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INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES IN HANDLING LEARNERS WITH DIVERSE NEEDS ON LEARNING AMONG PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN KIAMBU WEST SUB-COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Learning of preschool children continues to face numerous challenges where learners have registered and continued to register dismal grades in basic numeracy, language and creativity skills. Thus, the study examined the influence of teachers' instructional practices in handling learners with diverse needs in Kiambu County, Kenya. The objective, of the study was to investigate the influence of teachers' instructional practices in handling learners with diverse needs. The study adopted mixed methods approach, concurrent triangulation design. Target population comprised of 80 head teachers, 187 preschool teachers and 240 parents' representatives and 2400 preschool learners all totaling to 2907. Stratified sampling was applied to create five strata based on number of zones. From each zone, two head teachers and 11 preschool teachers were selected using purposive sampling. 4 parents' representatives and 48 preschool learners were selected using simple random sampling. Questionnaires were used to collect data from preschool teachers and interview schedules were used to collect data from head teachers. Focus group discussion was used to collect data from parents' representatives and observation checklists were used for collection of data from preschool learners. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically along the objectives and presented in narrative form whereas quantitative data was analyzed descriptively and inferentially using statistical package for social science (SPSS 23) and presented using statistical tables. The study established that preschool teachers with positive attitudes, interests and trained enhance learning in preschools. The study established that preschool teachers who doesn't engage learners in collaborative activities such as, mixed ability grouping, play, peer teaching, remedial work, provision of favorable learning environment and engaging parents do not enhance preschool learners' language skills, numeracy skills and learners' acquisition of creativity skills. The study recommends that teachers should understand the effectiveness of positive attitudes, interests and training in harnessing learners' academic, disciplinary and behavioral skills.

Keywords: Learners with Diverse needs, instructional practices, Literacy, Numeracy, literacy, creativity

INTRODUCTION

Globally, teachers adopt a variety of instructional practices and provide tools, organize workshops and guidance for individuals or children to adapt to new lifestyles. Cognizant of this assertion, Amarel (2008) and Ball (2000) indicate that such practices involves children's academic and social skills as they join school and teachers' instructional practices to serve all children. Despite these assertions, little is known about how instructional practices teachers adopt enhance learning in preschool settings which have become a virtual mantra of development. Recently, largely as a result of the interest in the contribution of learning theories, researches are more able to differentiate instructional practices by reference to developmental levels of children (Borrowman, 2001).

Combs, Blume, Newman and Wales (2000) define desires for children as a process by which learning is seen in a holistic non-compartmentalized manner. The integral means of learning are Play, first-hand experiences and talk. Children's ability to explore and imagine on their own is provoked by open-ended inquiries so as to cope with their surroundings. Learners with disabilities have become part of the general education, receiving a meaningful curriculum with necessary support, and being taught with effective strategies (Bennett, DeLuca & Bruns, 2011). The underlying premise of the integration/inclusion is that principles of equity, social justice, anti-discrimination, and basic human rights make it imperative that preschool learners with disabilities and special needs should enjoy the same access as all other preschool learners to a regular school environment and to a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum (Brackenreed, 2008). Over the past two to three decades, in most developed countries such as United States there has been a significant trend towards the placement of preschool learners with special educational needs in mainstream schools rather than in segregated special schools and special classes (Bunch, Lupart & Brown, 2007), a move referred to variously as integration, mainstreaming and more recently, inclusion. The inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms has become the basis of extensive research in education. As attention increases to ensure that all learners reach common standards, there is also more attention focused on integrating

preschool learners with disabilities into general education classrooms (Bunch *et al*, 2007). However, it is important to note, that the physical placement of preschool learners with disabilities in general education classes is not an end in itself, but rather a means to an end.

It is common in public school environments for special and general education teachers to work primarily with different groups of teachers and to utilize different strategies and methods to deliver instruction, intervene on student behavior, and evaluate progress (Bunch *et al*, 2007) where teachers may even work in separate schools or different parts of the building educators are being forced to step outside of their traditional roles and learn to work together by the current movement toward inclusion of all students with disabilities in the general education environment.

