Assessment of Institutional and Personnel-Related Challenges Facing Educational Programme for the Mentally Challenged Persons at Kaimosi Special School, Kenya

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Abstract
The Mentally Challenged child (MC) can achieve a lot if the right environment and curriculum are designed for him/her. However, the realization of the desirable outcomes faces many challenges. The objective of the study was to examine institutional and personnel-related challenges facing education programs for the MC persons at Kaimosi Special School. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The theoretical framework was based on Context, Input and Process Product Approach (CIPP) model of evaluation. Stratified sampling, purposive sampling and simple random sampling techniques were used to come up with the sample size. A total of 22 participants were selected comprising of one education officer, 3 administrators (2 male and 1 female), 8 teachers (5 female and 3 male) and 10 care givers. Questionnaires, interview schedules and document analysis were used to collect data. The study established that heavy workload, lack of motivation, poor staffing, high levels of stress, overcrowding in class, tiny classrooms, and inadequate resources were the most serious challenges facing Kaimosi Special School. It was recommended that the Special Education Department in the Ministry of Education should be strengthened with additional resources and trained personnel to handle issues of special education. There is need to engage all stakeholders in order to ensure that there are sustained efforts to provide quality programs for the mentally challenged.
Keywords: Mentally challenged, Special education

1.0 Introduction

This study focused on institutional and personnel-related challenges facing special schools for persons with Mentally Challenged (MC). According to the UN, one person in ten has a challenge and everyone will be affected in one way or another at some point in life. However, what makes challenged people more disadvantaged are the obstacles that the society puts in their path (UNESCO, 1994). Although studies carried out in advanced countries on educational programs for the MC have dwelt on global descriptions of the educational treatments offered such as class size, the age of the MC learners and perhaps IQ distributions of the children in the classes, little detail has been documented about the challenges that special schools for persons with mental challenges face in developing nations.

According to Bos and Vaughn (1994), teachers of special education need special training for this task. Under different levels of intellectual ability, teachers, especially those from mainstream education to special education, find it difficult to adjust to the differences in the intellectual levels of learners of the same age in one group. Some mentally handicapped children are multi-handicapped, making it even more difficult for the teacher (Friel, 1995). Moreover, the attitudes of decision-makers and the government are negative or non-committal. School administrators and Ministry of Education officials do not encourage initiatives to train and sensitize teachers about disability and challenges of learners. Commitment is only demonstrated in government policy papers and a few select institutions instead of a bottom-up system that needs to be ingrained in the whole system (Onderi, 2010).

Discipline in the mentally disabled class is more complicated. Disciplinary or behavioral problems might occur for various reasons in the classroom of mentally handicapped learners, such as a short attention span or lack of understanding. Mentally handicapped learners tend to be very restless, moody and sensitive, which demands a lot of effort and energy from teachers to maintain discipline in the class (Baum, 1982).

Special education and teaching the mentally handicapped child also entail a lot of additional work and responsibilities. Such teachers have to assume the roles of class aid, nurse, social worker and therapist (Albrecht, Seelman, and Bury, 2001). It is also true that since the learners do not achieve equally and instructions have to

suit each child's ability, the teacher has to do a lot of preparatory work. Besides, the teacher has to plan adaptation activities and material to ensure the learners' participation (Steenkamp and Steenkamp, 1992) and yet there are motivational challenges. To forestall some of the challenges, Engelbrecht and Green (2001) recommend employment of additional staff such as psychologists, occupational physiotherapists and speech therapists, as well as nurses and class aides, whether on a permanent or temporary, paid or voluntary basis as this would make a significant contribution to alleviating the pressure on teachers in special education schools.

