INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS WITH EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL DISORDERS IN NANDI CENTRAL SUB-COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract:
Some researchers argue that the most difficult learners to teach are those with emotional behaviour disorders. This is mainly due to the heterogeneous nature of this disability. Despite this, there exist appropriate research-based strategies to teach such learners. The main aim of this research was to investigate the strategies used to teach learners with EBD in the Nandi central sub-county and as well the challenges faced by teachers as they do so. Public schools should provide programs that enhance the educational and academic progress of both typically developing learners and those with EBD. Every child is entitled to free, appropriate education regardless of their disabilities. Academic performance of pupils with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBDs) in Kenya has been continuously dismal in both internal and external examinations. They commonly drop out of school prematurely and are more likely to be imprisoned at some point in their lifetime. This is because teachers use the same old strategies over and over again. This was mixed-method research that adopted a descriptive research design. The study was guided by Jean Piaget's constructivism theory (1995). According to Piaget, learners construct knowledge through experiences and interactions and not passively through receiving information. Constructivism motivates students to take an active role in their education. This is through relating new concepts to their own life experiences. It advocates for learner-centric approaches. The main tools of data collection in this research

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were questionnaires and in-depth interviews with both teachers and administrators. The findings indicated that teachers were not using EBD-friendly teaching and classroom management strategies. There was no appropriate use of multidisciplinary and collaboration team approaches either. There were also major deficits in resources and teaching and support personnel. The majority of teachers and administrators were not appropriately trained to teach learners with EBD. It was recommended that the government should fund the schools more and organise in-service professional development sessions.

1. Introduction

Emotional behaviour disorder refers to diverse conditions potentially impairing a child's learning, social functioning, safety, and behaviour. It is defined by the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) as a condition exhibiting one or more specific emotional and/or behavioural difficulties over a long period of time. The exhibition must happen to a marked degree and adversely affect educational performance (Gargiulo, 2010). Emotional difficulties such as anxiety, depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PSTD) tend to occur in late childhood. They are hard to detect by both parents and caregivers as children of that age have not developed vocabulary rich enough to express their emotions. Many clinicians and caregivers find it hard to distinguish between normal emotions in typically developing children, such as fears and anxieties, and prolonged emotional distress that qualify to be referred to as disorders (Ogundele, 2018).

For a child to be diagnosed with EBD, he should exhibit either or more of the following persistently and to a marked degree. Learning challenges at school are not associated with intellectual sensory or health problems. They may also have difficulties maintaining or establishing personal relations, exhibit behaviours and feelings that are inappropriate, have behaviours and feelings of depression, ongoing feelings of unhappiness and fears or physical symptoms relative to school or personal problems.

Characteristics of learners with EBD are generally a manifestation of externalised and internalised behaviours and addressing them can be a great challenge for teachers, parents, and other education stakeholders.

Learners with EBD present many long and short-term challenges, including poor academic performance, increased rate of being arrested at some point in life, and increased dropout rates. On the same note, complicating any effort of intervention is the heterogeneity within the condition. We have both externalised and internalised behaviour manifestations that require diverse intervention strategies.

Externalised behaviours are characterised by behavioural patterns directed outwards towards the social environment. This includes aggression, disruption and being hyperactive. Internalised behaviours are those behaviour patterns usually directed

at oneself. These include social withdrawal, depression, obsessive-compulsive behaviour and selective mutism (Gage, 2013).

In the USA, there are research findings which indicate students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorder (EBD) are arrested at a rate of 60% prior to leaving school, and 40% are on probation (Newman *et al.*, 2009). Further, 75% of students with EBD will be suspended or expelled prior to leaving school, and they are more likely than their peers to be retained in some classes (Wagner *et al.*, 2005). Students with EBD are at great risk of failure in school performance. These students have a low average GPA of 1.4. They miss an average of 18 days of school per year. Comparatively, this exceeds any other category of students in the USA.

Another concern is that only 42% of the category graduate from high school. Farther, 20% are arrested at least once in their school life. After leaving school, almost half of them get arrested within one year. The incarceration rate for those who drop out is even higher, with 73% of dropouts being arrested within two years. Sixty-eight percent are unable to get and keep employment after five years of leaving school. They are 8 times more likely to have a child in their teenage years than their typically developing counterparts (Cook, 2011). Finally, only 10% to 25% percent of students with EBD enrol in post-high school education.

Despite increased attention to the academic needs of pupils with EBDs, their academic achievement, like their behavioural and social skills, does not appear to improve (Lane *et al.*, 2008). Trained professionals, including instructor social workers and support, contribute to improved academic performance of pupils with EBDs. In the Netherlands, Cullinan and Sabornie (2004), conducted a study which established that when pupils are unable to negotiate social demands and meet teachers' expectations for school success, school becomes a formidable task. On the same note, in the absence of effective interventions, these behaviour patterns become more firmly established and less amenable to intervention efforts (Lane & Walker, 2015).

