IDENTIFICATION OF LEARNING DISABILITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME IN TAITA-TAVETA COUNTY, PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess implementation of Individualized Educational Programme (IEP) by teachers, on learners with LD in Kenya. Specifically, the study sought to establish how teachers identify learners with learning disabilities. The study was grounded on Constructivist Theory of Instruction by Bruner, (1966). The study adopted descriptive research design and targeted 226 teachers trained in Special Needs Education (SNE), distributed in 46 public primary schools, the study sample comprised of 45 teachers and nine head teachers. The study was limited to teachers trained in Special Needs Education (SNE), and their respective head teachers, in public primary schools in Taita-Taveta County, Kenya. A questionnaire with simple and precise questions was formulated to adequately provide information on the research objectives and help to achieve meaningful conclusions on the topic of study. Test-retest method was applied to assess the reliability of the data collection instrument. Data collected was coded, cleaned, categorized and processed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Information analyzed was presented using tables and charts, accordingly. The results of this study provide useful information on effective use of IEP strategies by teachers. The results indicated that most teachers identified pupils with LD through writing, reading, comprehension, speech, behaviour, and their academic performance. Teachers, head teachers, assessment personnel, parents and other professionals were involved in the process of identification. Parents, especially mothers, were more concerned about their children's school work, and attended meetings organized by the school to discuss about their children's academic problems. It was concluded that mechanisms that were used to identify students with LD in schools were mainly through assessing their performance, reading, writing and comprehension, levels of concentration in class, use of checklists in specific areas and their speech and behaviour. It was recommended that parents, classmates/peers and doctors, should be more involved more in identifying learners with LD. Frequency of teacher's updates to the head teachers should be increased to enable teachers carry out early intervention measures. There is

a need to encourage fathers to be more concerned about their children's school work, and further attend meetings organized by the school to discuss about their children's academic problems.

Keywords: *Learning disabilities and Individualized Educational Programme*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background Information to the Study

Individualized Educational Programme (IEP), can be said to be a starting point for provision of educational programme to learners with Learning Disabilities (LD). The IEP serves as a guide for teachers and other professionals (Blackwell & Rosset, 2014). Kothari and Garg (2014), describe IEP as services the learner will receive, and a process which enables the teachers, parents and students to work together to develop an individualized Educational programme through assessment. As Kothari, and Garg (2014) point out, effective IEP requires assessment on the extent to which teachers, parents and other professionals, collaborate in making decisions regarding learning disabilities, learner's strengths and needs. The results enable teachers plan instruction for effective implementation of the IEP. The growing number of learners with disabilities being served in the inclusive setting, and the call for general education teachers to work collaboratively with special education teachers is still growing. When teachers collaborate they have an opportunity to capitalize upon the unique and specialized knowledge and skills of their colleagues. That collaboration acts as a catalyst for instructional creativity and innovation. In contrast, when teacher collaboration is absent and teachers operate in isolation, school cultures tend to be non-innovative, conservative, and individualistic, whereby little professional growth occurs (Mattatal & Power, 2014).

Sakai (2017), states that the educational support that students with LD receive at school, is the most direct and affects their lives positively, he therefore, advocates for school personnel as the people who can help learners overcome both primary effects (difficulties in a classroom) and secondary effects (effects outside the classroom, such as, communication problems and bullying) from learning disabilities to lead a rewarding life (Halder & Sacks, 2017). The teacher's ability to select appropriate strategies, teaching and learning materials, is guided by the findings of the assessment. La Salle, Roach and McGrath (2013), note that it is important that the teacher is able to select teaching methods that match the needs of the learner and a particular instructional model on which the IEP will be based and direct the learning activities towards the learner's strength and interests.

Kaur (2017) noted that Special Education Policy of Ontario Canada, recommends that students and their learning needs are identified through IEP and plans made to address their difficulties by using appropriate accommodations, programme modifications and/or alternative programmes, as well as, specific instructional and assessment strategies. Kaur (2017), further, describes how the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies of Ottawa, Canada, pride itself of persons in a Bridging Program for International Educated Professionals, New York University, who became successful through individualized learning using IEP and have since acquired high offices in different organizations and continue to utilize their experiences and skills gained in New York University.

In 1975, the United States Congress acknowledged learning disabilities as a condition that needed attention and assured

