

**TEACHERS' COMPETENCES AND TEACHING-LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR PUPILS WITH DISABILITIES IN REGULAR PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF NGOMA SECTOR, HUYE DISTRICT-RWANDA**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The study aimed at establishing the professional qualifications of teachers educating pupils with disabilities, investigating whether teachers in regular public primary schools are able to identify and assess pupils with disabilities, and identifying teaching- learning strategies and materials used by teachers when educating pupils with disabilities. The study adopted a descriptive design. The study embarked on interviews for head teachers by use of structural interview schedule, semi-structural questionnaire for teachers and finally a lesson observation schedule for pupils with disabilities and materials utilized in classroom. The study was conducted in Ngoma Sector, Huye District. Purposive sampling was used to select the Sector, schools, classes, head teachers and teachers. Pupils with disabilities were randomly selected. The sample size comprised 4 head teachers, 52 teachers making a total of 56 respondents. The results were obtained and presented based on the objectives and questions formulated for the study. The study found that all teachers had professional qualifications to teach classes 1-6 but all of them had not been specialized in the area of disabilities. Also, none of the head teachers had knowledge about disabilities. It was found out that head teachers demonstrated a skill gap in identifying pupils with disabilities and their skills deficit, hence appropriate intervention was not done. The study recommended that the Ministry of Education facilitate training teachers to enable them acquire modern teaching and learning methods. Rwanda Education Board to ensure that standardized identification and assessment tools and various teaching materials are developed. Finally, pull-out programs initiated in schools so that pupils with specific learning difficulties can be assisted by the resourced teachers.*

***Key words: Teachers' competences, Teaching-Learning Strategies, Pupils with disabilities.***

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## I. Introduction

Universal Primary Education is a global goal. Providing education as a right is an obligation of all governments and requires that they translate their national commitments into legislation. This goal will only be achieved when the universal right to education extends to all individuals including those with special needs and disabilities in the country. People with disabilities make up 10% of the total world population, approximately 3.5 million people (World Health Organization [WHO], 2006). Generally, pupils with disabilities have normal intelligence yet they do not achieve at the same academic level as their peers. Their disability is hidden in such a way that they may appear normal yet do not perform commensurate to their age mates. Their weaker academic achievement particularly in reading, written language and mathematics hinder them from achieving their fullest potential in life thus enhancing poverty and high dependency ratio (Weinberge, 1978; Chadha, 2001).

The history of disabilities began shortly after World War II when educators began to experience a new phenomenon in the classroom. Teachers worldwide were beginning to experience increasing numbers of pupils with average or above average intelligence who were having difficulty in learning and sometimes performed below their peers who were also of average intelligence. Pupils with disabilities have in common some types of failure in school or in the community. They are not able to do what others with the same level of intelligence are able to accomplish. Furthermore, these children develop low self-esteem and perform poorly in school due to repeated past failure. The disability prevents the child from not only becoming a productive member of the society but also make him/her not maximize his/her potentials in life and thus enhancing poverty and high dependency ratio (Chafha, 2001; Lerner, 2006). Studies by Kinyua (2010) indicate that pupils with disabilities encounter challenges in carrying out certain tasks assigned to them for example in reading, writing and in mathematics.

A good number of pupils with disabilities repeat classes while other drop out of school due to lack of motivation and frustration, This kind of repetition or drop out can be solved through the use of learner centered approach where teachers pay attention to weak pupils and the teachers must be qualified and enough knowledgeable in special education

and get more training about special education. The problem is the lack of qualified teachers in special education resulting in not being able to identify and assess the pupils with disabilities.

### 1.2 Problem Statement

Children with disabilities are found in all nations, language groups and cultures of the world. Accumulative research shows that in all cultures there are children who seem to have normal intelligence but they have severe difficulties in learning oral language, acquiring reading or writing skills or doing mathematics. It is a condition that is identified after a learner has entered school and starts performing poorly in academic subjects.

According to EFA Global monitoring reports, achievements of universal participation in education will fundamentally depend upon the quality of education available, for example, how well pupils are taught and how much they learn which have a crucial input on how they stay in school and how regularly they attend (UNESCO,2005).

