

**Academic Performance and Self Concept of Physically Challenged Children
in Regular Primary Schools in Kenya**

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Abstract

Physical disability has been for a long time viewed as an impediment to social development in the society. Most of the physically challenged children suffer so much from the stigma which accompanied their physical status. They are denied the opportunities which could have been a source of their livelihood in future. This kind of inhumane way of treatment usually pause so many psychological torture which make them to develop low self-concept. The main aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between academic performance and self-concept of physically challenged children in regular primary schools. This study employed both ex post facto (causal comparative) research designs. A total of 240 physically challenged children were selected through simple random sampling from five selected primary schools. Those who were selected to take part in the study were from standard 4, 6 and 8. The research instrument was questionnaires and schedule interviews. Data analysis was done using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings showed that there is significant relationship between self-concept and academic performance of physically challenged children in primary schools. The results were found to be useful in sensitising the society on the significance on the importance of education of physically challenged children.

Key Words: Academic performance, Self-concept and Physical disability

Introduction

In most of the contemporary societies, persons with disabilities are viewed as people who develop and function much as others do, though their progress may be slower and their achievements may be lower (Ndurumo, 1996). Introduction of integration policy in 1990 in Kenya has greatly enhanced enrolment of physically challenged children in regular primary school (MOEST, 2003). In integrated schools, physically challenged children learn communication skills; increased numbers of social bodies directed towards peers and enhances social responsiveness (Staub & Hunt, 1993). When children are integrated into regular programme, special designations and labels disappear, costs are lowered through elimination of special budgets and the focus becomes excellence for all. As the children continue interacting with their peers in school, they will be able to develop positive self-image, which will enable them to sail through the storms and stresses of life in order to succeed in life and to become what they are capable of becoming. Much of zeal for the practice of integration is a blanket policy system from the anticipated effects in the social-emotional domain where

physically challenged children are accepted because of contact and familiarity will naturally model the appropriate behaviours of peers; will not suffer the stigma of special classes and will be provided a more real life environment of learning (Kauffman, 1993).

In recent years a body of research has emerged documenting that physically challenged children may benefit socially and educationally from being in a class with non-physically challenged children (Cordesco & Laus, 1993). The major objective of integration programme is to provide quality education and opportunities as well as encouragement for each child to develop his/her potentials fully (Marinelli & Orto 1977). It was with this observation that the researcher felt the need of investigation the relationship between physical disability and academic performance of physically challenged children in public primary schools.

The Objective of the Study

The objectives of this study were:-

- 1) To investigate the relationship between academic performance and self-concept of physically challenged children in integrated primary schools.
- 2) To investigate the effect of class level on self-concept of physically challenged children in primary schools.

Null Hypotheses

The hypotheses of this study were stated in null form as follows:

Ho1: There is no statistically significant relationship between academic performance and self-concept of physically challenged children in integrated primary schools.

Ho2: There is no statistically significant relationship between class level and self-concept of physically challenged children in primary schools.

Related Literature

Academic Performance

“Children with physical disabilities function normally academically in regular schools but the school teacher has a big role in counselling the child to be able to deal with his/ her feelings – hostility, aggression, self pity and dependency” (Ingule, Rono & Ndambuki, 1996, p. 241). The children who are not paralysed and whose arms are not affected can do well in integrated schools with their counterparts and can do better even than non-physically challenged children in their class work (Overton, 1996).

According to Mead’s Theory (1934), the self-concept of individual depends on how he/she will conceive one’s self in the way significant others conceive him/her. It should be noted that self-concept has a lot of influence on how a person responds to his disability. The academic performance is likely to be

affected especially when they are hospitalised due to illness or operations. Disability also has depressing effect and so it can affect the academic achievements of all learners. Burns (1979) observes that children with low self-esteem usually do poorly in their academic performances. These children often view themselves as less adequate, with less freedom and inadequate emotional expression (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1991). Self-concept determines to a great degree the extent to which learners perceive themselves from what they learn from the significant others. The formation of self-concept should be in the jurisdiction of parent and peers depending on the level of interaction. Academic performance does not depend only on cognitive ability, but it is also affected by the self-concept, the dynamic and motivating set of attitudes held about oneself. Jones and Greneeks (1970) reported that there is a positive relationship between measures of self-perception and academic performances.

