

## **PARENTAL ROLE INFLUENCE ON MAINSTREAMING OF MENTALLY CHALLENGED LEARNERS IN REGULAR PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KENYA**

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**Abstract:** *This study investigates the factors influencing the mainstreaming of learners with mental challenges in public primary schools in Gucha South Sub-County, Kisii County, Kenya, emphasizing the role of parental involvement. Despite global advocacy for inclusive education, Kenyan schools often face challenges integrating mentally challenged learners due to systemic barriers and societal attitudes. The research, employing a descriptive survey design, targeted 52 headteachers, 123 teachers, and a Sub-County Quality and Standards Officer (SQASO), with a final sample of 16 schools, 37 teachers, and the SQASO. Data collection methods included questionnaires, interviews, and observation schedules. The findings reveal significant issues: many parents are economically constrained, lack awareness of their roles, and often do not assist their children with schoolwork. Only 20.9% of parents believed they effectively supported their mentally challenged children's education, and 83.3% did not attend class conferences. Additionally, 91.7% did not help with homework, while 87.5% were unable to afford medical checkups for their children. The study identified that over 70% of children lacked basic adaptive skills and that all respondents acknowledged not all mentally challenged children were enrolled in school. Experience levels among teachers and headteachers varied, influencing their understanding of inclusive practices. The study underscores the need for community sensitization and policy reinforcement to foster positive parental attitudes and involvement. Promoting economic empowerment and training for parents could facilitate better integration, supporting learners' academic and social development. Findings advocate collaborative strategies among parents, educators, and policymakers to create inclusive educational environments for mentally challenged learners.*

**Keywords:** *parental role influence, regular public primary schools, mentally challenged learners*

### **1. Introduction**

Special Needs Education is defined as Education for children with range of physical, sensory, intellectual, and emotional or any other challenges that hinder the smooth learning of a learner in a normal/regular classroom. In article 26 of universal declaration of human rights of 1945, the United Nations (1948) states that every individual has a right to education. This right was further emphasized and affirmed as a plan of action in the world conference of special Needs Education held in Salamanca, Spain/United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The Dakar framework for action adapted the world declaration of

Education for All (EFA) world Education forum (2000) which affirmed the notion of education as a fundamental right and established the new millennium goal to provide every girl and boy with primary school education by 2015. Launch (2001) also clearly identified special needs Education (SNE) as one of the key strategies to address issues of marginalization and exclusion. The fundamental principle of the framework states that all children should have equal opportunity to learn whether with challenges or not. A significant number of children who are mentally challenged are excluded from education opportunities for both primary and secondary schooling.

The integration of learners with mental challenges into mainstream public primary schools in Kenya is a multifaceted issue that encompasses various dimensions, including parental roles, societal perceptions, and educational policies. As the global trend towards inclusive education gains momentum, understanding the influence of parental involvement becomes crucial in shaping the educational experiences of children with disabilities. Research indicates that parents play a pivotal role in advocating for their children's inclusion and fostering positive attitudes towards disability within the educational community (Yaffe, 2015; Filipino, 2023; Srivastava et al., 2013). This is particularly relevant in the Kenyan context, where cultural attitudes and educational practices can significantly impact the mainstreaming process.

Parental involvement is not merely a supportive action; it is a critical determinant of successful integration. Studies have shown that parents who are actively engaged in their children's education can enhance their children's psychosocial functioning and academic performance (Yaffe, 2015; Filipino, 2023). Furthermore, the emotional and psychological well-being of parents themselves can influence their capacity to support their children effectively. For instance, parents of children with intellectual disabilities often face emotional trauma during transitions between educational settings, which can affect their involvement in mainstream schooling (Lefakane, 2023; Twomey & Shevlin, 2016). Therefore, understanding the dynamics of parental involvement, including their educational background and cultural perceptions, is essential for developing effective strategies for inclusion (Filipino, 2023; Srivastava et al., 2013).

