

# Support Strategies Teachers' Use to Assist Learners with Learning Disabilities in Public Primary Schools in Trans-Nzoia County

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## Abstract

*Teacher support is critical to learners' participation in primary schooling. However, reports show that there are high incidences of learners dropping out of various public primary schools in Trans-Nzoia. Learners with learning disability need teachers support to aid their learning process. This paper looks at the support strategies that primary school teachers used to assist learners with learning disabilities in public primary schools in Trans-Nzoia County. The study was guided by social constructivism theory by Lev Vygotsky. The target population for this study consisted of all public primary school teachers in Trans-Nzoia County. A sample size of 351 teachers was selected to participate in the study through stratified random sampling technique. Data collection for this study was done using interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaires. Analysis of data showed that most (64.7%) of teachers always supported learners with learning disabilities in their schools. Teachers (64.4%) remediated learning problems of learners with LD through structuring learning environment to suit their needs hence promoting effective inclusion in schools. Findings also showed that only 58.6% of teachers reported that they always used several support strategies to educate and support learners with LD in inclusive education. The study suggests that teachers should support learners with learning disabilities to identify their strengths and build on them, and improve on their weaknesses. Teachers should help these learners procure assistive devices and other instructional materials required for learning in schools.*

**Key Words:** Teacher, Support, Learning Disability

## Introduction

Teaching involves sharing of knowledge between a teacher and a learner (Osero & Abobo, 2015). Therefore, teachers are required to coordinate the teaching and learning process for quality basic education implementation in classroom (UNESCO, 2009). This implies that for proper coordination of learning process, teacher has to have the right skills and mastery of the content for the correct level of learners with diverse needs in inclusive setting (Osero & Abobo, 2015). Strobel, Arthanat, Bauer and Flagg (2007) found out that there are approximately 95% of learners with diverse needs in general education classrooms. Out of these, 46% learners with Learning Disabilities (LD) were identified (Lerner & Johns, 2012). This study looks at the support strategies that primary school teachers use to assist learners with learning disabilities in public primary schools in Trans-Nzoia County, Kenya.

Learners with LD need to be provided with the right support and intervention they can succeed in school and have a successful and distinguished career in future (Lerner & Johns, 2012; Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). This is possible with the provision of a range of special support services to these learners in school (South Africa Department of Education, 2005). These services may include; the support to develop new skills, understand complex information and interact with other people. In addition, these learners may require adequate support services such as; appropriate teaching and learning materials, and adaptive devices and software to help them reach their full potential.

Cortiella (2011) argued that the support to LD learners needs to be provided by trained teachers certified in special education, specifically learning disabilities. However, the U.S. Department of Education (2006) has indicated that 11% of special educators are not highly qualified to teach learners with special educational needs, including those with LD making it impossible to support learners in classroom. Similarly, Engelbretch (2006) stated that in South Africa most classroom teachers found it difficult to support learners with learning disabilities because their in-service training did not train them on how to teach and support these learners. Vaugh, Bos and Schumm (2011) alleged that understanding the limits of personal expertise is vital, and knowing when and how to solicit advice from colleagues with specialized training is important to inclusive education by teachers in classroom. This is possible if primary school teachers understood the individual strengths and learning needs of all learners; and used the curriculum and teaching methods that are broad and flexible to accommodate the needs, abilities and interests of all learners (NCSE, 2014). Moreover, Vaugh, Bos and Schumm (2011) discussed the importance of understanding the limits of personal expertise, and knowing when and how to solicit advice from colleagues with specialized training in inclusive education. This is however possible if; primary school