Integration and Academic Performance

Since 1964 there has been a lot of effort to assist physically challenged children. The efforts of religious organization like the Red Cross and Rotary clubs together with the MOE are noteworthy. Implementation and practice of integration of physically challenged children are guided by the policies pronounced in Session Paper No. 6 1988. Among the key polices stipulated in the paper and what the MOE has been implementing is the integration of physically challenged children into regular schools in order to enhance their participation in formal education (MOE 2006). The policy further calls for early identification and assessment of children with disabilities. It also emphasizes sensitisation of parents and communities about the need for children with disabilities to enrol in integrated schools (MOE, 2005). The policy frame work on integration of physically challenged children is reflected in the national goals of education “education provision to promote social equality and foster a sense of social; responsibility within education system that provides equal education opportunities for all” (Koech, 1999 p. 253). The main objective of integration is to assist these children to develop towards realization for full participation in social life development and equality. “Integration of children with physical disabilities into natural settings is predicted on the development of social interaction and friendship among children, the improvement in self-concept, observation and imitation language, behaviour and skills of normally developing youngsters” (Winzer, 1996, p. 569). When these children learn with their non-physically challenged peers they will benefit both socially and academically. The child will be exposed to real world and so accepted by the community (Green & Stoneman, 1989).

Philosophically, integration is a way of promoting and conceptualising education of physically challenged children in a more positive way. It is a system where children with disabilities are offered increased opportunities for interaction with non-Physically challenged peers as well as meaningful curriculum content. In integrated schools, every one belongs, is accepted, supports and is supported while having individual education needs met as opposed to special schools which are discriminative, segregate and unequal, and in violation of the democratic ethos that allows equal education for all

students ” (Barnes & Lehr, 1993, p. 82). As these physically challenged children interact with their non-physically challenged children, they begin to show increased numbers of social bids directed towards peers and it also enhances communication skills (Staub & Hunt, 1993). The mere fact of school entry increases the probability of successful learning and allows a number of positive growth situations to occur for children with disabilities.

Today, many physically challenged children are placed in regular primary school under naturalistic curricula. The normal developmental processes of children provide the most critical reference for teachers in integrated schools (Kirk, 1979). Children with mild disabilities need the same skills as their peers and they usually acquire the same sequence. Schools and classrooms are places where all learners experience diverse cultures, backgrounds, abilities and contributions. Diversity is valued and celebrated since it strengthens the class and offers all its members greater opportunities for learning. “Much of the zeal of integration as a blanket policy stems from its anticipated effects in the socio- emotional domain. Children will be accepted because of contact and familiarity will naturally model the appropriate behaviours of peers, will not suffer the stigma of special classes, and will be provided a more real life environment for learning” (Lawrence, 1991, p.140).

Class Level and Self-concept

Even though it is generally acknowledged that self-concept is multifaceted and influenced by many factors other than academic performance and gender, it has been shown that age and period of integration has a lot of influence in self-concept of physically challenged children in primary schools. When disability is experienced in a family, it always leads to stagnation in all spheres of family functioning. The members of the family are faced with social, psychological, economic and physical challenges, which can cause a lot of misunderstanding amongst members in the family, (Kauffman, 1993).

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC; (1993) emphasised the education of children with disabilities as a key factor in all societies. Unfortunately, these children are left for a long time under isolation and they can only get a chance of entering schools if persons of goodwill dim fit to educate them. It is not surprising to find children with disabilities being enrolled in primary schools at ages of ten years and above. They join standard one when their age mates are already in upper classes like standard five or even eight. These children find it hard to adjust to school environment if teachers are not keen enough to arrest stigmatising and stereotyping aspects from the rest of the pupils. The chances of failure in academic performance are minimised whenever possible when opportunities for growth and understanding are provided rather than occasion for ridicule and embarrassment to these physically challenged children (Heward, 2000). Many of these children when they reach adolescent stage are confronted with serious challenges, which they may not be able to evade. These challenges may be physical, social, psychological, physiological or emotional

Efforts should be made to help the physically challenged children to adjust both socially and psychologically in the schools so that their self-perception may be enhanced. Efficient teaching and learning in the classroom as well as close monitoring of children’s performance is a solid foundation of optimum academic performance (Council of Human Rights, 2000). The teachers should therefore ensure that children with disabilities are learning at or more or less the same level as their peers in order to avoid chances of repeating the same class when their peers are proceeding to the next class. Good and efficient class teachers organise bright and stimulating classroom environments and possess the personal qualities of patience, commitment and understanding (Winzer, 1996). For the physically challenged children to excel in their academic work without being retained in any class, motivation, instructional programme and acceptance are supposed to be provided by teachers (Dahl, 1986). When the children are able to proceed to the upper classes like standard 6 and 8, they begin to view themselves as capable of competing with their peers. However, managing physically challenged children of any age, any grade and any functional level can be challenging and often frustrating. No matter how well the classroom is managed, there will be inevitable cases of children who fail to respond positively as others due to their level of acceptance of their disabilities. So these children will perpetually be of low self-concept and poor academic performance. They will persistently repeat one class after the other unless they accept to improve their self-concept.

