RESEARCH ARTICLE

LEARNER BASED OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES INFLUENCING EDUCATION FOR THE   MENTALLY CHALLENGED LEARNERS IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS IN KENYA: A STUDY ACROSS SPECIAL SCHOOLS IN HOMA BAY COUNTY

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The right to education for Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) is globally acknowledged as a basic human right. Education is regarded as the means by which economically and socially marginalized persons can break vicious cycle of poverty. In Kenya, the right to education is provided for in article 53(b) of Kenya Constitution, which advocates for the right to free and compulsory basic education for every child. Article 54 of the Constitution of Kenya emphasizes the need to enhance education for persons with disabilities. The Government of Kenya recognizes the importance of Special Needs Education as a crucial sub sector for accelerating the attainment of Education For All, Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals. The objective of the study was to establish learner based opportunities and challenges influencing education for the mentally challenged learners. The study established that learner-based opportunities are learners' attitude and existence of mentally challenged learners. The learner-based challenges are; learners' attitude, drop out and enrollment. It was concluded that learners are accorded various opportunities to participate in learning but there are challenges too. The study recommended that school management and the Ministry of Education should establish strategies to ensure that learners and teachers are motivated and facilitated to foster quality education for the mentally challenged. These findings are valuable in formulation of policies that facilitate promotion of special education in Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

The right to education has been globally acknowledged as a basic human right. Education is regarded as the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized persons can break vicious circle of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities (UNICEF, 2007). It has the potential to not only bring significant benefits to individuals and society but to also enhance skills and improve the individual's social status (OECD, 2013). This explains why education is high on the international community's agenda and is affirmed in various treaties as a right falling under the category of Economic Social and Cultural rights (ECOSOC, 1996). In Kenya, the right to education is explicitly provided for in Article 53(b) of the Kenya Constitution (Government of Kenya, 2010), which advocates for the right to free and compulsory basic education for every child.

Article 54 of the Constitution emphasizes the need to enhance education for persons with disabilities and provides that persons with disability have a right to access educational institutions and facilities that are integrated into society to the extent compatible with their interests and needs (Government of Kenya, 2010). The Government of Kenya recognizes the importance of Special Needs Education as a crucial subsector for accelerating the attainment of Education for All, Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals. Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 on "A Policy Framework for Education, Training and Research" outlines the vision of Kenya's education sector as a major enabler of youth development. This vision will be achieved through the provision of quality education that is accessible and relevant to the lives of all children including those with Special Needs. Global statistics indicate that approximately one billion people have some form of disability with over four in every five persons living in developing countries (UNICEF, 2010).

The prevalence rate varies significantly across the World: (United States, 19.4%; United Kingdom, 12.2%; Mexico, 2.3%; Egypt, 4.4%; India, 2.1%; China, 5%; Kenya, 10.7%; Spain 15 % of the total population). Of these, 93 million are children under the age of 14 living with moderate or severe disability (UNESCO, 2015). The statistics provided indicate that there are persons with disabilities among youth who deserve education. However, it is not clear as to the existence of mentally challenged persons with disability.

SYNTHESIS OF LITERATURE ON LEARNER BASED OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES INFLUENCING EDUCATION FOR THE MENTALLY CHALLENGED LEARNERS: A survey undertaken by Cassady (2011) on attitudes of student teachers toward the inclusion of children with special needs in the ordinary school. Participants included 25 general education teachers, both males and females, from various states Ohio, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and New York. The sample comprised of 135 students who were completing their teacher training courses at a university School of Education. The analysis revealed that the respondents held positive attitudes toward the general concept of inclusion but their perceived competence dropped significantly according to the severity of children's needs as identified by the UK "Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs". Moreover, children with emotional and behavioral difficulties were seen as potentially causing more concern and stress than those with other types of special needs. This study focused on students teachers in ordinary schools in the United States of America. The current study was conducted in special schools for the mentally challenged learners in Kenya: A study across special schools in Homa bay County, to add more data to the existing body of knowledge.

A study on perception of an inclusive program by secondary learning disabled students, teachers and support staff was done by Bookhaert (2013), in the District of Columbia, Cardozo. Mixed method paradigm was used. The sample of the study was 66 learners with disabilities, 4 class teachers and 7 support staff. Instruments such as questionnaires and interview guides were used to collect data. A descriptive method design was used for the study. The findings showed that in spite of students being included in regular education, they prefer being in special education because they felt important, safe and valued. They felt safe because the special education environment has students who are similar to them in academic ability where the students felt freer to make mistakes and they did not worry about other students belittling them. He noted also, the students felt that their teachers chose special education training to make a difference in their lives. Additionally, students felt a sense of worth in these special education classes. This contributes to the student's self-esteem which gives them the knowledge and ability to accomplish whatever goals one is capable of achieving. While Bookhaert did his study in Columbia, the current study was done in Kenya. The researcher used purposive sampling to sample students and teachers. This study used saturated sampling. Bookhaert studied the perception of teachers, students and support staff on inclusive program whereas this study investigated the learner based opportunities and challenges influencing education for the mentally challenged learners in special schools in Kenya: A study across special schools in Homa Bay County, to add more data to the existing body of knowledge.