teachers understand the individual strengths and learning needs of their learners, use the curriculum and teaching methods that are broad, and be flexible to accommodate the needs, abilities and interests of all their learners (NCSE, 2014). Nevertheless, teachers in inclusive education are required to have knowledgeable skills or competencies on special educational needs to be able to identify learners with a learning disability (Gandhimathi et al., 2010). The above information points to the importance of teachers possessing right competencies to help include learners with learning disabilities in primary education. This paper focuses on the support strategies that primary school teachers provide to assist pupils with learning disability in public primary schools in Trans-Nzoia County, Kenya.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Government of Kenya has also recognized education as a fundamental right that should be availed to all learners. Despite the commitment the government has put in place, there are numerous challenges that need to be addressed in regard to the implementation of inclusive education in Kenya (MOE, 2012). One of the challenges is that there is high number of children with different kind of disabilities not accessing primary education. Researchers have shown that learning disability presents the largest number of learners in public primary schools compared to other categories of special needs education (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). In many schools teachers are offering little or no assistance at all to these learners (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). Additionally, reports from the Trans-Nzoia County Education (2014); and research findings from Musavini and Mulee (2015) showed that there are high incidences of learners dropping out of various public primary schools in Trans-Nzoia County. However, there are research findings from different parts of Kenya showing that teachers are faced with a myriad of challenges towards provision of inclusive education (Gateru, 2010; Wafula, Poipoi, Wanyama & Begi, 2012; Mwangi, 2013). Nevertheless, there is a knowledge gap in support strategies that teachers use to assist learners with learning disabilities in public primary schools in Trans-Nzoia County.

### **Review of Literature**

According to Weeks and Erradu (2013), learners come to school with a wide range of strengths and weaknesses that are likely to impact on their potential to learn. Therefore, it is necessary for schools to provide a wide range of strategies to help meet individual needs of these learners. Apart from the school, classroom teachers are also required to take responsibility for learning needs of all learners, including those with learning disabilities (Murray & Zoe, 2011). This can be done if schools and teachers: (i) foster schools and classrooms where all learners have a sense of personal belonging and achievement; (ii) engage in practices that allow learners with a wide range of learning needs to be taught together effectively; and (iii) enhance learner's abilities to deal with diversity (MEAL, 2017). However, as discussed in chapter 1.2 and 2.3 of this study; researchers across the globe have indicated that most teachers feel inadequately prepared to include learners with special needs in their classrooms. Although learning disabilities cannot be cured (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014; NASSET, 2007; Taylor, 2009), researchers have identified instructional strategies that can be used by teachers for learners with learning disabilities in inclusive education (Skrtic, Harris & Shriner, 2005; National Centre for Learning Disabilities [NCLD] (2006); Lerner & Johns, 2014; Hallahan et al., 2005). Some of these strategies include: Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Differentiated Instruction (DI), Co-teaching and Peer Coaching.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a model for designing all aspects of the learning environment, materials, and devices to address the wide-ranging variation of learners' in an inclusive educational system (Dalton, McKenzie & Kahonde, 2012; MEAL, 2015). It's also a framework and guideline that provides change to the way teachers teach, learners learn, and the way barriers to education for all learners can be overcome (Centre for Applied Special Technology [CAST], 2011; Blanton, Pugach & Florian 2011). It is a framework that is highly relevant for learners with learning disabilities (Rose & Meyer, 2002) and therefore teachers of learners with LD are required to understand and implement it in their classrooms (Dalton et al., 2012). However, before implementing it teachers are required to plan for curriculum design, integrate support strategies and tools for teaching and learning for these learners' (Dalton, 2005). This will then enable them prepare a class profile that will assist in identifying learners with LD in their classrooms (MEAL, 2015). A class profile is the information gathered about the learners' learning styles, multiple intelligences, interests, strengths, and needs (Tomlinson & Cindy, 2003). This information therefore helps teachers to eliminate learning barriers, and build flexibility that makes the classroom instruction usable to individual learners (Rose & Meyer, 2002).

Another critical support strategy used for learners with LD is that of co-teaching (Stuart, Connor, Cady & Zweifel, 2006; Parker, 2010; Johnson, 2012). This strategy can sometimes be used interchangeably with collaboration (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain & Shamberger, 2010). Although co-teaching should be highly collaborative, the latter term refers to how professionals and others interact in meetings, teams and parent conferences. This therefore narrows the meaning of collaboration to apply to just the classroom settings other

