Integration, as used in this paper, is a way of eliminating segregation of physically handicapped children from the rest of the people in the society created by special education. The main aim of this study was to investigate the effect of integration on self-concept of physically handicapped children in regular primary schools. The study employed both ex post facto (causal comparative) research designs. A total of 240 physically handicapped children were selected through simple random sampling from the five selected primary schools. Those who were selected to take part in the study were from standard 4, 6 and 8. The research instrument was questionnaires and schedule interviews. Data analysis was done using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings showed that integration has positive effect on the self-concept of physically handicapped children in primary schools. The results will be used to sensitise society on the significance of integration of physically handicapped children.

In Kenya free primary education is considered a basic right and a basic need for every child. Over the past years special education was being provided in special schools, special units attached to regular schools, but these special schools acted as forms of segregation of physically handicapped children from the rest of the society. These children usually develop poor self-concept due to isolation, which deprives them of social interaction in the society. In 2002, the government of Kenya introduced free primary education for all children in the country. But, despite the policy underlining free primary education, the physically handicapped children are still being marginalized in the society. This is evidently seen when parents still insist on taking them to special schools or leave them at home with no access to education. These children usually develop poor self-concept because of isolation and segregation, which could easily be avoided if they are given a chance to learn in integrated schools. The overall problem emanates from lack of understanding on how integration of physically handicapped children in regular primary schools can boost their self-concept. This study therefore, investigated on the effects of integration on self-concept of physically handicapped children.
handicapped children in primary schools. The study sought to answer questions the whether or not there is a relationship between integration and self-concept of physically handicapped children in regular primary schools; whether gender affects the self-concept of physically handicapped children in primary schools and whether the period of integration affects the self-concept of physically handicapped children in integrated primary schools.

Related Literature

Integration of Physically Handicapped Children

Integration is the normalization of where people with disabilities live; with whom they work, and play; movement of people with disabilities from institutions to community living, from special schools to regular classes. It is a way of eliminating segregation of physically handicapped children from the rest of the people in the society, which had been created by special education (Dobson, 1995). This involves trying to make the lives of people with disabilities much like the lives of non-disabled people as possible. This include dropping most of the labels used to describe disabilities and emphasizing the civil rights of disabled people as they are stressed by Commission of Human Rights (2000). It means fostering treatment of disability, developing technology that enhances the independent functioning of people with disabilities, and encouraging the non-stereotyped portrayal of people with disabilities in the society. In integrated schools, physically handicapped children learn communication skills; increased numbers of social bodies directed towards peers and enhances social responsivenss (Staub & Hunt, 1993). Much of zeal for the practice of integration is a blanket-policy system from the anticipated effects in the social-emotional domain, where physically handicapped children, accepted because of contact and familiarity, will naturally model the appropriate behaviours of peers; will not suffer the stigma of special classes and will be provided a more real life environment of learning (Kauffman, 1993). Integration programme is aimed at removing existing barriers that make them become anti-social members of the society (MOE, 2005). “Each integrated school is being given a grant to facilitate procurement of the necessary teaching/learning materials and equipment” (MOE, 2003, p. 42). In addition, the government continues to train primary school teachers in special education at Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE) as well as in tertiary and university level in order to improve the national capacity of teachers of special education in regular schools (Koeh, 1999).

The substantive significance of integration is that the child will get opportunity to model other physically handicapped children who have adjusted despite the same obstacle of disability, (Lewis & Doorleg, 1991). The ultimate goal of integration is to help physically handicapped children to be self-sufficient and culturally enriched. These children require understanding, acceptance and help as well as emotional support from the school in order to fit well in the larger society. According to Gordon (1972), family is the first social context where physically handicapped children come in contact with those persons they value most. They acquire attitudes and value systems from the family and the child’s self-concept is a product of his/her socialization with family members and other members of the society (David, 1949 in Marinelli & Orto, 1977). Gordon (1972) further observes that the way children feel about themselves and their ability is relayed to their school performance. They can see themselves as capable of learning or reading when their teacher appreciates their efforts. Self-concept, therefore, is based on attitudes, personal beliefs and values that one holds for him/herself in relation to responses or regards from significant others (Mac Donald, 1965). When teachers and other children socially accept a physically handicapped child in school, that child will develop positive attitude, which can help him/her develop positive self-esteem. This child will compete with other non-physically handicapped children and whenever he/she can defeat them, he/she has self-competence and consequently positive self-concept.