free and appropriate education for all children with LD. As a result of the federal government accepting the definition of Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) and including it in the Education for All Handicapped Children's Act Public Law 94-142 of 1975, made it mandatory to develop IEP for all students in schools (Hallahan, Kauffman & Pullen, 2014). Blackwell and Rosset (2014) state that there are more than 6.6 million students with disabilities in U.S.A public school's who receive special education services. This implies that there are 6.6 million individualized education programmes (IEPs) that have been developed and are being implemented at any given time, as well as, receiving resource allocation. Mastopieri and Scruggs (2010), observed that parents who told of their adolescent boys who had learnt to read late in life after being supported through individualized education programme managed to reach their potential later on in life. The federal law, The Individuals with Educational Disabilities Act (IDEA) 2004, of the United States of America (USA), mandates that all learners with identified disabilities have an IEP (Bachrach & Steven, 2016).Kawano (2017), noted the attempts made by the Government of Japan, to implement policies to support learners with LD. The Ministry of Education, Culture Sports, Science and Technology of Japan, gave guidelines in January 2004 that provided a direction for educational administration, schools, specialists, parents and students on how people with learning disabilities would be helped. The Japan, People with Developmental Disabilities Support Law of 2004, aimed at extending the social welfare services for learning disabilities. Sakai, (2017) pointed out that these are the laws that had not been acknowledged earlier. Under these laws, the national and prefectural government declared support for LD and it also, included implementation of early detection of learning disabilities with infant or school identification, preparation of institutions, and employment support. Kawano (2017) noted,

in Japan, Tokyo, that there was a support system for all learners with special needs in regular schools inclusive of specialized education coordinators, external advisors and individual education support plans for each. Various municipal wards in Tokyo are responsible for administration of the IEP in regular elementary and junior high schools' students.

Education Department of South Africa put emphasis on curriculum differentiation in the year 2005 which was done according to the student's ability, where curriculum ladder is used to indicate how to adapt work according to the strengths and needs of the student (Borman & Donohue 2013). According to Abimany-Ochom and Mannan (2014), practical adoption of the laws in Uganda, have made it possible for people with disabilities to be included in all levels of political life from the village to parliament, making Uganda one of the countries with the highest number of elected representatives with a disability in the world. In Nigeria, Flicker, Kotosis and Kwon (2011), observed that, knowledge of learning disabilities by the masses is still unknown, and have not received much attention. However, he acknowledges many private and non-governmental organizations are trying to create more awareness about learning difficulties in Nigerian learners.

Kenya has no enforceable acts concerning identification procedures, care or support for learners growing with learning disabilities such as dyslexia, dyscalculia and others, as echoed by the Ministry of Education press release, (2011). Kenyan, teachers are likely to pay more attention to the able learners in class and neglect those with disabilities, Daily Nation of 2017, cites stories of impatient teachers and frustrated learners and parents, as narrated by Ruth Karanja whose daughter Nyawira took longer to learn how to read and write than expected. The daughter suffered under the teacher's impatience, neglect and mistreatment and had to be

transferred from one school to another, until she finally received individualized learning. Nyawira has since learned to speak well, read and write and her self-esteem is high.

As reported by World Health Organization (WHO, 2016), at least 10% of every country's population lives with some kind of disability. Consequently, there are at least 4 million Kenyans living with disability. The report indicates further that lack of information and poor policy planning has created openings within the system that have left children with LD deprived of education rights.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

It is ideal that schools need to provide all pupils with learning that will help them gain knowledge and skills to enable them do well academically and for economic reasons. This would enable the learners to sustain themselves and their families and join in their nation's building (Hallahan et. Al., 2014)**.** However, for unexplainable reasons, there are pupils who experience learning difficulties in schools that teachers do not understand despite efforts by KISE and other institutions of higher learning to train SNE teachers. The purpose of this study was, therefore to assess the extent to which the already trained SNE teachers were implementing their skills by properly identifying the learners with learning disabilities for placement under Individualized Educational Programme (IEP).

1.3 Objective of the Study

Therefore, the objective of the study was to examine the extent to which SNE teachers were able to identify learners with learning difficulties for IEP implementation in Taita Taveta County public primary schools.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study focused on the assessment of implementation of individualized educational programme by SNE teachers in public primary schools in Taita-Taveta

County. The study was particularly concerned with the SNE teachers' effectiveness in identifying LD learners. This was because for the IEP to be implemented effectively the LD learners must be properly identified. Secondly, public primary schools were investigated since the MoE is more concerned with SNE in that level of education at least for now.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Concept of Individualized Educational Programme

Kothari and Garg (2014), describe Individualized Educational Programme (IEP) as a management tool or planning vehicle that is specially designed for instruction and is a team-driven process by a multidisciplinary team. This team prioritizes services and supports for a learner in order to best meet his or her educational needs. Individualized Educational programme can also be defined as a comprehensive plan of instructional activities, developed and designed to support the student's growth in the skills needed to master curriculum content (Mercer & Pullen, 2009). The IEP has a time limit and focuses on child-centered objectives and the content, specifying special education services that will be provided, considering who, how and where these services will be delivered; and also, implemented within conditions such as, specific accommodations, teaching/learning materials, and instructional approaches needed in order for the students to learn effectively (Sakai, 2017).

This multidisciplinary team comprises of the subject teacher, class, or regular teacher, special education teacher, other professionals, such as, the speech therapist, physiotherapist, nutritionist, occupational therapists, social worker and language therapist. The team addresses issues such as eligibility, evaluation, programme development, and placement options of a learner in special educational programmes

(Rosenberg, Westling & McLesky, 2008). These professionals are of utmost importance and without them, teachers may not be in a position to render some of the services the child requires. The teacher's role, while using the IEP, is to guide and to assist each individual learner personally in his/her journey towards self-realization. Researchers agree that the IEP system of instruction is based on ten accepted educational principles, namely: active responding, positive conditions and consequences, specification of objectives, organization of learning materials, mastery before advancement, evaluation, objective congruence, frequent evaluation, immediate feedback, self-spacing and personalization (Ford, 2013).