Quality education as affirmed by Dakar Framework for Action (2000) sets out the desirable characteristics of pupils: healthy and motivated students, taught by competent teachers using active pedagogical methods through good governance and equitable resource allocation. This poses the needs for teachers to utilize those teaching and learning strategies that would address the needs of all pupils including those with disabilities. Scarce researches have been conducted with the consequences that teachers may not have adequate knowledge in disabilities instruction. No study at least known to the researchers has dealt with the current topic hence the need to carry out the study.

### 1.3 Research objectives

The general objective of the study was to analyze the contribution of teachers' competencies on teaching-learning strategies adopted by teachers to educate pupils with disabilities while the present research sought to achieve the following specific objectives: to identify professional qualifications of teachers educating pupils with disabilities; to investigate whether teachers in regular public primary schools are able to identify and assess pupils with

disabilities, and to evaluate teaching, learning strategies and materials used by teachers when educating pupils with disabilities.

#### 1.4 Research questions

From the mentioned objectives, the researchers sought to answer the following questions: what are the professional qualifications of teachers educating pupils with disabilities? How do teachers in regular public primary schools identify and assess pupils with disabilities? What are the teaching, learning strategies and materials used by teachers while educating pupils with disabilities?

#### 1.5 Operational definitions of key concepts

**Teachers' competences:** instructional and related activities to be performed by the teacher inside and outside the classroom.

**Teaching-Learning Strategies:** A variety of teaching and learning strategies to help students take more responsibility for their own learning and enhance the process of teaching and learning

**Disabilities:** Disability is any restriction or lack of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for human being.

**Pupils with disabilities:** pupils who require special education because of: autism; communication disorders; deaf-blindness; emotional disturbances, and hearing impairments.

## II. Review of Related Literature

### 2.1 Teachers' competences

According to the bureau of Labor Statistics U.S.A (2010-2011), children with disabilities should be taught by teachers who are well-equipped with skills and knowledge on appropriate teaching strategies. These teachers must have acquired teaching methods like small group learning, problem solving skills and intensive individual instruction related to the pupils disability. Communication and cooperative are also essential skills special education teachers

must have because they spend a great deal of time interacting with parents and school administration.

Kelchner (2011) also maintains that special education teachers must have professional qualifications that will enable them to help children with special needs. According to him, working in the classroom with pupils with disabilities provides experience and hands-on training under supervision of experienced teachers. Teachers are also supposed to be creative, flexible and have the ability to adapt to the needs of the children using teaching and learning strategies that work best. Teachers that are well trained are empowered with skills and knowledge to identify the special education needs, make appropriate curriculum adaptations and adopt several techniques such as peer tutoring, cooperative learning, task analysis and multisensory approach (Chadha, 2001). There is, therefore, direct need to analyze teachers' competencies and teaching strategies they use to educate pupils with disabilities.

## 2.2 Teaching and Learning Strategies

Teaching, learning strategies and materials are methods and resources used in the lesson by the teacher to ensure that delivery of instruction helps pupil to learn. Pupils with disabilities should be explicitly taught to complete a variety of academic tasks in a step by step fashion. Students disabilities differ in terms of their individual strengths, weaknesses and learning style, therefore no one instruction model can be recommended for all of them (Adams et al., 2003). Teaching and learning strategies that can be adopted by teachers of pupils with disabilities include applied behavior analysis, direct instruction (teacher modeling, group and individual responding, student practice, demonstrations, guided practice and feedback), peer tutoring, cognitive strategy instruction, cooperative teaching and authentic teaching (Alerto & Troutman, 1999; Adam et al., 2003; Torgesen, 1998; Boud et al., 2001; Spencer, 1994).

## 2.3 Teaching and Learning Materials

To help students with disabilities, generalize and apply what they are learning, teachers may need to construct opportunities for real world problem-solving. The teacher should choose teaching materials that help promote active learning of targeted skills, add interest to the lesson, according to the age appropriate; closely match the students' ability level and those that lead

directly to skill acquisition. Stoodt (1981) suggests that, teachers can create opportunities for pupils to experience success by selecting materials that line with pupils' level of ability. Pupils who associate pleasure and success in reading will be motivated to read hence learn.

