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ATTITUDE TOWARDS VISUALLY IMPAIRED PUPILS BY SIGHTED PEERS AND
TEACHERS IN INTEGRATED PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Visually impaired pupils have been faced by many challenges such as a rigid curriculum, social-economic deprivation, non-verbal communication, poor environments, inadequate and untrained teachers and also rejection by sighted hosts. In this study the attitudes of 94 & 91 sighted girls and boys in integrated primary schools were assessed. Girls and boys were separated using the stratified random selection method model and a Likert scale questionnaire was administered to measure their attitude towards integration of their visually impaired peers. The null hypothesis was stated that there were no significant perceptual differences between sighted pupils who were integrated below five years and those integrated above five years (Time). T-Test analytical method was done and showed that there was no statistical significant perpetual difference. The null hypothesis was accepted. Integration of visually impaired pupils is of great concern to educators and parents so as to provide a positive learning and home environments so that the visually impaired pupils reduce their personal, home and education challenges. Research on integration for visually impaired learners should be a continuous process or it can be done any time.

KEY WORDS: *Visually Impaired, Integration, Attitude, Integrated School, Sighted Pupils Quality Education*

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Background Information

Social attitude vary on how members of society perceive the disadvantaged people. Early Greek and Roman civilizations viewed the handicapped with a picture of superstition and futility. For instance, in Rome, Athens and Spartan disabled children were put to death in a legally approved manner and the fathers had the right to abandon newborn infants if they were deformed. Those handicapped children who survived were given severe punishment as it was believed that evil spirits possessed them and had to be exorcised by religious officials (Glass, 1982):

In the pre-Christian church era in Europe, the orphans, the aged and the blind were kept in wards. This segregated them from the rest of the society (Kirk & Gallagher, 1982). This is a reflection of how handicapped people were perceived by the non-handicapped people. In the 18th and 19th centuries separate places were established to provide care to the handicapped people. The reason behind this was society's positive change of attitude toward the handicapped people.

In Africa traditional societies, the care of the disadvantages people was dependent upon the cultural practices and beliefs of various communities. Among the Songye community of the Democratic Republic of Congo, a child disability was attributed to its father's inability to pay dowry for his wife or sorcery (Devlieger, 1989). Among the Chagga people of the Tanzania, the physically impaired were perceived as satisfying the evil spirit and hence acted as insurance to the normal society against them. This made it necessary to take care of the physically challenged (Walker, 1978, Nistoro, 2015).

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 sighted children influenced by duration of integration?

Literature Review

Meaning and Categories of Visual Impairment

Children with visual acuity of 6/60 are referred to as blind with visual acuity of 6/21 have partial impairment (Hallan & Kauffman, 1988). This means that if an object is placed at a distance of 6 meters from a blind person, he/she cannot see it while a person with normal vision does not alter ability to understand and use a language hence no difference from sighted children in verbal intelligence (Rogow, 1981). The difference occurs in conceptual abilities (Stephens & Grube, 1982). Visually impaired children manifest problems in mobility and orientation, reading, self-concept and social adjustment among others.

Benefits of integrating visually impaired children in regular schools

Integration of visually impaired children started in Kajiado District in 1972. During integration the non-handicapped peers act as both educational and therapeutic resources (Guralnick, 1976;

Glass, 1982, Cox and Dykes, 2001). This is because the regular classroom offers stimulation, academic and social skills. It also increases the number of visually impaired children access to education (Abilla, 1992, Willing, 2015). In regular schools, it removes stigma on handicapped and makes non-handicapped children interact well with their handicapped peers. Janney et al (1995), in their interview to teachers and administrators, reported that visually impaired children acquired the following benefits during integration with sighted ones; increased independence, alertness to the environment, improved functional skills, acquisition of age appropriate behavior, development of friendship and increased self-esteem. The visually impaired children also come to know and understand the sighted.

Duration of integration as a factor in attitude towards visually impaired children

When children who are unfamiliar are brought together and interact in play session, they behave as if they are familiar with one another (Asher, 1983) but when visually impaired children are together with sighted peers the former may become rejected and isolated over time (Coie & Kupersmidts, 1983, Celeste, 2016). This is because the task of entering a group possesses serious problems, not only to the socially inept but also to the socially skilled (Gavery, 1984; Puttallaz & Gottaman, 1981); Even after entering a group, attain group acceptance is a difficult task, which requires time because each group has its own frame of reference (Forbes, 1982, Gorsaro, 1979). This makes the visually handicapped child lack friend who are vital for her/his social development and adjustment (Hartup, 1985) when they join the mainstream school.

Lowen (1974) noted that young children usually accept the visual handicapped schoolmates quite readily, sometimes after an initial phase of curiosity. On integration, the sighted children adjust and accept the visual handicapped children. The sighted children, who attend school with the visually handicapped peers, have been found to develop more positive judgment of the abilities of the visually handicapped children and those who have never been integrated (Bateman, 1962; 1964; Steinzor, 1966).

