

Is Specialized Training a Basic Necessity for Special Students Teaching?

Samuel Chege Kinuthia¹ & Anne Christine Wanjiru Kabui²

¹ PhD Student at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT), Kenya

² Lecturer, School of Business and Economics, South Eastern Kenya University (SEKU), Kenya

Correspondence: Samuel Chege Kinuthia, PhD student at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT), Kenya. E-mail: kinuthias83@gmail.com

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Abstract

Every individual irrespective of their profession, requires requisite training to enable them to do a particular job with reasonable accuracy, achieving desired results. Mid-school is the stage between primary basic education and the tertiary level and in Kenya it is referred to as secondary education that is evaluated with a national examination (KCSE) at the end of the four years. Teachers' role in a students' performance cannot be underestimated where students with or without disabilities are subjected to the same national examinations. Performance in the national special schools in Kenya does not compare favorably with that of ordinary national schools irrespective of same caliber of teachers in both. This necessitated an empirical inquiry into whether there is need for extra training for teachers in special schools. The study sought to establish the influence of teacher training on the performance of special schools in Kenya. The performance of a school is measured based on the overall mean attained in KCSE examinations. The study focused on the national schools that are in the category of special schools in Kenya. The study is anchored on Behaviorist theory which states that learning is a function of change in overt behavior. A cross-sectional descriptive survey was carried out where data was collected using a self-administered semi structured questionnaire. Study findings indicate that 76.6% of variation in performance is predicted by training implying that relevant training of teachers in special schools is critical in achieving the expected learning outcomes with quality grades in KCSE that are pivotal in determining learners' career paths. The study recommends creating an enabling environment and support to teachers willing to pursue training in special education. Further research should be done to determine how the subsector can be adequately funded both for initial and on-the-job special teacher training for special needs schools.

Keywords: training, knowledge, skill, ability, performance, special national school

1. Introduction

Modern day pedagogy lays emphasis on the student-centered learning as an alternative to teacher-centered learning. The debate rages on, with proponents of each, arguing that they both have wealth of substance to offer, when and if applied correctly. The concern for academia and practitioners then is, does the absolute of either offer superior results to the other? Education provides students with the foundation of skills and knowledge they will lean on for the rest of their lives. This education can be formal in schools or informal in other social settings in their lives. As the world around them changes; be it due to changes in values, norms, individual preferences, societal shifts or technological innovations; the education landscape needs to shift in response (Ingram, 2009; Global education, 2018). The caliber of students in a classroom at any given time will also have a bearing on the application of the different methods in assisting them to learn. This calls for transitioning of classrooms into innovative learning spaces every new day and this resonates with the need for specialized training.

The Republic of Kenya since her independence in 1963 has been committed to the provision of equal access to quality and relevant education and training opportunities to all Kenyans including those with special needs (Sessional paper, 1963; Muhombe Andrew, Rop, Ogola, & Wesonga, 2015). Education is considered an avenue to eradicate poverty, disease and hunger. Accommodation of differently abled (disabled) students is a global challenge for the educators and education systems at large. Disability among learners varies in category and degree. Learners with disabilities are either mainstreamed (normal and disabled students all combined in the same class) or segregated hence the establishment of special schools for the disabled or special classes for learners with disabilities

in ordinary schools (Resilient Educator, 2020) At times the challenge of achieving desirable learning outcomes is not in the pedagogical method used but with its application. A teacher may have the challenge of teaching students with varied learning abilities in the same class with the expectation to achieve best results from all of them. This calls for individual students being given assignments or tasks as per their abilities and speed.

In Kenya, students in secondary schools sit for Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE), which is a prerequisite for entry to university and other tertiary institutions. This national examination is from the basic performance measure for secondary schools both for teachers and their students. The performance of national special schools in KCSE examinations have never been impressive when compared with other national schools handling ordinary students. This disadvantages students with varied disabilities from competing favorably with other able bodied students for the limited vacancies in universities and other tertiary institutions, and consequently in the labor market.

With increasing recognition of the importance of transitioning students from school to the outside world, student autonomy has become a key area of focus. Education leaders argue that 'student agency must become the norm, not the exception (Cooper, 2017). The new approach to pedagogy for normal schools is a total shift from the traditional method where teachers are a critical factor let alone students with special needs that have a high level of dependency on the teacher (Google for Education). Although student-led learning is important, the role of a teacher in student's performance is important.