Classroom management would call for making instructional arrangements for the learners that include; seatwork comprising all learners in the classroom, small groups, and peer teaching/tutoring. The teacher matches the learner, the task and instructional interventions, to ensure maximum growth. Friend and Marilyn (2010), observed that IEP should be connected to core (general) classroom activities (direct instruction) as this linkage represents the essentials of special education and specially designed instruction.

Rosenberg et al. (2008) state that the IEP process is reviewed yearly to evaluate the methods teachers are using and the learner's progress, which enable modifications or total change of the strategies. However, a step by step evaluation in the process of implementation is recommended to ensure that IEP is effective. A complete re-evaluation may be necessary to establish the learner's eligibility for special needs education services after three years. Mastopieri and Scruggs (2010), observed that teachers should be encouraged by being asked to update only those portions of the IEP that require changes at annual reviews, rather than having them to re-do the whole document as this discourages them, and if

emphasized it may affect the effectiveness of the IEP.

Friend and Marilyn (2010) maintains, that what works for one student, may not necessarily be appropriate for another due to the individual differences. There are learners who will require additional time to learn new information or testing, others need the task to be broken down into smaller and more manageable chunks, or the privacy provided by the study carrels. In this case, teachers are required to select instructional strategies only after a careful diagnosis by the multidisciplinary team or else, making wrong decisions will likely misguide the placement for the learner or even the IEP.

2.2 Identification of Students with Learning Disabilities for IEP

Identification begins when the learner is suspected to be at risk of developing Learning Disabilities (LD). It involves gathering information about a learner for reasons such as identifying a learner's areas of difficulties, assessing the student's functioning level in a given subject, determine suitable school placement, asses the learner's learning potential as well as, monitoring the student's progress. The identification process is used to determine learners' specific learning strengths and needs (Kothari & Garg, 2014).

Teachers often give learners activities to perform in a learning environment that are in the form of tests; class work or practical assignments. Through these tests, the teacher can rate the performance of each learner in a given assessment by awarding marks, awarding grades or make comments such as excellent, a good trial, pass or put more effort. The result of the performance on a given assessment provides important information to a teacher about the level of performance of each learner, his/her strengths and needs (Doorlag & Lewis, 2011). Teacher-made informal tests used by teachers to determine the learner's strengths and needs focus on the learning area of the

core curriculum already taught. The tests also, assess the effectiveness of the methods that have already been used in teaching. Making errors in identification or making wrong diagnosis may lead to inappropriate placement or a faulty IEP, which might not help the learners achieve their learning needs.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, (IDEA) of 2004 of the USA, specifies identification as the process of singling out suspected cases of learners with special needs in education and/or disability and the criteria for eligibility of special needs education and related services (Ford, 2013). This would ensure that learners are given academic support only when it is required and when the child is found to really need special education services.

A multidisciplinary approach to assessing and identifying learning needs is recommended. Parents/guardians supply information on child's birth history; and history pertaining to the learner's vision, hearing and physical condition and ailments, if relevant. Teachers carry out observations in the classroom. Professional assessments include psycho-educational and/or psychological assessments (Bachrach & Steven, 2016). The results of the assessment help in developing the learner's individual educational programme and also, decision for placement, which should be in an inclusive setting. Through the implementation of the IEP, children's behavior and achievement change overtime. In this case, the identification process conducted by the multidisciplinary team determines the LD learner's placement, which should be the natural environment in an inclusive setting; and should be based on the educational needs of the learner. However, according to Kothari and Garg (2014), late identification and intervention could impose limits on what a teacher expects from a learner and in turn reinforce the child's learning and behaviour.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study employed the Constructivist Theory of Instruction by Bruner, (1966), one of the most influential constructivists. He was influenced by Piaget's ideas about cognitive development in children. Bruner's theoretical principles focus on some of the following ideas: nature of learning, Instructional scaffolding, and the intellectual development of the learner. The Constructivist Theory foresee learners who are able to construct new knowledge, focusing on categorization in every aspect of learning done through the interpretation of information and experiences by similarities and differences. This process involves learning by categorizing information, conceptualizing it, and making decisions.

Bruner's constructivist theory is a general framework for direct learning instruction based upon the study of cognition. Bruner observes that instruction must be concerned with the experiences and contexts that make the learner willing and able to learn (learning readiness). The instruction must be structured so that it can easily be grasped by the learner. Instruction should also be designed to facilitate extrapolation and or fill in the gaps going beyond the information given, for this to happen. Bruner lay emphasis on four characteristics of effective instruction emerging from his theoretical constructivists. These were personalized; implying, instruction should relate to learners' predisposition, and facilitate interest in learning, structuring the content so that it can be most easily grasped by the learner, sequencing the material to be presented and use of reinforcement, rewards and punishment that is selected and paced appropriately.

