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## School Environment Challenges on Academic Performance of Physically Challenged Learners in Public Primary Schools, Isinya Sub-county, Kajiado County, Kenya

By

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#### **Abstract**

This study focused to establish whether management practices of head teachers influence performance of physically challenged learners in public primary schools in Isinya sub-county in Kajiado County. The study was guided by one main objective: to establish how the school environment, influence academic performance for physically challenged learners in public primary schools in Isinya sub-county, Kajiado County. The study adopted mixed research approach and the concurrent triangulation design. The target population comprised all public primary schools, head teachers and primary school teachers Isinya sub-county, in Kajiado County. Simple random sampling was used to select the primary school teachers and head teachers while stratified sampling techniques was used to select the various schools due to their various levels such as day, boarding and mixed boarding public primary schools. The researcher used questionnaires to collect data from the respondents where by the validity of this tool was done by the two supervisors from Lukenya University. Quantitative data was analysed descriptively and presented in frequencies, percentages, tables and graphs while qualitative data was analyzed thematically and presented in narrative form. The study revealed that there was a statistically significance relationship between academic qualifications of teachers and academic performance of the learner. The results revealed that the dependent variable was negatively and significantly related with the four independent variables. The results indicated that academic performance was negatively and significantly related with school infrastructure access related challenges (r = -0.471; p < 0.01), mobility related challenges (r = -0.591; p < 0.01), social adjustment related challenges (r = -0.832; p < 0.01), and staffing related challenges (r = -0.917; p < 0.01). It was also noted that there is little influence between gender and academic qualification. The study recommends for awareness creation and behavior changes communication on special needs.

**Key words**: Physically challenged, Triangulation, Thematically, Stratified sampling

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#### **Background to the Study**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights enshrines education as a fundamental human right (UN, 2013) and in achieving Education for All (EFA), nations committed themselves to realization of EFA goals due to the central role education plays in the development of any nation (UNESCO 2012). The achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) consider education as a key driver of these aspirations (UN, 2013). The Salamanca Statement of 1994 adopted by representatives from 92 countries and 25 international organizations set the policy agenda on inclusive education on a global basis (Mputhia, 2014).

Estimates show that there are 750 million disabled people in the world, 150 million are children and 80% live in low- income countries with little or no access to services. Only 23% of disable children in poor countries go to school (Mwangi, 2017). Despite the fact that the right to Education for All is enshrined in myriad national and international treaties, there are still challenges for children with disabilities with regard to accessing education(Sarton& Smith, 2018). Though international legal frameworks have been put in place to provide guidelines to governments to put measures in place to support individuals with special needs in education(Mwoma, 2017), the development of inclusive schools remains one of the biggest challenges facing education systems throughout the world. The child with special needs is unable to access meaningful education because society is organized to meet the needs of non-disable people as shown by the negative attitude that hampers them from leading normal lives (Mungai, 2014). It remains a complex and controversial issue as the development of inclusive practices in school is not well understood (Andai&Mwatela, 2017).

There is need to provide a school setting that will accord children with special education an enabling environment, rather than making them fit into specific educational settings or school settings (Tukur&Kiyuba, 2014). According to Maemba (2017), it is the policy of the government that children with physical disabilities are not excluded from the mainstream education.

Providing education to children with special needs is one way of ensuring that their right to basic education is protected (Mwoma, 2017). The learners with physical disability may lag behind in education if there are no environmental and instructional adaptations to enable them to compete on equal footing with their non-disabled peers (Simatwa&Kipkorir, 2016). According to the African Child Policy Forum (ACPF 2011), most African countries lack a proper law and policy strategy for the schooling of children with disabilities that complies with the requirements of recognized international and regional human rights instruments.

According to Mutugi (2018), traditionally and culturally, African society held negative attitudes and beliefs towards disability and the children with disabilities. Children with

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disabilities even at family level are neglected and rejected by their families, whereby the disabled are rarely sent to school.

The most progressive and comprehensive policy document on the education of children with disabilities on the continent is that of South Africa. However, according to Kinyanjui, Olembo&Onyango (2019), most of the schools in South Africa had no ramps or any enabling easy access for children who were physically challenged.

