

Original Research Paper

School Environment and Retention of Learners with Disabilities in the Universal Primary Schools of Kasese District Uganda

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Abstract: This study investigates the relationship between the school environment and the retention of learners with disabilities in Universal Primary Schools (UPS) within Kasese District, Uganda. Employing a descriptive research design integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the study examines three main objectives: the impact of teacher support, school infrastructure, and school relationships on the retention of learners with disabilities. A total of 154 respondents, including teachers, head teachers, and pupils from six selected UPS, participated in the study. Data collection involved self-administered questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. Findings reveal various home-related factors influencing the retention of learners with physical disabilities, such as poverty, negative parental attitudes, and lack of essential self-help skills training. Despite respondents indicating moderate levels of school attendance and retention for learners with disabilities, enrolment and retention rates remain significantly lower compared to non-disabled peers. The study underscores the need for collaborative efforts among government bodies, school administrators, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders to implement sustainable measures aimed at improving the school environment and enhancing retention for learners with disabilities.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Learners with Disabilities, School Retention, Uganda, Universal Primary Schools.



1. Introduction

The entitlement to education stands as a paramount prerogative for individuals with disabilities, given its pivotal role in facilitating their comprehensive enjoyment of all other rights enshrined by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Article 24 of the CRPD, delineating the right to inclusive education, expressly safeguards the entitlement of children with disabilities to an equitable and quality educational experience. This provision underscores the centrality of inclusive education in realizing high-quality educational outcomes for all learners, irrespective of disability status [1]. Nevertheless, statistical evidence indicates that children with disabilities exhibit lower rates of primary school completion [2]. Consequently, this study endeavors to elucidate the factors pertinent to the education of children with disabilities, with a specific focus on the correlation between the school environment and the retention of such children within educational institutions.

Education, an indispensable right for every child, whether disabled or nondisabled, serves as a vital tool in preparing children to confront life's challenges. International human rights instruments, including the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education of 1960, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1946, the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 2006, unequivocally prohibit any form of educational exclusion based on ability. Nevertheless, millions of children worldwide continue to grapple with exclusion from educational opportunities [3]. Impairments impeding communication and interaction, commonplace in mainstream educational settings, pose significant practical and social hurdles for children with disabilities seeking educational participation [4]. The researcher in [5] underscores that approximately 15% of the global population comprises individuals with disabilities, yet a disconcerting one-third of the 77 million children globally not enrolled in educational programs are children with disabilities.

In the context of Europe, disability policy has transitioned from an explicit care model to a human rights perspective since the 1990s. Concurrently, educational policies have evolved from the provision of segregated environments towards more integrative approaches since the 1980s. The European Disability Strategy 2010–2020 endeavors to enhance the integration of people with disabilities into society, including within the education system [6]. Despite the existence of a robust European legal framework promoting equality of opportunities and non-discrimination, the implementation of inclusive education remains in its nascent stages, with the efficacy of outcomes proving challenging to ascertain. Disabled children encounter myriad barriers to inclusion in education across most European nations. Mainstream educators often lack adequate preparation to adapt their pedagogical practices to the diverse needs of disabled students contributing to significantly higher dropout rates among children with disabilities [7], [8].

2. Literature Review

Since 1990, Sub-Saharan Africa has made significant progress in school enrollment [9]. However, there are still inequalities that hinder the achievement of universal education. Despite efforts to address gender and income disparities, children with disabilities are often overlooked. In East Africa, children with disabilities in particular often lack the necessary support to stay in school, leading to their exclusion from education and society as a whole [10].

