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RESEARCH ARTICLE

INFLUENCE OF TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT ON MENTORING LEARNERS WITH EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL DIFFICULTIES IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN BUSIA COUNTY, KENYA.

Bigambo, Jael Joan Dr. Moses Kapkiai and Prof. Violet Nabwire Kafwa.

School of Education, Kisii University, Eldoret Campus, Kenya.

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Abstract

All children have the right to be in school. They should be known, appreciated and mentored. However, some children drop out due to unknown factors. This study takes an inquisitive and interrogative approach to establishing the possible teacher characteristics and learning environment that could be the reason for the drop out of, especially, children with emotional and behavioral difficulties in public primary schools in Busia County. The study used the "Person-Centred" theory by Carl Rogers which posits the potential value(s) of individual learners in a target environment. The purpose of the study was to determine the relationship of the class teacher with the learner with emotional and behavior difficulties (LEBD) for purposes of mentorship, intervention and handling of target behavior difficulties. The study engaged a mixed research design. Simple random sampling techniques were used on a sample of 44 public primary schools with 106 respondents (teachers, headteachers, and education experts). Data was generated by a structured questionnaire, Focus Group Discussions, observation and in-depth interviews. The validity and reliability of each tool was determined. The data collected was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative descriptive statistics. The study found out that the teacher had both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that can influence and mentor learners. It was concluded that the teachers were resourceful but lacked the appropriate opportunity to construct the relevant procedures to mentor the target learners. It is hoped that the results of this study will create more awareness and need for the Ministry of Education, together with development partners to engage in specific continuous teaching and learning interventions for all children in primary schools in Kenya.

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Introduction:-

It is important to know and understand the children we deal with in order to invest in them for their own future and growth of a nation. Mayall (2002) argues that children can only be understood if teachers and parents can think from the children's life. Society and the people's culture constitute a child's background knowledge and education. By the time a child goes to school he or she has already a collection of beliefs and values to build on. It is documented in Institute of Education Sciences (IES) (2008). Homes and schools are, therefore, "social enterprises". Parents take up

Corresponding Author:- Bigambo.

Address:- School of Education, Kisii University, Eldoret Campus, Kenya.

the role of the first education experts. It is their initial assessment of the child that motivates them to take their child to school for the professional teachers to take over and proceed with the learner.

Save the Children International (2011) and UNICEF (2012) though on different platforms, together emphasize the role of education as a human right for all children. They decry the children who are denied growth through schooling. The main question that ran through this study was: “does the primary school teacher ever care to know whether his or her personal characteristics and learning environment contribute to the making or breaking of the young learners?” Sharma and Sharma (2013:26) arguing from the point of view of a study carried out in Asia provide precise insight into this study.

Teaching is the process of marshaling resources aimed at mentoring learners into responsible adulthood. Teachers are individuals usually identified and trained to handle and mentor children. This study was premised on the argument that the relationship between teachers and LEBD in Kenya, especially Busia County, has been compromised. Parents and teachers alike experience some dilemmas in explaining and handling some children. The problem is most acute in primary school classroom during teaching and learning. Many children have dropped out of school due to this dilemma.

One of the objectives of Kenya Vision 2030 is to have Education for All (EFA) by the year 2030. This is not a new concept in the plight of children who drop out of school. The UNESCO Conference on Access and Quality which was held in Salamanca (1994) provided a unique opportunity to place education within the wider framework of all (EFA) movement, launched in Thailand in 1990 (Salamanca Report, 1994). The Salamanca conference provided a platform to affirm the existence of children with special needs by ensuring that children with special education needs be included in these initiatives and take their rightful place in a learning society. Similarly, the current Sustainable Development Goals advocate the same. This conference highlighted the need to initiate major school reforms to ensure that what the schools offer through their curriculum match the needs of its pupils as well as those of parents and local community (Salamanca Report 1994). This position necessitated the inquiry in this study. Previously special education was defined in terms of children with a range of physical sensory, intellectual or emotional difficulties.

The world conference on Education for All (held in 1990 in Jomtein Thailand) introduced a new international commitment to basic education as a human right and basic need. Part of the resolution was that policy makers at all levels of teaching and learning reaffirm their commitment to inclusion and promotion of positive attitudes among teachers, learners, and the public towards learners with specific needs. Through the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) the international community collectively gave governments and NGOs the mandate to work together and put in place mechanisms to provide education for all (EFA) (MOEST, 2001).

