

*Original Paper*

# Teachers Challenges and Coping Mechanisms in Educating Learners with Disabilities among Some Selected Special Needs Units in Mombasa County, Kenya

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## **Abstract**

*Inclusion of children with disability in the special units has been a great challenge in many counties in Kenya. One of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to give all Children Living with Disability (CLWD) the opportunity to participate in the least restrictive environment. However, teachers in special units face a myriad of drawbacks in handling children with disabilities in the special units. This paper addresses challenges and mitigation as viewed by the teachers working in those special units. Purposive sampling was used to sample 50 respondents (teachers). Data was collected using interviews, Focused Group Discussions (FDG) and digital recorder. Descriptive data analysis method yielded results indicating that one of the major challenges teachers faced is the in efficiency of training capacity of teachers due to various disabilities children face and this spills over to inadaptability of the curriculum. Teachers have mitigated individual based education programme as a coping mechanism.*

## **Keywords**

*inclusive education, Children with Disability, teachers challenge and strategies*

## **1. Introduction**

### *1.1 Background Information*

The struggle for achieving education for all was for the first time recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948). Through this declaration and other various international, regional and local initiatives, all states are committed to resolutions that bind them to secure children's rights, protection, resources and voices regardless of traits such as race, religion, caste, gender, health

or age. Education as a right for all is stated in Article 26 of the 1948 Human Rights Declaration: The weight accorded to these international statements by individual countries varies widely. Some countries have made significant advances towards promoting inclusive education in their national legislation. Iceland, Germany and Canada, all have national policies which fully support inclusive education. The vast majority of Children with Disability (CWDs) are in their local schools. In Italy, India and Norway, there is a strong government commitment to the policy and goals of inclusion. As a result, the number of pupils with special needs being educated in special education classes decreases annually. Concurrently, those receiving education in inclusive regular classes increases annually (McCarthy, 2002; Rustermier, 2002). Although there is progress in access to education, there were regions and sections within regions as well as countries where little or no progress is reported (UNESCO, 2001). That implies that double standard practice has not yet ceased even though inclusive education is generally viewed as a good option for achieving Education for All (EFA). From the literature reviewed, it emerged that possibly factors related to school, teacher, pupil and socio-cultural/economic could be influencing on inclusion learning outcomes. This study was meant to establish whether such variables among others influenced in any way inclusion of learners with special needs in special units in Kenyan context.

In Africa some countries such as South Africa, Uganda, and Lesotho among others, do have a national policy in favor of inclusion. Uganda has been addressing the educational needs of CWDs as part of Universal Primary Education (UPE) since 1996. The Uganda government has made it financially possible for families to send their CWDs to school. In every family, the priority is given to the child with disability, then to girls (Miles, 2000; Bosa, 2003; Mittler, 2002). Although all that has been done, it is evident that there are some children especially CWDs who were still out of school. Similarly, some of those children with special needs who might have enrolled in regular schools, may have ended up dropping out of school if such schools are not inclusive oriented. Indeed, the study was carried out to establish the teachers challenge and copying strategies in trying to support inclusion of the CWDs. This could be of great significance in future plans to enable CWDs access education in special units as well as mainstream schools.

In Kenya before the Special Needs Education (SNE) policy was put in place in March 2010, the implementation and practice of special education programmes was guided by the policies stated in the Sessional Paper No. 5 of 1968 and No. 6 of 1988. These policies pointed out that the needs of the children with special needs should be catered for in special schools. Other policies had been adapted from presidential directives, education commissions and legal notices from the Ministry of Education (MoEST, 2005a). The recently launched SNE policy clearly points out on the need to implement inclusive education as a viable means of achieving EFA goal (MoE, 2009). The implementation of Free Primary Education (FPE) by the government was a positive milestone towards that achievement. Although this has been done and the enrolment in regular primary schools increased from 5.9 million in 2002 to 8.5 million in 2008, the number of children of school going age who do not access educational

services is still high. Out of the estimated 750,000 CWDs of school going age, only 45,000(6%) children are placed in learning institutions (MoE, 2009). This therefore implies that about 16.94% of the estimated CWDs are out of school or hopefully some may be in regular schools (MoEST/UNESCO, 2004; MoEST, 2004, 2005a; MoE, 2009). It is not clear to what extent the teachers in special units face challenges with children with disability in special units. The present study sought to fill this gap.