There is a stigma attached to special education owing to the reflections of socio-cultural attitudes and systems that condemn disability selectively and do not create avenues for accommodation and inclusion. Teachers of mentally handicapped children often lack the support, acknowledgement and appreciation they deserve. The way in which children and teachers are reared and socialized in their formative years contributes to their poor adjustment and response to school environment. Further, the stigma is often linked to the low academic status of the school and converted to the teachers of the school (Norwich, 1990). Special education causes stress for the teacher as they often feel drained and experience emotions such as guilt, anger and irritation. As such, the teachers need enormous resources of patience and empathy lest it affects the teachers' personal health and family life (McGrath, 1995). In spite of all the many problems, frustrations and concerns, special education teachers find their work highly fulfilling and rewarding (Riddell and Brown, 1994).

Concerns about job insecurity of staff in Special Schools posed another challenge (Tomlinson, 1982). In Kenya for instance, teachers are generally a poorly motivated lot in terms of salaries, job description and specification, poor working conditions and inadequate facilities (Onderi, 2010).

Teachers of mentally handicapped learners find it difficult to fulfill their task, because they are not often adequately orientated with regard to what would be expected of them. Some of the teachers find it hard to adjust to the new situation as they have no prior background experience of Special School teaching. Gerber, Nel and Van Dyke (1995) and Fink (1992) contend that all newly appointed staff should receive induction training from the institution's management to reduce adjustment problems by instilling a sense of security and confidence. Hutchinson (1982) argues that a more experienced teacher will be more equipped to live up to increased challenges in the teaching environment of Special School.

According to Hellriegel, Jackson and Slocum (1999), the important role of special training and development in overcoming certain limitations in the basic training of teachers is critical. Third was the need for support. It seemed the teachers needed support from experts in the field, from the Department of Education, e.g. in-service training regarding the curriculum and inclusive education, from parents who do not adequately care for their children, or overprotect them, or foster unrealistic expectations of their children and from their community and society at large posed great challenges (Fine, 1991). Most of the teachers needed assistance from professional experts to deal with the many physical and psychological problems experienced in their course of teaching. According to Hallahan and Kauffman (1997), teachers need to collaborate with other professionals in identifying and making maximum use of learners' abilities. Gulliford and Upton (1992) further explain that special education requires collaboration and a multi-disciplinary team approach which is often lacking.

According to VSO (2001), specialized teacher training by tertiary institutions and through in-service workshops is the appropriate avenue to equip teachers with the skills and competencies they need to address their task. Effective in-service staff development workshops are vital for the development of appropriate teaching strategies. These workshops should be preceded by a needs assessment.

Disappointment and dissatisfaction about the general lack of parental involvement and interest at their school exists. Parental involvement is almost non-existent and it is as if the parents are only too happy to see their children off at the school. This makes the work of these teachers difficult. Besides, parents are sometimes overprotective and in other cases they have unrealistic expectations of their children and the teachers and often display a lack of understanding for the child (Hegarty, 1993; Fine, 1991).

Teachers in Special Schools are of the opinion that the community and society in general are apathetic and ignorant, which could possibly be ascribed to a lack of communication. Such apathy means few sponsors and little financial support. Many Special Schools rely heavily on money raised from the community within which the school is located (Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana, 1997; Hegarty, 1993). Lack of learning facilities and materials in most schools due to overcrowding has disempowered teachers who are unable to fulfill their task because of shortage of apparatus which have a major influence on what and how information and skills are taught (Bos and Vaughn, 1994). The physical environment in schools is also an issue; the crowded classes are often pose danger to those with special needs. Most institutions in Kenya are disability unconscious (Onderi, 2010). The community support could be sourced from family members, volunteers, non-governmental organizations and the business sector through activities and strategies such as awareness and information campaigns, newsletters and brochures media campaigns by highlighting the achievements of and challenges facing mentally handicapped children (Engelbrecht and Green, 2001).

The various aspects of leadership and management, such as lack of co-operation and transparency at school and non-democratic style impair their working. The principal of a Special School has to be innovative,

flexible and should seek co-operation from all role-players to ensure the efficient functioning of his/her school. That would include the provision of resources, a visible presence and good communication skills (Harber and Davies, 1997).