In Kenya, the educational needs of children with disabilities have historically been neglected [11]. A 2008 survey revealed that only 39% of children with disabilities attended mainstream primary schools. Similarly, in Tanzania, the enrollment rate for children with disabilities is significantly lower than the general enrollment rate [12]. Many schools in mainland Tanzania are ill-equipped to accommodate these students, lacking both physical accessibility and assistive technologies. In Uganda, although the government implemented the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy in 1997 to increase educational participation among disabled children, significant challenges still remain [13]. While the Education Sector Strategic Plan 2004-2015 acknowledges the barriers faced by children with disabilities, they are still less likely to enroll, attend, or complete primary education [14]. Various interventions have been proposed to tackle the issue of low retention rates among children with disabilities. Authors in [15] emphasize the importance of accessible physical learning environments and inclusive practices. The researcher in [16] advocates for classrooms that promote emotional well-being, mutual respect, and effective classroom management. The scholar in [17] suggests a system-centered approach that involves multidisciplinary support tailored to each student's needs. The researcher in [18] recommends interactive instruction models and safe, supportive relationships. The scholar in [19]

highlights the importance of improving school environmental factors such as infrastructure, organizational structures, and interpersonal relationships.

This study aims to investigate how various aspects of the school environment, including teacher support, infrastructure, and relationships, impact the retention of children with disabilities. Previous research has identified these components as crucial for creating a supportive school environment. The study will explore the influence of these factors on the retention of children with disabilities in primary schools.

3. Methodology

1) Research Design

This study employed a descriptive research design, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches, with a primary emphasis on the quantitative method. Quantitative data facilitated statistical inferences by examining the relationship between independent and dependent variables [20]. Meanwhile, qualitative data enriched the analysis by offering detailed insights through interview statements. This mixed-method approach enabled the study to draw robust statistical conclusions and conduct comprehensive in-depth analyses.

2) Population of the Study

The study consisted of a total of 168 participants from six Universal Primary Schools in Kasese District. These participants included teachers, head teachers, and pupils. The selected schools were Rukoki Model, Nyakasanga Primary School, Kinyamaseke Primary School, Mpondwe Primary School, Hima, and Katiri. Teachers were specifically chosen for the questionnaire survey because it was determined that pupils with disabilities may have difficulty effectively responding to the questionnaire items. This approach ensured a more comprehensive and accurate collection of data. Additionally, the population included 78 pupils with disabilities in upper primary (primary five to seven), as well as six head teachers from the aforementioned schools.

3) Sample Size

The sample size for the questionnaire survey was determined to be 70 teachers, based on the criteria outlined in Table 1, Small Sample Determination by [21]. Furthermore, 78 pupils with disabilities in upper primary (primary five to seven) and six head teachers were purposively selected for interview data. As a result, the total sample size comprised 154 respondents.

Table 1. Population, sample Size and Sampling Technique

Category	Population	Sample Size	Sampling Method
Teachers	85	70	Simple random
Pupils	78	78	Purposive
Head teachers	6	6	Purposive
Total	168	154	

4) Sampling Techniques

This study employed simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. Simple random sampling was used to select teachers by chance, drawing from a list of participating teachers. This method was chosen to ensure that the findings could be applied to a larger population, as recommended by [22]. Purposive sampling, on the other hand, was used to gather specific perspectives from certain individuals, given the mixed-methods nature of the study. The intense purposive sampling technique, described by [23], allowed for the selection of a limited number of cases that provided rich information and insights into the phenomenon being investigated. In this study, head teachers and pupils were purposefully selected as participants.

5) Data Collection Instruments

A combination of self-administered questionnaires, interview guides, and focused discussion guides were used. These tools were carefully designed to gather comprehensive data from participants,

ensuring a thorough exploration of both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the research objectives.

The Self-Administered Questionnaire (SAQ) is made up of three sections, demographics, learner retention factors, and school environment. Section A gathered demographic data, Section B assessed learner retention, including social integration, commitment to studies and school, and persistence whereas Section C evaluated the school environment, covering teacher support, infrastructure, and relationships.

A Likert scale was used, and questions were translated into the local language. Additionally, interviews with head teachers and focus group discussions with pupils with disabilities provided qualitative insights, enhancing the study's comprehensiveness.

6) Research Procedure

The researcher obtained permission from the Institutional Research and Ethics Committee before collecting data. Headteachers facilitated access to learners, while special needs teachers, not affiliated with the schools, assisted in data collection. The researcher conducted interviews personally and recorded responses.

