



TEACHERS' INTERVENTION STRATEGIES AND SOCIAL INTERACTION AMONG LEARNERS WITH EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL DISORDERS IN SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS, NAIROBI CITY COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract:

The main aim of this research was to explore intervention strategies used to enhance social skills in learners with Emotional and Behavioural Disorder in selected regular primary schools in Kayole zone, Embakasi sub-county, Nairobi County, Kenya. The study was guided by Vygotsky's theory of social development. It employed a mixed-method research approach, adopting a descriptive research design. Questionnaires and face-to-face interviews were used as the main instruments of data collection. The targeted population was 102, which included 12 school administrators and 90 teachers teaching in the zone. The study utilized a simple random sampling technique to select two schools and the educationists who participated in the study. The sample size of the study comprised 16 teachers and 8 administrators. Qualitative data was analysed thematically and then presented narratively. Quantitative data were coded and fed into SPSS software for analysis. It was reported using frequencies, descriptive statistics, graphs, and charts. The study concluded that teachers appreciated conventional strategies but did not adequately utilize them. This was mainly due to poor training and unfavourable teacher-to-learner ratio. The study recommended that teachers, through in-service training, need to be provided with better training on social skills interventions in order to build their confidence in these techniques so that they actually implement them within their

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classrooms. The study also recommended more emphasis on the Guidance and Counselling department through employing trained counselors who can assist in addressing emotional and behavioral challenges by learners.

Keywords: teachers' intervention strategies, social interaction, emotional and behavioural disorders

1. Introduction

Defining children with emotional disturbance is a complex task. Several terms have been used to explain abnormal behaviour in children, although in adults, many describe it as mental illness or psychopathology, which has been thought to be too stigmatising to apply to children (Forness & Kavale, 2000). Emotional disturbance and behavioral disorders are less stigmatizing terms that are commonly used, particularly with professionals in the area of Special Education (Kutash, *et al.*, 2005). Emotional disturbance is among the thirteen disability classification, under U.S. federal law (IDEA), the Individuals with Disability Act. According to IDEA (2004), EBD means a disability that is marked by behavioral or emotional responses in school schedules so different from appropriate age, cultural, or ethnic norms that the responses unfavourably affect educational performance, as well as academic, social, vocational, or professional skills.

In the United States, at least 6000000 individuals experience serious emotional challenges at one point in their lives (Brauner & Stevens, 2000). Emotional deficits affect performance in elementary areas of functioning, which include academic achievement, social interactions, behaviour, and social skill fluency. In Social Skills Training (SST) remediation is necessary in order to assist learners with EBD improve in their areas of weakness. To assess the needs of students with EBD, effective programming with committed and qualified professionals is necessary. The development of social skills further upgrades their academic success and their overall well-being (Vallis, 2015). This is especially so in the era of inclusive education, where cooperative learning and coexistence of typically developing learners and those with disability are emphasised (Sutherland *et al.*, 2000).

In the United States, learners with EBD are at risk of dropping out of school (U.S. Department of Education, 2005) and have a high percentage of incarceration and unemployment in relation to other disabilities (Lehr & McCommas, 2005). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2005) and the National Research Council (2002), about 1% of learners in public schools in the United States acquire special education under the EBD category. In a longitudinal study, Bradley *et al.* (2004) ascertained that 3-4% of secondary school learners with EBD were suspended or expelled from school, in contrast to 22% of same-age peers in the general population. These learners are frequently rejected by classmates and by the adults with whom they spend their school days (Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004).

A study conducted in Germany with a cross-sectional design among children and adolescents, ages 13-18 years, divulged that they suffer from several emotional and behavioral problems, which require differentiated interventions determined by their symptoms, age and sex. In accordance with the respective occurrence definition, between 10% and 18% of the children and adolescents were regarded to have a clinically relevant score that needs counselling, diagnostics or treatment (Kefale *et al.*, 2018).

In India, along with the increasing total population of the country, there is a huge number of orphans and abandoned children, which is also growing. There are more than 25 million orphans or abandoned children and about 44 million destitute children in India, according to UNICEF (2012). In addition, the majority of them are brought up in institutional homes where individual care is insufficient. All these factors can socially and emotionally affect these children in general and their academic life.