than the school as a whole (Kochhar-Bryant, 2008). Co-teaching is a model for collaboration, cooperative learning, and a form of inclusion that impacts student achievement (Johnson, 2012). Essentially, it's a model of instruction used in school systems to meet the requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). Co-teaching is defined by Cook and Friend (1995) in Murawski and Swanson (2001) as two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse or blended group of students in a single physical space. This therefore implies that co-teaching occurs when two or more teachers deliver instruction to a diverse group of learners in a general education classroom (Lerner & Johns, 2009). Hence, co-teaching intends to make it possible for learners with disabilities, including those with LD to access the general curriculum while at the same time benefiting from specialised instructional strategies necessary to nurture their learning (Friend, 2008). Although this method is mutually satisfying, teachers must be willing to share and accept responsibility (Lerner & Johns, 2014). Probably this is the reason to why Lerner and Johns (2009) identified the following activities that teachers can use to promote co-teaching for learners with LD: (i) making time for co-teaching activities (teachers to make time to work without interruptions), (ii) recognising that the skills in co-teaching are learned through developmental process (co-teachers to go through developmental stages as they learn to understand each other and to work together), (iii) use coaching strategies (teachers to take on the role of a coach by giving instruction or demonstrating a specific skill), (iv) encourage open communication (teachers to communicate face-to-face with learners to avoid dissatisfaction and misunderstandings; teachers to give and ask for continuous feedback).

Since collaboration can be used interchangeably with co-teaching it is defined as, "the interactions between professionals who offer different areas of expertise yet share responsibilities and goals" (Murawski & Hughes, 2009:269). Thus, cooperative teaching is the process by which a general educator and a special educator teach together in an inclusive classroom (Stuart et al., 2006; Austin, 2001; Lerner & Johns, 2012). Meaning it's a process that requires teachers to consult and collaborate together to plan and be both responsible for the instructional process in the inclusive classroom (Stuart et al., 2006). Furthermore, cooperative teaching is considered to be essential for effective inclusive education (Friend & Hurley-Chamberlain, 2011; Blanton et al, 2011; Lerner & Johns, 2009). This is because it minimizes the problems with pull-out programs such as learners missing academic instruction, insufficient communication and coordination among professionals, and fragmentation of the curriculum (Friend & Hurley-Chamberlain, 2011; Friend & Cook, 2003). In addition, research has indicated that collaborative teaching enables general educators to coordinate their work to support learners with LD in diverse classrooms, (Johnson, 2012; Austin, 2001; Villa et al., 2004). This is because the model is focused on providing services to learners with special needs in the least restrictive environment (Parker, 2010), and has therefore required the general education teachers to prepare and participate collaboratively in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for learners with LD (Friend & Bursuck, 2006).

The IEP is a written statement for each child with a learning disability that creates an opportunity for teachers, parents, school administrators and students to work together to improve educational results for learners with learning disabilities (Lerner & Johns, 2009). Therefore, the IEP is the cornerstone of a quality education for each child with a learning disability. According to Friend and Cook (2003), successful collaboration requires elements such as: mutual goals, voluntary participation, equality among participants shared responsibility for participation and decision making, shared responsibility for outcomes, and shared resources. However, teachers might encounter several problems that may limit the effectiveness of cooperative teaching (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). These problems may include: teachers lack of time to plan and implement programs, lack of administrative support, resistance from colleagues, concerns about grading, increased workloads, and increased responsibilities (Johnson, 2012; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin & Williams, 2000). Furthermore, Deshler, Schumaker, Lenz, Bulgren, Knight and Ehren (2001) argued that scheduling students with disabilities in general education classrooms and assigning two teachers does not accomplish the purpose of both co-teaching and cooperative teaching. They warned against equating placement with success (Deshler et al., 2001).

Peer tutoring is an instructional method that facilitates access to the general education curriculum for learners with learning disabilities (Lerner & Johns, 2014). According to Rohrbeck, Ginsburg-Block, Fantuzzo & Miller (2003), peer tutoring are systematic, peer-mediated teaching strategies. In support of these views, Hott, Walker and Sahni (2012) stated that peer tutoring is a flexible, peer-mediated strategy that involves the learners serving as academic tutors and tutees. The peer tutor therefore helps the tutee to learn, practice, or review an academic skill that the classroom teacher has planned (Lerner & Johns, 2009). Since these learners work in pairs, it supports one-to-one teaching in the general education classroom. Thus, both the tutor and the tutee benefit from the peer-tutoring experience. Lerner and Johns (2014) argued that the tutee could gain in academic achievement by being able to learn more effectively from a classmate whose thinking processes are closer to him or her as a