- **Validity**
The researcher ensured that survey items aligned with the study's conceptual framework and sought feedback from supervisors for clarity and relevance. Confirmatory factor analysis in SPSS validated the survey items.
- **Reliability**
The researcher focused on credibility and dependability during interviews, avoiding biases and maintaining meticulous record-keeping. Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess the reliability of survey items, achieving a benchmark of $\alpha = 0.70$ and above, thus ensuring quality control of the instrument.
- **Quantitative Data Analysis**
The collected data was processed by the researcher through coding and inputting it into SPSS 24.0. Subsequently, it was summarized using frequency tables to identify and correct errors. The analysis involved univariate, bivariate, and multivariate levels. Univariate analysis included computing descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages. Bivariate and multivariate analyses utilized correlation and regression to investigate the relationships between independent and dependent variables, thereby facilitating the generalization of findings. The qualitative data underwent coding and categorization based on the objectives of the study and emerging themes. Content analysis was employed during this process. By distilling the data into concise categories or concepts, the qualitative analysis provided explanatory depth to the quantitative results.

7) Limitations/Delimitations

The study predominantly relied on survey methods, which limited the opportunity for in-depth qualitative exploration. Despite efforts to collect comprehensive data, challenges were encountered in obtaining accurate information due to the nature of the respondents, specifically children with disabilities. To address this, data collection was facilitated by special needs teachers who were familiar with working with such learners.

4. Finding and Discussion

4.1. Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

This subsection deals with the in-depth analysis of the data derived from responses gathered through the questionnaire. Initially, attention is directed towards demographic variables including age, gender, educational attainment, and teaching tenure. Subsequently, the narrative progresses to dissecting and interpreting the findings according to the predefined study objectives.

Table 2. Gender of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	104	67.1
Female	51	32.9
Total	155	100.0

From Table 2, it was found that the majority (67%) were male, while 32.9% were female. Both genders were adequately represented in the study. However, the data indicates that the majority of individuals involved in working with children with disabilities were male teachers.

Table 3. Age of the Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Below 30 years	39	25.2
30-40 years	93	60.0
40 years and above	23	14.8
Total	155	100.0

In consideration of the respondents' age, results indicate that the majority 60% were between 30-40 years, then 25% below 30 years and 14% above 40 years. This is an indication that between 30 – and 40 years old are mostly attached to children with disabilities and more so could be more caring and understanding of their plight.

Table 4. Level of Education

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Grade III Certificate	32	20.6
Diploma	26	16.8
Bachelor's Degree	68	43.9
Postgraduate	29	18.7
Total	155	100.0

As regards respondents' level of education, results showed that the majority 43.9% had attained a Bachelor's degree, 20.6% Grade III Certificate and 18.7% a Postgraduate training. It therefore indicates that these children are placed in the hands of well-trained persons/teachers to enable them to achieve their dreams.

As far as the level of experience for the teachers involved, results indicated that the majority 41.9% had been in practice between 5 – 10 years. This is an indication that these teachers are capable of understanding the issues surrounding the growth of these children.

Table 5. Teaching Experience

Teaching Experience (years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less than 5	57	36.8
5 -10	65	41.9
Above 10	33	21.3
Total	155	100.0

Table 6, examined the relationship between teacher support and retention of learners with disabilities in primary schools in Kasese District. This should that children with disabilities develop close personal relationships with other pupils, as the majority 65% of respondents believed this is untrue, while 23.4% considered it true. Only 4.8% of respondents affirmed that pupils with disabilities develop close relationships with other students at school.

Table 6. The Relationship Between Teacher Support and Retention of Learners with Disabilities in Primary Schools in Kasese District