According to Mungai (2014), often in Africa society, disability is associated with witchcraft and promiscuity during pregnancy and punishment from ancestral spirits. In Africa, fewer than 10% of disabled children are in school (Mwangi, 2017). ACPF (2011), estimates that 76% of children with disabilities in Sierra Leone are out of school. The forum showed that in Nigeria, teachers felt that they lack the professional knowledge and skills to work with children with SNE in mainstream settings because their pre-service teacher training

The researcher has also observed that there is no single assessment Centre nor EARC officers in Isinya Sub County where the study will be conducted. It is from this background that the researcher would like to investigateschool-based practices and strategies for improving the learning capabilities for physically challenged learners in public primary schools in Isinya subcounty in Kajiado County.

Curriculum did not have any content in disability. The situation has led to many countries to make use of teachers with no special education training.

Tanzania is among countries with a high number of person with disabilities in Africa, about 3 million persons which accounts to approximately 9% of the entire population (Udoba, 2014). According to Uromi and Mazagwa (2014), persons with disabilities in Tanzania are faced with serious stigmatization and torture.

In Kenya, the history of learners with physical handicaps date back to post second World War period, when those who were injured in wars were put together to facilitate the provision of treatment services (Simatwa & Kipkorir, 2016). According to GoK (2002), Joy town school for the physically handicapped in Kisumu was started in 1962, and the Dagoretti children's' home started in 1961 by the Red Cross Society and some of the earliest schools to cater for those children with physical disabilities in Kenya. In 1960, the Salvation Army church opened a rehabilitation Centre for children with physical disabilities in Thika. This later became the first school for the physically handicapped in Kenya (MOE Survey Report). In response to the Universal Primary Education (UPE), Kenya embraced Education for All (EFA) policy in 2003, which saw the abolishment of school fees in primary schools (Mwangi, 2017).

Education for children with disabilities in Kenya is the responsibility of the MOE although other ministries are involved to a very small extent (Maemba, 2017). A curriculum, which suits the educational needs of children with disabilities, should be designed together with pedagogical way of teaching as well as the educational environment that suit the learners (Tukur & Kiyuba, 2014). A study by Lelan, Rono & Sang (2019) revealed that 75.8% of learning institutions had inadequate or total lack of resources that directly support learners with physical disabilities. According to ACPF (2011), various policies and legal frameworks have been put in place, in favor for children with disabilities; implementation has not been realized to ensure that all children with disability are supported (Mwoma, 2017).

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#### **Statement of the Problem**

The Education of children who have special needs in education is an important initiative in Kenya and Kajiado County at large. In real life situation, physically challenged children find it very hard to fit into the world of non-disabled people. The gap between the ideal situation and the current provision of education for physically challenged pupils in public primary schools is still large. Most schools buildings and particularly toilets are not conducive for use by the physically challenged according to Mutungi (2019). A study done in Isinya Sub County by Marias 2014, revealed that there was no documented evidence on drop out of physically challenged pupils in Isinya Sub County. Lelan, Rono and Sang (2019) in a study done in Uasin Gishu County revealed that physically disabled learners who were using wheel chairs and crutches encountered difficulties to reach some places due to the nature of infrastructure which were unfriendly to them. A study by Waititu (2013) pointed out that 70% of teachers disagreed that the school structures are adapted to cater for Learners with Physical Disabilities (LWPD) in Kenya, Similarly, a study by Wangi (2014) revealed that, 90% of teachers and 95% of children agreed that the absence of disability friendly facilities affect access to pursuit of education. This resulted to the gaps between the national special needs education policy objectives and actual provisions of special needs education at school level. With these findings, there is an area of interest for study to uncover the influence of management practices on academic performance of physically challenged learners

#### **Objectives of the Study**

The study was guided by one objective, to establish ways in which school environments influence academic performance for physically challenged learners in public primary schools in Isinya sub-county in Kajiado County

#### **Research Design**

According to Creswell (2009), quantitative and qualitative data was collected concurrently analyzed separately

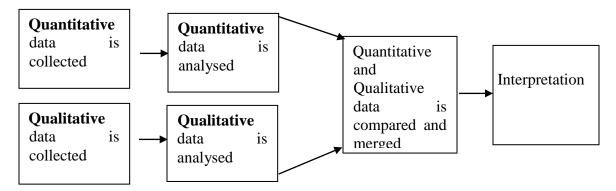


Figure 1: Mixed research approach and concurrent triangulation design

Adopted from Creswell (2009)

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### **Target Population**

The target population in this study was 30 public primary schools, which have a population of 900 teachers in Isinya sub-county who serve under the teacher's service commission.

