

Factors Influencing Provision of Play and Learning Materials among Children with Physical Challenges a Case Study of Joytown Special School, Kiambu County

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Abstract

In Kenya there is still a high population of children either born with or who develop physical challenges. These children are often neglected and most do not join school at the expected age. In joining school they encounter several difficulties in their play and learning activities. These children with physical challenges have developmental needs and rights like other children but due to their exceptionality they call for more attention in provision of adequate quality play and learning materials to enhance their holistic development. However, it is apparent that provision of materials to children with physical challenges has not been possible due to various factors which are not yet understood. The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of parents in the provision of play and learning materials to children who are physically challenged. The study sought to establish parents' involvement in provision of play and learning materials and factors influencing the kind of support they offer. The study was carried out in Joytown Primary School for the Physically Challenged in Thika Town. The school was purposefully selected because it is best suited for the study since it caters for children in the category of special needs being addressed in the study that is physical challenges. Case study design was used in order to gather in-depth information about roles of stakeholders in support of physically challenged children. Target population of the study was 100 children with physical challenges, 200 parents and 4 teachers and the head teacher. Stratified random sampling method was employed to arrive at a Sample size of 30 children with physical challenges, purposive and opportunity sampling to arrive at 30 parents and purposive sampling to arrive at 4 teachers. Therefore, the total sample size was 64. The data were collected using various techniques which included questionnaires for the teachers, interview schedules for parents and observation schedules for children. Collected data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative methods entailed use of descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages which enhanced discussion of qualitative data which was organized into themes and categories and presented in discussion form. Microsoft excel was used to ease data analysis. The study established that parental involvement in provision of play and learning materials is minimal. The major factors which influenced support offered by parents' were inadequate finance and complexity of some physical challenges which requires further investigation to establish the most appropriate play and learning materials to suit the needs of the child. It was evident that children were capable of engaging in various plays and learning activities where appropriate play and learning materials were availed consequently enhancing holistic development. The main recommendation of the study is that government should have a budgetary allocation meant specifically for purchase of play and learning materials and maintenance of facilities since it's a noble course which would ensure that children are actively involved in play and learning activities therefore enhancing holistic development molding children with physical challenges to become self-reliant and productive citizens.

Keywords: Provision of Play and Learning Materials, Physical Challenges

1.0 Introduction

Play and learning materials play a great role in enhancing development of children especially in their formative years. Play opportunities promotes learning of various physical skills, development of self-confidence, independence and social competence (Witt, 2004). However, play and learning for children with physical challenges requires more support as these children may not have the capability to venture into play on their own. Unlike, non-disabled children they beckon, for more attention especially in the provision of appropriate play and learning materials to enhance their holistic development.

Globally, efforts are made to meet the needs of persons with physical challenges persons through enactment of laws such as the Person with Disabilities Act (2003). The UN formally agreed upon the Convention on the Rights of Person with Disability on December 13th, 2006. By December, 2010, 96 countries out of the 147 signatories had ratified the convention. Ratification of the convention is a demonstration of the governments of countries that they commit to adopt new national laws and repeal the outdated ones so that persons with disabilities will have equal rights to education, employment and cultural life. Kenya also ratified the convention although a lot is yet to be done in promoting the welfare of persons with disabilities.

According to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2008) there are approximately 150 million children with disabilities in the world. The largest proportion of these children is from the developing countries. In

the United States the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that students with special needs be provided with a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment that is appropriate to the children's needs. Therefore, the U.S government provides special education ranging from the least restrictive such as full inclusion to the most restrictive such as segregation in a special school. However, the most dominant model is inclusion which is also adopted in countries like Australia, Denmark and others (Joe, Sue and Stuart, 2001). The model of inclusion helps children with special needs to adapt faster to life after school since they interact with other normal children unlike with the segregation model.

