

Challenges Experienced In Teaching Daily Living Skills to Learners with Mental Retardation

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to establish the challenges encountered when teaching Daily living skills (DLS) to learners with Mental Retardation (MR). The study used purposive sampling to select the sub-county, special units, learners and teachers. The target population in this study was eighty four respondents. The sample for the study was the same as the target population. The study used semi-structured questionnaires for teachers and head-teachers, and observation checklists for learners. The study was carried out in special units for learners with MR in public primary schools in Kasarani sub-county, Kenya. The data was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods. The findings of the study showed that learners with MR were not taught DLS effectively. The study also found out that seventy-eight percent (78%) of teachers in the units for learners with MR were not trained to teach such learners. Only 22% of the teachers were trained in the area of MR. The findings showed that forty-eight (80%) of learners did not get sufficient DLS to enable them live independently. Consequently, the study concluded that learners were not taught DLS appropriately to enable them live independently. The study recommended that the government should develop cost-effective training for teachers in the area of MR to curb the problem of understaffing and ineffective teaching. It also recommended that schools with special units need to be headed by teachers who are specialists in the area of MR because they can understand the needs, abilities and interests of learners with MR and provide appropriate learning environment as well as offering necessary support to the teachers in the units.

Keywords: Daily living skills, Learners with mental retardation, Challenges in teaching MR

1. Introduction

Most of learners with mild and moderate mental retardation (MR) are in the units in primary schools and majority still lack Daily Living Skills (DLS) for independent living. This was exhibited by the way they were discriminated, segregated, rejected and abused by the society (Friend, 2008). Consequently they were not well integrated in their communities. Their parents/guardians spent most of their time caring for them, which limited their contribution towards national development.

The court rulings in North Carolina in 1969 played a major role in the education of children with mental retardation. It stated that:

It is unconstitutional and invalid ...to operate the public school system in a discriminatory manner as against the mentally retarded children and to allocate funds to the disadvantage of the mentally retarded child. Often a mentally retarded child develops fair skills and abilities and becomes a useful citizen of the state but in order to do this, the mentally retarded child must have his/her chance (Kaur, 2005, pg 33)

2. Challenges experienced in Teaching Daily Living Skills

The teaching of DLS to learners with MR has its own challenges, such as lack of teaching/learning materials, negative attitude, lack of trained personnel, and lack of funds.

2.1 Lack of Teaching Learning Materials

Teaching and learning materials cultivate motivation in the learners and make them active participants in the learning process (Government of Kenya, 2008). Teaching and learning materials capture and maintain learners' attention, help them to understand what is being taught, and learn new skills (Ministry of Education, 2009). Learners with MR require materials over and above what is already being provided by the school. In most of the units, teaching/learning materials are lacking which implies that training of DLS is threatened. In a report by the

UN (2003), it was noted that one of the challenges the National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government (Kenya) faced was inadequate provision of education to the children with disabilities. This affected teaching of learners with MR. Moreover, it is important to note that all learners especially those with MR need materials which they can touch, feel, see and even play with. They need concrete materials for concept formation. The materials should reflect their functional curriculum and therefore, such themes as personal care, feeding, care of the home, food selection and preparation, safety and security, recreation and leisure, money, health and HIV and AIDS require concrete and situational materials (MoE, 2009). Most of these materials are very expensive and others are not locally available. It is therefore uncertain that special units have appropriate materials for all learners (MoE, 2001). It is also true that lack of appropriate teaching and learning materials hinder the effectiveness of teaching DLS to learners with mild MR.

2.2 Lack of Funds.

Due to limited funding by the Ministry of Education, the school administration may not be able to procure enough teaching and learning materials to enhance teaching of DLS in the units (National Action Plan on Education for All 2003-2015). Teacher-student ratio in most units is high especially because of free primary education. This limits the implementing of IEP services.

2.3 Negative Attitude

McMary & Sarah (2005) observes that negative attitude from both the teachers and the school administration play a significant role in the teaching of DLS to learners with MR. Negative attitude makes the teacher feel detached from the learners. This limits their attachment and interest in learners with MR, and therefore do not teach them well, hence learners continue being dependent on other people.

