

Teachers' Age and its Influences in Their Attitude towards Visually Impaired Children in Integrated Schools.

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ABSTRACT

When visually impaired learners are integrated in regular public schools one of the challenges they encounter is the negative attitude of the sighted peers and teachers. This affects their adjustment in the new environment. A sample of 21 teachers below the age of 39 and 27 teachers who were above 39 years of age was selected. The criterion for selection was that they taught visually impaired learners in integrated schools. The hypothesis was stated that there was no statistical significant difference between younger and older teachers in their perception of integration of visually impaired children in public primary schools. A Likert type scale with a Cronbach alpha of 0.7 was used to collect data. Collected data was analyzed using SPSS and the mean grades obtained were 69.4 for teachers below 39 years and 67.5 for teachers above 39 years. This gave a mean grade of 1.9, T-Value of 0.447 and P- Value of 0.657. The findings were that younger teachers were more flexible, accommodating and caring (more positive) than older teachers. The older teachers need to be sensitized on integration.

Key Words: Attitude, Teachers Age, Integration, Adjustment

Background Information

The successful implementation of any inclusive policy is based on the educators/teachers being positive about the whole concept. Examining teachers' attitude towards integration and inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream system is vital step in the process of successful implementation of educational policies. This paper investigated how teachers' workload influences their attitude towards visually impaired children in integrated schools.

In a study of social acceptance of speech handicapped children in ordinary schools, Marge (1996) found that children and teachers attitude towards handicapped children were similar and that both preferred the non-handicapped child. But for integration of the visually impaired pupils to succeed teachers accept visually handicapped one when they join the mainstream school.

Statement of the problem

The full integration and adjustment of visually impaired children in various regular primary schools is slowed by their rejection by their hosts. So how is attitude of teachers influenced by their age?

Hypothesis

There were no statistical significant differences teachers below and those above 39 years in their attitude visually impaired children in integrated schools.

Symbolic Interactions Theory

Societies are composed of interacting individuals who not only react but perceive, interpret, act and create. The individual is a dynamic and changing actor. The individual mind is always changing due to new experience and activities in the environment. We share meanings with others. We respond to others and reality emerges in the process of interaction. According to Blumer one of the chief architects of the symbolic interaction refers to the peculiar distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings. Human beings interpret or define each other actions (symbols). Skinner (1986), a behavioral psychologist points out that individuals react to external stimuli, a process Hollander (1969) says occurs in stages. That is, when a visually impaired pupil is brought in an integrated regular classroom the sighted children and even teachers may take time to familiarize themselves with the new comer. During that time of familiarization, significant learning occurs (Rogers, 1969). Abraham (1982) pressured this theory and observed that societies are made of interacting individuals, who are dynamic. The individual changes after acquiring new experiences. Experience is shared and through this interaction occurs, a situation Abraham called symbolic interaction. This interaction is vital for the adjustment in students including visually handicapped in school. When visually impaired pupils are brought to the integrated classroom, the above mentioned interaction may not be there. Visually impaired children have social features which are perceived by sighted children and teachers as lack of social competence. In their study Bryan, (1986a) Pearl et al, (1986) found that disabled children in integrated schools, received more negative than positive reinforcement from teachers than their non-handicapped counterparts.

In Kenya, studies indicate that visually impaired children perceive themselves as higher academic achievers (Anyango, 1984) although they hate integration (Njoroge 1991) due to their low self-concept (Muola, 2000) and perhaps the attitude of their sighted hosts in the schools.

Teachers training as a factor in attitude towards visually impaired children

Teachers' skills and attitude assist the process of bonding teachers and students. This facilitates knowing and working with students as individuals (Collins, 1996; McCain & Good, 1996, Morse, 1996). Teacher's skills necessary for working with the handicapped children may be instrumental in determining student's attitude towards placement and quality of intervention services (Medina & Luna, 1999). In addition, the flexibility and attitude of regular classroom teachers are related to success of integration once it has been undertaken (Grosenick, 1971; Simek, 1979 & White, 1980).

Planning teams often do not select or identify the receiving teacher before planning integration (Peterson, 1980). This is because teachers come from the same community as the visually impaired children; hence they possess the same negative attitude as the rest of the society. They resist the integration of the visually impaired children (Goodlad, 1984). This resistance is natural and stems from teachers not being prepared for the task. Handicapped should not be mainstreamed until teachers in regular schools are trained and willing to handle them.

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The observation supports Schwartz (1983) finding that, the teacher's positive attitude towards the handicapped children is crucial because it helps in adjusting and shaping the attitude of the non-handicapped ones. Wahler (1977) observed that teachers could convince an isolated Childs peer group to change their reaction towards him/her and thus increase social activities between them. In addition, Kounin (1970) found that interaction between a teacher and a pupil has an impact on how other students view the one who has interacted with the teacher. This means that if a teacher is trained to handle a visually impaired child favorably, especially in front of the other children, they will appreciate and accept the child faster than if the opposite is the case. This enhances social integration. Hence the need to investigate teachers' attitude towards the incoming visually impaired children. The study examined the impact of training in special education or lack of it, in influencing their attitude of teachers towards integration of visually impaired children in regular schools.