According to Mestry *et al.* (2007), barriers faced by learners with EBD in South African schools are notable concerns that need urgent attention. This is due to the number of children affected and the negative effects these barriers have on teaching and learning in mainstream schools. The lifetime prevalence of mental disorders at some point in South Africa was rated at 30%. There is a significant rate of anxiety, depression, and substance use disorder, especially in adolescents (Herman *et al.*, 2011).

In Kenya, a descriptive research study was conducted investigating the challenges teachers encountered in their endeavour to manage learners with EBD in Kiambu County. The study revealed that the most intense challenges the teachers confronted in managing learners with EBDs were high enrolment, overcrowded classrooms and shortage of specialized training. The study identified the need for training of teachers with a view to building capacity to enable them to handle the EBD learners. The study recommended constant capacity building for teachers in special needs education and that the Teachers' Service Commission should employ at least one trained special needs education teacher in every school for quality and professional management of the EBD learners.

In Kenya, there are no special classes purely meant for learners with EBDs (Murugami, 2015). Learners with severe behaviour problems who are antisocial are placed in special transitional schools known as approved schools. These schools serve as rehabilitation Centres and juvenile systems that receive learners who are taught by professionals referred to as probation officers. Consequently, a limited number of learners get help in comparison to the many children in school settings who go unreported and eventually remain unattended (Gathua *et al.*, 2015). This study seeks to find out the influence of teachers' intervention strategies on social interaction for learners with EBD in regular schools.

2. Statement of the Problem

Children with behavioural and social skills deficits are at risk of academic failure. Learners with poor social skills have limited opportunities to learn, which negatively affects their self-concept. They are also at a greater risk for juvenile delinquency and adult psychopathology than socially competent children. Learners dropping out of school before graduation are a prevalent problem in Kenya. Research indicates that most learners with Emotional Behaviour Disorder perform poorly in national exams and rarely proceed to post-secondary training institutions. The majority of them end up in the criminal justice system. This makes them unproductive members of the nation and remains a burden to the state as prisoners. Early intervention is quite critical to save learners with EBD from dropping out of school and give them a chance to participate in post-secondary education. It is important to investigate the strategies teachers use to intervene for behaviour and social skills deficits. This will help plan for pre- and post-service training for aspiring teachers and professional development training for teachers already in the field.

2.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of teachers' intervention strategies on social interaction among learners with EBD in selected primary schools in Nairobi County.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The study adopted Lev Vygotsky's Social Development Theory, which is the work of a Russian psychologist (1896-1934). This theory suggests that social interaction is fundamental to cognitive development. The theory is one of the pillars of the constructivist school of thought. It affirms two major themes regarding social interaction, which include the more knowledgeable other (MKO) and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory considers human development as a process that is socially mediated, whereby children pick up their cultural values, beliefs, and problem-solving strategies through collaborative dialogues with more knowledgeable members of society (McLeod, 2020). Social interaction is the basis of learning and development. Learning is a process of apprenticeship and internalization in which skills and knowledge are transformed from the social into the cognitive plane (Shaban & Ewing, 2016).

According to Vygotsky, if the students are not able to achieve the set task, with or without the support of another, the challenge is too great, and they become anxious. However, if students are too easily able to achieve and the level of challenge is too low, they will become bored. Thus, in order to effectively challenge and engage students, tasks and assignments must be structured in a way that keeps them within the zone of proximal development, where they are most likely to perform well. A good teacher or a more

knowledgeable other (MKO) identifies a learner's ZPD and helps them stretch beyond it. Then the MKO gradually withdraws support until the learner can perform the task unaided.

3. Review of Related Literature

3.1 Research-Based Intervention Strategies For Enhancing Social Skills in Learners with Emotional and Behaviour Disorder

Social skills are critically significant not only in Education but in day to day lives of human beings. Learners with emotional and behavioural disorders have a challenge in the area (Hukkelberg *et al.*, 2019). Social skills training helps EBD learners develop social abilities that enhance their potential to relate effectively. Through social skills training, EBD learners acquire skills that enable them to build healthy social relationships and deal with social problems. Educators may observe a few red flags that some of their students with EBD are facing challenges in social situations, and may be concerned that this signals some deficits in their social skills. In fact, it was established that more than 50% of individuals with a disability have social, emotional, or behavioural challenges, including specific difficulties with social skills (Mansour & Wiener, 2020).