Moreover, the perceptions of parents and teachers regarding the capabilities of learners with disabilities significantly shape the educational environment. Research has highlighted that positive parental attitudes towards inclusion can lead to more favorable outcomes for children with special needs (Hellmich & Loeper, 2019; Gómez-Marí et al., 2022). Conversely, negative perceptions can create barriers to acceptance and integration within the classroom (Broomhead, 2013; Voinea & Topala, 2018). This underscores the importance of fostering partnerships between parents and educators, as collaborative efforts can enhance the inclusivity of educational practices and promote a supportive atmosphere for all learners (Kourkoutas et al., 2015; Srivastava et al., 2013).

In conclusion, the role of parents in the mainstreaming of mentally challenged learners in Kenya is a critical area of study that warrants further exploration. By examining the interplay between parental involvement, societal attitudes, and educational practices, stakeholders can better understand how to create inclusive environments that cater to the needs of all students. This research aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on inclusive education by highlighting the essential role of parents in advocating for and supporting the integration of learners with mental challenges in mainstream public primary schools.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The mainstreaming of learners with mental challenges in public primary schools in Kenya presents a significant challenge, reflecting broader societal attitudes and systemic barriers within the educational framework. Despite

the global shift towards inclusive education, many schools in Kenya continue to operate under traditional models that segregate learners with disabilities, often due to prevailing misconceptions about their capabilities and the perceived burden of accommodating their needs (Kiru (2018)Chabeda-Barthe et al., 2019). This segregation not only limits the educational opportunities for these learners but also perpetuates stigma and discrimination within the community, hindering their social integration and personal development (Yaffe, 2015; Frew et al., 2012).

Parental involvement is a critical factor influencing the successful integration of children with mental challenges into mainstream education. Research indicates that parents who actively engage in their children's education can significantly enhance their academic performance and social skills (Strassfeld, 2018; Spernes, 2023). However, many parents face barriers to involvement, including a lack of awareness about their role in the educational process and cultural beliefs that may prioritize traditional schooling methods.

### **3. Study Objective**

This study was part of a broad research on factors influencing mainstreaming of mentally challenged learners in regular public primary schools in, Kisii county, Kenya, with a specific objective to ascertain the extent to which parental role influences mainstreaming of learners who are mentally challenged in regular public primary schools in Gucha South Sub-County.

### **4. Relates Studies Literature**

Emerlahu (1998) gives three ways to show how parents are crucial in their children's development. The family has a huge and very tough responsibility as it has to take proper care of their health, their physical development, their overall education, and the development of their intellectual affinities as well as creation for better moral values, convictions, and attitude. The family as an institution has to create favorable conditions for the development of positive relationships towards work, which is a predisposition towards a better establishment of a realistic approach for the better development of the children's personality. The parents take care of the overall children's physical and intellectual development until the point they become independent and ready to face the challenges of the society they live in. Parents are aware of the work; at the same time, they need pedagogical information on the right to education of their children (Mojsovska-Koleva, 2006).

The parents play a leading role in children's development. Focusing on the development of their personality is seen from the perspective of three interacting factors: pleasure in their children's achievement, needs, and the stress that imposes the parental role in the process and the feeling regarding parental competency towards their children's overall development. It consists mainly of acquiring experiences which are usually attracted by constant learning (Lakinska-Divin, 2006). In this regard, the parents, as well as the family as a whole, play the role of direct leaders as well as supporters of the implementation of the education of their children. It can be seen as the fundamental one which undoubtedly has a greater influence on the overall development and creation of human personality. When parents involve themselves in the education process of the children, usually the outcome can be qualified as positive and encouraging. In this regard, they are usually connected and act under their raw parental attitudes, which are transmitted through their demonstration of mutual confidentiality regarding the children's capabilities and their overall learning education as a complete process. Therefore, parents should get involved in supporting their children in doing their homework, as in this way they offer their parental support as one of the key strategies leading towards successful education.

The education level of children in the family depends more on the level of the parents' education. So, this factor strongly affects family relationships and the successful development of children (Matilow, 2002). In order to have good results at school, the parents' control over the child needs to be apparent. Children have two main educators in their lives: their parents and their teachers. Parents are their children's strongest model and greatest influence. Children always adopt parents' values and types of behavior (Kassap-Glymasere, 2013). According to Huang and Waxman (2016), the rate of attendance of children who are mentally challenged in regular community schools in India is too low. It was further noted that there is a high rate of illiteracy among pupils who are mentally challenged. This was demonstrated by research findings that recorded a percentage of 74 in urban areas and less than a third of this figure in rural areas.