The bedrock of inclusion process is the assumption that the general classroom teacher has certain knowledge and understanding about the needs of different learners, teaching techniques and curriculum strategies. The result is both academic and social benefits for all preschool learners, such as social interaction and providing opportunities for communication. Teachers currently working within the public-school environment may be able to provide the best insight into the supports that are necessary to facilitate successful collaboration between professionals (Idol, 2006). From an educator's perspective, several common supports have emerged.

Adequate time for planning and communication, instructional support, administrative support and the need for training and professional development opportunities in collaboration are some of the emerging support systems. While educators were able to identify that these supports would be beneficial in theory, in practice they were not always available (Bradley *et al*, 2008). In most cases one must be present for the others to occur since these supports are interrelated, for example, without administrative support, teachers will not receive adequate time for planning and communication or opportunities for professional development. In addition, if there is not time for educators to discuss and plan to implement new strategies and methods, there is no benefit to professional development.

The most frequently support identified by professionals needed to facilitate the inclusion of preschool learners with disabilities was training, professional development opportunities in collaboration and co-teaching (Johnson, 2000). Increased implementation of collaborative practices has been associated with training programs and professional development in public schools. Determining the success of the programme the evaluation of teachers' attitudes towards inclusion appears to be a good method and for such inclusion to occur, strategies adopted by preschool teachers come in handy. Cartledge and Kourea (2008) posit that teachers' ability to handle and teach learners with diverse needs is important aspect teachers' characteristics. The achievement gap in outcomes for learners of color and those with disabilities has fueled the discourse around methods of best preparing teachers to meet the needs of the most vulnerable learner populations (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Trent, Kea, & Oh, 2008). A study conducted in the Netherlands, Milner (2010) observed that preparing educators for effective teaching of learners of varying academic abilities and culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds is one of the most challenging tasks faced by general and special education teacher preparation programs. This indicates the need for a continued shift to a more responsive and inclusive focus in teacher education programs for general and special education is evident. In the field of special education teacher preparation in particular has evolved from medical models of disability and distinct clinical approaches to more inclusive models of educational environments for instructional delivery to learners with learning disabilities (LD) (Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely & Danielson, 2010). Legislative mandates spanning the Education for all Handicapped Children Act in 1975 to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) indicate the changing concepts that have required adaptation of teacher preparation approaches.

Teachers' ability to respond appropriately and flexibly to preschool learners' different needs is reflected by quality instruction therefore teachers should adjust their instructional practices to support individual preschool learners' learning. Teachers may for example use cooperative learning in some tasks and provide multi-sensory stimuli in some other tasks. Teachers need to possess rich knowledge and skills in using different strategies and content to exercise activities such sound judgments to improve every preschool learner's learning and achievement. Through utility of such knowledge and skills teachers can make professional decisions on the most appropriate instructional practices to support preschool learners under different circumstances.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, teachers who are not confident in their ability to teach challenging learners are more likely to rate the general education classroom as an inappropriate setting to meet the needs of low performing and/or racially/ethnically diverse learners (Podell & Soodak, 2003). Opportunities and ideas for building positive relationships with learners and families from culturally diverse backgrounds can be enhanced by teacher diversity

capital which is intended to employ the type of teaching enhancement that embraces emotion and drives teachers to seek new knowledge. As a result, diversity capital can in turn afford teachers the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for a sustainable commitment to, validation of, and exchange with culturally diverse students and families. Though, in most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, inclusion of preschool learners with special needs has been widely researched in many countries, the available evidence is not consistent (Winzer, 2009).

Besides knowing the general characteristics of children with special needs, instructional practices for preschool learners with special needs still need to be individualized. Therefore, it is important for teachers to realize their expectations of their preschool learners. In a study conducted in Nigeria, Esteve (2000) indicated that preschool learners with special needs such as autism often have spatial strengths. Cognizant of these assertions, teachers can modify their instructional strategies in a number of ways. Teachers should demonstrate and model expected skills.

