



**INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS'
STRATEGIES ON EFFECTIVE MAINSTREAMING
OF LEARNERS WITH READING DIFFICULTIES
IN PUBLIC MAINSTREAMED PRIMARY SCHOOLS
IN KOIBATEK SUB-COUNTY, KENYA**

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Abstract:

Mainstreaming involves integrating learners with disabilities into general education classrooms, but it often overlooks the diverse needs of children, including reading difficulties. The study objective was to establish the influence of school administrators' strategies on mainstreaming learners with Reading Difficulties. Systems Theory, developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968), was used to guide this study, focusing on the development of reading difficulties and the need for more effective teaching methods for these learners. The study was conducted in Koibatek Sub-County, Baringo County. The Sub-County has a total of 56 public Primary schools, of which 11 schools are practicing mainstreaming and were used in the study. Selection of the study sample was done through purposive sampling. A total of 166 respondents selected from various categories were used for the study. Research instruments were piloted to ensure reliability and validity were maintained using Cronbach's alpha. A descriptive survey design was used, where both quantitative and qualitative data were collected using semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and an observation checklist. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically as per the objectives, while quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as percentages and presented through tables, charts and summary paragraphs. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0 was utilized to prepare and organize data for analysis. The findings of the study showed limited parental involvement, with 58.8% reporting involvement, while 60.3% lacked knowledge of reading instruction and 70.6% did not help with sounding out words. The study concluded that school administrators, Parents and BOM members need to take an active role in ensuring that they are aware of the learners' special needs so that they can assist the teachers in taking care of their learners' needs. Teachers and parents should share various approaches to enhance the learning process in mainstreaming and focus

more on acquiring resources to support mainstreaming. Based on the study findings, it is recommended that school administrators should consider tailored instructional strategies, early detection and intervention, provision of resources, professional development for teachers and effective collaboration amongst stakeholders for effective mainstreaming of learners with RDs in Koibatek Sub-County.

Keywords: school administrators, strategies, mainstreaming, learners with reading difficulties, Koibatek

1. Introduction

Mainstreaming in education refers to the practice of educating learners with special educational needs within regular classrooms alongside their peers, with appropriate instructional, assessment, and support mechanisms to address their individual learning needs. Contemporary inclusive education emphasizes that learners with disabilities and learning difficulties should have equitable opportunities to access, participate in, and benefit from regular education rather than being excluded from schooling (UNESCO, 2024). The movement towards inclusive education recognizes the right of learners with disabilities to enroll in regular classrooms and calls for education systems to adapt teaching, assessment, and support services to accommodate diverse learning needs (UNESCO, 2024). At the primary school level, school administrators involve head teachers, deputy head teachers, senior teachers, and other teachers assigned administrative responsibilities who coordinate teaching, learner support, resource utilization, parental engagement, and the implementation of inclusive education practices

Learning difficulties (LD) refer to persistent difficulties in acquiring and using academic skills, particularly in areas such as reading, writing, and mathematics, despite learners having opportunities to access education. Reading difficulties are particularly significant because reading is fundamental to learning across the curriculum, and persistent difficulties in reading can affect learners' academic participation and progression. A worldwide systematic review and meta-analysis estimated the prevalence of developmental dyslexia among primary school children at approximately 7.1%, demonstrating the substantial number of learners who may require appropriate identification and educational support (Yang *et al.*, 2022). Recent research further indicates that learners with learning disabilities experience substantial reading difficulties and require evidence-based interventions targeting foundational reading skills, comprehension, and writing through individualized or small-group instruction (Al Otaiba *et al.*, 2023).

Similarly, King *et al.* (2023) emphasize the importance of rigorous evidence when selecting reading interventions for learners with learning disabilities, particularly because reading is one of the academic areas most commonly affected by learning

disabilities. Consequently, successful mainstreaming of learners with reading difficulties requires more than physical placement in regular classrooms, as it depends on school administrators' characteristics, instructional strategies, availability and utilization of learning resources, teacher preparedness, parental involvement, and the capacity of schools to address administrative barriers affecting inclusive learning (UNESCO, 2024).

Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) (2018) states that Competency Based Education (CBE) requires learners to acquire strong literacy skills (the ability to read and understand). This forms the foundation of all learning. According to Bamidele (2017), information is presented in text all over the world, in books, websites, magazines and newspapers. Similarly, the education system relies heavily upon text especially when learners reach higher grades of learning. Standardized tests that learners take to show their competencies in all the learning areas require them to be able to read, understand and respond appropriately.

This implies that school administration in mainstream schools should deliberate on efforts to enrol, retain, nurture and finally graduate learners with reading difficulties to the next levels of learning. According to Uwezo Kenya (2016), in the 2015 assessment, a total of 134,234 children from 72,106 households in 124 districts were assessed. This was a household-based assessment which included children who do not go to school; a significant number of children could not read a single word. The assessment further found that 7 out of 10 class 3 learners, 16% of class six learners and 1 out of 10 learners in class 8 could not acquire the basic competencies of class 2 learners in reading. From the assessment, learners who have been in school for more years improved over time, unlike those who had not gone to school. According to Kibby and Hynd (2001) in Yaseen (2013), 90 to 95% of learners with RDs can overcome their difficulties when they are assisted early.

In an attempt to ascertain the impact of RDs, a comparative analysis was done on the 2024 end-of-year reading assessments in regular schools and mainstream schools in Koibatek Sub County. The schools were clustered into regular and mainstreamed schools. Learners with RDs in grade 3 were identified in both regular and mainstreamed schools. 10% of the identified learners were further sampled randomly. A total of 46 learners from regular schools and 11 learners from mainstreamed schools took part. Learners were provided with a short paragraph of 160 words and were expected to read all the words in one minute, pronounce words accurately, understand the message of what is read, and associate vocabulary in the text with their meanings. The words read correctly were counted and rated on four levels.

1.1 Objective of the Study

- To establish the influence of school administrators' strategies on effective mainstreaming of learners with RDs in public mainstreamed primary schools in Koibatek Sub-County.

1.2 Research Question

- What is the influence of school administrators' strategies on the effective mainstreaming of learners with RDs in public mainstreamed primary schools in Koibatek Sub-County?

2. Literature Review

Research conducted across different educational contexts demonstrates that effective school leadership is positively associated with the capacity of schools to respond to learner diversity. Wu and Shen (2022), in a multivariate meta-meta-analysis, established a positive association between principal leadership and student achievement, although the strength of the relationship varied across leadership practices and educational contexts. Similarly, Shen *et al.* (2021) established that improvement in principal leadership was associated with improvement in school performance, demonstrating the importance of leadership in creating conditions conducive to effective teaching and learning. At the international level, OECD (2021) reported that school leaders influence teaching quality through professional collaboration, instructional guidance and the development of supportive school environments. In Africa, UNESCO (2021) identified effective school leadership and teacher support as important conditions for strengthening equitable and inclusive education systems. In Kenya, Ireri *et al.* (2020) observed that successful implementation of inclusive education depends on school-level strategies, teacher preparedness, institutional support and adequate resources. Moruri *et al.* (2021) similarly found that teacher attitudes, professional preparation and school support influenced the readiness of public primary schools to mainstream learners with special educational needs. These studies converge in showing that effective administration extends beyond formal authority and involves creating an organizational environment in which teachers are supported to identify learner needs, adapt instruction and monitor progress.

Despite the positive relationship between effective leadership and inclusion reported in many studies, other research indicates that administrative commitment alone may not automatically result in effective mainstreaming. Ohba and Malenya (2020), examining inclusive education in Kenyan public primary schools, found that schools made efforts to accommodate learners with disabilities but continued to experience challenges in translating inclusive education policies into consistent classroom practices. Their findings suggest that the existence of administrative structures and policy commitments does not necessarily guarantee effective implementation where schools face shortages of trained personnel, inadequate resources and weak support systems. Similarly, Rasugu *et al.* (2022) found that teachers and school administrators experienced inadequate preparation for supporting learners with special educational needs despite the existence of inclusive education initiatives. The World Bank (2022) also notes that education systems in low- and middle-income countries continue to experience

institutional constraints, including inadequate teacher preparation, weak support systems and limited capacity to respond to diverse learning needs. UNICEF (2021) further observes that exclusion may persist where education systems lack effective coordination between schools, families and specialized support services. These findings contrast with studies that portray school leadership as a relatively direct determinant of inclusive outcomes. They demonstrate that administrative characteristics operate within broader organizational and systemic conditions.