Parents should be engaged to change on matters of disability among children. Thomas (2015) noted that illiteracy is high among all categories of disability in many African countries. To promote mainstreamed classroom education for children who are mentally challenged requires an optimistic change of attitude by families. Idol (2015), Huang and Waxman (2016), and Thomas (2015) did not analyze the factors that influence mainstreaming of learners who are mentally challenged in regular public primary schools. However, if parents are positive, it will influence their children's everyday lives and, most importantly, their education and the future will be more beautiful and more successful. An estimated 80% of all individuals with disabilities reside in isolated areas in developing countries (Oviedo, 2003), with 15 million of them being children (Eleweke, 2002). Despite all the above, no researcher has dealt with factors influencing the mainstreaming of learners who are mentally challenged in regular public primary schools in Gucha South Sub-County, in Kisii County, Kenya. In reference to the above literature, the parents have a greater role to play in influencing the mainstreaming of learners, and so the government should sensitize parents of the same.

## **5. Research Methodology**

The study utilized a descriptive survey design to collect and interpret data on factors affecting the mainstreaming of learners with mental challenges in regular public primary schools. This design allowed for a broad gathering of quantitative data to inform policy and educational practices. The research was conducted in Gucha South Sub-County, Kisii County, Kenya, which encompasses 52 public primary schools across three zones: Tabaka, Mochengo, and Nyakembene. The region's economy largely depends on agriculture, including sugarcane farming, and soapstone mining.

The target population included 52 headteachers, 123 teachers, and one Sub-County Quality and Standards Officer (SQASO), totaling 176 respondents. The study used stratified random sampling to ensure representation from all zones, resulting in a sample of 16 schools, 16 headteachers, 37 teachers, and the SQASO. Purposive sampling was employed for headteachers and the SQASO, while teachers were selected using simple random sampling.

Data collection methods included questionnaires for teachers, interviews with headteachers and the SQASO, and observation schedules to assess school facilities. Questionnaires comprised both open and closed-ended questions to capture teachers' views on various factors influencing mainstreaming, such as training, parental roles, infrastructure, and resources. Interviews and observations were used to validate and supplement questionnaire data.

The research instruments were reviewed for validity by experts and piloted to ensure reliability, achieving a Cronbach's alpha of 0.785, indicating acceptable reliability. Data analysis involved quantitative methods, including percentage distribution for numerical data, and qualitative narrative analysis to describe respondents'

perspectives. Findings were presented using tables, charts, and graphs to aid in visual interpretation. This methodical approach ensured comprehensive data collection and analysis aligned with the study's objectives.

## 6. Results and Discussion

Demographic factors length of service of headteachers and teachers in the public primary schools, and the length of time in current position individuals have spent in their professional roles can significantly impact the parental role in mainstreaming mentally challenged learners in regular public primary schools in Kenya. Older teachers or those with more extended experience as caregivers often bring deeper perspectives shaped by years of parenting or exposure to various educational challenges and successes. Similarly, teachers and school administrators who have been in service for a long period may better understand the critical roles parents play in supporting inclusive education due to their accumulated interactions with families and awareness of best practices. These educators may also have developed stronger relationships with parents, fostering greater trust and collaboration in the mainstreaming process. In contrast, newer teachers or parents might lack the same level of understanding or engagement, which could affect how they perceive or fulfill their supportive roles. Hence, the length of service and age can influence how effectively parents and educators collaborate to integrate mentally challenged learners into mainstream classrooms, shaping the overall success of inclusive education efforts.

The study sought the length of headteachers and teachers in the respective public primary schools. This was important as it enabled in determining the factors influencing mainstreaming of learners who are mentally challenged in regular public primary schools according to the long-term experience of the teacher who would give reliable information for the study. The findings are as presented in Table 1.

