

Assessment of Teacher Competencies in Handling Physically Challenged Pupils in Public Primary Schools in Kericho County

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Abstract

The process of having inclusive education in Kenya has been very slow for children with special needs yet many of these children are still at home and have attained school going age. The purpose of this study was to assess teacher competencies in handling physically challenged pupils in public primary schools in Kericho County. The study was informed by Lev Vygotsky Social-Cultural Constructivism Theory. The study utilized a descriptive survey design. The objective of the study was to assess the level of competence of the teachers to handle the physically challenged pupils in public primary schools. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed. The target population was composed of 214 teachers. A sample size of 42 teachers were used. Stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to select the study sample. The data collection instruments used were the questionnaire and interviews. Spearman rank order correlation was then be used to compute the correlation coefficient in order to establish the reliability of the instrument. The instrument got a coefficient of 0.87. Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer programme and presented using tables, pie charts, bar graphs, frequencies and percentages to form part of the descriptive statistics. The study found that many of the teachers, 29 (69%), teaching in the public primary schools have not undergone training on Special Needs Education (SNE). The recommendation is that the government should provide in-service training to all the teachers teaching in public primary schools on how to handle physically challenged pupils. This will therefore make public primary schools inclusive to all learners.

Keywords: Assessment, inclusive education, teacher competencies and physically challenged pupils

Introduction

People with disabilities are the most universally excluded from education (Stubbs, 2008). United Nation Convention on the Rights of a Child declared that States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination (Article 2). It further said that the best interest of a child shall be the primary consideration (Article 3), (UNICEF, 1989).

According to the Education for All (EFA) conference held at Jomtien in Thailand, education was recognized as one of the fundamental human right (UNESCO, 1990). Consequently, during the Special Needs Education (SNE) conference held in Salamanca, Spain, it was noted that major reforms needed to be made to the ordinary school (UNESCO, 1994). The World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, reported that many countries were far from having reached the goals established at the World Conference on EFA. The participants agreed on the Dakar Framework for Action on their commitment to achieve EFA by the year 2015 (UNESCO, 2000).

Kenya Law Reports (2010), Chapter Four on Bill of Rights, states that basic education is a fundamental human right. It also states that a person with any disability is entitled to be treated with dignity and respect. They also need to be addressed and referred to in a manner that is not demeaning. The access to educational institutions and facilities for persons with disabilities that are integrated into society to the extent that should be compatible with the interests of the person. The National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD, 2003) states that persons with disabilities shall not be denied the right to admission to any course of study by reason of such disabilities.

However, physically challenged pupils still feel excluded in public primary schools in Kenya and those learning in inclusive schools still face a lot of challenges despite the efforts from the world declarations, Kenyan Constitution and NCPD. As a result, physically challenged children drop out of school or do not attend school at all. This is because the level of competence of the teachers with the required skills to handle the physically challenged pupils is still wanting. It was from this background that the study sought to carry out assessment of teacher competencies in handling physically challenged pupils in public primary schools in Kericho County.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess teacher competencies in handling physically challenged pupils in public primary schools in Kericho County, Kenya.

Objective

The objective of the study was to assess the level of competence of the teachers to handle the physically challenged pupils in public primary schools.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted Lev Vygotsky Social-Cultural Constructivism Theory (Lev Vygotsky, 1978). Constructivism is how we learn. Vygotsky in 1978 sees the Zone of Proximal Development as the area where most sensitive instruction or guidance should be given allowing the child to develop skills they will then use on their own developing higher mental functions. Bodrova and Leong (2012) observed that teachers teaching in an inclusive setting can give these sensitive instructions to the physically challenged pupils at this point so as to develop more skills. Competent regular pupils can also be very useful at the Zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky refers to this process of assisting as "scaffolding," which helps bridge the difference between a child's current level of problem-solving and his potential for more complex problem solving.