A study was done by Westwood and Graham (2003) on challenges facing integration into mainstream schools in Iowa country, North America. It examined acceptance of young people without disabilities toward peers with disabilities and the impact on mainstreaming. Students from grades 3, 6, 9 and 12 in 11 different schools were sampled. The researcher used experimental design, two different groups and a control group. The instrument used were questionnaires and unlabeled vignettes describing several types of children: well-adjusted and physically handicapped (wheelchair bound), mentally challenged, and behavior disordered. The results suggested that children in educational mainstreaming programs can be at heightened risk for rejection by their peers even with the strong support of the school administration. In addition, children with behavior disorders are at greatest risk for rejection in both mainstreaming and ordinary classroom situations. The importance of relevant social skills to creating social intimacy and status may help explain some of the difficulties in creating a climate of acceptance in mainstreaming situations, especially for the child with a behavior disorder. All the disabilities included in this study had either physical or behavioral characteristics that potentially lowered the status of the child or disrupted social interaction. The above study investigated the challenges facing integration of learners with special needs not specifically mentally challenged learners. The findings were done in Northern Europe, and the researcher used experimental design to sample respondents. This study was done in Kenya with learners who are mentally challenged. Data collection instruments in the reviewed study were questionnaires and vignettes while the current study used questionnaires and interview guides which were more comprehensible and familiar to the respondents. Mukhopadhyay, Nenty and Abosi (2012) carried qualitative case study on inclusive education for learners with disabilities in Botswana primary schools. Multiple stakeholders, such as school heads, general education teachers, learners with disabilities, and their peers, from six elementary schools participated in this research. The data collection methods included focus group discussions, school and classroom observations, and document analysis. Findings indicate that most of the teachers preferred to include learners with mild disabling conditions compared with learners with severe to profound disabling conditions but did not highlight where such learners that are not integrated go. The findings also revealed that the learners with disabilities expressed high levels of acceptance to these schools but did not discuss the opportunities that lead to this. As a result, this study added data to the existing body of knowledge by finding out the learner based opportunities and challenges influencing education for the mentally challenged learners in special schools in Kenya: A study across special schools in Homa Bay County. A research was carried out in Israel by Schreuer and Sheus (2011) on socio-cultural factors affecting inclusion of students with disabilities. The study was done in higher education institutes in Israel, six universities and twenty-two colleges. It compared students without disabilities and students with various disabilities (physical, sensory, and psychiatric) among themselves, on the outcome measures. Research tools used were questionnaires designed for the study. Statistical analyses were conducted using Social Package for Statistics Study version 17. The findings were that achievements of students with disabilities proved only slightly below those of students without disabilities. Students with disabilities were much more satisfied with their participation and achievements than students without disabilities.

The researchers thought perhaps their satisfaction stemmed from comparison with other friends with disabilities who were left behind, or from their feelings of success in spite of the challenges they face. However, an in-depth examination revealed students with disabilities used computers and information technology less, and participated less actively in their courses and in social- cultural events such as arts, music, and theatre-going. It revealed further that students without disabilities interacted more freely than the others. The reviewed study is similar to this study as it focused on learners with disabilities. It however included learners without disabilities in higher institutions of learning, this study added more data to the existing body of knowledge by establishing opportunities and challenges influencing education for learners with mental challenges in special schools in Kenya: a study across special schools in Homa Bay County. Kavishe (2017) investigated factors influencing access to education for children with mental challenge in Kibaha town council. The study followed a case study design whereby quantitative and qualitative approaches were the major means of data collection and analyses. The data were collected through questionnaires, interviews and observation. The study involved three public primary schools with special needs and about 45 respondents were involved. The study revealed that most public primary schools with special needs had deficit of teaching and learning materials for mental challenge which affected satisfaction of pupils. Several things can be deduced from this study which sampled array of respondents including challenged learners yet their mental capacity may compromise reliability of results and it may take long time to complete data collection process. The design was case study yet the researcher failed to adequately explain which case(s) was investigated. Lastly and more importantly, the study sought to investigate factors influencing access to education yet majority of the findings were derived from the respondents' perception of which influence participation of challenged learners in primary education. This current study sough to investigate opportunities that exist within special schools as well as challenges. The mental state of learners will mean that they will be excluded as the teachers, would provide relevant information due to their daily interactions. The nature of study demanded qualitative and quantitative data therefore descriptive survey design was appropriate.

Waititu (2015) investigated the psychosocial challenges faced by physically challenged learners integrated in selected mainstream secondary schools. The study was done in selected mainstream schools in Olkalou Central District in Nyandarua County, Kenya. The researcher employed mixed method paradigm; both descriptive cross-sectional and naturalistic phenomenology designs to collect the data. Probability and non-probability sampling were employed to select the sample; 22 teachers, 48 students and 10 support staff. Tools used to collect data were questionnaires; for teachers and the students who were the key respondents, and interview guide for teacher counselors and the support staff. The study found that learners with physical disabilities in integrated schools suffer low self-esteem, however, they enjoy warm peer acceptance and both teachers and the support staff relate in discriminatively. There is glaring evidence that this study is different from current study as it focused on physically challenged learners in integrated main stream secondary schools. Studies have indicated that there is poor transition for special need learners, by focusing on secondary schools, the study would not be generalized comprehensively and conclusively.

Despite the fact the study focused on challenges of physically disabled students, there were no explicitly opportunities provided in the study that policy makers and other stakeholders may exploit to improve education of special need learners in mainstream schools. Therefore, this study tackled learner based opportunities and challenges in special schools for mentally challenged learners. In this set-up, learners with different disabilities receive special education. Among them are mentally challenged learners who are further divided into mild, moderate and severe learners? Education of mentally challenged learners in special schools has not attracted attention of scholars as compared to inclusion in regular schools.

