# TEACHERS' PREPAREDNES IN IDENTIFICATION OF APPROPRIATE INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR USE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS PUPILS IN REGULAR PRE-SCHOOLS IN THARAKA-NITHI COUNTY, KENYA

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**Abstract:**
Children with special needs are found in all ages and class levels within the school system. What is of concern is their school performance most of which is below average since they have some difficulties that affect their learning. Use of appropriate instructional strategies by special needs education (SNE) teachers, ensure that such children are actively engaged in meaningful and challenging learning activities that meet their educational needs by use of appropriate instructional strategies. The main objective of this research paper is thus to present findings of a study conducted on the preparedness of teachers with regard to competence to identify appropriate instructional strategies for use with special needs pupils in regular pre-schools in Tharaka South Sub-county of Tharaka-Nithi County, Kenya in order to enhance their learning. Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences was employed to guide the descriptive research study, using the survey oriented. Data were obtained from 31 (30%) regular pre-schools that were randomly sampled from 102 pre-schools and a similar number of pre-school teachers, purposively sampled. using questionnaires for teachers, as well as observation guide. Analysis of data was done both qualitatively and quantitatively. The findings of the study revealed that extra assignments and exercises were the instructional strategies majorly used by teachers (100%), self-pacing (64%), adapting curriculum (22%), remedial classes (53%), repetition of content (67%), and peer tutoring (95%). Chi square test further revealed a significant relationship ($X^2$ (4, N=31) =21.47, p<0.80) between teachers' preparedness in competence to identify appropriate instructional strategies for use with

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special needs learners. A blend of these strategies has been advocated for by special education scholars for meeting the educational needs of this category of learners. However, to attain maximum gains for these learners, the study recommended that pre-school teachers needed to enroll for higher levels of training in order to have a wide knowledge on the trending changes on instructional strategies in special needs education.

**Keywords:** instructional strategies, Special Needs Education (SNE), educational requirements

## 1. Introduction

Learning is a phenomenon that enhance acquisition of new skills or knowledge that is defined by aspects like understanding, relating ideas, connecting new knowledge to the prior knowledge, analyzing the content learnt and the ability to use the learnt skills across contexts. Learning is deemed effective when there is a notable change in functionality that is brought about by the experience a learner is exposed to by the teacher (Lachman, 1997).

Every child having special needs has limiting characteristics depending on the type and severity of the need, a situation that challenges the learning compared to an average child (Fletcher, Dejud, Klingler and Mariscal, 2003). Teachers therefore need to develop a different set of skills and knowledge during instruction, than traditionally required by the profession in order to cater for the needs of every child for an effective learning. The roles of teachers ranges from solely being a teacher to becoming a class room manager, who has to plan and implement the classroom activities by designing appropriate instructional strategies considering the abilities of all children for an effective instructional programme (Hunter and Rassel, 1997).

All children have abilities to learn. However, they differ in learning rate and this may require use of different learning strategies. They may learn through exploration, discovery through child- initiated activities with the extra support from peers or guidance from a teacher. For the children with special needs to succeed in the classroom, there is need to use appropriate instructional strategies and classroom activities that have been modified to meet the needs of every child (Listen, 2010). A child with special needs in regular preschools encounters obstacles like inaccessible content, insensitive and inexperienced staff, parameters that limit their level of functionality in the classroom. To promote learning in children with special needs in regular preschools, it is essential that teachers need to be innovative enough to modify and adapt the available educational resources and environment to design instructional strategies that matches the child's needs for them to participate fully in the learning activities. Instructional strategies are described as techniques used by teachers during teaching/ learning activities to help children attain educational goals such as social competence, effective communication, employability and personal independence.

According to the Salamanca Statement and Framework on Special Needs Education (1994), Convention on the Rights of the Child (1986), Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities (2006) and others, all children of school going age, with or without disabilities have the right to education. Kenya in its commitment to abide by the statutes, passed the children's Act in 2001 and the Disability Act in 2003. Despite the measures taken by the government to ensure equal educational opportunities to all children, there are challenges that face the education of children with special needs as indicated by Kibet (2012) and Nadia (2012). One of the challenges being the appropriate use of instructional strategies by teachers in classrooms. Fletcher et al, 2003 indicated that learners who have special needs in education require additional instructional strategies above the average child. This implies that for this right to education of children who have special needs to be realized, teachers who teach them must be equally more prepared in terms of knowledge pertaining use of appropriate instructional strategies and resources in their classrooms. There was therefore the need for this study to answer the major question of instructional strategies teachers' use to enhance learning of children with special needs in regular pre-schools in Tharaka south sub-county.