For example, if the teacher expects a preschool learner with special needs to place his or her book bag in his or her cubby when he gets to class in the morning, the teacher should demonstrate exactly how this is done. This implies that, underlying the process of inclusion is the assumption that, the general classroom teacher has certain knowledge and understanding about the needs of different learners, curriculum strategies and teaching techniques. In addition, teacher preparation courses need to incorporate more interpersonal communication skill building into curricula so that teachers are better prepared to develop shared meaning with families.

In a review conducted in Ghana, Berkeley *et al* (2009) asserted that, while positive attitudes may be able to transcend philosophical barriers to inclusion, they may not always translate into feeling prepared for the reality of inclusive teaching. Berkeley *et al* (2009) concluded that although most teachers held positive attitudes toward inclusion, teachers did not feel prepared for teaching students with exceptional needs, especially in the case of learners with severe learning difficulties and behavioral/emotional disorders. On the other hand, little is known about the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs in multicultural education and the effect such programs have on teacher instruction, epistemologies and beliefs in regards to the instruction of learners.

Lack of preparation in preservice coursework or professional in-service programs may lead to feelings inadequate once teachers engage in classroom environments where learner needs are diverse. In Kenya, the emphasis on meeting the needs of learners in preschool settings coupled with the move towards more inclusive practices in special education has led to the consideration of special education or disability as an “area of diversity” within many teacher preparation programs (Ministry of Education, 2012). The Council for Exceptional Children recommended diversity standards to be infused or embedded within courses across teacher education programs but are often addressed as a separate unit on diversity within programs (MoE, 2012). Many researchers however have opposed this approach and noted the importance of viewing disability as situated within a diverse sociocultural framework.

Mwangi and Njuguna (2011), in a review of the recent literature, found that the majority of the research on the preparation of pre-service teachers for diversity was conducted within general education teacher preparation programs. Inconsistent with such assertions, Okoth (2012) emphasized that such research should continue particularly for addressing issues of equity, privilege, and social justice, but there should be an increased focus on the relationship between teacher pedagogy and behaviors in the instruction of learners with within special education.

In Kiambu West Sub-county, the lack of emphasis on cultural diversity within special education teacher preparation programs may also be related to the primary focus on strategy instruction targeted to categorical learner characteristics and differentiation of instruction based on individual performance differences. Wilson (2010) asserts that school teams spend precious time creating the foundations of inclusive programs for preschool learners with disabilities. In addition, careful thought goes into training co-teaching partners scheduling co-taught classes, creating balanced classroom rosters, developing collaborative relationships and providing appropriate supports for students with disabilities (Wilson, 2010).

In Kiambu West Sub-county, however, even with well-planned inclusive services, general education teachers and co-teaching teams often struggle with how to effectively instruct preschool learners with diverse needs in general education classrooms. Despite these assertions, Wilson (2010) failed to specify the best inclusion strategies teachers need to adopt in order to enhance academic performance of preschool learners with diverse needs. Further, Wilson (2010) has not exhaustively indicated that teachers’ ability to handle and teach learners with diverse needs guarantee quality of learning; a research gap which this study sought to address.

Objective

To investigate Influence of Teachers Instructional Practices in Handling Learners with Diverse Needs on learning among Preschool Children in Kiambu West Sub-county, Kenya

Research Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant influence of teachers' instructional practices in Handling Learners with Diverse Needs on learning among Preschool Children in Kiambu West Sub-county, Kenya

METHODOLOGY

The study applied mixed methods approach, where, both qualitative and quantitative approaches were applied. According to Creswell (2009), in qualitative approach, the researcher relies on the views of participants, asks broad, general questions and collects data consisting largely of statements from the participants (Creswell,2009). In this case, the researcher described and analyzed these statements based on the objectives of the study. This kind of data was collected using an interview schedule guide, focus group discussion and an observation schedule. At the same time, the researcher adopted quantitative approach. Concurrent triangulation design was applied in this study since it is single-phase design in which the researcher implements the quantitative and qualitative methods during the same timeframe and with equal weight (Creswell, 2009). This design generally involved the concurrent, but separate, collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data so that the researcher may best understand the research problem. The researcher merged the two data sets by bringing the separate results together in the interpretation during the analysis.