According to Burns, Santally, Halkhoree, Sungkur, Juggurnath, and Rajabalee, (2019) teaching practices in sub-Saharan Africa are highly traditional and many who are teaching have not been prepared in either their content area or in pedagogy. According to Bashir, Lockheed, Ninan, and Jee-Peng, (2018), most teachers in sub-Saharan Africa receive no continuous professional development or support. Lack of special training for teachers in special schools culminates to poor performance by students in national examinations and subsequent poor placement into tertiary institutions. Osborne (1996) defines training as a planned process to modify attitude, knowledge or skill behavior through learning experience to achieve effective performance in an activity or range of activities. They say teachers affect eternity and going by this, shaping teacher training to specifically suit their respective students can affect service delivery and performance positively.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis

It is vital for organizational leaders to recognize the importance of training and development in employee performance and evaluation. Enhanced capabilities, knowledge, and skills are the foundation for the organization's competitive advantage in today's global market (Walters & Rodriguez, 2019). There are many reasons why training is done among them include improving employee productivity and performance on the job, reducing employee mistakes since workers conform to the firm's policies, practices and procedures reducing the total wage costs. Training reduces employee turnover, management's supervisory time, providing improved customer service and ultimately develops goodwill. Training is necessary to meet technological changes, provides greater employee satisfaction and leads to a greater fulfillment of a firm's societal responsibilities.

This study is anchored on the behaviorist theory (Skinner, 1974) which states that behaviorist learning theory is a psychology-grounded pedagogical line of thought, based on the idea that behavior can be researched scientifically without consideration of cognitive states (Reimann, 2018). According to Osborne (1996) a performance gap window may arise due to poor motivation, inadequate resources to carry out the tasks, wrong persons for the job, and lack of training and development activities. According to KSA handbook (2005), training is described as a composition of knowledge, skill and ability where knowledge refers to an organized body of information, usually factual or procedural in nature, Skills refers to the proficient manual, verbal or mental manipulation of data or things, while ability is the power or capacity to perform an activity/task.

According to Kigondu (2010), the effectiveness of the teachers can be measured through: outcomes/results as seen through the level of commitment to the task. These outcomes include KCSE results in the subject taught, success in co-curricular activities like games drama and music festivals and maintenance of high discipline levels with the academic results bearing the greatest weight. Against this background, national special schools have had a below average performance over the years while other national school have high performance in the seventy fifth percentile. This calls for an empirical enquiry into possible causes of this dismal performance and the current study conceptualizes that teacher training is a probable cause. The hypothesis adopted is; Teacher training has a significant influence on the performance of national special schools in Kenya.

3. Methods

The study adopted cross-sectional descriptive survey collecting data at a particular point in time. Primary data on

training was collected using a self-administered, semi structured questionnaire. The operationalization of training was based on knowledge, skill and ability. Knowledge as the organized body for academic achievement was evaluated based on the teacher ability to deliver content and ensuring that during every lesson, every student is well catered for. It enquired on factual and procedural approach to teaching special children that teachers receive during training and later on the job. The skill was evaluated against the proficient manipulation mental or physical that is geared towards developing students' self-esteem, free of teacher prejudice and cultural attitudes towards the disabled as part of what the teachers are prepared for before they are posted to schools. Ability was assessed against a teacher's power and capacity leaning on individual giftedness towards their students for development of the social skills of their learners. The respondents were the teachers and heads of departments in the national special schools of Thika School for the Blind and Joytown School for the Physically Handicapped. Secondary data on special schools' KCSE performance results for the past three years is available at the local education office and this provided the average trend that was used for this study.