## 2. Purpose of the study

The purpose of study was to establish the influence of instructional strategies teachers used to enhance learning of children with special needs in public pre-schools, with the aim of suggesting remedies that could be put in place to alleviate the problems encountered during instruction.

## 3. Reviewed literature

Use of appropriate instructional strategies for children with special needs is crucial if these learners are to benefit from school. Failure in this endeavor may lead to their educational requirements going unmet (Fletcher et al, 2003). This would further jeopardize the overall goal of Education which is to ensure that all children in school participate to their utmost potential as well as infringe on article 26 of 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that every individual has the right to quality education where elementary education should be free and directed to the full development of the human personality. Some of the strategies that teachers can use in teaching such learners include curriculum differentiation, tiered lessons, Curriculum extensions, grouping and self pacing to develop the areas of strength within every child from the struggling learner to the active learner.

Curriculum differentiation refers to the need to tailor teaching environments, curriculum and instructional practices to create appropriately different learning experiences for different learners. It's an instructional approach that assumes students need many different avenues to reach their learning potentials (Tomlinson, 2001). It can address the content covered, assessment tools, the task learners complete and

instructional strategies employed (Tomlinson et al., 2002). Teachers can differentiate whatever they expect from a child by designing objectives of a lesson and activity that range from less complex levels to more complex levels of interaction with materials.

Teachers can extend the curriculum for gifted learners by having those learners participate in activities that move up the taxonomy, from applying information and knowledge to solve novel problems to synthesizing information in order to create new structures or patterns. Such activities teach learners the skills needed to be more creative and develop effective thinking skills (Tumbull, et al., 2007).Tiered lessons refer to a differentiated instructional strategy that provides different extensions of the same basic lesson for groups of learners of differing abilities (Heward, 2006). On the other hand, curriculum extensions refer to the efforts to expand the breadth of the coverage of a given topic. It involves additional services or accommodations such as more practice or explanation and repetition of information.

Walker (1978) states that ability grouping is used widely in many school systems where learners are dividend according to their abilities. Self pacing methods such as the Montessori Method use flexible grouping practices to allow children to advance at their own pace. Self pacing can be beneficial for all children. Within-class grouping is also part of the universal design concept for learning (UDL), and it can be effective at all schooling levels and for learners who have many types of special needs. Learners within the same heterogeneous class are grouped for instruction according to their achievement. The most common form of within-class grouping is regrouping by subject, learners are generally grouped into three or more levels, and they study materials from different textbooks at different levels (Friend, 2008; Heward, 2006). Another form of within-class grouping is cluster grouping, in which several talented learners receive specialized instruction from a teacher who treats them as talented. Four to six learners should make up a cluster. Cluster grouping can be used effectively at all grade levels and in all subject areas. It can be especially effective when there are not enough students to form an advanced placement section for a particular subject. Cluster grouping is also a welcome option in rural settings or wherever small numbers of learners with specials needs make appropriate accommodations difficult (Heward, 2006).

## 4. Research methodology

The study focused on teachers' preparedness in identification of appropriate instructional resources for use to enhance learning of special needs pupils in pre-school, using the descriptive research design and specifically the survey method in order to document current conditions that existed in the given study context (Wimmer & Dominick, 1987). A survey as Neuman (2000 p21) states, was also appropriate as a means of gathering information to describe the nature of extent of the specific set of study data ranging from physical counts and frequencies to attitudes and opinions. The design was used to collect information from a target population of teachers by administering questionnaires to them (Orodho, 2003). Random sampling procedure was used to select

31 pre-schools (30%) out of 102 public pre-schools while purposive selection of one teacher per each school was done, but where there was more than one teacher, random sampling applied.