Literature Review

Teachers' Professional Qualification

Even with the introduction of FPE (Free Primary Education) in Kenya and her commitment to EFA by including it in the Kenya Constitution, physically challenged pupils still face many challenges in public primary schools. Mungala, Mungai, Daniel, Taylor and Last (2012) argued that Kenya has shown her commitment for EFA to children with and without disability. This is mainly in line with the policy of international communities by initiating FPE in 2003 and releasing disability Act in the same year, which have given opportunity to persons with disability to access education and participate as equal members of the society. Muricho and Changach (2013) observed that Sessional Paper no 1 of 2005, National Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 2006 and Non-Global Policy Framework on Education of 2009 underscore the importance of the Special Needs Education (SNE) for human capital development.

Agbenyega (2007) contends that qualified teachers know that classroom needs must be approached "from a curricular stand point", in which difficulties are defined on each specific task, activity and classroom conditions. Gathumbi, Mungai and Hintze (2013) asserts that it is impossible to achieve EFA goals if the quality of teacher performance is not ensured through professional development. Mwangi and Orodho (2014) in a study done in Nyeri established that teacher preparedness in terms of training and experience posed a great challenge to SNE implementation. According to the study findings, most teachers agreed to the fact that their professional training was inadequate to take charge and impart knowledge and skills to pupils with special needs in education. Ogadho and Ajowi (2013), in their study in Kisumu East District found out that a high percentage of teachers that teach learners with learning disabilities had not undergone any in-service training on SNE.

United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF, 2013) observed that pre-service training rarely prepares teachers to teach inclusively and existing training is of variable quality. Lack of people with disabilities among teaching personnel presents another challenge to IE; adults with disabilities often face considerable obstacles of qualifying as teachers. Teacher training for regular teachers rarely prepares teachers for working in diverse classrooms and particularly does not equip them with the confidence, knowledge and skills to effectively support learners with disabilities. This is the major reason why many children with disabilities remain out of school or excluded in the learning process within school. Nthia (2012) found that majority of the head teachers had P1 certificate indicating their lack of enthusiasm to career improvement and that many primary schools had very few teachers with SNE training denoting a serious shortage of these teachers. His study indicated that of the head teachers had no training in SNE. A study done by Gwala (2006) contends that a few school managers and teachers have the inclusive kind of training that enables them to deal with the complexities of inclusive education.

Competence of the Teachers to handle physically challenged pupils

Njoka et al. (2012) established the relevance of inclusive and equitable education in the provision of basic education from the policy makers, education officials, head teachers and NGO representatives in Kenya. The study revealed that slightly more than half had knowledge of the meaning of inclusive and equitable education. Halinen (2007) argued that the quality of regular class teaching and competencies of teachers to handle the physically challenged pupils are the most important prerequisites skills for inclusive arrangements. Peter and Nderitu (2014) in their study found out that there are inadequate SNE trained teachers as a challenge to inclusion.

Ogadho and Ajowi (2013) in their study revealed that teachers use inappropriate teaching methods like direct instruction whereas individualized education programme method was not appropriately used by many teachers either they do not understand or they lack skills. Their study also indicated that there is a serious problem with adaptation of the curriculum in regular primary schools to enable learners with learning disabilities benefit in their education. Raditloaneng (2011) observed that for children with learning disabilities, self-

awareness and self-confidence is very important. Struggles in the classroom can cause children to doubt their abilities and question their strengths. Deku, Amponsah and Opoku (2013) posit that the self-concept develops in response to life experiences which includes teacher classroom practices, a good example is grouping children for various assignments, cooperative learning and peer tutoring bring learners together thereby promoting healthy relationships among them. The teaching methodology and the way the teacher handles the learner has an effect on the personality development of children and the emotional climate which in turn will influence their self-concept.

Ministry of Education (MOE) (2012) observed that access and participation of children with special needs is relatively low across the country. Their needs are not being specifically addressed. The emphasis on academic performance and examinations creates an unfavourable learning environment for children with special needs and disabilities, creating a challenge to the integration and inclusion of children with such disabilities in regular schools. The absence of reliable data on children with special needs across all levels of education, constrains effective special education service delivery and planning. According to Agbenyega (2007), many regular education teachers who feel unprepared and fearful to work with learners with disabilities in regular classes, display frustration, anger and negative attitude toward inclusive education because they believe it could lead to lower academic standards.

