

**FACTORS AFFECTING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS IN
MATHEMATICS WITH SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTIES
WITHIN MASALANI ZONE, MASALANI DIVISION,
IJARA DISTRICT KENYA**

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**A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE INSTITUTE OF OPEN AND
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DECLARATION

I, Ahmed Mursal Ali hereby declare that this study paper is my own original work it has therefore never been submitted to any institution of higher learning for any academic purpose

Signature

Ahmed Mursal Ali

Date.....

APPROVAL

This is to certify that this study has been submitted with my approval as a university supervisor

Signature 

Ssekajugo Derrick

Date 

DEDICATION

This entire work is dedicated to my wife Rahma Mowlid and to my son Abdirahman for the corporation they accorded to me during my time of study.

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ABSTRACT

The study was intended investigate the factors affecting academic performance among learners with specific learning difficulties in mathematics within Masalani zone, Ijara district Kenya and possible solutions to such problems. The researcher used qualitative approach in the study since it is descriptive in. This method is commonly used in educational research to establish the situation of a problem on the ground.

The researcher used questionnaires in the collection of data. These questionnaires comprised of 15 questions which were to be answered by the respondents basing on their opinions. The researcher found out that the negative attitudes; the curriculum used in schools does not cater for learners with specific learning difficulties. On the other hand the resources used in teaching and learning do not promote proper learning among the learners. It was recommended that there was need to motivate teachers with good salary so as to eradicate the negative attitudes in handling learners with special needs and also, the need to train teachers skills on how to handle learners with specific learning difficulties.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background

Education is a key factor in promoting economic and national development of a country. Kenya being a developing country faces a lot of problems in meeting the educational needs of its citizens and especially the children. As a result of various hindrances which have brought a lot of impacts on the teaching of the children with specific learning difficulties in Masalani zone, Ijara district - Kenya.

Kamunge's report (1988) which puts a lot of effort on education and training for this decade and beyond. It looked at the categories and learners with special needs in education. The problems associated with these learners are easy to detect in a classroom situation. However, in order to detect them you have to work with them on one to one basis. Most of these problems are seen when you are interactive with the learner.

A pupil cannot be said to have a specific learning difficult after making a mistake once or twice. You need to know the age of a child before you make judgments. To meet their needs in the general public and in the education setting has therefore become a concern. Educators must look for ways and means for teaching them hence the reason for this research.

The major recommendation of Kamunge's report suggested that appropriate curriculum be developed for children with various special needs, regular teachers be trained in

remedial teaching, methodology and guidance and counseling to enable them effectively teach children.

The universal declaration of Human rights of (1948) emphasized that education shall be free to all. This is an aspect of access. Children were to learn in regular schools and meet their needs there. It also stressed that education shall be directed to the full development of Human personality and to the strengthening of respect for Human rights and fundamental freedom. Children were to be given education which fosters understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, races which calls for all stakeholders to provide quality education to all learners.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

It has been analyzed by the researcher that children with specific learning difficulties (S.L.D) in inclusive classes perform poorly in academic subjects especially mathematics as compared to other regular learners in Masalani zone, Ijara District Kenya. This has prompted the researcher to be much concern since the learning resources and learning environment are the same for all learners. Performance is also expected would be almost the same. The researcher therefore found the reasons to do the study and establish what might be causing the differences in performance.

1.2 Purpose

The study was intended investigate the factors affecting academic performance among learners with specific learning difficulties in mathematics within Masalani zone, Ijara district Kenya and possible solutions.

1.3 Specific Objectives

1. To find out teachers' attitudes (regular teachers) towards learners with specific learning difficulties.
2. To find out intervention strategies employed in helping learners with specific learning difficulties.
3. To find out why learners with specific learning difficulties perform poorly in mathematics in Masalani zone.
4. To find out suitable curriculum for learners with learning difficulties.
5. To identify relevant teaching methods for learners with specific learning difficulties.
6. To determine the adequacy of facilities and resources in alleviating factors affecting mathematics performance in an inclusive setting.
7. To determine teachers skills and knowledge in teaching learners with S.L.D.s.