Data Analysis

Hypothesis One

The first null hypothesis stated that that there is no statistically significant relationship between academic performance and self-concept of physically challenged children in primary schools. In order to test this hypothesis, the physically challenged children were asked to complete the self-concept scale. Moreover, their marks for four consecutive end term examinations were added and averaged. The mean scores for self-concept and academic performance for each child were correlated using Pearson product moment correlation and the result of the analysis is reported in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1

Correlation of Self-Concept and Academic Performance of Physically Challenged Children in Integrated Schools

	Self Concept	Academic Performance
Self-concept	-	.63
Academic Performance	.63	-

N = 120

Table 2

Correlation between Self Concept and Academic Performance of Physically Challenged Children in Special School

	Self Concept	Academic Performance
Self-concept	-	- .42
Academic Performance	- .42	-

N = 120

The results of the analyses indicated that the physically challenged children in integrated primary schools had a significantly positive correlation $r = .63$, $p < .05$, while those of special school had a statistically negative correlation $r = -.42$, $p > .05$. The results evidently showed that the physically challenged children in integrated primary schools have high self-concept and high academic performance while those of special school had low self-concept and low academic performance. Thus the null hypothesis was rejected and was concluded that academic performance has a relationship with self-concept of physically challenged children in integrated primary schools.

Hypothesis Two

The second null hypothesis stated that there is no statistically significant relationship between class level and self-concept of physically challenged children in primary schools. In order to test this hypothesis, the physically challenged children from standards 4, 6 and 8 were asked to complete the self-concept scale and their mean scores were computed. The means of these physically challenged children from standard 4, 6 and 8 are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Class Level and Self Concept

Standard	N	Self Concept	
		Mean	SD
4	83	159.84	15.78
6	83	160.52	16.38
8	74	166.77	16.58
Total	240	162.21	16.45

From the above table, it was realized that physically challenged children in standard eight have higher self-concept with a mean score of 166.77 than those in standard six and four. In order to assess more of this result, one-way ANOVA was performed in order to test whether or not a significant relationship exists between class level and self-concept of physically challenged children in primary schools. The results of this analysis indicated that there was a

statistically significant relationship between class level and self concept of physically challenged children in regular primary schools, $F(2, 237) = 4.252, p < .05$. Hence the null hypothesis was rejected and it was concluded that class level has statistically significant relationship with self-concept of physically challenged children in regular primary schools. The physically challenged children in Standard 8 have higher self-concept than those in standard 4

Discussion of the Findings

Academic Performance and Self-concept

This research study was aimed at investigating the relationship between academic performance and self-concept of physically challenged children in integrated primary schools. The results indicated that there was a positive significant correlation between academic performance and self-concept of physically challenged children in integrated primary schools. These findings imply that high self-concept of physically challenged children can be improved by enhance their academic performance. These findings supported the studies made by Mac Donald (1969) and Kakui (2003) who also reported that good academic performance boost a child's self-concept. Achievement in school is related to self-perception of ability and to general self-concept. Physically challenged children in integrated primary schools are facing the challenges of being recognized as competent and they want to show emerging concern about how others view them. This perception of competence can diminish as their self-concept reduces (Frey & Rubele, 1987).

The results supported the arguments of Winzer (1996) who observed that as children develop a heightened awareness of their own competence, the relationship between perceived competence and scholastic achievement increases. Common sense indicates that tremendous differences exist in developmental levels of non-physically challenged children in integrated primary schools and those in special primary schools. Holmes (1989) reported that physically challenged children who are promoted to the next class have a stronger self-concept and are ready to learn new things than those who are retained in the same grade. Through achievements in school and recognition by their peers, parents and teachers, the physically challenged children develop a sense of themselves, a self-concept that is the same of the things that they do (Linkona, 1988). Therefore these children need to be appreciated and understood by peers and teachers so as to influence their cognitive growth and socialization processes (Saracho & Spodek, 1983). The major goal of integration is to change the total educational environment so that it promotes respect for the wider range of children's disabilities and enable them to experience equal educational opportunities (Council of Human Rights, 2005). This will therefore boost children's self-concept and enhanced their academic performance.