In South Africa, Berry and Guthrie's (2003) study exposed that learners with EBDs face serious problems in the education system. About forty-five percent of the teachers in South Africa leave the profession annually, citing learners' emotional and behavioural disorders as one of the reasons for doing so (Clarke, 2000). The involvement of pupils in violent activities is prevalent in almost every South African community, with juveniles arrested for violent crimes such as murder, forcible rape, robbery or aggravated assault. In Kenya, most learners with EBDs are in rehabilitation schools. The schools are more under the criminal justice system than the Ministry of Education. By the time learners land in these institutions, they have already contravened the law. It is extremely important that teachers are trained on various intervention strategies to ensure that learners with EBD are served in the education system instead of waiting when they break the law and are treated as criminals who need to be rehabilitated. They should taught with modifications and accommodations given to their learning challenges.

Teaching learners with EBD in Kenya has a cultural perspective. Different communities in Kenya perceive emotional and behavioural challenges differently. For

example, in communities in which boys are culturally trained to be warriors, engaging in physical activities perceived as a "fight" would commonly be acceptable. This could, however, be shunned in another community. Although Kenyan cultures are generally changing, the geographic location, education level, economic status, and religious affiliation are still contributory factors on how disabilities like EBD are perceived. It is important to conduct research on teachers' competence in using appropriate research-based strategies for learners with EBD. This will help devise appropriate intervention strategies to help enhance teachers' competence.

2. Statement of the Problem

An assessment report by the Ministry of Education (MoE) (2015) indicated that, despite noble steps towards mainstreaming primary school pupils with EBD, their academic performance in both internal and national examinations has been inconsistently poor. Individuals with disabilities in Kenya experience difficulties due to built-in social, cultural, and economic prejudices, stigmatisation, ostracism, and neglect. While education policies and the constitution entitle every child to free appropriate education, many learners with EBD drop out of school early due to frustrations and lack of teacher capacity. Teachers lack the appropriate skills to handle learners with EBD. After dropping out of school, they fall into the trap of violating the law, ending up in the criminal justice system at a very young age. They are sent to rehabilitation schools in an incoherent and non-coordinated way. Unfortunately, the criminal justice system has no capacity to differentiate law violators with EBD and those who are typically developing. Depending on the crime, they are sentenced to serve prison terms for a diverse number of years regardless of their having emotional behaviour disorders. They exit from rehab schools not when they graduate academically but when their prison time is done. They then get back to regular schools with no planned follow-up or integration plans. By the time they sit for their national examination, they perform pathetically poorly and cannot join high school or any tertiary institution. Finally, they end up being adult criminals and go back to the prison system as adults. Instead of contributing to the economy of the country like other typically developing peers, they become a burden to the government. They also become a threat to community security.

Teacher practices heavily determine levels of academic performance, and little has been done to interrogate how teachers' teaching strategies influence the academic performance of public primary school pupils with EBDs. In this modern age, teacher practices need to be enhanced to meet specific differences of learners with EBDs, thus improving their academic performance. The findings of this study may be used by the government to prepare in-service training courses as well as improve the way teacher training institutions prepare their teachers.

3. Methodology

The research took a mixed method research approach and adopted a descriptive research design. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used to collect data in a supplementary and triangulated way. Questionnaires in the form of a Likert scale were used to collect relevant information for the study from teachers. The respondents were required to indicate their views on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Strongly disagree and 5 = Disagree. For the interviews, open ended questions were asked to school administrators and teachers to help learn more about what was initially given as responses by teachers in the Likert scale questionnaire. Probing questions and member check techniques were used to increase the trustworthiness and credibility of qualitative data collected through interviews.

3.1 Data Collection Procedures

Teachers were given questionnaires to fill which were collected the same day. Data was immediately analysed using SPSS software. The outcome helped to design face-to-face interview questions to be asked of administrators and teachers for the purpose of triangulation. There were two trained research assistants who helped the researcher throughout the study.

3.2 Data Analysis

Using SPSS software, quantitative data was analysed and reported using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data from interviews was transcribed and read repeatedly to identify patterns and key themes. It was reported narratively.