1.4 Significance of the Study

- The results of the study will be used to improve the attitude of teachers and children in the community towards learners with specific learning difficulties.

- The results of the study will be used by teachers and the community to modify the learning environment to make it barrier free for all learners.
- The results will be used to enlighten teachers to realize the need of eliminating factors which affect learning among learners with specific learning difficulties.
- The results of the study will be used to assist school administration and other stakeholders to improve on learning strategies to improve mathematics performance among learning with specific learning difficulties.
- The outcome of this study will provide parents of children with special needs in education information on medical care, guidance and counselling.
- The study will be used to sensitize the community on the need of accepting the learners with specific learning difficulties in their schools and provide education to learners with special education needs.
- The progress record of SLD has to be analyzed and compared with other learners. After this, the researcher sums it all and gives some recommendations on way forward for betterment of specific learning difficulties of learners' education.
- The outcome of the research is important as it enables the researcher to investigate several areas of education which includes Teacher training and experience. The study would focus on experience of the teacher and the curriculum used in the school whether it has any impact on specific learning difficulties.

1.5 Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined as operational terms.

- Difficulty** – Circumstance whereby a learner cannot achieve what is expected in learning.
- Curriculum** – A system of group of activities, content and materials of instruction for the purpose of preparing children to learn and live effectively.
- S.L.D.** – These are conditions affecting the learner's ability to learn specific skills like academic subjects like reading, writing, spelling and arithmetic or mathematics.
- Intervention** – Anything done to minimize the effects of disability in the life of a child e.g. teaching a child to walk using a walking aid is a form of intervention.
- Curriculum adaptation** – Refers to slightly changing the curriculum or method of delivery to achieve the same or equivalent objectives.
- Special needs** – Refers to difficulties that an individual learner has which may hinder him or her from learning effectively.
- Withdrawn** – Shy, reserved, unsociable, not interested in mixing with others for play or any other activity.
- A research** – An exercise planned and designed to solve or alleviate a problem

1.6 Scope of the Study

The study was conducted in 28 schools in Masalani zone in Ijara district. He has also narrowed himself to four schools to represent the larger group and also make the study easy, well manageable and easy to carry.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 General Learning Difficulties

A learner is termed to have a general learning difficulty when she /he experiences or faces greater difficulties than the majority of age mates. The child faces various learning needs affecting him /her from acquiring skills in the environment.

According to E.P. Njuki children face problems in school subjects, self help skills like bathing, toileting, dressing, feeding and acquiring skills to cope up in the immediate environment. Njuki E. P. (2001) further defines learners in the category of general learning difficulties as mentally retarded, intellectually disadvantaged children in this group may not use to their maximum their five common sense in manipulating the environment for their own good and the good of the society. The sense of hearing, sight, test, touch and smell can be affected resulting to being disadvantaged. The person will require assistance in school work and adaptive skills like communication, self direction, safety, leisure and work.

In 19th century many people and societies saw these people as lesser beings and they did not show any kindness and love to them. They were seen as burdens to the society and given funny names like idiots, embezzile, morons most of such people were not given basic needs like food and many could be starved to death. Others were thrown in to the bushes for wild animals to eat them. They regarded their disability as a curse, witchcraft,

or punishment from God and therefore isolated and their needs not adequately provided for by families and communities.

2.1 Specific Learning Difficulties

Children with specific learning difficulties have problems or difficulties in one or two areas of the curriculum. It is a condition affecting a learner's ability to acquire specific skills in academic subjects like mathematics calculation, reasoning, spelling writing spoken language. They have the capacity to perform well in most school subjects and yet experience difficulties in the listed areas.

Teachers label them as lazy, not serious, slow learners or underachievers but according to school – based research development (2001) these children have common characteristics e.g. being unstable to sit still, move around, hyperactive, poor memory, not attentive in class.

They exhibit what is often described as significance discrepancy between actual performance and their expected ability, perform well in other subject and fails in one or two areas without or for no apparent reason, consistently fails.