The Dakar Framework for Action; Education for All: Meeting outlined collective commitments adopted by the World Education Forum Dakar, Senegal, 26-28 April (2000). It reaffirmed the vision of the World Declaration on education for All adopted ten years earlier in Jomtein. The Dakar Framework for Action was based on EFA (2000) assessments carried out in each country. During this World Forum, the international community collectively recommitted itself to achieving education for every citizen in every society. The Dakar Framework for action, thus, states that the "heart of EFA lies at country level (MOEST, 2001). This study is, in part, a contribution towards an assessment of EFA in Kenya.

In Kenyan context, like in other countries, the critical question is what actions have been put in place since the Dakar meeting to address the concept of EFA? Kenya conducted a conference to determine its EFA status in Kisumu in 1992 (Kenya Country National Conference on Education for All, 1992). This conference was organized to review Jomtein Conference of 1990 and to prepare for implementations of Education for All frameworks. The Kisumu conference marked Kenya's climax of the preparations. This conference looked at the Jomtein expanded vision of Basic Education. Aspects of this amongst others included domesticating the EFA objectives for national use According KIE (currently known as Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development), Education for All calls greatly influenced the move towards children's inclusion in primary schools.

According to Sessional Paper No. 1 of (2005), there is lack of data on children with special needs, tools and skills in identification and assessment. Ndurumo (1993) asserts that children with emotional and behavioural difficulties have not been considered as part of the challenged groups. He argues further that UNESCO (1985) conducted a survey to determine the total number of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties enrolled in Eastern and

Southern Africa. They found that there were only 14 programmes in both regions with an enrolment of approximately 1,465 children, out of whom 1,134 were enrolled in approved schools in Kenya.

Teachers are probably the most influential persons in the lives of learners outside the home. They are representatives of the “real world” that is part of the usually supportive and protective unit of the family. One dilemma that the community of the world faces is how to realize the dream of having all school-going children in school (Ololube, 2005). This problem trickles down to Kenya as a country and Busia as a county. The fact that the Government of Kenya is working towards achieving the Sustainable Development and Vision 2030 goals is significant. However, still much has to be done to ensure that there is education for all for common quality life. One of the discussion points in this study is the extent to which, according to Neil (2008), teachers are sufficiently prepared to include learners with emotional and behavioral difficulties (LEBD) into their mainstream classroom. The researcher therefore investigated the effect of teacher characteristics and learning environment on mentoring learners with emotional and behavioral difficulties in public primary schools in Busia County, Kenya.

Literature Review:-

Teaching and learning should be some kind of celebration. According to U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES 2008) observe:

Much of attention currently given to improving student’s academic achievement addresses issues of curriculum, instructional strategies, and interventions or services for struggling learners, and rightfully so. However, even after addressing these issues, barriers still remain for some students.

The teachers form the main basis of getting to the learner. It should all begin with the potential of an individual teacher. It is concerned with self-appraisal and evaluation by others. Individuals deliberately attempt to evaluate various aspects of his work. The process often involves introspection; diving into thoughts and feelings regarding goals, activities, problems and successes. Individual teachers should also have an opportunity to discuss their strengths and weaknesses in confidence with a senior colleague and to identify future goals and training needs which will further promote good practice (Hewton, 1988).

Figure 1 demonstrates according to Myers (1998), the significance of interacting perceptions, feelings, and values that encourage, enhance and change behavior of target learners. Eliot-Kemp and Roger 1982: 599 adds that genuine evaluation means looking at not only what you feel about yourself, but also at what other people feel about you. So it is important to seek the opinion of others i.e. your students and colleagues so that you can take them into consideration when valuing, yourself. Hewton further explains that the process of self-analysis can be encouraged by deliberately planned activities such as use of self-evaluation questionnaires or appraisal interview.



Figure 1:- Teacher-Self-Conscious as a basis for interacting with learners

Erraut (1986) argues that it is the product which will determine the real purpose of appraisal: *"If the product is an action plan for development, then appraisal interview will become a staff development interview under another name.... but if the product is an agreed appraisal of a teacher's performance for insertion into their file, appraisal foreground will put staff development purposes very much into the background"* (Erraut, 1986). Erraut's argument is supported by Turner and Cliff (1985) who state that an open University survey indicated that most schools with appraisal schemes place staff development as the aim of their scheme. A survey carried out in Sussex Schools noted that all teachers should be trained to play their part in self-appraisal and that resources should be made available for this purpose.