Social skill training necessitates comprehensive teaching of positive social behaviours and social problem-solving skills to groups of children or adolescents who are experiencing challenges with social relationships. SST interventions aim to teach new skills, enhance existing skills, and facilitate the maintenance of previously learned skills. SST interventions for these learners are usually based on cognitive-behavioral principles (Wiener & Timmermanis, 2012). The proper identification process of intervention strategies for managing emotional or behavioural problems determines the level of success in the social skills intervention process (Alberto & Troutman, 2010).

To effectively manage EBD learners, it is important to design a personalized curriculum to suit their educational needs. Most strategies include placing these students in inclusive classrooms. Section 504 of the Individuals with Disabilities Act dictates that schools in America must educate their students in the least restrictive environment possible (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Teachers should be adjustable and apply a variety of proactive behavioural management strategies (Jensen, 2005). Effective educational programming is a key determinant and success factor in the management of EBD learners. These learners require individualized programming based on proven successful strategies implemented by professionals (Simpson, 2011). Thus, many of the effective educational programs for students with EBD focus primarily on the social skill training component to develop social-emotional competence, which significantly correlates with improved academic functioning.

3.2 Consistent Routine, Limits and Rules

Expectations are intended to provide students with clear information on the academic and social responses required for instruction and learning to take place (Gresham & Shaughnessy, 2002). A study by Marzano (2003) analysed the design of rules in the classroom; nevertheless, it did not look into the effectiveness of the rules. This study seeks to find out the effectiveness of the rules, limits, and routines. According to the USA Department of Education Institute (2019-2020), teaching students what to do during daily routines will help them be successful and can significantly lessen disruptions in the classroom and allow students to learn expectations and the flow of the classroom. Once routines are learned, students should be able to transition throughout the day with minimal time lost. Routines help to reduce disruptive behaviour, therefore maximising the time spent on instruction, which would enhance their interactions with the teachers.

3.3 Planned Ignoring of Minor Inappropriate Behaviours

In planned ignoring, teachers purposively ignore minor inappropriate behaviour to avoid giving unnecessary attention (Stahr *et al.*, 2006). The U.S. Department of Education (2004) recommends utilising planned ignoring of minor inappropriate behaviours when students manifest inappropriate behaviours to gain the attention of their teachers or fellow classmates. This behavioural strategy demonstrates effective results when students are attempting to gain attention or refrain from completing non-preferred tasks. Planned ignoring is a form of extinction designed to weaken, decrease, or eliminate a behaviour (Sheuermann & Hall, 2008). For example, when the teacher ignores call-outs, for instance, does not attend to verbal misbehaviour, the intent is to signal to the student that inappropriate behaviour will not lead to desired outcomes (Alberto & Troutman, 2006). Sheuermann and Hall (2008) suggested that teachers explain to students that when a target behaviour occurs, there will be no teacher response. The underlying assumption is that by withholding reinforcement, the student will cease to engage in the target behaviour.

3.4 Reminders and Verbal Prompt

Reminders bring to the attention of students how to comply with rules, class expectations, or routines of the classroom or school, and teachers simply post their rules in their classrooms. They should be actively incorporated into teaching and reviewing activities (Scheuermann & Hall, 2008). A research by Alberto (2003) found that verbal prompts worked well with students by ensuring they remained on task.

3.5 Contracts and Documented Self-Monitoring

A contract is a written agreement between a student and teacher, administrator, or parent that demarcates each participant's obligations. It lists behaviours that the student will perform, how much, by when, and what the teacher or adult will do to support and reinforce those behaviours (Scheuermann & Hall, 2008). Students actively participate in

negotiating the contract. Behaviour contracts are a useful intervention used by classrooms and schools to help monitor and change student behaviour. The teacher and the student work together to discuss the goals that they are working toward. Working together with the student, the teacher can also identify rewards and incentives that will motivate the student to follow the contract. Parents should also be informed of the contract before it is implemented. They will need to agree to the terms and rewards before it can be successfully started.