Self-Concept of Physically Handicapped Children

Self-concept is thought of as an organized configuration of perceptions of the self, which are admisible to awareness. It is composed of such elements as the perceptions of one’s characteristics and abilities; the perceptions and concepts of the self in relation to others and to the environment; the value qualities which are perceived as associated with experiences and objects, goals and ideas which are perceived as having positive or negative values (Rogers, 1951). As long as the self-conscious is firmly organized and no contradictory material is dimly perceived, then positive self-feelings may exist; the self may be seen as worthy and acceptable, and conscious tension is minimal. The extent to which an individual dimly perceives incongruence and discrepancies of self and behaviour is a measure of his internal tension and determines the amount of defensive behaviour (Mac Donald, 1965). It should be taken into great consideration that each individual is unique and has changing and concrete world of experiences. Effective socialization can be achieved through learning to reduce the stigmatising effects of disability and in building positive self-image (Wylie, 1974). The physically handicapped children who are cut-off from socialization environments are capable of exhibiting emotional or behavioural disorders, which are not in accordance with social norms (Harrison, 1985). Some of them may withdraw completely from the rest of the people and they do not participate in any activity in the society. They keep on nursing the “poor me” feelings and they have very low self-esteem. On the contrary, when physically handicapped children are brought up in a warm and friendly environment, they grow up with a sense of belonging and they have positive self-image, which is a booster to self-concept (Augustinos, 1987). They need to be accepted and given warm emotional support by parents, siblings, peers and other significant persons. This will help them have positive self-perception and be able to accommodate their own disabilities. Positive self-concept can be enhanced through good compliments from parents, teachers, peers and other significant persons (Wylie, 1974).

Heward (2000) observes that the kind of interaction and feedback that the physically handicapped children receive from their parents, relatives, peers and teachers (either in words or deeds) goes a long way to influencing the nature of evaluations that children make of themselves either positively or negatively. Many a times, physically handicapped children do not receive accurate or spontaneous feedback from others, who feel that they must be especially considerate or careful of the feelings of someone who is handicapped. Absence of accurate feedback makes it difficult if not impossible for the
handicapped child to develop skills ultimately. This impoverishes the experiences needed for a child’s socialization, and hence can lead to low self-concept. In some instances, physically handicapped children may succeed in establishing a rewarding social relationship with others who can view them as children with physical disabilities but not as disabled children. With these encounters, they will require some rewarding experiences and will have the opportunity to learn and practice social skills, if their parents are able to facilitate such relationships. Burns (1982) in his studies postulated that children’s interaction even with their peers gives them courage to open up to socialize even in the wider world. Their self-esteem continues to build up and so will feel socially accepted in school as well as at home. They see themselves as capable of accomplishing certain tasks, which could otherwise be seen as for only non-physically handicapped children (Lawrence, 1991).

Period of Integration and Self-concept

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC, 1993) emphasised the education of children with disabilities as a key factor in all societies. Unfortunately, these children are left for a long time under isolation and they can only get a chance of entering schools if persons of goodwill deem them fit to be educated. It is not surprising to find children with disabilities being enrolled in primary schools at ages of ten years and above. The physically handicapped children may sometimes take long to grasp the contents offered in school and these make them lag behind as their peers are promoted to the next grade. This retention rate has a lot of negative impacts in the development of their self-concept because they view themselves as incapable of achieving high academic standards in school. This retention may result in long periods of integration, which will eventually give rise to low self-concept. As their academic performance is lowered, these children are retarded for long in the class progress and consequently, their self-concept is totally debilitated. The effects of lower self-concept are manifested by feelings of inferiority, not having same material possessions as other children, lack of awareness of self (strengths and weaknesses) and not accepting self and their disabilities. They then resort into self-damaging fantasies of inadequacies in adjusting to school community (Best, 1978). But on the other hand, if these children are given a chance to join integrated schools early in their age, they will have opportunity to learn with their peers and compete with them. Neurological disorders in many cases do not have any inference with intellectual capacity of these children. So, they have high chances of doing well in their academic performance even if mobility is a problem to them (Sailor, 1991). These children manifest a lot of effort in their academic work when they are given equal opportunities for learning like their non-physically handicapped peers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Integration and Self-Concept

This study investigated the effect of integration on self-concept of physically handicapped children in primary schools. The findings indicated that integration has a significant effect on the self-concept of physically handicapped children (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>166.72</td>
<td>17.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>157.70</td>
<td>14.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>162.21</td>
<td>16.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A t-test for independent samples was performed to test whether or not a significant difference existed in self-concept between physically handicapped children in integrated schools and those learning in special schools. The results of this analysis showed that there was a statistically significant difference in self-concept between these two groups of physically handicapped children, t (238) = 4.4, p < .05. From this result of the inferential statistics, the null hypothesis was rejected and it was concluded that physically handicapped children learning in integrated schools have higher self-concept than those learning in special schools. Since the mean scores of physically handicapped children in special schools were significantly lower than the mean scores of those integrated schools, then we can automatically accept that integration has a lot of influence in moulding of self-concept. Integrations make them try the tasks which their peers do, and once they succeed, they change their negative self-concept to positive. These tasks include playing with their peers, socialisation and competing in class activities. Johnson (1986) and Slavin (1988) argue that integration is a way of fostering dynamic and realistic view of physically handicapped children and their peers in the school environment. This means that the physically handicapped children are viewed by non-physically handicapped children as possessing more attributes that contradict stereotype attitudes that accompany disability and possess attributes that may not be relevant to all aspects of disability because each type disability has various levels of severity (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1988). Their self-concept in most cases depends on the way the others perceive and treat them in the society. If they are treated in a positive way then their self-concept is also influenced positively.