In line with Bruner's characteristics of effective instruction, in order to facilitate direct instructional learning, the teacher is required to develop meaningful, measurable goals and objectives of the IEP. The intention is to provide a long-range direction to a learner's educational programme, for

effective implementation (Ford, 2013). Individualized instruction presumes that most learners with learning disabilities do not have adequate skills and knowledge to direct their own learning, hence, the need for planning and guidance by teachers or peers if necessary.

To facilitate instruction, Bruner notes the importance of knowledge on the student's predispositions that influence learning. This enables the teacher to plan instructions, decide on the strategies, the accommodations and curriculum adaptations and the teaching/learning materials. This is consequent to assessment by a multidisciplinary team composed of teachers, parents/guardians and where necessary, a psychologist, a physiotherapist, social worker and other professionals, depending on the learner's needs. The team assessment reveals the underlying situations hindering the learner's understanding and guides the IEP planning that must happen after the learner's strengths and needs have been diagnosed.

In relation to the implementation of IEP, collaboration is necessary for the success of IEP implementation. Mattatal and Power (2014), point out, collaboration is highly advocated in special needs education as a means of improving teachers' instructional activities and subsequently, strengthen student's learning. Accommodations and curriculum adaptations allow a gradual improvement of concepts moving from simple to most difficult. Bruner also, affirms that any child can be instructed in any subject, in some intellectually honest form at any stage of development. This notion led Bruner to present his concept of the spiral curriculum which states that curriculum should revisit basic ideas - (prerequisites), building on them until the learner grasps the full concept. Using educational principles during planning, will enable learners master the concepts taught. These include; active responding, positive conditions and consequences, specification of objectives, organization of learning materials, mastery before advancement, evaluation, objective congruence, frequent evaluation, immediate feedback, self-spacing and personalization.

Bruner postulated three stages of intellectual development in his constructivist theory, that is, Enactive- a person learns about the world through actions on physical objects and the outcomes of these actions, Iconic- a child requires to observe models and use pictures to obtain learning and Symbolic- where the child develops the ability to think in abstract terms (Kaufman, Mostert, Trent & Pullen, 2011). However, success in learning process is dependent on the teacher's participation, role models and the interaction of learning materials. According to Bruner, when a learner is faced with new knowledge, a combination of concrete, pictorial and symbolic activities will lead to more effective learning, this is true even for adult learners. These stages are modes of representation that are integrated, and only loosely sequential as they translate into each other. Needless to say, the most part of the learning disabilities field has responded by adopting a direct instructional teaching approach to academic deficiencies; while, IEP involves structuring of learning instruction and ensuring that the learner is able to access general education curriculum that is adapted to meet his/her educational needs. Educational researchers have echoed sentiments that IEP improves learners' accomplishments substantially (Mercer & Pullen, 2011). Individualized Educational Programme is flexible, varied and personalized to the learner's needs.

Bruner tried to show that with constructive planning and structuring instruction of the subject matter in terms of basic themes, fundamental ideas, principles, and relationships and continuous support by teachers, students should be able to conceptualize information they learn at school. Teachers are therefore, encouraged to make efforts to infuse constructivist theory by structuring learning instruction as they endeavour to use cooperation and

collaboration. This approach is likely to bring positive effects on students' learning (La Salle et al., 2013). In this study, the researcher attempted to conduct assessment of the implementation of the IEP, by special needs education teachers, on learners with LD in public primary schools in Kenya, with a focus on the ability of the SNE teachers to identify LD learners, subsequently, the study was conceptualized as having one independent variable; identification of learners with LD, and one dependent variable- effectiveness in the implementation of IEP.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Location of the Study

This study was carried out in Taita-Taveta County, one of the 47 counties of Kenya, located in the Southern part of Kenya. It lies northwest of Mombasa and southeast of Nairobi city of which, a bulk is within Tsavo East and Tsavo West National parks. Its headquarters is presently situated in Wundanyi. Three other major towns include Voi, Mwatate and Taveta. The choice of this location was considered appropriate because a number of teachers in public primary schools has undergone training in SNE, and therefore, they were considered competent to handle the IEP and that their opinions in this study would be important and relevant for this study.

3.2 Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey design which is appropriate for determining and reporting the way things are in their natural environment (Kothari & Garg, 2014). The design therefore fitted data collection (mainly qualitative) from the teachers and the head teachers in order to assess the effectiveness of implementation of IEP by SNE teachers on learners with learning disabilities in Taita-Taveta County, Kenya.