2.2 Causes, Characteristics, Intervention Strategies

Causes

A disorder is a condition affecting one or more of the basic processes involved in understanding, use of language either spoken, written maths problems with place value, addition, subtraction and abstract terms like fractions.

Characteristics

- Retrieval /memory problems.
- Short attention span
- Unstable when sitting
- Hyperactive and distractive
- Impulsive or acting without reasoning.

Intervention Strategies

- Seat him at a desk alone preferably at the front of the class with most of the distraction at the back.
- Explain instructions clearly
- Plan reasonably goals to achieve
- Provide the learner activities to their abilities and interests
- Plan for an Individualized Educational Programme (I.E.P.)
- Use as lot of visual teaching learning aids.
- Provide mnemonics which are memory aids
- Encourage impulsive learner to pause before acting or speaking
- Involved parents, peers as mediators e.g. impaired reading and mathematics remediation.
- Mark and reward pupils work immediately
- Modify the learning tasks into smaller units.

Kenya has expanded the concept of basic education so that education can serve the basic learning needs of learners through systematic instruction on which learning is based in Kenya Basic education for all (BEFA).

Expanded educational provision to other levels not within universal primary education. BEFA deals with education for literacy, general knowledge, early childhood education and development, disadvantaged and special groups also called children living under difficult circumstance like the child soldier and child labor. It was in the light of the emerging issues after BEFA conference that the need for another conference called the world conference on special needs education was held in Salamanca, Spain June 1994.

The conference focused on the range of differences which are present in today's societies. It stated that many groups of children with special needs education are excluded from mainstream education. These children include: street children, dropouts repeaters, working children, disabled children. This indicated a need to look at general educational reform and to address issues of access and quality for all children.

Special needs are part of education for all. The main objectives of the conference were to;

- Present new thinking on learning difficulties and on the relationship between special education provision and general school reform and review recent development in young people with special education needs as the majority were general educators.

- Provide forum for sharing experiences at international, regional and bilateral levels.
- Provide education to special needs through inclusive schooling approach and remove barriers so that all children can learn together.

According to Hegaty (1996) the first choice for placement for their children with special needs education should be in regular school within their community. In line with the current world order, Kenya has set some bench marks to be achieved by 2005 universal primary education (UPE) should be realized by 2015 (EFA) should be achieved and Kenya has ascribed to the rules (1994) and emerging issues that education if free in Kenya, the need for inclusive education is something that ought to be practical now.

Education throughout the world is a basic requirement for development the researcher concurs with Gachukia E, Yambo M. Mwarani K. and Anwar J. (1993). Education benefits is assessed in the productivity, quality of life and the roles of males and female learners. In primary education gender equality has been achieved but as one goes higher in education the percentage of males is higher than females confirmed by Mwanika K. et al (1992).

The main issue pointing to the decrease could be lack of early identification of Learners special needs and affected on time. Mc. Mutt (1984) pointed that holistic learning begin

at the bottom of the spiral with little or no knowledge as the type of learning is ongoing and continual.

SLD progress is assumed to be low average due to lack of material and lack of trained manpower in the area of special needs education. There are a number of factors which determine the quality of persons education “genetic”, environmental, physiological . Artion (1939) came with a theory that relied on mixed dominance as an indication of brain pathology being accused of learning difficulty.

According to Artion location of speech function as dominant over the right hemisphere i.e. the interference of the right hemisphere during language activities can cause language confusion. The government should recognize the right of the child to education and to achieve this right progression and on the basis of equal opportunity make primary education compulsory and free measures to encourage regular attendance and reduce dropout rates Grant (1991).

Learning is easier when the task is broken down into manageable tasks. Behavioral approaches to written language instruction have subjected learning desirable and remedial children to years of drill and practice. The continuous drill and practice focus on deficits or weak areas.

The deficit of the learners inadequacies has had a devastating effects on the lives of many learners (Poplin 1984) when the learning process are broken in to units, objectives that we take away the possibility of the students own interpretation from which they

make sense of new information making learning less difficult drill encourages positivity in learners. It is the teacher who makes all decisions about all what is to be learned.