tutee than that of a teacher. They further argued that there are also academic benefits to the tutor; as he or she learns something in the process of teaching the tutee. They went on to say that, this experience would also offer the tutor a sense of accomplishment. Nevertheless, the tutor serves as a model of appropriate academic and non-academic behavior and the relationship between the two peers will provide opportunities for establishing additional social relationships in the classroom (Harper & Maheady, 2007). There are several types of peer tutoring (Access Centre, 2017, Hott et al., 2012; Lerner & Johns, 2009; Greenwood, Maheedy & Delquardi, 2002). These include: (i) Same-age Peer Tutoring (in which one learner in the classroom tutors a classmate); (ii) Cross-age Peer Tutoring (in which the tutor is several years older than the tutee); (iii) Class-Wide Peer Tutoring [CWPT] (in which the organization involve the entire class as tutor-tutee pairs work together on a class-wide basis); (iv) Peer Assisted Learning Strategies [PALS] (in which one learner is paired with another learner of the same skill level, without a large discrepancy between abilities); and (v) Reciprocal Peer Tutoring [RPT] (in which higher performing learner is paired with low performing learner to alternate between acting as the tutor and tutee during each session, with equitable time in each role).

Teachers of learners with LD can also use Response to Intervention (RTI) support strategy to assist these learners receive responsive and high-quality instruction as required by their needs (Taskforce on Students with Learning Disabilities, 2013). RTI is based on the principle of prevention and early intervention that uses ongoing assessment to inform teaching and allocate instructional resources to teachers to be able to provide appropriate, evidence-based interventions (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2011). Furthermore, teachers can also analyse their classroom environment in relation to their learners' academic and social needs and make necessary adaptations to enable these learners succeed in the classroom (UNESCO, 2004; Friend & Bursuck, 2006; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2011). However, Weeks and Erradu, (2013) argued that inclusiveness of the curriculum and support of the teaching and learning process of learners with LD is possible if teachers know and understand these learners needs in inclusive education. There are research studies on support strategies used by teachers for learners with learning disabilities. One such study is by Gateru (2010) which found out that teachers have different interventions and teaching strategies in ensuring the success of inclusive education for learners with LD. The support strategies included; use of corrective approaches, direct instructions, systematic phonics, and using connectivity with pupils individual learning needs. In another study conducted by Ford (2013), pointed out that there are several support strategies that teachers can use to educate learners with LD in inclusive classrooms. These included: co-teaching, differentiated instruction, peer-mediated instruction and interventions.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework used in this study is that of social constructivism views of Lev Vygotsky (1896 – 1934). He is commonly associated with general and developmental psychology, educational psychology, special education, and the psychology of art (Rodina, 2007). The researcher chose to work with Vygotsky's idea of social constructivism because of his focus on the education of learners with special needs in inclusive education, specifically learners with learning disabilities. The researcher believed that Vygotsky's views on social and cultural contexts will help ease the difficulties faced by learners with learning disabilities and their teachers in inclusive education. This is in line with other researchers who viewed the social constructivist learning theory by Vygotsky as central to instructional engagement, classroom change and redevelopment for learners with disabilities (Shambaugh & Magliaro, 2001; Flem, Moen & Gudmundsdottir, 2004). Social constructivist theory viewed learning as a dual-agentic, between the learner and the teacher, and also learner/teacher within the social cultural context (Silcock, 2003; Amanda, 2014). Lani and Florian (2004) alleged that social constructivism theory is related to active learners participating in the process of learning, making sense of their own experiences and gaining intrinsic satisfaction from learning and solving problems (Davis & Florian, 2004). Thus, Constructivist learning is seen to be a transformative experience which opens up opportunities for further learning as children gain greater depth of understanding and increasingly flexible ways of representing their knowledge and dealing with new information (Davis & Florian, 2004; Woolfolk, 2009).

Vygotsky developed several concepts that arose from the social constructivist theory that are important to classroom teaching (Blake & Pope, 2008). These include: Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), Defectology and Scaffolding (Bruster, 2014; Subban, 2006; Rodina, 2007; Lamport et al., 2012). Out of these, Vygotsky's central topic was that of the ZPD which is believed to use social interaction with others who are more knowledgeable to move development forward (Wilhelm et al., 2001; Lamport et al., 2012). Thus, in ZPD a more capable person such as a teacher or peer provides assistance to the learner to complete a task (Bruster, 2014). In this case, a learner is given a range of tasks to perform with the help and guidance of teachers (Hurst, 2016). Vygotsky viewed this zone of proximal development as the area where the most sensitive instruction or guidance should occur to allow the learner with learning disability to



develop skills to use on his or her own and develop higher mental functions (McLeod, 2014; Hurst, 2016). Thus, the teachers' role becomes one of the purposeful instructions, a mediator of activities and substantial experiences allowing the learner with LD to attain his or her zone of proximal development (Suban, 2006).