This argument is supported by the Teachers Service Commission which pointed out that: *"Teachers Service Commission has developed and launched a performance appraisal system for the secretariat staff... Performance appraisal system for teachers is also in the pipeline"* (Teachers Image vol. 8: 2005: 6). This has posed the greatest challenge in getting the true picture of school and individual teacher-needs in Kenya. This study will, therefore, fill this gap by making recommendations on teacher appraisal schemes.

Teaching and learning are both a process and a product. The outcomes should be assuming both variables should involve strategic logistics. Haward et al (1994) point out that a teacher should be well trained if he is to handle the heavy task of satisfying everybody in the classroom. This supposes that proper teacher education and training is necessary to develop teachers' moral and intellectual virtues. The type of training should make him/her an effective counselor, instructor, a master in his classroom and a real promoter of academic pursuits. Weeden et al (1998) argue that professional development is about the capacity of a teacher to remain curious about the classroom; identify significant concern in the process of teaching and learning; and seek dialogue with experienced colleagues as support in the analysis of data, and to adjust patterns in the light of new understanding. This is true because for a teacher to be at the centre of an inclusive teaching and learning, he should be well designed to offer results.

Training needs analysis is necessary for teachers in primary schools. This is particularly concerned with identifying learning and training needs of individual teachers in a systematic manner and defining the gap between what is happening and what should happen. Armstrong (1995) further notes that the analysis of corporate needs leads to identification of training needs in departments. These in turn lead to identification of individual needs.

Research Methodology:-

This study used mixed research design that allowed for collection of a body of qualitative and quantitative data on more than one case according to the perspective of Bryman (2004). Cross-section design is advantageous in that with it, according to Bryman (2004) it is not easy to manipulate variables. The study involved both qualitative and quantitative approaches with the aim of accounting for contextual diversity (the different primary schools) and personality differences in a teaching and learning situation. This design was in addition, found relevant in carrying out wide-ranging descriptive analysis of persons, groups, systems, phenomenon, character traits, events or circumstances leading to factors that might change individual and institutional behaviors (Creswell, 2013).

Creswell's (2013) argument for mixed methods approach was applied in this study in view of the different reality of schools, individual teachers, and individual children; and the diverse perceptions related to the challenges posed by the effect of intra- and inter-social relationships. In this respect therefore, a mixed methods approach, involving quantitative and qualitative research methods, was used appropriate to the research design. This approach helped to explore the impact of Teacher-characteristics on children with EBD in relation to mentoring them into specific behavior frameworks in school. Results from the qualitative method (in-depth interviews) helped to inform the quantitative method (content analysis) findings in tackling the different dimensions of the problem (Cresswell 2003; Earl, 2011). The mixed methods approach also helped increase the validity and reliability of the present study findings (Bryman, 2012). It further detailed issues arising from the relationship between teacher-characteristics and the children with EBD.

The study design allowed for the use of in-depth interviews, document analysis, questionnaire, and observation in the context of a mixed methods approach. According to Clark et al. (2008) as quoted in Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p7), a mixed methods approach is "a design for collecting, analyzing and mixing both qualitative and quantitative data in a study in order to understand a research problem." Bryman, (2012) says mixed method inquiries integrate quantitative and qualitative research within a single project. According to Johnson et al. (2007) as quoted in Denzin

and Lincoln (2011, p285) this type of research enhances the breadth and depth of understanding and collaboration. In the case of this study, this approach allowed for gathering of data using multiple forms rather than relying on a single data source. Notably, Creswell (2013) encourages this approach since it allows the various strengths to be capitalized upon and the weaknesses to be offset. It gave the researcher flexibility and opportunity to borrow the positive attributes in each of these methods which complemented each other. In their study, Harkness et.al. (2006), found that combining both methods reduces biases associated with each method.

The sample size consisted of 44 schools from which 99 teachers were identified, and 7 education officers. Kusek and Rist (2004) provided a precise and systematic approach. The schools were coded into clusters. Every cluster's sampled schools with certain common regional, environmental and cultural distinctions was categorized further. The study considered all the seven Education officers as a unique sample. A sample is part of a substantive population. According to Saunders *et al* (2003), a sample is a subgroup or part of a larger population. Sampling is, therefore, a process of selecting a number of individuals or objects from a target population. Charles (as cited in Kombo, 2008) defines a sample as a small group of participants drawn from the population in which the researcher is interested in gaining information and drawing conclusions. This study, therefore, used a small sample according to the Carl Rogers "person-centred" theory in order to focus on and handle individuals and small groups exhaustively. This means that some units in the population were selected to participate in the study over others (Bryman, 2012). The study employed purposive and snow-ball sampling techniques to raise target participants.