*Table 1: Length of service of Headteachers and Teachers in the Public Primary Schools*

| Length of Service  | Headteachers |              | Teachers  |              |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|--------------|
|                    | Frequency    | %            | Frequency | %            |
| 1 - 5 Years        | -            | -            | 10        | 27.1         |
| 6 - 10 Years       | 01           | 6.2          | 09        | 24.3         |
| 11 - 15 Years      | 03           | 18.8         | 06        | 16.2         |
| 16 – 20 Years      | 04           | 25.0         | 04        | 10.8         |
| 21 years and above | 08           | 50.0         | 08        | 21.6         |
| <b>Totals</b>      | <b>16</b>    | <b>100.0</b> | <b>37</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Table 1 shows that 27.1% (10) of the teachers had a working experience of 1-5 years while another 24.3 % (09) of them and 6.2% (01) of the headteachers had worked for 6-10 years. It is also revealed that 16.2 % (06) of the teachers and 18.8 % (03) of the headteachers had worked for 11- 15 years. Further, it is instructive from the Table 1 that 10.8% (04) of the teachers and one quarter 25.0% (04) of the headteachers had a working experience of 16 – 20 years. Finally, it is revealed that 21.6 % (08) of the teachers and half 50.0% (08) of the headteachers had worked for 21 years and above. This implies that most of the respondents had work experience of more than one year and therefore were in position to give reliable information concerning the factors influencing mainstreaming of learners who are mentally challenged in regular public primary schools. In addition, slightly more than half of the teachers had not worked for more than 10 years and therefore they needed in-service training which could be inducted by the headteachers for effective instructional delivery.

The headteachers are also the implementers of the SNE policy in the respective public primary schools while the teachers are the ones expected to enhance policy effectively. These findings were presented as in Figure 1.

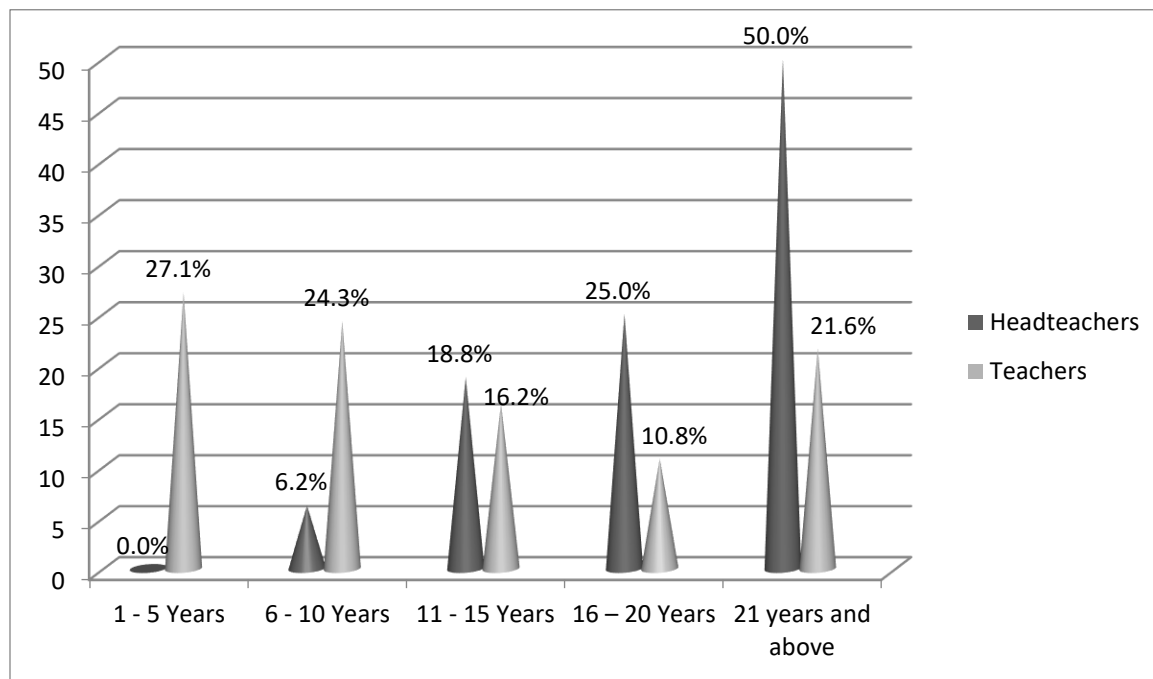


Figure 1: Length of service of Headteachers and Teachers in Primary Schools

The study further sought the length of time in current position of the respondents. The findings are as presented in Table 2:

Table 2: Length of Time in current position of respondents

| Length in Current Position | Teachers  |              | Headteachers |              |
|----------------------------|-----------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
|                            | Frequency | %            | Frequency    | %            |
| 1-5 Years                  | 05        | 13.5         | 02           | 12.5         |
| 6- 10 Years                | 10        | 27.1         | 03           | 18.8         |
| 11- 15 Years               | 17        | 45.9         | 04           | 25.0         |
| 16 Years and Above         | 05        | 13.5         | 07           | 43.7         |
| <b>Totals</b>              | <b>37</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>16</b>    | <b>100.0</b> |

Data from Table 2 indicates that 13.5% (05) of the teachers had been in their current position for 1-5 years with 12.5% (02) of the headteachers. It is also shown that 27.1% (10) of the teachers had been in their current position for 6-10 years as well as 18.8% (03) of the headteachers. It is also revealed from the table that 45.9% (17) of the teachers had been in their current position for 11-15 years with 25.0% (04) of the headteachers. Finally, it is revealed that 13.5% (05) of the teachers and 43.7% (07) of the headteachers had stayed in their respective positions for a period of 16 years and above. This implies that most of the respondents have been in the respective positions long enough to be able to respond to the items in the questionnaires. These findings were presented as in Figure 2.

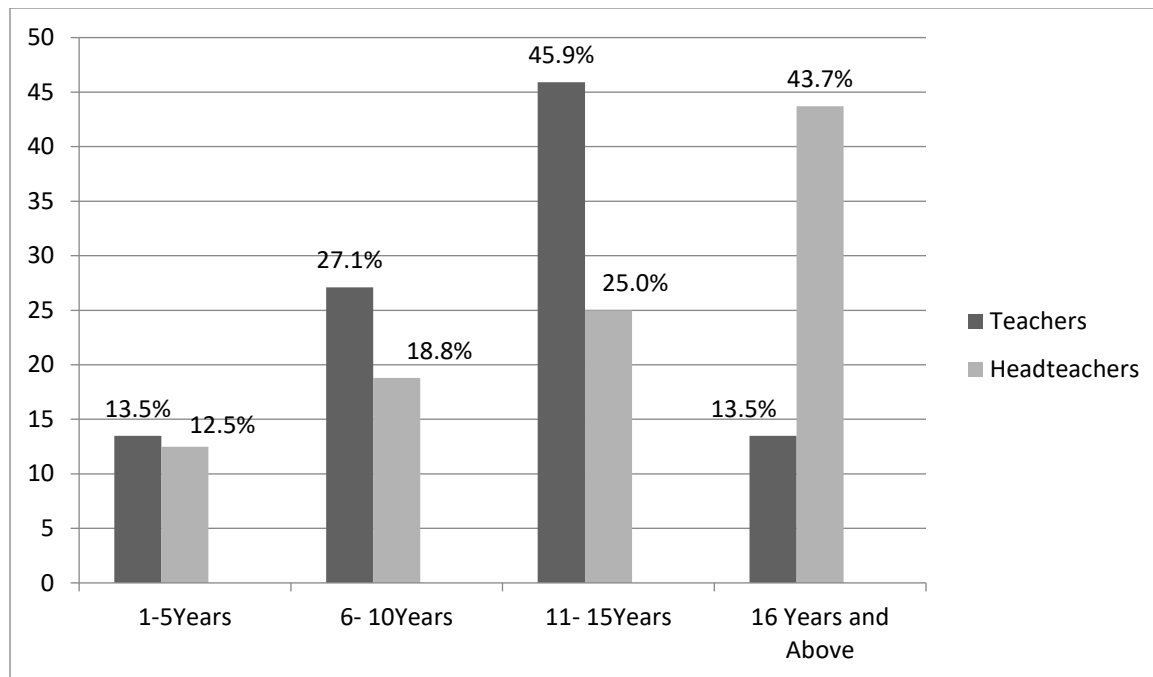


Figure 2: Length of time in current position of respondents

To address the study objective, the parents were asked on the roles and were expected to give a “Yes” when in agreement and a “No” when with a contrary opinion. Their responses were presented as in Table 3.

