

School Teachers' Attitudes towards Integration of Children with Speech Difficulties in Public Primary Schools: A Case of Busia District, Kenya

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Abstract

Since the onset of inclusion of children with disabilities in the education sector, many challenges are facing the reform effort especially as regards to improving services of the disabled children. In an inclusive school, general education does not relinquish responsibility for pupils with special needs, but instead, places them at the centre of challenges which include attitudes of teachers and peers. Their self-concept which is influenced by these attitudes determines their academic achievement. Philosophies regarding the education of children with disabilities have changed over the past two decades and several countries have led in the effort to implement policies, which foster the integration of all pupils into mainstream environments. Although the movement of integration has gained momentum in recent years, a key element in the successful implementation of the policy is the views of the personnel who have the major responsibility for implementing it, that is, teachers. It is argued that teachers' beliefs and attitudes are critical in ensuring the success of the integration practices since teachers' acceptance of the policy of integration is likely to affect their commitment to implementing it. The importance of investigating attitudes towards people with disabilities has long been recognized. Thus, this paper aims at examining the attitude of teachers towards children with speech difficulties in public primary schools. Descriptive survey design was adopted for this study with focus on a target population of eighty four Primary schools in Busia District. A sample size of twenty five (25) schools was obtained through stratified sampling, simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. Data collection was done by use of questionnaires after which descriptive statistics was used in analysis. The study findings showed that teachers held positive attitudes about integration on children with speech difficulties. This boosted the self-concept of pupils with speech difficulties and made them perform averagely in school. This study recommends that integration should be made successful through training sensitization of teachers in special education and improvement in staffing. The study is aimed at helping to identify ways, create and encourage the development of favourable conditions that would boost the self-concept of children with speech difficulties and realize their potentials in life while learning in an integrated setting.

Keywords: Teachers, Attitudes, Children with speech difficulties, Public Primary Schools, Busia District

1. Introduction

According to Avramids, et. al. (2000), identifying teacher attitudes is important on two levels, that is, the individual classroom level and the wider programme level. At the classroom level teacher attitudes affect teaching and pupils. These authors review research report that demonstrate the influence of teachers' attitudes on their expectations for their pupils and their behaviour towards them. These attitudes, expectations and behaviors influence both pupil self image and academic performance. Negative teacher attitudes towards handicapped pupils are detrimental to the handicapped pupils integrated into their classrooms. At the programme level, teacher attitudes provide important feedback for judging overall programme effectiveness and for improving integration procedures.

Beny Man, (1989), asserts that attitudes held by professionals are critical to their clients' quality of life. When considering the profession of teaching, attitudes are particularly relevant given the importance of the interactional nature of the teacher – pupil relationship in learning. The attitudes of teachers to children with disabilities are an integral component in the success or failure of including them in regular classrooms. In addition to attitude assessment, Antonak and Larrivee (1995) point out that attitude measures can identify both teacher characteristics and programme procedures, which appear to affect teacher attitudes. Results can help improve programme design and implementation, daily procedures, pre-service and in-service teacher training and support services. Moreover, assessing changes in teacher attitude overtime helps to evaluate the effectiveness of experience, changes in training or procedures and the general progress of programme implementation. Although the movement for integration is part of a broad human rights agenda, educators have serious reservations about supporting the widespread placement of pupils with disabilities in regular schools.

Research undertaken in Western countries about professional attitudes towards integration, has provided a range of information in this area. There is, however, a general lack of consistency in the findings adduced from these researchers. According to Kavale, (2000), attitudes about integration have historically been

multi-dimensional and reflective of a variety of underlying factors. He identified these factors and found that they include Academic concerns whereby negative effects of integration which include segregation affect the general academic performance of children with disabilities.