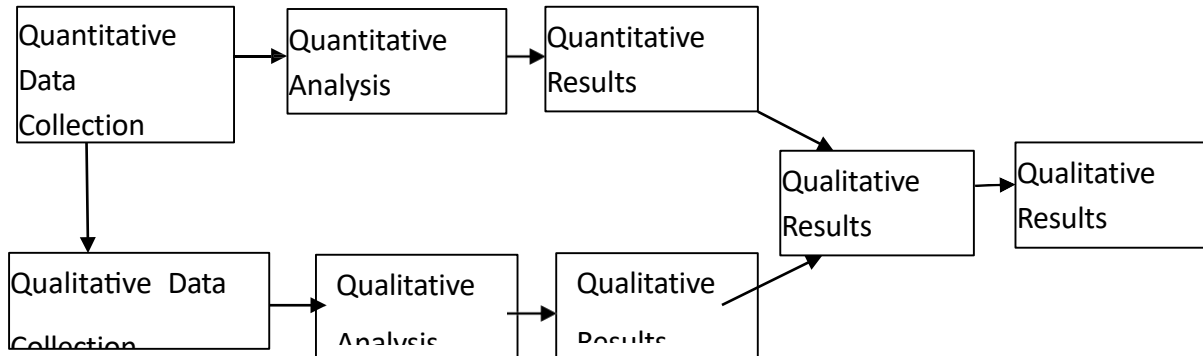


Figure 2. Concurrent triangulation design

Source: Adapted from Creswell (2009)

Using The Central Limit Theorem of sample size determination, a sample of 10 Preschools, that is, 12.5% of the targeted 80 Preschools, was selected. The Central Limit Theorem states that, for any sample size, $N \geq 30$ (N is the sample size), sampling distribution of means is approximately a normal distribution irrespective of the parent population. It thus allows the researcher to select, $N \geq 30$ from the target population (Kothari, 2005). Thus, from The Central Limit Theorem, the researcher sampled 326 respondents, that is, 11.2% of 2907. Stratified sampling was applied to create 5 strata based on the number of zones in Kiambu West Sub-county. From each stratum, 2 head teachers and 11 preschool teachers were selected using purposive sampling. The inclusion criterion was based on the Preschools which have registered low learning outcomes in basic numeracy, language and creativity skills. Purposive sampling was appropriate due to the fact that the sampled respondents hold responsibilities as implementers of ECD policies. Four parents' representatives and 48 preschool learners were selected using simple random sampling. This was appropriate since it eliminated bias and favoritism since there were equal chances of inclusion in the sample. This sampling procedure enabled the researcher to realize a sample of 10 head teachers, 56 Preschool teachers and 20 parents' representatives and 240 preschool learners.

Piloting of research instruments was conducted amongst 33 respondents (head teachers, preschool teachers, parents' representatives and preschool children) from preschools in the neighboring Kiambu East Sub-county since it has members of the relevant population, but not on those who formed part of the final sample. The purpose of piloting was to check on suitability and the clarity of the questions on the instruments designed, relevance of the information being sought and the language used and to test the reliability and validity of the instruments. The respondents who participated in the piloting of instruments were not included during the actual data collection. Questionnaires were

used for collection of data from preschool teachers. This was relevant since according to Morse (2000), a questionnaire consists of a series of questions and other prompts for the purpose of gathering information from respondents and is often designed for statistical analysis of the response. Nominal, ordinal and ratio data were also collected. The questionnaire had three sections designed to acquire information on the different variables of the study. Section A of the questionnaire gathered demographic information about preschool teachers' gender and level of education. Sections B, C, D, E and F of the questionnaire contained test items drawn from the study objectives. The test items containing 5-point Likert type of questions based on the research objectives were relevant since according to Creswell (2009), the Likert scale illustrates a scale with theoretically equal interval among responses.

