

Integrating Learner Disabilities in Inclusive Schools In Njoro Sub-County

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Abstract

The complexities and daily challenges experienced by learners with special needs in inclusive primary schools are numerous. They make them feel frustrated and unable to perform optimally in their studies, since they are sometimes unable to cope effectively with inclusive learning, and this makes them withdrawn. In order to avert such situations, counselling services are required in mainstream programmes to aid the learners develop academic, social and personal competencies that promote their adjustment for life-long development. The purpose of this study was to explore ways of integrating disabilities into the schools for holistic development among learners with disabilities in Njoro Sub-County. Data was collected using two questionnaires which were administered to 100 learners and 20 teachers. Interviews were conducted among five (5) education officers in the sub-county. The data was analysed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) to obtain descriptive statistics (percentages and frequencies). The findings showed that learners with special needs in inclusive schools in Njoro Sub County faced diverse psycho-social challenges including self-pity and self-devaluation among others. These challenges require well programmed guidance and counselling services. The findings of the study are expected to provide a basis upon which the ministry of Education and the school administrators can operate to fully integrate learners with disabilities into all educational institutions for development. They can also help the ministry to formulate guidelines to address the challenges facing this special group of learners. The study recommended that the admission of learners into all schools should be so structured to include learners with disabilities irrespective of their gender and nature of impairment.

Key words: Integration, disability, special needs, development

Introduction

Education is a fundamental right for all persons including those with special needs. It is a key to other human rights, the heart of development and a tool for empowering people to improve their welfare. The World Educational Forum for All in Dakar recognized it as the prerequisite for equity, diversity and lasting peace. Examinations and certification of learners are central to the education and learning process. However, this poses challenges to learners with special needs in that their performance does not commensurate with those of their peers in normal schools. Their performance is often dismal. Examination results often causes a rift between school administrators, education officers, parents and the teachers, as their hopes are pegged on performance. This happens in spite of the challenges the learners with special needs go through, including financial, social, psychological, mobility and the attitudes the community holds towards disability (Adolo, 2006). As a result, very few learners with special needs end up being enrolled in primary schools. Besides, majority of them are economically dependent on relatives, friends and well wishers and this leads to poor integration of such learners in these schools (Wamuchu, Karagu & Nwoye, 2008).

The challenges facing learners with special needs in inclusive schools can be attributed to factors such as discrimination, stereotyping, inadequate physical facilities, poor administrative policies and inadequate supervision, teacher incompetence, large class sizes, indiscipline and formative assessment (ADEA 2012, JICA 2012 and MOEST, 2009). Inclusive education in Kenya is hindered by insufficient educational resources, lack of a barrier free environment, high teacher-pupil ratios, rigid curriculum and unfriendly

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classrooms, (Oketch, Mutisya, Ngware, Ezech and Epari, 2010), as well as unfriendly national examinations (UNESCO, 1990). In addition, the counselling services that are available are poor in quality and the personnel who handle them are not skilled enough and also lack the requisite training to handle them competently.

Kenya's policy on special education has created a brain-drain of the few specialized teachers due to poor remuneration and stereotyped community attitudes. According to Craig, Kraft and Duplessis (1998), effective teachers are highly committed, caring about learners' welfare and therefore need a supportive working environment to maintain these positive attitudes. The Kenyan constitution (2010) article 43, section 1(f) and article 54 section 1(b) asserts that all individuals, including persons with disabilities, minorities as well as the marginalised groups have a right of receiving quality and relevant education.

Over-enrolment in schools has led to poor integration of learner disabilities in inclusive schools in Njoro sub-county. It has also led to over-stretched facilities, inadequate specialized personnel, overcrowding in schools and diminished community support. This situation therefore requires psychological intervention strategies, which are insufficient in Njoro (Njoro Sub-County Education Office, 2013). According to Woolery and Bailey (2003), children with learning disabilities perform poorly in schools, develop low self-esteem, and become disenfranchised when their needs are not met. A study by Gargiulo (2006) showed that such learners suffer challenges which may affect their reading, listening writing, spelling and computation abilities. Those with communication disorders experience problems when reading, talking and writing. Learners with physical, psychological and neuron-skeletal impairment and other special needs encounter difficulty in accessing education resources and facilities. It is also a fact that the adolescent disabled suffer frustrations, loneliness, withdrawal and embarrassment due to undue pressure to perform by parents, teachers, peers, siblings and the society at large (Turnbull, Turnbull, Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2013).