Theoretical Framework

Socialization Theory

Socialization is a powerful process that influences human development in many aspects be it physical, cognitive, emotional and social development. It is during this process that skills, norms and attitudes of a society are imparted into a child (Ezewu, 1983). It occurs through interaction and much of it is unconscious to non-deliberate. This interaction mostly occurs in the family and it gives a child cultural identity, because it is lifelong (Mead, 1934; All port, 1961; Kelly, 1973; Wood head, 1988). The family is universally recognized as the primary socializing agency. It is only social institution which has a role child bearing and rearing (Ezewu, 1983, Pandey, 2018). At the age of two months, a child is able to recognize what is visually happening around it (Bronson, 1974; Haith, 1979). An infant starts interacting with its mother or caregiver and this mark the start of the socializing process. The quality of the interaction is very important in the socializing process (Schaffer, 1984). The higher the quality of interaction, the more an infant becomes attached to its mother and the environment (Erickson, 1963). Every family has values or norms, which are passed onto the child by the mother and then by the rest of the family members (Winser & Gallimore, 1977). As a child grows, he/she continues to imbue and internalize values of the family which form the child's values of the wider society.

When the child goes to school, she/he finds other socializing agents with different values. They are pupils, teachers and workers, who combine to make up another social environment for the child. The environment provides structured, deliberate, casual and even accidental socialization (Blummer, 1066; Pennington, 1992; Peil & Oyeneye, 1998). Though the school is a distinct community, it represents the values of the wider community (Ezewu, 1983) and the children learn what is considered worth by the society or what is called the dominant culture, which is transmitted by peers, teachers and parent (Wentworth, 1980). Members of a given community involuntarily reproduce the dominant culture whether in school or elsewhere. So the social perception of the visually impaired children by the rest of the society is similar whether the visually impaired child is in school or at home. In addition, education's main function is to transmit culture or certain values in a given society and if it ignores certain values in school, these will not be transmitted at all. For example, if the society's attitude towards the visually impaired children is negative and this is not corrected in school, pupils will retain such negative attitude.

Modeling Theory

Modeling behavior is a key factor in determining attitude development (Bandura, 1963) and this makes children imitate their parent's behavior from early ages. Apart from parents, children later imitate other powerful models in school and society especially those people who are prominent and powerful. They shun weak personalities (Bandura, Ross and Ross, 1963). The learnt attitudes are internalized, retrieved and used at the appropriate time.

The sighted society has stereotyped attitude towards the visually impaired children (Jan, 1977) and this makes some parents view their visually impaired children as retarded with a consequence of social rejection. Non-handicapped children internalize these attitudes, and later use them as the standard measure in the perception of others whether children or adults, at home or in the school. This sighted peers use the following characters to label the visually impaired children: fearful, hostile, aloof, suspicious and dreadful (Rosenham, 1973), which results in rejection of this children by their sighted hosts (Gootlieb and Leyser, 1981, Kedebe, 2015). This is because the sighted children have brought the negative attitude towards the visually impaired from home to schools. This means that social discrimination may operate as an isolating mechanism to outsiders, Catania (1992) reported that studies done by Mineka, et al (1984, Kapur, 2018) show that avoidance behavior is learnt. This is based on observing others.

In summary, socialization and attitude formation process explain the concept of social acceptance of the visually impaired children by the sighted children in integrated classes. The attitude of perceiver (sighted children) is formed at home and then transferred to school where it is reinforced or moderated. This is then used in responding to the visually impaired children whether at home or in school. So when a visually impaired child joins a regular school and gets rejected or accepted by the sighted ones and teachers, the sighted children are just doing what is normal to them, a process that may delay the adjustment of the visually impaired children in the new school and academic process.

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

Population of the study

In Nakuru County there were 558 primary schools, including 26 ones, with visually impaired pupils. These schools have a population of 352,465 pupils which translates over 700,000 parents, over 5000 teachers. 17 out of 26 integrated schools lacked visually impaired children. The target population as 200 sighted pupils, all visually impaired pupils, all teachers who taught integrated classes and all parents of visually impaired pupils in those integrated classes.

Sample and sampling procedure

In the study there were 9 schools with at least one visually impaired pupil in the sample. The sample size of 261 was distributed as follows; 16 visually impaired pupils (10 boys and 6 girls), 12 parents of visually impaired children, 48 teachers of visually impaired pupils, and 185 sighted pupils in 9 integrated schools. This is considered a fair representation of the total population (Kathuri & Pals, 1993; et al; 1996; Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999).

Table 1: distribution of the study by categories of respondents

Distribution of the study by categories of respondents

Sighted pupils	185
Teachers	48
Visually impaired pupils	16
Parents of visually impaired pupils	12
TOTAL	261

Probability sampling involves selecting a reasonable number of subjects that is a true representative of the target population. Approximately 94 girls 91 boys constituted the final tally of the study sample. Non probability sampling was used to select 16 visually impaired pupils, 12 parents of the visually impaired while all teachers (48) who taught any integrated classroom was selected. 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

The aim of the study intended to establish whether time of integration of visually impaired pupils influence sighted pupil's attitude towards the visually impaired pupils in integrated schools. Results obtained indicate that there was statistically significant difference between those integrated early and those integrated late

Differences between sighted pupils integrated earlier and those integrated later in their attitude towards visually impaired pupils in integrated schools.