Teachers are faced with difficult in making decisions about which teaching materials to select for pupils especially those with disabilities. Smith (1983) discovered that most teachers often select materials they are most familiar with, have been trained to use, have found available and match with their teaching style. Smith further maintains that the most appropriate materials for a teacher to use with pupils who have disabilities are those which have logical, hierarchical sequence of instructional objectives, are adaptable to a variety of learning styles, cover the same objectives in a multiple of ways, pretest to determine where teachings should begin, have a built-in evaluation mechanism for determining mastery of instructional objectives and allow pupils to proceed at their own rate and skip objectives they have already mastered and have reinforcement activities.

#### **2.4 Identification and Assessment of pupils with disabilities**

The classroom teacher is usually the first to notice signs of disabilities and refers students for special education assessment. This poses the need for both the special and regular teachers to have knowledge on classification and characteristics of disabilities in order to identify the learner. According to Lerner (1981), there are four separate but related phases of identification of children with disabilities. First, there is the child find, which refers to ways of pinpointing that there is a child with disability in class and this is done by the regular teacher. Second, there is screening which attempts to identify children who need further study. Third, diagnostic stage that consists of determining the extent of development delay and devises an intervention program. Lastly, the evaluating stage, which concentrates on measuring progress and judging whether a child remain in a special education program and planning for transition.

#### **2.5 Types of disabilities**

Children with disabilities can be classified in three categories, namely; the neuropsychological / development disabilities, academic /achievement disabilities and social

disabilities. The neuropsychological model assumes that disabilities are due to something wrong with the child's brain or perceptual systems (Kavale, Fornes & Bender, 1995).

Academic or achievement disability on the other hand manifests itself in school subjects such as reading, writing, spelling and mathematics. These problems are rarely detected before a child joins school because few serious demands are made at preschool (Wolery & Bailer, 2003).

Socially, pupils with disabilities may demonstrate social or behavior challenges. Some exhibit socially unacceptable behaviors with peers, they are unable to predict consequences of behaviors misinterpret and social cues or are less likely to adapt their behaviors to different social situations.

## 2.6 Characteristics of Disabilities

Pupils with disabilities are said to have average intelligence but have difficulty in one or more basic psychological processes which manifest themselves in one or more basic areas which make a child struggle to learn (Kirk, Gallagher & Anastasiow, 2003). Some of these basic areas are mathematics, language (both spoken and written) and reading difficulties which are the most fundamental characteristics of individual with disabilities.

## 2.7 Challenges related to Teaching-Learning Strategies for Pupils with disabilities

Teachers face the problems like lack time to teach those pupils with disabilities in order to cope with speed of pupils, the pupils with disabilities are slow and it is difficult to teach them with their speed in class, the pupils with disabilities are not able to complete given tasks. This requires teachers who understand them. The teachers lack relevant teaching skills to handle the problems of pupils with disabilities. The teachers are further asked to say whether they are equipped with skills and knowledge on how to teach pupils with disabilities. The curriculum is not adapted for pupils with disabilities and the schools or classrooms are not equipped with relevant teaching methods and are not accessible; the teaching materials available are not adequate to teach pupils with disabilities (Lerner, 1995).

## 2.8 Theoretical orientation

The study was guided by cognitive theory of instruction by Brunner (1971). He looked at the role of strategies in the process of human categorization and more generally the development of human cognition. Brunner in his two books “The process of education”, “Towards a theory of instruction and the relevance of education” (1961-1971) respectively puts forth his evolving ideas about the ways in which instruction actually affects the mental models of the world that students construct, elaborate on and transform. He further stresses that to instruct someone is not a matter of getting him/her to commit results to mind, rather, it is to teach him/her to participate in the process that makes possible the establishment of knowledge (Brunner, 1966).

