

ATTITUDES OF TEACHERS TOWARDS LEARNERS WHO ARE MENTALLY CHALLENGED IN NYAMAIYA DIVISION NYAMIRA COUNTY, KENYA; A CROSS SECTIONAL STUDY.

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Page | 1 **ABSTRACT**

Background:

This study aims to find out the attitudes of teachers toward learners who are mentally challenged in Nyamaiya division of Nyamira County, Kenya.

Methodology:

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The study was conducted in Nyamira Township, Nyamira County Kenya. The target population needed all countries in the continent as they served less than 1% of the population with special needs consisting of head teachers and teachers of public primary schools. The total number of teachers was 260. The study adopted proportionate random sampling to select (30%) of public primary schools from the township. The data was generated using questionnaires and observation schedules.

Results:

The gender distribution of the respondents shows that 48 (61.5%) are males, while 30 (38.5%) are females. data reveals that teachers in Nyamaiya Division generally have mixed attitudes towards learners who are mentally challenged. Only 12.8% strongly agree, 19.2% agree, 2.6% are neutral, 51.3% disagree, and 14.1% strongly disagree. The majority of teachers either have negative attitudes or are unsure about their stance. There was a pessimistic view among teachers regarding the academic potential of mentally challenged learners. Only 7.7% strongly agree, 7.7% agree, while a significant 33.3% strongly disagree.

Conclusion:

The identified gaps in attitudes underscore the urgency of a multifaceted approach involving targeted interventions, resource allocation, and collaborative efforts among stakeholders. The study emphasizes the need for strategic investments in training, infrastructure, and awareness programs to create an inclusive educational environment conducive to the holistic development of all learners.

Recommendation:

Awareness Campaigns: Launch awareness campaigns targeting both teachers and regular students to foster a positive and inclusive mindset, reducing negative attitudes towards mentally challenged learners.

Keywords: Attitudes, Teachers, learners who are mentally challenged, Nyamaiya division Nyamira County, Kenya
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BACKGROUND.

Teachers' attitudes towards mentally handicapped learners significantly impact the success of inclusive education initiatives (Jones & Brown, 2018). Positive attitudes and beliefs about the capabilities of these learners contribute to a supportive and inclusive classroom atmosphere. On the contrary, negative attitudes may create barriers to effective learning and hinder the social integration of mentally handicapped learners (Mitchell, 2016). The Ministry of Education report recommended that teachers in regular schools be in service of special needs to acquire the necessary skills to handle learners with special needs to facilitate inclusion effectively. In Nyamaiya Division, there is a discernible gap in the attitudes of teachers towards learners with mental challenges. Negative attitudes can

create barriers to effective learning and inhibit the development of a supportive and inclusive educational environment (Jones & Brown, 2018). Additionally, the academic qualifications of teachers become pivotal in ensuring that educators possess the requisite knowledge and skills to cater to the diverse learning needs of mentally handicapped learners (Mitchell, 2016). Moreover, the availability of facilities and materials specifically designed for challenged learners in Nyamaiya Division is a critical aspect of inclusive education. Inadequacies in resources can impede the implementation of effective teaching strategies and limit the overall learning experiences of mentally handicapped learners (Heward, 2018). Given the interconnectedness of these challenges, the problem becomes more pronounced. In Nyamaiya Division, the confluence of negative attitudes, potential gaps in academic

qualifications, and deficiencies in facilities and materials for challenged learners may collectively contribute to the suboptimal academic performance of mentally handicapped learners. This study aims to find out the attitudes of teachers toward learners who are mentally challenged in the Nyamaiya division of Nyamira County, Kenya.

METHODOLOGY.

Research design.

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) survey is an attempt to collect data from members of a population to determine the current status of that population concerning one or more variables. Survey research seeks to identify what large numbers of people think or feel about certain issues.

Survey research design was used to describe some aspects or characteristics of the population such as opinions, attitudes, beliefs or even knowledge of certain phenomena of the mentally challenged children in regular public primary schools made survey research design most appropriate in that people's attitudes, feelings, and conditions were involved.

