

**FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PLACEMENT OF LEARNERS WITH HEARING
IMPAIRMENT IN LEARNING INSTITUTIONS IN KAJIADO NORTH SUB-COUNTY,
KAJIADO COUNTY, KENYA.**

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Abstract

This study focused on factors influencing the placement of learners with hearing impairment in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kenya. The study specifically examined the influence of personnel, parents/guardians, cost of education and availability of learning institutions in the placement of learners with hearing impairment. This study was anchored on Labelling Theory. This was a descriptive study covering various learning institutions with a sample of 78 respondents. Data was collected by use of questionnaires, which were then analyzed descriptively, and reported in percentages, tables, pie charts and graphs. Significant factors that influenced placement of learners with hearing impairment in the district were parents, cost of education and availability of learning institutions. Recommendation for the training of more personnel in various fields of special education, as well as the establishment of well-equipped assessment and learning facilities for learners with hearing impairment was arrived at. There is also need for sensitization of parents to regard the professional advice of specialists on the placement of learners with certain forms of impairment. The fact that this study was confined to a small geographical area, calls for the need for similar studies to be done in parts of Kenya so as to provide for a comprehensive understanding of issues relating to assessment and placement of learners with hearing impairment in our country Kenya.

Key words: *Placement, assessment hearing impairment, influence.*

Background to the Study

This study focused on factors influencing placement of learners with hearing impairment in learning institutions in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kenya. Hearing impairment is experienced in all parts of the world, by all age groups and gender, although with varying degree of severity (WHO, 2012). It is estimated that 5.3% of the world's population suffer from hearing disabling problem, with about 91% and 9% of these people being adults and children respectively. About 56% of persons suffering from hearing impairment are males, compared to 44% females. The problem is most prevalent in South Asia, Asia Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa in that order.

Although there are no comprehensive statistics on the number of people with hearing impairment in Kenya, it was estimated over five years ago that the number of children with hearing impairment was about 23,000 countrywide (NDCS, 2008). However, this only represents less than 10% of the number of persons with hearing impairment in the entire county if WHO (2012) approximations of the adult to children prevalence of hearing impairment are anything to go by. The placement of learners with hearing impairment in Kenya began in the 1950s following the establishment of Kenya Society for the Deaf Children (KSDC). Nyangoma and Mumias Schools in Western Kenya became the first placement institutions for learners with hearing impairment (KSDC, 2001).

The burden that hearing impairment pose to countries transcends all sectors of the human society, but there are more pronounced in employment and educational sectors (Laska, *et al.*, 2014). The burden that hearing impairment pose to the two sectors is said to be twice as large in developing countries as to the developed world with Kenya being no exception. For instance, in Kenya, only 3,600 or 16% of persons with hearing impairment were actually placed in special schools in the year 2008 (KSDC, 2001). This implied that about 84% of these learners were either placed in mainstream schools or were not enrolled in schools at all. However, unlike normal learners, the education of learners with hearing impairment, by virtue of their unique challenges begins with their placement

(Hargreaves, 2001). Contributing on the significance of proper placement of persons with hearing impairment, Turnbull and Turnbull, (2006), observe that education of learners with hearing impairment is a complex process, which require assessment and placement structures that guarantee quality, relevance, and that isalso responsive to the changing needs of contemporary education.

The assessment and placement of learners with hearing impairment in Kenya is done by Educational Assessment Resource Centers (EARCs). In 2003, it was reported by The Taskforce for Special Needs Education Appraisal Exercises that most of the EARCs' personnel were merely trained special education teachers without any further training, and that most of the Educational Assessment Resource Centers lacked critical assessment equipment and tools. Additionally, The National Special Education Policy Framework (2009) revealed that there was inadequate skilled labour for the assessment and placement of learners with special needs education (SNE). Despite these constraints faced by special needs education sector, proper formal education remains the most viable avenue through which the fortunes and status of persons with hearing impairment can be raised (Chenget *al.*, 2001). This means that efforts must be made to improve on the access to education and vocational rehabilitation services for persons with hearing impairment. However, limited physical and human resources mean that persons with hearing impairment have to compete for placement in the limited opportunities available in the country. It is against this background that this study focused on factors influencing the placement of learners with hearing impairment in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