A study by Ormrod (2003), deemed learners with emotional disorders to have attention deficits, inability to settle on given tasks and to present declining academic performance. Unskilled teachers usually label gifted and talented children as bossy, unruly and rude learners, and therefore do not auger well with them due to the poor rapport created. Consequently, they become passive, inattentive and withdrawn (Mwaura and Wanyera, 2007).

Patterson (2009) postulated that children living under difficult circumstances have poor concentration, suffer mental agony and emotional stress. They are poorly socialized, often traumatized, and need family support. They also lack parental stimulation. These factors make them perform poorly in academics. Learners with albinism in particular, are likely to suffer rejection and generally have low self-esteem. Besides, they are photophobic, and cannot perform practical subjects on sunny days. They also get bored easily and experience jerky eye movements which make them perform poorly in class (Kimani, 2003). These, among other factors, call for evaluation of the education system (Daniels, 2010).

It is against this background that the research sought to find out the factors that hinder integration of learners with disabilities in inclusive primary schools in Njoro Sub-County, Nakuru County, Kenya. The study was guided by the following objectives:-

- i) To determine the types of special needs among learners.
- ii) To establish factors which enhance the challenges.
- iii) To find out how the challenges affect the learners' performance.
- iv) To suggest ways that these challenges can be mitigated.

Materials and Methods

The target population of the study comprised all teachers, education officers and pupils in both public and private schools in Njoro Sub-County. Purposive sampling procedure was employed to select 20 teachers, 5 education officers and 100 pupils from 3 primary schools. Descriptive survey design was adopted since it gives an in-depth description of the performance and displays the phenomena in their existing setting (Kothari, 2004). Questionnaires and interview schedules were used to collect data. A pilot study was conducted in the area to validate the instruments prior to the study. Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha method was used to determine the internal consistency of the items where a coefficient of 0.702 was computed. This method was deemed appropriate because it requires only one administration of the test (Cohen and Swerdeik, 2005). The data was coded, tabulated and analyzed to generate frequencies and percentages using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Results and Discussion

Findings of the study showed that most learners in inclusive schools face psychosocial challenges which in turn impact negatively on their academic and life goals as reported by the respondents. The special needs include Physical and visual impairment, health and hearing problems, communication, emotional and learning difficulties as well as giftedness as illustrated in Figure 1.