4. Findings and Discussion

The main aim of the research was to establish whether there was use of appropriate instructional strategies for learners with EBD and teachers' perception of their competence on the same. Two data collection tools were used: Lickert scale questionnaires and in-depth interviews with teachers and administrators. To begin with, teachers were given Likert scale questionnaires. They were given statements and were required to either Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Undecided, Agree or Strongly Agree. Their responses are provided in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Use of appropriate strategies and teachers' perception

Statements		SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Teachers keep class rules and procedures	F	13	20	7	3	2	45
simple and clear	%	28.9	44.4	15.6	6.7	4.4	100
Teachers reward good behaviors of	F	4	29	5	5	2	45
learners with EBD	%	8.9	64.4	11.1	11.1	4.4	100
Teachers allow for mini-breaks during	F	4	29	6	4	2	45
classes to learners with EBD	%	8.9	64.4	13.3	8.9	4.4	100
Teachers practice fair treatment for	F	11	20	8	4	2	45
all learners with EBD	%	24.4	44.4	17.8	8.9	4.4	100

The findings showed that 73.3% (mean=4.00) perceived that teachers do not keep class rules, procedures and activities simple and clear, 73.3% (mean=4.00) were of the opinion that teachers do not reward good behaviour of learners with EBDs, 73.3% (mean=4.00) perceived that teachers do not recognize good behaviour in learners with EBDs and praise them, 68.8% (mean=3.12) perceived that teachers do not practise fair treatment for all learners with EBDs.

A teacher's ability to effectively manage the classroom and to organise instruction are basic components of teaching. Classroom management strategies have a strong potential to positively influence achievement and learning. They are a paramount concern for many teachers, especially those who are contemplating new instructional approaches for the first time (Evertson *et al.*, 2010).

Raising teachers' expectations and increasing teachers' sense of individual and collective efficacy was a complex concern in this research study. Leaders/administrators can create environments where reflective practices are integral to teachers' interdependent work. This leads to the benefits of increased efficacy and high degree expectations on what learners can accomplish or otherwise. By so doing, learners with EBD may feel a sense of belonging and boost their self-esteem and, therefore grow positively in their academics. To check on these, administrators were given a face-to-face interview. The responses are given and discussed below.

4.1 Administrators Interviews

Face to face interviews indicated that all was not perfectly well. All headteachers believed that teachers were not providing individualised instruction due to insufficient training. Asked what they perceived to be the skill competence level of their teachers, the following were the responses.

HD 1 had the following to say:

"When we ask for teachers from the Teachers Service Commission, we look to fill the gaps in our regular curriculum. We do not ask for specific skills needed to teach learners with disabilities. Precisely, the majority of our teachers have not been trained to teach learners with EBD. There is a big gap."

As noted in the above response, the majority of teachers have not been adequately trained to teach learners with EBD. Attitudes, perceptions and concerns of teachers greatly affect their ability to teach learners with disabilities. Teachers must feel competent in order to deliver (Odongo & Davidson, 2016). Research by Allam & Martin (2021) found that a good number of teachers teaching learners with various disabilities, including EBD, did not receive any form of training in their teacher training institution to give them sufficient skills to teach learners with special needs, including EBD. They, therefore, feel inadequate. This frustrates learners with EBD, who may end up dropping out of school prematurely and all graduate but perform poorly.

Another administrator, HD 2, had the following to say:

"Most of our supervision concern is the National exam performance. Some of us have no idea what EBD entails. We are head teachers by virtue of our training and experience in teaching learners who are typically developing. Ourselves and the majority of teachers have not benefited from any form of training on teaching learners with EBD or any other disability. Identifying appropriate skills amongst our teachers is therefore a challenge considering we are equally incompetent."

Teachers play a critical role in the education of learners with EBD. First, they are their advocates and as well they are the ones to teach and manage their behaviours. Due to poor preparation and lack of support to help improve their skills, research indicates that the majority of them plan to or commonly quit the profession within their first five years of service (Aderas & Bullock, 2010). Further, Teachers of learners with EBD are more likely to quit teaching compared to general education teachers and those teaching learners with other disabilities (Billingsley, 2004). This brings a discontinuity and leaves only novice teachers in the field. Experience is quite critical in teaching learners with EBD.

Asked what they felt about the availability, type and adequacy of resources to help learners with EBD, one head (HD 3), teacher had the following to say:

"While we appreciate the Ministry of Education for supplying free textbooks for every child, we have not seen much support for learners with exceptional needs, including EBD. We do receive support for our learners with severe intellectual disabilities in our special units but not the fairly moderate developmental disabilities like EBD."

Given the above responses, it is clear that resources are not adequate to support learners with EBD. Research indicates that the high cost of instructional materials for learners with special needs acts as a big barrier to access to education in many countries. Research by Mutugi (2018) found that the cost of instructional material for learners with Special Needs is far more costly compared to the cost for typically developing peers. Due to this, many learners do not get quality education and end up dropping out of school prematurely. They rarely proceed with post-secondary education.

Asked whether they avail themselves for I.E.P and multidisciplinary team meetings, one head teacher (HD5) responded as follows:

"While we would like to schedule time and avail ourselves for meetings, there is too much pressure on our side on syllabus coverage. We are promoted and judged by how our typically developing children perform in national examinations. On the same note, I.E.P and multidisciplinary teams require participation from other professionals, such as Behaviour analysts and psychologists, who are non-existent. The ministry has not provided any. This is a big limitation."