### *1.2 Problem Statement*

In the recent survey (MOEST, 20015a) in placement of children with disability, out of 90,000 CWDs who have already been assessed nationwide in Kenya, about 70.2% are still waiting for placement in various inclusive learning institutions. It is doubtful whether they can all be accommodated in the available special schools and special units. However, even if the special schools and special units were available, the other concern is that these schools and units mostly cater for some categories of children with various special needs. This leaves out other areas of special needs with the option of either being out of school or being in regular schools yet with unmet education services provision. On the other hand, with the estimated 94% CWDs being out school in Mombasa County, Kenya (Educational Assessment and Research Center, Mombasa, 2017). Many special units in Mombasa County, Kenya are meant to accommodate children with one special need. However, the units tend to accommodate children with diverse special needs. This turns to be great challenges to the teachers who have also trained to manage one special need case. Lack of conducive environment among other factors may limit enrolment of CWDs in some special units. As a result, this has made special schools too limited to absorb all CWD. This is an indication that provision of education for all the children with special needs may not be catered for fully by provision of special schools and units only. There is therefore need to further investigate challenges teachers in special units face in Mombasa, Kenya and the coping mechanisms adopted.

### *1.3 Objectives of the Study*

The study addressed three research questions:

- 1) What are the challenges faced by teachers educating learners with disabilities in special units Mombasa County, Kenya?
- 2) What are the coping mechanisms that these teachers apply to mitigate?
- 3) Does the demographic distribution of teachers in these special learning units' points out to some challenges the inclusive learning environment face in Mombasa County?

### *1.4 Significant of the Study*

It is hoped that the findings of this study would contribute to documented knowledge in special needs teacher's challenges in inclusive learning set up in Mombasa County—Kenya. Improve on the curriculum review of special needs education in inclusive learning environment. The findings would help the government through the ministry of education to step up trainings on various special needs skills which in turn would provide an enabling environment for the inclusion of learners with special needs.

## 2. Literature Review

Manisah, Ram, and zalizan (2006) conducted a study in Malaysia on teachers Perception towards inclusive Education. They found out that collaboration between special education teachers and regular teachers is vital in the implementation of inclusive program. However, the findings indicated that the presence of a special education teacher in regular classrooms could raise difficulties in determining who really is responsible for the special students, though majority of the teachers concurred that the role of special education teacher is to assist the students with disability. Manisah, Ram, Lee and Zalizan felt that the success of the inclusive program depends, among other factors, on the attitudes of classroom teachers towards the children with special needs teachers. They pointed out that the aspect of collaboration between mainstream and special education teacher needs to be improved. It is not clear whether the challenges identified in this study are the ones faced in special units in Mombasa County, Kenya. The present study sought to fill this gap.

Abongdia, Foncha, and Dakada (2015) conducted a study in two primary schools in the East London district, South Africa. This study investigates the challenges teachers encounter in identifying learners with learning barriers. It focused on diversity and inclusive education as well as practices and procedures within the school. Being a phenomenological study, it conceptualizes Social Constructivism, Kurt Lewin's Field Theory, and Ecological Systems Theory. The literature review embraces three focal points: conceptualization of inclusive education, inclusive education in South Africa, and learning barriers in inclusive classrooms. The study employed a qualitative research method through the use of semi-structured interviews and observations. The findings are analyzed using content analysis. The key findings reveal the lack of effective training of the teachers, teachers' approach to identification, overcrowded classrooms, parental involvement, and lack of collaboration among educators. This study only researched on challenges teachers face in mainstream schools. It is not clear whether the challenges identified are faced in the special units. The present study sought to feel this gap.