3.3 Target Population

Population refers to an entire group of persons or elements that have at least one thing in common. Target population is that population to which a researcher wants to generalize the results of the study (Kothari, 2007). This study focused only on teachers who had been trained in Special Needs Education (SNE) and specifically in the schools were located, as well as, the head teachers in those particular schools where the SNE teachers are placed. Hence, the total target population of teachers who had been trained in SNE in Taita-Taveta County public primary schools, were 226. These teachers were distributed in 46 public primary schools around the county. Since the study targeted teachers trained in SNE, it used only head teachers where the SNE teachers were located, making a total of 46 head teachers. This made a total of 272 potential respondents.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Purposive sampling was used in this study to sample the head teachers and the teachers. The subjects in such a group are homogenous with common qualities, and are believed to be reliable for the study (Kothari & Garg, 2014). Only 226 teachers specialized in Special Needs Education (SNE) for this study were selected and these were distributed in 46 public accessible primary schools. Therefore, the study used 46 head teachers, who came from the respective schools where SNE teachers were located. This made a total of 272 respondents for sampling. According to Mugenda and Mugenda, (2003), a sampling percentage of 10-30% is considered adequate for a descriptive study, therefore, in this study a sample of 20% of both the teachers and head teachers was considered appropriate. This gave 45 teachers and nine head teachers, respectively, making a total of 54 respondents as shown on Table 3.1. The Head teachers were used because of their administrative and custodial role as, well as, being the immediate supervisors of these schools.

Table 3.1: Sampled Size in Relation to Target Population

Sampled respondents	Frequency	Percent	Sample Size
Teachers	226	20%	45
Head teachers	46	20%	9
Total	*272*	*20%*	*54*

3.5 Research Instruments

Research questionnaires were used to collect data from both the 45 teachers and the nine head teachers. The questionnaires had both structured and open ended questions. Open ended questions give the respondents the liberty to provide their opinions where applicable and necessary. A questionnaire is an appropriate tool that is most logical in measuring public opinions. Questionnaires also, give respondents an opportunity to express their thoughts freely by answering questions willingly and with an open mind, thus eliciting honest comments (Kothari, & Garg, 2014). Further, for this study, questionnaires were designed to provide genuine answers to questions and allow uniformity of answers, hence, simplifying the researcher's analysis of data. The advantage of using questionnaires was to enable the researcher to gather a large amount of information within a reasonable space of time. Two sets of instruments were considered appropriate because of the nature of each respondent. The head teacher is the school administrator and manager; hence the teacher works under the head teacher's supervision. Therefore, some questions asked would require answers from one set of the respondents and not the other.

The questionnaires were validated using face and content validation approaches, while test-retest was used to assess the reliability of the data collection instruments. The reliability index was observed to be 0.82. This index was considered reasonable according to Kothari and Garg (2014) recommendations.

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

The researcher obtained an introductory letter from Kenya Methodist University (KeMU). The introductory letter was used to apply for a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovations (NACOSTI). The research permit was used to seek for local authorization to collect the needed data.

The researcher made personal visits to the schools in order to seek appointments as to the convenient times to administer the questionnaires. Later, the researcher visited the heads of the schools at the agreed times. During the data collection everyone involved in the study was given instructions and assured of confidentiality and freedom to participate in the study. The researcher waited for the respondents to complete the questionnaire upon completion, the instruments were collected immediately. The latter was necessary in order to ensure a high response rate and also limit any consultations among the subjects. Data collection took place between May – August 2016, due to the expanse of Taita-Taveta County.

3.7 Data Analysis

The questionnaires were cleaned of vague responses, as well as, any incomplete questionnaires after the data collection. Responses were then coded to facilitate entry into the computer. After coding, the data was entered into a computer and analyzed using SPSS Version 22. The results assisted in the tabulation of frequencies and percentages. Descriptive statistics, such as means were used in the analysis. The response from open ended questions were put into themes and categories that involved explanations and separated answers accordingly.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic Information

The first step in the data analysis was to investigate respondents' background information. The results of this analysis are presented in Tables 4.1 - 4.3.

4.2.1 Teachers experience

The study sought to establish the experience of the teachers sampled. Key attributes investigated included teachers teaching experience including their training in Special Needs Education (SNE).

Table 4.1: Teachers Experience

Demographic Characteristics	*Categories*	*Frequency (n)*	*Percent (%)*
Teaching experience	1 - 5 years	3	**7**
	6 - 10 years	4	**9**
	11 - 15 years	5	**11**
	Over 15 years	33	**73**
	N	**45**	100
Training in Special Needs Education	Yes	45	**100**
N		*45*	*100*

The findings presented in Table 4.1 shows that all the teachers in the targeted schools were professionally trained in SNE; and had adequate teaching experience as indicated by 73% of the sampled teachers who had over 15 years of teaching experience. Therefore, these teachers were conversant and well informed on the issues influencing learning of students with learning disabilities in the schools.