(Ibid), further observes that research evidence about attitudes surrounding integration has remained equivocal because of the very disparate opinions held. He reports a review of some studies; which have shown general education teachers to hold negative views about integration, while others have revealed more positive attitude. For example, Kavale(2000) cites a study by Semmel et al. (1991), which found that teachers favoured educating all pupils with disabilities in the general education classroom. These differences may support research, which has found that more experience with integration is associated with more positive attitudes.

In an effort to clarify the complexity surrounding attitudes about integration, Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) conducted a quantitative research synthesis of 28 investigations that surveyed the perceptions of almost 10,000 general education teachers regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities. Although two-thirds of general education teachers supported the concept of integration, only a small majority expressed a willingness to include students with disabilities in their own classrooms. While there was support for the concept of integration, less than one-third of general education teachers expressed the belief that the general education classroom was either the optimal placement or would produce greater benefits than other placements. The two factors, which seemed to influence these perceptions, were severity level of pupil disability and the amount of additional teacher responsibility required. Among about one-third of the sample, these two factors were also associated with the belief that including pupils with disabilities would have a negative impact on the general education classroom.

Leyswer, Kapperman and Keller (1994), undertook a cross-cultural study of teacher attitudes towards integration in the USA, Germany, Israel, Ghana, Taiwan and the Philippines. Their findings showed that there were differences in attitude to integration between these countries. Teachers in the USA and Germany had the most positive attitudes which were attributed to integration being widely practiced as the result of public law 94-142 and seen as surprising respectively, because at the time of the investigation, Germany had no special education legislation, their teachers were not provided with special education training, their children with special education needs were educated in segregated settings and integration was being practised only on an experimental basis. The authors speculated that the positive views expressed by the German teachers represented an overall sensitivity of Germans towards minorities thus, towards disabled people. Teacher attitudes were significantly less positive in Ghana, the Philippines, Israel and Taiwan. The authors reasoned that this could probably be due to limited or non-existence training for teachers to acquire integration competencies; the limited opportunities for integration in some of these countries; and the overall small percentage of children who receive services at all (none of these countries had a history of offering children with special education needs specially designed educational opportunities). However, it is evident that the above studies reveal a problem that needs to be justified. The attitudes of teachers adversely affect the self-esteem of children with speech difficulties in an integrated setting which finally affect their learning.

Another study that (Ibid) cited was conducted by Giangreco, Dennis, Edlman and Schattman (1993) who established that as years progressed, teachers reported increasing their own involvement in an ownership of students educational programmes. Clough and Lindsay (1992) conducted a study in UK among teachers and concluded that the change in teacher attitude towards children with special Education needs changed in their favour overtime. They attributed this to the experiences teachers had where they had developed some competency over the length of time.

2. Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in Busia district, in Western Province of Kenya. The district borders Nyanza Province to the South, Teso district to the North, Uganda as a Country to the West and Bungoma district to the East. It covers a total area of 854.3km² and has two administrative divisions namely Nambale and Matayos (Gok, 2003). The study adopted a descriptive survey design which provided a systematic empirical inquiry that was used to collect more information in a large population in the shortest time by utilizing samples (Kothari, 1985). The study population composed of teachers, pupils without speech difficulties and those with speech difficulties. Twenty four (24) schools (3 girls' schools, 1 boys' school and 20 mixed schools) out of a total of eighty four Public Primary Schools in the district were randomly sampled through stratifying the schools into rural and urban public primary schools based on the four zones. Purposive sampling was used to involve the head teachers in the study. Questionnaires were administered to two head teachers. The teachers' sample was drawn from 288 teachers in the 24 schools. Out of this, 48 teachers filled the questionnaires. Descriptive statistics was employed in data analysis.

3. Results and Findings

This paper sought to determine the attitude of school teachers towards children with speech difficulties in public

primary schools. Both Open ended and closed-ended questionnaires were used to assess this. The results were as shown in table 1 and 2. From the study findings, it shows that a huge proportion 47 (97.9%) of the teachers teach children with varied disabilities. This signifies that the teachers were ready to identify and accord the necessary assistance to children with disabilities in regular schools. The teachers were aware of the disabled cases in their schools and were in a position to help them at school level and classroom level.