3.6 Documented Self-Monitoring

Documented self-monitoring occurs when a student records how frequently he or she performs specific, targeted behaviours. Students learn to evaluate and self-reinforce themselves (Lewis & Doorlag, 2006). Self-monitoring is a technique used for students that allows them to pay close attention to their behavior. Self-monitoring consists of two parts: students tracking their own data and comparing data to their previous data to see improvement in their behaviour. Explicitly teaching students self-monitoring skills promotes independence and responsibility for their own actions. Learning these skills is essential for students with behavioural problems (Hayes, 2019). Self-monitoring is a concept that promotes independence, responsible behaviours, and positive coping abilities while increasing on-task behaviour, productivity, self-awareness, and reflection. Many students who are identified as having emotional/behavioural disorders lack self-monitoring skills that are vital to be successful in the real world after high school. Self-monitoring of attention has proved to be an effective intervention for students with serious emotional disturbance and has also helped improve academic performance (Otero & Haut, 2016).

A study by Gathua *et al.* (2012) on the analysis of teacher intervention strategies in managing learners with EBD, done in Kiambu County in Kenya, used a descriptive research method with a target population of 149 teachers, and found that teachers do not use effective intervention strategies to manage behaviours for learners with EBD. This study, therefore, sought to find the effective strategies that should be employed in regular schools.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This was a mixed-methods research that adopted a descriptive research design. The major purpose of using descriptive research is to describe the situation as it exists within the schools under study, with no manipulation of any variables by the researcher.

4.2 Sampling Techniques

Purposive sampling was used to select eight administrators, including head teachers and deputies from each of the two schools. Further, simple random sampling techniques were used to select sixteen out of ninety teachers.

4.3 Sample Size

The sample size of this study consisted of 8 administrators and 16 teachers.

Table 3.1: Sample Size

Subject	Population	Sample Size	Percentage (%)
School administrators	12	8	66.7
Teachers	90	16	17.8
Total	102	24	23.53

4.4 Data Collection Tools

The main tools of data collection used in this research were questionnaires and a face-to-face interview schedule

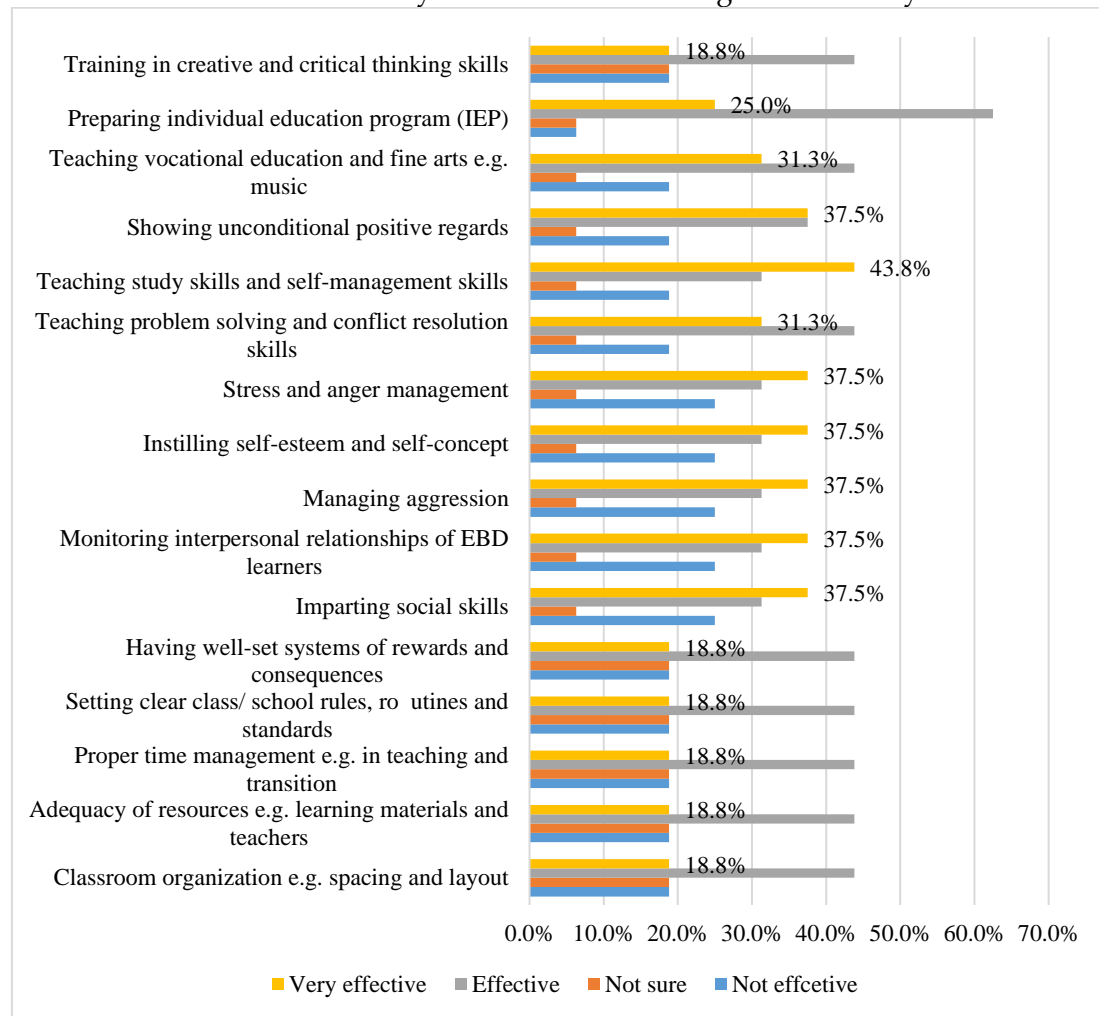
5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Intervention Strategies and Their Influence on Social Skills in Learners with EBD

