

Perceptions of teachers on vocational skills training for mentally challenged learners: a case study of two selected special Schools in Siaya County, Kenya

All children including those with special needs have a right to an appropriate education process that can lead to the exploitation of their potential. Despite the existence of a special curriculum for learners with mental challenges in primary schools that stress vocational training, it is not clear whether these children get into gainful employment on completion of the training. This study focused on perceptions of teachers on vocational skills training for mentally challenged learners in Siaya County – Kenya. The study was guided by three research objectives; find out the relevance of the curriculum for vocational training for MCLs, establish perceptions of teachers towards the process of vocational skill training for MCLs and examine the process of career-choice among MCLs. The study was informed by Human Capital Theory. The research design for the study was a case study approach within a qualitative methodological paradigm. Two special schools from Siaya County participated in the study. The target population included all teachers from the two schools – 10 teachers from school A and 13 from School B. Both purposive and saturated sampling techniques were used to select the participating schools and the sample size which included 2 county quality assurance and standards officers from the two sub-counties, 2 head teachers and 4 vocational teachers from both schools were interviewed. (2 from each school) 6 vocational teachers from school A Equator and 7 vocational teachers from school B formed the two focus group discussions making a total of 21 participants. Piloting was done one month before the actual collection of data for reliability and validity reasons. The instruments for collecting data included: Interview schedules for QUASOs, head teachers and vocational teachers. Focus group discussion for teachers and document analysis where the vocational curriculum was scrutinized. Thematic analysis was employed in analyzing the qualitative data collected from the study. Trustworthiness and authenticity of the qualitative data was achieved by logical coding and organizing of data into appropriate themes for the final analysis. The study instruments were validated by the researcher's supervisors. The analysis of data was through selective coding of common themes and concepts and presented according to the objectives of the study. The finding of this study revealed that the vocational curriculum for the mcls is irrelevant as it was a regular curriculum and lacked some vocational courses and could not cater for individual's diverse needs. Teachers had positive perceptions towards the process of vocational skills training for MCLs however, its the societal negative perception towards MCLs participation that was found to be a major barrier to their community integration. The study also established that MCLs lacked career awareness in the choice of vocational courses due to their intellectual disability and so career choice was majorly teacher based where after assessment in the EARC centres they were placed in prevocational classes where teachers observed them keenly and then placement into right vocational courses was done depending on ability, interest, age, gender, safety and strength. The study recommends that teachers handling MCLs should be involved in the curriculum development as well as collaborative effort between the government, through MOE, in providing funds to purchase tools and equipment in vocational classes finally, social cultural negative attitudes should be addressed through awareness raising campaigns using print and electronic media as well as in other social gatherings.