Hariparsad (2010) conducted a study on challenges facing educators in the inclusion of attention deficit hyperactive disordered learners in the mainstream classrooms in South Africa. A self-structured questionnaire was utilized. An analysis of one hundred and ten questionnaires completed by primary schools' educators from the Mafukezela Gandhi district on the North Coast of Kwazulu Natal was done. The data was processed and interpreted by means of descriptive statistics. Essentially the findings of the study indicated that educators lack the necessary knowledge, skills, training and experience of learners with diverse special needs those with mild cognitive disability included. In addition, some teachers experience forms of temper tantrums and hyperactivity as a challenge in the management of learners with disability. The present study sought to confirm these findings in the Kenyan context.

Mugambi (2011) conducted a study to investigate the problems the teachers encountered in integrating students with visual impairment. The study sought to find out whether teachers were adequately trained to teach students with visual impairment. The locale for the study was Moi Girls' School, Nairobi where there was integration programme. The data for the study was collected using a questionnaire to

investigate challenges the teachers faced in teaching students with visual impairment in integrated schools. The study targeted the teachers at Moi Girls' School Nairobi. A purposive random sampling technique was applied to identify the teachers. Forty-seven teachers were selected from the school whereby 25 of them were female while 22 were male. The study found out that the specialized facilities were limited. It also found out that teachers teaching students with visual impairment lacked support from the school administration. This study shows that there is a challenge in as far as inclusion of children with disability is concerned however, it never came out with coping strategies which teachers can use in educating CWDs in special units. The present study sought to fill this gap.

Sinbair (1999) conducted a study in schools within Botswana. The study revealed that teachers preferred using group contingencies in supporting positive behaviour among learners with disability. Boamah (2010) conducted a study in Ashanti in Ghana and reported teachers encouraged learners to engage in sports and games together as a major strategy in managing inappropriate behaviour among learners with disabilities. In a study by Milteniene and Meliene (2010) on forms of special Education in the context of inclusive education, found out that support for the SNE Learners in mainstream school is most often provided by peripatetic teachers, specialists of certain spheres, belonging to the expert centers, situated in special schools. These professional consults teachers, but they do not provide support directly for the learners in the Kingdom of Netherlands. They further explain that when a mainstream school teacher sees that a student needs some specialist help, she/he talks to the parent and together they fill out a document of a certain form. They then go to the service which evaluates if there is a disorder, assesses the student's achievements and decides if extra special support should be provided such as the provision of equipment furniture. Then, the specialist explains or shows the teacher how to work with such a student. This study attempted to compare the findings of Milteniene and Meliene in the Kenyan context, particularly the coping strategies teachers use in special units in Mombasa County, Kenya.

Ndeto (2013) conducted a study on effectiveness of school rules and regulations in enhancing discipline for students with mild cognitive disability in public secondary schools in Kang'undo division, Machokos County, Kenya. A descriptive survey was used to examine the effectiveness of school rules in enhancing discipline. The findings of the study revealed that students' mild cognitive disability were not adequately involved in the formulation of school rules and regulations though they were highly involved in the implementation of the same and this points to challenges in coping mechanisms.

### **3. Methodology**

The study employed qualitative research design and applied a phenomenology methodology. Qualitative research methodology interrogates a given phenomenon from the people experiencing it through textual descriptions that can be analyzed for themes and of daily life situations of individuals (Pierce, 2008). Teachers' practices for supporting inclusion of learners with disabilities in special units constituted components of daily life that were the focus of the researcher's attention. In addition, the

methodology was thought appropriate for the present study as the study examined real-life experiences brought about by the existence of challenges can induce transferable interpretations (Pierce, 2008; Silverman, 2009; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). As the study focused on individual participants' views, experiences, and practices, its methodological approach was entrenched in phenomenology. Phenomenological research is grounded in understanding facing teachers educating learners with disabilities in special units.

### 3.1 Study Site

The study was carried out in Coastal region of Kenya in special units of learning with children with disability in Mombasa County. Mombasa County has six Sub-counties namely Nyali, Kisauni, Changamwe, Likoni, Mvita, Jomvu with a total of 23 special learning units for children with disabilities. These special units have been reported to be accommodating only 4% of CWD (Educational Assessment and Research Center, Mombasa, 2017). This is against the United Nations Conventional Right of children with the Disability (UNCRD) which states that each and every child has a right to education regardless of his or her condition. Mombasa County has a population of 939,370 (2009 population census). The County covers an area of 229.7Km excluding water mass of 65Km situated in the Southern Eastern part of the Coastal region.