Teachers were given questionnaires and were required to rate their perceptions on strategies of intervention based on a scale of 1 to 3 (where 3= Effective; 2= Not sure, and 1= Not effective). The variables were expressed in percentages during the analysis, and the results are presented in Table 1 below.

Results in the above table indicate that the majority (62.5%) of the participants agreed that preparing an individual education program (IEP) was very effective among methods of identifying learners with EBDs. Further results indicate that 43.8% equally agreed that training in creative and critical thinking skills, teaching vocational education and fine arts, teaching study skills and self-management skills, setting clear class/ school rules, routines and standards, having well-set systems of rewards and consequences, proper time management, adequacy of resources and classroom organization were very effective. Conversely, 25.0% equally reported that stress and anger management, instilling self-esteem and self-concept, managing aggression, imparting social skills and monitoring interpersonal relationships of EBD learners were not effective methods.

Table 1: Perceived Efficacy of Intervention Strategies Utilized by Teachers



5.2 Teachers' Response on the Availability of Guidance and Counselling Programs in Schools

The researcher asked teachers whether their schools had a guidance and counselling program. Figure 2 presents the results.

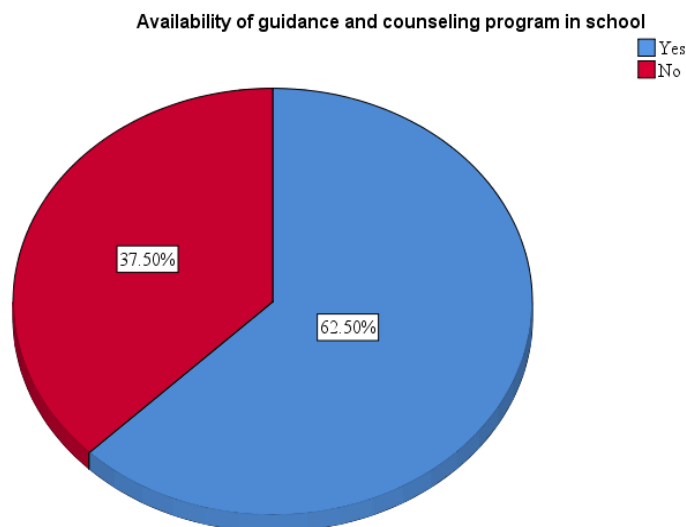


Figure 2: Availability of Guidance and Counselling Program in School

From Figure 2, it was important to note that more than half (62.5%) of the teachers indicated that there were functional guidance and counselling programmes in their respective schools. The difficulty with social skills is measurable and treatable in the context of school counseling. This is corroborated by Jiya's (2022) findings, which showed that addressing social skills challenges should be deliberately planned and carried out through school counseling, infusing or integrating social skill components into the core curriculum, and regularly planning group activities that will enable students to demonstrate social competence.