The focus is on isolated skills. Students are not able to take advantage on previous learning Rhodes & Duddy, Marling (1988). Grant (1991) agreed that education of the child shall be directed to be development of the child's personality talent, mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential. Holistic approaches be used because they take developmental view of children's reading and writing problems. When learning is placed in meaningful context. It encourages children to actively integrate what they learn into what they know.

2.3 Teachers Role in the Treatment of Maladjusted Children

The role of teachers in the treatment of the maladjusted children are:-

1. Preserve mental health as fast as possible by dealing with minor difficulties of children as soon as they arise. There is need for increase in the number of persons available to give education and guidance in school.
2. Know the characteristics of normal children and watch out for early signs of maladjustment e.g excessive lazy, aggressive anxiety, living in fantasy children. The teacher to combine firmness with friendliness and understanding. He also builds up the moral of children by arranging school work and extra-curricula activities such that poorly adjusted pupils get access in the same field and thus gain self confidents. Lovel (1976) indicated that aggressive children under excessive disapproval and failure often "Blossom" and become cooperative unto

sincere special approval and success. Remove obvious cause of irritation. Do not let dull or otherwise handicapped pupils feel neglected.

If the behavior continues to cause concern, it might be helpful to do consultation with the parents, if it is of no avail, then the child should be referred to the child guidance clinics.

Teachers should do all that is possible to develop wider and more objective interests among children encourage them to play games and take part in school societies and outside youth organization to mix with other children.

According to Rist (1982) disability is a condition of an individual hence special education is coordinated system of services that help children who are focused as disable, improve, diagnosis, intervention and technology.

Bogdam and Kuqelmess 1984 says special education has worked to ascribe on individualized, purpose, character to the concept of handicapped and does not include social factors. Handicapped is seen as a deficit, disease or individuals rather than result of social interaction process Bart 1984. Special education focus on the child and his problem.

Curriculum is to be modified and attention be on social structures and emotional climate in which education takes place. Most teachers question Warnock as he says there is need for provision of special mean of access to curriculum. He further says that one in six

children at any one time and upto one in Five children at some time in school career require some form of special education.

PARENTAL ATTITUDE

According to education act of 1981 states in Warnock terms of assessment as continuous process emphasize parental participation and professional perception of the child as a whole person. Focus on child rather than disability.

Parents have not only a right but a duty to contribute to this information giving exercise as long as confidentiality is kept by professionals.

According to 1944 education act, special school Carter for low intelligent quotient learners Coard (1971). They see these schools as for problems pupils not good place in which to meet needs of pupils. According to Rutter et al (1970) Warnock refers to them as handicapped and says teachers cannot meet those needs on their own. Parents should be partners. They question their I.Q. because it is below 70.

Children have behavior problems due to persistent suffering or stress or disturbances to the community. Rutter and Graham (1968) Language use i.e working class pupils may be disadvantaged in school. Perform less than peers from middle homes is not a dispute. Bernstein 1971 and Lobov 1970.

Teachers' Skills and Attitudes

According to Tarnopol (1974) professionals urge teachers to teach individual pupils to meet individual needs. Researcher concurs as system is right teachers are required to complete the syllabus within a time by the ministry of education. Teachers end up rushing to finish with little attention to learners with special needs.

Ongero 2003 in effective classroom management with narrow imbalance and irrelevant activities not suited to pupil needs affects their learning. She asserts that when teachers base their teaching on material or mental level of learners with inflexible teaching styles affects pupils behavior. If pupils behavior is negatively affected, learning outcomes is adversely affected.

According to Kithure (2002) curriculum in a regular classroom calls for differentiated flexible, and adaptation to suit the various needs to avoid dropouts and class repetition. Otiato et al 2001 curriculum adaptation means modification and manipulation of the environment factors to match needs, abilities and interests of the learners considering that they may exist.

Teachers should choose teaching methods and presentation which benefit learners . When adapting consider learners with health problems which require medical treatment or therapy as well as guidance and counseling.