Finally, there are issue regarding the curriculum structure and content which present disability in negative terms such that it is very wide and challenges the teachers' capacity to meet its demands and is not in most cases learner sensitive (Onderi, 2010). Coupled with the lack of guidelines to assist teachers of MH children to address the challenges posed by the different levels of development, intellectual abilities and languages of the learners in one class make the teaching-learning experience unbearable (Gerber, Nel and Van Dyke, 1995).

2.0 Research Methodology
2.1 Research Design
This study employed a descriptive survey design. It entails the collection of data on more than one case and at a single point in time which is then examined to detect patterns of association (Alan, 2001). A descriptive survey design was appropriate mode of inquiry for making inferences about a large group of people from data drawn on a relatively small number of Individuals from that group (Marshall and Rossman, 1989). The study focused on data of variables that have already occurred such as institutional and personnel-related challenges.

2.2 Study Area
The study was carried out at Kaimosi Special School for MC persons situated near Kaimosi Mission along the Kapsabet - Chavakali highway in Hamisi District of Vihiga County, Kenya. The school is located in a rural setting save for the neighbouring Quakers mission complex. The area was chosen because the local inhabitants (Terik) have a strong belief and attachment in their culture and this has greatly affected their way of life such that the disabled persons are always excluded from communal activities and appearances.

2.3 Sampling Procedure
The target population was 42 respondents comprising of 13 academic staff members including 3 administrators, 26 direct care staff and one Education Officer from the DEO's office, Hamisi. The study used stratified sampling, purposive sampling and simple random sampling techniques. Stratified sampling technique was used to group the respondents by sex. Purposive sampling was employed to select a 30% sample of either gender of the care staff. Simple random sampling was used to select care staff while purposive sampling was employed to the school's principal, the deputy principal, two ordinary teachers (1 female and 1 male), and the Education Officer in-charge of special education. On this basis, a total of 22 respondents participated in the study consisting of the principal and his deputy, 8 teachers (3 male and 5 female), 10 care staff (6 females and 4 males) and the officer in-charge of Special Education at the DEO's Office.

2.4 Data Collection
The study used questionnaires, interview schedules, focus group discussion and document analysis to gather relevant data. Both open and closed ended questions were used when interviewing instructors, care takers administrators and learners at Kaimosi Specials School for persons with mental challenges. Closed-ended questions were used to obtain both personal and specific details from respondents while open ended questions were used where explanations and personal opinion were sought. Interview schedules with relevant questions were prepared and this involved both individual and group interviews. Document analysis involved careful scrutiny of institutional records, journals, publications, library research and literature from both published and unpublished sources. These sources of information were blended and provided a crucial basis in background information, theoretical framework and literature review. In addition, teachers' students' evaluation records were scrutinized to authenticate assessment/ evaluation procedures.

2.5 Data Analysis
Data was analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Qualitative data was received verbatim, transcribed and reported according to emerging themes. Quantitative data on the various educational materials, resources, academic outcomes and challenges facing teachers for the MC was analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented in form of frequencies, percentages, tables, pie and bar graphs and other graphical presentations. The Statistical Procedure for Social Sciences (SPSS) 12.0 was used in the analysis.

3.0 Results and Discussion
The thrust of the study was to establish the challenges facing Kaimosi special school for the mentally challenged persons. Teachers were asked to rate the seriousness of the challenges either as 'most serious', 'fairly serious' or 'not serious'. Their responses are summarized in table 1.

