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# Relationship between Age and Self Concept of Physically Challenged Children in Primary School

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## Abstract

*Most people with disabilities were viewed as helpless, dependent and incapable of any task, which required a lot of effort. They were treated as totally disabled and were not considered as human beings. If they were fortunate to grow up to adolescent or early adulthood, non-physically challenged members of the society discriminated them upon. This made them to have low self-concept as they saw themselves as insignificant members of the society. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between the age and self-concept of physically challenged children in primary schools. This study employed both ex post facto (causal comparative) and correlation research designs. The research population consisted of all standard 4, 6 and 8 pupils in five primary schools, that is, four integrated schools in Nyando County and Kisumu County. A total of 120 physically challenged children were selected through simple random sampling from the five selected primary schools. Those who were selected to take part in the study were from standard 4, 6 and 8. The selected physically challenged children were of ages 10-21 years. Research instrument was questionnaire which was administered to physically challenged children.. The results in this study indicated a statistically significant relationship between age and self-concept of physically challenged children in regular primary schools. The findings are helpful for sensitizing the parents to take their physically challenged children to primary schools at the appropriate age like the non-physically challenged children.*

Key words: *Age, Self-concept, integration and physically challenged.*

## Introduction

According to Kirk (1979) in traditional societies, persons with disabilities were viewed as helpless, dependent and incapable of any task, which required a lot of effort. They were treated as totally disabled and were not considered as human beings. Some of them were killed or left in isolation till they died of starvation. If they were fortunate to grow up to adolescent or early adulthood, non-physically challenged members of the society discriminated them upon. This practice was counteracted in 1960's where the governments intervened with the help of religious communities by introducing special schools, which were like a dumping place for these children. There they could get some medical attention and could receive education and basic needs. Even though it is generally acknowledged that self-concept is multifaceted and influenced by many factors 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 among the 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 (Pearpoint & Forest, 1992). 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. Many of these children when they reach adolescent stage are confronted with serious challenges, which they may not be able to evade and these challenges may be physical, social, psychological, physiological or emotional (Kauffman, 1993). For the first time in their lives, they are faced with body changes, which they try to understand in conjunction with their background. Sometimes, they face serious conflicts in school between interdependence and less dependence, conformity and non-conformity, self-assertion and self-negation, early versus later maturation, development of genitals and even financial trouble. All these produce stress which makes them to feel lower self-perception (Ndambuki & Muite, 1999).

The physically challenged children may sometimes take long to grasp the contents offered in school and these make them to lag behind as their peers are promoted to the next grade. This retention rate has a lot of negative impacts in the development of their self-concept because they view themselves as incapable of achieving high academic standards in school. This retention may result in long period of integration, which will eventually give rise to low self-concept but on the other hand, if these children are given chance to join integrated schools early in their age, they will have opportunity to learn with their peers and compete with them (Kauffman, 1993). Neurological disorders in many cases do not have any inference with intellectual capacity of these children. So, they have high chances of doing well in their academic performance even if mobility is a problem to them (Sailor, 1991). These children manifest a lot of effort in their academic work when they are given equal opportunities for learning like their non-physically challenged peers.

In cases where these children go to school late in their age, they experience conditions, which are beyond their control. Some of these conditions include the stigmatising effect from the younger classmates and even the teachers. The treatment, which they receive, makes them to have poor self-perception, which in turn will affect their academic performance (Kauffman, 1993). As their academic performance is lowered, these children are retained for long in the class progress and consequently, their self-concept is totally debilitated. The effects of lower self-concept are manifested by feelings of inferiority, not having same material possessions as other children, lack of awareness of self (strengths and weaknesses)

and not accepting self and their disabilities. They then resort into self-damaging fantasies of inabilities in adjusting to school community (Best, 1978).

**Objective of the Study**

To investigate the relationship between the age and self-concept of physically challenged children in primary schools.

**Hypothesis of the Study**

The hypothesis stated that there is no statistically significant relationship between age and self-concept of physically challenged children in primary schools.

**Methodology**

This research study investigated the relationship age and self-concept of physically challenged children in primary schools. The study was carried out in Kisumu and Nyando districts in Kenya. The data was collected from physically challenged pupils learning in four integrated schools. The research population consisted of all standard 4, 6 and 8 pupils in five primary schools, that is, four integrated schools in Nyando district and one special school in Kisumu district. A total of 120 physically challenged children were selected through simple random sampling from the five selected primary schools. Those who were selected to take part in the study were from standard 4, 6 and 8. The selected physically challenged children were of ages 10 – 21 years.

This study employed both ex post facto (causal comparative) and correlation research designs. The ex post facto design was used because the study investigated the relationship between age and self-concept of physically challenged children in primary schools. The researcher did not manipulate the independent variable (age) but only measured its relationship with the dependent variable (self-concept), which had already occurred by the time the data was collected. Research instrument was questionnaire which was administered to physically challenged children. The items in questionnaire were considered to be adequate for testing self-concept of the pupils and they provided sufficient required information for the study. This questionnaire was a Likert scale in format based on directed an agreement-disagreement continuum. The participants were to select the response category that best represents their reaction to each statement by checking/ticking Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D) or Strongly Disagree (SD).