Social Integration	Very Untrue	Untrue	Somewhat True	True	Very True
• Children with disabilities develop close personal relationships with other pupils	65% (124)	23.4% (39)	1.6% (6)	5.2% (19)	4.8% (10)
• Interpersonal relationships with other pupils have had a positive influence on the personal growth, attitudes, and values of children with disabilities	66.7% (132)	9.6% (19)	2.5% (5)	2.5% (5)	18.7% (37)
• Interpersonal relationships of children with disabilities & other pupils have a positive influence on their intellectual growth and interest in ideas	76.3% (151)	9.6% (19)	13.1% (26)	1.0% (02)	0% (00)
• It is easy for children with disabilities to meet and make friends with other pupils	58.6% (116)	13.1% (26)	15.7% (31)	4.5% (09)	8.1% (16)
• Pupils are willing to listen to children with disabilities and help them if they have personal problems	82.3% (163)	9.6% (19)	6.6% (13)	0 (0)	5.6% (11)
• Children with disabilities develop close personal relationships with teachers	57.1% (113)	19.2% (38)	10.6% (21)	0 (0)	12.1% (24)
Commitment to Studies					
• Children with disabilities want to continue with their studies.	58.6% (116)	13.1% (26)	15.7% (31)	4.5% (09)	8.1% (16)
• Most children with disabilities are interested in learning	40.9% (81)	24.2% (48)	19.2% (38)	5.1% (10)	10.6% (21)
• Most children with disabilities are determined to complete their studies successfully	21.2% (42)	12.1% (24)	21.7% (43)	11.1% (22)	33.8% (67)
• Children with disabilities are very involved in their studies	9.1% (18)	7.6% (15)	20.3% (40)	14.2% (28)	48.7% (96)
• Children with disabilities usually put a lot of effort into their studies	2% (4)	2.5% (5)	20.3% (40)	25.4% (50)	49.7% (98)
Persistence to Studies					
• Children with disabilities persist with whatever school activity they are given	4.5% (09)	5.1% (10)	0% (00)	7.1% (14)	83.3% (165)
• Children with disabilities need to be encouraged to complete their schoolwork	36.5% (72)	11.7% (23)	12.7% (25)	17.3% (34)	21.3% (43)
• When they fail to understand something, Children with disabilities ask teachers for an explanation	21.2% (42)	12.1% (24)	21.7% (43)	11.1% (22)	33.8% (67)

Furthermore, 56% of respondents agreed that children with disabilities form satisfying friendships, which indicates that these children likely interact with peers who share their concerns. 18.7% considered that interpersonal relationships on the personal growth, attitudes, and values of children with disabilities have an impact whereas 66.7% of respondents disagreed. This suggests that children with disabilities are more likely to develop their values and attitudes from sources other than their relationships with peers. Interestingly, 76.3% of respondents indicated that interpersonal relationships contribute positively to the intellectual growth of children with disabilities, influencing the development of their ideas.

Regarding the ease with which, from Table 6, it was observed that 58.6% of respondents agreed that it is easy for children with disabilities to meet and make friends, while 8.1% disagreed. Hence, 82.3% agreed that peers are supportive and willing to help with the personal problems of the disabled and make them friends.

Table 6 also showed that 57% of respondents found it very true that children with disabilities develop close relationships with their teachers, and none disagreed. This indicates that these children find it easy and important to build close relationships with their teachers for assistance. However, despite these relationships, children with disabilities often find them unsatisfying in meeting their needs.

From Table 6, it was observed that 58.6% of respondents agreed that children with disabilities persist in continuing their studies, while 8.1% disagreed. 40.9% of respondents agreed that children with disabilities are interested in learning whereas 33.8% disagreed with the statement that these children are determined to complete their studies, highlighting the difficulties and increased dropout rates faced by these students. This difficulty in persisting with studies until completion is likely due to the challenges, they encounter in the learning process. Moreover, respondents indicated that children with disabilities often do not enjoy their time in school, affecting their abilities and attitudes toward education.

Table 6 showed that 48.7% of disabled are fully involved and put more effort into their studies and 49.7% of respondents disagreed that children with disabilities are highly engaged and diligent. This suggests that these children often require additional encouragement and support from teachers. Regarding completing school activities, 83.3% of respondents disagreed that children with disabilities persist and finish their tasks, indicating that they frequently struggle to complete assignments without extra support.

Finally, 36.5% of respondents agreed that children with disabilities need encouragement to complete their school work, while 21.3% disagreed. Hence, 33.8% disagreed, whereas 21.2% strongly agreed that children seek help from teachers to understand something, indicating that a significant number of the disabled seek teacher assistance for better understanding.