The findings also supported Gordon’s (1972) theory of self-concept, where he advocated that a child’s self-concept depends on the way the others treat him/her. In integrated schools, the teachers and peers of physically handicapped children have a high tendency of accommodating and they treat them in an acceptable manner. This gives them a sense of belonging and so their self-concept is boosted. The significant others’ attitudes towards physically handicapped persons has profound influences on how they see themselves and on their opportunities for physiological and social adjustment (Kauffman & Hallanah, 1988). If the reaction is one of fear, rejection or discrimination, they may spend a great deal of energy trying to hide their stigmatising differences but if the reaction is one of pity and an expectation of helplessness, physically handicapped children will intend to behave in a dependent manner. On the contrary, if physically handicapped children are seen as persons who have limitations, just like anyone else, and are accorded respect of their dignity, they will be encouraged to become independent and productive members of society (Newman, 1980). When physically handicapped children perceive their disability positively, and once they fit in regular School community, their self-concept also improves and they begin to behave in
accordance with the expected norms of the society (Finnie, 1980). They even perform well in their academic work and in social interactions with their peers. It was concluded that integration is effective in influencing self-concept development amongst primary school pupils and it is ideal in establishing and maintaining the self-concept of physically handicapped children in primary schools.

**Period of Integration and Self-Concept**

The results indicated that the period of integration has a significant effect on self-concept of physically handicapped children in integrated primary schools (Table 2). A t-test for independent samples was conducted to show whether or not a significant effect existed between the period of integration and self-concept of physically handicapped children in regular primary schools.

**Table 2: Period of integration and self-concept**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period of Integration</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>188.86</td>
<td>18.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>165.19</td>
<td>16.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>170.03</td>
<td>17.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results showed that the period of integration has a statistically significant effect on self-concept, t (238) = 2.712, P < .05. It was concluded that short periods of integration enhanced the self-concept of physically handicapped children in primary schools. Since some of these children are moderate in their academic capability, then, it is not surprising to find that some of them take long to comprehend some concepts in various subjects (Oderkirk, 1993). These children’s self-perception is higher if they find that their academic progress is more or less like that of non-physically handicapped children (Sailor, 1991). When these children are accepted and supported by peers and teachers while their individual education needs are met, their self-perception is elevated and they begin to refocus their self-image and life goals. Those who keep on missing school to go for physiotherapy tend to take long in primary education and may not cope up with steep competition from their peers. Furthermore, physically handicapped children who have stayed longer in integrated primary schools have lower self-concept than those who have stayed for a short period of time. When they are back in school, teachers may not have enough time to individualize learning for them and this can make them lag behind and have self-pity as they watch their counterparts’ progress to next level (Barnes and Lehr, 1993). The t-test results revealed that, the period of integration has a lot of impact on self-concept of physically handicapped children. Kakui (2003) reiterated that early educational intervention is a way of assisting the physically handicapped children to view their disabilities in a more positive way.

Although integration was aimed at providing less restrictive, more natural and integrated environment, the physically handicapped children are faced with challenges of regular rigid school curricula. The teachers find it hard to accommodate these physically handicapped children in regular school curricula (Dahl 1986). They feel that they have limited resources, are not properly trained and they may not believe that these physically handicapped children really belong in regular primary school. KISE (2002) advocated that physically handicapped children should be given enough time to learn all the concepts which other non-physically handicapped children are learning. This attitude can strain the relationship between teachers and learners who are physically handicapped and this can make the physically handicapped children maladjusted, anxious and can develop low self-concept (Pugach & Lily, 1984). Efforts need to be generated to ensure equal learning opportunities for all children in primary schools irrespective of their state of ability and disability.

**Conclusion**

The integration of physically handicapped children in regular primary schools has positive effect in the formation of self-concept. This was revealed by high self-concept mean scores of physically handicapped children in integrated primary schools as compared to those in special and primary schools. Integration of physically handicapped children in regular primary schools is so vital in improving their self-concept. This means that when these children learn in integrated schools they gain enough opportunities to exercise their potentials in all spheres of life to the full. Therefore, integrated schools are credited for their role in interactions and socialization of physically handicapped children as a way of preparing them to meet the demands of the larger society later in life. These schools should be better facilitated to create a better learning environment for all learners irrespective of their physical status.

**REFERENCES**


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