The Ministry of Education (2018) identifies early identification, assessment, intervention and monitoring as important components of supporting learners with special educational needs in Kenya. The Education Commission (2020) also emphasizes the importance of strengthening teacher capacity and professional learning in improving educational outcomes. Recent evidence indicates that experienced educators are more likely to develop classroom routines, recognize persistent learning difficulties and adjust instruction when learners fail to make expected progress (Mahmood *et al.*, 2024). In Kenya, KICD (2021) emphasizes learner-centred approaches and differentiated instruction within the competency-based curriculum, while KISE (2023) highlights early identification and intervention for learners with special educational needs.

Despite evidence supporting the contribution of experience, other studies indicate that many years in teaching do not automatically translate into effective mainstreaming of learners with RDs. Serry *et al.* (2022) found that educators supporting learners with RDs experienced limitations in confidence, preparation, time and access to professional support, demonstrating that experience alone may not eliminate difficulties in responding to struggling readers. Similarly, Merga *et al.* (2021) found that teachers in mainstream schools did not always perceive adequate whole-school support for learners experiencing literacy difficulties, even where teachers possessed classroom experience. In Kenya, Ohba and Malenya (2020) established that schools implementing inclusive education continued to face challenges related to inadequate teacher preparation, limited resources and difficulties in translating policy into classroom practice. The World Bank (2022) further emphasizes that learning outcomes depend not merely on teachers being present but on their capacity to provide effective instruction and receive adequate professional support. These findings contrast with the assumption that experienced teachers and administrators are naturally better equipped to mainstream learners with RDs.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. The target population comprised Education Assessment and Resource Coordinator (EARC), Board of Management (BOM) members in charge of Special Needs Education (SNE), head teachers, senior teachers, Grade teachers, parents/guardians and learners from the fifty-six (56) public primary schools in Koibatek Sub-County, Baringo

County. Purposive sampling was used to select only the schools that practised mainstreaming of learners with reading difficulties. From the initial frame of 56 public primary schools, 45 schools that did not practise mainstreaming were screened out, leaving 11 mainstreaming schools. Data were collected using semi-structured interview schedules and an observation checklist to collect primary data. The reliability of the research instruments was assessed using Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient, which yielded an overall reliability index of 0.83. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were thematically analyzed and triangulated with quantitative results.

4. Findings

4.1 Parents' Responses on Instructional Strategies Used in Assisting Learners with RDs

The objective sought to establish the instructional strategies used by teachers while mainstreaming learners with RDs. The following are responses from the few parents and BOM members who were asked to rate various question statements related to the instructional strategies used by teachers. The responses were summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Parents' Response on Engagement with Teachers in
 Relation to Parents Engagement /Assisting Learners with RD

Instructional Strategies	Yes	No
Teachers involve you in your child's reading.	40(58.8%)	28(41.2%)
Do you know how children are learning to read?	27(39.7%)	41(60.3%)
Do you sound out words for the children?	20(29.4%)	48(70.6%)
Does the school support you in assisting your child with reading?	42(61.7%)	26(38.2%)
Do you have the capacity to assist your child in reading?	28(41.2%)	40(58.8%)
Do you receive information that enables you to help your children in reading?	23(33.8%)	45(66.2%)
Are you guided by the school on how to use the given materials to assist your child/children with RDs?	46(67.6%)	22(32.4%)
Average	34(20.6%)	54(79.4%)

The results show that most of the respondents, 40(58.8%), were in agreement that parents' involvement in children's reading is among the strategies used by teachers in teaching, compared to only 28(41.2%) who disagreed with the statement. Parental involvement in the teaching of learners with RDs was among the strategies used by the teachers in mainstreamed schools. On whether the parents and the BOM know how children with RDs are learning to read in the mainstreamed schools, 41(60.3%) disagreed, while only 27(39.7%) agreed that they knew how they learn. Most parents and BOM members were not so aware of how teaching of the learners with RDs were taught.

