

Techniques to Support Early Identification of Children with Vision Problems in Public Primary Schools in Central Kenya

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to establish whether children with vision problems were identified early and given support to avoid visual impairment in Kiambu, Murang'a and Kirinyaga Counties in Central Kenya. Although visual impairments remain a major threat especially to school children, they can be avoided through early identification. Unfortunately, children with vision problems have largely remained undetected and unsupported. Even worse, the children stand a higher risk of developing visual impairment and failure to attain their academic potential. The major aims of this study were to identify children with vision problems and to explore teacher constraints that hindered early identification of children with vision problems. The study employed a descriptive research design. Convenience sampling was used to select public primary schools from Kiambu, Murang'a and Kirinyaga Counties. Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents including school children from classes two and three, class teachers and head teachers. In data collection, interviews, vision problem identification checklists and visual acuity checker were used which generated qualitative data. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and narratives. The findings of the study were: Teachers lacked special education qualifications necessary for effective identification of children with vision problems, a significant number of children were identified with vision problems including those who were holding book close when reading, had a tendency to move near or away from light and those who experienced difficulties reading from chalkboard. About 9% percent of the children had significant visual loss and among them, 1.3% had severe visual loss and could not see using the affected eye/s. Teachers experienced constraints in identifying and supporting children with vision problems like lack of necessary knowledge and skills, lack of qualified personnel to do visual checkups and lack of school visual screening programs. Recommendations included routine vision screening programs for all school children, special education seminars and workshops to equip teachers with relevant knowledge and skills about vision problems identification and necessary support, inclusion of the component of special needs education in pre- service teacher training colleges and creation of vision problem awareness amongst parents and the children.

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