Muhombe et al (2015) sought to examine influence of Special Needs Education Policy on access to secondary school education by learners with hearing impairments in Nandi County, Kenya. The study employed a descriptive case study research design. Both primary and secondary sources of data were critical in this study. The target population was 193 and used a sample of 135 that represented 69.4% of the population using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Primary data was collected through the administration of questionnaires. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative data which was analyzed using frequency distribution tables, means, numbers, percentages and thematic presentations. The results showed that there were cases of learners dropping out of school because of a number of reasons including financial problems, lack of motivation to be in school and cultural factors. The reviewed study, however, did not find out the opportunities and challenges experienced in education of the learners, therefore this study sought to fill the existing gap. Muhombe et al (2015) focused on hearing impairments in Nandi County but failed to state the schools that were sampled in Nandi County. It is also evident that the study did not indicate whether it focused on special schools or regular schools which have special units. This would have informed the adoption of stratified sampling technique. Lastly and more importantly, the study objective was on special need education policy, however, no policy was associated to learners dropping out of school but rather why learners dropped out of school. The current study was conducted in special schools; regular schools were not included. The challenges informed why learners with mental challenge have not been included in the policy as some learners with mental challenge are also hearing impaired. On the other hand, opportunities were further exploited so that mentally challenged learners in regular schools can join their counterpart in special schools.

Ndinda (2005) studied on the root causes of marginalization of the physically disabled learners in selected mainstream schools in Machakos District in Eastern Province of Kenya. The study aimed at coming up with proposals for better integration of learners with disability and to enhance their welfare. Data was collected through face to face interview of learners with disabilities and care takers, and through focus group discussion. The researcher used a sample size of 170 respondents; these included the teachers, care-takers and the learners. The study used qualitative design and random sampling of the respondents. The data collected was analyzed through content analysis. The findings revealed that the physically challenged learners lacked counseling, health care, adequate facilities among others. This greatly affected their self-esteem, ambitions, goals and self-motivation.

The above reviewed study did not achieve the general objective, the root cause of marginalization of physically disabled learners rather the study revealed that what they lack in mainstream schools. Further, the study used the learners as the respondents which may limit the information that the give as they may withhold vital information, the current study sought to fill the gap in knowledge by using the EARCCS and teachers in the special schools for the mentally challenged. Lastly, the study was purely qualitative making it impossible to conduct data on 170 respondents for academic study. The current study focused on the mentally challenged learners employing mixed methodologies so that there is triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data.

Emily and Kipruto (2012) studied the effects of integration on self-concept of physically handicapped learners in primary schools in Eldoret municipality. The study employed both ex post facto and the causal comparative research designs. A total of 240 physically handicapped children were selected through simple random sampling from five selected primary schools. Classes 4, 6 and 8 took part in the study. The research instruments were questionnaires and schedule interviews. Data analysis was done using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings showed that integration has positive effects on the self-concept of physically handicapped children in primary schools. Students with positive self-concept related well with their peers and teachers while the vice versa applied to those with negative self-concept. While the duo investigated the variable of self-concept on integration, this study makes findings on psychosocial challenges facing integrated learners with physical disabilities. The study used both purposive and simple random sampling unlike the current which found out learner based opportunities and challenges influencing education for the mentally challenged learners and used saturated sampling to add more knowledge to the existing literature.

Research Objective: The research objective was to establish the learner-based opportunities and challenges influencing education for mentally challenged learners.
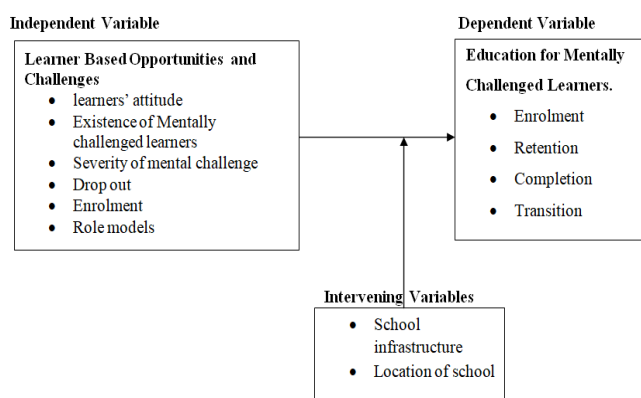
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework showing the opportunities and challenges influencing education for the mentally challenged learners

Figure 1 postulate the opportunities and challenges in education of the mentally challenged learners in special schools in Homa Bay County, Kenya.