Study area and target population.

The target population referred to a group of individuals, objects, or items from which samples were taken for measurement Mugenda and Mugenda (2003). The study was conducted in Nyamira Township, Nyamira County Kenya. The target population needed all countries in the continent as they served less than 1% of the population with special needs consisting of head teachers and teachers of public primary schools. The head teachers and teachers were included in the study because they are the disseminators of knowledge and skill; influence the implementation of the special education integration, oversee the implementation of the ministry's policies at the school, and prepare regular reports concerning the physical facilities, learning resources and equipment needed for implementation of the special education in schools.

Sample size.

The total number of head teachers in Nyamaiya Division is 18 arising from 18 schools. The total number of teachers was 260. The study adopted Mugenda and Mugenda 30% of the total in which 6 head teachers and 78 teachers were selected to take part in the study.

Sampling techniques.

The study adopted proportionate random sampling to select (30%) of public primary schools from the township. To obtain a specific public primary school from each location, a primary school assigned a number, and the numbers were placed in a basket. A number was picked at random without replacement. The number picked was represented by the public primary school where the study was carried out. This ensured that all the public primary schools in the location had equal chances of being selected for the study.

Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) state that random sampling allows generalization to a large population with a margin error that is statistically determinable. Specifically, simple random sampling was used. According to Nachamia and Nachmias (2016), simple random sampling is the basic probability sampling design. Simple random sampling is a procedure that gives each of the total sampling units of the population (N) An equal and known non-zero probability of being selected Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) further say that simple random sampling involves giving a number to every subject or member of the accessible population, placing the numbers in a basket and then picking any number at random. The subjects corresponding to the numbers picked were included in the sample. For the study the targeted population assigned number and the subject that corresponded with the picked number used in the study.

Data collection methods.

The data was generated using questionnaires and observation schedules. The questionnaires were generated by the study and administered to the head- teachers and primary school teachers.

The study administered observation schedules both inside and outside the classroom to make observations on the classrooms to make observations on real-life situations. The main advantage of the questionnaire was that it generated a considerable amount of questionnaire data and enabled the study to obtain a wider coverage of description data at a comparatively low cost in terms of time, money, and effort. Since it was a standard study instrument it allowed uniformity in the manner in which questions were asked and made it possible to be compared across respondents

Data collection procedures.

It involved the real process of going to the field to get the required information from the selected population. The study sought permission from Kampala University, to enable the study to get a research permit from the county Education Officers to enable the study to conduct research in the selected schools. This was done through a letter stating the research area, the purpose of the research, and the

exact dates when the research is expected to take place. Further, the study got permission from the head teachers of the selected schools for the study.

This was done two weeks before the commencement of the study to allow time for any changes.

On the actual dates of the study, the study visited individual schools to conduct the research.

Data analysis and interpretation.

The data collected for the study was adopted and coded for completeness and accuracy. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques (means, modes, and percentages) and data was presented in tabular form. This study adopted a survey research design.

The study was conducted in Nyamaiya Division, Nyamira County Kenya. The target population consisted of head teachers and teachers of public primary schools.

The study adopted proportionate random sampling to select (306) public primary schools from the township. The data was generated using questionnaires and observation schedules. Content validity was used in the study. In addition, pre-testing was done to improve the instruments. Reliability was tested by piloting the study in a neighboring district but having the same characteristics. The study sought permission from Kampala University to enable the study to get a research permit from the county Education Officers to enable the study to conduct research in the selected schools. Further, the study sought permission from the head teachers of the selected schools for the study.

The data collected for the study was adopted and coded for completeness and accuracy. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques (means, modes, and percentages) and data was presented in tabular form.

Ethical Considerations.

This study dealt with the fact people that who participated as respondents in the research (head was teachers voluntary and teachers). The study therefore of confidentiality of the information they gave. The study also assured the respondents the respondents of the study and thus requested the study to explain the importance study. It also took time in information relevant for to develop a rapport with respondents to participate in the study the participants, by giving the study endeavored good working relationship with them.