Table 3: Parent Roles on Mainstreaming of Learners who are mentally challenged

| Guiding Questions   | Yes (%)  | No (%)     | Total (%)  |
|---|----------|------------|------------|
| In your community do you think parents play their roles effectively in the education of learners who are mentally challenged? | 5 (20.9) | 19 (79.1)  | 24 (100.0) |
| Do the parents attend class conferences for their mentally challenged learners?   | 4 (16.7) | 20 (83.3)  | 24 (100.0) |
| Are you economically stable to all financially needs in your family?  | 6 (25.0) | 18 (75.0)  | 24 (100.0) |
| Do you help children who are mentally challenged in doing their homework?   | 2 (8.3)  | 22 (91.7)  | 24 (100.0) |
| Do you take your mentally challenged for checkup?   | 3 (12.5) | 21 (87.5)  | 24 (100.0) |
| Do you think a child who is mentally challenged has a right to own or inherit properties?                                     | 6 (25.0) | 18 (75.0)  | 24 (100.0) |
| Has your child acquired skills for daily living activities?   | 7 (29.2) | 17 (70.8)  | 24 (100.0) |
| In your community do you think all children who are mentally challenged are in school?  | 0 (0.0)  | 24 (100.0) | 24 (100.0) |
| Do you prepare your mentally challenged learners in school just like the siblings?  | 8 (33.3) | 16 (66.7)  | 24 (100.0) |

|   |             |              |               |
|---|-------------|--------------|---------------|
| Do parents freely bring their children to a mainstreamed school or they prefer taking them to special school? | 7<br>(29.2) | 17<br>(70.8) | 24<br>(100.0) |
|---|-------------|--------------|---------------|

When parents were asked whether they play their role effectively in terms of taking their mentally challenged children to school meeting their educational needs majority 79.1% (19) of the parents indicated that they did not while 20.9% (05) of them indicated that they do cater for their children educational needs as shown in Table 13. This implies that most of the parents have abdicated their parental role in providing the educational needs. This poses a big challenge to the learners that are mentally challenged.

When asked whether they attended class conferences for their learners, majority 83.3% (20) of them indicated that they did not attend whereas 16.7% (04) of the parents indicated that they do attend. This implies that most of the parents with learners who are mentally challenged do not bother to attend class conference possibly due to the attitude they have towards them. There is need for sensitization on discrimination against learners who are mentally challenged as they can be useful in the society.

Concerning the fact that whether the parents were economically stable to meet all financial needs of their family, majority 75.0% (18) of the parents indicated that they were not stable while 25.0% (06) indicated that they are stable. This implies that most of the parents with learners who are mentally challenged in the sub-County were not economically stable. This to a large extent influences mainstreaming of these learners in the regular schools. These findings are in line with those of Heber and Garber (1975) who found out that there is a correlation between social economic status and environment. These study findings also concur with another study on the impact of poverty on education (Ndiku, 2007) which found out that there is correlation between academic performance and poverty. The study also found out that parents do not believe that a child who is mentally challenged should own and inherit properties whereas every child has a right to access education, own properties and decent living. Most notably the United Nations Standard of UN policies such as those of embolden in the UN convention on the right of the child (1989) the UN standard rules on the equilibration of opportunities for persons with disabilities (1993) and the UNESCO (1994). Report on the education of children with disabilities (Salamanca statement) all affirms the right of all children to equal education without discrimination within the mainstream education system.

It was found out that 91.7% (22) of the parents with learners who are mentally challenged do not help their children to do homework whereas only 8.3% (02) of them did help. This implies that majority of the parents in the sub-County were not in a position to help their children who are mentally challenged with homework. This could possibly because they lacked prior training on how to assist them.