The researcher also used structured interviews with open-ended test items to collect qualitative data from head teachers where the researcher developed an interview guide with a set of questions on the research objectives. Interviews were important for this study since it enabled the researcher to ask probing and supplementary questions and develop a good rapport with the respondents and a goal-directed attempt by the interviewer to obtain reliable and valid measures in the form of verbal responses from one or more interviewees. A focus group discussion was used to collect information on perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards a product, service, concept, advertisement, idea, or packaging of parents' representatives. Questions are asked in an interactive group setting where participants are free to talk with other group members.

The researcher divided the sampled parents' representatives (20) into 4 groups each consisting of 5 members. The questions for discussions were drawn from the objectives of the study. Observation Checklist for Preschool Learners was also used in data collection from the learners. This is a data collection instrument where systematic observations are made and results of such observations are recorded (Creswell, 2009). In this study, use of observation checklist was appropriate for gathering information from preschool children based on the objectives of the study. The researcher observed live lessons conducted by the preschool teacher and then assess the ability of preschool learners in basic numeracy, language and creativity.

To improve the validity of the instrument, the researcher and supervisors assessed the consistency of the responses on the piloted instruments to make a judgment on their reliability. The reliability of the instruments was established using split-half method where the researcher administered a set of test items to a group of respondents once and then divided the results into two categories, that is, halves, in odd and even patterns. Computation of the reliability coefficient between the scores of the two halves was carried out using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Formula. A reliability coefficient, $r = 0.7$ was obtained which indicated that there was high internal reliability.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed and then merged into one overall interpretation in which the researcher related the quantitative results to the qualitative findings. Frequency counts of the responses were then obtained so as to generate descriptive information about the respondents and to illustrate the general trend of findings on the various variables that were under investigation. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically along the research objectives and the basic quantitative data was analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages and inferentially analyzed using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Test Analysis in Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS V23).

Since the study involved concurrent triangulation design, the separately, but concurrently, collected data was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively and then merged into one overall interpretation in which the researcher related the quantitative results to the qualitative findings. Frequency counts of the responses were then obtained so as to generate descriptive information about the respondents and to illustrate the general trend of findings on the various variables that were under investigation. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically along the research objectives and the basic quantitative data was analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages and inferentially analyzed using Pearson's product moment correlation test analysis by use of Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS Version 23). The quantitative findings of the study were presented using tables whereas qualitative findings were presented thematically and in narrative forms.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study intended to find out whether teachers are prepared to handle preschool learners with diverse needs and its impact on learning processes in preschools. Data was collected from preschool teachers and organized into specific thoughts and results are indicated as shown in the Table below;

Summary of Test Items	N %	R %	S %	O %	VF %
Preschool teachers develop scheme of work and lesson plan to teach learners with diverse needs e.g. use of mixed ability grouping to assist slow learners	69.1	19.4	1.1	6.9	3.5
Preschool teachers interact with parents to assist learners from low socio-economic backgrounds	71.4	17.9	2.3	5.2	3.2
Preschool teachers attend training to assist learners with diverse needs	75.1	12.7	2.7	6.1	3.4
Preschool teachers interact with colleagues and parents to assist learners with learning difficulties	67.4	13.0	2.1	7.3	10.2
Preschool teachers give more attention to slow learners to enhance acquisition of numeracy, literacy creativity skills	72.3	10.9	1.3	8.7	6.8
Preschool teachers ensure interactive and collaborative learning environment for learners from both genders	77.2	12.1	2.2	4.9	3.6
Preschool teachers administer complex tasks to the gifted and talented learners to enhance acquisition of literacy, numeracy and creativity	71.6	10.4	1.1	10.7	6.2
Preschool teachers provide remedial work for learners with reading and writing difficulties	69.9	19.5	3.9	3.5	3.2
Preschool teachers ensure interactive and collaborative learning environment for learners from varied cultural backgrounds religious affiliations	70.9	11.3	4.7	5.9	7.2
Preschool teachers interact more with learners with attention deficit to enhance their acquisition of literacy, numeracy and creativity	72.3	10.9	1.3	8.7	6.8
Preschool teachers bond well with learners from both genders i.e. boys and girls	77.2	12.1	2.2	4.9	3.6
Preschool teachers ensure learners with physical challenges participate in play	71.6	10.4	1.1	10.7	6.2
Preschool teachers ensure mild visually impaired learners are positioned near the chalkboard	67.4	13.0	2.1	7.3	10.2