RESULTS.

Response rate.

The questionnaires were distributed to respondents. Out of 79 respondents, that is, 6 head teachers and 73 teachers, 5 teachers responded and five questionnaires were collected back by the respondents and all the 73 teachers answered and returned the questionnaires for data analysis.

Table 1: Showing response rate.

Respondents	Frequency		Percentage (%)
	Total questionnaires distributed	Questionnaires returned	
Headteachers	6	5	
Teachers	73	73	
Total	79	78	98.7

Source: Primary data, 2023

From Table 1, the response rate was 98.7% which was good to provide reliable data for analysis and making conclusions.

Gender of respondents.

The respondents were asked to tell their gender and their responses were summarized in table 2. All the head teachers who were selected were male

Findings on background characteristics of respondents.

Table 2: shows the respondents' gender.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Male	48.0	61.5
Female	30.0	38.5
Total	78	100

Source: Primary data, 2023

In Table 2, the gender distribution of the respondents shows that 48 (61.5%) are males, while 30 (38.5%) are females. The significant majority of male head teachers (61.5%) suggest a clear dominance of male teachers within the teaching staff in schools of Nyamaiya division. This gender imbalance may have implications for diverse perspectives and leadership styles within these educational institutions.

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The age group of respondents

The respondents were asked to tell their gender and their responses were presented in Table 3;

Table 3: Showing findings on the age group of respondents.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
20-25 years	15.0	19.2
26-30 years	20.0	25.6
31-35 years	30.0	38.5
36 years and above	13.0	16.7
Total	78	100

Source: Primary Data, 2023

From Table .3, the majority of respondents fall within the age groups of 31-35 years (30.0%) and 26-30 years (20.0%). Substantial proportions are also within the age groups of 20-25 years (15.0%) and 36 years and above (13.0%). The concentration of respondents in these age groups suggests a mix of mid-career and relatively early-career educators, along with some more experienced individuals. This

distribution may contribute to a blend of experience and contemporary perspectives in managing schools.

Respondents' highest academic qualifications.

The respondents were asked to tell their highest academic qualifications and their responses were presented in table 4.

Table 4: Showing findings on the age group of respondents.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
KCSE	0.0	0.0
Certificate in ECE	25.0	32.1
Diploma in ECE	15.0	19.2
BED in ECE	13.0	16.7
BED in primary education	10.0	12.8
PI CERTIFICATE	5.0	6.4
DIPLOMA in primary education	10.0	12.8
Total	78	100

Source: Primary Data, 2023

From Table 4, the highest frequency is for respondents holding a Certificate in ECE (32.1%), followed by a Diploma in ECE (19.2%). Other qualifications include BED in ECE (16.7%), BED in primary education (12.8%), PI CERTIFICATE (6.4%), and DIPLOMA in primary education (12.8%). This implies that the prevalence of ECE qualifications among respondents indicates a specialization in early childhood education. This could influence teaching practices, especially for younger students, and suggests a

diverse pool of educational backgrounds among the head teachers.

Respondents’ teaching experience.

The respondents were asked to tell their teaching experience and their responses were presented in the table 5.

Table 5: Showing findings on the age group of respondents.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1-5 years	25.0	32.1
6-10 years	15.0	19.2
11-15 years	13.0	16.7
16-20	10.0	12.8
Over 20 years	5.0	6.4
Total	78	100

Source: Primary Data, 2023

Table 5 shows that a significant portion of respondents (32.1%) have 1-5 years of teaching experience. Other categories include 6-10 years (19.2%), 11-15 years (16.7%), 16-20 years (12.8%), and over 20 years (6.4%). This implies that the concentration of relatively less experienced teachers (1-5 years) might impact decision-making and instructional practices. This indicates a potential need for mentorship and professional development programs to support the professional growth of these educators. Simultaneously, the

presence of experienced teachers suggests a balance in terms of institutional knowledge and expertise.