Ramos (2009) observed that the challenges teachers face in inclusive classrooms include; lack of skills on how to deal with insensitiveness by special needs learners and treating all learners with respect regardless of ability. Making an individual lesson plan by teachers is challenge as learners have varying abilities in the classroom to address individualized academic needs based on ability. Haddad (2009) argues that, if teaching approaches and teaching/learning material are not learner-friendly, nor responsive to the diversity of needs and abilities among learners, they become a barrier. If teachers, discriminate against children who are perceived to be different from the majority of their peers, it also becomes a barrier. There is therefore a need for the teachers to value and respect each individual learner if meaningful learning has to take place in an inclusive setting. Adoyo (2007) reported that special institutions in Kenya follow the regular curriculum which is demanding and rigid leaving very little room to adapt new teaching methodologies.

Squires and McKeown (2003) observed that learning and teaching are reciprocal and occur in social interaction in which the more competent teacher, structures learning environment and tasks of the less competent pupils. This is because the children's learning difficulties are teacher's teaching difficulties. Teachers ought to appreciate the diversity of the learners and take responsibilities to ensure that the teaching methodologies are inclusive to all learners. According to Ngugi (2007), pupils with special needs in regular classes do better academically than those in non-inclusive setting because of being challenged by their peers. Their self-esteem is also improved because of reduced fear of human difference, increased comfort and increase in self-awareness. The regular pupils develop warm and caring friendships. According to Ndani and Murugami (2009), smaller teacher-pupil ratio in special need education classrooms facilitates the implementation of Individualized Education Programmes (IEPs). Hegarty and Alur (2002) point out that to teach in an inclusive class demands a new role for the teacher as part of the team.

Methodology

Participants

The participants were selected from public primary schools. A total of 42 teachers were sampled. Simple random sampling was used to select the schools which formed part of the study. The study used stratified random sampling to achieve adequate representation of males and females teachers (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2011). Simple random sampling was used to pick the males and females teachers from each stratum where Lottery method was applied to choose teachers of either gender. To enable the study to get information on the competencies of the teacher in handling the physically challenged pupils, a questionnaire was used to collect the data.

Background of the Respondents

The study sought to carry out assessment of teacher competencies in handling physically challenged pupils in public primary schools in Kericho County. The background information of the teachers' questionnaire examined whether the teachers had gone through any training in SNE. This information was very important because it revealed whether the teachers had the required skills to handle SNE pupils in regular primary schools. Information on the level of training on special needs education of the teacher confirms the true picture of the level of competence of the teacher in handling the physically challenged pupils.

Findings

Table 1

Level of training on SNE (n=42)

Training on SNE	Number of Teachers	Percentages
Certificate	02	4.8
Diploma	08	19.0
Degree	02	4.8
Others	01	2.4
None	29	69.0
Total	42	100.0

Source: Author (2016)

The findings in Table 1 with regard to the level of training in SNE of the teachers can be deduced that only 2 (4.8%) respondents had certificate, a few, 8 (19.0%) had diploma, only 2 (4.8 %) had a degree, a majority 29 (69.0%) had not gone for any training and only 1 (2.4 %) of the respondents had other types of training. These findings revealed that the majority of the respondents (69.0%) did not have any training on SNE. These findings mirrors the study done by Ogadho and Ajowi (2013) in Kisumu East district which revealed that a high percentage of teachers that teach learners with learning disabilities had not undergone any in-service training on SNE leading to low enrollment of learners with special needs.

Competence of the Teacher to cater for Physically Challenged Pupils

The objective of the study was to assess the level of competence of the teachers to handle the physically challenged pupils in public primary schools. To achieve this objective, the respondents were asked to respond to a number of items in the questionnaire. These included whether they had knowledge in inclusive education, ability to manipulate classroom environment, making of individual lesson plan, use of different teaching methodologies and whether physically challenged pupils benefit in an inclusive set up. Data related to the objective was analysed and presented as shown. A five point Likert scale which had responses as follows; SA = Strongly Agreed, A = Agreed U = Undecided, D = Disagreed and SD = Strongly Disagreed was collapsed into three points to capture the response of the questionnaire to read as follows: A = Agreed, U = Undecided, D = Disagreed.