2.4 Lack of Trained Personnel

Other challenges experienced when implementing DLS to learners with MR is lack of trained personnel for learners with MR. Teachers who are not trained in the area of MR may not understand their learners' characteristics hence do not apply teaching methods or even strategies effectively. In extreme cases, ignorance concerning disability can result in quite damaging prejudice, hostility and rejection (Friend, 2008). This is even more serious if the disability is MR because of its characteristics of deficits in both adaptive behavior and IQ. Koech Report (1999: 97) summarizes the challenges encountered in implementing DLS when he asserted that 'there is nothing more unequal than the equal treatment of unequals'. The report asserts that the quality of the service for children with special needs in Kenya is adversely affected by acute shortage of specialized aids and equipment, specialized personnel, inappropriate curriculum, insufficient institutions and programmes, lack of coordination and unity of purpose between and among service providers, inadequate support staff, an absence of clear policy guidelines, lack of legal status on special education, provisions, laxity on the side of government to fund special education materials among others.

3. Objective of the Study

The study sought to determine the challenges teachers experienced while teaching DLS to learners with MR.

3.1 Methodology

The study employed descriptive survey design involving both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Descriptive survey is a method of collecting data by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals (Orodho, 2003). According to Kombo and Tromp (2006), descriptive survey can be used to collect information about the nature of the existing condition, identifying the standards against which existing conditions can be compared as well as determining the relationship between specific events (Orodho, 2004). The design was suitable for the study in that the researcher was able to determine the effectiveness of teaching methods on acquisition of DLS by learners with MR. Data collected through this design enabled the researcher to report the status of effectiveness of teaching methods on the acquisition of DLS to learners with MR in Kasarani sub-county, Kenya.

3.2 Location of the Study

The study was carried out in Kasarani sub-county, Kenya. The choice of Kasarani sub-county was mainly based on the fact that it had the highest prevalence of persons with MR (1,587) as compared to other sub-counties in Nairobi County whose prevalence was: Nairobi West-1,075, Nairobi East-1,303 and Westlands-340 respectively (Kenya National Census, 2009). The county also had the highest number of special units for learners with MR, in

regular primary schools (T.S.C. Educational Management Information Systems (EMIS), 2011). Finally, the selection of Kasarani was ideal, considering personnel and financial resources available to the researcher.

3.3 Target Population

The target population was eighty-four (84) respondents. The researcher studied the whole population because it was convenient for the study to capture all issues envisioned in research objective. There were sixty-four (64) learners with mental retardation in special units in public primary schools, fourteen (14) teachers and six (6) head teachers in six special units in Kasarani sub-county, Kenya (EMIS, May, 2011).

Table 1: Target Population

Units	Number of Learners	Teachers	Head teachers	Total
Baba Dogo	19	3	1	23
Njathaini	12	2	1	15
Marurui	4	1	1	6
Githurai	20	4	1	25
Garrison	4	3	1	8
D. Comboni	5	1	1	7
Total	64	14	6	84

Source: EMIS, May, 2011

3.4 Sample Size

The special units in the area of study were few (seven). Out of the seven special units, one unit was used for pilot study. The remaining six units were used for the main study. Therefore, all the special units in primary schools were used in the study because they were few and easily accessible. Findings from all the units were helpful in making reliable conclusions. A total of sixty-four (64), (100%) learners were involved in the study. Being a heterogeneous group of learners, it was vital to study each learner because their learning characteristics were quite different. All teachers from special units were used in the study since they were fourteen (14) only. Therefore a total of eighty-four (84) respondents were used in the study.

3.5 Research Instruments

A questionnaire and observation checklists were utilized to collect data for this study.

3.5.1 Data Collection Procedures

The researcher visited the selected schools and made orientations and also notified the school of its selection for the study. The purpose of the study was explained to the administrator. During the visit, arrangements were made regarding the time of data collection. Primary data was obtained from head teachers, teachers and learners from the units in the sampled schools using questionnaires and Observation checklists.

