Examining the Impact of Parental Involvement on Reducing School Dropout Rates among Learners with Special Education Needs in Inclusive Settings: A Case Study of the Meteitei Zone, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

School dropout among learners with Special Education needs in an inclusive setting in Meteitei zone has been very rampant. Therefore, the researcher is attempting to find ways of minimizing it. The methods used by the researcher include qualitative analysis, and the findings have been presented in tabular form. The tools utilized by the researcher were questionnaires. The participants included teachers, Parents Area Education Officers, and pupils who served as respondents. The findings by the researcher indicate that school dropout among learners in inclusive settings in Meteitei zone has become a significant challenge and therefore requires appropriate measures to be taken to curb it. The researcher recommends that the Kenya Institute of Education provides a flexible curriculum to accommodate all learners' diversities.

Keywords: Special Education, Parents, Learning, Special Needs

INTRODUCTION

Learning is a lifelong process that begins when one is born and continues until one dies [1, 2]. As we interact with everyone and everything around us, we continuously get involved in the learning process. In ancient days, children learned generally in an informal manner, which made learning more real and meaningful [3, 4]. At a certain age, they learned some activities practically, which helped them develop skills in a more practical and real situation [5]. This encouraged learners because they became curious and eager to grasp new ideas. Moreover, teachers who taught these children were well familiar with the learners, enhancing concrete teaching. The introduction of formal education has brought about many changes, such as sitting in classrooms, adhering strictly to a curriculum, and being taught by professional teachers. Since then, there have been many problems the learner faced in traditional times, which assumed that the child's educational progress was largely a function of their personal abilities and attributes [6]. Before the 17th century, children and people with disabilities all over the world were considered socially and physically less capable of undertaking the learning process, which is education. They were not readily and easily accepted, and their needs were completely ignored by the normal people of that time. As a result, they were often segregated due to negative attitudes toward disabilities [7–9]. In the 18th century, Beverly and Alexander, parents of children with special needs, hired a person to provide education to their children in their homes after they saw the potential in children with disabilities[10]. The Kenyan government has continued to develop education for learners with special needs. It has implemented education for learners with special needs as declared by the Jomtien Declaration on Education for All (EFA) 1990, The Salamanca Statement on Inclusive Education[11], and the Framework for Action [11]. It has also implemented free, compulsory, and accessible education for all school-age children. The education system embraces the efforts made by the government, and most learners have joined the education system irrespective of their background and social status. The less fortunate learners, who have disabilities, for instance, children with learning difficulties, tend to withdraw from the education mainstream because of various factors such as stigmatization, labeling, and negligence, just to mention a few[12]. These factors make such learners feel displaced and unwanted, eventually leading them to drop out of school and engage in various activities such as herding animals, small-scale trading, being house helps, and engaging in negative acts like stealing. In the

wider Kenya, the Meteitei zone has people who are not willing to continue with formal education and therefore opt to undertake other businesses, which have far-reaching effects, often leading to unsuccessful endeavors due to the limited knowledge they have about the same[13].

Therefore, the researcher intends to point out the causes of dropouts in primary schools, how they can be minimized, and how they affect the academic performance of learners with special needs in the entire zone.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate intensively and extensively the causes of school dropouts among learners with special needs, bearing in mind that these children have the potential to pursue learning to higher levels like their counterparts who are considered normal children.

Objectives of the Study

The following are the objectives of the study:
i) To find out why there was a high dropout rate among learners with special needs in the Meteite zone.

ii) Determine the effects of dropouts among learners in an inclusive setting in the zone.
iii) To suggest and recommend ways of making the future of these learners important to their lives and that of the society.

Research Questions

The study will attempt to answer the following questions derived from the objectives of the study:
i) Do you have children with special needs who have dropped out of school?

ii) What are the reasons why these children drop out of school?
iii) What suggestions do you make to ensure that these children are retained in school?

Assumptions of the Study

The study was based on the following assumptions:
i) The adequacy and quality of the variables under study will curb the problem.

ii) Generally, there were obvious reasons that led to high dropout rates.
iii) All respondents were cooperative and provided reliable responses.