Knowledge on Inclusive Education

Teachers' responses on whether they had knowledge on inclusive education were sought. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Teacher' knowledge on the meaning Inclusive Education (n =42)

Response	Number of Teachers	Percentage
Agree	38	90.4
Undecided	02	4.8
Disagree	02	4.8
TOTAL	42	100

Source: Author (2016)

The results in Table 2 indicate that a majority, 38 (90.4%) of the respondents agreed that they had knowledge on the meaning of inclusive education, only 2 (4.8%) were undecided and also only 2 (4.8 %) disagreed. The results implied that majority of the teachers had knowledge on inclusive education. These results concurred with a study done by Njoka et al. (2012) which showed that many teachers had knowledge of the meaning of inclusive and equitable education. This means that inclusive education is not something new to the teachers in public primary schools. The findings however contradicts with the study of Peter and Nderitu (2014) which indicated that majority of the teachers did not have the knowledge in inclusive education.

Manipulation of Classroom Environment

The researcher sought to ascertain the competence of the teacher in manipulation of the classroom environment in terms of arrangement to enable the physically challenged pupils benefit through cooperative learning and group discussion. The summary of the teachers responses are revealed in Fig. 1.

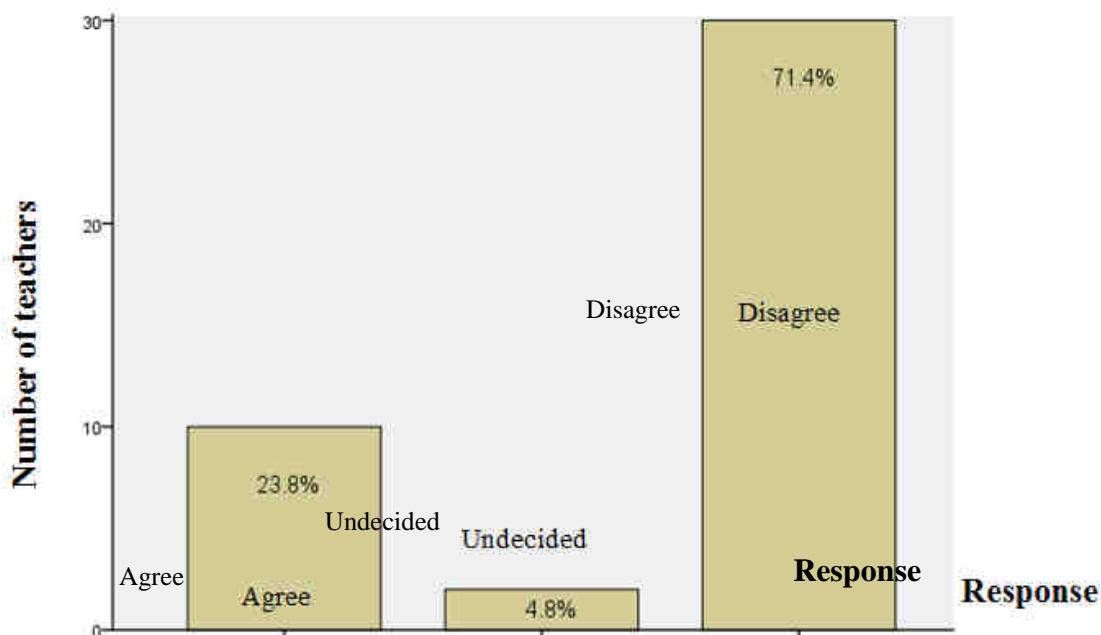


Fig. 1: Manipulation of Classroom Environment (n =42)

The data in Fig 1 revealed that some of the respondents 10 (23.8 %) agreed that they are able to manipulate the classroom environment, a few 2 (4.8%) were undecided, and majority 30 (71.4%) disagreed. It is therefore clear that the mobility of the physically challenged pupils in the classroom had been compromised making the classrooms unfriendly to these learners as they are not able to move freely in class. This prevents the social interaction of physically challenged learners with their peers making them not to learn how to develop problem solving skills hence not develop knowledge, skills and attitudes as was indicated in Lev Vygotsky constructivism theory. Raditloaneng (2011) observed that struggles in classroom can cause children to doubt their abilities and strengths making them loose their self-confidence.