#### **Sample Size and Sampling Procedure**

Mugenda & Mugenda (2013) on research said that a sample of 10% is sufficient for a study. This implies that the sample size was 10% of the target population which was 90 teachers in Isinya Sub-County Kajiado County. For the purpose of this study, 30 schools were selected with 3 teachers in every School including one head teacher randomly picked for study.

### **Pilot testing**

After the instruments were constructed, they were tried out in the field. The pilot study was conducted before the start of data collection. The research tools were re-tested to a selected sample of respondents which was similar to the actual sample used in the study. Pilot study helps the researcher to review the research instruments so that the research questions focus on developing a deeper understanding of the situation studied (Udoba, 2014). The pilot study was done in Isinya Sub-county of Kajiado County. The pilot testing was done on nine (9) regular teachers including head teachers. That is 10% of the sample size according to Mugenda&Mugenda (2013).

### **Instrument Validity**

Best and Khan (2016) asserted that validity of an instrument refers to asking the right question formed in the least ambitious way. Validity is concerned with whether the results appear to be what they are. Orodho (2017) says that validity is concerned with establishing whether the tools content is measuring what is supposed to measure. Content validity is ensured through pilot testing. Content validity was achieved through the review of the relevant literature to find out the relevant concepts. External validity was achieved through generalization of the findings of the studies.

### **Instrument Reliability**

Saunders et. Al. (2019) defined reliability as the extent to which your data collection analysis procedure will yield consistent findings. A reliable measureable is one which if it will be repeated for a second time it will give the same results as in the first case. For example a pupil who scores 90% in an examination will score similar marks in the same examination if it is administered the second time.

Hair et. Al. (2016) said that Cronbach's Alpha measures internal consistency of how closely related set of items are as a group. Items should be closely related to be reliable. A measure of Cronbach Alpha of 0.7 and above means that there is reliability and a measure of 0.7 and below shows that there is no reliability whereas a measure of 1.0 on Cronbach Alpha indicates a perfect reliability.

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#### **Data Collection Procedures**

After getting the introduction letter from Lukenya University, the researcher proceeded to apply for a research permit from National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). She then proceeded to the County Commissioners officer in Kajiado County for authorization to visit schools. The researcher visited schools and started by briefing the head teachers on the purpose of the visit. With permission granted by the head teacher, she went ahead to interview the head teachers and the teachers after sampling. The researcher immediately then collected the questionnaires filled to ensure a higher return rate. Immediately then collected the questionnaires filled to ensure a higher return rate.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

Data analysis is the process of organizing the collected data into categories (Kothari, 2008). Data analysis is important for interpreting raw data in order to obtain their meaning and pattern from data (Bell, 2005 cited in Udoba, 2014). The aim of data analysis is to transform information or data into an answer to the original research question. In this study, data analysis will be done after the process of data collection is over.

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics namely: frequencies, percentages and mean. Quantitative data was then presented in tables, figures and charts.

Quantitative approach was used to examine the situations that teachers face in public primary schools Qualitative data was organized in themes and presented in narratives and direct quotations. A thematic analysis was used to arrange, organize, break the data units, synthesize and search patterns as brought out by the respondents. The researcher categorized the data into themes according to research objectives and use the thematic analysis through discussion and presented it inform of narratives and direct quotations. According to Orodho (2009)

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### **Analysis and Presentation of Findings**

### 1. Challenges of accommodating learners with physical challenges

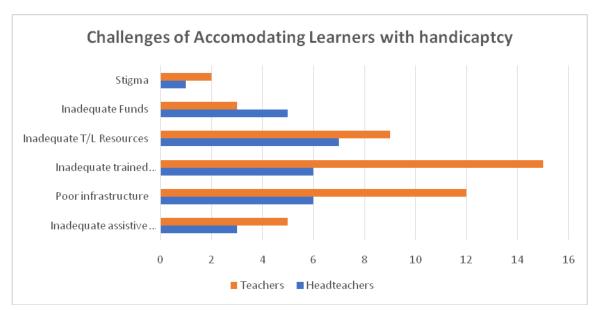


Figure 2 Challenges of accommodating learners with physical handicaps.