Persons with hearing problem constitute about 6% of the world's population. The burden that hearing impairment pose to society is quite huge, with many adults with hearing impairment experiencing higher rates of unemployment. However, even among those who are employed, a higher percentage of them are in the lower grades of employment compared with the general workforce. Low levels of education and training has often been cited as the root cause of the disadvantaged position of persons with hearing impairment in society. Improving access to education and vocational training has thus been promoted as one of the most viable avenues through which persons with hearing impairment can advance their social and economic standing in society. Education of persons with hearing impairment unlike other learners with no known significant disability problems begins with their assessment and placement. Good learning outcomes are, however, dependent on effective and appropriate placement. Effective assessment and placement has been shown to be possible through proper procedures on assessment and placement. Yet in many countries including Kenya assessment and placement of learners with hearing impairment is facing serious challenges including inadequately trained personnel, inadequate assessment equipment and tools as well as insufficient of teaching, assessment and placement staff. Limited physical and human resources imply that persons with hearing impairment have to compete for placement in the limited opportunities available in the country. It is against this background that this study focused on factors influencing the placement of learners with hearing impairment in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kenya.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine factors influencing the placement of learners with hearing impairment in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kenya.

Objectives of the Study

This study was guided by the following objectives:

- a) To examine the personnel-related factors influencing the placement of learners with hearing impairment in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kenya.
- b) To assess the influence of parents/guardians in the placement of learners with hearing impairment in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kenya.
- c) To analyze the cost of education as a concern in the placement of learners with hearing impairment in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kenya.
- d) To examine the availability of learning institutions for special needs students in the placement of learners with hearing impairment in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kenya.