In Canada, support for people with physical challenges is also advanced due to availability of quality assistive devices. In addition, most schools use adaptations such as specially printed examinations for children with visual impairment, in other instances alternative assessment or modification that simplify tests are permitted and some are exempted from the test entirely (Beach, Bertrand, Forer, Michal, & Tougas, 2004). This brings about a sense of achievement at the level of the learner hence developing self-confidence. In Germany, 1 in 21 German children attends a special school since they are highly developed with trained teachers, favorable student teacher ratio and adapted facilities not available in regular schools.

However, in country like Kenya which is developing pupil teacher ratio in special schools is usually high therefore our special schools are not effective in preparing children with special needs for life. Many physically challenged children live a life of dependency on their family members and they participate minimally in productive activities even after completing their school (Kamau, 1986) and (Mwathi, 1997). This can be attributed to lack of adequate play and learning materials for physically challenged children which promotes realization of one's potential while still young. Therefore, this study sought to establish factors influencing provision of play and learning materials to children with physical challenges.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

Provision of play and learning for children with physical challenges is a complex endeavor which requires a lot of effort due to complexity of physical challenges. Adequate provision of play and learning materials among children with physical challenges can promote their learning and development. However, in Kenya studies by Kamere (2004), Kimosop (2002) and Wamocho (2003) reveal that special schools do not have adequate play and learning materials. The studies did not investigate factors behind the inadequacies hence the current study investigated the factors contributing to the issue of providing play and learning materials. The issue if not addressed children with special needs will continue being dependent and may never become self-reliant in the society.

3.0 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate factors influencing provision of play and learning materials to young children with various physical challenges in Joytown Primary School for the Physically Challenged in Thika, Kenya.

4.0 Objectives of the Study

1. To establish factors influencing provisions of play and learning materials by parents
2. To establish factors influencing provisions of play and learning materials by teachers.

5.0 Significance of the Study

The findings also may be useful to teachers' training colleges especially Kenya Institute of Special Education (K.I.S.E) where emphasis should be put on development of play and learning materials to promote teacher initiative in provision of materials to children with diverse special needs. In addition, parents and members of the community will be sensitized about the importance of play and learning materials challenging them to improve their support to physically challenged children.

6.0 Literature Review

In Kenya, Special Needs Education has been developing though incapacitated by lack of funds. Therefore there are many children with physical challenges who rarely receive any support from the government. Such children are deprived education and knowledge which can promote independence. They live a life of dependency and tend to be poorly adjusted to life (Bare Foot College, 1991). The more a child plays and exercises the more the brain and body develops (UNICEF 1999). For children with Physical challenges to play/learn they need extra services in the provision of play and learning materials to compensate for their handicapping limitations. However, in most cases the support for children with physical challenges in provision of play and learning material is questionable since a lot has not been done even in availing play/learning materials and also in adapting the environment.

Adapting play and learning environment for children with physical challenges is a challenge for

playground developers and teachers because each disability presents unique considerations. There are three ways of adapting instructions for children with physical challenges which include changing the following: The actual content of lessons, the specific knowledge being taught, the skills being taught or the environment in order to create an appropriate setting to teach (Joe et al, 2001). Changes in the content and skills can be done without affecting anyone outside the immediate group. However, in Kenya this has not been possible since physically challenged children are exposed to the same curriculum with children who are not disabled in the regular programmes also there are no additional attempt to provide of play and learning materials above what is provided in regular schools. This makes it difficult for physically challenged children to benefit fully from their academics.

The government can provide resource room for use by physically challenged children. Hammill & brown (1978) defined a resource room as any instruction setting to which a child comes for specific period of time usually on regular scheduled basis. Resource room requires a special teacher who consults with the classroom teacher to develop programs that are intended to eventually eliminate the problem that the child may be experiencing. Micro computers have been effective in offering children with physical challenges an opportunity to learn. Browning & Cater (1983) noted that microcomputers are finding new uses on regular basis and it has a variety of application for example computerized communication helps children who cannot communicate to talk with others. McConnell (1982) computers translate Braille into print and print into Braille for children with severe vision problems. However, in Kenya such provisions are rarely there. As a result early childhood programmes do not lay the expected foundation which facilitates growth and development in the future.