Source: Data Collection 2021

Views gathered from both the teachers and head teacher pointed out to several obstacles in accommodating the physically challenged learners. Data analyzed cumulatively indicated a myriad of the challenges, a number of which were most pronounced. From the analysis, inadequacy of trained personnel was the top reason followed closely by lack of supportive infrastructure and assistive devices. Although scored least, community stigma and negative attitude on learners with special needs was an important realization that should be addressed with the seriousness it deserves.

#### 2. School Environment and Performance of Learners with physical Challenged

The school environment was noted to have a big influence on the performance of children with special needs. For instance, teachers noted that Children with special needs are likely to feel motivated to attend school in an environment that is friendly, with good infrastructure and thus can perform well academically.

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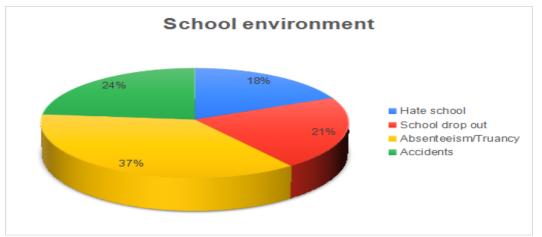


Figure 3: School Environment and Performance of Learners with physical Challenges Source: data collection 2021

Contrary to this is a situation where unfavorable school environment would lead to learners to hate the school, make them truant, cause accidents (for instance school grounds with bad terrain or lack of ramps, washrooms that are not adaptive to special needs etc). The ultimate result of poor school environment could even be school dropout. All the said conditions will unfortunately adversely affect their academic performance.

#### 3. Improving School Environment

To improve environmental so that it is responsive to the needs of children with special needs, the teachers provided several suggestions, among them was the establishment of boarding schools. There was a general feeling that having children with special needs in boarding schools will save them from the difficulty of commuting to school every other day which partly make them tired and exhausted to remain attentive in class. Other suggestions included training and hiring of qualified staff, improving school compound terrain especially in the area of study where the land is very rocky and of a difficult topography. The teachers further noted that most of the schools have been built on these grounds/lands without much adjustment such as ground leveling, removing of rocky fields. Building ramps to ease movement of the children within the school compound as well as sensitization of the community (both school and general) on the need to value children special with needs was also sighted as measure improvement

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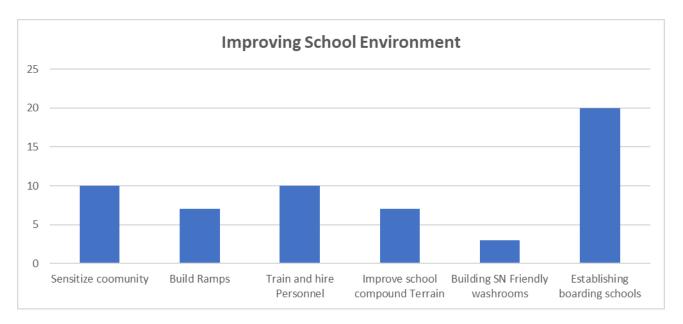


Figure 4: Teacher's suggestions on Improving School Environment

Source: Data collection 2021

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### 4. School Environment and Performance of Learners with physical Challenged

The school environment was noted to have a big influence on the performance of children with special needs. For instance, teachers noted that Children with special needs are likely to feel motivated to attend school in an environment that is friendly, with good infrastructure and thus can perform well academically.