Research Methodology

Research design

The study used ex-post facto design, which involves systematic empirical inquiry in which the researcher does not have direct control of independent variables because their manifestations have already occurred and cannot be manipulated. This approach makes use of a naturally subjected to treatment (independent variable) in the form of integration into regular schools.

Location of the study

The study was done in Nakuru County, Kenya

Population of the study

In Nakuru County there were 558 primary schools, including 26 ones with visually impaired pupils. These schools had a population of 352,465 pupils which translates over 700,000 parents, over 5000 teachers. There were 9 integrated schools. The sample size of teachers in integrated schools were 48.

Sample and sampling procedure

In the study there were 9 schools with at least one visually impaired pupil in the sample. There were 48 teachers of visually impaired pupils in 9 integrated schools. The criteria of selecting teachers was that they taught integrated classrooms. This is considered a fair representation of the total population (Kathuri & Pals, 1993; et al; 1996; Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999).

Probability sampling involves selecting a reasonable number of subjects that is a true representative of the target population. Non probability sampling was used to select all teachers (48) who taught in any integrated classroom. All the schools in the sample were selected on the basis of having at least one visually impaired pupil.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics namely frequencies, percentages and means were used to analyze the data collected. The inferential statistics, mainly t-test were used to test the hypotheses of the study.

Findings

Results finding showed that there was a statically significant difference between younger and older teachers in their attitude towards integration.

Table 1: Distribution of teachers by age

Age of the Teacher	N	%	Mean
Below 39 years	21	43.8	69.4
Above 39 years	27	56.2	67.5
Total	48	100	

Table 2: T-test result on teacher's attitude and age

Workload	No	Mean attitude	Mean difference	T value	P value (2 tailed)
Below 39 years	21	69.4	1.9	0.0447	0.657
Above 39 years	27	67.5			

The hypothesis statement was that there was no significant difference between teachers aged above 39 years and those below 39 years in their attitude towards the visually impaired pupils. There were 48 teachers (20 males and 28 females) who participated in the study. Those below 39 years had an attitude mean score of 69.4 while those above 39 years had an attitude mean score of 67.5. Data was subjected to t-test and the obtained t value was 0.447 and the mean difference was 1.9 the null hypothesis was accepted. There was a statistically significant difference between teachers aged below 39 years and those above 39 years in their attitude towards integration of visually impaired pupils. Younger teachers in integrated schools may be rigid, ignorant and unprepared to engage an extra burden in their classrooms.

On the issue of putting visually impaired children in separate or special schools, majority the teachers disagree (60.4 %) while 27.1 % of the respondents agreed with this position. Disabled children drop out of school due to poor academic performance and rejection, hence there is need to enhance the classroom environment by accepting and respecting their visually impaired students (Sparks & Stinson, 1991; Rockwell & Stooglund, 1997). However, one out of four teachers (27.1%) wants visually impaired pupils taught in separate or special schools. Separation enhances rejection, isolation and labeling of these visually impaired pupils, a fear they may live forever. Some scholars have pointed out the disadvantages of integration (Morgan 1978) teaching the handicapped children with the non-handicapped ones in the regular classrooms. First, the handicapped might be exposed to a curriculum that is inadequate to their needs particularly regular classroom teachers may not be adequately prepared to receive and handle this extra burden (Dinbrough & Knirad, 1979).

Secondly having an extra handicapped child in class means extra workload and this may force the regular classroom teacher to use a lot of time with the handicapped children at the expense of the non-handicapped. Thirdly, simply placing the handicapped child in a regular classroom offers no guarantee that the students will be accepted by the handicapped peers (Monroe and Howe, 1971; Jones, Lavine and Shell, 1972). This situation can worsen if teacher's attitude towards the visually impaired pupils is not positive or accommodative.

The quality of teacher's interaction with pupils may influence sighted pupils reactions towards the visually impaired children. Deiro (1996) said that children value adults but questioned who value them. It is teachers who care, intervene best, foster better teachers students relationships especially when dealing with disabled children (Morgan, 1987). Teacher's skills and attitudes assist the process of bonding between teachers and students: knowing and working with students as individuals (Collison, 1996) and establishing trust. Low vision pupils were not disruptive in were. A minority (4.2 percent) of the teacher were undecided. This is good news for the process of integration. However, a significant 37.5 percent of the teacher reported that visually impaired pupils were disruptive in class. This could be they also differ in speech and language development and social development, orientation and mobility.

Conclusion

Teachers below 40 years had a more positive attitude than those above 40 years towards visually impaired children; the Kenya integration education program should target and train all teachers above 40 years in special education.

Recommendation

Teachers above 40 years of age should be targeted for training before integration of visually impaired starts.

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