The figure also shows the independent and dependent variables that guided the study. The independent variable included learner based challenges and opportunities. The dependent variable is education for the mentally challenged learners in special schools which was measured using enrolment, retention of learners, and completion of primary school as well as transition to secondary schools. The opportunities and challenges was conceptualized into learner based. It is worthy to note that, learning cannot take place without the learners and therefore, this important variable will be included in the study. The challenges and opportunities that are inherent with mentally challenged learners will act as a barrier or an access to their education in special schools as compared to other education set-up. These include their attitude, ability and interest to learn in special schools. Successful education for the needs of children with special needs and/or disabilities require a positive socio-cultural view of disability, emphasizing empowerment of individual skills instead of disorders according to Lev Vygotsky's social constructionist theory of learning as advanced by Rodina (2007). According to Vygotsky, development of higher mental functions and processes are not independently constructed by children in early ontogenesis, but "rather mediated by adults in the context of social interactions" (Karpov, 2005, p.10). Lev Vygotsky's concept of mediations is "the process and method by which members construct the learning environments, tasks, identities and contexts" (Thorne, 2005, p. 339). Focusing on primary reasons for disability implies ignoring the developmental processes. "The psychological makeup of a disabled person arises not primarily from the handicap itself but secondarily as a result of social consequences of the defect" (Vygotsky 1993, p.63). Primary disorders; visual and hearing, language and speech - related disorders, motor and central nervous system related impairment lead to the child's exclusion from the social – cultural traditional and educational environment, in turn causing secondary (socio – cultural) disability. Due to primary disorders, the child displays a distorted connection to culture as a resource for development of higher mental functions, which is vital for education (Vygotsky, 1993). According to Vygotsky's theory, the potential for cognitive development depends upon the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD); a level of development attained when children engage in social behavior. Full development of ZDP depends upon full social interaction. (Rodina, 2007). The teachers' main responsibility is to lead the child into the general culture in education. This has been recognized in the practice of special education in USA and has become the theoretical basis for inclusive education in Norway and South Africa (Rodina, 2007). Lev Vygotsky's theory is perceived relevant to the current study because it focuses on mediations as the process and method by which pupils construct the learning environments, tasks and identities. In this process, the teacher plays a central role, informing the reason why this study is exploring the opportunities and challenges in education for the mentally challenged learners in special schools in Kenya. Additionally, the theory stresses the role of society and its cultures as resource for development of higher mental processes in children. The teacher, though a professional in school, represents the society and its culture. It is common practice that most teachers in primary schools in Kenya actually work in their local communities and therefore their views are likely to reflect those of the society. The intervening variables were parental socio-economic status and cultural factors. These variables were controlled by making assumptions that all other factors were held constant and also

through random sampling of the population which ensured that the positive and negative effects of intervening variables are neutralized

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The target population of this study comprised of 60 teachers, 6 head teachers and 3 EARCC officers from 6 special primary schools under study in Homa Bay County. The sample size for the study was 57 teachers, 4 Head Teachers and 3 Educational Assessment Resource Centre Coordinator officers. Instruments for data collection were interview schedule and questionnaire. The instruments for data collection were validated and reliability determined before use. Quantitative data was analyzed by use of frequency counts, percentages, means and t-test.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic data for respondents were as shown in Tables 1 and 2. From Table 1, it can be noted that most teachers were male 28(50%) and female were 27(48.2%). Though gender balance is almost attained, the slight unequal representation may be attributed to cultural factors where the society educates males more than females. This is because most teachers in Homa Bay County are male. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this study the representation was sufficient to guard against biases based on male chauvinism. With respect to highest qualification, most teachers were Bachelor's degree holders, 20(35.7%). 7(12.5%) had Ph.D. qualification, and those with Diploma and Masters were also relatively few, 11(19.6%) and 10(17.9%) respectively. This implies that most teachers were qualified to teach in Homa Bay County and therefore their responses were considered authoritative from experts in this area of specialization. With respect to professional training in Special Needs Education, most teachers were trained up to Diploma level, 35(62.5%) and only 1(1.8%) had a certificate training in Special Needs Education,. A relatively good number of teachers had a training on inclusive education, 11(19.6%) and some had a Bachelor's degree in Special Needs Education, 7(12.5%). This means that teachers involved were competent and able to give accurate and well thought information. In terms of experience in other schools, the largest number of teachers at 19 (34.2%) had been in the teaching profession for a range of 1-5years followed by a range of 11-15 years at 15 (25%), 6-10 years at 13 (23.4%) and 16-20 years at 2(3.6%). This shows that teachers' experiences in handling special pupils was significant to the success of the mentally challenged learners and thus were able to give authentic data on challenges and opportunities for learners with mental challenges. With respect to experience in the current school, the largest number of respondents at 59.4% had been in the teaching profession for a range of 1-5years followed by a range of 6-10 years at 25.2%, 11-15 years at 3.6% and 16-20 years at 1.8%. With respect to area of specialization, the findings reveal that majority (46.4%) of the teachers were specialized in PH while ECDE, IE/HI, MH/PH/IE had the least teachers specialized in them at (1.8%) each. Teachers specialized in Certificate, EBD, IE and MH constituted a relatively high percentage of users at 10.7%,

10.7%, 16.1% and 7.1% respectively. These results suggest that most teachers are not specialized to handle mentally challenged learners but have a good background in handling learners with special cases. From Table 2, it can be noted that all head teachers who responded were male. This shows that females are not in leadership positions. For the purpose of this study, the head teachers were from the few special schools for the mentally handicapped and hence the chances of obtaining different gender were inevitable. With respect to highest qualification, most head teachers were either Master's degree holders (75%) or Diploma holders (25%). This implies that all the head teachers were capable of giving credible information as pertaining to opportunities and challenges that learners with mental challenge face. All the head teachers (100%) had an experience of more than 10 years in other schools and in their current schools. Therefore, they were considered to have been in the teaching profession especially in special schools for long to give credible information with relation to the topic under investigation.