This is consistent with the earlier response that the parents and BOM members did not attend meetings on learners' assessment reports in the school. KICD (2024) states that parental engagement and involvement allow parents to enhance children's learning

achievements, as guided by the teacher, which enrich the child's experiences. This is usually a good instructional strategy for parents to be involved so that they can support the teachers.

On whether parents are actively involved in sounding out words for children, 48(70.6%), that is, the majority of respondents disagreed with that, while only 20(29.4%) agreed that parents are doing so as a learning strategy. This again shows that the work of teaching learners with special needs has been left solely to teachers. The results also show that most respondents 42(61.7%), indicated that school support enables parents of children with RDs to assist in the learning process, while only 26(38.2%) disagreed with the statement. This implies that schools take responsibility for ensuring they assist parents of learners with RD to actively take part in the learning process. According to (KICD 2024), parental involvement in the education of all learners is very crucial and more so for learners with special needs. Parents ensure there is continuity in the knowledge from a specific area by guiding and giving hints where the learner faces difficulties.

It was also noted by parents and BOM that most parents who have learners with RDs and do not have capacity to help them accounted for 40(58.8%) while 28(41.2%) indicated that they have the capacity. The work of teaching learners with RDs has been left to teachers who are already overwhelmed by the workload of other learners. The results show that most respondents, 45(66.2%), felt that they do not have information to enable them to effectively assist RDs learners to effectively read, while 23(33.8%) of respondents indicated that they have information to enable them to effectively assist RDs learners.

The results indicate that most parents, 46(67.6%), are guided on how to use the given materials by the school to assist their children with RDs, while 22(32.4%) indicated that parents were not guided on how to use the given materials to help learners with RDs. Although parents receive assistance from schools to help the learners with RDs, overall results show that most parents, 54(79.4%), did not effectively understand the instructional strategies used by teachers in teaching learners with RDs because they do not actively participate in the learning of their children with RDs. Only 34(20.6%) seemed to understand the strategies used. This agrees with findings of Ruwa (2022), who noted that BOM members have a great influence on the performance of pupils in public primary schools; however, this influence is dependent on the level of involvement of BOM members and parents' understanding of how to handle learners with special needs such as RDs.

4.2 Response on Instructional Strategies Used on Learners with Reading Difficulties (RDs) according to learners.

Learners were asked whether teachers assist them in dealing with reading difficulties. All the respondents agreed that they were being assisted by teachers and parents. Results were then thematically analysed, and the common themes were identified. These were

themes reflecting instructional strategies such as assistance in the area of comprehension, assistance in word recognition, sounding out words and improvement in reading speed through reading speed tests. The learners indicated that teachers were very helpful in those areas of difficulty.

Provision of written materials such as storybooks and class readers to learners by the teachers was one of the strategies that schools used to assist the RD learners; teachers were also taking the initiative to give individual assistance to the learners to help them catch up with the rest of the learners. It was also noted that teachers linked up learners with RDs with other learners to assist them in catching up with reading. Similarly, parents who were ready and willing to assist the learners at home were assisted by the teachers to understand how they should help learners. These results show that learners with RDs appreciated the effort by teachers to give them extra time to catch up with the rest of the learners in order to enhance mainstreaming in public primary schools. The need for providing appropriate written materials to learners by teachers was also a positive instructional strategy to assist learners in catching up with others in their classes. The findings also show that teachers played an important role in providing support to learners through other learners and peer assistance, with those who were willing to assist learners with RDs catching up. The study also found that learners appreciated the assistance they received from parents. The study findings support the findings of Chumo (2020) and Hidayah (2023), who noted that teachers' ability to employ different instructional strategies plays an important role in promoting mainstreaming and hence assisting the learners with RDs. Gordana (2021), through their study, found that one of the most important factors that influence the success of learners with special needs in a mainstream school is the instructional strategies that are used by teachers in assisting learners. The study observed that the learners' views had gaps in that the majority could not tell the time when they were assisted, meaning there was no extra time created for them. Their responses centered on similar lines, and they may have been coached prior to the study.