Table 1 reveals that there were various types of disability cases in schools that were identified by teachers. The cases include hearing impairment, mental impairment, the deaf and dumb, those with speech difficulties, physically impaired, epileptic cases and those with learning difficulties. A large proportion 46 (95.8%) of the disabled cases were children with speech difficulties. This is an indication that there were many children with speech difficulties in regular schools and there is need for correct measures to be put in place to help them realize their potentials. Pupils with speech difficulties have had no special schools designed for them and this therefore means that most of them if not all of them learn in regular schools. The least number 1(2.1%) of disabilities cases identified were the deaf and dumb. The deaf and the dumb have well established Special Schools for them for example Mumias school for the deaf and dumb. In teaching the deaf and the dumb, it requires technical skills like the use of the sign language which can only be very comfortable to a trained teacher in special Education, more so, in sign language. Some of the deaf and dumb children who come from poor families are hardly taken to school since their parents cannot afford the requirements in a special school.

Many 35(72.9) of the school teachers give help to pupils with speech difficulties by offering remedial teaching, while 7(14.6%) of the school teachers guide them and the least number 4(8.3%) of the school teachers help pupils with speech difficulties by grouping them in mixed ability groups. Pupils with speech difficulties are generally slow in attaining concepts especially in languages. Languages are enhanced through the four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Speaking as a skill is often interfered with in the case of children with speech difficulties. The children with speech defects therefore require a lot of commitment and extra time from teachers to give them remedial work. From the study therefore, it is evident that the school teachers are committed and dedicated to help children with speech difficulties despite the high enrolment rates they are experiencing.

The findings also indicated that, the majority 19 (39.6%) of the school teachers said the help they gave to children with speech difficulties was time wasting to other learners. The least number 8(16.7%) of school teachers said that they experienced indiscipline problems from other learners as they helped those with speech difficulties. Time wasting is being cited as a major problem because the teachers use most of their time in offering remedial teaching to pupils with speech difficulties. This means that the learners without speech difficulties are left idle and are also not provided with remedial teaching to improve on their academic performance.

A large proportion 45(99.8%) of the teachers strongly agreed that the challenge of pupils with speech difficulties in being in a regular class will promote their academic growth. Pupils with speech difficulties interact freely with their friends in school and share ideas in groups through discussions. Some pupils who are well vast with given areas of the curriculum can become tutors. Children learn better from their friends than even their teachers.

Most 44(91.7%) of the teachers further strongly agreed that isolation in special classes has negative effects on social development of pupils with speech difficulties. Separating pupils with speech difficulties creates room for withdrawal, ridicule and social stigma. The peers in other rooms would label those in special classes as abnormal beings, unteachable or slow learners. Such utterances on reaching the ears of those with speech difficulties demoralize them and lead to low self-esteem.

When teachers were asked their views on whether integration of pupils with speech difficulties was beneficial to regular pupils, majority 40(83.3%) of them strongly agreed. This implies that 'disability is not inability'. Pupils with speech difficulties were quite good in some curriculum areas like mathematics and science subjects which were practical in nature and did not involve much of oral work. The pupils without speech difficulties benefit more from their challenged peers through interaction in class in form of group discussions or during their preps time as they do their homework.

Their views on whether pupils with speech difficulties made adequate attempts to complete work, indicated that a large number 27(56.3%) of the teachers agreed with the statement. Pupils with speech difficulties just like their peers without speech difficulties were determined in their academic performance. They worked hard in all areas of the curriculum in order to attain their potentials in life.

The research revealed that many 35(72.9%) of the teachers agreed that most pupils with speech difficulties are well behaved in integrated setting. Due to their disability, most of them hardly talked or participated in activities. They tend to talk only when required to and this reduced cases of indiscipline that emanated from idle talks. They feared ridicule or rebuking words from their friends.