Table 1: Teachers rating of 'Most Serious' Challenges

	Frequency	Percentage
Poor staffing	5	62.5
Lack of motivation	7	87.5
High stress	6	62.5
Heavy workload	7	87.5
Inadequate resources	5	62.5
Overcrowding in class	6	75.0
Tiny classrooms	6	75.0

Source: Field Data

Table 1 shows that the most serious challenges according to the teachers were heavy workload and lack of motivation (87.5%) followed overcrowding in class and tiny classrooms (75.0%) and poor staffing, high stress and inadequate resources (62.5%). From the data gathered, the most serious challenges centre on the teacher. Because of poor staffing, the teacher ended up with a heavy workload and because there is very little motivation, the teacher suffers from stress. This finding finds support in the Salamanca report (UNESCO,1994) which noted that for an institution to have a ratio of 1:50 and expect such a teacher to be individual learner sensitive not only defies logic but also human capacity. On teacher motivation, one of the teachers had this to say:

> *"There is lack of motivation on the part of the teachers due to poor remuneration and very poor allowances. Promotions are very hard to come by yet we are heavily burdened. Perhaps there is need to create departments whose heads can get some allowances. ... housing for the teachers is a nightmare. Sometimes we work late into the night and yet the school gives no accommodation. It is just survival"* (Comment by a teacher, 2012).

The sentiments expressed above are typical of many learning institutions in Kenya particularly after the government froze teacher employment because of a constrained economy due to a number of factors ranging from corruption, mismanagement, misappropriation, misplacement of priorities, lack of clear policy and adherence to the same which the government is quick to attribute to a poorly performing economy. Over the years, the situation has not changed.

> *"Teachers suffer high stress levels due to the very high student-teacher ratio. Individualized attention and instruction is very difficult. Classrooms are small in size. Handling special need learners is in itself stressful but add on the extra workload arising from teacher shortage, you can only think of more stress"* (Comment by a teacher, 2012).

According to Onderi and Croll (2009), it is a struggle for the fittest and of the challenged is a real disadvantage. He goes further to say that the physical environment in schools is an issue with crowded classes posing dangers to those with special needs with most institutions in Kenya being disability unconscious. The desire to face the challenges and create an enabling environment needs adequate motivation among teachers. To be an effective teacher, specific efforts and motivational structures need to be put in place to ensure that teachers are well motivated to face personal and institutional challenges, recommends Salamanca report (UNESCO, 1994).

On those challenges faced by the institution and perceived as 'fairly serious', data obtained is presented in table 2.

Table 2: Teachers rating of 'Fairly Serious' Challenges

	Frequency	Percentage
Indiscipline among the learners	4	50.0
Poor communication	4	50.0
Lack of parental concern	4	50.0
Lack of knowledge in use of learning aids	5	62.5
Lack of refresher courses	5	62.5

Source: Field Data

Table 2 shows that lack of teacher adjustment and lack of refresher courses scored the highest frequency 5 (62.5%) among the fairly serious challenges facing the institution. This was followed by indiscipline among the learners, poor communication and lack of parental concern, all of which received 4 (50%) support from the academic staff. Technology is forever changing. These changes pose serious challenges which can only be capped with refresher courses. The lack of refresher courses may have therefore led to the lack of knowledge in the use of learning materials. Although the use of modern technology was not evident in Kaimosi special school and the available teaching/learning resources were poorly maintained due to inadequate funding, it can be assumed that the problem can only get worse with lack of opportunities for the academic staff to learn new skills and knowledge to enhance service delivery. As one teacher wrote:

> *"Seminars and workshops are very few and rarely forthcoming. If and when they are organized, only one of us would be sometimes selected to attend apparently on behalf of the rest. Such an arrangement is not beneficial as there is no forum to sensitize others on the proceedings"* (Comment by a teacher,

2012).

On the issue of need for refresher courses and lack of knowledge in the use of learning materials, Onderi and Croll (2009) notes that the selective training of a few teachers is inappropriate. He avers that all special needs teachers need to be equipped with skills to effectively identify, handle, and respond to the individual learners and their special challenges. Thus, specialized teacher training by tertiary institutions and thorough in-service workshops/seminars will be the appropriate avenue to equip teachers with the skills and competencies they need to address their task. However, these workshops/seminars should be preceded by a needs assessment, recommends VSO (2001).