### 3.2 Study Participants, Sampling Criteria and Sample Size

The target population of this study was teachers teaching in the 23 public primary schools special learning units in Mombasa County. The participants were teachers trained in special needs education and had taught in the selected special unit for a period of five years. There were 53 teachers in special units. The criteria for teachers' participation in the study included the following: at least a primary school teacher's diploma with an endorsement in special needs education and an undergraduate degree in special needs education or related field of specialization, at least teaching experience of 4 years in a special unit class. Purposive sampling procedure was therefore applied in recruiting the teaching for the study. Data was collected using an in-depth interview of 30 minutes for about 10 participants each, while 40 participants divided into 3 groups each of 12 x2 and one group with 10 participants took part in Focused Group Discussion (FGD), lasting for an hour.

### 3.3 Sample Size

**Table 1. Sample Size**

<b>Special Units (N)</b>	<b>Teachers in Special Units (N)</b>	<b>Total (n)</b>
<b>23</b>	<b>53</b>	
<b>Special Units (n)</b>	<b>Teachers (n)</b>	
<b>23</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>

### 3.4 Data Storage, Analysis and Interpretation

Qualitative data analysis technique was used to analyze data. The interviews and FGDs were recorded and transcribed. Content analysis was utilized to analyze the data. The data were then coded for consistencies and differences. All the codes with similar content were grouped together, each bearing the name of a theme. Connections within and between themes were identified for interpretation and analysis.

### 3.5 Ethics Approval

Written informed consent was attained from the participants. It was emphasized that participation in the study was voluntary and there were no subsequent consequences for refusal or withdrawal. The participants were assured that the information they gave would not be made available to anyone. Plagiarism was avoided by acknowledging all source of information solicited from various researchers and authors. In reporting of research findings, the researcher made sure not to omit any important information provided by the respondents nor falsify the participants' information to suit the researcher's opinion or pre-empted outcome.

### 3.6 Study Results

The results section of this study describes the challenges for teachers educating learners with disabilities in special units in Mombasa County, Kenya. Integrated within these challenges were coping strategies which teachers use during the teaching process.

**Table 2. Demographic Information of Study Participants**

		No of respondents	%
<b>Age Range (in years)</b>	20-30	7	13%
	31-40	30	60%
	41-50	6	12%
	51-60	7	14%
<b>Education Level</b>	Certificate in Special Needs Education	1	1%
	Diploma in Special Needs Education	29	58%
	Degree in Special Needs Education	20	40%
<b>Experience (in years)</b>	0-10 Years	13	26%
	11-20 Years	15	30%
	21-30 Years	10	20%
	31-40 Years	12	24%
	42 and above	0	
<b>In service Training in</b>		10	20%

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**Area of Specialty**
**Period stayed in school**

0-1year

2-5years 13 26%

5-10years 37 74%

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**4. Does the Demographic Distribution of Teachers in These Special Learning Units' Points out to Some Challenges the Inclusive Learning Environment Face in Mombasa County?**

The study also found out that 15(30%) of the teacher respondents had a teaching experience of 11-20 years while only 12(24%) had a teaching experience of 31-40. The findings were presented in table 1. This meant that they could participate in the study. Additionally, A minority 10(20%) reported that they had undergone in-service training of managing learners with special needs in special units. Therefore, the findings unveiled that learners with cognitive disability exist in inclusive schools. Further, majority of the teachers had undergone in-service training pertaining special needs. The findings predict that inadequate in-service training in area of specialization could be a challenge in teaching learners with disabilities in special needs since teachers' are not equipped with up to date information in their area of specialization.