Also, it was established that the schools had more boys (55.6%) enrolled than Girls (44.4%). This could be attributed to cultural factors although the difference is not big enough to cause for alarm. In the case of teachers, most of them were male (51.2%) though females (48.2%) were close enough to almost strike a gender balance. With respect to area of specialization, the findings reveals that majority (50%) of the head teachers were specialized in EBD/IE while MH/IE and MH/PH/HI/IE had the least teachers specialized in them at (1.8%) each. Teachers specialized in Certificate, EBD, IE and MH constituted a relatively high percentage of users at 10.7%, 10.7%, 16.1% and 7.1% respectively. These results suggest that most head teachers are not specialized to handle mentally challenged learners but have a good background in handling learners with special cases. Also, most learners were found to be from the local community that is, Homa Bay County 17 (30.4%) while the rest were from neighboring communities and counties. Also, the head teachers indicated that they do receive funding from Community manpower support, National Council for the disabled, community support, Non Governmental Organizations, Community support, World Vision, Safaricom, National council for the Disabled and World Vision.

Research Objective: The research objective was to establish learner-based opportunities and challenges in education for mentally challenged learners. The head teachers and teachers responded to a questionnaire with three items on learner-based opportunities and five items on learner-based challenges. They rated the questionnaires on a rating scale of 1 to 5 with 1=never, 2=A very small extent, 3=Small extent, 4=Large extent and 5=Very large extent. The results were as shown in Tables 3 and Table 4. From Table 3, it can be observed that both teachers and head teachers rated the learners' attitude as often an opportunity in the education of learners with mental challenge in special schools. The mean rating by teachers was 3.21 and Head Teachers 4.00. These mean ratings were not significantly different (t (59) = -1.082, p >.05). This means that both teachers and head teachers concurred on the extent to which learners' attitude was an opportunity to the mentally challenged learners. This can be attributed to practices in specials schools that encourage learners to want to learn, be receptive and participate in the learning process to ultimately experience satisfaction from learning.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Teachers

Demographic Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	28	50
	Female	27	48.2
	Nil response	2	1.8
	Total	57	100
Highest qualification	Ph.D.	7	12.5
	Masters	10	17.9
	Bachelors	20	35.7
	Diploma	11	19.6
	Nil response	7	12.3
	Total	57	100
Professional Training in SNE	Bachelor in SNE	7	12.8
	Certificate in Sign Language	1	1.8
	Diploma in SNE	35	62.5
	EBD	1	1.8
	Inclusive Education	11	19.6
	MI	1	1.8
	Total	57	100
Teaching Experience in other schools	1-5 yrs.	19	34.2
	6-10 yrs.	13	23.4
	11-15 yrs.	15	27
	16-20 yrs.	2	3.6
	Nil response	8	22.5
	Total	57	100
Teaching Experience in current school	1-5 yrs.	33	59.4
	6-10 yrs.	14	25.2
	11-15 yrs.	2	3.6
	16-20 yrs.	1	1.8
	Above 20 yrs.	0	0
	Nil response	7	10.7
	Total	57	100
Area of Specialization	Certificate	6	10.7
	EBD	6	10.7
	ECDE	1	1.8
	HI	2	3.6
	IE	9	16.1
	IE, HI	1	1.8
	MH	4	7.1
	MH, PH, IE	1	1.8
	PH	26	46.4
	Total	57	100
Catchment Area for Students	Homa Bay	17	30.4
	Homa Bay-Kisumu	3	5.4
	Homa Bay-Migori	3	5.4
	Homa Bay-Siaya	1	1.8
	Homa Bay-Siaya-Kisumu	1	1.8
	Kakamega	1	1.8
	Kisumu	6	10.7
	Kisumu-Homa Bay	2	3.6
	Kisumu-Migori	1	1.8
	Migori	5	8.9
	Migori-Homa Bay	1	1.8
	Nyahururu	1	1.8
	Nyandarua	1	1.8
	Nyanza	9	16.1
	Nyanza Region	2	3.6
	Vihiga	2	3.6
	Total	57	100

Practices like motivation, participation in learning, rewards for performing better, employing creativity and innovativeness while teaching them cultivates a positive learning attitude to the mentally challenged learners'. Existence of mentally challenged learners was rated by teachers (MR=3.39) as being sometimes an opportunity and Head Teachers (MR=4.25) as being often an opportunity to participate in learning. These mean ratings were not significantly different (t (59) = -1.626, P = .109). This means that both teachers and Head Teachers were in concurrence that the existence of mentally challenged learners was sometimes an opportunity to participate in learning (OMR=3.18). This is true because if there are other learners with the same conditions, they are likely to attain a quorum to be attended differently in their own institution or facilities.

This is what leads to formation of schools specifically for learners with mental challenge or having their own classes, hence seamless accessibility to the education system. Interview findings revealed that the learners with mental challenge do not grasp concepts in lessons with ease and hence need specialized attention by well trained teachers. That way, Government and Non Governmental Organizations send funds and materials to support their learning and even buying them gifts. Severity of mental challenge was rated as often an opportunity to learners with mental challenge to participate in learning with an overall mean rating of 3.47. The mean rating by teachers was 2.95 and Head Teachers with a mean rating of 4.00. These mean ratings were significantly different (t (59) = -1.626, p<.05).

