

**THE INFLUENCE OF TEACHER TRAINING ON
PARTICIPATION IN CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES BY
LEARNERS WHO ARE MENTALLY CHALLENGED IN
SPECIAL UNITS IN TIGANIA WEST SUB-COUNTY
MERU COUNTY**

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ABSTRACT

Learners who are mentally challenged participate in co-curricular activities to remain physically and emotionally healthy. Their participation is however limited due to special needs. The study sought to examine the influence of teacher training on participation by learners who are mentally challenged in co-curricular activities in special units in Tigania West Sub-county. The study could be beneficial to policy makers in the Ministry of Education, School management, learners who are mentally challenged and scholars. This study was guided by Alexander Astin's (1985) theory of Student Involvement. This study adopted the convergent parallel design. The target population for this study was 211 from 14 public primary schools with learners who are mentally challenged in Tigania West Sub-county, Meru County, Kenya. The sample size of the study was 138 respondents consisting of 14 head teachers, 14 BOM chairpersons, 23 special needs education teachers and 87 regular teachers. The study employed three sets of questionnaires: one for the head teacher, one for the special needs teachers and the other for the regular teachers and another for BOM chairpersons for data collection. Frequency tables and figures were used to present the quantitative data. Qualitative data was presented descriptively. The study established that teacher training enables the teacher to be child friendly, to be willing to work with children with mental challenges, to handle learners professionally and ensures learners will be motivated because the teacher has the skills. The study recommended that teachers in charge of learners with mental challenges should be well trained, and should motivate learners with mental challenges in order to enhance their participation in co-curricular activities.

Key words: Teacher training, mentally challenged, Regular teachers, Special needs teachers, Resource adaptation.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Countries around the world are appreciating the importance of educating individuals with special needs (Habib, Nadeem, Aslam, Ahmad & Hussain, 2011). People with special needs are being recognized as individuals who can positively contribute to the development of a country. Learning institutions for people with special needs are playing an important role in the literacy of a country. People around the globe are contemplating providing similar or tailored amenities to people with special needs in order to promote equality between individuals considered to have special needs and those considered to have no such needs (Habib, Nadeem, Aslam, Ahmad & Hussain, 2011). In order to attain better growth and development, learners with special needs require specialized and regular attention. A study conducted by Sukoco (2009) in Yogyakarta Indonesia reported that learners with mental challenges require comprehensive support and consultations that are continuous for their social behaviors in the physical education learning. The study also indicated that for such learners to engage in educative interaction, it is vital for them to understand the importance of engaging in practical aspects of physical activities. Sukoco (2009) further established that such learners require brief and clear instructions for practicing physical tasks and these learners should only be instructed in one activity at a time. The study also reported that the teacher should be in a position to provide individualized learning approach that takes into consideration the needs of each learner with mental challenge.

Trained teachers are aware that learners with mental challenges usually have health problems that are combined with physical inactivity (Pediatric Orthopaedic Society of North America (POSNA), 2007). The hearts of persons with mental challenges are usually older than their age functionally. POSNA (2007) reports that a mentally challenged individual may have a heart that functions like that of someone aged 20 to 30 years old. Lack of physical activities among this group of individuals makes them to be prone to heart related problems. Lack of activity among these persons also exposes them to inability to undertake activities that enhance their wellbeing. POSNA argues that physical activities enhance self-esteem, behavior, physical function and health of persons with mental challenges. In addition, physical activities is an avenue of enhancing enjoyment among individuals with mental challenges and thus help in ensuring that caregivers and family members enjoy taking care of these persons. Aerobic activities such as cycling, walking, using a wheelchair or jogging, increase the level of endurance and help in improving the functioning of the lungs and heart. Strength training helps in enhancing bone health, daily function and strength. Strength training ought to entail at least the exercising of each muscle group twice every week. This helps to improve muscle balance among individuals with mental challenges since they usually have muscle imbalances. Thus, muscles on both sides of the joint should be exercised. This allows balanced strength and helps in preventing muscle to that is abnormal. The motion of joints and movement can be enhanced through engagement in stretching exercises. Decreased flexibility resulting from muscle spasms makes stretching a vital exercise among persons with mental challenges (POSNA, 2007). To participate in such activities

learners who are mentally challenged require trained teachers to guide learners in using physical facilities, adaptation to available resources,

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Learners who are mentally challenged just like other normal learners participate in co-curricular activities to remain physically and emotionally healthy. The level of participation of learners with mental challenges in Tigania West Sub-county has been dismal. One of the factors thought to contribute to this low participation is lack of teacher training. However, there is no empirical study which has been done to support this. Thus, this study seeks to systematically determine the influence of teacher training on participation in co-curricular activities by learners who are mentally challenged in special units in Tigania West Sub-County.