Significance of the Study

The findings of the study will provide essential information to parents, teachers, pupils, and stakeholders. Parents will be able to motivate learners by providing essential basic needs for their daily living and closely supervising and monitoring the learners' work and behavior both at school and at home to ensure that they are comfortable. Pupils will realize the importance of pursuing learning to higher levels regardless of their disabilities. They will also value and promote positive interactions, acceptance, self-esteem, and cooperation among themselves. The community will be sensitized to the negative effects of illiteracy in society and, consequently, will have the urge to ensure that learners receive proper education. The community will be motivated to educate their children to higher levels to serve as role models for upcoming children. The research will enable teachers to improve and use a variety of teaching techniques and methods in teaching learners with special needs to capture their attention throughout the learning period. The Ministry of Education, together with the Teachers Service Commission (TSC), will design a suitable teacher-pupil ratio to enable teachers to cater to individuals with special needs. This will also help curriculum developers modify the present curriculum to suit the needs of learners with various diversities and prepare examinations that will suit learners with special needs to ensure equal learning opportunities for all learners in schools. The government, in general, will be able to make policies that cater to learners with diverse needs so that each schooling individual can benefit from learning. Moreover, the policies that are made should be implemented to the fullest extent.

Literature review

Education is an effort to help children acquire skills, knowledge, values, and attitudes which will culminate in positive changes in behavior [14]. Education trains and helps the child develop all-round in a holistic manner. The child will develop to his or her full potential when he or she has acquired the right and desirable education. For this to succeed, children must experience love, affection, and appreciation in the environment they are living in: at home, school, and in the community. Piaget states that at six years, the child has developed concrete thinking; hence, between six to eleven years of age, the social world of the child expands tremendously as a result of attending school. Here the child acquires knowledge from parents, siblings, peers, teachers, and other community members. It is during this time that boys and girls learn roles performed by different genders. These roles are associated with peers of the same sex. Jotzke [15] brings out that the child is an immature, undeveloped being who must be physically nurtured mutually to fit into

society[16]. The child needs to be given desirable education to assist in developing its potential to the fullest. The needs, background, and abilities of the child must be considered as major factors when designing the curriculum. What should be taught to the child at each level or within the school system should mainly be determined by his or her environmental background, readiness, and his or her nature as a member of society. Frank-Brick, and Alikor [17], state that children who do well in schools and are popular with their peers will develop a self-concept that is non-anxiety arousing. While on the other hand, those who fail in school and have few friends will develop a conceptualization of the self that is anxiety arousing and will influence personality in a major way. Frank-Brick, and Alikor [17] remind us that between 15 and 30% of school-age children can be classified as rejected or neglected by other children. Boys are more likely to be rejected than girls, in part because boys have greater aggressiveness, resulting in some becoming bullies. Neglected children are passive, timid, shy, and withdrawn. School-going age children are influenced by the way others treat them such as teachers, parents, and peers. Therefore, learners with specific learning difficulties (SLDs) may opt to drop out of school due to rejection and join society where they engage themselves in activities such as house help, houseboys, little businesses such as selling boiled maize, sweets, second-hand clothes, and even groceries.

Definition of specific learning difficulties

Learning difficulty is a much broader terminology which describes several disabilities. These include the following: dysgraphia, dysnomia, dyscalculia, and dyslexia. Grigorenko et al., [18] defines SLD as learners of at least average intelligence whose academic performance is impaired by a developmental lag in the ability to attain selective attention. Such children require specialized attention in order to permit the use of his or her full intellectual potential. Wegner et al., [19] defined learners with specific learning difficulties as those who have academic problems, discrepancies, cognitive developmental problems, and psychological problems, whereas Muktamath [20] defines specific learning difficulties as a general term used to refer to learners with retardation disorders or delayed development in one or more of the processes of speech, language, reading, spelling, writing, or arithmetic, and emotional disturbances.

Causes of dropout in Meteitei Zone
Education causes

Vincent and Arinwe [21, 22] states that the teacher has a role of being the facilitator, motivator, promoter, director, and pacesetter, and also a liaison officer. That is, he is the one to plan the classroom instruction, interpret the curriculum and other materials, set objectives, goals, and plans, and even set strategies for teaching the subject, a method which does not arouse and sustain the interest of the learners; hence the learners get tired and bored. Wong [23] states that one of the uses of theories of learning is to arouse and sustain the interest of learning. Hopper, a German psychologist, lowers his goals depending on prior performance. When the teacher does not motivate the child to feel part and parcel of the learning system, the child becomes frustrated and gives up achieving higher grades and even classes. Therefore, most of these teachers do not give work that arouses the children with special needs education since they lack skills on how to handle them.