### Materials and Methods

This study was based on pragmatist research paradigm. Pragmatism is defined as a philosophy that allows the researcher to study what is of interest and of value in ways he/she deems appropriate and to use the results in ways that can bring about positive consequences within the values system (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009). The researcher used concurrent triangulation design to collect information about participants' knowledge, opinions and perceptions about learners with LD in inclusive setting. In this design, no phase between quantitative and qualitative is prioritised over the other as priority can be given to either phase (Creswell, 2009). This study was carried out in Trans Nzoia County. It is a county located in the North Rift region of Kenya and borders Uganda to the North West, West Pokot County to the North, Elgeyo-Marakwet County to the East, Uasin Gishu and Kakamega Counties to the South and Bungoma County to the West and South West. The target population for the study consisted of 4107 teachers who were chosen because they are the key implementers of inclusion policy in classrooms. Stratified random sampling method was used to select 351 teachers. In this case, the researcher sampled the teachers into five stratas based on the sub county they came from. The second step involved the researcher to take a random sample within each stratum. Questionnaires, interview schedules and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were used to collect data for this study. Analysis of data was done using qualitative and quantitative methods.

### Results and Discussions

The researcher requested teachers to indicate their age category and teaching experience. The results are given in Table 1.

**Table 1 Demographic Data of Respondents**

Variable	Details	Frequency	Percent
Teachers' age	20-35 yrs	79	25.6
	36-45 yrs	117	37.9
	46-60 yrs	107	34.6
	60 yrs and above	6	1.9
	Total	309	100.0
Teaching experience	0-5yrs	28	9.1
	6-11 yrs	92	29.8
	12-17 yrs	63	20.4
	18 yrs and above	126	40.8
	Total	309	100.0

Results on teachers age reveal that 117 (37.9%) of teachers were aged 36-45 years and 107 (34.6%) were aged between 46-60 years. Combined results for teachers aged 36-45 years and 46-60 years therefore shows that most teachers (72.5%) have encountered learners with learning disabilities in their teaching profession. This finding relate with Gateru (2010) who established that most teachers in schools were aged between 36-50 years. In addition, Gandhimathi et al. (2010) who established that majority of respondents (50.7%) fell under the age group of 31-40 years. When asked to indicate their work experience in primary school teaching, 28 (9.1%) had taught for less than 5 years, 92 (29.8%) had taught for 6-11 years, 63 (20.4%) had taught for 12-17 years while 126 (40.8%) had taught for over 18 years. This indicates that more than 61.2% of teacher who participated in the research had been teaching in primary schools for more than 12 years and therefore they had good experience to have encountered learners with learning disabilities in their schools or classrooms. This is important because less experienced teachers might not be exposed enough to matters on inclusive education (Naikoloyieu, 2014). Also, a duration a teacher has in teaching profession determines the level of exposure gained in implementing the inclusive education (Cambridge-Johnson, Hunter-Johnson & Newton, 2014). This is similar to Leyser and Tappendorf (2001) report that teachers with experience in teaching students, particularly those with special needs, intensify their confidence to teach them.

### Support Strategies Teachers' Use to Assist Learners with LD in Public Primary Schools

The objective was to establish the support strategies that teachers used to assist learners with learning disabilities in public primary schools in Trans-Nzoia County. The study obtained information from teachers. The teachers were asked to provide their responses on support strategies they used to aid learners with LD in their classes. The responses were measured using Teacher Support for Learners with LD Scale (TSLLDs) which had the following variables; strategies to educate learners with LD, structuring of learning environment to suit LD learners' needs,

and collaborating with colleagues to support learners with LD. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 2