The study specifically focused on three types of data: quantitative (i.e. numerical and statistical data); qualitative (opinions, views, statements and observations), and document analysis from a variety of sources. The methods used to collect specific data were questionnaires, In-depth interview, document analysis and Observation.

The researcher constructed precise instruments to raise relevant and acceptable responses to the objectives and research questions of the study. Validity and or, credibility in this case, according to Mugenda and Mugenda (2012) is the criteria of establishing that the results of quantitative and qualitative research are trustworthy or believable from the perspective of the participant in the study. In this study, the main question the researcher asked in order to achieve credibility was: is my study credible? That is, can it be believed or trusted? The question of credibility was addressed as follows: the researcher involved the supervisors throughout all the stages of the study. Second, she used five different techniques of data generation: questionnaire, interviews, Focus Group Discussion, observation and document analysis. Findings from all these sources were synchronized to determine credibility.

As for reliability, according to Gilliam (2000) and Yin (2003), the instruments sought data from the point of view of: what the participants said, what the researcher observed them do; what they produced, and what the documents and records showed. All these steps were undertaken in relation to the objectives and questions of this study. The findings, therefore, contributed to both credibility and reliability of methodology and the expected results.

Data analysis involves organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing data and forming an interpretation of them (Creswell, 2013). Analyzing data for this study included thematic analysis, use of codes, categories and use of excel to generate graphs, tables and illustrations. Data collected during the study especially from interviews was transcribed and coded before being analyzed with a view to bringing order, structure and meaning to it. Frequencies, cross-tabulations and other relationships were established and presented using figures and statistical percentages which were, in some cases, presented in tabular form.

Data was analyzed first, following Giuseppe's (2006) and Creswell's (2013) guidance, from a more general perspective, thereafter categorized in codes, categories, themes or dimensions before working deductively to gather evidence to support the themes and interpretations. In view of the theory of this study every data was interrogated with interest and critical thinking.

Ethical principles that were applied in this study included informed consent or voluntary participation, confidentiality and harm to participants. Ethical considerations were upheld at different stages of the research process, especially during data collection, analysis, writing and dissemination of results.

Results and Discussions:-

With regard the effect of teacher characteristics and environment on the character of LEBD, results in Figure 4.7 show clear evidence of disharmony. Data gathered by the questionnaire from across the sampled clusters showed that 24% of the respondents had unfriendly teacher-personality, 16% reported Weak self-esteem, 22% cited lack of goodwill, 16% of the respondents reported having congestion in classroom and 12% cited lack of enough text books while 10% of the respondents cited inability to identify/assist LEBD). Overall, the study revealed 62% of the respondents noted the inadequacies in teachers' personality, self-esteem, and goodwill, whereas 38% of the respondents declared inappropriateness of teaching-learning environment. The latter also noted congestion in classrooms, and lack of enough text books as some of the factors that led to inability of teachers to identify and assist LEBD.

The study further found out that teachers were uncertain and did not understand the range of emotional and behavior difficulties, and especially the standards in mentoring. This confirmed the argument by DfEE (1994:7):

Emotional and behavioural difficulties range from social maladaptation to abnormal emotional stresses. ... They may be multiple and may manifest themselves in many different forms and severities.

The study further noted that there was lack of effective interaction between teachers and learners, especially learners with emotional behavior difficulties, was contained in the strong opinion of one headteacher, thus:

"Teachers are in a hurry to go into class and come out. Some of them do not have the time to explain things slowly and carefully. He/she walks out of class leaving the learners complaining about many issues in the just ended lesson. Some children come to me crying about harassment; some cry about lack of teacher friendliness."

Scholars, especially education psychologists, advocate need for harmony in every classroom encounter in order for teacher-influence and mentoring to take place. Sharma and Sharma (2013:26) argue:

"Teachers are not merely the machines by which educative experiences are made available to children but they are part of the active environment of the child. Children desire affection from them, status with them and recognition from them".

According to Rosenberg et. al (1992:9) ... *"deviant behaviours are the product of an incomplete developed personality."* The two citations point to the need for teachers to accept to rework their personal characteristics in order to calm down and mentor LEBD.

