Some are too severe and do not grasp lessons with ease. Some cases are very severe. Teachers feel frustrated when they teach and learners seem not to show signs of learning taking place. Some learners’ conditions are too severe and the teachers lack the skills to handle them.” This finding is in agreement with a study conducted by Mbwambo (2015) on; Teachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education in regular primary schools used a qualitative study design aimed at exploring regular primary school teachers’ knowledge and understanding of the concept inclusive education. The study found that primary school teachers who participated in the study have limited knowledge about inclusive education. The findings also revealed that regular teachers have negative feelings towards teaching students who face barriers to learning and participation. The findings revealed that lack of inclusive training, low salaries, lack of motivation, shortage of teachers, lack of enough teaching and learning materials, lack of government support and poor support from parents and community at large contribute to regular teachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education. While the study was general to teachers, the current study has singled out attitude as a challenge to promoting the education of the mentally challenged learners. Also (Kirui 2014) investigated; the challenges facing the effective implementation of inclusive education in selected regular and special schools in Langata District of Nairobi County. First, the study failed to indicate the number of special schools and inclusive schools that were targeted. Secondly, the study failed to separate findings from special schools and inclusive schools. Therefore, the current study fills this knowledge gap by successfully establishing teacher attitudes amongst other factors which influence education of the mentally challenged learners.

Teachers in special face unique challenges and hence more often require recognition and promotion or even salary increase frequently. The challenge is that in many a case, they are treated equally to other teachers irrespective of their need for special attention. Findings from interviews showed no difference as one of the interviewees, EARCC1 asserted: “It is true that sometimes teachers in zone experience challenges relating to terms and conditions of service especially when their special allowances take too long to reflect on the payslips. Further, it is understood that their working environment is not normal and keeps adjusting itself to new challenges. Despite

this, the government has not been up to date in improving the working conditions. For instance, the special allowance has never been revised and adjusted even with the growing challenges and population of SNE learners.” In agreement to this finding, Mwanasaid (2018) in a study on Terms and conditions of service and their relationship to motivation of pre-school teachers in Kwale district, Kenya revealed that pre-school teachers in Kwale District work under significantly different Terms and Conditions of Service. The results also revealed that over half 87(62%) of the pre-school teachers from Kwale District are demotivated by their Terms and Conditions of Service. The study used ex post-facto research design. A sample size of 140 pre-school teachers was drawn from Community Schools, County Council Schools, Religious Organization Schools and Private Schools using disproportionate stratified random sampling. The sampled pre-school teachers responded to a self-administered questionnaire on pre-school teachers' Terms and Conditions of Service. The study guided the current study to explore further and establish whether teachers' terms and conditions of service are a challenge for the education of the mentally challenged learners to which the findings have confirmed. Most teachers, other than the pre-service training they receive in colleges, are not updated on the current trends or even new technology of teaching learners with special needs. This supported by interview findings as asserted by EARCC1: “Some of the teachers in my zone indeed seem to have gained a little from the pre-service training in imparting knowledge to the special learners. Some of them have not taken the initiative of attending seminars or further studies to polish their pedagogical skills in SNE. In agreement to this finding, Kering, Rop and Ogola (2019) had conducted a study on Influence of Teacher Characteristics on Academic Performance of Learners with Hearing Impairment in KCPE in Special Primary Schools in Selected Counties, Kenya. The study used the descriptive survey research design. The selected teacher characteristics for the study included teacher level of qualification, teacher years of professional experience and teacher absenteeism from school and teacher pedagogical knowledge. One hundred and eight respondents were purposively selected for the study. This sample was made up of seventy-one learners, thirty-three teachers teaching upper primary and four head teachers. The findings showed majority of teachers handling learners with hearing impairment in special primary schools were highly qualified, experienced, attend school regularly and had the requisite pedagogical knowledge to cater for these learners effectively. Contrary to the findings, academic performance of learners with hearing impairment in KCPE in special primary schools continues to remain below average with most schools managing a mean of less than hundred and fifty marks. Interview findings as noted by one interviewee, EARCC3 revealed that: “It can be noted with regret that most of the teachers are female while most of the learners are male.

This gender imbalance has made the male learners not to believe in themselves as they feel only few males can make it in life. Some schools do better by inviting motivational and guest speakers with influence in the society even though some do not for one reason or another. EARCC1 also revealed that: “Teachers sometimes would feel unrecognized as their hard work is not appreciated well enough by parents and the ministry or their employer. Incentives such as encouragement, team building and seminars are rare and this makes them feel less motivated. Some learners are sometimes very hostile and

takes a lot by teachers to control them. Counselling of teachers is essential but missing in most cases.” This finding corresponds to the findings of a study by Otieno (2018) on Implications of special needs education policy on enrolment of learners with multiple disabilities in special primary schools in Kisumu County, Kenya. The study used cross-sectional descriptive design combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Target population comprised 8 head teachers, 110 teachers, 2 Educational Assessment Resource Services (EARS) officers, 1 county education officer, and 350 parents/guardians of LwMDs (Learners with Multiple Disabilities). Multi-stage sampling was used in the study, whereby purposive technique was used to select 7 head teachers, 100 teachers and 2 EARS officers, while stratified sampling was used to select 35 parents from the seven sub counties. Triangulation method was used to collect data comprising Questionnaires, KII interviews, Observation, and FGDs. The study established that service provision to LwMDs was poor owing to inadequate resources and poor motivation of teachers; and content of curriculum as well as procurement of assistive devices in the special schools did not suit educational needs of LwMDs. Equally, teachers' experience was rated by both teachers and head teachers as often a challenge faced by learners with mental challenge in their education. The mean ratings were 4.000 by teachers and 4.25 by head teachers. These mean ratings were not significantly different [$t(54) = -0.86, p > .05$].

This means that both teachers and head teachers were in concurrence that teachers' experience was often a challenge to the education of mentally challenged learners. This is further in agreement with a research by Kini and Podolsky (2016) titled, ‘Does Teaching Experience Increase Teacher Effectiveness?’ The research was a review of 30 studies published within the last 15 years that analyze the effect of teaching experience on student outcomes in the United States. The findings showed that: teaching experience is positively associated with student achievement gains throughout a teacher's career; Gains in teacher effectiveness associated with experience are most steep in teachers' initial years, but continue to be significant as teachers reach the second, and often third, decades of their careers; As teachers gain experience, their students not only learn more, as measured by standardized tests, they are also more likely to do better on other measures of success, such as school attendance; Teachers' effectiveness increases at a greater rate when they teach in a supportive and collegial working environment, and when they accumulate experience in the same grade level, subject, or district; and More experienced teachers support greater student learning for their colleagues and the school as a whole, as well as for their own students. This applies even to learners with special needs. The findings imply that less experienced teachers are a challenge to the education of learners with mental challenge since the learners won't reap from the benefits of an experienced as outlined above

CONCLUSION

The main teacher based opportunities for the education of learners with mental challenges were; qualified teachers, teacher's attitude, special school allowance for teachers, teacher-pupil ratio, teachers' skill, motivation, gender and teachers' experience. The teacher based challenges faced by learners with mental challenges in pursuit of their education in special schools included: level of challenge of learners,

availability of qualified teachers, teacher's attitude, special school allowance for teachers, teacher-pupil ratio, teachers' skill, motivation and teachers' experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The school management and Teachers Service Commission should employ mechanisms to motivate teachers and provide them with appropriate equipment for handling learners with mental challenges. This will ease teachers work and ensure teaching and learning is enjoyable.

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