4.2.2 Head teachers experience in teaching

The study further obtained responses from the head teachers regarding their experience in teaching, as well as, training in Special Needs Education (SNE). Their responses are shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Head Teachers Experiences

Demographic Characteristics of Head Teachers	*Categories*	*Frequency (n)*	*Percent (%)*
Teaching experience	11 - 15 years	3	**33**
	Above 15 years	6	**67**
	(N)	**9**	100
Training in Special Needs Education	Yes	6	**67**
	No	3	**33**
(N)		*9*	*100*

The findings show that most (67%) of the head teachers had been trained in SNE, while, the same percentage (67%) of the sampled head teachers had above 15 years of teaching experience. This shows that most of the head teachers in the targeted schools had received training in SNE, and equally, had adequate teaching experience and hence, well

positioned to provide the needed information on the outcomes of individualized educational programme implementation for students with LD in schools. The findings in Tables 4.1 and 4.2, respectively, show that a high number of teachers (100%) were trained in SNE, as compared to 67% of the head teachers. In addition, more teachers (73% had a longer teaching experience in teaching students with SNE, than the head teachers, as shown by 67%. This implies that more teachers than head teachers had undergone training in SNE, and that they had more experience in dealing with LD learners than the head teachers,

however, their differences in experience was not so big.

4.2.3 Areas of specialization in SNE

The study sought to establish the teachers and head teachers 'specific areas of specialization in relation to special needs education. To achieve this, both teachers and head teachers were requested to indicate the areas in which they had been trained, in relation to SNE. In this case, head teacher's total N was 'nine' and the teachers total 'N' was 45 making a total of 54 (100%) respondents. Table 4.3 contains the areas of training.

Table 4.3: Areas of Specialization for Teachers and Head Teachers

Specific Training in SNE	*Frequency (N) Teachers*	*Percent (%)*	*Frequency (N) Head Teachers*	*Percent (%)*
Learning disabilities	9	20	2	22
Gifted and talented	2	4	0	0
Autism	2	4	1	11
Emotional and behavior				
Disorders	4	9	1	11
Hearing impairment	12	27	3	33
Mental handicap	12	27	3	33
Physical impairment	2	4	0	0
Visual impairment	2	4	0	0
Not specialized	0	0	0	0
Total (N)	*45*	*100*	*9*	*100*

The findings in Table 4.3 reflect that more teachers and head teachers were trained in Hearing Impairment and Mental Handicap as indicated by 27% teachers and 33% head teachers, respectively, while 20% of the teachers and of the 22% head teachers had been trained in learning disabilities. This clearly showed that, there was need to have more teachers and head teachers trained for learners with LD in order to increase expertise in this area. There were no head teachers specialized in gifted and talented, physical and visual impairments. Only (4%) of teachers respectively were trained in those areas. This study established that there is a need for further training to increase expertise in these

and other areas with fewer specialized personnel.

The findings concerning the teachers teaching experiences and their training in SNE, revealed that most of the teachers and head teachers were trained in SNE. Majority had adequate teaching experience, mostly of over 15 years. This implies that they were conversant and well informed on the issues affecting students with learning disabilities in the schools; and that most head teachers were well positioned to understand the IEP process. However, most teachers and head teachers were specialized in Hearing Impairment and Mental Handicap, while only a small percentage, (20%) of teachers and 22% head

teachers had specialized in learning disabilities. Therefore, there is need to have more teachers trained in SNE to increase expertise in this area. Equally, fewer teachers were trained in areas of gifted and talented, physical and visual impairments, hence, more teachers should also, train in these areas to fill in the gap. Hallahan *et al* (2014), describes the IEP as a management tool that provides teachers with skills and knowledge in classroom instructions, hence, the need for the teacher's specialization in SNE so that they could support learners with LD in the classroom.

In order to meet the demand for training, Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE), established in 1986 under the Ministry of Education (MoE), spearheaded the training of teachers in SNE (Oketch, 2009). The effectiveness of this programme is dependent on the teacher's ability to articulate the IEP and having thorough knowledge about the process. To date, the MoE continues to sponsor teachers for training in both certificate and diploma courses in SNE.

4.3 Identifying Learners with LD in Schools

Making a faulty diagnosis and judgments lead to inappropriate placement of learners with LD which may compromise the student's learning by engaging in the wrong

programme. The objective of this study was to assess implementation of IEP by teachers, on learners with LD and hence establish various ways professionals employ to identify learners with learning disabilities for the implementation of IEP in Taita-Taveta County, public primary schools. The key sections investigated included methods of identifying learners with LD, involvement of other personnel in identifying students with LD, learners' assessment, referrals and placement in schools and assessment centres, as well as challenges teachers experienced in identifying learners with learning disabilities in schools.

4.3.1 Identifying learners with learning disabilities

The study sought to establish the various methods teachers used to identify learners with learning disabilities. According to Doorlag and Lewis (2011), the results of the performance on a given assessment provides important information to a teacher about the level of performance of each learner, his/her strengths and needs. To achieve this, teachers were asked to indicate ways in which they identify leaners with learning disabilities. The responses were as indicated in Table 4.4 – 4.6

Table 4.4: Identifying Learners with LD in Schools

Methods of identification	*Frequency (N)*	*Percentage (%)*
Physical appearance	3	7
Speech and behaviour	8	18
Taking questions and receiving answers from learners	7	15
Performance	3	7
Writing	6	13
Reading	9	20
Comprehension	9	20
Total (N)	*45*	*100*

The teachers identified reading and comprehension as methods used mostly in identification of the learners. This was an implication that SNE teachers were effective as concerns identification of learners with LD.