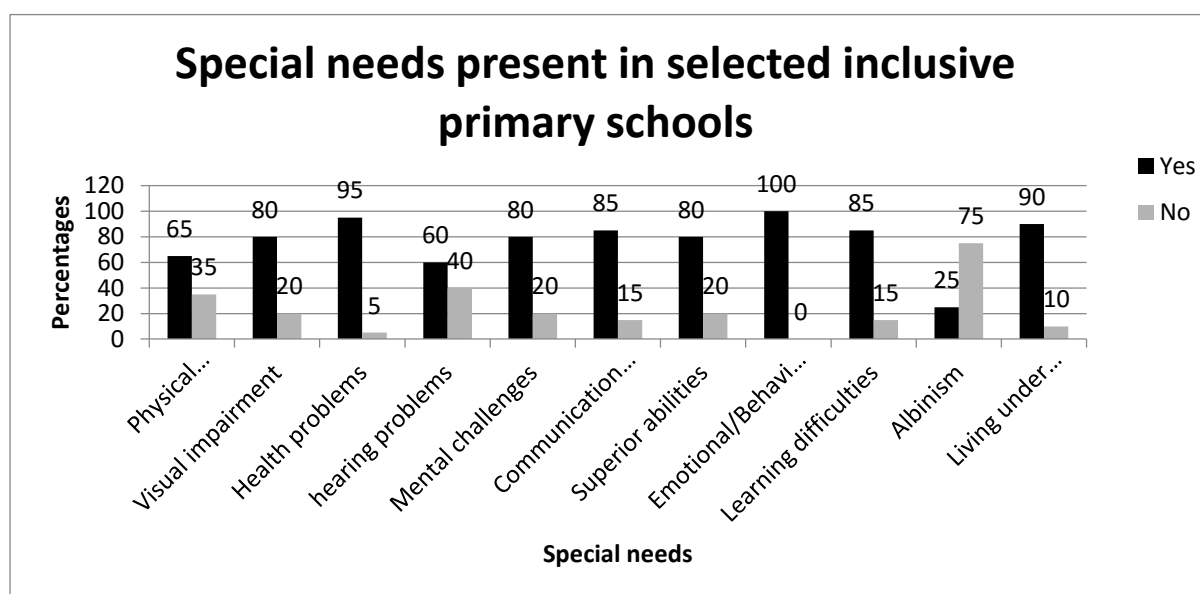


Figure 1: Special Needs in Selected Inclusive Schools

Most of the teachers in the Sub-County are not professionally trained to handle learners with special needs. The findings further established that the few specialized teachers are overstretched, poorly remunerated and unevenly distributed, and hence are not able to meet the needs of these learners. This falls short of the report by Ongama (2008) which purports that personnel charged with care for children with special needs should be well trained and have the right attitude for assisting learners in schools. Table 1 shows the responses of teachers when asked whether they were trained to handle learners with special needs.

Table 1: Percentage of teachers trained to handle Learners with Special Needs

Responses	Frequency(f)	Percent (%)
Yes	6	30.0
No	14	70.0
Total	20	100.0

Table 1 shows that out of the 20 class teachers contacted, only 6 (30%) were trained to handle learners with special needs in seminars and at certificate level while (70%) were not. This confirms the Kenya Government (1999) report of the Commission of Inquiry into the education system of Kenya, which observed that there are inadequate trained personnel in schools to handle learners with special needs. The Pedagogical approaches they use are usually rigid and fail to capture the needs of learners with disability in the Kenyan inclusive primary schools. Hence, the pupils' special needs that cause psychosocial challenges in Njoro Sub County Primary schools were unmet and therefore called for urgent attention. It follows that the teachers are not in a position to mount counseling intervention strategies that could alleviate the challenges.

The research attempted to establish how teachers view the learners' participation in class. Table 2 shows that 17 (85%) of the teachers felt that most of the learners with special needs were passive learners. Only 2 (10%) of the respondents indicated that pupils with special needs were active learners. This is a clear indication that this group of learners had intrinsic issues that required immediate interventions so that the individuals can benefit in the teaching and learning process.

Table 2: Teachers' report on learners' participation in class activities

Responses	Frequency(f)	Percent (%)
Active learners	2	10
Passive learners	17	85
Total	19	95

The research also sought the opinion of teachers on whether there were major, minor or no adjustments that should be done on the curriculum for handling learners with special needs and the responses are as indicated in table 3.

Table 3 shows that 18 (90%) of the teachers asserted that the curriculum used in handling learners with special needs require major adjustments to include the various needs of the learners. 1 (5%) of the teachers' results noted that the curriculum needed minor adjustments with only 1 (5%) thinking that the curriculum required no adjustments.

Table 3: Teachers' responses on the kind of adjustment necessary in the curriculum for handling learners with special needs

Curriculum amendments.	Frequency(f)	Percent (%)
None	1	5
Major	18	90
Minor	1	5

Total **20** **100.0**

The two aforementioned results concur with the Kenya Government, (1999) report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Education system of Kenya. A totally integrated quality of Education and training calls for the Kenyan Government to adjust the curriculum so that it can favour all learners with special concerns. In depth findings from the teachers indicated that they used different methods to assist learners with special needs.

When the learners were asked if there was anything that made them not to concentrate in class, the responses were as shown in Figure 2. These discussion details most of the causes of psychosocial challenges to learners with special needs.