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Head teachers

Demographic Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	4	100
	Female	0	0
	Total	4	100
Highest qualification	Ph.D.	0	0
	Masters	3	75
	Bachelors	0	0
	Diploma	1	25
	Total	4	100
Experience in other schools	1-10	1	25
	11-20 yrs.	1	25
	20-30 yrs.	0	0
	Above 30 yrs.	0	0
	Total	2	50
Experience in current school	11-20 yrs.	2	50
	20-30 yrs.	0	0
	Above 30 yrs.	0	0
	Total	2	50
School enrollment	Boys	158	55.6
	Girls	126	44.4
	Total	284	100
Area of Specialization	EBD, IE	2	50.0
	MH, IE	1	25.0
	MH, PH, HI, IE	1	25.0
	Total	4	100
Catchment Area for Students	Homa Bay-Migori	2	50
	Homa Bay-Migori-Kisumu	1	25
	Vihiga	1	25
	Total	4	100
Non-Governmental Support	Community manpower support, National Council for the Disabled	1	25
	Community support, NGOs	1	25
	Community support, World Vision, Safaricom	1	25
	National council for the Disabled, World Vision	1	25
	Total	4	100

Table 3. Learner Based Opportunities influencing education for the Mentally Challenged learners in Special schools in Kenya

Opportunities	Respondents	N	MR	SD	OMR	T-Test
Learner's attitude	Teachers	57	3.21	1.44	3.61	
	Head Teachers	4	4.00	.00		t (59) = -1.0, P =.284
Existence of mentally challenged learners	Teachers	57	3.38	1.04	3.18	
	Head Teachers	4	4.25	.500		t (59) = -1.6, P = .109
Severity of mental challenge	Teachers	56	2.95	1.19	3.47	
	Head Teachers	4	4.00	1.15		t (58) = -1.7, P = .004
Overall Mean	Teachers		3.18	.22	3.63	
	Head Teachers		4.08	.14		t (3.441) = 5.916, P = .006

KEY: n = Sample; MR=Mean Rating; OMR = Overall Mean Rating.
Interpretation of Mean Ratings
1.00-1.44 Not an opportunity
1.45 -2.44 Rarely an opportunity
2.45 -3.44 Sometimes an opportunity
3.45 -4.44 Often an opportunity
4.45 -5.00 Always an opportunity

Table 4. Learner Based Challenges influencing Education for the Mentally Challenged Learners in Special Schools in Kenya

Challenge	Respondents	N	MR	Std. Deviation	T-Test
The learners' attitude	Teachers	56	2.96	1.33	t(58) = 1.419, P = .161
	Head Teachers	4	2.00	.81	
Drop out	Teachers	56	3.57	1.04	t(58) = -1.754, P=.085
	Head Teachers	4	4.5	.58	
Severity of mental challenge	Teachers	56	3.02	1.20	t(55) = -6.133, P = .000
	Head Teachers	4	4.00	.000	
Role Models	Teachers	54	3.44	1.28	t(6.56) = -4.281, P = .004
	Head Teachers	4	4.75	.500	
Enrollment	Teachers	53	3.38	1.33	t(55) = .550, P = .585
	Head Teachers	4	3.00	1.15	
Overall Mean	Teachers	57	3.23	.937	t(59) = -.886, P =.379
	Head Teachers	4	3.65	.300	

KEY: n = Sample; MR=Mean Rating; OMR = Overall Mean Rating

Interpretation of Mean ratings
1.00-1.44Not a challenge
1.45 -2.44 Rarely a challenge
2.45 -3.44Sometimes a challenge
3.45 -4.44 Often a challenge
4.45 -5.00 Always a challenge

This is true because of the fact that schools with mentally challenged learners tend to vet the severity of the mental challenge of learners before admitting them. This in turn ensures that they at least try to level their severity and hence the process of imparting knowledge to them eases. From Table 4, it can be observed that Teachers rated learners' attitude as a challenge sometimes by a mean rating of 2.96. Head teachers also rated learners' attitude as being rarely a challenge by a mean rating of 2.00. These mean ratings were not significantly different (t (58) = 1.42, P> 0.05). Drop out was rated as often a challenge by teachers and teachers. That is mean rating 3.57 for teachers and 4.5 for Head Teachers. These mean ratings were not significantly different (t (58) = -1.754, P> 0.05). Role models was rated as sometimes a challenge to learners with mental challenge with a mean rating of 3.44 by teachers and as always, a challenge by Head Teachers with a mean rating of 4.75. These mean ratings were significantly different (t (6.56) = -4.281, p<.05). Severity of mental challenge was rated by teachers as being sometimes a challenge to the education of mentally challenged learners with a mean rating of 3.02. Head teachers on the other hand rated Severity of mental challenge as being often a challenge with a mean rating of 4.00. These mean ratings were significantly different (t (55) = -6.13, p<.05). Both teachers and head teachers rated enrollment as being a challenge sometimes. The mean for teachers was 3.38 and head teachers were 3.00. These mean ratings were not significantly different (t (55) = .550, P> 0.05). This is true because as much as enrollment may be viewed as an opportunity, if given a multidimensional perspective; it is more of a challenge than an opportunity.