1.3 Objective of the Study

To determine the influence of teacher training on participation in co-curricular activities in by learners who are mentally challenged in special units in Tigania West Sub-county

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Teacher training and participation in co-curricular activities

The focus of teachers' pre-service training is most likely to be either on developmental stage like early childhood education or content like mathematics or history. It is possible that mainstream teacher will have undergone a basic course special education, leading to minimal data on and minimal opportunity on teaching techniques that are essential in attaining the needs of special needs learners. According to National Association of State Boards of Education (1992) such trainings have been referred to as "inherently superficial". Special needs teachers are most likely to be more educated in ways of dealing with learners' disabilities and special needs. However, because of personnel shortages nationwide, very few of special education personnel are certified for the position they hold (Office of Special Education Programs, 1994). This implies that very few teachers may be able to steer learners who are mentally challenged to attain better participation in co-curricular activities.

A study by Wanyama and Quay (2014) investigated experiences of teachers in association with pedagogy, curriculum to gain an understanding of the teachers' experiences in relation to administration, curriculum and pedagogy of physical education programs in secondary schools. The experiences brought forth via challenges encountered by teachers in both Victoria and Kenya were investigated. The study indicated that while Victoria and Kenya have common aspects in their school systems, there were significant differences that had effects on how physical education was positioned in these nations. From the view of Victorian physical education teachers, Kenyan physical education teachers carry out their activities in a setting that is more helpful. In addition, Wanyama and Quay (2014) established that perception of physical education amongst parents, teachers and learners in Kenya are that it is simply an act - in contrast

to a subject that is academically essential for learning to take place. Thus, the attitude of teachers towards sports might be a challenge in sporting talent development among students. However, this argument needs to be systematically established through empirical study.

According to Gray and Plucker (2010) the key roadblocks to participation in sporting activities is trying to recognize talent at an initial stage of life, use of faulty athletic capacity identification models, and absence of educated teachers, parents and coaches in relation to proper identification of talent. This implies that teacher training can impact the participation of learners in co-curricular activities. Gray and Plucker (2010) further argued that sporting talent is a result of support, physiological and psychological factors, and these factors ought to be scrutinized to actually grip the complexity of recognizing athletic talent. Gray and Plucker (2010), further argue that talent identification and development should put more emphasis on the capability to develop instead of immediate performance. One's capability to progress rests on psycho-behavioral aspects, in order to progress in a sport, essential basic movement skills ought to be available in their vocabulary; and talent recognition and talent growth processes ought to be combined. However, it is unclear whether teachers have necessary training to enhance participation of learners who are mentally challenged in co-curricular activities hence the reason for this study.

Subotnik, Edmiston, Cook and Ross (2010) reported that maximal instruction for development of talent occurs via three stages. In the first stage, youths are steered to fall in love with a discipline, an idea or a topic. The second stage entails instruction in the values, knowledge, and skills of the domain. In the third stage, young individuals who are talented learn to use their technical and passion mastery to generate a unique message and style, and to analyze original problems. This implies that participation in sporting activities requires motivation at some point. Subotnik et al (2010) argue that most programs in schools focus on short-term role modeling, designed to inspire and motivate. However, it is unclear whether learners who are mentally challenged are motivated to participate and enhance their participation in co-curricular activities. Thus, there is need to document this through evidence-based research.

According to Allen, Bell, Lynn, Taylor and Lavalley (2012) excellent coaching practice creates a respectful environment and foster athlete empowerment and motivation. Allen et al (2012) also indicated that such coaching involves coaches who are approachable and inspiring. This implies that teachers need to be approachable and inspiring in order to motivate learners who are mentally challenged to participate and attain better participation in co-curricular activities. Moreover, Allen et al (2012) established that such coaching requires the ability to spontaneously restructure one's knowledge to changing situational demands and it involves communication and tailored feedback. However, it is unclear whether teachers take into consideration such issues when training learners who are mentally challenged to participate in co-curricular activities.

Participation in extracurricular activities provides possibility of a student acquiring some type of supportive relationship, mentor or role model with an adult. When children identify with a

helpful teacher or coach, the children get to know them better by being involved. Students have the opportunity to have genuine interaction, constructive feedback and support from an adult role model while developing positive relationships outside of their immediate families. This type of participation may help to develop mutual trust, respect and commitment in relationships (Logan & Scarborough, 2008), as aided by Wilson (2009), most students benefit from supporting and caring relationships with teachers and other adults. The presence of "other adult relationships" is recognized as a developmental asset linked to facilitating academic and life success (Logan & Scarborough, 2008). Thus, participating in co-curricular activities may itself be motivating to learners.