Respondents selected for the study were given questionnaires to fill, which were collected immediately after completion. The respondents were given adequate explanation before responding to the items. The researcher made all possible attempts to ensure that the data attained from questionnaires and observation checklists was valid and reliable. The researcher filled the checklist through class observation. The researcher used a checklist with each learner as they carried out the activities. A mark was put against the activity a learner was able to carry successfully and no tick was put against an activity a learner failed to perform. To ensure this, the researcher established a good rapport with respondents and assured them that the information they gave would be treated with utmost confidentiality.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data collected was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods. Thematic approach was also used to analyze the data. Under thematic approach, the gathered information was sorted out, classified and categorized according to the theme of the study. The theme was the challenges encountered in teaching DLS. All the information relevant to the theme was further analyzed to yield answers to research questions raised in this study. Quantitative data was presented using tables, frequencies and percentages.

4. Findings

The findings suggested that head teachers and teachers in the study locale did not have capacity or the resources/abilities to teach, manage and even organize learners with MR to benefit from education. Further, the

findings revealed that the critical challenges facing head teacher and teachers was lack of capacity to specifically cater for learners with MR. This was manifested through their clear revelation that they lacked training, knowhow and valuable improvisational skills to come up with teaching and learning materials that could be used to teach learners with MR. In addition, the findings revealed that head teachers and teachers lacked organizational competence and positive attitude which are exemplary in effective and sustainable teaching and learning process among learners with MR. These glaring technical inadequacies among the teaching personnel have gross ramifications to acquisition of DLS by learners with MR. The preceding findings are supported by UN report (2003) which noted that the NARC Government faced a challenge of educating its children especially those with disabilities, and specifically, learners with MR.

Lack of materials, untrained teaching staff, poor memory, absenteeism and forgetting were among the major challenges. The mention of poor memory (low cognitive ability) and clumsiness was an indication that both head teachers and teachers lacked knowledge of characteristics of learners with MR. Lack of space made learners with MR to be integrated in regular classes without any assistance. Such learners were not taught DLS, which are a core to independent living. Trained teachers are critical in teaching of DLS. A trained teacher understands his/her learners' needs, abilities and interests, and is therefore able to choose the right activities, methods, strategies and materials for his/her learners. Untrained staff would not do as explained; hence most learners did not acquire DLS for independent living.

Concrete materials are critical in the learning of learners with MR. Since they experience challenges in imagination and memory, concrete materials would help in concept formation. Therefore insufficient materials indicated that learners were not taught DLS effectively. Lack of classroom was an indication that learners in such environments lacked chance to interact with others and materials properly. That limited their learning of DLS since it involves interaction with materials in the environment. That was an indication that it was a challenge to teach DLS to learners with MR.

4.1 Summary of the Findings

The study sought to find out the challenges experienced by teachers while teaching DLS. The study findings indicated that lack of teaching materials ranked first. This must have had an impact in the teaching of DLS. Lack of materials, untrained teaching staff, lack of funds, and negative attitude were among the major challenges. Lack of space made learners with MR to be integrated in regular classes without any assistance. Such learners were not taught DLS, which are a core to independent living. Due to the above challenges, learners with MR in the units did not acquire DLS for independent living.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following are the recommendations that need both short and long term implementation.

- Schools with special units should be headed by teachers who are trained in mental retardation and have knowledge and skills, and also have learners with MR at heart. Such head teachers would advice their special unit teachers on the correct methods while considering learners abilities and interests in teaching DLS.
- TSC should post specialist teachers to the units for learners with MR. These are teachers who can prepare and apply IEP effectively, and use the correct teaching methods and teaching/learning materials to ensure learner's acquisition of DLS for independent living.
- The government to provide enough funds for purchase of materials and construction of enough classrooms, creation of awareness and advocacy on abilities of learners with MR if they have acquired DLS.
- Government provides enough funds to buy such concrete materials.

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