*4.1 Challenges Teachers Experience in Teaching Learners with Disability*
**Table 4. Challenges Faced by Teachers Educating Learners with Disabilities in Special Units**

NO	Challenges	NO of Respondent	%
<b>1</b>	<b>Teaching and Learning Challenges</b>		
i	Training inadequacy	11	22%
ii	Facilities	4	8%
iii	Curriculum	10	20%
iv	Classroom size	3	6%
v	Specialization	4	8%
vi	Pedagogical skills	6	12%
vii	Content coverage	5	10%
viii	Learning time allocation per subject	4	8%
xi	Pre-vocational training	3	6%
<b>2</b>	<b>Social challenges</b>		
i	Discrimination	6	12%
ii	Parents high expectations	12	24%

iii	Management of specific special disabilities	14	28%
iv	Non supportive parents	11	22%
v	Cultural draw backs	7	14%
<b>3 Behavioral challenges</b>			
i	Inappropriate behaviors	22	44%
ii	Self-destructive behaviors	18	36%
iii	Low cognitive abilities management	10	20%
<b>4 Economic challenges</b>			
i	School fees	9	18%
ii	Distance from home to school	13	26%
iii	Dependency on donor funds	8	16%
iv	Low motivation	20	40%

From Table 4, the study results revealed four main outstanding challenges. Teachers training in the area of specialization were noted as the most outstanding challenge under teaching and learning challenges with 11(22%). Further, 14(28%) of the respondents noted that management of specific special disabilities was the most outstanding social challenge they encounter. 22(44%) of the respondents noted that inappropriate behaviours exhibited by learners with disabilities was an outstanding behavioural challenge. In addition, 20(40%) of the respondents noted that low motivation was an outstanding economic challenge in trying to educate learners with disabilities. This implies that adequate provision of education to children as was stated in United Nations Declaration on the Rights for Persons with Disability is a mirage of dream to be achieved in Mombasa County, Kenya.

#### 4.2 Coping Mechanisms That These Teachers Apply to Mitigate

**Table 5. Coping Mechanisms That These Teachers Apply to Mitigate**

NO	Coping Mechanism	NO of Respondent	%
<b>1 Problem-Focused Strategies</b>			
i	Individualized Education Program	13	26%
ii	Caretaker services	6	12%
iii	Modification of Physical Facilities	10	20%
iv	Dietary Management	9	18%
v	Adapted strategies	7	14%
vi	Guidance and Counseling	5	10%
<b>2 Emotion-Focused Strategies</b>			
i	Spiritual Healing	13	26%

From Table 5 the study results reveal two main coping mechanisms: problem-focused and Emotion-focused. The most outstanding coping mechanism as a problem-focused mechanism that teachers apply to mitigate the challenges in teaching children with disability in the special units of Mombasa County is designing an Individualized Education Program 13(26%). Further, 10(20%) of the respondents viewed that modification of physical facilities would assist alleviate the challenge of educating learners with disabilities. This implies that education children of children with disabilities can be achieved through an individual based approach with a well modification of physical facilities within the special schools to cater for the individual needs of the learners in Mombasa County. These coping strategies were further supported by other as revealed in the study; dietary management especially for children with autism spectrum disorder and adapted strategies 9(18%) and 7(14%) respectively. Consequently, 13(26%) of the respondents noted that spiritual healing could be used as a coping mechanism. This implies that more teachers used problem-focused strategies whereas very few teachers were taking emotion-focused strategies on spiritual healing as a coping strategy in teaching and learning of learners with disabilities.

## 5. Discussion

The present study describes some of the challenges of educating children with disability in special units in Mombasa County, Kenyan. Participants of this study included teachers teaching children with disabilities in special units, who interact regularly with the children with disability as well as their parents. The study revealed that teachers teaching learners with disability in special units' experience common challenges when educating and managing children with disability. A number of key findings were observed. First, teaching and learning resources and pedagogy challenges which puts a tremendous strain on implementation of the curriculum meant for learners with special needs. Second, the impact on behavioral challenges exhibited by children with disability tends to have negative impact on realization of some related programs initiated by the teachers'. Third, the impact of societal negativity towards children with disability may force some parents to engage in search for possible treatments while ignoring therapeutic intervention recommended by the teachers'. Fourth, the need for constant monitoring of the child with disability by the teachers may have negative economic impacts on parents and the government in trying to meet the needs of this group of learners. Fifth, teachers apply mechanisms that are either problem-focused or emotion-focused to enable them cope with the stress of teaching children with disability.