Furthermore, the study indicated that majority 33(68.8%) of the teachers strongly disagreed that classroom management was significantly affected by integrating pupils with speech difficulties. Classroom

management entails discipline of the learners, their participation in class, time management and sitting arrangement. A well managed class attains the set objectives and therefore the academic performance of the learners is improved.

4. Discussion

The study has revealed that most teachers indicated positive attitudes towards pupils with speech difficulties. Their attitudes might have been influenced by their demographic characteristics which included sex, age and experience. Other issues that might have prompted them to be positive towards children with speech difficulties could have been the Kenyan laws and policies that have been put in place.

Firstly, the study indicated that the majority 26(54.2%) of the teachers who participated in the study were female. Female teachers are noted to have a greater tolerance level for integration and for special needs persons than male teachers. Female teachers replace the mothers of pupils with speech difficulties in school. Their cultural upbringing sees them to be socializing agents and sympathizers than men.

Secondly, basing on the study findings, a large proportion 27(56.3%) of the teachers belonged to the age bracket of 35-44 years. On average in Kenya, most people get employment at the age of 20 years onwards. That means, most of the teachers had taught for more than 15 years. With 15 years of teaching experience, the teachers were much aware of the integration process. The government through the Ministry of Education regularly builds capacity of teachers through issuing of circulars, carrying out workshops, seminars and short-courses to equip teachers with knowledge. During the on-start of the process of integration, a few schools were selected for pilot study before implementing the process. The knowledge the teachers had, may have prompted them to be more positive towards children with speech difficulties. Having served for long, they were aware of what is expected of them in the integrated educational programme.

Thirdly, the teachers may have been more positive to pupils with speech difficulties due to the Kenyan law. Kenya as a country has enacted a legislation pertaining to persons with disabilities. The persons with Disabilities Act (P.W.D 2003) place emphasis on provision of equal opportunities to persons with disabilities without discrimination. The act further outlines the charges that have been put in place to those who break the act. For example, according to Amnesty International (2005), the individuals who are found abusing disabled persons should be jailed for life.

Such emphasis and fear of the law might have prompted teachers to be more positive towards children with speech difficulties. The consequences of discriminating disabled persons according to the law are too harsh. The study findings of teachers being positive to pupils with speech difficulties due to law are in agreement with Leysiver, Kapperman and Keller (1994), who undertook a cross-cultural study of teacher attitudes towards integration in the USA, Germany, Israel, Ghana, Taiwan and the Phillipines. Furthermore, a number of past and recent United Nations (UN) policies affirm the right of all children to be valued equally, treated with respect and provided with equal opportunities. The UN convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) stressed, that education should make the child achieve the fullest possible social interaction and individual development. The UNESCO Salamca statement (1994) emphasized that every child has a right to education that takes into account one's unique abilities and learning needs. It called for governments to develop policies and structural frameworks to encourage and enable schools accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional and linguistic difficulties.

The experience the teachers had influenced their attitudes positively. This is in agreement with the views of Mc Donald Birnbraver and Swerrisen (1987) as cited by Kavale, (2000) in his study who noted that experience with pupils with disabilities influenced teachers' attitudes positively. This was due to the fact that as teachers get older in the profession, they explore ways of getting trained in coping with children of varied disabilities. The study findings are also similar to a study conducted by Clough and Lindsay (1991). They conducted a study in UK among teachers and concluded that the change in teacher's attitudes towards children with special education needs changed in their favour overtime. They attributed this to the experiences teachers had had; where they had developed some competency over the length of time.

5. Conclusion

The teachers in regular schools held positive attitudes towards children with speech difficulties. The teachers were willing to use their extra time to help children with speech difficulties attain their potentials to the full. Despite the challenge of understaffing that the research established, the teachers were determined to continue teaching children with speech difficulties together with their peers. The teachers helped children with speech difficulties by offering remedial teaching to them, guiding them when they had problems and placed them in mixed ability grouping in order to benefit from other learners.