Indiscipline remains a major problem in most learning institutions. It was reported that mood swings were very common among the learners making instruction a very difficult task. More often than not, the learners even turned violent on some occasions. This misdemeanour on the part of the learners is not unusual since a number of them have poor social skills something that may be reflected in their outbursts. This finding agrees with Baum (1982) who notes that MC learners tend to be very restless, moody and sensitive, behaviour that demand a lot of effort and energy from teachers in order to maintain discipline.

Parents have a role to play in the education of their children. However, the little effort seen in the parents' direct involvement in their children's welfare once the children are taken to the special school puts the whole concept of parenting to question.

> "... parents do not provide the basic necessities for their children. They assume that the school will provide. Most of the parents stay away from the institution for fear of being asked to pay fees. Grand parents are the only ones who are left with the responsibility of visiting the children in the institution rendering efforts to instil discipline in vain" (Comment by a teacher, 2012).

As rightly noted Hegarty (1993) and Fine (1991) commented that disappointment and dissatisfaction about the general lack of parental involvement and interest at their children's schools is common. Parents are only too happy to see their children off to school, something that makes work difficult for teachers. As noted by the deputy head teacher:

> "The biological parents of these children feel embarrassed of their children's disability. We have never seen some of them. It is so serious that it even goes to the extend that on closing day, some of the children are not picked up on time and can even be left in school for several weeks before they are collected" (Deputy head teacher, 2012).

According to Norwich (1990), there is a stigma attached to special education owing to the reflections of socio-cultural attitudes and systems that condemn disability selectively and do not create avenues for accommodation and inclusion. Teachers teaching mentally handicapped children often lack the support, acknowledgement and appreciation they deserve. Furthermore, the low academic status often linked to the school is converted to the teachers of the MH. To overcome this, Engelbrecht and Green (2001) advice that teachers should encourage parents to play a more active role at the school through activities and strategies such as awareness and information campaigns, newsletters and brochures and media campaigns by highlighting the achievements of and challenges facing mentally handicapped children

Other challenges in whose opinion teachers thought were 'not serious' were also considered and are presented in table 3.

Table 3: Teachers rating of 'Not Serious' Challenges

	Frequency	Percentage
Poor administration	7	87.5
Lack of technical support	6	75.0
Lack of teacher adjustment	7	87.5

Source: Field Data

Data in table 3 indicates that poor administration with a frequency of 7 (87.5%), lack of technical support at 6 (75%) and lack of teacher adjustment with a frequency count support of 7 (87.5%) of the academic staff toped the list. This was expected particularly so because majority of the teachers had approved almost overwhelmingly, the 'good' way the institution was being run. This should be enough motivation to the institution's management to deliver services to the learners with every stake holder's input being brought on board. It may be argued that teachers' lack of the necessary knowledge in the use of the learning materials and the lack of teacher adjustment to the school environment may partly be attributed to lack of technical support perhaps because there are no itinerant teachers to offer technical advice needed in certain areas. As such, some of the teachers find it hard to adjust to the new situation as they have no prior background experience of Special School teaching. And as Hutchinson (1982) argues, the more knowledgeable and experienced a teacher is, the more equipped he/she may live up to the increased challenges in the special school environment.

Regarding personnel-related challenges, the study sought the teachers' views and on job satisfaction, their responses yielded the following information as presented in table 4.

Table 4: Teachers Perception of their Job Satisfaction

	Frequency	Percentage
Very satisfied	1	12.5
Fairly satisfied	7	87.5
Not satisfied	0	0
Total	8	100

Source: Field Data

As seen in table 4, 7 (87.5%) of the teachers were 'fairly satisfied' with their current job leaving out only 1 (12.5%) who felt very satisfied with the job. In other words, none of the teachers dislikes his/her job. This scenario could be explained by the fact that the most teachers in Special Schools are not driven by monetary returns but by the wish to make some difference in less fortunate child's life. And with the thought that things could be better conditions of services, the teachers seemed highly optimistic of a better future. This finding is in agreement with Riddell and Brown (1994) who wrote that in spite of all the many problems, frustrations and concerns, special education teachers find their work highly fulfilling and rewarding.