A pilot study was carried out in a different special school to test for content and construct validity. Expert opinion confirmed content validity of the questionnaire. Reliability was tested on the Cronbach alpha. Cronbach alpha (α), is a popular reliability test in social sciences, (Kaliappen & Hillman, 2013) whose value ranges from 0 to 1 with a high coefficient implying that the items correlate highly among themselves and there is consistency among items in measuring the concept of interest or a single latent variable on the questionnaire (Cronbach, 1951; Peterson, 1994; Cooper & Schindler, 2006). A cutoff of 0.7 for variable with more than five items was used, and 0.5 for those with less than five items (Kaliappen & Hillman, 2013). The questionnaire achieved a cronbach of between 0.657 and 0.834 hence reliable for the study. A regression analysis was done to establish the possible effect of training on the performance of national special schools in Kenya. The regression model is stated as;

$$P=f(\text{Training})$$

$$P= \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon$$

Where; P= Performance; X_1 = Training; ε = Error term and β_0, β_1 , = Coefficients

$P= \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{11} + \beta_2 X_{12} + \beta_3 X_{13} + \varepsilon \dots$ Performance as a function of training operationalization

4. Results and Findings

The response rate was 73.8% which is acceptable with male teachers accounting for 22.6% while female teachers form 77.4%. The study revealed that 64.5% of the respondents were between the ages 35-44 years. There were no teachers below age 25 years and above 55 years. The research also revealed that only 6.5% of the teachers had Bachelor of Education degree (special education) and another 2.5% had acquired post graduate diploma in special education with the remaining 91% having a regular Bachelor of Education degree. The study revealed that 70.9% of the teachers with a Bachelor of Education are unsatisfied with their job, feeling stressed and not sure how to handle the students hence not sure of always teaching in a special school for the whole of their teaching career. Only 28% of the teachers were willing to continue in special schools for their teaching career.

The respondents indicated that they receive knowledge on how to deliver content to their students and basic inclusion of students during training and assessment. However, the knowledge they receive is for ordinary learners and not special needs learners. Majority admitted that the first time they encountered special needs students was when they were posted to their current work station. In class, they are unable to accommodate the learners with different levels of disabilities and in most cases they do not know how to harness their unique abilities. Majority of the respondents admitted to have prejudice towards special persons in general as informed by their cultural stereotype background which highly influenced their approach to what the learner is capable of. Some believe that the schooling the special students get, is just another stage of growth and passing time and not necessarily for any professional career in later life. The teachers admitted to a great degree that they lack the physical and mental fortitude to deal with special children. Further they admit that academic achievement, self-esteem and social skills which are the fundamental outcomes of every learning experience are relatively harder to achieve with special learners as compared to ordinary students.

On performance, Thika School for the Blind and Joytown Secondary School for the Physically Handicapped KCSE results on a scale of 1-12 (1 being lowest and 12 being the best) for three consecutive years are as follows: Thika School for the Blind; 2019 (5.090), 2018 (4.392) and 2017(4.099). Joytown Secondary School for the Physically Handicapped 2019(3.403), 2018(3.800) and 2017(3.532). Teachers felt that teaching in these schools is emotionally demanding, physically draining, and heavy workload compared to other schools and they are always in fear of litigation from parents on perceived mistreatment of the child. According to the teachers, these children are already considered as failures from where they come from making it more taxing for the teacher to deliver to

them.

The results from the regression model are as indicated in the table below:

Table 1. Training and Performance of national special schools

Model Summary^a

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.875 ^a	.766	.747	.74544	1.477

a. Predictors: (Constant), Knowledge, Skill, Ability

b. Dependent Variable: Performance

ANOVA^a

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean square	f	Sig.
1 Regression	65.595	3	21.865	39.348	.000 ^b
Residual	20.005	36	.556		
Total	85.600	39			

a. Dependent Variable: Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Knowledge, Skill, Ability

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized		Standardized		
	B	Coefficients Std Error	Beta	T	Sig
1 (Constant)	-.184	.865		-.213	.833
Knowledge	.940	.132	.886	7.11	.000
Skills	.576	.377	.557	.201	.022
Ability	.660	.093	.633	.648	.015

a. Dependent variable: Performance

Training is good predictor of the performance of national special schools as indicated by high and statistically significant F-value and R value of 0.875. 76.6% of variation in performance is explained by variation in training as indicated by the value of R² which is a very strong positive relationship. Knowledge, skill and ability all have a positive relationship with performance as indicated by positive beta values and they are statistically significant predictor of performance as indicated by a high and statistically significant t-value. The negative coefficient for the constant indicates that, when all training variables are held constant, the variation in performance of national special schools will be negative.