For data analysis, both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed because the data generated consisted both numeric and non-numeric values. Specifically, qualitative data were analyzed thematically using narratives. Quantitative data on the other hand were analysed using frequency tallies and Chi square test used on inferential data to determine whether there was a statistical significant relationship or not between pre-school teachers' preparedness and identification of appropriate instructional strategies for use with children with special needs.

## 5. Findings and Discussions

The purpose of study was to establish the influence of instructional strategies teachers use to enhance learning of children with special needs in public pre-schools. A total of 62 teachers (12 male and 50 female) were sampled. Their demographic information shows that none of them had a degree in ECE level of training, with most of them, 61% (19) being Certificate holders, 32% (10) at Diploma level while 7% (2) were untrained. Most of them 46 (74%) had work experience of above 6 -10 years in handling learners in pre-schools, 12 (19%) had between 1-5 years while 4 (7%) had 11-15 years' work experience.

When asked of the strategies they used to teach the learners with special needs in their classes, the teacher respondents cited the strategies as shown in Table 1 below:

**Table 1:** Instructional Strategies Used by Pre-school Teachers to Teach SNE Learners

| Instructional strategy | % of teachers | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Extra assignments | 100% | 31 |
| Self-pacing | 64% | 20 |
| Adapting curriculum | 22% | 68 |
| Remedial classes | 53% | 16 |
| Repetition of content | 67% | 21 |
| Exercises | 100% | 31 |
| Peer tutoring | 95% | 29 |

The findings in Table 1 indicate the instructional strategies employed by pre-school teachers to teach children with special needs in the sampled schools. The findings show that all the sampled teachers made use of extra assignments and exercises. 95% of the teachers indicated use of peer teachers, 67% repetition of content, 64% self-pacing, 53% remedial classes and only a few, 22%, adapted the curriculum.

Observation made by the researcher during learning found that the teachers spent extra time with some learners whom they had identified as having special needs. Also, the teachers were seen attending to those learners individually during free periods. From observations on the learners' books, the researcher found out that the learners were given exercises and extra work for more practice. This concurs with Tomlinson (2001) and

Heward (2006) that different instructional strategies such as more practice of content, explanation and repetition of information to the learners with special needs would make them more conversant with the concepts and content being covered in class.

To find out whether any significant relationship existed between teachers' preparedness in terms of competence and identification of appropriate instructional strategies for use with learners with special needs, Chi square test was administered as Table 2 below indicates.

**Table 2:** Chi-Square Test on Teachers' Preparedness in Competence to
Use Appropriate Instructional Strategies with Special Needs Learners

|  | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2- sided) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 21.563[a] | 4 | .000 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 22.174 | 4 | .000 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | .027 | 1 | .843 |
| N of Valid Cases | 31 |  |  |

Findings based on Table 2 reveal a statistical significant relationship between pre-school teachers' preparedness in competence to identify and use or provide appropriate instructional strategies for use with learners with special needs, $\chi^2$(4, N = 31) = 21, 47, p <0.80. Hence the hypothesis that stated, "There was no significant relationship between pre-school teachers' preparedness in competence to identify and use or provide appropriate instructional strategies for use with special needs learners," was rejected since it was evident that competence was importance in the identification and use of appropriate instructional strategies. However, although these findings tally with the findings of this study, the current world of education is changing with many sophisticated ways of acquiring knowledge, thus more updated and suitable instructional strategies should be continually sought.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

From the findings of this study, it is clear that pre-school teachers need to be adequately equipped with the skills that will enable them devise appropriate instructional strategies needed to meet the educational needs of learners with special needs in pre-school in order for them to fully make these learners realize their maximum potentials. Majority of the teachers however, had only the minimum training of Certificate level in ECDE and none of them had a degree in the area. A training only in Certificate was too minimal to equip these teachers with the requisite knowledge and skill for teaching learners with special needs. Hence it was recommended that there was need for pre-school teachers enrolling for higher level of training to gain more knowledge on the most effective instructional strategies that can enhance learning of children with special needs in regular classrooms. The government through the Kenya Institute of Curriculum development should strengthen the course on children with special needs to ensure that ECDE teachers being trained underwent a comprehensive training in the area for adequate knowledge and

skills. The Ministry of Education should similarly organize frequent refresher courses for the pre-school teachers in order to keep them on toes with the current trends and practices in special needs education

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