Environmental causes

Learners with special needs education require a conducive environment that accommodates all their needs. All learners who are physically impaired are not taken care of in the zone. Since the area has many hills and valleys, this makes learners' movement to be tiresome and sometimes difficult. This makes the children get discouraged and subsequently drop out of school. According to an article by [24] recommended that as some of the intervention measures, the learners with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorders (ADHD) should have an orderly environment because these children feel secure in an orderly environment. Since these children lack these, they drop out of school and find other ways of fending for their needs for survival.

Parental causes

With the introduction of the 8-4-4 system of education, there were several complaints about heavy workload on the parents and also pupils. Parents have failed to provide the essential basic needs for their children, especially those with special needs. Some even do not bother to check whether their children have the basic needs. In the long run, children run away and seek ways and means to get these needs. The children, therefore, lack the basic survival needs throughout hence no self-actualization. Ahdian and Maulana [25]states that Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs are basic needs, safety needs, where the children react to the school environment which eventually determines if the child will adjust in the school or drop out. The learners also need love and a sense

of belonging, esteem needs, and finally self-actualization. Once children lack all these necessities from either parent, they drop out of school. For fear of stigmatization, parents with disabled children do not allow the children to go to school, hence denying them a chance to learn and realize their potential. According to the Daily Nation [26], an article by Oywa states that

learners with SLDs face problems of over-repetition leading them to drop out of school. Parents do not choose a career for their children, making them grow up without ambition of any kind in their life. They learn in school without a career to aim at, making them indulge in non-career-based activities such as little businesses that require minimal or no knowledge at all.

Age factor

Since most of these children are adolescents, they are exposed to diverse experiences that contribute to changes. **Kholmogorova** et al [27] explain that adolescents are faced with the task of reconciling their physical characteristics with cultural standards of attractiveness. At this stage, most learners need various items such as bras,

petticoats, sanitary pads, and some makeup for girls. For boys, they also need to be well-groomed, with good shoes, caps, and fashionable clothes. If their parents are unable to provide for them, these learners may decide to look for ways to earn money, which often leads to dropping out of school and engaging in small income-generating projects.

Attitude causes

Children are different and unique from each other, with varying mental abilities and characteristics. Through the introduction of inclusive education, all learners with varied special needs are brought together to learn in regular classrooms. However, in these classrooms, abuses and labeling of learners with special needs can cause them to drop

out of school. There is a close relationship between a child's emotional life and their ability to learn. A child who enjoys a happy, trusting relationship with their parents and teachers will tend to be the child who, upon entering school, finds it easy to develop similarly friendly relationships with teachers and other learners [4, 28]

Societal causes

Many well-established and wealthy people in society dropped out of school and started building their futures by engaging in small businesses such as horticultural farming, poultry keeping, housekeeping, liquor brewing, and even cattle herding. These people are now successful providers for their families, which motivates many learners in the Meteitei zone to try and emulate

their economic activities. However, learners with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs), after spending time in school and repeating classes, may copy the behaviors of their peers, such as drinking local liquor and smoking, without realizing the dangers involved. Eventually, these learners feel out of place, drop out of school, and seek ways to obtain money to buy drugs.

Effects of school dropouts

In the Meteitei zone, like most parts of the Rift Valley Province, many learners have Specific Learning Difficulties (SLDs) and require support services to enable them to learn better in inclusive classrooms. [29], suggests support services such as remedial instructions, protection from discrimination, specialized services like occupational, psychological, and health services, and advocacy programs. These services are influenced by various factors such as family life, cultural norms, support systems within schools, local communities, employment prospects, and public awareness. Lack of support can lead to learners giving up on education, resulting in illiteracy among children and eventually causing

the entire community to lag behind in literacy attainment. When learners observe dropouts succeeding in life or obtaining basic necessities, they may emulate their behaviors, seeing education as having no value. This may lead to behaviors such as prostitution, which results in unwanted pregnancies and diseases like HIV/AIDS, further depopulating the community. Robbery and theft become rampant among school dropouts who fail in their small entrepreneurial endeavors, leading to frustration and engagement in violent activities such as mugging, kidnapping, and rape. Idle dropouts contribute to early marriages and poverty within the community.