DISCUSSION

Practices in special schools that encourage learners to want to learn, be receptive and participate in the learning process to ultimately experience satisfaction from learning are like motivation, participation in learning, rewards for performing better, employing creativity and innovativeness while teaching them cultivates a positive learning attitude to the mentally challenged learners. Findings from interviews with the Education Assessments and Resource Centre Coordinators (EARCCs) revealed that their same level of challenge help them to cope with each other. EARCC 2 noted that:"The teachers had the training in SNE and as a result, most learners enjoy all these and look forward to them as their source of major enjoyment since they see the teachers just like their peers and receive love and enjoyment which they miss back at home. Indeed, some schools provide food and some NGOs give goodies such as biscuits and sweets to the learners which help in the retention of the learners. This also boosts their morale which is attached to their attitude. The learners are also handled by well trained teachers who know how to handle them and this really helps up their attitude to be positive. The stereotyping of learners with mental challenge as "mad" not only affects their attitude but also casts them out of any educational opportunity they may be eyeing. In support of this finding, Asmali (2017) in the study on Young Learners' Attitudes and Motivation to Learn English, Young learners studying in this grade were the focus of the study. While quantitative data were gathered via two questionnaires from 192 participants; three personal semi-structured interviews and a focus-group interview were conducted for qualitative data gathering, Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Following data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification phases, qualitative data were analyzed through interpretive-descriptive analysis technique. The findings indicated that parents, teachers, and favorable learning conditions and activities were important factors in determining young learners' attitudes and motivation to learn English. Students' attitudes were mostly positive toward learning English. Singing songs and playing games were their favorite activities and they had an intrinsic motivation to learn English. The findings read together with the current study implies that given a positive parents' attitude, teachers and favorable learning conditions, the learning of mentally challenged learners will be seamless. Cassady (2011) study on teacher factors affecting the inclusion of children with severe special needs in the ordinary school. The findings revealed that the respondents held positive attitudes toward the general concept of inclusion but their perceived competence dropped significantly according to the severity of children's needs as identified by the UK "Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs". Moreover, children with emotional and behavioral difficulties were seen as potentially causing more concern and stress than those with other types of special needs. What this means is that the severity of the mental challenge must be considered when handling the learners. This in turn, if handled well will ensure retention of learners because it will positively shift their attitude. Also, once the severity is established, the learners can be put be put to care accordingly. During interviews with EARCCs, it was identified that teachers are well prepared to handle learners according to their severity as highlighted by one interviewee, EARCC2 concurs that teachers had the training in Special Needs Education and so place themselves at the level of the children, dance with them, tell stories, cook and eat with them which promote the learners' education.

The findings are in agreement with Bookhaert (2013) study on perception of an inclusive program by secondary learning disabled students, teachers and support staff whose findings showed that in spite of students being included in regular education, they prefer being in special education because they felt important, safe and valued. They felt safe because the special education environment has students who are similar to them in academic ability where the students felt freer to make mistakes and they did not worry about other students belittling them. He also noted, the students felt that their teachers chose special education training to make a difference in their lives. Additionally, students felt a sense of worth in these special education classes. This contributes to the student's self-esteem which gives them the knowledge and ability to accomplish whatever goals one is capable of achieving. Also in concurrence to these findings was a study by Westwood and Graham (2003) on challenges facing integration into mainstream schools in Iowa country, North America. The findings suggested that children in educational mainstreaming programs can be at heightened risk for rejection by their peers even with the strong support of the school administration. In addition, children with behavior disorders are at greatest risk for rejection in both mainstreaming and ordinary classroom situations. Although the above study was not specific on what type of special needs was being looked at, the current study does the courtesy of filling this gap through its findings above on mentally challenged learners. Other specific special need learners can be handled by another study. Indeed, learners' attitude is not such a big challenge considering the fact that the schools contain learners with same conditions.

Also, the teachers are well trained to handle learners with special needs hence they are technically equipped to deal with the attitude of the learners. Interview findings revealed that some teachers have negative attitudes. This could culminate to learners feeling that they are not wanted or misunderstand teachers' attitude to their status. This is as highlighted by EARCC2. Teachers feel frustrated when they teach and learners seem not to show signs of learning taking place. Even the Competency Based Curriculum only train teachers on how to improve learners in class work yet the teachers may not be able to apply other skills like carpentry and tailoring to the learners as some may not gain from academics alone. The teachers have a training in Special Needs Education and so place themselves at the level of the children, dance with them, tell stories, cook and eat with them hoping to promote the learners' education. Both head teachers and teachers concurred that drop out by mentally challenged learners was often a challenge in their access to education. This is true in that in most cases mentally challenged learners cannot cope with education and tend to drop out especially when their situation gets worse or when they feel alienated. This is also likely to happen if there are not enough well-trained teachers to handle them or when the attitude of teachers is negative. Some teachers are trained to handle the physically handicapped but are teaching the mentally handicapped. Interview findings supported this finding. Thus, during interviews EARCCs emphasized, "In some special schools, teachers lack the necessary technical muscle to handle the various needs of the learners not because they are less qualified but owing to the fact that these learners need specialized individual attention which the few teachers cannot handle by themselves. This ends up making the situation worse and most parents would then prefer to have them at home where they can constantly monitor them."