Theoretical Framework

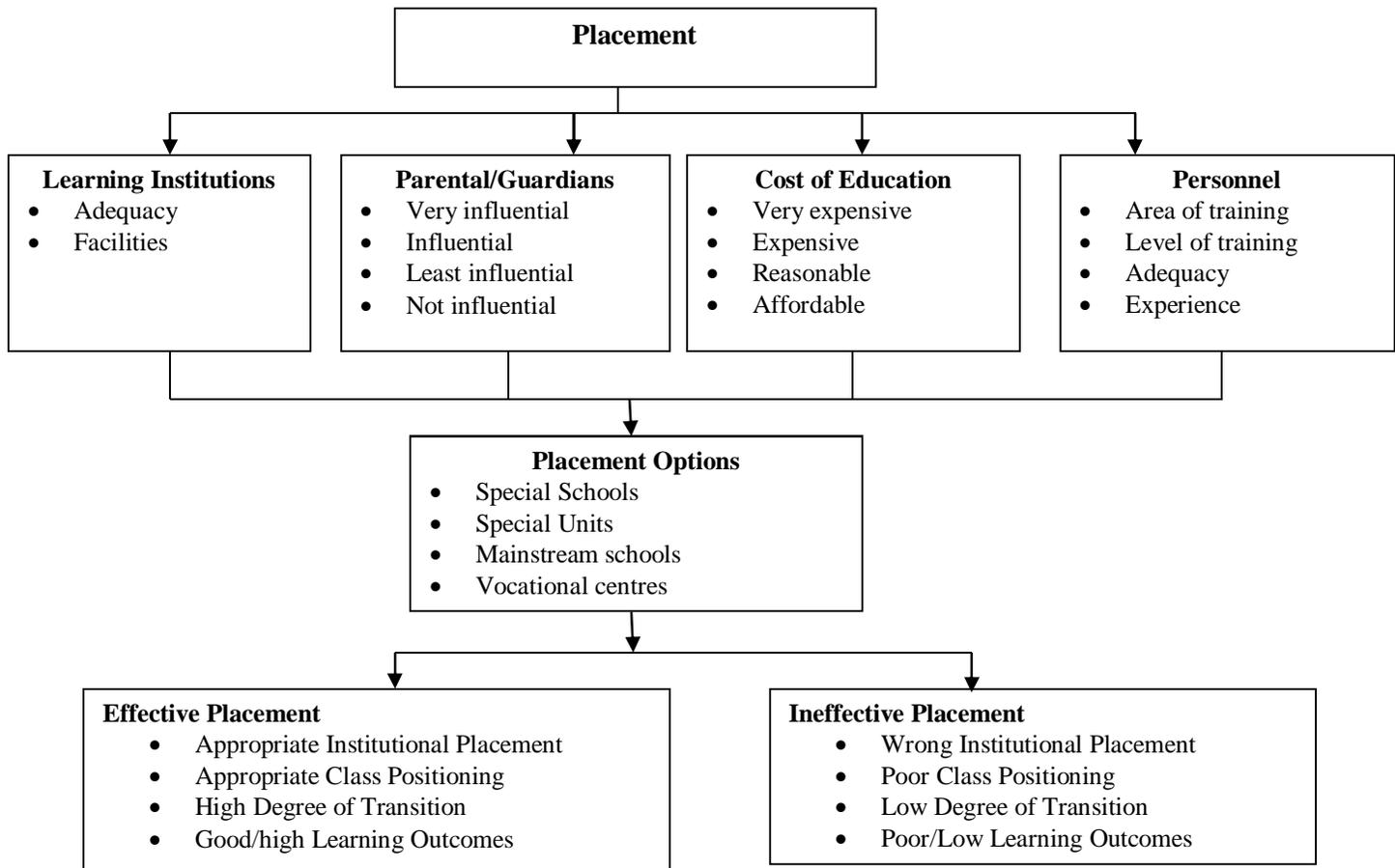
This study was guided by Labelling Theory. Labelling theory is traceable to the works of Becker (1973). Labelling theory was preferred for this study because it reveals that, people obtain labels from how people view their behaviour. According to Bala (2004), labelling is assigning a child with a condition to a general category in the classification system. There are both positive and negative sides to labelling (Ademokoya, 2006). The positive part of labelling a learner leads to improved legislation, improved communication and development of advocacy, but on the negative side, there are possibilities of stigmatization, peer rejection and wrong placement of learners with disabilities based on inappropriate assessment (Ademokoya, 2006).

This theory builds a subjective conception of the self but others intrude into the reality of that individual's life (Wright, 2009). The theory hypothesizes that the labels applied to individuals influence their behaviour particularly the application of negative or stigmatism. Labelling promotes deviant behaviour, becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy that an individual who is labelled has little choice but to conform (Wright, 2009). The essential meaning of labelling theory is that people become deviant because majority of the population and the authority concerned attach certain labels to their behaviour.

The implication of this theory to this study is that during assessment, learners with hearing impairment can either be labelled appropriately or inappropriately. This will have a bearing on the on whether the learner is wrongly or appropriately placed in the available learning institutions. It will then follow that an erroneously labelled child with hearing impairment will not only be inappropriately placed but also unsuitably instructed.

Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework was modelled along the objectives of the proposed study, the literature reviewed and theory adopted for the study. Placement of learners was examined in the context of context of available learning institutions, parental preference/guidance, cost of education and availability of personnel. The following figure 2.1 shows how this study conceptualized the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.



Availability of learning institutions, cost of education and parental preference are important factors that may have a positive or negative bearing on the where the learners-even if properly assessed- are placed. The recommendations of the assessors in terms of where the learners need to be placed may or may not be strictly implemented depending on the availability of the institution, parental choice and cost of education. Assessors' recommendations on placements are likely to be implemented in cases where learning institutions are available, parents have raised no objections or where the costs are affordable. On the contrary such recommendations may be ignored where the recommended learning centres are absent, parents have raised objections or the costs of education in the recommended centres are prohibitive. In such instance, the assessed learners may be placed in the available learning institutions that are also affordable and also preferred by parents even if they do not meet the required standards.