Key: **N**--Never **R**--Rarely **S**--Sometimes **O**--Often **VF**—Very Frequently

The study that a fair majority (69.1%) of the preschool teachers responded in favor of the view that they do not develop scheme of work and lesson plan to teach learners with diverse needs e.g. use of mixed ability grouping to assist slow learners. At the same time, 19.4% rarely do. On the contrary, only a small proportion of 1.1% of the preschool teachers indicated that they sometimes develop, 6.9% often develop whereas 3.5% very frequently develop. The study also revealed that majority (71.4%) of the preschool teachers revealed that they never interact with parents to assist learners from low socio-economic backgrounds as did 17.9% of the teachers who rarely interact. However, 2.3% of the preschool teachers sometimes interact, 5.2% often interact whereas 3.2% very frequently interact.

Similarly, majority (75.1%) of the sampled preschool teachers were in favor of the view that they do not attend training to assist learners with diverse needs as did 12.7% of the teachers who rarely attend training. However, 2.7% of the sampled preschool teachers sometimes attend, 6.1% often attend whereas 3.4% very frequently attend training. Majority (67.4%) of the sampled preschool teachers revealed that they do not interact with colleagues and parents to assist learners with learning difficulties as did 13.0% of the teachers who rarely do. However, 2.1% of the sampled preschool teachers sometimes interact, 7.3% often interact whereas 10.2% very frequently interact.

The study also established that majority (72.3%) of the sampled preschool teachers revealed that they do not give more attention to slow learners to enhance acquisition of numeracy, literacy and creativity skills. At the same time, 10.9% rarely give more attention. However, 1.3% of the sampled preschool teachers sometimes give more attention, 8.7% often give more attention whereas 6.80% very frequently give more attention.

Majority (72.3%) of the preschool teachers responded in favor of the view that they never interact more with learners with attention deficit to enhance their acquisition of literacy, numeracy and creativity skills as did 10.9% who rarely do. On the other hand, 1.3% of the sampled preschool teachers indicated that they sometimes ensure interactive and collaborative learning environment, 8.7% often do whereas 6.8% very frequently ensure such interactive and collaborative learning. An impressive majority (77.2%) of the sampled preschool teachers indicated that they do not ensure interactive and collaborative learning environment for learners from both genders. At the same time, 12.1% rarely ensure. However, 2.2% of the preschool teachers sometimes ensure, 4.9% often do whereas 3.6% very frequently ensure.

Majority (70.9%) of the sampled preschool teachers responded in favor of the view that they never ensure interactive and collaborative learning environment for learners from varied cultural backgrounds religious affiliations as did 11.3% who rarely do. On the other hand, 4.7% of the sampled preschool teachers indicated that they sometimes ensure interactive and collaborative learning environment, 5.9% often do whereas 7.2% very frequently ensure such interactive and collaborative learning. The study also revealed that majority (71.6%) of the preschool teachers indicated that they never administer more complex tasks to the gifted and talented learners to enhance acquisition of literacy, numeracy and creativity skills as did 10.4% of the teachers who rarely administer. On the other hand, 1.1% of the sampled preschool teachers sometimes administer, 10.7% often administer whereas 6.2% very frequently administer. A fair majority (69.9%) of the sampled preschool teachers indicated that they do not provide remedial work for learners with reading and writing difficulties as did 19.5% of the teachers who rarely provide. On the other hand, 3.9% of the preschool teachers indicated that they sometimes provide, 3.5% often provide whereas 3.2% very frequently provide.