Attitudes

Negative attitudes towards learners with special needs arise from ignorance and fear of the unknown. In the Meteitei zone, parents prioritize gifted and talented learners, often discouraging those who perform minimally in school and providing little support for their education. Girls

may be particularly disadvantaged, seeking employment as house help or in other minor job opportunities, while boys may join senior men in tea picking or sugarcane cutting to avoid idleness. Educators may fear having learners with specific learning difficulties in their classes, fearing that it

will lower the mean score of their classes and school. This fear denies learners a harmonized and modified learning environment, leading to feelings of displacement and frustration, ultimately resulting in dropping out of school. [30, 31] point out shortcomings in the Kenyan school curriculum, which lacks clear policy guidelines and legal status for special needs education provisions. The curriculum also lacks a commitment to assisting learners in job creation, employment, or training, focusing more on theoretical aspects rather than specific development needs and practical skills. In conclusion, addressing the challenges of school dropouts requires a multifaceted approach involving changes in societal attitudes, educational policies, and support systems to ensure that all learners have equal opportunities for success.

METHODOLOGY
Research design/approach

The researcher employed an evaluation method and simple tabulated data. This method was chosen because it involves describing the data collected using words rather than numerical terms. The approach was preferred as it allows for the collection of information on people's feelings, issues, or situations in their own writing and words.

Research strategy

The researcher opted for the survey method to collect data as it involved asking questions directly to individuals in interviews or indirectly through questionnaires about various observable aspects. This method was considered ideal for the study due to its nature and the type of variables investigated. Descriptive research seeks to portray an accurate profile of events, persons, and situations [32, 33].

Target population

The study was conducted among head teachers, teachers, learners, area education officers, and parents from the Meteitei zone in Tunderet District, Kenya. This group was chosen because they interacted frequently with the learners. The researcher targeted ten schools with a population of 90 teachers.

Sample size

Although the sample included thirty schools, respondents were chosen from ten schools. The sample consisted of ten head teachers, twenty teachers, six parents, one area education officer, and two pupils from each class from lower primary to upper primary.

Sample Procedure

The researcher employed random sampling to ensure every member of the population had an equal opportunity to express their views. Cluster sampling was used to select learners from various levels of learning, and purposive sampling was used to select respondents from AEO and selected head teachers. In purposive sampling, cases are handpicked based on the researcher's judgment of their typicality.

Instruments/tools and data collection
Questionnaire method

Questionnaires were developed based on the literature review concerning the study, focusing on the causes of school dropouts in the zone. These were distributed to schools to be answered by the literate sample population, including teachers and pupils.

Interview guides

Interview guides were used specifically for parents who were unable to read and write, enabling the researcher to obtain vital information. The researcher also observed various aspects in the sampled schools, including learning aids, class registers, and the learning environment.

Data collection procedure

The researcher obtained permission from their workplace and sought permission from the schools where the research was to be conducted. They personally distributed questionnaires to the respondents, briefing them on expectations and assuring them of confidentiality. The researcher also observed class registers to determine dropout rates and used interview guides to obtain information from selected parents and learners.

Data analysis

Data collected were processed and analyzed using descriptive analysis, including frequency tables and percentages, to summarize and organize characteristics of the sample population, facilitating analysis [34].

RESULTS
Data Interpretation
Contribution of questionnaires to respondents in schools
Table 1: Head Teachers' Responses

School	Dispatch	Frequency	Percentage
Kamelil	1	1	10%
Kapsoen	1	L	10%
Olomotit	1	1	10%
Tuiyobei	1	1	10%
Kapkeri	1	1	10%
Meteitei	1	1	10%
Setek Gaa	1	1	10%
Tereno	1	1	10%
Sigawet	1	1	10%
Lengon	1	1	l0%
Total	10	10	100%

The results above indicate that all the head teachers in the sample population responded and returned all the questionnaires to the researcher. This facilitated the researcher's work, making it simpler and more manageable.

Table 2: Pupil Enrolment

No. of pupils	Dispatch	Frequency	Percentage
Above 500	1	0	0%
400—499	1	6	60%
300-399	1	4	40%
Below 300	1	0	0%
Total		10	L00%

From the table above, it is evident that schools in the 400—499 pupil category increased the most, by 60%, while schools in the 300—399 category increased by 40%. Categories above 500 and below 300 did not increase their pupil population.