5. Discussion

The study hypothesis that teacher training has a significant influence on the performance of national special schools in Kenya failed to be rejected by the study findings. Performance of a secondary school teacher is measured against the performance of his/her students in the national examinations (KCSE) as the main indicator while other indicators may include performance of students in the co-curricular activities and the level of discipline of the students. The training of the teacher is a significant predictor of this performance in national special schools in Kenya.

Training was operationalized into knowledge, skill and ability (KSA, 2005). Knowledge is organized body of information usually of a factual or procedural nature which if applied makes adequate performance on the job possible. Majority of the teachers in the special schools went through regular teacher training at their bachelor degree or diploma level and hence are not equipped with requisite knowledge and this is despite the fact that they are teaching students who are physically or visually challenged. Bashir, *et al* (2018) concurs with the study that most teachers in sub-Saharan Africa receive no continuous professional development or support. They are posted

to these schools directly from university or are transferred from other regular schools into the special schools. This makes them prone to protecting students from the learning experience as opposed to exposing them to learning and innovation.

According to Palmer, Ziegenfuss and Pinsker (2004) educators may feel overwhelmed and confused as to which of the studies should be used in assessing and designing curriculum. The result reveal the studies have commonalities that educators can use to begin the assessment process. Specifically, the knowledge, skills and abilities that were found to be important were: communication skills, interpersonal skills, general business knowledge, accounting knowledge, problem-solving skills, information technology, personal attitudes and capabilities and computer skills. Student-centered learning is a learning approach where the tutor allows the students' creativity and ability guide the learning process and in modern day it is usually applauded as the better pedagogical approach compared to teacher-centered approach. The involvement of students in learning activities is not an end in itself. Some students informed by their social orientation/background prefer the teacher-centered approach where they remain passive listeners. Many students appreciate the wealth of knowledge and real experiences of their tutors which they have not been exposed to previously.

Skill is proficient manual, verbal or mental manipulation of data or themes that is measured by a performance test where quality and quantity of performance are tested within an established time limit (Springer, 2019). The study revealed there were no respondents with above 55 years despite the retirement age being 60 years. This could be an indication of low job satisfaction. If the respondents were interested in their jobs, there would have been some teachers heading for retirement in the two institutions. The teachers felt that they lack the quality and quantity of service expected of them towards the special children since they do not understand the level of disability, the special learning skills required and the care and containment each student requires in order to facilitate their learning. This compares to Meghan, Brian and Debra (2018) findings that public health practitioners receive training in methods, theories and evidence based approaches, yet further investment in workforce is necessary to advance population health. This too applies to continuous professional development for teachers in special education.

Ability is the power to perform an observable activity at the present time. Activities similar to those required of a job include planning and organizing work. The feeling that disability was a curse from family sin or misfortune due to bad habits of an individual and their kin informed the thinking that educating disabled children was a waste of time and money. The ability of a teacher is informed by their values, norms and beliefs from their social setup with majority that are in these schools considering themselves on transit and not in a work station they would prefer by choice. This resonates with the findings of Muuya (2002), that many head teachers expect pupils with mental and physical handicaps to spend their lives at home and not to move onto employment, further education or training.

The performance of national special schools was below 6 points on average which contrasts the normal average performance of national schools in Kenya which is above an average of 10 points, a clear indication that special schools are way below average. Admission to any university in Kenya requires that a candidate scores an average of 7 and above and this denies majority of special students this chance. The cascade effect is also manifest when jostling for vacancies in the job market. Though different countries have methods of managing the education systems for the handicapped, most of them use all the four approaches. These are mainstreaming, inclusion, segregation and exclusion. However, the level of expertise differs from country to country. The underdeveloped economies don't offer quality services because of lack of manpower and resources (Karen et al., 2006). Bashir *et al.* (2018) adds that education officials and principals must understand how to support and evaluate teachers as they use technology to promote more learner-centered environments, and teachers themselves must know how to incorporate technology into lesson design, instruction, and assessment. A teacher's attitude towards teaching and learning is key to students' performance.