Through interviews, administrators were asked to comment on how effective the school guidance and counselling department was in assisting learners with EBD in their schools. A participant from school E said that,

"...Guidance and counselling programs help to assess the sources of stress and anger management among children with EBDs. It also opens the minds of the young school-going children seeking the service to take preventive measures to avoid being influenced by other peers to engage in violence, theft and sexual activities at an early age. We, however, have a big challenge. The number of students is too high. We also need professional counsellors."

Another participant from school F remarked,

"Guidance and counselling have reduced the truant behaviour in our school. Physical discussion with the children tends to open their minds and share their personal problems."

The above findings imply that the development of social skills among children is predetermined by various personal characteristics, which must be nurtured accordingly. This would only be successful if the teacher has the knowledge and experience that

would help in identifying weaknesses and improving on the same by employing appropriate social skill intervention strategies.

During an interview, administrators were asked whether their school carried out educational assessments to identify learners with special educational needs and disabilities. A participant from school A said that,

"...Even though it is very important to conduct, educational assessments to identify learners with special educational needs and disabilities, we rarely do it. However, when we receive a medical history of a child concerning disorder, we would prefer the parent to transfer such special cases to special units if we don't have the capacity to handle learners with such conditions. "

Another participant from school C remarked,

"Mmm. Yes, we do it sometimes, and if the case can be managed, it means it is mild. Nonetheless, serious cases would require specialists."

Finally, another participant from school D explained,

"I mean, conducting an educational assessment to identify learners with special educational needs and disabilities needs to be done by specialists. However, we do not have any teacher-specialists specifically trained to guide, handle and manage children with EBDs."

During an interview, administrators were asked to briefly explain the programs they put in place for learners with EBD in their school. A participant from school B explained that,

"Setting clear class/ school rules, routines, and standards enables EBD learners to acquire social skills that enable them to build healthy social relationships and deal with social problems."

Another participant from school C remarked,

"Monitoring interpersonal relationships of EBD learners enables students to learn to evaluate and self-reinforce themselves. It allows them to pay close attention to their behaviour. Self-monitoring consists of two parts: students tracking their own data and comparing data to their previous data to see improvement in their behaviour."

The above sentiment concurs with that of Hayes (2019), who explicitly teaches students self-monitoring skills, which promote independence and responsibility for one's

own actions. Teaching study skills and self-management skills, preparing individual education programs, training in creative and critical thinking skills, teaching vocational education and fine arts, setting clear class/ school rules, adequacy of resources and classroom organisation were the main strategies reported. These strategies are all directed to change the behaviour of learners with EBDs. The results of this study similarly support those of Maina (2015), who found that nearly two-fifths of instructors in a sample of schools believed that behaviour strategies were helpful, while a similar percentage said they were ineffective, and a quarter were unsure.

The results of this study suggested that counselling and guiding were effective behaviour management methods. Additionally, according to Karim (2022), tailored education plans must be created for each learner who may not be able to learn effectively in an inclusive environment owing to a disability.

5. Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

The main aim of this study was to explore intervention strategies teachers use to influence social skills in learners with EBD in Embakasi sub-county, Nairobi County, Kenya.

5.1 Summary

The findings indicate that teachers agreed and perceived all 16 strategies positively. They clearly know what is expected of them to be able to influence social skills in learners with EBD. It is also evident that teachers have challenges related to unfavourable teacher-to-learner ratios. Head teachers also noted that there were challenges in guidance and counselling departments because schools lacked professional counsellors.

5.2 Conclusion

Teachers had diverse but relatively positive perceptions of the efficacy of varied intervention strategies used to enhance social skill challenges in learners with EBD. There were challenges related to inadequate teacher training and a lack of professional counsellors in schools.

5.3 Recommendation for Policy

The Ministry of Education should organize in-service professional development training for teachers already in the field to build capacity and enhance their skills in Social Skills Intervention Strategies. On the same note, it is important that teacher training institutions include in their Curriculum Inclusive Education Strategies, which entail, among other things, social skill intervention training for learners with EBD.

5.4 Recommendations for Practice

Teachers need to take their own initiatives to improve their competence in using research-based intervention strategies. There is a lot of modern-day research and conference presentations on the internet, other digital and print media. We also have many published journal articles on strategies. Most of them are freely accessible, and teachers should take advantage of them to empower themselves. Further, teachers need to work collaboratively with one another to enhance their effectiveness in improving social skills. This is because they need to benefit from one another's experience, expertise and teamwork.

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