This study maintains that placement of learners will only be effective if it results in appropriate institutional placement, appropriate class positioning-for mainstream schools-, high degree of transition and good/high learning outcomes. On the other hand placement is ineffective if results in inappropriate results such as wrong institutional placement and class positioning, low degree of transitions and low or poor learning outcomes. Although this study holds that effective placement of learners with hearing impairment is influenced by personnel qualifications, availability of learning institutions, parental choice and cost education, learners attitude towards learning, teachers and parental support may also have a bearing on the effectiveness of placement outcomes. Parents and teachers support in post-assessment and placement situation may help a great deal in helping the

learner achieve better transition. However, where such support is very minimal or absent, a learner may find it difficult to adapt leading to low transition and learning outcomes. The kind of attitude the learner has toward education may also affect the effectiveness of learning outcomes notwithstanding the nature of learner's assessment and placement. A favourable view of education may help the learner adapt to the learning environment leading to a better transition and learning outcomes, with the opposite view of education resulting in poor or low transition and learning outcomes.

Methodology:

Research Design

This study was grounded on descriptive research design. This design is used to explore the relationship between variables (Borg and Gall, 1996). This design was preferred because it allows for the reportage of results from the respondents the way they are. Further, descriptive design allows the researcher for the systematic collection, summary, presentation and interpretation of the results (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). This study collected data, analyzed, summarized and interpreted the results on the influence of personnel factors, availability of learning institutions, cost of education and parents/guardians influence on the placement of learners with hearing impairment in Kajiado North district, Kenya.

Target Population

There were 90 public primary schools, 8 special units, and 2 special schools in Kajiado North District, with a population of 33,555 learners, 420 were learners with disabilities of which 85 were learners with HI by the time the research was carried out. There were 80 special trained teachers in the district and 80 parents/guardians.

Sampling

This study employed multi-method of sampling. These were purposive, simple random and convenient sampling methods. Purposive sampling was used to select head-teachers of special schools and special units, EARC officers and special trained teachers in education. Head teachers, special trained teachers and EARC officers were selected purposively because they were better placed to respond to issues relating to availability of learning institutions, assessment and placement personnel as well, as how these influenced the placement of learners with hearing impairment. This study used random sampling to select students with hearing impairment, with convenient sampling used to select parents due to the nomadic lifestyle of the community in the study area.

Sample Size

This study sampled 78 respondents representing 30% of the study target population. Kajiado North Sub-County had 80 special trained teachers, 80 learners with hearing impairment and 80 parents with children with hearing impairment. The Sub-County had 10 head teachers heading schools where learners with impairment were placed, and 2 EARC's officers. Consequently the study had the following sample size.

Table 1: Sample Size

Respondents' category	Target population	Sample size
Special trained teachers	85	25
Parents	80	24
Learners with HI	80	24
Head teachers	10	3
EARCs	2	2
Total	275	78

Research Instruments

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative procedures of data collection. Questionnaire was the main instrument used to collect quantitative data. Questionnaires had both structured and unstructured questions to enable collection of standardized responses while simultaneously providing respondents the opportunity to respond without restrictions. More data especially those relating to physical resources were obtained through observational method. The observation checklist covered issues such as the availability of assessment room, assessment tools and equipment, retrospective records among other relevant issues.

Pilot Study

The pilot study was conducted on a sample of 10% of the sampled respondent at Ili-bilis unit for the deaf in Kajiado county. Nieswiadomy (2002), recommends that 10% of the study sample size would be sufficient to serve as a sample for the pilot study. The researcher modified the research instruments after the pilot study. The modified research instruments were thus made clear, specific on the issues sought and simple. The piloting involved 10% of each of the respondents' categories.