4.3 Response on the Instructional Strategies and Mainstreaming Learners with Reading Difficulties (RDs) According to the Administrators

In a different questionnaire given to administrators, the researcher expected administrators to specifically indicate instructional strategies to help learners with RDs in mainstreamed schools in Koibatek Sub County. The findings show that concerns and needs of learners with RDs in mainstream primary schools are not given the required attention in terms of instructional strategies for effective teaching and learning that can culminate in improved performance. The administrators were asked to indicate whether they have reading programmes to support the learners with RDs. According to the results, most administrators 68.8% indicated that they do not have programmes to support learners with RDs. Only 31.2% of the administrators indicated that they have such programmes. This implies that though most schools in the Sub County had

embraced mainstreaming to accommodate learners with special needs, school administrators had not developed reading programmes to support the learning of RD learners.

In reference to teaching strategies employed, administrators' responses from the open-ended questions were thematically summarised into the following categories: teaching sounds, Phonic methods, Word identification, Scaffolding, read aloud, Word identification, Shared reading with peers, Individualized program and Paired reading. The results noted that most administrators felt that the most effective strategies from their teaching experience that influence the learning of learners with RDs were phonic, word identification, peer reading and individualised programs. Though administrators were trying their best to mainstream learners who had RDs to catch up with the rest of the learners, they felt that they did not receive enough support from parents and that the schools did not have enough resources to support the programs.

The findings showed inadequate cooperation among teachers, parents and learners in supporting instructional strategies used by school administrators. Parents and BoM members also indicated limited parental involvement in understanding learners' progress. This finding agrees with Cherotich *et al.* (2022), who found that collaboration between head teachers and parents supported the implementation of inclusive education in Kenyan public primary schools. Similarly, Oduor *et al.* (2024) reported that parent-teacher collaboration was important in supporting learners with learning disabilities in public primary schools.

From the administrators' assessment, a good mainstreaming programme for learners with RDs is essential in developing appropriate instructional strategies that are familiar to both the teachers, parents and learners themselves. This makes learners seek assistance at all levels, from teachers, parents and peers. These findings corroborate the findings of a study carried out by Kathleen (2021) and Liew (2022), which established that the instructional strategies adopted for use for the learners with special needs play an important role in enhancing inclusion and hence making mainstreaming a success.

4.4 Response on the Instructional Strategies on Mainstreaming Learners with Reading Difficulties (RDs) According to the EARC

EARC was required to state some of the common types of RDs which learners experience in primary schools. The EARC response was: the most common difficulties which learners face include decoding or sounding out words, which may arise from failure to master letter sounds. Some learners may master sounds and decode words so well but fail to associate words with their meanings or comprehend texts. Lack of fluency affects reading speed and accuracy or failure of accurate expression. Common teaching and learning strategies to address the above challenges for learners include repeated reading and reading aloud for learners with RDs to get the right pronunciation of words. Rulers and reading windows guide the reader to keep track of words to avoid skipping or repetition of lines. Hands-on learning activities such as building words and playing

BINGO games arouse and sustain learners' interests in reading. Some assessment adaptations can be made to accommodate individual needs for every learner. On whether there are programmes in the EARC's office to help in dealing with RDs in learners, the response was 'No', but the EARC said that he encourages every school to come up with programmes that support learners with RDs. This concurs with a study finding by Alqahtani (2024). While conducting a study on teaching learners with RDs that schools adopt a holistic approach when teaching in the classroom and focus on learners' preferred learning styles.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that schools must employ appropriate instructional strategies to ensure that mainstreaming is effective in schools. The study concluded that most schools lack the essentials of mainstreaming and that parents are not very supportive of the programme. Teachers are usually overwhelmed by the activities of mainstreaming, and hence the process seems very ineffective in assisting the learners with RDs.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings, School administrators should be at the forefront to advocate for the mainstreaming of schools to cater for learners with special needs. They should ensure that they implement policies that support mainstreaming in order to promote effective inclusion of special needs learners such as those with RDs. Koibatek Sub County, through the Ministry of Education and Teachers Service Commission, needs to work hand in hand to equip the schools with the required resources, including qualified teachers who have skills in teaching learners with special needs, besides equipping the schools with enough classrooms, teaching materials and ensuring schools have effective libraries and any other relevant materials.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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