From Table 7, the majority 50.9% of respondents agreed that teachers encourage children with disabilities to work hard and make an effort to answer questions while only 7.6% disagreed. This suggests that teachers working with children with disabilities consistently strive to help them participate and excel in class and other activities. However, when asked if time is taken to ensure children with disabilities achieve better grades, a cumulative majority disagreed. This indicates that, frequently, these children must struggle on their own to improve their academic performance.

The result in Table 7 indicates that a significant proportion of 33.8% of respondents believe that teachers speak positively about disabled children, while 12.1% disagreed. This suggests that teachers generally maintain a positive discourse about children with disabilities, which fosters their personal growth and enhances their self-perception.

As shown in Table 7, 48.7% of respondents agreed that teachers encourage children with disabilities to excel academically, whereas 9.1% disagreed. Additionally, a substantial majority 76.3% affirmed that children with disabilities receive guidance about their future aspirations while only 1% disagree. These findings highlight a supportive environment that promotes the development and empowerment of children with disabilities.

The results in Table 7 indicate that the majority 36.5% of respondents agreed that teachers help children with disabilities understand their strengths whereas 21.3% disagreed, suggesting that some children may still be lacking the necessary support from their teachers to identify and capitalize on their natural strengths.

Finally, 33% of respondents cumulatively agreed that teachers care about what happens to children with disabilities. This suggests that many teachers are concerned about the challenges these children face and are interested in their well-being. However, this implies that there is room for improvement in how teachers support and care for children with disabilities.

Table 7. Responses on the relationship between Teacher Support and Retention of Learners with Disabilities in Primary Schools in the Kasese District

Teacher Support	Very Untrue	Untrue	Somewhat True	True	Very True
• I encourage Children with disabilities to work hard	2% (4)	2.5% (5)	20.3% (40)	25.4% (50)	49.7% (98)
• I make an effort to children with disabilities to answer my questions	7.6% (15)	5.6% (11)	22.8% (45)	13.2% (26)	50.8% (100)
• I take the time to help children with disabilities to get better grades	36.5% (72)	11.7% (23)	12.7% (25)	17.3% (34)	21.3% (43)
• I talk good about children with disabilities	21.2% (42)	12.1% (24)	21.7% (43)	11.1% (22)	33.8% (67)
• I push children with disabilities to perform well	9.1% (18)	7.6% (15)	20.3% (40)	14.2% (28)	48.7% (96)
• I advise children with disabilities about what they should be in the future	76.3% (151)	9.6% (19)	13.1% (26)	1.0% (02)	0% (00)
• I encourage children with disabilities to be smart academically	58.6% (116)	13.1% (26)	15.7% (31)	4.5% (09)	8.1% (16)
• I help children with disabilities understand their strengths	36.5% (72)	11.7% (23)	12.7% (25)	17.3% (34)	21.3% (43)
• I care about what happens to children with disabilities	21.2% (42)	12.1% (24)	21.7% (43)	11.1% (22)	33.8% (67)

From Table 8, a significant 58.6% of respondents strongly disagreed that the schools have ramps for easy movement, with only 8.1% agreeing. This suggests that the schools have largely failed to accommodate the needs of children with disabilities. This issue requires immediate attention from stakeholders to ensure these children can integrate and move freely within the school environment.

Further, 36.5% of respondents disagreed that it is easy to access school infrastructure for children with disabilities and 49.7% agreed that school building entrances are easily identifiable from a distance, indicating that most entrances are visible from afar.

Table 8, showed that 50% of respondents agreed that there are no hazards for children with disabilities whereas 13% disagreed, highlighting that some schools have hazardous routes that could impede easy access for these children. Additionally, 36.5% of respondents agreed that doors are easy for children with disabilities to open, while 33.8% noted insufficient space for circulation, particularly affecting wheelchair users.