Musibala (2001) says that resources equipment, people that make easier for a child to learn. Resources which enhances functions of parts of the body as compensatory devices which enable learners with motor disabilities or sensory impairment to use the remaining abilities for normal function. Tarnopol (1974) indicates that noise within the class should be minimized by use of carpeting on the floor and giving the room other acoustic treatment to prevent reverberation. Lighting needs in the classroom be considered to compensate hearing loss.

Kay (1970) indicates also that children will understand easily if a teacher uses a working model or picture of something outside their experience rather than verbal. Researcher agrees with Kay's views on use of teaching, learning aids as it makes the concepts clearer and increase retention rate.

Poor and restrictive learning that does not stimulate the child is not sensitive to the children's individuality, when children are put in an environment that restrict their movement and no appropriate teaching learning materials, they are not able to explore as they learn. Ongera (2003).

The researcher concurs with Ongera's observation since lack on conducive environment can lead to behavior difficulties thus affect learning negatively. According to Front, the teacher must play a part in selecting materials from which the child will learn. He should choose wisely resources based learning should be used as it encourages initiative and independence. Otiato and Kathenye (2001) educational materials as important in an inclusive setting without them curriculum restriction is inevitable.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter deals with research design that the researcher used in the field of study. It indicates the methods of data collection and analysis of the study. The sampling procedures and the instruments which was used for data collection and the collection of questionnaires. The study required the researcher to interact a lot with the population to get the full information.

3.1 Research Design

The researcher used qualitative approach in the study since it is descriptive in. This method is commonly used in educational research to establish the situation of a problem on the ground.

3.3 Population of the Study and sample size

With the population of 40 teachers, the researcher used random sampling to get teachers in every school representing the larger population. These teachers filled questionnaires to represent the whole school society. In total, the whole sample constituted 20 respondents.

3.4 Instruments of Data Collection

The researcher used questionnaires in the collection of data. These questionnaires comprised of 15 questions which were to be answered by the respondents basing on their opinions. They were taken to each school by the researcher to be filled well.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION, AND ANALYSIS

Table 1. Number of questions dispatched

Respondents	Actual Questionnaires	No. of questions received
Teachers	20	15

Source: Primary data 2009

Out of 20 questionnaires dispatched, 15 were received back making the return rate to be 75%.

$$\frac{15}{20} \times 100 = 75\%$$

20

Therefore, there was a high rate of return.

Table 2.2 Categories of learners with specific learning difficulties in the school.

Category	Frequency	Percentage
SLD	25	42%
Hearing impaired	15	25%
Visual impaired	12	20%
Physically handicapped	8	13%
Total	60	100%

Source: Primary data 2009

From table 2.2, it shows that 42% of the pupils have S.L.D and 25% have hearing impairment. 20% and 13% respectively have visual, physical impairments. There are more learners with specific learning difficulties.

Table 2.3 Teachers attitudes towards learners with special needs.

Types of response	Respondents	Percentage
Negative	14	100%
Positive	0	0
Total	14	100

Source: Primary data 2009

According to the response, an attitude of teachers towards children with special needs is strongly affirmed that 100% teachers have negative attitude towards these children.

This is witnessed from the progress of those children. Teachers think that they are lazy, uneducable and all sorts of name calling.

Table 2.4. Relevant teaching methods in handling learners with specific learning difficulties.

Teachers Response	Respondents	Percentage
Child centred	6	50%
Teachers centred	4	33%
Not known	7	17%
Total	12	100%

Source: Primary data 2009

Table 2.4 shows that 50% of the teachers use child centred and 17% are not known. Though majority of the teachers use child-centred method which is a good approach which could have improved performance of the learners with specific learning difficulties hence they have not stratified their intervention measures which is clearly seen in their poor performance.

Table 2.5. Teachers parents support in handling learners with specific learning difficulties.

Teachers response	Frequency	Percentage
Parents	6	75%
Community	4	25%
Other professionals	2	0%
Total	12	100%

Source: Primary data 2009

The table indicates that 75% of the respondents are parents who give a lot of support to the education of children. 25% is the community while 0% is the support from other professionals. This means that teachers and parents make learning easy and eliminate the factors which lead to poor performance of Mathematics among learners with specific learning difficulties.