Respondents’ children per class.

The respondents were asked to tell the children per class and their responses were presented in the table 6.

Table 6: Showing findings on the number of children per class.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Below 10 children	12	15.4
11 -20 Children	12	15.4
21-30 Children	14	17.9
Above 30 children	40	51.3
Total	78	100

Source: Primary Data, 2023

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In Table 6, the majority of respondents (51.3%) have classes with above 30 children. Other categories include below 10 children (15.4%), 11-20 children (15.4%), and 21-30 children (17.9%). This meant that larger class sizes may pose challenges for effective individualized instruction and attention. Resource allocation and strategies for managing larger classes may be areas of consideration for educational policymakers. The presence of varying class sizes indicates a need for flexible teaching approaches.

Findings on number of children with mental challenges in a class.

The respondents were asked to tell the number of children with a mental challenge in a class and their responses were presented in table 7.

Table 7: Showing findings on the number of children with mental challenges in a class

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Below 5	65	83.3
6- 10	8	10.3
10 -15	5	6.4
15-20	Nil	0.0
20- 40	Nil	0.0
Total	78	100

Source: Primary Data, 2023

Table 7 shows that his highest frequency is for classes with below 5 children with mental challenges (83.3%). Other categories include 6-10 children (10.3%), and 10-15 children (6.4%), and no respondents reported having 15-20 or 20-40 children with mental challenges in a class. This implied that the prevalence of smaller numbers of mentally challenged students in a class below

Might enable more focused attention and tailored support. This could positively influence the learning experiences of these students. The absence of classes with higher numbers

of mentally challenged students suggests a need for specialized attention and support for these students.

Findings on attitudes of teachers towards learners who are mentally challenged.

The respondents were asked to tell whether they have a positive attitude toward learners who are mentally challenged and their responses were presented in the table 8.

Table 8: Showing findings on whether teachers in Nyamaiya Division have a positive attitude towards learners who are mentally challenged.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	10	12.8
Agree	15	19.2
Neutral	2	2.6
Disagree	40	51.3
Strongly disagree	11.0	14.1
Total	78	100

Source: Primary Data, 2023

In Table 8, the data reveals that teachers in Nyamaiya Division generally have mixed attitudes towards learners who are mentally challenged. Only 12.8% strongly agree, 19.2% agree, 2.6% are neutral, 51.3% disagree, and 14.1% strongly disagree. The majority of teachers either have negative attitudes or are unsure about their stance. This implied that the findings suggest a need for interventions or training programs to improve teachers' attitudes towards mentally challenged learners.

Findings on whether mentally challenged learners are fully accepted and integrated into regular classrooms by teachers

The respondents were asked to tell whether mentally challenged learners are fully accepted and integrated into regular classrooms by teachers and their responses were presented in the table 9.

Table 9: Showing findings on whether teachers in Nyamaiya Division have a positive attitude towards learners who are mentally challenged.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	6	7.7
Agree	10	12.8
Neutral	0	0.0
Disagree	40	51.3
Strongly disagree	22.0	28.2
Total	78	100

Source: Primary Data, 2023

Table 9 indicates that there is a significant challenge in fully accepting and integrating mentally challenged learners into regular classrooms. A mere 7.7% strongly agree, 12.8% agree, while a substantial 28.2% strongly disagree. The majority either disagrees or strongly disagrees, indicating a lack of full acceptance and integration. This meant that the

results highlighted a potential barrier to inclusive education in Nyamaiya Division, emphasizing the need for awareness and support programs.

Findings on whether teachers believe that mentally challenged learners can perform well academically if given the right support

The respondents were asked to tell whether mentally challenged learners are fully accepted and integrated into regular classrooms by teachers and their responses were presented in table 10

Table 10: Showing findings on whether they believe that mentally challenged learners can perform well academically if given the right support.