**Table 2 Support Strategies Teachers' Use to Assist LD Learners (n=309)**

Support areas	A		O		S		R		N		M	SD
	f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
I can use several support strategies to educate learners with LD in inclusive education	181	58.6	98	31.7	24	7.8	5	1.6	1	0.3	4.4660	.73611
In order to remediate learning problems of learners with LD, I structure the learning environment to suit their needs	199	64.4	79	25.6	22	7.1	8	2.6	1	0.3	4.5113	.76704
I collaborate with my colleagues to support learners with LD	200	64.7	80	25.9	26	8.4	3	1.0	0	0.0	4.5437	.69005
<b>Average</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>62.6</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>27.7</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>4.5070</b>	<b>0.73107</b>

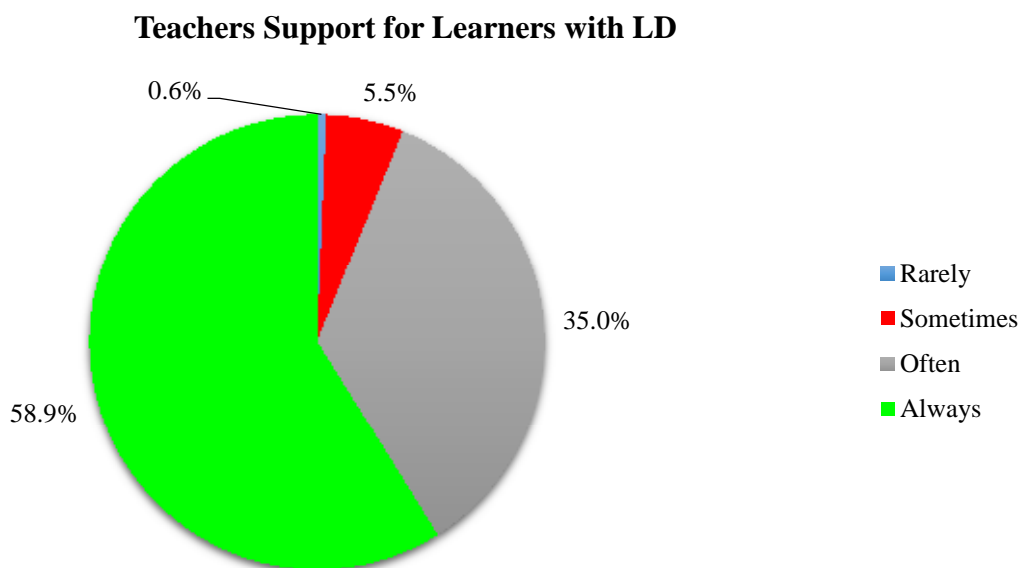
Key: A-Always, O-Often, S-Sometimes, R-Rarely, N-Never, M-Mean and SD-Standard Deviation

Results on teachers support strategies for learners with LD in Table 2 indicate that most 181 (58.6%) indicated that they always used several support strategies to educate learners with LD in inclusive education setting. This statement was reinforced by mean statistics that showed that most teachers always ( $M=4.46$  and  $SD=0.73$ ) applied various support strategies required by learners with learning disabilities. What is not clear is the effect of teacher awareness on support strategies for learners with learning disabilities and their inclusion in mainstream education setting. In Nigeria, Adebowale and Moye (2013) found out that teachers walked around the class when teaching to locate any pupil with difficulty early enough. Similarly, in Bahamas, Cambridge-Johnson, Hunter-Johnson and Newton (2014) found out that most of the teachers collectively agreed that they were receptive to teaching students with various disabilities in inclusive setting. In addition, Kafonogo and Bali (2013) research found out that 40% of teachers had adequate knowledge how to adapt teaching to the differing learning styles', 30% had moderate knowledge, 7% was undecided, 20% had limited and only 1% had no knowledge.

It was also clear that 199 (64.4%) of teachers always remediated learning problems of learners with LD by structuring the learning environment to suit their needs. This statement was highly supported by majority of teachers in the county ( $M=4.51$  and  $SD=0.76$ ). This shows that teachers always made learning environment to be conducive and supportive for learners with learning disabilities. This finding is exemplified by Weeks and Erradu (2013) who found out that in instances where learners could not be able to write down their responses; teachers accepted them to use oral and pictorial responses, as well as signs and charts to communicate their answers. In Nigeria, Adebowale and Moye (2013) established that teachers placed learners with poor eye sight in vantage position to enable them see the chalk board/magic board and located learners with mild hearing impairments close to the teacher's seat (in front of the class). Even in Kenya, Gateru (2010) found out that teachers accommodated individual differences among the learners through identification of a preferred style of teaching by providing instruction and direction in the preferred style or teaching in a multi-sensory fashion that stimulated both auditory and visual perception.