## 2.9 Related Studies

Huffman (1997), who conducted a study to determine the effects of teaching explicit problem-solving strategies in physics teaching at high school level on students’ conceptual learning skills through three open-ended questions related to FCI and Newton’s laws, concluded that there was no significant difference between the strategy teaching group and the control group. In addition, he also put forward that female students benefit from strategy teaching more than their male peers.

Hanushek, Kain and Rivkin (1998), like many other researchers have concluded that the school effect on achievement derives mainly from variations in teacher quality.

## III. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive design that employs both qualitative and quantitative research approaches to identify teaching and learning strategies used by teachers when serving pupils with disabilities.

### 3.2 Research population

The population of this study included teachers, head teachers and pupils from 12 primary schools of Ngoma Sector.



### 3.3 Sample Size

**Table 1: *The Sample Size***

Sector	Primary School	H/T	Teachers	Total
Ngoma	Ngoma Adventiste	1	10	11
	CJSM	1	19	20
	Ngoma Catholique	1	11	12
	Matyazo	1	12	13
	<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>56</b>

Source: Researchers, 2015

### 3.4 Sampling Techniques and Procedures

The researchers used universal sampling and convenience sampling because of the availability of the respondents and accessibility of areas. The researchers purposely selected the schools to be studied within the sector. The head teachers in these schools were purposely selected in order to provide the required information. Teachers who handle pupils with disabilities were purposely selected because they were instructors of these pupils hence in a position to provide rich information required for the study. The 4 schools were purposely selected using convenience sampling and four head teachers were universally selected.

### 3.5 Research Instruments

The researchers used interview schedules for the head teachers, questionnaires with closed ended questions for teachers and observational schedule for the pupils and materials

### 3.6 Data Analysis

Data collected from questionnaires, interview and observation schedule were carefully analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively by making inferences and conclusions, thematic analysis and with frequencies and percentages respectively.

IV. Data presentation, interpretation and analysis

4.1 Demographic data for teachers and head teachers

Table 2: Demographic data from Teachers and Head teachers

Variable		T	%	H/T	%
Age	≤ 25	8	15	0	0
	26-30	14	27	1	25
	31-40	20	38	1	25
	≥ 41	10	19	2	50
	<b>Total 1</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100</b>
Gender	Female	40	77	2	50
	Male	12	23	2	50
	<b>Total 2</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100</b>
Qualification	A2 TTCs	48	92	4	100
	A2 in other domains	4	8	0	0
	<b>Total 3</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Researchers, 2015

The majority of the teachers were between 31-40 years and majority of H/T was over 40 years. This is an indication that majority of the teachers and H/T have a wealth experience in teaching and administration respectively. Among 52 teachers who were engaged in the study, 77% (40) were females and 23% (12) were males. This can be an indication that most of the teachers who teach in the education sector are females. The majority had attained in TTC's and this comprised 92% (48), and 8% (4) have attained in other domains. This is also an indication that the majority of the teachers in Primary schools of Ngoma Sector are qualified for teaching in Primary Schools.

4.2 Professional Qualification of teachers

Table 3: Professional qualification of the teachers and H/T

Professional Qualification	Teachers		Head teachers	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Trained in teaching and assisting pupils with disabilities	0	52	0	4
Total	0	52	0	4

Source: Researchers, 2015

Findings on the areas of specialization as shown in table 3 indicate that 100% (52) of the teachers were not trained in teaching and assisting pupils with disabilities, the same for all H/T. Literature reviewed on professional qualification for teachers educating pupils with disabilities shows that teachers need to be equipped with appropriate skills and knowledge if they would teach these pupils effectively (Schwartz, 2008)

According to Bureau of Labor statistics in USA (2010-2011), teachers already trained can obtain a specific specialization by completing additional year training. It is not very clear from the study findings whether teachers who have furthered their studies have done so far promotion purposes or to acquire professional skills necessary so that they can help pupils with disabilities but concerning the study, pupils with disabilities are not enough helped.