Research has shown a clear link between the teachers' and parents involvement and children's success in school. Further, studies have also demonstrated a correlation between the teachers' and parent involvement and children's educational development and subsequent intrinsic academic motivation (Badariah, 2011). When parents and teachers believe in children's competence and have high expectations for them, provide the resources that children need to feel connected to others and facilitate a sense of autonomy by supporting children's initiations and problem-solving, children's motivation is most likely to thrive (Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 2010). This indicates that both parents and teachers play a vital role in motivation of learners to participate both curricular and co-curricular activities. It is however, unclear whether such motivation may enhance participation of learners who are mentally challenged in co-curricular activities.

3.0 Research Design

This study adopted the convergent parallel design (also referred to as the convergent design). It is one of the most well-known approaches to mixed methods. Convergent design is where the researcher uses concurrent timing to implement the quantitative and qualitative strands during the same phase of the research process, prioritizes the methods equally, and keeps the strands independent during analysis and then mixes the results during the overall interpretation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This design was appropriate for this study because it enabled the researcher to collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data concurrently. The design was also chosen because it allowed concurrent quantitative and qualitative analysis of data collected, and merging the two sets of results.

4.0 Findings of the Study

4.1 The influence of teacher training on participation in co-curricular activities

The teachers, head teachers and BOM chairpersons were requested to indicate their level of agreement with various statements related to the influence of teacher training on participation in co-curricular activities by learners who are mentally challenged. The results are summarized in Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3 (SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, U = undecided, A = agree

and SA = strongly agree).

Table 1. The influence of teacher training on participation in co-curricular activities (teachers)

Statement	SD		D		U		A		SA	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Teacher training level impacts on learners who are mentally challenged' participation in co-curricular activities	0	0	0	0	0	0	60	61.9	37	38.1
Teacher training in special needs education influences participation of learners who are mentally challenged in co-curricular activities	0	0	0	0	0	0	59	60.8	38	39.2
Teachers' attitude towards co-curricular activities influences participation of learners who are mentally challenged in co-curricular activities	0	0	0	0	0	0	63	64.9	34	35.1
Teacher training helps in talent identification among learners who are mentally challenged	0	0	0	0	0	0	63	64.9	34	35.1
Talent identification and subsequent nurturing influence participation of learners who are mentally challenged in co-curricular activities	0	0	0	0	9	9.3	63	64.9	25	25.8

The results showed that majority (61.9%) of teachers and 83.3% of head teachers agreed and 38.1% of teachers and 16.7% of head teachers strongly agreed with the statement that teacher training level impacts on learners who are mentally challenged' participation in co-curricular activities. Results from BOM chairpersons also indicated that 44.4% of the BOM chairpersons agreed and 33.3% of them strongly agreed with the statement that teacher training level impacts on learners who are mentally challenged' participation in co-curricular activities. This implies teacher training is an important factor that may determine the participation of learners with mental challenges in co-curricular activities. This supports Gray and Plucker (2010) argument that the key roadblocks to participation in sporting activities is trying to recognize talent at an initial stage of life, use of faulty athletic capacity identification models, and absence of educated teachers, parents and coaches in relation to proper identification of talent.

The study also established that majority (60.8%) of the teachers and 83.3% of head teachers agreed and 39.2% of teachers and 16.7% of head teachers strongly agreed with the statement that teacher training in special needs education influences participation of learners who are mentally challenged in co-curricular activities. Results from BOM chairpersons also indicated that 88.9% of the BOM chairpersons agreed and 11.1% of them strongly agreed with the statement that teacher training in special needs education influences participation of learners who are mentally challenged in co-curricular activities. This implies that the level of teacher training in special needs education is a vital determinant of participation of learners who are mentally challenged in co-curricular activities. This also supports Gray and Plucker (2010) argument that teacher training is important in talent identification and developments since trained teachers are able to monitor psycho-behavioral aspects of learners.