Research findings also showed that 200 (64.7%) of teachers agreed that they always collaborated with their colleagues to support learners with LD. The finding suggest that most teachers always ( $M=4.51$  and  $SD=0.69$ ) worked with their colleagues to support learners with learning disabilities in their schools. This is because, learners with learning disabilities in upper primary are taught by different subject teachers and it is essential that all teachers are aware of the pupils so that they can implement necessary strategies to assist in their learning. The result shows that most teachers provide support required to assist learners with learning disabilities in public primary schools in Trans-Nzoia County. Results are in agreement with the study conducted by Dukmak (2013) who found that teachers showed supportive attitudes towards inclusion. Similarly, majority of respondents (80%) in Ali, Mustapha and Jelas (2006) study in Malaysia agreed that the collaboration between the special education teachers and regular teachers was vital in the implementation of the inclusive program. The findings are in contrast with Robuck (2009) who found out that involvement of psychologist or any other educational support service practitioner (teachers in this case) was not found to be popular among the teachers who participated in

the study. Otherwise, Robuck suggested that teachers could successfully reduce or eliminate a child's difficult behavior with a simple change in the way they present information, provide assistance, or alter the way the child can demonstrate performance of academic tasks. Moreover, the researcher in Figure 1 shows the summarised result for teachers support for learner with learning disabilities.



**Figure 1 Teachers Support for Learners with LD (TSLLD)**

Result from Figure 1 show that most 182 (58.9%) of teachers always supported learners with learning disabilities, 108 (35.0%) often supported, 17 (5.5%) sometimes supported and 2 (0.6%) rarely supported learners with LD in their class. The findings therefore show that teachers always supported learners with learning disabilities in Tran-Nzoia Sub County. The study findings coincides with Weeks and Erradu (2013) who found out that teachers in South African schools provided high levels of support to foundation-phase learners who experienced severe intellectual barriers to learning. In addition, El-Gamelen and El-Zeftawy (2015) research in Egypt found out that majority of the teachers in rural and urban areas allowed active participation of the child, creating cooperative atmosphere, speaking slowly, clearly, and naturally, pre-planning lessons, and identifying strength and weak points of learners. Even in Kenya, Gateru (2010) established that the teachers had internalised inclusive education as they are able to accommodate the pupils with LD. These are teaching strategies that can be used when teaching students with learning disabilities.

**Teachers Support for Learners with LD and Inclusion in Primary School**

The research question (What are the support strategies that teachers use to assist learners with learning disabilities in public primary schools in Trans-Nzoia County?) sought to establish the support strategies teachers' use to assist learners with LD in public primary schools in Trans-Nzoia County. The researcher correlated combined scores for the two variables and results are given in Table 3.

**Table 3 Teachers Support for Learners with LD and Inclusion in Primary School**

		TSLLD	INC
TSLLD	Pearson Correlation	1	.462**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.004
	N	309	309
INC	Pearson Correlation	.462**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	
	N	309	309

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Key: TSLLD-Teacher Support of Learners with Learning Disabilities and INC-Inclusion

Table 3 shows that there exist significant positive relationship ( $r=0.462$  and  $p=0.04$ ) between teacher support for learners with LD and inclusion in public primary schools in Trans-Nzoia County. However, the relationship appears to be weak positive (less than  $r<0.5$ ) which implies that teachers support for learners with LD has not increased inclusion of these learners in their schools. The findings coincides with Saravanabhavan and Saravanabhavan (2010) research in India which found out that teachers were unable to develop appropriate teaching strategies since they lacked preparation in various instructional models and differentiated instruction. This therefore suggests that teachers need to improve their support for learners with LD so that inclusion can be high (effective). Therefore, the study has found out that teachers were providing various support services to learners in their classrooms as part of assisting them to learn without any challenges. However, the correlation results between supports that teachers provided on inclusion of learners with LD in public primary schools in Trans-Nzoia County was on average. This implies that teachers need to be at the forefront in implementing inclusion policy in classrooms.

### **How Teachers Assist Learners with Learning Disabilities in Classroom**

The teachers were also asked to indicate ways through which they supported learners with learning disabilities in their classroom in the interview. Teacher No. 1 said the following:

Those with LD are made to sit on classroom front desks.