Information was also sought from the care givers on whether tasks assigned to them posed any challenge. The question elicited responses as summarised in figure 1.
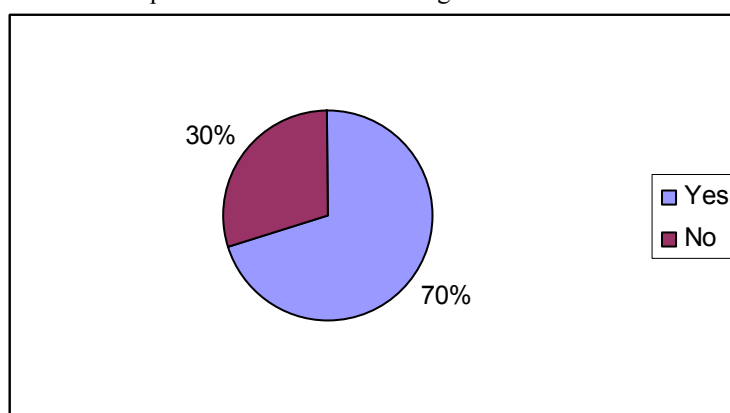

Figure 1: Percentage response of care givers whether roles assigned are challenging

Out of the 10 care givers studies, 7 (70%) passed a verdict of 'yes' implying that they felt challenged by their roles. Only 3 (30%) care givers felt that the roles were not challenging. The care givers faced a number of challenges which included but not limited to lack of corporation from the learners, indiscipline by the learners, inadequate resources (gloves, medicine, transport to hospital, lack of brooms, detergents, soaps, protective clothing etc), children soiling their cloth (relieving on themselves) poor remuneration and too much work. Indeed these are enough problems to pose serious challenge to the care givers. Albrecht *et al* (2001) note that special education and caring for the mentally handicapped child entails a lot of additional work and responsibilities. Service providers have to assume the roles of class aid, nurse, social worker and therapist all at the same time.

In order to improve service delivery, the care givers suggested that the situation could be made better by provision of regular supply of job-related equipment and materials, improvement of communication channels and adequate parental participation and support in schools management. In their view improved working relationship with different members of the school community was essential for the smooth running of the institution. They envisaged better days with increased funding for the institution. This revelation is in agreement with Engelbrecht and Green (2001) assertion that special schools could source community support from family members, volunteers, non-governmental organizations and the business sector through activities such as awareness and information campaigns, newsletters and brochures, and media campaigns by highlighting the achievements of and challenges facing mentally handicapped children.

Other challenges faced by the institution involved parents/guardians involvement in their children's welfare. Figure 2 gives a summary of the finding.
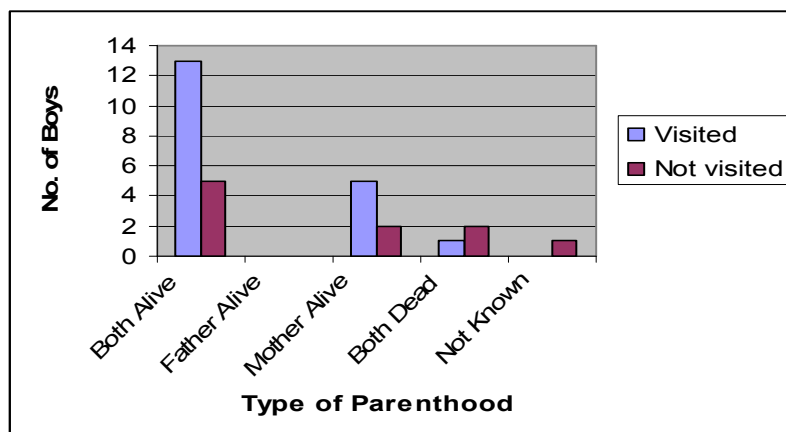
Figure 2: School Visits by Parents/Guardians (Boys)