Table 2.6: Adequacy of teaching learning.

Teachers Response	Frequency	Percentage
Not enough	9	75
enough	3	25
none	0	0%
Total	12	100

Source: Primary data 2009

According to table 2.6 it shows that 75% of the respondents say lack of enough resource books contribute to poor performance of S.L.D while 25% confirms that the resource books are enough the people of individual such as teachers, learning support, assistance and pupils themselves.

However, the attitude towards accepting each other depends on teachers adapting the learning environment they are involved in.

Most people are not aware of learners with specific difficulties (S.L.D) there is an urgent need a researcher to educate the public or society on the value of helping such learners because we have to nurture the present generation through remediation and intervention for a better future.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to explore the possible factors which contribute to poor academic performance among learners with specific learning difficulties in Mathematics, writing, reading and spelling. The cause of these difficulties ranges from genetics or heredity. The society and especially the teachers who handle much of the time learners suffering from such conditions are misused, not loved at all. They are neglected and labeled as low performers.

The researcher found out that the negative attitudes; the curriculum used in schools does not cater for learners with specific learning difficulties. On the other hand the resources used in teaching and learning do not promote proper learning among the learners.

The researcher finally comes with general strategies, which could be of help to person who would be handling the learners with same or similar conditions. From the data collected, the researcher found out that three quarters of teachers in Masalani zone had not been exposed to inclusive education skills and approaches that they may be competent in handling learners with different disabilities.

The researcher noted that in the zone to alleviate the factors affecting Mathematics performance among learners with specific learning difficulties, they have to consider a school as a teacher who is trained in special needs.

- Curriculum to be modified to suit the learners with specific learning difficulties (S.L.D)
- Teacher training colleges should include training on special teaching methods of learners with special needs.
- Teachers, parents and community be involved in assisting special education need children.
- Teachers to use songs, games to remind the learners with poor memory on sub sequential.
- There is need for the government to employ more trained teachers to curb the high rate of retirees which has created acute shortage of manpower in the Masalani zone in Ijara district.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the study that was carried out, the researcher recommends that:-

- The government to meet the provision of learning teaching materials to all schools in Masalani zone in Ijara district.
- There is need to motivate teachers with good salary so as to eradicate the negative attitudes in handling learners with special needs.
- There is need to train teachers skills on how to handle learners with specific learning difficulties.
- Awareness to the general public the importance of supporting learners with special needs education.
- Teachers to provide learners with S.L.D supportive materials like Mathematical tables, charts with letters of alphabets and numbers.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE RESPONDENTS

Dear respondent,

Please kindly teachers, I request you to assist me in completing this research questionnaire by indicating the number of your tentative answer on the space provided before the question.

4. Strongly agree

3. Agree

2. Disagree

1. Strongly disagree

1. Teachers attitudes make learning successful because;

- They facilitate and create an atmosphere for every one to acquire Mathematical skills.
- Hinder mathematics performance among S.L.D.
- Create a positive change in Maths performance and learners with S.L.D.
- Co-operate with other stakeholders
- can purchase materials to alleviate Mathematical problems.

2. Adequacy of facilities and resources creates;

- There is teaching learning materials which are locally made.
- Commercially made materials are easy to obtain.
- Teachers are trained to use teaching learning materials.

3. Teaches relevant knowledge and skills resulted in

- Teachers are fully trained in relevant field.
- Teachers training is relevant.
- Teachers are given regular induction courses.

4. Curriculum meets the needs of specific learning difficulties as it.

- It is regular modified.
- The curriculum and its adaptation meet the educational needs.
- There is varied teaching methods in the curriculum development.
- The eyed curriculum developers have knowledge in S.L.D.

5. Teachers and parents give support in order to;

- Make learners pass examinations.
- Support the ministry of education in alleviating factors affecting Mathematics among learners with S.L.D.
- Make learning easy as they provide teaching learning materials.
- Minimize the barriers affecting learners with S.L.D.