Table 3: Increment in Enrolment

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	8	80%
No	2	20%
Total	10	100%

The results suggest that 80% of the schools experienced an increase in learners. This could be attributed to the introduction of free primary education and parental sensitization on the importance of education, including for children with special needs.

39

Table 4: Questionnaires Delivered and Received

Category	Dispatch	Received	Percentage
Area Education Officer	1	1	100%
Parents	15	14	90%
Teachers	15	15	100%
Pupils	13	10	66%

From the table above, it is evident that the Area Education Officer and the teachers returned all the questionnaires, representing 100%. Most likely, literate parents returned 90% of the questionnaires promptly. However, only 66% of the pupils returned the questionnaires, likely due to forgetfulness or misplacement.

Table 5: Factors Affecting Learners who Drop Out of School

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Negative attitude/poverty	l	50%
Age/exposure to get money	1	50%
Total	2	100%

Factors leading to early school dropout among learners in an inclusive setting include poverty, as stated by the Area Education Officer. Poverty is identified as the leading factor causing school dropout. The major factors that led to dropout in Meteitei Zone include exposure to easy ways of making money, especially through casual labor in tea and sugar plantations, burning charcoal, making posts in the forest, herding cattle, and working as house help. Some learners engage in buying goods and livestock, while others feel they have grown old enough to pursue other opportunities outside of school. Parents in Meteitei Zone sometimes have negative attitudes towards education, which discourages learners from pursuing it.

Table 6: Factors Leading to School Dropout among Learners with Special Education Needs in Meteitei Zone as Viewed by Parents

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Poverty	4	44.4%
Indiscipline cases	2	22.2%
Negative attitude	2	22.2%
Pregnancies	1	11⁰JO
Total	9	1 00⁰JO

From the table above, it is evident that poverty is the primary factor contributing to dropout among learners in an inclusive setting, with 44.4% of parents mentioning it. Additionally, 22.2% of parents noted negative attitudes towards education among some learners, while 22.2% mentioned cases of indiscipline among learners. Therefore, parents need guidance and counselling to encourage their children to pursue education to higher levels.

Table 7: Views of Teachers on Learners who Drop Out

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of motivation	6	40%
Minimal role model emulation	4	26.6%
Negligence by parents	3	20%
Culture/parents	1	6.7%
Conflict	1	6.7%
Total	15	100%

From the above, it's evident that learners with special education needs drop out due to a lack of motivation from parents, teachers, and scholars. Learners feel that education is a waste of time if they are not employed after completing school.

Additionally, some parents are not responsible enough to monitor their children's education, and conflicts at home may contribute to learners dropping out.

Table 8: Views of Pupils on School Dropout among Learners in an Inclusive Setting

Response	Frequency	Percentage
	5	50%
Guidance and counseling	3	30%
Lack of motivation	2	20%
Total	10	100%

40% of the learners believe that if they are provided with basic needs, they will pursue education more easily. 30% of them lack proper counselling, while 20% lack motivation.

DISCUSSION

The study aimed to investigate the causes of school dropouts among learners with special needs in education in Meteitei Zone, Tinderet, Kenya. The researcher presented the problem statement, purpose, objectives, research questions, and definitions of terms and concepts. They conducted a literature review, discussing causes and prevention of Special Learning Disabilities (SLDs) and general teaching and learning approaches to support learners with special needs. The methodology focused on the research approach, design, targeted population, sample population, sampling procedures, instruments/tools, and data collection procedures. Thirty schools were targeted, with a sample population of ten head teachers and twenty teachers. Simple random sampling was employed, with questionnaires used as instruments/tools. Interview guides were not used due to illiteracy among parents. The researcher compiled raw data from respondents into tabulated form for easy interpretation. Major points identified included inadequate consideration for learners with special needs, inappropriate remedial support services, lack of awareness among parents, lack of supportive services, and fear of exams, influence of peer groups, undetected disabilities, and parental conflicts. From Table Two, it is evident that some learners drop out of school and engage in early self-employment due to factors such as negative attitudes by parents towards education and lack of trained special needs teachers in the Meteitei Zone. There is a need for seminars to raise awareness among teachers and parents about supportive services for learners with special needs. Additionally, flexible curricula and parental involvement are suggested to overcome the challenges of early school dropouts.

CONCLUSION

The findings from the study indicate an acute shortage of trained personnel in special needs education and evidence of inappropriate teaching approaches. There is a need to change methods used in remedial instructions and involve parents in their children's learning process.

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