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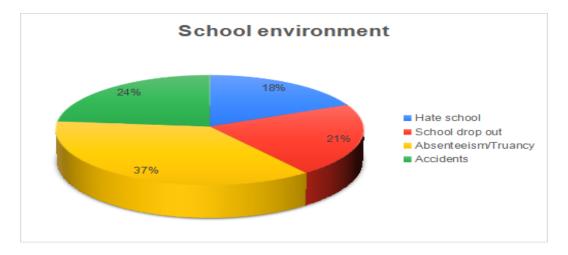
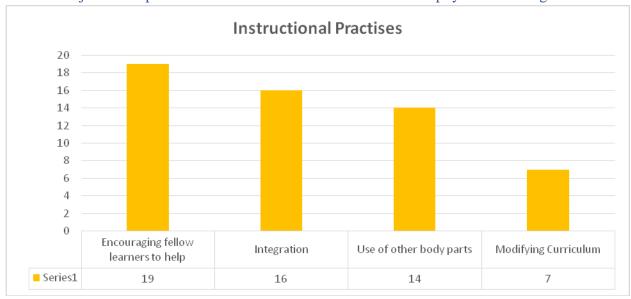


Figure 5: School Environment and Performance of Learners with physical Challenges Source: Data collection 2021

Contrary to this is a situation where unfavorable school environment would lead to learners to hate the school, make them truant, cause accidents (for instance school grounds with bad terrain or lack of ramps, washrooms that are not adaptive to special needs etc). The ultimate result of poor school environment could even be school dropout. All the said conditions will unfortunately adversely affect the academic performance when dealing with physically challenged pupils.

## 5. Social adjustments practices used to accommodate learners with physical challenges



**Figure 6: instructional methods used to accommodate learners with physical challenges** Source: Data collection 2021

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The teachers pointed out a myriad of practices used to accommodate learners with special needs. Majority of the respondents seem to be encouraging other learners to support those with physical challenges. This was followed closely by the use of integration and inclusion while a few mentioned encouraging the learners to use other parts of the body which are well and can work. Curriculum modification was also cited as an approach to modification of instructional practice.

#### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

### School environment is a big pull-push factor for Children with special needs;

Just like in the above challenges, the school environment was noted to a pull and at the same time a push factor as far as the education of these special children is concerned. Good and conducive environment is attractive to learners while unfriendly environment deters them thereby making them hate school, become truant and ultimately drop out. Learners whose school attendance is irregular will not do better compared to their peers who attend regularly. The environment thus heavily disadvantages the children with special needs.

Environmental and structural adaptations were thus suggested as important areas for improvement if learners with disabilities were to be fully accommodated in public primary schools.

#### Recommendations

To address the challenges sighted in the study and in cognizant to the suggestions provided by the respondents, the study recommends the following

Awareness creation and behavior change communication on Special Needs. There is need for community sensitization on Special Needs Education and what it really entails. The question of stigma is one that needs to be addressed given the impact it is causing on children with special needs. The School, Government departments as well as the general community need to have positive regard to Special needs to be able to support the Special needs agenda fully.

**Establishing data on Special Needs**; Evidence from the research noted some gaps in terms of the actual number of children with special needs in the schools. There was seemingly lack of congruence in the data provided by head teachers and teachers of same schools. It is important therefore to carry out census on the number of these children so as also to plan effectively for their support.

Adequate resource allocation for Special Needs; the question of resources was repeatedly reviewed throughout the research and was seen to be part of the root cause for the sorry state of special needs support in public primary schools in the study area. Availability of resources will facilitate most of the improvements including establishment of boarding schools to save the children from the difficulty of commuting to school every. The respondents suggested that resources should be availed to improve on the overall outlook of the Special Needs Education fraternity. This will check on environmental and structural adaptation, teaching and learning resources as well as provision of adaptive/assistive resources. With improved resource capacity,

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more personnel shall be trained and hire but above the personnel shall be recognized (better remunerated) for their efforts.

Coordination from all sector players; the challenges of Special Needs as sighted in the research are far beyond the capacity of any one party to intervene on single handedly. Special Needs support is an expensive venture which is not only resource straining but emotionally overwhelming too. This study thus recommends the need to take a Multi- sectoral approach to SNE intervention by working with the other actors public and non-public.

In conclusion, the survey was quite informative and managed to establish to some level the challenges of supporting learners with physical challenges, the community perception on the subject but most importantly the gaps therein. As a matter of public importance, the call for joint efforts in addressing the gaps in the county as evident from the findings of this survey is a matter that cannot be overemphasized.

#### **Suggestions for Further Research**

- 1. Establishing the actual population of (school going age) Children with Special needs in and out of school.
- 2. The motivation behind caring for and supporting children with special needs

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