Table 8. Showing on the Relationship between Teacher Supporschool Infrastructure and Retention of Learners with Disabilities in Primary Schools in the Kasese District

School Infrastructure	Very Untrue	Untrue	Somewh at True	True	Very True
The school buildings have ramps for easy movement	58.6% (116)	13.1% (26)	15.7% (31)	4.5% (09)	8.1% (16)
School infrastructure is easy to access despite children's disabilities	36.5% (72)	11.7% (23)	12.7% (25)	17.3% (34)	21.3% (43)
The school building's entrance is easily identified from a distance	2% (4)	2.5% (5)	20.3% (40)	25.4% (50)	49.7% (98)
The routes to the different buildings have no hazards for children with disabilities	7.6% (15)	5.6% (11)	22.8% (45)	13.2% (26)	50.8% (100)
The doors are easy to open for children with disabilities	36.5% (72)	11.7% (23)	12.7% (25)	17.3% (34)	21.3% (43)
Sufficient circulation space (the spaces are wide to allow easy movement including for wheelchairs)	21.2% (42)	12.1% (24)	21.7% (43)	11.1% (22)	33.8% (67)
The desks in the classroom enable children with disabilities to write comfortably	9.1% (18)	7.6% (15)	20.3% (40)	14.2% (28)	48.7% (96)
The chairs in the classroom are comfortable for children with disabilities	7.6% (15)	5.6% (11)	22.8% (45)	13.2% (26)	50.8% (100)

Finally, 50.8% of respondents agreed that desks and chairs enable children with disabilities to sit and write comfortably, with only 7.6% in disagreement. This indicates some effort to provide necessary classroom accommodations, though more comprehensive measures are needed to ensure these provisions are universally available and effective.

These findings underscore the urgent need for improved infrastructure and facilities to support children with disabilities, ensuring they have equal access to education and school activities.

Table 9. Responses on the Relationship between Teacher-Pupil Relationships and Retention of Learners with Disabilities in Primary Schools in the Kasese District

Teacher-Pupil Relationships	Very Untrue	Untrue	Somewhat True	True	Very True
In class, I care about the learning problems and challenges of children with disabilities	66.7% (132)	9.6% (19)	2.5% (5)	2.5% (5)	18.7% (37)
In class, I am empathetic to children with disabilities	58.6% (116)	13.1% (26)	15.7% (31)	4.5% (09)	8.1% (16)
In class, I am aware of the feelings of children with disabilities	82.3% (163)	9.6% (19)	6.6% (13)	0 (0)	5.6% (11)
In class, I show warmth to children with disabilities	57.1% (113)	19.2% (38)	10.6% (21)	0 (0)	12.1% (0)
I share affectionate and warm relationships with children with disabilities	15.7 (31)	8.1% (20)	0% (00)	33.3% (66)	40.9% (0)
I behave in a friendly with children with disabilities	58.6% (116)	13.1% (26)	15.7% (31)	4.5% (09)	8.1% (16)
Children with disabilities seek comfort from me	36.5% (72)	11.7% (23)	12.7% (25)	17.3% (34)	21.3% (43)
Children with disabilities openly share their feelings and experiences with teachers	7.6% (15)	5.6% (11)	22.8% (45)	13.2% (26)	50.8% (100)

Table 9 results indicate that a significant majority 66.7%, agree that teachers care about the learning problems and challenges of children with disabilities and it implies that teachers are eager to understand the challenges these children are facing. Additionally, 82.3% of respondents affirmed their awareness of the children's feelings and their commitment to supporting their growth and potential.

Finally, 50.8% of respondents agreed that children with disabilities openly share their feelings and experiences with their teachers which implies warm reception provided by teachers makes it easier for these children to communicate openly about their experiences. Furthermore, 40.9% of respondents agreed that teachers share affectionate and warm relationships with children with disabilities. This suggests that children with disabilities receive the affection they need at school, fostering a supportive and conducive learning environment.

Table 10 shows the responses on the relationship between pupil-pupil relationship and retention of learners with disabilities in primary schools in Kasese District

Results in Table 10 indicate that a significant 36.5% of respondents were not satisfied with the level of acceptance the disabled receive from other pupils of the same age. This highlights a considerable need for increased sensitization among children regarding the social inclusion of children with disabilities.

Furthermore, Table 10 shows that 33.8% of respondents show that children with disabilities share with other kids willingly without hesitating, although a notable 21.2% of them expressed reluctance

From Table 10, the majority 50.8% agreed that children with disabilities have friends among their peers, whereas only 7.5% disagreed. This suggests that there is some progress in the social integration of children with disabilities, but there remain significant areas for improvement to ensure they are fully accepted and seen as equals by their peers.

