

Challenges Faced by teachers in Teaching Mentally Challenged and Communication Deficient learners in Mbagathi Special Unit, Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine challenges faced by teachers in teaching mentally challenged and communication deficient learners in Mbagathi special unit in Kenya. The study employed case study design that aimed at providing in depth understanding of the challenges experienced by teachers in teaching mentally challenged and communication deficient learners. The study targeted teachers and the school head teacher associated with learners with mental and communication deficit. Purposive sampling was used to obtain a sample of 5 key informants who took part in the study. For data collection, the study employed interview guides, participant observation guide and document analysis as data collection instruments. Data collected through interview, analysis of documents and observation was analyzed qualitatively. The collected data was first transcribed before coding into themes. The study findings revealed that lack of adequate fellow teacher support to the challenged learners, lack of adequate parental support to the challenged learners and inadequate physical and financial resources were the major challenges faced by teachers in teaching mentally challenged and communication deficient learners in Mbagathi special unit. Based on the finding, it was recommended that parents should be more intensive in assisting, accompanying, and guiding their children, especially to the children who have special needs so that their motivation and academic achievement can be enhanced. It is also recommended that teachers and school should give more fruitful collaboration between schools to facilitate their needs and potentials. Just like other students, the government should provide adequate physical and financial opportunities to the mentally challenged and communication deficient learners. This will motivate their teachers and boost the academic performance of the students.

Keywords: *mentally challenged education, communication deficient learners' education, special needs teachers' challenges*

1. Introduction

To help overcome day to day challenges of life across the continents, education for all children has been made mandatory both for those with and without disabilities. Since the early 1990s the movement to have education for all was launched at the World Conference that involved various international organizations such as UNESCO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and the World Bank (Oduba, 2014). The main agenda for this conference was Education for All in the entire world.

According to Roy (2020), education is the right of every child because it equips him to meet the challenges of life. To supplement their differential talents so that they can prepare themselves for a happy productive and useful life, children with disabilities need education and training just like the normal children. Efforts to educate children with disabilities began. Example of efforts put across included inclusive education.

Inclusive education is a new approach towards educating the children with disability and learning difficulties with that of normal ones within the same roof. It brings all students together in one classroom and community, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area, and seeks to maximize the potential of all students (Singh, 2016). This was done to improve the working environment of teachers, and reduce general disparities of the children with disabilities,. However, despite all measures being put across to support special needs teachers in educating the disabled, their effective services is hindered by several challenges. For instance, education should enhance teachers who teach children with developmental disability and also create awareness in the society to accept children with special educational needs. However, children with developmental disability need extra attention in terms of curriculum adaptation, teaching methods, and availability of teaching and learning materials, assistive technology, assessment systems, as well as resources and funds for more assistance in adapting the school environment.

The challenges covered by this article includes: Inadequate physical and financial resources, inadequate skills and knowledge/experience to handle serious challenges, improper implementation of inclusive education, Lack of incentives after training as a special education teacher, Lack of adequate support from both parents and fellow teachers to the challenged learners.

With reference to Inadequate physical infrastructure, in India the number of the disabled people is so large, their problems so complex, available resources so scarce and social attitudes so damaging.

In Nigeria, Inadequate physical infrastructure Lack of facilities and materials has been one of the barriers to special needs education in Nigeria. The lack of support services pose barrier to enrolment and education of persons with special needs. Evidence suggests clearly that most students with special needs are unable to enroll into special or regular schools in the country, as they may not receive support services to assist them in the schools (Anumonye, 1991; Eleweke,

1997) The massive recruitment of professionals in the education of learners with special needs would make great impact in the identification, referral, diagnosis, treatment, and provision of appropriate educational and related services. Obviously, an adequately number of trained professionals is required in the provision of meaningful educational services to students with special needs.

Evidence, however, indicates that Nigerian schools are faced with serious shortage of qualified teachers and support personnel (Eleweke, 1999), and where it exists, professionals leave the job for other 'greener pasture', as a result of lack of better treatment on the parts of the employers. Data also shows that at the tertiary institutions, there is a serious lack of enough instructors. For example, the World Bank (1999, 2005) reports that there is a staffing deficit in Nigerian colleges and universities. It equally found out that the position of special school in Nigeria indicated that, the number of special education teachers is grossly inadequate. The irony of it is that Universities and colleges in Nigeria, notably Universities at Ibadan, Jos, Kano, Calabar, and Nsukka, as well as the Kaduna Polytechnic and the Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo training and trained thousand of teachers of students with special needs to provide education and other related services in the schools and communities. With this effort it remains the case that most of the schools in the country do not have adequate number of qualified teachers. The programmes for the training of support personnel such as educational audiologists, psychologists, speech and language pathologists and communication support workers such as interpreters are not offered in most of the institutions of higher education in Nigeria (Adebisi, Jerry, Rasaki, & Igwe, 2014).