From the above response, it is evident that head teachers have challenges attending I.E.P. meetings and using a multidisciplinary team approach. Research indicates that collaboration with other professionals and a multidisciplinary team approach contributes positively to the quality of support given to learners with Special needs, including EBD (Bagadod & Saigh, 2016). This indicates that the majority of the learners with EBD, therefore, do not benefit from collaboration and a multidisciplinary approach.

4.2 Teachers' Interview Responses

After filling out the questionnaires, teachers were also subjected to interview questions. The questions sought to get more profound knowledge and clarification on some of the responses given in the Likert scale responses. First, they were required to explain whether they use differentiated instructions for learners with EBD. One of the teachers (T1) had the following to say:

"While it is the wish of every teacher to see all learners succeed in school and in class, we have challenges with strategies and teaching skills. I trained in a regular teacher training college, and hence, I have no skills at all in dealing with learners with any disability, let alone EBD. I have never received any in-service training. I am therefore unable to differentiate any instructions despite the willingness."

Asked whether they have been using I.E.P and multidisciplinary approach, one teacher (T3) had the following to say

"Personally, I believe in the use of both approaches. However, the pressure of work and the lack of trained support personnel like behaviour analysts, and overpopulated classes always work against the approach. It is not the fault of the teacher. I have 52 learners in my class. The teacher-student ratio is highly wanting."

A critical role of school administrators is supporting special educators' instructors in their schools. This includes attending I.E.P. meetings and supporting a multidisciplinary team approach (Gilson & Etscheidt, 2022). Instructional supervision

skills of school heads are crucial in fostering a culture of excellence and continuing school progress in academic institutions (Go & Eslabon, 2024).

Teachers were asked to comment on the use of Behaviour analyses and positive reinforcement as a teaching strategy. One of the teachers gave the following response.

"I do believe learners are supposed to be encouraged to behave appropriately. One limiting factor in this is the fact that some learners with EBD need tangible items to reinforce them. Some of these items need to be provided by the school or precisely be bought. Some parents are poor and neither do they want their children to overly rely on this. This makes the approach hard to use in class."

Given the above response, it is clear that learners with EBD never benefit from Applied behaviour analyses yet this is an approach that works perfectly well in developing countries. One of the most pressing social challenges in special needs education is funding. It is usually associated with an increase in enrolment without a proportional increase in funding. The financial burden has increased in aggregate and per pupil (CRC, 2012).

Similarly, another teacher (T3) had the following to say

"Some parents do not believe their learners with EBD have a disability. They are uncooperative, and they feel we are discriminating against their children. Some of the strategies we use here are not reciprocated at home. There is no consistence, and there is a great disconnect between home and school."

Given the above response, it is clear that there is no teamwork between teachers and parents. Behaviour management requires teamwork. Parents play a critical role in the education of every child but more so in the education of learners with special needs, inclusive of EBD. Having a child with a disability affects the psychology of the affected parents (Marfo *et al.*, 2020). Research indicates that many parents deny that their children have Special needs even after diagnosis. They live in a state of denial. This later is followed by anger. This is because of contemplating that disability has actually happened to them. This significantly affects their cooperation with teachers and other stakeholders to the detriment of learners with Emotional behaviour disorder (Rositas *et al.*, 2023). There is not a clear way of explaining how intensely a parent may experience a castellation of feelings when her child is dragonised with special needs, including EBD (Dan *et al.*, 2023).

Asked about the adequacy of support received from the administration, one teacher (T4) had the following response:

"We cannot blame the administration for not supporting us but I believe they could do better. Unfortunately, some of the administrators are willing to support us, but too much work pressure and lack of exposure to special education is a limiting factors. Some have no training at all."

From the above response, it is evident that many administrators are poorly equipped to offer support to teachers teaching learners with EBD. Professional standards for school administrators include diverse provisions addressing the need to have the knowledge and skills necessary to promote effective special education programs (Gilson & Etscheidt, 2023). As noted above, teachers felt they were not getting enough support from administrators for various reasons. The respondent does not seem to blame the administrators but, however, thinks head teachers would have been more efficient if they had a special education background. However, research by Shurr *et al.* (2023) found that not much difference exists between administrators' support by either leaders with Special needs training and those who do not. It is necessary that the administrators take their own initiative to gain appropriate administrative skills to support teachers teaching learners with Special needs education, including EBD. They play a significant role in multidisciplinary teams. Research by Bagadood and Saigh (2022) concluded that both teachers and administrators have challenges using a multidisciplinary team approach. It is critical that administrators work hand in hand with teachers and related stakeholders for the benefit of learners with EBD.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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