**Data Analysis**

In order to test this hypothesis, the physically challenged children were asked to fill in the self-concept scale. Moreover, physically challenged children involved in this study were grouped according to their ages: group 1 (10-13 years), group 2 (14-17 years) and group 3 (18-21 years). The mean scores of these physically challenged children according to the age categories are reported in Table 1

Table 1: Age and Self-Concept

| | | Self-Concept | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age (year) | N | Mean | SD |
| 10-13 | 70 | 160.80 | 16.75 |
| 14-17 | 143 | 164.19 | 16.04 |
| 18-21 | 27 | 155.41 | 16.25 |
| Total | 240 | 162.21 | 16.45 |

One-way ANOVA was performed in order to test whether or not the significant relationship exists between age and self-concept of physically challenged children. The result revealed that there is statistically significant relationship between age and self-concept of physically challenged children $F(2, 237) = 3.676$, $p < .05$, therefore the null hypothesis was rejected and it was concluded that there is statistically significant relationship between age and self-concept of physically challenged children in primary schools.

**Discussion of the Findings**

The results in this study indicated a statistically significant relationship between age and self-concept of physically challenged children in regular primary schools. The findings showed that the physically challenged children of ages 14-17 years had higher self–concept while those of ages 18-12 had low self-concept. These findings show that self-concept of physically challenged children increases up to age of 17 years but as they approach the age of 18 years their self-concept begin to decline. These findings supported those of Marfo and Thornburn (1990), Maligning and Wellhan (1992) and Bonjo (2003) who reported that the age of physically challenged children determine the level of their self-concept. Bonjo (2003) observed that an adolescent with physical disability face a lot of challenges in social interactions because their peers see them as boring or incompetent. This can lead to none or few socialization opportunities, which in turn cause lack of dating encounters, and consequently feelings of self-pity can emerge. This self-pity is a leading factor that can cause low self-concept.

When children enter adolescent age span, the search for identity becomes a central focus. They involve themselves on deliberately choices and decisions, particularly about a vocational future, sexual orientation, and a “philosophy of life” (Marcia, 1980). The adolescents are faced with tremendous biological, sociological and physiological changes as well as emotional turmoil. The findings supported the argument of Erikson (1968) who stated that early adolescence is a time of huge biological, cognitive and physical changes and it is the early phase that emotional expression may become more intense, and negative as compared to late adolescence (Kauffman, 1993). The non-physically challenged adolescents are now capable of accepting constructive criticism with more grace. But for physically challenged adolescents, this is a changing period which they cannot reciprocate friendships and cannot control their feelings and they outwardly exhibit high emotional extremes. This argument was supported by the results, which showed that the physically challenged children had low self-concept as compared to those of age 14 – 17 years.

The result obtained from one-way ANOVA indicated that age has a lot of influence on self–concept of physically challenged children. Thomas and Khan (1974) posited that a social interaction helps in the development of an adolescent identity. Also peer grouping helps children to copy and learn from one another. In most cases physically challenged children lack the opportunity to socialize with their peer and therefore may not learn what non-physically challenged children earning during socialization time these will tend to be isolated and can withdraw themselves from their peers. It should be noted that, opportunities for interaction between them and non-physically challenged peers are sometime limited due to stereotype behaviours (Winzer, 1996).

When physically challenged children approach the age 18 years, they begin to compare themselves with the non-physically challenged children who are so active in terms of socialization (Kauffman, 1993). Some of these physically challenged children are still in primary schools while their age mates are already in secondary school. This lowers their self-perception and creates poor self-image as they entertain the notion that they are incapable of meeting the educational demands like their non-physically challenged children age mates (Ndurumo, 1996). In addition, to the misconception regarding disability-imposed limitations, there are special problems engendered by reduced ease and speed of performance of the physically challenged children. So, whether they are denied participation or not, they feel that the other members of the society are imposing on them inconvenience which they must endure. Marinelli and Orto (1977) found out that physically challenged children who are in the prime of their adolescence find it difficult to balance their discrepancies between their self-conception and public exceptions. These can lead to self-pity that can perpetuate low self-perception of physically challenged children.

These findings supported the argument of Winzer (1996) who stated that, physically challenged children who are in their late adolescent stage are at great disadvantage in social interaction. They find it difficult to establish spontaneous social contacts; they may feel anxious and frustrated when confronted with unfamiliar experiences and variations in their life routine (Rogow 1987). They can engage themselves in ritualistic, stereotypic behaviour that can be self-injurious and interferes with learning. The physically challenged children who are self-absorbed and locked in a private world of fantasies are not interacting with anyone or anything in the environment. These physically challenged children end up becoming fearful, withdrawn and start entertaining a “poor me” attitude on one-self (Voeltz, 1982)

**Conclusion**

The study realized that self-concept is influenced by age. Physically challenged children face a lot of challenges as they grow especially during adolescence period. This may be due to lack of socialization opportunities from the non-physically challenged peers. When they are discriminated from socialization group, they become withdrawn from the rest and hence the self-concept is lowered. It should be noted that disability can result in slow academic progress due to its effect on mental development due to absence in school to attend medical services. These

children may reach adolescence stage while they are still in lower classes. This can make them to have low self-perception because they cannot move in the same level like their age mates.

**Recommendations**

Having established that age has a lot of influence on self-concept of physically challenged children, it can be recommended that physically challenged children should move in the same level to the next grade with their non-physically challenged peers. To achieve this, the parents should be advised to take their physically challenged children to primary schools at the appropriate age like the non-physically children.

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