Validity and Reliability

Validity refers to the degree to which a study accurately reflects or assesses the specific concept that the researcher is attempting to measure. In order to test the validity of the evaluation tool, the study administered questionnaires to sampled respondents using test-retest method.

Reliability is the consistency of an instrument to yield the same result at different times (Frankel & Wallen, 2003). In the study, reliability was arrived at by exposing the respondents to the same test after two weeks. The co-efficient (alpha value) of 0.7 was assumed to reflect the acceptable reliability (Cozby, 2001). The Alpha value ranges from zero to one and indicates the reliability of an instrument. The more the Alpha value is closer to one, the more reliable the instrument. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a correlation coefficient greater or equal to 0.75 shows a high reliability of the instruments.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was based on the research objectives. Data collected from the questionnaires were coded, edited and then analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS- Version 20). Data was analyzed descriptively, with results being presented in figures and tables.

Results and Analysis:

The Availability of Learning Institutions in the Placement of Learners with Hearing Impairment

There were inadequate learning institutions suitable for persons with hearing impairment. , which was key for placement of learners with hearing impairments, were found to be short in supply. The study, however, found that the availability of learning institutions greatly influenced the placement of learners with hearing impairment. It is evident in table 2 that 30(51.1%) of the respondents cited the availability of learning institutions as being critical in the placement of learners with hearing impairments. About 31 (40.1%) of the respondents reported that availability of learning institutions influenced the placement of learners with hearing impairments. A small proportion of the respondents 5(6.4%) felt that availability of learning institutions was least influential in the placement of learners with hearing impairment in the district. However, one representing (2.3%) of the respondent considered availability of learning institutions as not being an influential factor in the placement of learners with hearing impairments. This study wishes to state that learners with hearing impairment were placed in various learning institutions including regular schools, special unit for learners with Mental Retardation and integrated special schools. There was only one special unit for hearing impairment in the entire, thus suggesting that some learners with hearing impairment were placed in unsuitable learning institutions.

Table 2: Availability of learning institutions for placement of learners with HI

Importance	Frequency	Percent
Very influential	42	51.1
Influential	31	40.1
Least influential	5	6.4
Not influential	1	2.3
Total	78	100.0

The findings of this study concur with those of Faeza (2008) and Tobey (2004), but differ significantly with that of Baine (2006) as the following discussions illustrate. Faeza (2008) for instance, observe that school placement for learners with hearing impairment are not static as it can be either the special school setting or mainstream placement. Tobey (2004) contends that locality of the school can influence placement of a learner with hearing impairment and further more that most schools for learners with hearing impairment are far from home which implies that proximity of the school would influence the school selection for placement by parents. Baine (2006) on the contrary maintains that learners with hearing impairment must be placed in their special schools, where they are guided and supported by a specialist in order for them to receive the maximum benefits of education. Oyebola (1988) in Farao(2012) supports Baine(2006) on academic achievement of the hearing impaired students, that academic performance level of these students can be better than those of the normal hearing students, if only they will be well placed and given more supportive services.

Parental/Guardian's Influence on the Placement of Learners with Hearing Impairment

This study established that parents/guardians were very influential in the placement of their children with hearing impairment. As table 3 below shows, majority 65 (83.3%) and 8(12.1%) of the respondents concurred that, to a great extent and extent parents/guardians influenced where their children with hearing impairments were placed. About 3 (4.1%) and less than 1% of the respondents indicated that parental/guardians had least and no influence on the placement of learners with hearing impairments.