#### 4.3 Teaching and Learning Strategies for Pupils with Disabilities

**Table 4: Teaching and learning methods used by the teachers**

Teaching-learning methods	F	%
Peer group in teaching pupils with disabilities	12	23
Tutoring in teaching pupils with disabilities	10	19
Active and participatory pedagogy is used to teach LD	6	12
Make sure all LD have manipulated teaching equipments	5	10
To serve LD successfully, I document myself in areas that I need more improvement	8	15
Others: Individual teaching pupils with disabilities	16	35
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>114</b>

Source: Researchers, 2015

Teachers were asked to express their views on teaching and learning methods they use to help pupils with disabilities. Among the responses given 35% ( 16) affirmed that they teach pupils with disabilities as individuals; 23% ( 12) use peer- group teaching; 19% (10) use tutoring in teaching; 12% (6) confirmed that they use active and participatory teaching; 10% (5) affirmed

that they make sure all pupils with disabilities have manipulated teaching equipments and 15% (8) agreed that they document themselves from internet for improving what they need more to serve pupils with disabilities successfully.

Literature reviewed indicated that there are very powerful strategies that can be used to help pupils with disabilities. For example, direct instruction is highly structured as a repetitive strategy in teaching basic skills to disadvantaged lower grade levels. It includes demonstrations, guided practices and giving feedback (Rosenshine, 1976). He further asserts that teachers use direct instruction, present clear, well sequenced and highly focused lessons. According to him, many relevant examples are presented to teach new skills and this greatly helps pupils with disabilities.

#### 4.4 Identification and assess Pupils with Disabilities

**Table 5: Knowledge of teachers to identify and assess pupils with disabilities**

Identification and assistance	Teachers			
	Yes	%	No	%
I do observe all pupils during class time and even outside to identify pupils with disabilities	0	0	52	100
Physical check helps in identifying pupils with disabilities	6	11	46	88.4
More focus, attention and approach are used to specifically assist pupils with disabilities	0	0	52	100
Give opportunities pupils with disabilities especially in learning and teaching activities	1	2	51	98
Advocacy to pupils with disabilities in different institutions for improved assistance	0	0	52	100
Others:	0	0	52	100

Source, Researchers, 2015

According to the data summarized in table 5, 13% (7) of the teachers affirmed to do identification using some knowledge of identifying pupils with disabilities like physical check, while 87% (45) didn't say anything and this means that they don't do identification of the pupils

with disabilities because of lack of knowledge about identification. This explains that the pupils with disabilities are not enough helped.

Wafula (2010) asserts that teachers who have ability to identify pupils with disabilities are able to provide early intervention and individualized attention according to the needs of the pupils.

#### 4.5 Views from of Head teachers

When H/T were asked to give their views on challenges experienced by teachers during identification of pupils with disabilities, 50% said that teachers lacked adequate skills and knowledge on identification, while 50% said that the large class sizes discouraged the teachers from sparing time for the children with disabilities. When asked to give their opinions on what steps should be taken, 75% of the H/T said that teachers needed to be equipped with skills and knowledge of identification of these pupils in order to provide early intervention. This is because some characteristics disabilities are not easily identifiable and especially for a teacher who does not know the characteristics, the teacher might assume that the learner is stubborn or lazy.

Further, lack of an identification tool in class was a clear indication that though teachers claimed to have knowledge in identification, they did not have adequate knowledge to develop one. 25% of H/T reported that work load should be reduced for the teachers to give them ample time to deal with individual pupils. All H/T interviewed accepted that they are not trained in assisting pupils with disabilities and they have no competences in teaching pupils with disabilities.

#### 4.6 Teaching and Learning Materials for Pupils with Disabilities

**Table 6:** *Teaching and learning materials used by teachers*

Used Materials	Teachers	
	F	%
Black boards and chalks	34	65
Books and notebooks	15	29
Computes and Laptops	2	4
Toys and Sport related materials	2	4
<b>Others:</b> Locally available	20	38

materials, same materials		
Total	69	132

Source: Researchers, 2015

Out of 52 teachers approached in the study, 4% indicated that they use computers and laptops as instructional materials to help pupils with disabilities; 65% use black boards and piece of chalks and 4% use toys and sport related materials; 29% use books and notebooks, while 38% use locally available materials .