Indeed, schools with mentally challenged learners are not necessarily taught by teachers with special needs too. As much it is difficult to have the schools fully handled with teachers with special needs, the learners would sometimes want to feel that they can make it if others have made it. Head teachers are administrators and do have a hand in the hiring process hence they are more acquainted to the challenges they face in obtaining teachers with special needs to serve as role models. Brown and Trevino (2014) in their study on, do role models matter? An investigation of role modeling as an antecedent of perceived ethical leadership, surveyed supervisors and their subordinates to examine the relationship between three types of ethical role models and ethical leadership: the leader's childhood role models, career mentors, and top managers. The study found that having had an ethical role model during the leader's career was positively related to subordinate-rated ethical leadership. As expected, this effect was moderated by leader age, such that the relationship between career mentoring and ethical leadership was stronger for older leaders. Leader age also moderated the relationship between childhood models and ethical leadership ratings, such that having had childhood ethical role models was more strongly and positively related to ethical leadership for younger leaders. The results of the study aforementioned implied that mentally challenged learners having role models at their tender age greatly motivates them to become successful in academic and any other endeavors. Absence of such models also propagates to halting of their career aspirations. This study has gone further to establish that indeed the absence of models is a challenge to mentally challenged learner's education. According to head teachers, the severity of mental challenge is often both an opportunity and a challenge. This is true because if learners with the same severity are grouped together, they are likely to have a sense of belonging and thus cope with each other well. In that case, it is an opportunity to their access to education. However, if the learners of different severity are grouped together, some of them may feel left out and inferior as compared to others. This in turn makes them develop a hostile attitude and not in the same track with everyone hence a challenge to their access to education. EARCC2 highlighted that: "Some cases are very severe and hence cannot be handled. The difference in their severity is a challenge. Some cases are too severe and do not grasp lessons with ease. Some learners' conditions are too severe and the teachers lack the skills to handle them. The teachers are at times just stranded with the learners." Educational Assessment Resource Centre Coordinator 1 asserted that: "Some learners' conditions are too severe and the teachers lack the skills to handle them. I have witnessed teachers handle very critical learners and I do not marvel at the way they manage some very serious cases. In our institutions, teachers are not really trained on the handing the real situations that they meet in the special schools. It is a big challenge in the schools." The findings are in concurrence with the study by Mukhopadhyay, Nenty and Abosi (2012) on inclusive education for learners with disabilities in Botswana primary schools. Its findings indicated that most of the teachers preferred to include learners with mild disabling conditions compared with learners with severe to profound disabling conditions but did not highlight where such learners that are not integrated. Both teachers and head teachers rated enrollment as being a challenge sometimes.

This is true because as much as enrollment may be viewed as an opportunity, if given a multidimensional perspective; it is more of a challenge than an opportunity. This is based on the fact that during enrollment, it is a big challenge to determine the severity or threshold for enrollment. Some learners could be challenged but occasionally with other times being normal. Also, it requires expertise to develop a criterion for enrollment so as to establish cases that can be handled and be able to prepare content and teachers for the same. Findings from interviews concurred with this finding as asserted by EARCC2: "The difference in their severity is a challenge. Some cases are too severe, a few of the learners do not have the ability to communicate, some of them have serious health conditions while others lack the mobility and orientation skills in addition to the mental condition. This makes it difficult for the teachers as they have to handle all these learners and instill some skills into them. Some learners end up not grasping lessons well and they need to be identified during admission so that they can be offered individualized attention." Educational Assessment Resource Centre Coordinator further highlighted that: "In some special schools, teachers say they are few and the work load is too much for them. Indeed, the teachers are few as many have retired while some have gone to be with the lord, a few are interdicted and even some applied for hardship allowance and have joined regular schools as head teachers or deputy head teachers. Some learners' conditions are too severe, others are very hyperactive and once in a while have inured the teachers and so teachers lack the skills to handle the hostility." This was in agreement with the findings of Kipkosgei, Wanjala and Riechi (2017) in their study to investigate the factors influencing enrolment of learners with disabilities in primary schools with inclusive education in Nandi South district,

Kenya used an ex-post facto research design and data was gathered using two questionnaires for head teachers and teachers. The sample consisted of 44 head teachers and 306 class teachers. The study found out that the factors under investigation influenced enrolment of learners with disability. Notably, there was a decrease in enrolment because most of the facilities were not structured to accommodate learners with disability; Secondly, though limited and delayed, funds were availed to schools and basic requirements like exercise books, chalk and exam material were adequate in virtually all the schools. Other challenges included insufficient, inconsistent and delayed funding which affects planning of school, lack of adequately trained staff teaching and learning materials and physical facilities to match the increased learning enrolment was noted to be very low.

These findings are in agreement with Muhombe et al (2015) on their study that sought to examine influence of Special Needs Education Policy on access to secondary school education by learners with hearing impairments in Nandi County, Kenya. The study employed a descriptive case study research design. Both primary and secondary sources of data were critical in this study. The target population was 193 and used a sample of 135 that represented 69.4% of the population using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Primary data was collected through the administration of questionnaires. Findings revealed that there were cases of learners dropping out of school because of a number of reasons including financial problems, lack of motivation to be in school and cultural factors. Also the findings concur with those of Emily and Kipruto (2012), who studied the effects of integration on self-concept of physically handicapped learners in primary schools in Eldoret Municipality. The study employed both ex-post facto and the causal comparative research designs. A total of 240 physically handicapped children were selected through simple random sampling from five selected primary schools. Classes 4, 6 and 8 took part in the study. The research instruments were questionnaires and schedule interviews. The results showed that integration has positive effects on the self-concept of physically handicapped children in primary schools. Students with positive self-concept related well with their peers and teachers while the vice versa applied to those with negative self-concept.

CONCLUSION

The main learner based opportunities that influenced participation in education of the mentally challenged learners were; learners attitude and existence of mentally challenged learners. The main learner based challenges faced by learners with mental challenge in their pursuit for education were mainly; the learners attitude, drop out and enrollment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The school management and the Ministry of Education should establish methods to determine the severity of challenge of learners before enrolling them and teaching them according to their severity. This will ensure that the mentally challenged learners will be accorded the attention they require without derailing others.

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