Through both the content analysis and in-depth interviews, this study established that when a teacher exercises unconditional self-regard by recognizing target learners and going to the individuals in classrooms, play-grounds, and resting places, may increase learner self-concept and self-esteem (Rosenberg et.al., 1992). The learner will feel appreciated and accepted. From the literature reviewed for this study in Chapter two, a general notion was noted among behavior theorists (Cooper 1989; Rosenberg et.al. 1992; DfEE 1994, 1997; James and Prout 1997; Iszatt 1997; Kelly 1999; Mayall 2002) that children's behaviors are shaped by the expectations and examples offered by "important adults", especially teachers. As such, the adults should play a critical role both in proactive teaching and reinforcement of appropriate learner behaviors. They can also reduce the frequency of behaviors that impede learning.

The emerging argument from this study is that all teachers of public primary schools in Busia County should make every effort to be aware of their responsibility to society, especially reflected in the school-going child. Teaching should be handled as strategic socialization. This would serve as a critical process that ensures the survival and continuity of a chosen way of life through target mentoring. According to Rosenberg et.al (1992) schools are top on the list of socialization agencies. With regard to the analysis and interpretation of findings, results show clear evidence of an ever-widening gap and increasing disharmony between teachers and learners with emotional and behavior difficulties. This finding agrees with the discourse on teacher influence of LEBD that is supposed to be founded on teacher-characteristics.

According to Carl Rodger's theory of complete entity appreciation that guided this study, teacher-efficiency and teacher-accountability can only be realized by taking interest in details of individual-learner entities. It is emerging that a teacher who does not create time for the LEBD, or has a "don't care attitude" cannot achieve efficiency and accountability in a classroom situation. The other dimension to it is that efficiency and accountability are products of design, choice and use of appropriate teaching and learning resources in a correct environment.

The study further found out that some teachers wrongfully classified and labelled learners with emotional and behavior difficulties (LEBD). This could have led to wrong intervention measures. The latter would, in one way or other, aggravate the state of emotionality of the learner.

The following Figure 5.0 presents aspects of emotional intelligence that effective teachers should embrace.

Figure 2.0: Emotional Intelligence levels for Classroom Use



Freud's Psycho-analytic theory (in Rosenberg et. al (1992:13) posits that the human personality consists of three interacting forces that constitute character and personality. These are the id (the reservoir of drives or psychic energy), ego (the regulator of the personality), and super-ego (conscience). It is worth arguing here that a successful teacher-learner relationship requires deep interrogation of the character(s) of the partners. This process explains part of what is known as social skills and empathy in emotional intelligence. It is clearly observable here that once a teacher does not know or understand the learner, decisions regarding the performance of both the teacher and learner are put to question. The teacher's services in Rosenberg's (1992) perspective are supposed to fall into step with the learner's performance on informal and curriculum-specific measures.

Kauffman (1985) had earlier called for the need to identify and classify characteristics of children's behavior disorders to facilitate professional handling. This study went ahead to reveal that if not well identified and handled the LEBD manifests Despair; Mistrust; Inferiority; Isolation; Role confusion; Stagnation; Guilt and Shame or doubt. This study is, therefore, authoritative enough to declare from the available evidence that many LEBD who passed through the classrooms handled by the target teachers were victims of profound deficit and uncertainty.

The findings of this study, therefore, corroborate the position held by Adelman and Taylor (in IES, 2008:7) who found out that:

"...just as poor academic performance can reflect deficits in specific academic skills, some students' failure to meet behavioral expectations reflects deficits in specific social or behavioral skills. And just as explicit instruction can help students overcome some academic deficits, explicit instruction can help students learn the positive behaviors and skills they are expected to exhibit at school. Showing students how they can use appropriate behaviors to replace problem behaviors and consistently providing positive reinforcement when they can do so can increase students' chances of experiencing social and behavioral success."

This study was particularly clear on the need to establish teacher-learner observable behavior developed in well-designed environmental stimuli (classroom). The said behavior would depend on the teacher's target intervention, especially to learn certain behavior difficulties. Similarly, focusing on the overall productivity of the LEBD, in relation to Robinson, Smith and Miller (2002) this study emphasizes the centrality and interactivity of literacy development, academic support, family engagement, collaborative mentoring and service-learning. These scholars, in addition propose continuous chronic behavior problems interventions.

Conclusions and Recommendations:-

This study made very strong conclusions that emerged from the confirmation that there was a direct relationship between teacher-characteristics, environment and mentoring of learners with emotional behavior difficulties. The study also noted that the teachers lacked the knowledge and skills to determine the range of emotional and behavior difficulties. It is recommended for the Ministry of Education through KICD to engage teachers in Behavior problem rating and classification education. This will enable them interrogate and handle individual learners with ease.

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