The use of variety of materials by the teachers agrees with literature reviewed because according to Fisher (1995), it is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that their classes are adequately resourced. Adequacy of teaching materials stimulates learning and encourages imaginative use. Further, studies by Forgosen (1998), indicated that practical approach to learning would help the pupils with disabilities. This is because these pupils are less to grasp abstract concepts since their memory is impaired.

Concerning observation made in different classrooms, the following observations have been drawn: 21% (11) of observed teachers; the pupils with disabilities answer the questions; the marks of pupils with disabilities are very less than the marks of pupils without disabilities, for example the average marks of pupils with disabilities is 40% while that of pupils without disabilities is 65%; 7% (4) of observed teachers focus and pay particular attention on pupils with disabilities while 93% do not do it. This is a consequence of lack of trained teachers in special needs education and low awareness with regard to the education of pupils with disabilities. About 30% of the teachers give priority and time to respond in classroom, most of materials are not available and those that are available are not used properly either by teachers or pupils. 40% of the teachers use tutoring, 32% peer group and 20% collaborative learning.

## V. Summary of findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1 Summary of findings

#### a. Demographic characteristics of teachers and head teachers

Almost all the teachers who teach in the schools selected for the study were young; they were in the age group of between 31-40 years. Majority of the H/T were over 40 years.

**b. Professional qualification of teachers**

Basically, 92% of teachers had professional qualifications with ample teaching experience to teach children in primary school. The levels of education of teachers were A2 in TTCs, A2 in other domains. Though teachers had professional qualification, the majority claimed not having knowledge in identification and assessment of pupils with disabilities, teaching and learning strategies to help the children. This is an indication that there is direct need for additional training that would equip teachers with necessary skills to educate pupils with disabilities. Most teachers taught classes with between 40 to 60 pupils which is relatively large class size. This can be a challenge because making individualized education for such number of pupils becomes an obstacle.

**c. Identification and assessment of pupils with disabilities**

The research found that 13% of the teachers affirmed to have some knowledge of identifying pupils with disabilities while 87% were unable to identify them. However, 100% of the teachers do not observe all pupils during class time and even outside to identify pupils with disabilities. Only 11% of teachers use physical checking in identifying pupils with disabilities, and only 2% of teachers give opportunities to pupils with disabilities in learning and teaching.

**d. Teaching and learning strategies and materials**

It was found that most teachers mainly use individual teaching, peer-group teaching and peer teaching, tutoring teaching, active and participative pedagogy as teaching and learning strategies to educate pupils with disabilities. 35% of the teachers preferred teaching pupils as individuals and 10% preferred to make sure pupils with disabilities have manipulated teaching equipments. 65% of the teachers use black board as teaching material to help pupils with disabilities. Other materials commonly used were computers and laptops, books and note books, locally available materials and toys and sport related materials, but with low frequency.

## 5.2 Conclusion

On the question about professional qualifications, the study concluded that though teachers had professional qualifications, they lacked adequate skills and knowledge to teach pupils with disabilities. On the question of the ability of the teachers in regular public primary schools to identify and assess pupils with disabilities, the study concluded that teachers lack knowledge and skills of identifying and assessing pupils with disabilities. There is therefore a very serious need for all primary school teachers to be equipped with necessary skills on identification of pupils with disabilities so that these pupils are not left unattended on the basis that they do not want to learn.

Regarding the question of the teaching and learning strategies and materials used by teachers serving pupils with disabilities, the study concluded that most teachers used individual teaching, peer group teaching and tutoring teaching among other strategies.

## 5.3 Recommendations

The Government of Rwanda puts in policies and proper mechanism of ensuring that teachers are adequately trained and equipped with modern teaching and learning strategies that will enable them accommodate pupils with disabilities; ensure that teachers handle small class sizes so that teachers can develop individual education plan for pupils with disabilities; adequate funding specifically for pupils with special needs should be enhanced so that ample specialized teaching and learning materials can be provided; teacher training colleges should also focus on pupils with disabilities curriculum as a significant component in the training syllabus; various teaching and learning materials should be developed so that teachers handling pupils with disabilities will not have excuses for not accommodating pupils with disabilities in their classes.

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