Majority (77.2%) of the sampled preschool teachers responded in favor of the view that they never bond well with learners from both genders i.e. boys and girls as did 12.1% who rarely do. On the other hand, 2.2% of the sampled preschool teachers indicated that they sometimes bond, 4.9% often do whereas 3.6% very frequently bond. Majority (71.6%) of the sampled preschool teachers responded in favor of the view that they never allow learners with physical challenges participate in play activities as did 10.4% who rarely do. On the other hand, 1.1% of the sampled preschool teachers indicated that they sometimes allow, 10.7% often do whereas 6.2% very frequently allow.

Majority (67.4%) of the sampled preschool teachers responded in favor of the view that they never ensure mild visually impaired learners are positioned near the chalkboard as did 13.0% who rarely do. On the other hand, 2.1% of the sampled preschool teachers indicated that they sometimes ensure interactive ensure, 7.3% often do whereas 10.2% very frequently ensure. These findings lend credence to the findings of a study conducted in the Netherlands in which Milner (2010) observed that preparing educators for effective teaching of learners of varying academic abilities and culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds is one of the most challenging tasks faced by general and special education teacher preparation programs.

The findings also corroborate the findings of NCES (2009) which indicated that when learners are taught with culturally responsive techniques and content specific strategies they make significant academic gains, regardless of teachers' racial/ethnic background. Thus, the need for a continued shift to a more responsive and inclusive focus in teacher education programs for general and special education is evident. These findings are also consistent with the assertions of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) which indicates that general education teachers frequently believe they cannot meet the needs of those learners who fall outside the norm and that placing learners in special education is believed to be the best option for both the individual learner and the teacher. These findings further lend credence to the findings of a review conducted in Ghana in which Berkeley *et al* (2009) indicated that, while positive attitudes may be able to transcend philosophical barriers to inclusion, they may not always translate into feeling prepared for the reality of inclusive teaching. Berkeley *et al* (2009) concluded that although most teachers held positive attitudes toward inclusion, teachers did not feel prepared for teaching learners with exceptional needs, especially for learners with severe learning difficulties and behavioral/emotional disorders.

Berkeley *et al* (2009) asserted that lack of preparation in pre-service program coursework or professional in-service programs may translate into feelings of inadequacy once teachers enter classroom environments where learner needs are diverse. In the same vein, these findings are also consistent with the assertions of Podell and Soodak (2003) that teacher diversity capital is intended to name the type of teaching enhancement that embraces emotion and drives teachers to seek new opportunities and ideas for building positive relationships with learners and families from culturally diverse backgrounds. These findings corroborate assertions of Ministry of Education (2012) that, in Kenya,

the Council for Exceptional Children recommended diversity standards to be infused or embedded within courses across teacher education programs but are often addressed as a separate unit on diversity within programmes.

Inferential Findings on the Influence of Teachers’ Instructional Practices for Collaboration and Learning of Pre-School Children

To verify the possibility of relationship between teachers’ instructional practices in handling learners with diverse needs and preschool children’s performance, data was collected on how often preschool teachers have been trained to handle such learners and learners’ academic performance in basic numeracy, language and creativity skills. The results are shown in the Table below;

Frequency of Training	Academic Performance (Mean score, %)		
	Basic Numeracy	Language	Creativity
1	43	27	26
2	58	42	45
3	66	63	56
4	60	55	65
5	63	62	60
6	70	69	59

The results indicate that preschool teachers who have undergone several training sessions have their preschool register impressive grades in basic numeracy, language and creativity skills. These findings were consistent with the assertions of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) which indicates that general education teachers frequently believe they cannot meet the needs of those learners who fall outside the norm and that placing learners in special education is believed to be the best option for both the individual learner and the teacher. Such learners are able to register good academic grades (IDEA (2004). These results were further subjected to Pearson’s product Moment Correlation Test Analysis and results were as shown in the Table below:

		Frequency	Basic Numeracy	Language	Creativity
Frequency of Training	Pearson Correlation	1	0.822*	0.890*	0.818*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.045	0.017	0.046
	N	6	6	6	6
Basic Numeracy	Pearson Correlation	0.822*	1	0.966**	0.858*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.045		0.002	0.029
	N	6	6	6	6
Language	Pearson Correlation	0.890*	0.966**	1	0.891*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.017	0.002		0.017
	N	6	6	6	6
Creativity	Pearson Correlation	0.818*	0.858*	0.891*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.046	0.029	0.017	
	N	6	6	6	6

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results are presented in a matrix form such that the correlations are replicated. A Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was run to determine the relationship between how often preschool teachers under training to handle learners with diverse needs and preschool children’s academic performance in basic numeracy, language and creativity skills. The test generated which generated correlation coefficients of $r=0.822$, 0.890 and 0.818 respectively with corresponding and significant levels (p-values) of 0.045 , 0.017 and 0.046 respectively which were less than the predetermined level of significance, 0.05 , that is, $p\text{-value} = 0.045, 0.017, 0.046 < 0.05$. These findings were significant and thus indicate that there is significant relationship between teachers’ instructional practices to handle learners with diverse needs and preschool children’s acquisition of basic numeracy, language and creativity skills. Thus, the Null Hypothesis, H_0 , is rejected. These results were consistent with the findings of a study conducted in Kenya by

Ministry of Education (2012) which generated a p-value of $0.042 < 0.05$. These results affirm the fact that teachers' instructional practices to handle learners with diverse needs enhance learning of preschool children process.

The interviewees and discussants also responded in favor of the view that preschool teachers do not develop scheme of work and lesson plan to teach learners with diverse needs like use of mixed ability grouping to assist slow learners do they interact with parents to assist learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. Most importantly, the head teachers and parents' representatives indicated that most preschool teachers do not attend training to assist learners with diverse needs. Headteacher, H6 and parents' representative, PR6, observed: '*Preschool teachers do not attend training on how to handle learners with diverse needs nor do they interact with colleagues and parents to assist learners with learning difficulties*'.

CONCLUSION

When learners are taught with culturally responsive techniques and content specific strategies they make significant academic gains, regardless of teachers' background. Thus, the need for a continued shift to a more responsive and inclusive focus in teacher education programs for general and special education is evident. In the same vein, the study has established that most preschool teachers do not give more attention to slow learners to enhance acquisition of numeracy, literacy and creativity skills nor do they interact more with learners with attention deficit to enhance their acquisition of literacy, numeracy and creativity skills.

These indicates that most preschool teachers cannot meet the needs of those learners who fall outside the norm and that placing learners in special education is believed to be the best option for both the individual learner and the teacher. Most preschool teachers do not ensure interactive and collaborative learning environment for learners from both genders nor do they ensure interactive and collaborative learning environment for learners from varied cultural backgrounds and religious affiliations. These findings attest to the fact that, while teachers' positive attitudes may be able to transcend philosophical barriers to inclusion, they may not always translate into feeling prepared for the reality of inclusive teaching. Besides, although most teachers held positive attitudes toward inclusion, teachers do not feel prepared for teaching learners with exceptional needs, especially in the case of learners with severe learning difficulties and behavioral/emotional disorders. In other words, lack of preparation in pre-service program coursework or professional in-service programs may translate into feelings of inadequacy once teachers enter classroom environments where learner needs are diverse.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers need to acquire skills necessary in handling learners with special needs. Preschool teachers need to understand they ought not to work in isolation in order to enhance learning of preschool children. On the same breath, parents need to be sensitized that they play critical roles on the education of their children and thus should avoid hands-off approach and stand-alooft attitude.

The Ministry of Education and Policymakers should ensure that preschool teachers adopt collaboration strategies which are learner-centered to improve basic numeracy, language and creativity skills amongst preschool learners. Policies should be formulated to ensure that teacher education programmes are enriched with relevant content to make teachers more competent in handling learners with diverse needs.

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