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Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	6	7.7
Agree	6	7.7
Neutral	Nil	0.0
Disagree	40	51.3
Strongly disagree	26.0	33.3
Total	78	100

Source: Primary Data, 2023

Table 10 suggests a pessimistic view among teachers regarding the academic potential of mentally challenged learners. Only 7.7% strongly agree, 7.7% agree, while a significant 33.3% strongly disagree. The results indicate a lack of confidence in the academic capabilities of mentally challenged learners. This meant that the findings signal a necessity for interventions to build confidence among teachers in the academic potential of mentally challenged learners.

Findings on whether there is sufficient training and awareness for teachers on how to effectively handle mentally challenged learners.

The respondents were asked to tell whether there is sufficient training and awareness for teachers on how to effectively handle mentally challenged learners and their responses were presented in table 11.

Table 11: Showing findings on whether there is sufficient training and awareness for teachers on how to effectively handle mentally challenged learners.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	20	25.6
Agree	15	19.2
Neutral	5	6.4
Disagree	20	25.6
Strongly disagree	18.0	23.1
Total	78	100

Source: Primary Data, 2023

In Table 11, the results indicate that there is a mixed perception of the sufficiency of training and awareness. While 25.6% strongly agree and 19.2% agree, 23.1% strongly disagree. This suggests a need for enhanced training and awareness programs. This meant that the findings highlighted the importance of providing more comprehensive training and awareness programs to equip teachers with the necessary skills.

Findings on whether teachers in Nyamaiya Division are open to adopting inclusive teaching methods for mentally challenged learners

The respondents were asked to tell whether they are open to adopting inclusive teaching methods for mentally challenged learners and their responses were presented in Table 12

Table 12: Showing findings on whether teachers in Nyamaiya Division are open to adopting inclusive teaching methods for mentally challenged learners.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	30	38.5
Agree	15	19.2
Neutral	5	6.4
Disagree	10	12.8
Strongly disagree	18.0	23.1
Total	78	100

Source: Primary Data, 2023

Table 12 shows that a significant portion of teachers are open to adopting inclusive teaching methods (38.5% strongly agree). However, a considerable percentage (23.1%) strongly disagrees, suggesting a divided stance. This meant that the results underscore the importance of addressing barriers and fostering a more unified approach to inclusive teaching methods.

Findings on whether teachers actively collaborate to support the academic and social development of mentally challenged learners

The academic and social development of mentally challenged learners and their responses were Presented in the table 13.

Table 13: Showing findings on whether teachers actively collaborate to support the academic and social development of mentally challenged learners.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	30	38.5
Agree	15	19.2
Neutral	5	6.4
Disagree	10	12.8
Strongly disagree	18.0	23.1
Total	78	100

Source: Primary Data, 2023

Table 13 reveals a positive aspect, indicating that a considerable percentage of teachers actively collaborate (38.5% strongly agree) to support the academic and social development of mentally challenged learners. This meant the positive findings suggest a foundation for building collaborative efforts among teachers to enhance the development of mentally challenged learners.

DISCUSSIONS.

Attitudes of teachers towards learners with mental challenges.

A significant percentage of teachers (51.3%) expressed a negative attitude towards learners with mental challenges. The negative attitudes revealed in the study highlight an urgent need for interventions to address misconceptions and promote a positive, inclusive mindset among educators.

A substantial number of teachers (28.2%) strongly disagree that mentally challenged learners are fully accepted and integrated into regular classrooms. The lack of agreement on the integration of mentally challenged learners suggests the necessity of targeted awareness programs and inclusive teaching strategies.

A significant proportion of teachers (33.3%) strongly disagree that mentally challenged learners can perform well academically with the right support. The skepticism regarding academic potential underscores the importance of providing evidence-based training and resources to enhance teacher confidence in supporting these learners.

While 25.6% of teachers strongly agree that there is sufficient training, 23.1% strongly disagree, indicating a lack of consensus on the adequacy of training. Inconsistent perceptions of training adequacy highlight the need for comprehensive and standardized training programs tailored to the diverse needs of mentally challenged learners.