With the affirmative action meant to offer equal opportunities to all for access to education and the job market, investment in education for the special needs children is key. The government should increase its investment in special schools by building and equipping new ones as well as give more support to those already established by faith based institutions. Teachers already teaching in special schools can be offered scholarships to pursue studies in special education and offered special allowances. Teacher training curriculum should be reviewed and special education made compulsory for all teachers regardless of level of training. Further investment in state of the art equipment can go a long way to bridge the gap between the performance of students with special needs and ordinary students.

6. Conclusion

Three quarters of the teachers in the special schools are placed in these institutions and do not choose them as a place of posting. Of these, more than ninety percent wish to do a master degree as part of their exit plan citing the high cost of post graduate diploma in special education as a disincentive. These teachers feel that they are not mentally, physically and psychologically prepared at training, on how to handle special children and accurately harness their every ability. They suffer sympathy rather than empathy for these learners. Special education teachers must be organized, patient and able to motivate students, understanding of their needs and accepting of their differences. Some among the many responsibilities include helping the students develop in behavioral, social, and academic excellence. This helps the learners interact effectively in social and emotional situations (UNESCO, 2008). Since tutors in special schools were ordinarily trained for normal schools, modules on special education should be compulsory units in all teacher training institutions.

Data from the World Bank indicate that twenty percent (20%) of the world poorest people have some kind of disability, with UNDP stating that more than eighty percent (80%) of people with disabilities live in developing countries. World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) reports that between ninety three million (93M) and one hundred and fifty million (150M) school going children have disability so that one in every three of these children has severe disability. This constitutes fifteen percent (15%) of world population. In Kenya, three hundred thousand (300,000) secondary school age children have disability and only one thousand one hundred and thirty five (1,135) special education trained teachers are expected to handle them (Daily Nation, 2018). The ratio is of one special teacher for every two hundred and sixty five (265) which is way below the global best standards.

Special needs children constitute about fifteen percent (15%) of school going children in Kenya, they have a right to education just like all other children. This education should not only be given, but must be as competitive as what regular children receive too. It should ensure that these children, stand an equal chance as others in further training and job placement post-secondary level. They should not be perceived as failures but should be granted equal opportunity. Training is a learning process that involves the acquisition of skills, concepts, rules, or attitudes to enhance the performance of employees (Byars, 2000). Additionally, education equips citizens with understanding and knowledge that enables them to make informed choices about their lives and those facing Kenyan society (RoK, 2007). The study findings indicate that awareness should be created to teacher trainees on the different learning environments, the different caliber of learners; fast and slow learners, normal and disabled learners, those from affluent and poor backgrounds. The exposure to trainee teachers about learning challenges by learners of different categories is important. During micro-teaching, simulation should be done with learners presumed to be having disabilities of varied forms plus actual visits to special schools.

6.1 Implications

It is not the disability but the attitude of the able people that is the hardest burden for the differently abled (disabled) persons have to deal with. Majority of the teachers in the special schools say that given a chance they would exit the special school and join regular schools. They however were open to being trained on how to handle the special children. The training is very expensive with an extra allowance that is not commensurate to the investment made. The government may consider subsidizing the training to enable more teachers to access it. Special needs training should also be incorporated in the curriculum that the regular teachers go through to ensure they are all prepared in case they are posted to such schools. Teachers already posted to these school need on job continuous training that helps them deal with emerging issues at their job place

Majority of special schools are founded by faith based institutions and the government only assists in posting teachers. This delink of government from total school ownership and management contributes to inadequate resources; financial and otherwise for running these schools. There is need for clear national policies towards the disabled, integration of handicapped children in ordinary schools, education assessment and resource services for the handicapped, manpower development and adequate facilities. Others areas include relevant curriculum, syllabus and approaches, national examinations and increased financial support to special education programs. Considering most of disabled cases are from the poorest populace, the government intervention in both medical and educational needs would be critical (Cameron, 2017).

6.2 Limitations of Study and Recommendation for Further Research

Some section of respondents felt that the research instrument was an added burden to their already stretched schedule and that several research had engaged them yet they did not yield any improvements on their plight. The researcher clarified that empirical research was fundamental for formulation of a pool of scientific evidence which can be used to inform policy decisions

The study recommends that further research can be carried out on the specific kind of knowledge, skill and ability that the special school teachers feel is necessary for them to be able to handle the special children in a better way. They are best placed to inform this skill gap since they have experienced the gap between reality on the job and the training they received at university or college.

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