Figure 2 shows that out of 18 boys whose parents were both alive, only 13 ever visited the school while 5 did not at all. Of the 7 whose mother was alive, only 5 paid a visit to their child. Of the total orphans, only one had been visited, probably by a guardian or relative but two had not been paid a visit. The one student who did not known the parents had not been visited. Most children with special needs bring shame and embarrassment to their families due to the stigma the cultures hold. Parents/guardians may therefore feel not inclined to stay abreast with their children's progress.

A similar trend was observed on the part of parents/guardians in regard to school visitation of the female (girls) children (Figure 3).
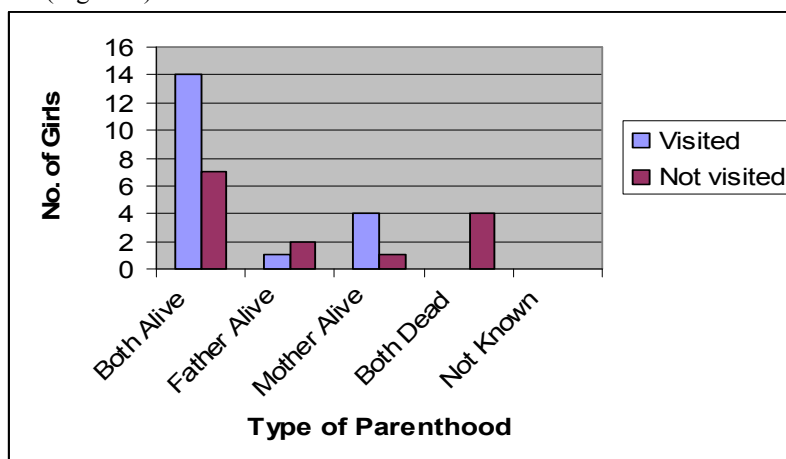
Figure 3: Visit to School by Type of Parenthood (Girls)

Data in figure 3 indicates that out of 21 girls whose parents were both alive, only 14 were visited while the remaining 7 had not visited been visited at all. Similarly, of the 3 girls whose father was alive but mother dead, only 1 had been paid a visit while 2 had not. Interestingly, 4 out of the 5 girls who had only one parent alive (the mother), only 1 had not been visited. The import of this finding is that mothers rather than fathers tend to be more responsive and caring to their special needs children. However, of the 4 girls whose parents were both dead, none had ever been visited. In the absence of the more 'caring' mother, such girls were believed to be in safe school hands, a practice that is common in many Kenyan societies. Perhaps this is the reason why Dunham (1992) suggested that there should be improved interaction between special education schools as well as the community and society at large to address the reality of the stigma attached to special education.

4.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

From the foregoing, it is quite evident that challenges facing Kaimosi special school are both institutional as well as personnel-related. On the basis of the findings, it was concluded that heavy workload, lack of motivation, poor staffing, high levels of stress, overcrowding in class, tiny classrooms, and inadequate resources, were the most serious challenges. Lack of teacher adjustment, lack of refresher courses, poor communication, lack of parental concern, and indiscipline among the learners were rated fairly serious concerns encountered in the institution. However, poor administration, lack of knowledge in use of learning aids and lack of technical support were 'mild' concerns for Kaimosi special school.

In view of these finding, it was recommended that the Department of Special Education in the Ministry

of Education should strengthen by providing additional funds and with the qualified and experienced personnel who can handle programs related to special education. In addition, the need to bring all stakeholders on board to find lasting solutions to the myriad problems afflicting the institution and similar ones in Kenya ought to be considered as a matter of urgency if quality education is to be given to this less advantaged group of children.

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