A notable percentage of teachers (23.1%) strongly disagree that they are open to adopting inclusive teaching methods for mentally challenged learners.

The resistance to inclusive methods underscores the importance of fostering a culture of openness, supported by ongoing training and awareness initiatives.

While a significant number (38.5%) strongly agree that teachers collaborate to support mentally challenged learners, a notable percentage (23.1%) strongly disagrees. The mixed responses highlight the need for fostering a collaborative culture and addressing barriers to effective teacher collaboration.

About caring Noddings (2001) posits that caring is exemplified in a multitude of ways including being attentive and receptive. As educators, teachers are responsive to the needs and feelings of the students Noddings writes, "A caring teacher is someone who has demonstrated that she (he) can establish more or less regularly, relations of care in a wide variety of situations (and) will want the best for that

person The relationship of teacher and student giving and receiving care, does a continuous one, lasting over time and involving intimate and personal understand In addition. Noddings connects caring with preparation and organization. Learners recognize caring in teachers who are prepared and organized. Hence teachers, in inclusive settings, have to be prepared and organized.

Norlander case, Reagan, and Case (1999) clearly articulate the importance of being a nurturing teacher, calling for teachers who can nurture those in their care Nurturing of students becomes a critical issue and enables students to learn and create Effective teachers to practice pedagogical nurturing in every lesson, in every human interaction. Supporting Noddings. Theory of caring Norlander case, Reagan, and case posit that caring is cut from many fabrics, and the teacher becomes the tailor-fashioning environments that is caring and that teach students to care for their learning and one another.

According to Borich (2000), a teacher who is excited about the subject being taught and shows it by facial expression, voice inflection, gesture, and general movement is more likely to hold the attention of students than one who does not exhibit these behaviors.

Research on the enthusiasm of the teacher is strongly connected to student success, Cabello and Terrell, (1994) Cruickshank, and Jenkins Metcalf (2003) report that effective teachers are enthusiastic, have warmth, and possess a sense of humor. This personality trait is linked to student success so, far the physically handicapped to be successful in integrated programs the teachers have to possess these character traits.

Teachers have to develop positive attitudes toward the physically disabled who are integrated into the regular classroom. Borich (2000) suggests that effective teachers are those who use meaningful verbal praise to get and keep students actively participating in the learning process. Cruickshank, Jenkins & Metcalf (2003) write that effective teachers are generally positive-minded individuals who believe in the success of their students as well as their ability to help students achieve.

CONCLUSIONS.

In conclusion, the findings reveal a complex landscape of challenges and opportunities in addressing the academic needs of mentally challenged learners in Nyamaiya Division. The identified gaps in attitudes underscore the urgency of a multifaceted approach involving targeted interventions, resource allocation, and collaborative efforts among stakeholders. The study emphasizes the need for strategic investments in training, infrastructure, and awareness programs to create an inclusive educational environment conducive to the holistic development of all learners.

The gender disparity among teachers, the inadequate facilities for mentally challenged learners, and the prevailing negative attitudes demand immediate attention. The study brings to light the critical need for a paradigm shift in educational practices, advocating for inclusivity, understanding, and support for mentally challenged learners.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

Training Programs: Develop and implement specialized training programs for teachers to enhance their skills in handling mentally challenged learners. This should include continuous professional development to keep educators updated on effective teaching methods.

Resource Allocation: Allocate resources for the creation of specialized classrooms, provision of assistive technologies, and adaptation of learning resources to cater to the diverse needs of mentally challenged learners.

Awareness Campaigns: Launch awareness campaigns targeting both teachers and regular students to foster a positive and inclusive mindset, reducing negative attitudes towards mentally challenged learners.

Collaborative Support System: Establish and promote a collaborative support system involving teachers, parents, and community members. This can enhance the overall support network for mentally challenged learners.

Research and Development: Invest in research and development initiatives to identify innovative strategies and technologies that can further improve the educational experience for mentally challenged learners.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST.

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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