Table 10. Responses on the relationship between Pupil-Pupil Relationships and Retention of Learners with Disabilities in Primary Schools in the Kasese District

Pupil-Pupil Relationship	1	2	3	4	5
Children with disabilities can rely on their friends	76.3% (0)	9.6% (19)	13.1% (26)	1.0% (02)	0%
Children with disabilities feel accepted by other pupils of their age	58.6% (116)	13.1% (26)	15.7% (31)	4.5% (09)	8.1% (16)
Children with disabilities can talk about everything with their friends	36.5% (72)	11.7% (23)	12.7% (25)	17.3% (34)	21.3% (43)
Other pupils want to talk to me.	21.2% (42)	12.1% (24)	21.7% (43)	11.1% (22)	33.8% (0)
Other pupils want to be with children with disabilities	2% (4)	2.5% (5)	20.3% (40)	25.4% (50)	49.7% (98)
Children with disabilities have friends among other pupils	7.6% (15)	5.6% (11)	22.8% (45)	13.2% (26)	50.8% (100)
Other kids want to be friends with children with disabilities	36.5% (72)	11.7% (23)	12.7% (25)	17.3% (34)	21.3% (43)
Children with disabilities share with other kids (food, games, pens, etc.)	21.2% (42)	12.1% (24)	21.7% (43)	11.1% (22)	33.8% (67)
Children with disabilities spend time with their friends	9.1% (18)	7.6% (15)	20.3% (40)	14.2% (28)	48.7% (96)
Children with disabilities have many friends to play with	7.6% (15)	5.6% (11)	22.8% (45)	13.2% (26)	50.8% (100)

Table 11 shows that the p-value of 0.222 is greater than the 0.05 significance level, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between teacher support and the retention of learners with disabilities. Consequently, the alternative hypothesis is accepted, indicating a strong and significant relationship between teacher support and the retention of learners with disabilities in primary schools. This suggests that learners with disabilities who receive close support from their teachers are more likely to remain in school and complete their studies.

Table 11. Descriptive and Multi-Correlational Analysis on School Relationships and Retention of Learners with Disabilities in Primary Schools in the Kasese District

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Teacher Support	School Safety	School relationships	Retention
Teacher support	4.31	0.361	1			
School Safety	3.04	0.404	-0.353**	1		
School Relationship	3.52	0.277	0.114	0.160*	1	
Retention	3.47	0.285	0.303**	-0.057	0.222**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

N = 168

Results from Table 11 also indicate that the p-value of -0.057 is less than the 0.05 significance level, leading to the conclusion that the null hypothesis is accepted. This suggests that the nature of relationships within the school does not significantly impact the retention of children with disabilities in primary schools. The results imply a negative correlation between school relationships and the retention of learners with disabilities.

Additionally, the results show that the p-value of 0.303 is greater than the 0.05 significance level, indicating a moderate but positive and significant relationship between teacher support and the retention of children with disabilities in the Kasese district. Therefore, school management committees should continuously improve the support provided to these children with disability to encourage them to stay in school until completion. Finally, the findings suggest that children are more likely to stay in school if they feel their challenges are addressed by the school administration. As a result, the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between school safety and the retention of children with disabilities in primary schools is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This implies that children and parents prefer schools that prioritize the safety of the students.

4.2. Discussion of Study

The study aimed to analyze the determinants of the school environment and retention rates for learners with physical disabilities in Universal Primary Education (UPE) schools within the Kasese district. According to respondents, the access and retention rates for learners with physical disabilities in Kasese district were moderate. Over the past four years, there has been a noticeable increase in enrollment, indicating a positive trend and growing awareness among education stakeholders about the benefits of educating children with physical disabilities. However, not all assessed learners with physical disabilities joined specialized institutions, citing reasons such as financial constraints, negative parental attitudes, unfriendly school environments, and a lack of assistive devices.