The unfriendly classroom environment may have led to the low enrollment of the physically challenged learners. If the teacher makes the classroom friendly to all pupils, they will relate well with one another through cooperative and group learning. The findings in Fig. 1 revealed that, a small percentage of teachers, 10 (23.8 %) agreed they are able to manipulate the classroom environment for the physically challenged pupils. These may be the teachers who had gone through SNE training. The training enables the teachers to sharpen their skills so as to manipulate the classroom environment. This makes the physically challenged pupils interact freely with their peers thereby benefiting from cooperative and group learning. Hence the results are significant. This happening is not by chance.

Making Individual Lesson Plans

Teachers were asked to indicate whether they can make individual lesson plans for the physically challenged pupils. Their responses are indicated in Table 3.

Table 3

Making of Individual Lesson Plans (n = 42)

Response	Number of Teachers	Percentage
Agree	04	9.5
Undecided	01	2.4
Disagree	37	88.1
Total	42	100.0

Source: Author (2016)

Results in Table 3, indicate that out of 42 teachers who responded to questionnaires, majority, 37 (88.1%) of the teachers disagreed, they indicated that they do not make individual lesson plans, only one (2.4%) was undecided, a few, 4 (9.5%) agreed that they make individual lesson plan for the physically challenged pupils. The findings revealed that the level of competence of individual teacher was compromised. This was indicated by the inability of the teachers to make individual lesson plans which had impacted negatively on the physically challenged pupils since the pupils need special attention unlike the regular pupils. Teachers used uniform format for all pupils in class to the disadvantage of the disabled. These findings concurred with Ramos (2009) which stated that, making of individual lesson plans is a challenge that the teachers face in an inclusive setting. There is therefore a need to in-service or give a seminar to the teachers on the need to make individual

lesson plans for the physically challenged pupils.

Use of Different Teaching Methods

Teachers' responses on whether they use different teaching methods to cater for the physically challenged pupils have been summarized in Fig 2.

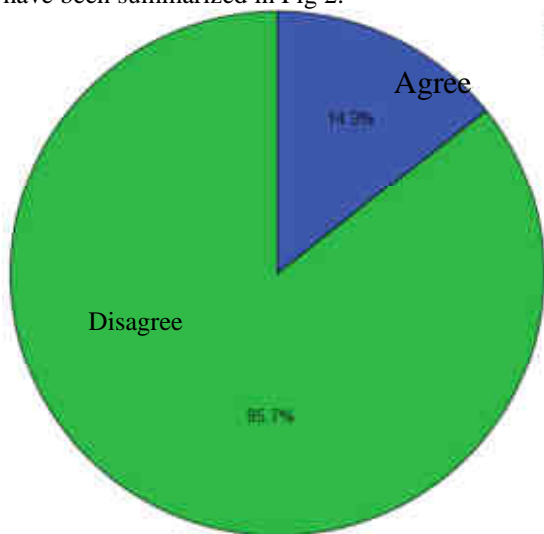


Fig. 2 Teachers responses on the use of Different Teaching Methods (n = 42)

The Fig 2 revealed that, a few of the respondents, 6 (14.3 %) respondents agreed that they use different teaching methodologies, a majority and 36 (85.7%) disagreed and none was undecided. This also contends with a study of Ogadho and Ajowi (2013) who mentioned that teachers use inappropriate teaching methodologies. According to Squires and McKeown (2003) observation, teachers ought to appreciate the diversity of the learners and take responsibilities to use inclusive teaching methodologies. This will make the classrooms friendly to all pupils.

Halinen (2007) stressed that the quality of teaching and teachers' competencies when handling the physically challenged pupils are the most important prerequisites skills for inclusive arrangements. Deku et al. (2013) depict that teachers teaching methodologies and how they handle learners can affect personality development, emotional climate and therefore affecting the self-concept. Teachers therefore need in-service training on SNE so as to be able to use different teaching methodologies to cater for the learning needs for the physically challenged pupils. The pre-service teachers also need SNE training so as to be equipped with the required skills to handle physically challenged pupils.