Differences between sighted pupils integrated earlier and those integrated later in their attitude towards visually impaired pupils in integrated schools.

Integrated	No	Mean attitude	Mean difference	t. value	p value (2 tailed)
Late integration (1-4 years)	102	171.73	±3.31	±1.514	0.132
Earlier integration (5-8years)	83	175.04			

The null hypothesis stated that there was no significant statistical difference between sighted pupils integrated late and those integrated early. T-test results indicate that there was no statistical significant difference between those integrated late and those integrated early. Since the obtained p value 0.132 was greater than 0.05 for test, the null hypothesis was accepted. This implies that there was no statistically significant difference between sighted children integrated early and those integrated late in their rejection of visually impaired peers in integrated early and those integrated late in their rejection of visually impaired peers in integrated schools. This suggests that the point of integration significantly affect rejection of visually impaired peers in an integrated classroom. Why do sighted pupils refuse to play games with visually impaired peers? The majority (54.6 %) of them believe that the visually impaired pupils did not have the competence to do this, while 31.4 % of sighted pupils did not know the reasons. On whether visually impaired pupils should be separated from sighted pupils during teaching majority (65.9 %) of sighted pupils did not accept this position because they believed visually impaired children should be taught.

Discussion

Children, whether visually impaired or not are rejected at some point during their entry attempt into a group (Puttalaz and Gottman, 1981). Dodge and Frame (1982) have shown that peers become biased in their perception of a child and alter their behavior towards that child once they have identified that child as liked or disliked. They may assume a disliked child is worthy of negative outcomes, and therefore exclude him or her from playing activities. Alternatively they make it very easy for liked child to succeed. Early experience determines how all future social situations are approached. Many social psychologist regard the first relationship as a blue print for future relationship, which determine how one interacts with other people (Pennington, 1992).

Becoming friends and maintaining these relationships are among the most significant achievement of childhood and adolescence (Hart up, 1995). To enter a new group (Classroom) requires more attempt by the new member whether one is visually impaired or not (Putallaz & Gottman, 1981) because attaining group acceptance is difficult task which requires time. One goal of many intervention programs is designed to help handicapped children become better equipped to enter and become integrated into already existing peer groups. This may be a difficult task as rarely does the group as a whole or any of its members attempt to put the newcomers at ease, give him or her opinions or take their activities into their account (Philips et al, 1995). This situation, may force the visually impaired children to become isolated and less interactive over lime (Coie, Kupersmidt, 1983; Dodge, 1983). These rejected children are likely to dislike integration and drop out of school.

Perhaps this is due to fear or negative attitude towards these pupils. For integration to succeed this small minority of sighted pupils need to be changed because exclusionary education and positive interaction between children with or without disabilities is not easy. But daily contact through such social activities like greeting can enrich integration. Social and physical integration of visually impaired pupils in school and at home is very important for successful integration in the life of visually impaired pupils. This was confirmed by 93.5 % of the sighted pupils when they were asked whether they could go home with pupils who were visually impaired. Only 6.5 % of the sample reported that they could not assist a visually impaired peer to go home. A very small portion of sighted pupils (2.7 %) were not sure or had never helped a visually impaired pupil to go home. Within the school compound, visually impaired pupils will be helped to go to the toilets by 81.9 % of the sighted pupils while only 2.7 % will not do this and 5.4 % had not made a decision. Children are very supportive of others especially those who have difficulties? This observation concurs with Gerken's (1979) study which established that cooperation and intimacy emerge in childhood and adolescence? But personal support is especially strong in adolescence. Apart from locating toilets within the school the visually impaired pupils move to their appropriate classrooms. Almost all respondents (97.3 %) reported in agreement that they were ready to assist their visually impaired peers locate classrooms. One of the difficulties visually impaired pupils face is walking to school from home. In this study teachers confirmed that absenteeism of visually impaired pupils was rampant especially during the rainy season.

This is due to poor mobility which leads to falling down due slippery paths. This has made majority of the sighted pupils sympathize with the visually impaired ones. Approximately 93.2 % of the sighted pupils were willing to assist the visually impaired pupils go to school from their home. This assistance greatly enhances physical and social integration. One of the challenges that visually impaired pupils face is travelling from home to school. This is why the integration programs should be planned well in advance so that sighted pupils can be identified earlier and given the task of helping the visually impaired in travelling or mobility in their natural environments. Lichman (2002) argues that visually impaired pupils require to be trained in daily living skills which they can use independently, with or without assistance. Pupils also do extra-curricular activities like field trips.

Conclusion

Sighted children integrated late and those integrated earlier had no significance statistical difference in their perception towards visually impaired children

Recommendation

Integration can take place anytime

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