The results of this study in indicated that there was a negative correlation between academic performance and poor self-concept of physically challenged children in special school. These results supported the idea that segregations of physically challenged children in special schools can lead to self-concept and

consequently low academic performance (Jackson, 1975). These children lack a spirit of competition because the only role models they have are their own physically challenged peers. Moreover, these children may be nursing the stigmatizing effect of disability because they are lacking emotional support. Surprisingly, some of the teachers in special school are physically challenged and so they can easily transfer their unresolved state of non-acceptance of disability to the children.

The results gave a clear indication that self-concept can influence the academic performance and vice versa. If high academic performance is to be achieved, then self-concept should be enhanced positively (MacDonald, 1965). The major role, which is played, is interaction and competition in academic achievement between physically and non-physically challenged children in primary schools (Kirk, 1979). These children need a conducive, safe, warm and accepting environment so that they can exercise their full potentials and excel in academic performance. Jones (1993) stated that, isolated person with disabilities find it hard to meet the demands of the larger society. The two different results for integrated and special primary schools is a clear indication that integration is ideal in establishing and maintaining of self-concept of physically challenged children in primary schools. The non-physically challenged children play a great role in their social interaction with the physically challenged children in the same school environment.

Class Level and Self-Concept

This study was aimed at investigating whether class level has any statistically significant effect on self-concept of physically challenged children in integrated primary schools. The results indicated that class level has statistically significant effect on self-concept of physically challenged children in integrated primary schools. It was obtained that the physically challenged children in standard eight had high self-concept while those of standard six and four had low self-concept. This clearly indicated that as they advance in their classes their self-concept increases. Since these physically challenged children are learning with the non-physically challenged children and they can compete, interact and even play together they then develop a sense of cohesiveness in school. The findings were in agreement with those of Deloach and Greer (1981) who reported that, the physically challenged children are still dependent on others when they are in lower classes and they start to be independent and self-sufficient as they advanced in their classes. They begin to set self-realistic goals particularly when others are honest and clear in their appraisal of their physical disability.

Barner (1999) and Bergen (2003) postulated that the physically challenged children who are in lower classes spend a great deal of energy trying to hide their stigmatizing differences especially when other members of the community are portraying a spirit of pity and seeing them as helpless. These children usually stay in isolation and keep on watching their age mates as they engage themselves in most of the activities in school. Since physical disability can sometimes affect academic progress may be due to absenteeism, the physically

challenged children in standard six are already in their adolescent stage (Ingule, Rono & Ndumbuki 1996). This is the time when the physically challenged children have a desire to practice their own found mental ability in order to consider various view points in all issues of their physical conditions. While on the other hand the significant others are creating a notion of dependency by treating them as children who are helpless. These physically challenged children have problems in distinguishing between what interests them and what interests someone else (Thones, 1978). They imagine that everyone else is thinking and watching on them and they create “imaginary audience” that can lead to poor self-perception due to the extreme self- conscience of their disability.

As physically challenged children progress in their classes their ages also increase and so their reasoning capacity improves. They learn to accommodate their disability and begin to increase their ability of understanding and tackling problem of increasing complexity in life. Their ability to communicate with other people increases and they can make apparent decisions for themselves. Fredrickson and Cline (2002) observed that the physically challenged children who are in integrated schools have the ability to understand moral concept tremendously and they can internalize them logically unlike those in special school. So the physically challenged children who are in upper classes are capable of making hypothetical deductive reasoning based on statements that are true unlike those who are in lower classes. Their self-concept is higher than that of physically challenged children in lower classes.

The findings supported the report given by KISE (1993; 2002) that integration of physically challenged children helps them to have positive self-perception as they continue learning with the non-physically challenged children. When they realize that they can compete with their peers in the regular classroom, their self-concept begins to improve since they can view their disability positively. They begin to realize that their disability has nothing to do with their ability to learn in regular primary schools.

Conclusions

From the findings, it was deduced that good academic performances have a lot of influence in boosting the self-concept of physically challenged children in integrated schools. Physically challenged children need to be given enough educational support in order to realize their full potentials just like the non-physically challenged children. The results revealed that the physically challenged children who have moved higher in their academic endeavors have higher self-concept than those who are still in the lower classes. This can be attributed to the fact they see themselves as capable of achieving what other non-physically children can achieve. So the parents, teachers and entire community can be encouraged to take these physically challenged children to school early enough so as to be able to achieve their academic aspirations and be able to develop positive self-concept.

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