Physically Challenged Pupils benefit in an Inclusive Setting

The responses of the teachers on whether the physically challenged pupils benefit in an inclusive setting are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Physically Challenged Pupils benefit in Inclusive Education (n = 42)

Responses	Number of Teachers	Percentage
Agree	31	73.8
Undecided	03	7.1
Disagree	08	19.1
Total	42	100.0

Source: Author (2016)

The results in Table 4 shows that, majority, 31 (73.8%) of the teachers agreed that physically challenged pupils benefit from inclusive setting, a few, 3 (7.1%) were undecided and also those who disagreed were few, 8 (19.1%). From these findings, a majority of the teachers (73.8%) are of the opinion that physically challenged pupils benefit in an inclusive setting since they perform better in their academic work. During the process of administering the questionnaire, 3 (7.1%) pointed out that the physically challenged pupils' self-esteem normally improves by the way they relate with others and how they participate in class. These findings concur with what the Vygotsky said in Bodrova & Leong (2012) that teachers and more competent peers in an inclusive setting play important role in encouraging learners to develop problem solving skills when learning new skills, attitudes and knowledge in a classroom situation. The results also confirms what Ngugi (2007) pointed out that pupils with special needs in regular classes do better academically than those in non-inclusive setting since they are challenged by their peers. According to Ngugi, learners' self-esteem is also improved because of reduced fear of human difference, increased comfort and increase in self-awareness.

Summary of the findings

Even though majority of the teachers had knowledge on inclusive education, they were challenged in their competence to handle the physically challenged pupils with the required skills. This is because it was noted that a higher percentage were unable to manipulate classroom environment, make individual lesson plan and use different teaching methodologies so as to cater for the physically challenged pupils. The background information revealed that there are a few teachers who have undergone training in SNE. This further confirms that they lacked the required skills to handle the physically challenged pupils. The findings also showed that the majority of the teachers could not provide individualized attention to the physically challenged pupils. This therefore limited most of the public primary schools from being inclusive to the physically challenged pupils since their learning needs were not well met by the teachers. The findings showed that most teachers agreed that physically challenged pupils benefit in an inclusive setting.

Conclusion

The teachers teaching in public primary schools have acquired training to teach in primary schools but are not competent to handle the physically challenged pupils. This is because they have not undergone any training in SNE to acquire the required skills to handle the physically challenged pupils. The study revealed that, enrollment of the physically challenged pupils in public primary schools was still very low. The study revealed that teachers teaching in regular schools showed that there is need for in-service and pre-service training of the teachers with the required skills to handle the physically challenged pupils. This will also enable them to have good classroom management practices.

Recommendations

1. The government should provide pre-service and in-service training to all the teachers teaching in public primary schools on SNE. This will make teachers more competent with the required skills to handle the physically challenged pupils.
2. The government should recommit herself to UPE and EFA by complying with the world declarations on SNE and revisiting the constitution of Kenya 2010.
3. There is need for teachers to bring into awareness to the regular pupils in public primary schools on the dangers of stigmatizing physically challenged pupils through subject like Christian Religious Studies. This will then then improve the self-esteem of the physically challenged learners
4. Guidance and Counselling of both the regular and physically challenged learners is also necessary so as to reduce stigmatization of the physically challenged pupils and improve self-awareness of both groups. Stigmatization of the physically challenged pupils can make them have low self-esteem.
5. There is need to sensitize parents with physically challenged pupils on the importance of sending them to primary schools to foster independent living in future.
6. The study recommends an integrated system so that learners can benefit from interacting with regular peers.
7. There is need for the MOE to encourage teachers to emphasize the importance of IE to the parents so as to encourage more special need learners enrolling in regular schools.
8. Teachers in regular public schools need to be encouraged to make their classrooms learner friendly by ensuring that all learners develop positive self-concept.
9. Teachers in regular public primary schools needs to be made aware of the rights of learners with special needs which are presented in world declarations, Kenya Constitution and NCPD.
10. Teachers in regular public primary schools need to be sensitized on the importance of having positive attitude to learners with special needs which helps to mentor regular learners towards special needs children.

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