The study found that most schools did not have adequate physical facilities thus disadvantaging a number of children with special needs in the society (Mutugi, 2018). The study also found that there were inadequate instructional materials for SNE learning. The findings also found out that schools lacked essential facilities that aid learning of SNE pupils, for example ramps for learners who are physically challenged, hearing aids among others.

Khoaeane (2012) observed that there are two most profound challenges affecting special needs teachers in different schools of Lesotho. The challenges included inadequate skills and knowledge/experience to handle serious challenges and the challenge of physical infrastructure. Khoaeane further observed that inclusive education is not properly implemented because the most Lesotho school buildings do not accommodate children with physical disabilities (Khoaeane, 2012).

Udoba (2014) also observed local teachers in most of the primary schools in Tanzania lacked training in special needs education for children with developmental disability. Despite the "Primary Education Development Plan" (PEDP), that ensure education for all, the overall quality of primary education in Tanzania remains generally poor for children with developmental disability. The shortages of teachers trained on special- educational needs professionals, as well as the lack of teaching facilities, have a negative effect on the delivery of quality education to

children with developmental disability. In many schools, class sizes are too big for teachers to facilitate quality learning. After training, specialist teachers for pupils with learning difficulties actually find their promotion prospects become worse. Lack of support from fellow teachers has made life hard for specialist teachers for learners with difficulties. The regular teachers refuse to assist children with learning disabilities on the pretext that they do not have expertise on how to handle children with disabilities (Udoba, 2014).

Another study by Johnsen (2004) on the challenges teachers face in teaching children with special needs in regular class: a case study of teachers in regular second cycle primary school in Bale zone, Robe town, South Ethiopia. The results of the study showed that teachers teaching this regular second cycle primary school faced challenges concerning knowledge, skills and experience on how to teach learners who have special needs together with the regular learners in the same class. None of the six interviewed teachers was trained in special needs education. Other challenges that were revealed in the study were: lacking in-service training, rigidity of the curriculum, shortage of teaching materials, lacking collaboration among teachers and between the parents and school, inadequate fund and lack of clear guidelines for inclusion. However, all the teachers who participated in this study were willing to teach children with special needs in their classroom and seemed to support the idea of integration or inclusion. Results from Roy (2020) also tend to take the same course. The results reveal that teachers lack of knowledge of the types of learners, indiscipline cases and heavy workload demanding more time, teachers' negative attitude towards disabled, no facilities for teachers and learners, disabled have low self-esteem.

Regarding Lack of adequate parental support to the challenged learners, scholars also have different view. Parents are known to provide a variety of support in the education of their children like supervising children doing home work, providing food, clothing. However this kind of support observes Mcheka 2008, is denied to most of the children with disabilities for several reasons, such as negative attitudes.

Special disability teachers also suffer from long travelling distances: Due the long distances from one school to the other specialist teachers have to use public transport at times over 5 kilometres to meet their students put in different schools. Travelling becomes even more challenging to those teaching learners with difficulties in schools situated in villages where roads become bad during rainy season (Johnsen et al, 2015).

Challenges have been faced by special needs teachers, interpreters and psychologists not only in Kenya, but also across the globe. One of the most likely challenge teachers encounter is to change from the previous setting, where learners have been for a long time placed in special schools designated for certain specific disabilities, for instance special schools for the deaf, blind or mentally challenged. It may be both a challenge to parents and even the members of the society. This challenge has been so due to the fact that education for learners experiencing disabilities is undergoing a revolutionary change (Osero, 2015). Despite the government system putting up strategies to curb some of the challenges, there are still some underlying challenges that still affect both teachers and learners with disabilities and the normal ones. Therefore, this

paper examined challenges faced by teachers in teaching mentally challenged and communication deficient learners in Mbagathi Special Unit, Kenya.

2. Methodology

This study employed a case study design. Case study consists of intensive observation in a particular setting (Ogula 1996). Thus, this design was found appropriate since it allows the participant to describe what is meaningful to them rather than being restricted to predetermined categories, provides high credibility and face validity and allowed the researcher to probe for more details and ensured that participants were interpreting questions the way they were intended. It also gave a deep understanding of the issues, and allowed data collection using in-depth interviews, and document analysis (Trochim and William 2006).

The targeted population in this study consisted of teachers, head teacher, associated with learners with mental and communication deficit from Mbagathi Primary school in Langa'ta Division, Nairobi District. This population was particularly targeted since it provided key information on the challenges faced by teachers in teaching mentally challenged and communication deficient learners.