Table 2. The influence of teacher training on participation in co-curricular activities (Head teachers)

Statement	SD		D		U		A		SA		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Teacher training level impacts on learners who are mentally challenged' participation in co-curricular activities	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	83.3	2	16.7
Teacher training in special needs education influences participation of learners who are mentally challenged in co-curricular activities	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	83.3	2	16.7
Teachers' attitude towards co-curricular activities influences participation of learners who are mentally challenged in co-curricular activities	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	83.3	2	16.7
Teacher training helps in talent identification among learners who are mentally challenged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	75.0	3	25.0
Talent identification and subsequent nurturing influence participation of learners who are mentally challenged in co-curricular activities	0	0	0	0	2	16.7	7	58.3	3	25.0	

The results also indicated that 64.9% of the teachers and 83.3% of head teachers agreed and 35.1% of teachers and 16.7% of head teachers strongly agreed that teachers' attitude towards co-curricular activities influences participation of learners who are mentally challenged in co-

curricular activities. Results from BOM chairpersons also indicated that 66.7% of the BOM chairpersons agreed and 33.3% of them strongly agreed with the statement that teachers' attitude towards co-curricular activities influences participation of learners who are mentally challenged in co-curricular activities. This implies that teachers whose attitude towards co-curricular activities is positive are likely to enhance participation of learners with mental challenges in co-curricular activities.

Table 3.1 The influence of teacher training on participation in co-curricular activities (BOM Chairpersons)

Statement	SD		D		U		A		SA	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Teacher training level impacts on learners who are mentally challenged' participation in co-curricular activities	2	22.2	0	0	0	0	4	44.4	3	33.3
Teacher training in special needs education influences participation of learners who are mentally challenged in co-curricular activities	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	88.9	1	11.1
Teachers' attitude towards co-curricular activities influences participation of learners who are mentally challenged in co-curricular activities	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	66.7	3	33.3
Teacher training helps in talent identification among learners who are mentally challenged	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	66.7	3	33.3
Talent identification and subsequent nurturing influence participation of learners who are mentally challenged in co-curricular activities	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	44.4	5	55.6

The findings further indicated that 64.9% of the teachers and 75% of head teachers agreed and 35.1% of teachers and 25% of head teachers strongly agreed with the assertion that teacher training helps in talent identification among learners who are mentally challenged. Results from BOM chairpersons also indicated that 66.7% of the BOM chairpersons agreed and 33.3% of them strongly agreed with the statement that teacher training helps in talent identification among learners who are mentally challenged. This implies that well trained teachers may help learners with mental challenges to identify their talents.

The study also found out that 64.9% of the teachers and 58% of head teachers agreed and 25.8% of teachers and 25% of head teachers strongly agreed that talent identification and subsequent nurturing influence participation of learners who are mentally challenged in co-curricular activities. Results from BOM chairpersons also indicated that 44.4% of the BOM chairpersons

agreed and 55.6% of them strongly agreed with the statement that talent identification and subsequent nurturing influence participation of learners who are mentally challenged in co-curricular activities. This implies that when talents are identified among learners with mental challenges and subsequently nurtured, the learners are likely to excel in co-curricular activities.

The teachers, head teachers and BOM chairpersons were also requested to highlight other way through which teacher training could influence participation of learners who are mentally challenged in co-curricular activities. The teachers indicated that teacher training can enable the teacher to be child friendly and be willing to work with children with mental challenges. The study also established that training imparts knowledge needed to deal with the kids during training and helps in handling in the right way the challenged learners. The training also enables teachers to handle learners' differences and equips teachers with knowledge, skills and attitude to handle these learners. The head teachers indicated that teacher training builds positive attitudes towards learners who are mentally challenged to participate in co-curricular activities, ensures learners will be motivated because the teacher has the skills and enables the teachers to handle the challenges professionally. The BOM chairpersons indicated that teacher training empowers the teachers to handle learners with mental challenges professionally and to help the learners nurture their talents.

5.0 Findings

It was established that teacher training is an important factor that may determine the participation of learners with mental challenges in co-curricular activities. It was further established that the level of teacher training in special needs education is a vital determinant of participation of learners who are mentally challenged in co-curricular activities. The study also indicated that teachers whose attitude towards co-curricular activities is positive are likely to enhance participation of learners with mental challenges in co-curricular activities. It was further noted that well trained teachers may help learners with mental challenges to identify their talents. The study also indicated that teacher training enables the teacher to be child friendly, to be willing to work with children with mental challenges, to handle learners professionally and ensures learners will be motivated

5.1 Conclusions

Teacher training enables the teacher to be child friendly, to be willing to work with children with mental challenges, to handle learners professionally and ensures learners will be motivated because the teacher has the skills.

5.2 Recommendations

Teachers in charge of learners with mental challenges should be well trained to enhance learners' participation in co-curricular activities.

5.3 Suggestion for further studies

A longitudinal study should be carried out to establish the long term effects of participation in co-curricular activities by learners with mental challenges on their wellbeing

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