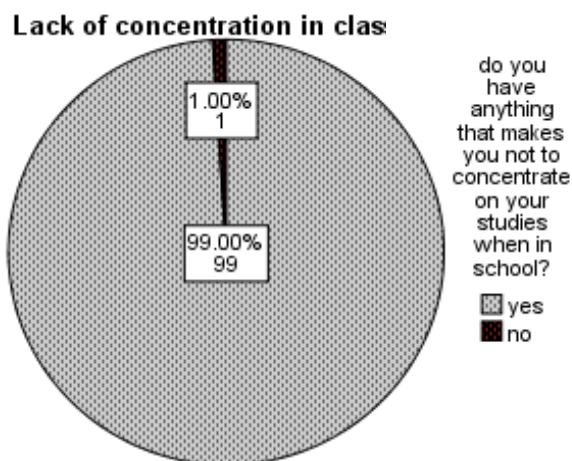


Figure 2: Deterrents to concentration of learners with special needs

This Figure shows that almost all of the learners involved in the research 99 (99%) had at least something that made them not to concentrate in class with only 1 (1%) responding otherwise. Hence, inclusive learning should be adopted in all regular schools in order to provide psychological services which promote acceptance, comfort, empathy and unconditional positive regard to learners with special needs. However, the situation is bleak in rural areas, highly enrolled schools, and urban regular schools where there are neither facilities nor trained personnel to cater for the handicapped learners (UNESCO, 1990).

The research further sought to find out whether there were psychosocial challenges which learners face in a teaching and learning atmosphere. Figure 3 depicts the feelings of pupils in a classroom atmosphere.

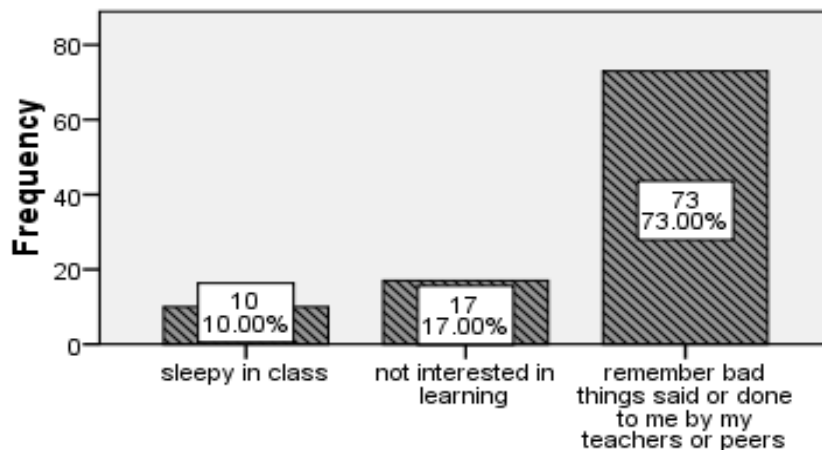


Figure 3: Feelings of the learners while learning

Figure 3 indicated that 73 (73%) of the learners always remembered bad things said or done to them by their teachers or peers while learning. 17 (17%) of the children were not interested in learning, and only 10 (10%) of the children usually felt sleepy in class while learning. These findings revealed presence of psychosocial challenges in a teaching and learning atmosphere. The findings concur with the study of Dean (1996) which suggests that some teachers may object to having learners with special needs in their schools or classes fearing that the pupils would lower their schools' mean scores. This could be attributed to the education system which is examination oriented, resulting in the learners experiencing psychosocial challenges in the school.

The research further indicated that there were other stressors which caused psychosocial challenges among learners with special needs. These are shown by some subjects they felt were especially difficult as illustrated in figure 4.