In this study, two major challenges are highlighted that are more common in response to teaching learners with disability in special units in Mombasa County, Kenyan Coast. They include teacher training in their area of specialization and management of specific special needs cases. These findings are in line those of Abongdia, Foncha, and Dakada (2015) in East London District in South Africa the found out that lack of effective training of the teachers, teachers' approach to identification of children with disability and overcrowded classrooms were key challenges that teachers encountered in

managing children with disabilities in schools.

Curriculum, low motivation and distance from the school were also noted as challenges towards teaching and learning of learners with disability in special units. This finding is in line with those of Sethosa (2001) in South Africa who reported that teachers felt that they were inadequately equipped and incompetent in issues related to implementation of a special needs education curriculum. However, the findings contradict those of Chimwaza (2015) in Malawi, who indicated that a teacher training in special needs education was essential in managing learners with disabilities in schools. A few respondents were of the view that time allocation to teach learners with disabilities and cultural drawbacks could be challenges in teaching and learning of children with disability.

Therefore, how do teachers educating children with disability deal with their challenges? The present study shows they used both problem and emotion-focused approaches. Two major interventions that seem to be very popular among the respondents in Mombasa County in Kenyan Coast were developing Individualized Education Program and modification of physical facilities to accommodate various cases of disabilities in the institutions.

Another intervention was Special diet management where some foods or groups of foods are eliminated from child's diet. Teachers have advised parents on the diet recommended for children with disability. Some parents took these measures following advice by different professionals they had consulted; the popularity of diet intervention among parents of children with disability in Mombasa County, Kenya could be explained by the fact that Autism Society of America has endorsed the use of dietary intervention. This finding is in contrary to those of Milteniene and Meliene (2010) who found out that teachers preferred using support services such as specialist to assist them in identification of special needs cases and modification of curriculum. Further, the findings contradict those of Villamero (2014) in Negros Occidental, Philippines who found out that proper assessment by teachers could assist them in modification of the content and delivery based on the needs of the children.

Spiritual coping by belief or seeking prayer is a salient approach for dealing with children with disability in special units. Few respondents had taken the point of convincing some parents to seek divine intervention to find solace in the belief that the presence of a child with disability in the family was planned by God. Teachers utilized this strategy in collaboration with guidance and counseling process after their efforts and consultation to get treatment for their children with disability were unsuccessful. The finding is in line with those of Nyaga (2013) in Kagame, Murang'a County, Kenya, who found out that teacher preferred guidance and counseling as a strategy in managing learners with disabilities in schools. However, findings are in contrary with those of Sinbair (1999) and Boamah (2010) who conducted studies in Botswana and Ghana respectively. They reported that teachers used group contingencies as well as sports and games as a way of managing learners with disability in mainstream schools. Further, the findings are in contrary with those of Ndeto (2013) in Kang'undo division, Machakos County, Kenya, who established that teachers preferred using rules and regulations as a strategy in managing learners with disabilities in classrooms.

### 5.1 Study Implications and Recommendations

The results demonstrate that having children with disability in special units puts an incredible strain on the teachers as well as personal and emotional resources of parents. This may be reduced through the government stepping in via their semi-autonomous bodies like Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development to design a well-structure curriculum for teachers training in special needs education as well as those training in Teachers' Training Colleges. In addition, the Educational Assessment and Research Centers should find out early intervention programs that can assist teachers in the special units in managing inappropriate behaviours of the learners. A home-based participatory model has been used with parents and children with disability between teacher-parents and the children with disability. It can be recommended that this model could be extended to parents of children with disability to strengthen parental resilience and to challenge stigma and discrimination. It is also recommended that professional in the field of special needs education engage teachers and parents in discussions related to parental beliefs about the etiology of disability and available therapeutic options. These would help raise awareness and contribute towards them making optimal interventions and therapeutic choices.

## 6. Conclusion

This study observed a range of challenges encountered by parents from teachers in Mombasa County that could have tremendous impact on the teaching and management of children with disabilities. Knowledge of teachers' experience in teaching children with disability is vital in addressing the unmet needs of children with disability. This knowledge could be important in the design of community-based interventions where parents can also play a role in the implementation and evaluation of the intervention.

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