Table 3: Parental/Guardian's Influence on Placement of Learners with HI

Response	Frequency	Percent
No Extent	1	0.3
Least Extent	3	4.1
Extent	9	12.1
Great Extent	65	83.5
Total	78	100.0

The study established that parents preferred that their children with hearing impairment be placed in learning institutions closer to their homes. This forced head teachers and assessors to place some of the learners with hearing impairment in unsuitable schools. Others studies including those of Rossy (2006), Carlberg and Kavale, (2004) confirm that parents are indeed very influential in the placement of learners with hearing impairment. The authors observed that while other professionals such as doctors and teachers can offer advice on the child, parents reserve the right and holds the ultimate responsibility on key decisions about the placement of their children. A similar observation has also been made by Tobey (2006), who asserts that parents have a right in the choice of educational placement of their children

The Cost of Education for Learners with Hearing Impairment

Cost of education was another factor that influenced placement of learners with hearing impairment. Cost is at the heart of any form of education with learners with hearing impairment being no exception. The study revealed that 40(51.2%) of the respondents indicated cost of education as a factor that influenced the placement of learners with hearing impairment while 35 (45.44%) strongly influenced. Nevertheless the cost of education as least important consideration in the placement of learners with hearing impairment was reported by only 1(1.4%) of the respondents.

Table 4: Cost of Education

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly influential	35	45
Influential	40	51
Least influential	1	1
Not influential	2	3
Total	78	100.0

While the cost of education is generally high, that of learners with special needs such as those with hearing impairment is even higher. For instance, a study done in the United States found that the average cost of educating a child with disability was twice that of educating a child without disability (UNESCO 1994; Hegarty 2002). The author noted that the extra cost of educating children with disabilities was often passed over to the parents. Faced with inability to meet these extra costs, most parents often find themselves misplacing their children in non least restrictive environment (IDEA 2004) even if it meant these schools were unfit for their children's disability.

3.5 Influence of Trained Personnel as a factor in the Placement of Learners with Hearing Impairment

Table 5 illustrates that the availability of special trained teachers in schools influenced placement of learners with hearing impairment. Majority of 44(56.4%) and 16(20.1%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively that availability of special trained teachers in the area of hearing impairment was indeed a factor that influenced the placement of learners with hearing impairment in the Sub-County. Two representing (3.7%) and 13(16%) of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that availability of qualified personnel was a factor that influenced placement of learners with hearing impairment in schools in the Sub-County. Two (3.7%) of the respondents could not deny or confirm that availability of qualified personnel influenced the placement of learners with hearing impairment in the Sub-County.

Table 5: Availability of Qualified Personnel

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	44	56.4
Agree	16	20.1
Neutral	2	3.7
Disagree	13	16.0
Strongly Disagree	2	3.7
Total	77	100.0

It is clear from the results that, trained personnel was an influential factor in the placement of learners with hearing impairments in Kajiado North Sub-County. This concurred with Garrick Duhaney and Salend (2000), Moog (2002) and Kang'ethe-Kamau (2004) who observed that educators who have knowledge and experience with learners with special needs could influence the accommodation and placement of learners with special educational needs. However, the study established that only 2 (2.5%) of all the educational personnel in the entire Sub-County were trained in the area of hearing impairments. The fact that the number of teachers trained in hearing impairment could not match the number of learners with impairment implied that unqualified personnel handled most of these learners. The same with the assessment team who were trained in different discipline of disability. In this sense therefore, the headteachers and the special trained teachers assumed the role of the EARC and placed learners with hearing impairment before any assessment was carried out. Other than the obvious misplacement that comes with this, it is also possible that such learners may be predisposed to high rates of drop outs.

Conclusion

Significant factors that influenced the placement of children with hearing impairment were parents/guardians, availability of learning institutions, lack of trained personnel and cost of education in that order. Majority of the parents preferred special unit within the locality, a move that led to the placement of learners with hearing impairment in unsuitable institutions. Lack of enough schools for learners with hearing impairment meant that some of the learners were placed in mainstream schools or special units despite of the disability and degree of hearing loss. Further, there was chronic shortage of teachers trained in the area of hearing impairment, a situation that undermined the effective assessment, placement and learning of children with hearing impairment in the Sub-County. High cost of special education in Kenya generally and in Kajiado North Sub-County in particular forced a sizable number of learners with hearing impairment to be placed in unsuitable environment.

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