The study findings indicated that majority 87.5% (21) of the parents who participated in the study lived in abject poverty and that they were unlikely to meet the financial needs of their families to take their mentally challenged learners to hospital checkup while 12.5% (03) managed. This implies that most of the parents with children who are mentally challenged in the sub-County live in abject poverty and hence are unable to fend for their children.

Further, when parents were asked whether their children have acquired adaptive skills 70.8% (17) of them responded that they did not whereas 20.2% (07) of the parents responded that they had. This implies that majority of the learners who are mentally challenged have not acquired adaptive skills hence posing a challenge since the children lacked basic skills for daily living. The findings of this study showed that 100% (24) of the parents believe that not all children who are mentally challenged are in school. It therefore implies that



sensitization through barazas or social gatherings should be used to increase number of the learners in the regular primary schools.

Finally, it was found out that majority 66.7% (16) of the parents indicated that they do not prepare their children who are mentally challenged to go to school like other siblings while 33.3% (08) of them did prepare the children. This implies that most of the parents in the sub-County do not prepare their children who are mentally challenged possibly due to negative attitude as well as being non-committed.

## **7. Conclusion**

The objective of the study was to ascertain the extent to which parental role influences mainstreaming of learners who are mentally challenged in regular public primary schools in Gucha South Sub-County. When parents were asked whether they play their role effectively in terms of taking their mentally challenged children to school meeting their educational needs, it was established that majority 79.1% of the parents indicated that they did not cater for their children educational needs. This implies that most of the parents have abdicated their parental role in providing the educational needs. This poses a big challenge to the learners that are mentally challenged.

When asked whether they attended class conferences for their learners, it was further established majority 83.3% of them indicated that they did not attend the class conferences for their learners. This implies that most of the parents with learners who are mentally challenged do not bother to attend class conference possibly due to the attitude they have towards them. There is need for sensitization on discrimination against learners who are mentally challenged as they can be useful in the society.

Concerning the fact that whether the parents were economically stable to meet all financial needs of their family, it was established that majority 75.0% of the parents indicated that they were not stable. This implies that most of the parents with learners who are mentally challenged in the sub- County were not economically stable. This to a large extent influences mainstreaming of these learners in the regular schools. It was found out that majority 91.7% of the parents with learners who are mentally challenged do not help their children to do homework. This implies that majority of the parents in the sub-County were not in a position to help their children who are mentally challenged with homework. This could possibly because they lacked prior training on how to assist them.

It was established from the study findings that majority 87.5% of the parents who participated in the study lived in abject poverty and that they were unlikely to meet the financial needs of their families to take their mentally challenged learners to hospital checkup. This implies that most of the parents with children who are mentally challenged in the sub-County live in abject poverty and hence are unable to fend for their children.

Further, when parents were asked whether their children have acquired adaptive skills, it was established that majority 70.8% of them have not acquired adaptive skills. This implies that majority of the learners who are mentally challenged have not acquired adaptive skills hence posing a challenge since the children lacked basic skills for daily living. Finally, it was found out that majority 66.7% of the parents indicated that they did not prepare their children who are mentally challenged to go to school like other siblings. This implies that most of the parents in the sub-County do not prepare their children who are mentally challenged possibly due to negative attitude as well as being non-committed. The ministry of Education should sensitize parents to be committed to their learners' requirements as far as their education requires.

In conclusion, the study reveals that demographic factors such as the length of service and duration in current positions among headteachers and teachers significantly influence the effectiveness of parental roles in mainstreaming mentally challenged learners in regular public primary schools in Kenya. The data shows that a substantial number of teachers and headteachers possess considerable experience, which positions them well to provide reliable insights into the factors affecting inclusive education. However, the findings also indicate that despite experienced educators being better equipped to foster collaboration and support for parents, many parents face significant challenges in fulfilling their roles. These include economic instability, lack of engagement in school activities, and insufficient assistance with homework and daily adaptive skills for their children. Furthermore, a notable percentage of parents harbor negative attitudes and lack commitment to preparing their children for school, exacerbating the challenges of mainstreaming. Addressing these issues through targeted sensitization, training, and supportive policies is crucial to ensure effective parental involvement and successful mainstreaming of mentally challenged learners in Kenya's regular public primary schools.

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