Doorlag and Lewis, (2011) concedes that during the assessment process, teachers provide their learners with activities to perform and rate them accordingly, depending on how each performs, enabling teachers

determine strengths and needs of each learner. Also, 18%, 15% and 13%, respectively, cited speech and behaviours, taking questions and receiving answers and writing as methods used to identify strengths and needs in learners, which was also a criteria used in the identification process. Accurate identification process is necessary because if incorrect it may lead to wrong programme planning and incorrect placement of the learner with learning disabilities in school. Kothari and Garg (2014) posit that early identification and intervention could impose limits on what a teacher expects from a learner which could in turn reinforce the child's learning behaviour.

4.3.2 Involvement of other personnel in identifying learners with LD

The study sought to establish from the teachers and head teachers whether other personnel were involved in identifying learners with learning disabilities and if so, the main personnel involved in the identification process. Anastasiow, Coleman, Gallagher & Kirk, (2011) observe that each of the other personnel that may be involved can support and help to enhance the learning progress for students with exceptionalities. The findings are displayed in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Involvement of other Personnel in Learner's Identification

Responses	*Frequency (N) Trs*	*Percentage (%)*	*Frequency (N) H/trs*	*Percentage (%)*
Teachers and head teachers Yes responses about other persons involved	39	87	6	67
	6	13	3	33
No				
Total (N)	**45**	**100**	**9**	**100**
Other personnel involved Special Education Teachers	25	56	5	56
Parents	10	22	2	22
Classmates/peers	4	9	1	11
Itinerant teachers	0	0	0	0
Doctors	6	13	1	11
Total (N)	*45*	*100*	*9*	*100*

According to the responses, most (87%) teachers and head teachers (67%) agreed that other (67%) personnel were involved in the identification process of learners with LD. The respondents listed the categories of other personnel who were involved in the process. Both agreed that special education teachers were mostly used, as indicated by 56% of the teachers and 56% of the head teachers, respectively. This is in agreement with Mattatal and Power (2014) who observed that in a collaboration model, each of the professionals bring their skills, training and perspectives to the team. Parents, class mates/peers, doctors, are less involved as indicated by less than 22% by both teachers and head teachers, respectively. The results showed that the itinerant teachers were not used at all; a pointer that such teachers may not have been available. This implies that learners in schools without teachers trained in SNE, would not receive the much needed intervention to alleviate the learning difficulties, even if it were needed, thereby, continued development of learning disabilities. It is necessary to employ itinerant

teachers who would assist teachers in identifying learners with LD.

4.3.3 Assessment and placement recommendation by EARCs personnel

Teachers and head teachers were asked to state whether they referred students to be assessed by personnel in assessment centres and personnel in assessment centres referred students whether for placement to schools, as shown in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Assessment and Placement Recommendation by EARCs Personnel

Learners assessment	*Response*	*Frequency (n) Trs*	*Percentage (%)*	*Frequency (n) H/Trs*	*Percentage (%) H/Trs*
Referred learners by teachers for assessment by personnel at the centres.	**Yes** **No**	33 12	73 27	5 4	56 44
Total (N)		*45*		*9*	*100*
Referred learners by assessment personnel for Placement in Schools	**Yes** **No**	31 14	69 31	7 2	78 22
Total (N)		*45*	*100*	*9*	*100*

The findings on Table 4.6 show that most of the respondents answered these two questions on the affirmative as accounted by 73% teachers and 56% head teachers, respectively that the school personnel referred students to assessment centres to be assessed by the EARCs staff. Likewise, both agreed, as indicated by 69% of the teachers and 78% of the head teachers, that the EARCs personnel referred students for placement to schools. This shows that there was a strong cooperation between the schools and personnel in assessment centres. This was significant in identifying and helping students with learning disabilities in schools. These findings were consistent with Hallahan et al., (2014), who argued that students with special needs are best served by collaboration of professionals. In addition, the findings agree with Doorlag and Lewis (2011), who concede that collaboration takes place when groups of individual teachers work together, to identify and provide the best opportunities in education for students in need of extraordinary interventions. The team approach is the strategy of choice for addressing the problems of learners who are struggling with learning in schools and this, ensures effectiveness of the programme.

4.3.5 Challenges teachers face in identifying learners with LD

The teachers highlighted various difficulties experienced in identifying learners with learning disabilities. Results are presented in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7: Challenges Faced in Identifying Learners with LD

Challenges	Frequency(N)	Percentage (%)
Difficulty to distinguish leaners with LD from those with MH	9	20
Late discovery of Learners with LD	13	29
Parents not accepting that their child has LD	3	4
Parents not willing to discuss child's background	2	7
Overcrowded classrooms	11	24
Learners with multiple disabilities	4	9
Lack of trained personnel to assist in identification of learners with LD	3	7
Total (N)	*45*	*100*

Most 29%, 24% and 20%, of the teachers agreed that there were challenges in identifying students with LD citing, late discovery, since students with LD appeared to be physically fit and active orally, overcrowded classrooms, difficulty in distinguishing the learners with LD from those with mental handicaps (MH), since some of the learners had multiple disabilities as indicated by 9% of the teachers. There were also, parents who did not accept that their children had learning disabilities and equally, lack of trained personnel to assist in identification of learners with LD as indicated by 7% in each case. These challenges in identifying learners with LD contribute to lack of effectiveness of the programme, thereby, causing a delay for early intervention; hence, learners may develop low self-esteem and learned helplessness which causes some to drop out of school. Also, according to Kothari and Garg (2014), late identification and intervention could impose limits on what a teacher expects from a learner and in turn reinforce the child's learning and behaviour problems.