The sample in the study consisted of four teachers (n=4) and one head teacher (n=1). In total there was a sample of 5 respondents. Purposive sampling design was used to select the head teacher and all the 4 teachers in the unit since they are the key informants whose opinions and ideas are of specific interest to this study (Luborsky and Rubinstein, 1995).

In data collection, this study employed observation method, interview guides, and document analysis. Interview method was used since it generally yield the highest cooperation and lowest refusal rates, offers high response quality, takes advantage of interviewer presence and it's multi-method data collection (Owens, 2002). An in-depth interview with the head teacher and teachers was used to solicit a lot of information that was useful in providing information on the challenges faced by teachers in teaching mentally challenged and communication deficient learners.

The researcher was able to observe how the mentally challenged learners and those with communication deficit were taught, participate and respond in the teaching and learning process. The guide also consisted of the main areas of the study which was the kind of difficulties both teachers and learners face in teaching and learning process.

In analysis of document, the researcher brought out the document type (e.g., report, records etc), the kind of document it was (government or institution document), its dates, were written, author and title. The aim of the document, the factual information contained, why the document is a valuable source of information, how the document can be used, what the document does not answer and could be answered by the author were all brought out (Marshall, and Rossman, 1998). In this study, the researcher dealt

with the records of the learners with disabilities of special unit in Mbagathi primary school. These records were analyzed with the aim of retrieving key information about the mentally challenged and communication deficient learners. For instance the details about the academic progress of particular learners and the difficulties they experienced in the learning process. Where the document fails to answer some questions, the author (secretary) was called upon. In this study, the guide was used to gather background information of the mentally challenged and communication deficient learners, records of instructional materials used by special unit teachers and issued that these learners are facing in learning process.

Data collected through interview, analysis of documents and observation was analyzed qualitatively. The collected data was first transcribed before coding into themes. This involved breaking down the data into manageable pieces, sorting and sifting while searching for types, classes, sequences, processes, patterns or themes. The aim of this process was to assemble or reconstruct the data in a meaningful or comprehensible fashion (Jorgensen, 1989). The categorizing typically based on the major research questions guiding the study. Data is presented in form of narratives. Generalization from the themes about the phenomena in question and discussion in the light of the available literature was made.

3. Results

3.1 Background Information

The study considered background characteristics of all those who participated in the study. These included the teachers and the head teacher of Mbagathi special unit. These characteristics were sort out mainly to provide the demographic characteristics of the target population, which form the foundation of any study (Gall et al, 2003).

The background characteristics of teachers that were considered included: Gender, Age, how long they have been in the teaching profession. All the special education teachers who participated in the study were female. It is also noted that 3 out of 4 of them were in the 41-45 age bracket while only one (1) was in the 35-40 years age bracket. Two of the respondents were assistant teachers and the other (2) were special needs teachers in Mbagathi Primary School.

Only one head teacher participated in the study. He was a diploma holder in Education and had a working experience of two years in the current school.

3.2 The challenges faced by teachers when teaching mentally challenged and communication deficient learners

The researcher was interested in finding out the main challenges faced by teachers when teaching mentally challenged and communication deficient learners in Mbagathi Primary School. Some of the challenges that came out included lack of adequate fellow teacher support to the challenged learners, lack of adequate parental support to the challenged learners and inadequate financial funding resources.

3.2.1 Lack of adequate fellow teacher support to the challenged learners

In order to solicit information, the special education teachers were asked to indicate whether all teachers in the school support and get involved in the teaching and learning process of the learners with disabilities.

All teachers who took part in the study indicated that the teachers teaching in the regular classes in the school do not support and get involved in the teaching and learning process of the learners with disabilities.

They were further asked to explain the reasons as to why they thought that the teachers are not supportive. Most of them explained that their reasons as to why the teachers teaching in the normal classes were not being supportive were: lack of understanding and awareness; lack of motivation and wrong attitude towards learners with disabilities. One of the teachers bitterly said that:

The teachers in the normal classes rarely accept integrated children due to their slow pace of understanding. They always think that the slow pace could affect the syllabus coverage (Mbagathi Primary School teacher 1, 13th August 2009).

3.2.2 Lack of adequate parental support to the challenged learners

The teachers were asked to indicate whether the parents are supportive enough in the teaching and learning process of the learners with disabilities.

All of them gave a negative answer that the parents do not get involved in supporting the learners with disabilities.