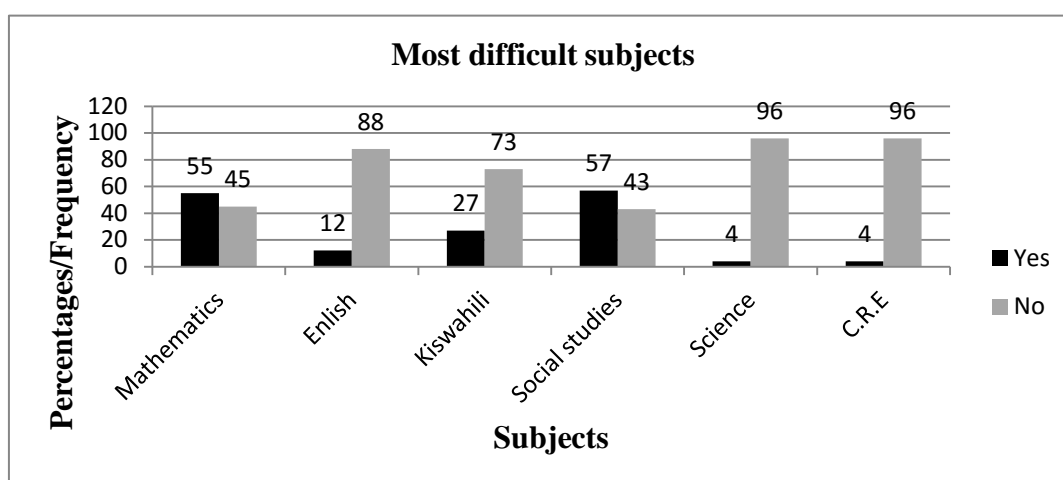


Figure 4: Most difficult subjects

Figure 3 shows the responses of the children when they were asked about the subjects they felt were most difficult during their course of study. The learners were asked if there were any of the aforementioned subjects which appeared most difficult to them. When a learner gave a yes response, then it was taken that the subject was most difficult to the child. No as a response attracted a conclusion that the subject was easy. From Figure 4, it is clear that social studies appeared most difficult subject with 57 (57%) of the learners rating it so. Mathematics was rated by 55 (55%) of the children as the most difficult subject. Kiswahili came third with 27 (27%) of the children rating it as most difficult. The easiest subjects appeared to have been C.R.E and science with 96 (96%) of the learners rating them so. This was followed by English with 88 (88%) of the learners rating it as an easy subject. Some of the learners exhibited learning difficulties in more than one subject. This study established that there are some learners with specific learning difficulties as observed by Gargiulo (2006). This therefore causes intrinsic psychosocial challenges to the learners which need counseling interventions.

In an attempt to find out other causes of psychosocial challenges among learners with special needs in certain aspects of learning, they were asked whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed to the statements on the x-axis. The responses revealed that that 62% of the learners (the highest percentage) could not do assignments alone and therefore needed their friends to help them. 44 % of the learners strongly agreed to the fact

that the homework given to them was too much and therefore needed to be reduced. 49% also agreed to this fact. The study therefore concluded that a bigger percentage of the learners felt that the homework given to them by their teachers was too much and therefore needed to be reduced. 32% of the learners strongly agreed that they liked moving about in class while 22% just agreed that they liked moving about in class after finishing their assignment. 26% of the learners strongly agreed that they feared answering questions in class, and 50% agreed that they feared answering questions in class. 42% of the learners strongly agreed that they needed a better sitting position in class with 15% agreeing with this statement. 24% of the learners liked staying alone doing their own things. 16% also agreed with this statement. 10% of the learners had a sickness which disturbs them. This probably implied that the sickness which disturbed them was a serious one and they were sure about the nature and form of the sickness. Those who agreed that they had a sickness which disturbed them were 16%. The sickness and the aforementioned stressors caused psychosocial challenges to learners with special needs, therefore calling for counseling interventions. The findings are illustrated in Figure 5.