5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of the Results

The first step in the data analysis was to investigate the respondent's demographic information, their work experiences and areas of their specialization. The results of the study revealed that majority of the respondents, both teachers and head teachers had 15 years and above of teaching experience. Most (84%) of the teachers and 67% of the head teachers, indicated that they were trained in Special Needs Education (SNE). Hence, the study revealed that most of the respondents in the targeted schools were professionals in SNE and had adequate teaching experience to enable them use IEP on students with learning disabilities effectively.

As a whole, the SNE teachers had been trained in nine areas of special needs education, with the majority trained in the area of hearing impairment and mentally handicapped. A few teachers were trained in learning disabilities as indicated by 22% of the teachers. This implies that there was need to train more teachers in the area of LD and also, other areas such as Gifted and talented, Autism, Visual impairment and Physical disabilities, which had indicated less number of teachers, specialized in those areas.

From the results, most (20%), of the teachers could identify students with LD through reading and comprehension. Other indicators were speech and behaviours, taking questions and receiving answers and writing, which were at 18%, 15% and 13%, respectively.

However, 7% of the teachers who indicated that learners with LD were identified by physical appearance was a contradiction since generally students with LD appear as normal as any of their peers, hence, could not be identified through using this criteria (Borman & Donohue, 2013). Therefore, accurate identification process is necessary, because if the diagnosis is wrong, it may lead to inappropriate programme planning and incorrect placement of the learners with learning disabilities in school.

The study further established that 87% of the teachers and 67% of the head teachers agreed that there was involvement of other personnel in identifying learners with LD. The respondents listed the personnel such as, parents, doctors, special education teachers, learner's friends and classmates as possible sources of information on identification of learners. This would ensure that students get the necessary interventions in schools. It was also, revealed that teachers and head teachers referred learners to assessment centres for assessment. Likewise, Education and Resource Centres (EARCs) personnel, referred students for placement as indicated by 56% of the teachers and 78% head teachers. This implies that there was a strong cooperation between personnel in the schools and assessment centres.

However, the results also, revealed that there were major challenges experienced by teachers in identifying learners with learning disabilities. These included difficulty in distinguishing learners with LD from those with mental handicaps, late discovery of the disability since the LD learners appeared to be physically fit, while others were even very active orally as indicated by 20% and 29%, respectively. This emerged as a major challenge. In addition, getting trained personnel to assist in identifying learners with LD was a problem, parent's unwillingness to discuss their child's background and some parents not accepting that their children had learning disabilities were cited among the challenges hindering

early interventions. Further, schools had overcrowded classrooms, as indicated by 24%, of the teachers, hence, constraining identification of learners with LD, while some learners had multiple disabilities that posed challenges in identifying learners with learning disabilities.

Consequently, mechanisms that were used to identify students with LD in schools were mainly through assessing their performance, reading, writing and comprehension, levels of concentration in class, use of checklists in specific areas as well as their speech and behavior.

5.2 Conclusions

Conclusions are based on the set objectives and findings; ways used for identifying learners with LD, teaching methods used in the implementation of IEP, collaboration, consultations used in IEP for IEP implementation. On identification of learners with LD, the study reveals that most teachers identify students through writing, reading and comprehension. Other teachers cite speech and behaviour, taking questions and receiving answers from them, their academic performance, from their hand writing, reading and comprehension. Such learners can be identified positively if professional personnel are used for the purpose, to ensure that the learners access academic support only when such assistance is absolutely necessary and the learner is found eligible for special education services.

On collaboration, the study reveals that teachers, head teachers, assessment personnel, parents and other professionals are involved in the process of identification. The study reveals that parents are concerned about their children's school work, and further attend meetings organized by the school to discuss about their children's academic problems. However, results also, indicate that the mothers' participation is rated higher than that of the fathers.

5.3 Recommendations

Special Needs Education teachers need to update themselves with the emerging issues in special education, especially on identification of the learning problems. Parents, class mates/peers and doctors, should be involved more in identifying learners with LD. Frequency of updates on the head teachers by their respective teachers should be increased to facilitate teachers carry out early intervention measures. The findings indicated that mothers' participation was rated higher than that of the fathers. There is a need to encourage fathers to be more concerned about their children's school work, and further attend meetings organized by the school to discuss their children's academic problems. This study determined how teachers identified a learner as having learning disabilities for implementation of individualized educational programme in Taita-Taveta County, public primary schools. It is recommended that a similar study should be carried out across Kenya and see whether the results would be replicated.

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