7.0 Research Methodology

The study employed a case study which is an in depth study of a particular situation. It is a method used to narrow down a very broad field of research into one easily researchable topic. Even though it doesn't answer a question completely, it gives some indications that allow further elaboration and hypothesis creation on a subject. The case study design helped the researcher to gather data about parental roles in provision of play and learning materials to children with different physical challenges in school settings. The researcher used observation schedules, questionnaire for teachers and interview schedules for parents. Content validity of the research instruments was established through review by experts and the reliability was established through test retest method. Piloting of the research instruments was conducted in the same school with a group that did not participate in the main study. Collected data was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods which included descriptive statistics such as calculation of frequencies and percentages. The data were then organized into themes and categories and then presented in discussion form. Micro soft excel was used to enhance data analysis and results were presented using tables and graphs.

8.0 Research Findings

The data was analyzed qualitatively and the findings of the study were categorized into the following themes which emanated from both the parents and the teachers.

8.1 Inadequate Finance

High cost of the materials which the school is unable to cater for due to limited budget. Therefore, teachers' are provided with very few resources for material development. Pre- primary class is given priority consequently other classes hardly get play and learning materials like manila papers, plasticine, toys and others. Teachers' also reported that most of the children come from poor backgrounds where parent struggle to meet with the educational needs of their children with physical challenges. Therefore, parents in most cases are not able to purchase play and learning materials that may be needed in school

About 87% of the parents interviewed reported that lack of finance was a major factor that impedes their support to their children. This is because of the extra requirements to meet the health needs of children with physical challenges. As a result they don't bother with the play and learning of the child at home or even when at school. Some of the parents reported that they struggle to meet medical costs and also in purchasing assistive devices which their children are required to have consequently such children may not play or learn even if they are provided with play and learning materials because of unmet basic needs.

8.2 Diversity of Needs and Complexity of Physical Challenges

Teachers reported that severity of physical challenges vary a lot from one individual child to another and the situation poses a great challenge to the teacher who is expected to give individual attention to each child. The school also admits children with diverse physical conditions all of which requires involvement of the teacher in development of appropriate play and learning materials. In some cases teachers are unable to establish the condition that a child has even with the help of medics. Such a situation leaves the teacher unaware of what to do to enhance play and learning of the child.

8.3 Wrong Perception of Children with Physical Challenges

About 23% of the parents reported that they experienced family problems due to wrong perception of the child with physical challenges. As a result some parents are raising their children single handedly after separation; other children are deserted by their real parents as they move on with their lives leaving the special child with the grandparents. Due to wrong perception little effort is put in supporting these children especially in provision of play and learning materials.

8.4 Negative Attitude

Both parents and teachers felt that the community and parents tend to be negative toward children with physical challenges since they view them as individuals who cannot achieve anything in life. Consequently they neglect their play and learning needs both at school and also at home. About 33% of the parents reported how they do not get support from other family members and they cannot be able to hire a caregiver who can assist in supporting the child in play and learning. Therefore, with time the child becomes isolated even due to negative remarks from other members of the family which makes the child to develop a negative self-concept hence minimizing attempts to interact with other children during play activities.

8.5 Limited Expertise in Material Development

In cases where some resources were availed teachers felt that they are not competent enough to develop materials. Also most of the teachers felt that the task of developing materials is time consuming and overwhelming to them because of other duties which they should address in the school. They felt it would be helpful if the school had a specialist in material development to assist in development of play and learning materials for all children

9.0 Recommendations and Conclusions

Inadequate finance emerged as the major factor that influence provision of play and learning materials by parents. Teachers reported that majority of the children come from poor backgrounds where parents are likely not to bother with provision of play and learning materials due to many other issues they may be experiencing in life. Other factor identified were negative attitude toward children with physical challenges by parents and other members of the community, wrong perception of the child who is physically challenged, diversity and complexity of physical challenges as well as limited expertise from teachers in material development.

To address issues identified above, resources should be mobilized from several stakeholders such as NGO's, church and others in order to fully address play and learning needs of children with physical challenges. Also, Parents and members of the community should be sensitized about how to support children with physical challenges to avoid stigmatization and misperceptions about the ability of physically challenged children.

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