Those learners with physical disabilities who dropped out of school cited mobility issues, academic challenges, rigid curriculum structures, and health problems as contributing factors. While the majority of respondents believed that the UPE program facilitated access and retention of learners with physical disabilities in schools, they unanimously agreed that the funds allocated by UPE—Ugandan Shillings of 4,000 per term per learner—were insufficient. This inadequacy is attributed to the higher costs associated with educating learners with physical disabilities compared to their peers without disabilities.

Despite the government's provision of free Universal Primary Education for all children, the study revealed that access and retention rates for learners with physical disabilities still lag behind due to the UPE program's inability to fully meet their educational needs. Key informants identified various school-related challenges, including financial constraints, a lack of assistive devices and mobility aids, inadequate physical infrastructure, insufficient human resources, long distances to schools, and rigid teaching methods and curriculum structures.

The study also highlighted home-related factors affecting the retention of learners with physical disabilities, such as poverty, negative parental attitudes, discrimination, a lack of training in basic self-help skills, limited access to medical care, and medication side effects. Limited resources often result in parents prioritizing children without disabilities, leaving those with physical disabilities with limited access to primary education.

4.3. Summary of the Findings

The school environment and retention rate of learners with physical disabilities in the Kasese district were deemed moderate. This suggests that the Ministry of Education and Sports still has work to do in ensuring that schools accommodating learners with physical disabilities have adequately trained teachers, support staff, appropriate infrastructure, and the necessary learning materials and equipment, as outlined in the Basic Education Policy of 1998. Despite the government's provision of Free Universal Primary Education for all Ugandan children, the study uncovered a shortfall in meeting the educational needs of learners with physical disabilities, resulting in lower retention rates within the UPE program.

Insufficient government funding emerged as a significant barrier to access and retention of education for learners with physical disabilities. Nonetheless, there were notable efforts by the government and other stakeholders to improve the overall school environment and retention of such learners. Through initiatives like the UPE program, the government allocated resources to provide trained teachers, educational materials, and financial support to schools. Parents played a crucial role by facilitating their children's education, ensuring they received medical attention when needed, covering school fees where necessary, and meeting other educational requirements. Schools also contributed by creating supportive environments, implementing feeding programs, educating parents, and fostering motivation among learners with physical disabilities.

Encouragingly, enrollment numbers have been on the rise over the past four years, indicating an increasing awareness among education stakeholders of the benefits of educating children with physical disabilities. Furthermore, the relatively low dropout rate of 55 students over four years underscores the

effectiveness of efforts to keep enrolled students in school. Contrary to common assumptions, the study found little evidence to support the belief that children drop out of school to beg for money to support their families. Instead, it suggests that parents may resort to sending their children to beg due to desperation stemming from other socioeconomic challenges.

5. Conclusion

The study conducted in Kasese district's Universal Primary Education schools highlighted significant obstacles faced by learners with Physical Disabilities (PD) in both enrollment and retention within the educational system. Despite moderate attendance and retention rates among respondents, learners with PD exhibited notably lower enrollment and retention rates compared to their non-disabled peers. Financial constraints emerged as a predominant barrier, preventing parents from sending their children with PD to school. Negative parental attitudes towards disabilities, an unwelcoming school environment, and a lack of assistive devices further compounded enrollment challenges. Dropout rates were influenced by mobility issues, socioeconomic struggles, negative parental attitudes, academic difficulties exacerbated by curriculum inadequacies, and insufficient support systems. Government funding, primarily through the UPE initiative, was recognized as crucial but insufficient to meet the unique needs and higher costs associated with educating learners with disabilities. The study emphasized the critical interplay between home and school-related factors in influencing attendance and retention, highlighting challenges such as inadequate facilities, human resources, prohibitive education costs at schools, poverty, medical care inadequacies, and parental discrimination at home. To address these multifaceted challenges comprehensively, interventions targeting both school and home environments are necessary. These include ensuring accessibility through assistive devices and adapted facilities, enhancing teacher training to accommodate diverse learning needs, sensitizing parents and communities to foster inclusive attitudes, and advocating for increased funding to adequately support learners with PD. Collaborative efforts among stakeholders are crucial in fostering a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for children with disabilities not only in the Kasese district but also beyond its borders.

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