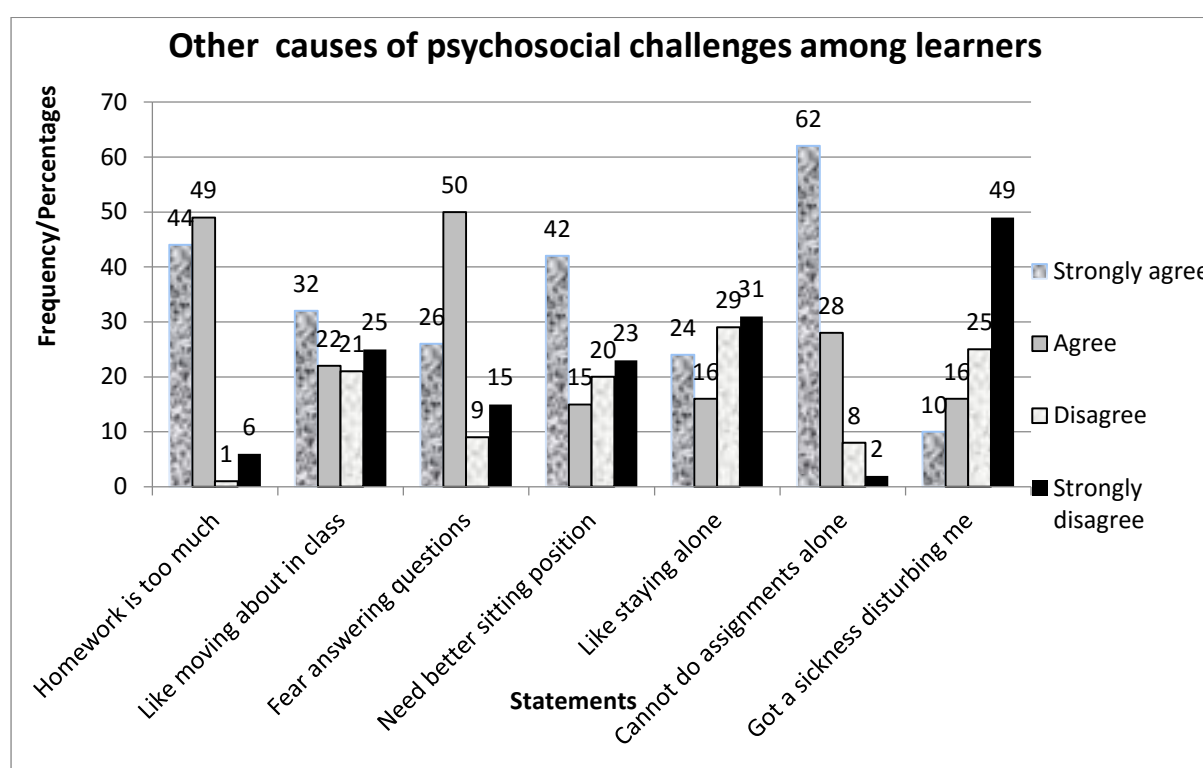


Figure 5: Other causes of psychosocial challenges among learners in Njoro Sub County

These findings agree with the Kenya Government, (1999) report of the Commission of Inquiry into the needs of learners with special needs in that the education system lacks clear policy guidelines and legal status on special needs provision.

Conclusions

The findings of the study revealed that learners with special needs in Inclusive schools in Njoro Sub County face a variety of challenges. The special needs include physical and visual impairment, health and hearing problems, communication, emotional and learning difficulties as well as giftedness. These conditions interfere with the learning process, and consequently the achievement of their daily lives and study goals. The teachers who handle these learners are neither adequate nor properly trained. The distribution of trained personnel among the inclusive schools is also wanting. The effects of the challenges are compounded by

inadequate and ill-prepared teachers, rigid curriculum, lack of a user friendly school environment and poor education policies. At the same time, examination styles, certification and assessment procedures do not favour learners with special needs.

Recommendations

The study recommends:

- Strengthening of guidance and counselling programmes for learners with special needs.
- Introduction of a diversified curriculum and examination system that accommodate learners with special needs.
- In-service training of teachers in the area of handling learners with special needs.
- Motivation of teachers through better remuneration and certification.
- Development of policies and legislations that support learners with special needs.
- Administrative policies within the school environment, including friendly rules and regulations.
- Provision of learning resources and infrastructural facilities that favour learners with special needs.
- Admission of learners into all schools which should integrate learner disabilities into the mainstream program.

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