On being asked to explain how they thought the parents were not supportive enough, most of the teachers explained that: the parents fail to provide basic necessities like food and clothing to the children; the parents are not committed to problems arising in the learning process to a point where they rarely attend meetings in the school when called upon and that they fail to assist children at home so that they can improve their skills. One of the teachers said that:

One of the major challenges that we face is that parents expect too much from us in terms of improving the skills and capabilities of the children. By doing so they fail to understand that they too have a part to play in the learning process (Mbagathi Primary School teacher 4, 10th August 2009).

3.2.3 Inadequate physical and financial resources

Teachers were further asked whether the government has been keen in funding programs for the mentally challenged and communication deficient learners.

All of them indicated that the government has not been fully committed in funding programs for the learners in terms of allocations. This money would be useful for purchasing more furniture and buying materials like candles, ropes and musical instruments. In fact, one teacher said that:

Since the introduction of the Free Primary education, the special unit has only received two allocations, between 2004 and 2009 which is allocated to about half of the pupils we have. This is not good enough (Mbagathi Primary School teacher 2, 16th August 2009).

The head teacher on the other hand was asked to indicate the reports that he receives from the teachers concerning their experiences with the mentally challenged and communication deficient learners. The reports that the teachers gave according to the head teacher included: absenteeism that was not seen in regular classes, negligence of parents and frustrations in controlling the classes.

4. Discussion

On whether the teachers were asked to indicate whether other teachers provided adequate support, most teachers thought that the teachers are not supportive. Most of them explained that their reasons as to why the teachers teaching in the normal classes were not being supportive were: lack of understanding and awareness; lack of motivation and wrong attitude towards learners with disabilities. This can show that the teachers teaching in the normal classes are yet to accept and accommodate the learners with disabilities in the normal classes because this wrong attitude greatly discourages the learners. By having a positive attitude towards the learners, they tend to create a conducive and comfortable environment that can lead to improved performance. This is in agreement with Monsen et al (2004) who conducted a study in New Zealand concerning teachers' attitudes towards mainstreaming of the disabled in regular schools, as well as their pupils' perceptions of their classroom-learning environment. The study revealed that children taught by teachers who exuded highly positive attitudes towards mainstreaming were found to have significantly higher levels of classroom satisfaction than children taught by teachers with less positive attitudes.

When asked to explain how they thought the parents were not supportive enough, most of the teachers explained that: the parents fail to provide basic necessities like food and clothing to the children; the parents are not committed to problems arising in the learning process to a point where they rarely attend meetings in the school when called upon and that they fail to assist children at home so that they can improve their skills. This can mean that the parents have not yet understood that it's not only the role of the teachers to get actively involved in the learning process by encouraging them and buying supplementary materials like books and uniforms. The parents too need to monitor their children progress at home. Parental involvement plays a critical role in the performance of their children. These results appear to be in line with the study conducted by Bariroh (2018) on the influence of parents' involvement on children with special needs' motivation and learning achievement. The study conducted a T-test that showed t-calculate value for variables of parents' involvement (X) was 3,813. The results showed that $t\text{-calculate} > t\text{-table}$ or $3,813 > 2,093$ or t value is higher than t table. It means that parents' involvement significantly influences children's motivation. The result of the t-test also indicated that t-calculate value for parents' involvement (X) was 3,601. If compared to t-table, then, $t\text{-calculate} > t\text{-table}$ or $3,601 > 2,093$. It meant that there was an influence of parents' involvement on children's achievement as well.

On whether the government provided adequate financial and physical support to the learners, all of them indicated that the government has not been fully committed in funding programs for the learners in terms of allocations. This money would be useful for purchasing more furniture and buying materials like candles, ropes and musical instruments. This can imply that although the government has shown some commitment to the plight of the mentally challenged and communication deficient learners, a lot is yet to be done in order to guarantee these learners quality education.

5. Conclusion

From the findings, it can be noted that there are a number of challenges that the teachers face in teaching the mentally challenged and communication deficient. These challenges range from their fellow teachers who have a negative attitude towards disabled children because of their inability to perform expected tasks at school, to the parents who expect the teachers to single handedly handle the learning of the children and also lack of enough funding from the government.

Teachers should plan to have more time to remedy the children such as slow learners and they should maintain class control by involving all learners within each learning experience; Teachers should also provide adequate support to the teachers dealing with disability cases in all schools; Based on the finding, it can be recommended that parents should be more intensive in assisting, accompanying, and guiding their children, especially to the children who have special needs so that their motivation and academic achievement can be enhanced. It is also recommended that teachers and school should give more fruitful collaboration between schools to facilitate their

needs and potentials. Just like other students, the government should provide adequate physical and financial opportunities to the mentally challenged and communication deficient learners. This will motivate their teachers and boost the academic performance of the students

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