Another Teacher No. 3 indicated that to assist learners with LD they:

Give them less challenging activities, having more time (extra) with these children to help them improve

The above responses by teachers' shows that teachers who have identified learners with LD allow them to sit at the front while others provide them with easier tasks to help them improve and understand concepts gradually.

It is important for all stakeholders within the school to be informed on the need to integrate all learners irrespective of their disability status in the classroom. In the interview, the respondents were asked what they had done to sensitise other teachers on learning disabilities in their schools. Teacher No. 8 who said that:

I have encouraged the teachers to embrace the individual education programme where they single out and help the individual learner.

In addition, Teacher No. 10 remarked that:

Holding seminars and INSETs regularly

The findings by teachers agree with head teachers that adequate awareness and sensitisation is done to all stakeholders on the need to support learners with LD in their schools. The results are supported by Gateru (2010) who found out that teachers got inducted by the head teacher who had the knowledge on special needs education. Some schools supported teachers through invitation of visitors who gave insights on how to handle learners with LD in schools.

Through focus group discussion, the researcher also sought to know how teachers understood the prevalence of learners with LD in their classrooms. According to their responses, majority agreed that the prevalence (proportion) of learners with LD in their classes was high. This is in agreement with Cortiella and Horowitz (2014) who estimated that there were 2.4 million children with learning disabilities in American public schools. Similarly, Australian People with Learning Disabilities (2015) estimated that there were at least 20 percent Australian children who were struggling with learning disabilities. After the participants in FGDs reported that there was high proportion of learners with LD in their classes, the researcher enquired from them how they provided support to assist these learners to learn. The teachers said that in schools which had fewer number of teachers, they used peer teaching approach to enable the learners with LD learn in groups and discuss together with peers. Other teachers said that they sometimes used follow up activities of what they had taught while others mentioned that they used various method of teaching to ensure that no one was left behind through remedial classes. It was also mentioned in the discussion that teachers cooperated with each other on matters concerning their pupils' abilities as they looked for ways of assisting them. The teachers also discussed how inclusion of learners with learning disabilities was practiced in public primary schools in Trans-Nzoia County. During the discussion, it emerged that various strategies were practiced at class and school levels to ensure that inclusion of learners with LD was effective. However, majority of the teachers had no specific methods of inclusion for learners with LD in their classes. For instance, they reported that they relied on trial and error methods for inclusion of learners with LD in their classes. Moreover, others mentioned that they gave learners with LD leadership roles for inclusive purposes while others mentioned that they encouraged these learners to work hard by giving them positive reinforcement (feedback) regularly in class. Some teachers said that for inclusion purposes, they had to be patient and attentive to these learners.



## Conclusions and Recommendations

It was found out that 64.7% of teachers always supported learners with LD through collaboration with their colleagues. This was also evident during interview and focus group discussions where some of them said that they involved other teachers in trying to help learners with LD in their classrooms/schools. Research results also revealed that 64.4% of teachers always remediated learning problems of learners with LD through structuring learning environment to suit their needs. This is because learners with LD require extra attention, extra support and additional motivation to ensure that they achieve their learning goals in an inclusive setting. Despite teachers indicating to be aware of the support needed for learners with learning disabilities, this was not actually the case in public schools. Since, only 58.6% of teachers reported that they always used several support strategies to educate and support learners with LD in inclusive education. The lack of regular support was cited by teachers during interview due to high learner: teacher ratio, increased workload, lack of adequate facilities (classroom), lack of necessary instructional resources (human and material) and less parental support. Composite scores revealed that 58.9% of teachers were aware of the support needed by learners with LD, but this did not translate to actual support. However, during interview, the teachers mentioned that the support given was not to a higher degree. This is against the tenets of ZPD which advocates that learners should be assisted with a more knowledgeable person to complete a task. Therefore, teachers have to be mediators in inclusion of learners with special needs to ensure that they attain their zone of proximal development. In recommendations, there is need for teachers to provide IEPs as an inclusive practice in all schools. Teachers also need to look for opportunities for further training on issues related with inclusive education and learning disability. Teachers also need to ensure that they work as a team with other stakeholders in helping learners with learning disabilities in their schools.

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