6. Recommendation

There is need for the teachers to strike a balance and help all the learners equally with their varied disabilities.

The gifted and talented learners need challenging tasks to keep them busy; otherwise, they end up becoming indiscipline cases.

6.1 Suggestions for further Research

Since this study was limited to children with speech difficulties in public primary schools, the researcher is obliged to make the following suggestions for further research:

Research on other variables not studied that are likely to influence teachers' attitude towards children with speech difficulties like socio-political background and economic status.

It is suggested that future research on integration and self-concept should include other key informants in the school system such as the head teachers, Education officers and parents and assess their attitudes as well.

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Table 1: Teachers' Attitudes towards Children with Speech Difficulties

Item	Frequency		Percent	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Teach children with disability	47	1	97.9	2.1
Types of disabilities				
Hearing impaired	34	14	70.8	29.2
Mentally impaired	18	30	37.5	62.5
Deaf and dumb	1	47	2.1	97.9
Speech difficulties	46	2	95.8	4.2
Physically impaired	17	31	35.4	64.6
Epilepsy	4	44	8.3	91.7
Learning difficulties	12	36	25.0	75.0
Help given to children with Speech difficulties				
Remedial teaching	35	13	72.9	27.1
Guiding	7	41	14.6	85.4
Mixed ability grouping	4	44	8.3	91.7
Problems created to other learners				
Time wasting	19	29	39.6	60.4
Indiscipline	8	40	16.7	83.3
Delay in syllabus coverage	17	31	35.4	64.6
Create boredom	15	33	31.3	68.8
Challenges faced while teaching in an integrated setting				
Planning learners needs	40	8	83.3	16.77
Not covering syllabus	17	31	35.4	64.16
Poor performance	17	31	35.4	64.6
Poor understanding	16	32	33.3	66.7
Slow learning	4	44	8.3	91.7
Time consuming	19	29	39.6	60.4
Lack of skills	32	16	66.7	33.3
Lack of special teaching materials	29	19	60.4	39.6
High enrolment	45	3	93.8	6.3

Table 2: School Teachers' Attitudes towards Children with Speech Difficulties

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD
The challenge of being in a regular class will promote academic growth of pupils with speech difficulty	45 (99.8%)	2 (4.2%)	-	-	1 (2.1%)
Isolation in special class has negative effects on social development of pupils with speech difficulties	44 (91.7%)	3 (6.3%)	-	-	1 (2.1%)
The integration of pupils with speech difficulties can be beneficial to regular pupils	40 (83.3%)	7 (14.6%)	1 (2.1%)	-	-
Pupils with speech difficulties do make an adequate attempt to complete work	15 (31.3%)	27 (56.3%)	5 (10.4%)	-	1 (2.1%)
Most pupils with speech difficulties are well behaved in integrated classes	4 (8.3%)	35 (72.9%)	8 (16.7%)	1 (2.1%)	-
Integration offers mixed group interrelation between pupils with speech difficulties and the regular pupils which will foster understanding and acceptance of differences	40 (83.3%)	7 (14.6%)	1 (2.1%)	-	-
Pupils with speech difficulties can best be served in general classrooms	28 (58.3%)	12 (25.0%)	6 (12.5%)	1 (2.1%)	1 (2.1%)
It's difficult to maintain order in a class where there are pupils with speech difficulties	4 (8.3%)	6 (12.5%)	-	33 (68.8%)	5 (10.4%)
Classroom management is significantly affected by integrating pupils with speech difficulty	2 (4.2%)	12 (25.0%)	-	33 (68.8%)	1 (2.1%)
Pupils with speech difficulties will greatly monopolize the general classroom teachers lime regular C.P socially isolate P.W.S in integrated classes.	10 (20.8%)	1 (2.1%)	3 (6.2%)	17 (35.4%)	17 (35.4%)

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