




## Exploring the attitudes of girl learners with physical disabilities towards education in Kisumu, Kenya

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**Abstract**— The study explored the attitudes of girl learners with physical disabilities (GLwPDs) toward their education. It adopted a descriptive exploratory design within a qualitative approach. Fifty participants including eighteen GLwPDs, twenty of their parents, ten teachers in a special school for the physically challenged, and two opinion leaders participated. They were selected through convenience and purposive sampling techniques. Data were collected through interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. The thematic findings revealed that GLwPDs had negative attitudes toward their education. Comparing the girls with physical disabilities to their non-disabled peers, most parents are reluctant to take them to school.

**Keywords:** Attitudes, Education, Girl learners with physical disabilities

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### I. INTRODUCTION

GLOBALLY, girls with physical disabilities are the most excluded children in accessing education (Frankline, 2000). According to Asch, Rousso, and Jefferies (2001), females with disabilities are a large, diverse group whose educational needs have gone unnoticed by those committees to either gender equity or disability equity. This could have been influenced by societal regard of disability as a strain on society.

Little attention has been focused on education of girls with physical disabilities from a global perspective (Smith, Polloway, Patton & Dowdy, 2002). For females in any society, having a physical disability is seen as a weakness, leading to loss of status and condemnation for being unproductive (Deabester, 2003). Studies have shown that only a few females with physical disabilities who have managed to break through walls of prejudice and discrimination in education have benefited (UNICEF, 2000). Many studies have focused on many issues surrounding people with disabilities, but there is a lack of information on the attitude of females with physical disabilities towards education.

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Gimberleth (2000), in the United States of America, females with physical disabilities who were upper-level students in schools served as mentors to those in lower-level classes. They all recognised that students who were physically disabled did not develop the social skills that they needed to succeed in education. Sometimes, these students were regarded by teachers and other students as unable to do the required academic work (Kemp & Parette, 2000). The girls themselves believed they could do well academically. They might only lack the motivation to succeed due to societal negative attitudes towards their capability as females and as the disabled. The female students with physical disabilities, therefore, had strong support for each other. They met weekly to provide emotional support and information. Through this, they discovered the existing academic and social risks and

developed strategies to meet and overcome the challenges. They also identified the most accessible study locations and techniques for leaving particular subjects. The girls evaluated major career goals and shared how to advocate for themselves in society effectively. In this context, females with physical disabilities in senior classes could similarly encourage each other and the newly enrolled students to complete their education.

Burchardt, Le Grand, and Pichaud (2002) indicated that women with disabilities face the typical disadvantages of gender inequality, which are compounded by disability. The disadvantages posed by gender and disability intersect to create further marginalisation and disadvantage, a concept referred to as intersectionality. The double discrimination faced by women and girls with disabilities can be seen within this context. These females are often excluded from education, health services, family life, and employment and experience high rates of physical, mental, and sexual abuse.

UNICEF (2006) revealed a common view that girls were academically less capable than boys and that taking them to school would be a waste of resources in four countries in Africa. This attitude has negatively affected girls' participation in education (Krathwol, 2007).

Since females who were physically disabled were considered less capable academically, they received less encouragement and were rarely challenged at home or school to strive to succeed in their education. Since less was expected of them, they also expected less of themselves and were less confident in their academic abilities.

UNESCO (2002) in Uganda revealed that girl learners with physical disabilities who do manage to break through the walls of prejudice and discrimination benefit from strong role models or support groups of their peers.

Butalia (2001) argued that a student's emotional and psychological well-being is a factor that underlies success in education, coupled with a suitable environment for teaching and learning. Moreover, a students' positive attitude towards learning influences the learners' performance and retention in schools.

According to Summers (1992), girls who are physically disabled need to increase their self-determination, confidence, independent living

skills, and community participation. This is to help them become more self-efficacious, encouraging them to show great determination and dependability. GLwPDs can do all tasks as their non-disabled peers, except they have different ways of doing them.

A study carried out by Frankline (2000) indicated that teachers, parents of non-disabled children, and non-disabled viewed their peers GLwPDs as incapable in several ways, including their academic work.

A qualitative study conducted by Muigai (2012) on challenges facing education of females with physical disabilities in Kenya established that discrimination and isolation impede the education of GLwPDs.

From the cited literature, it is evident that globally, females with physical disabilities were regarded by society as not being able to do the required academic work. This would negatively impact their attitude toward their education.

### III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study explores the attitude of GLwPDs toward education in Kisumu, Kenya. It explores the challenges that GLwPDs face as they pursue their education, the availability of girl role models with physical disabilities and parental attitudes toward the education of their GLwPDs.

### IV. METHODS

#### Research design

A descriptive exploratory design within a qualitative approach was used in the study. Exploratory research is most of the time qualitative. However, in certain circumstances, an exploratory manner may also be quantitative, depending on the sample size and research instruments used (George, 2021). Descriptive research tries to determine the characteristics of a phenomenon. It can majorly help identify patterns in the characteristics of a sample to establish issues the researcher needs to understand other than why things happen the way they do (Shona & Sharma, 2023). While exploratory research aids in exploring and uncovering new knowledge, ideas, and occurrences, descriptive research tries to understand an existing phenomenon and why things happen the way they do. Both approaches are crucial in advancing knowledge gaps, especially when little about a research study is known.

#### Research paradigm

In educational research, a paradigm is a world perspective, school of thought, or shared beliefs that inform the meaning or interpretation of research data (Hesse-Biber, 2017). In this case, an interpretive paradigm was used. The social model of disability is key to understanding and explaining the economic, political, and social barriers encountered by persons with disabilities (Olive & Barnes, 2010). This model suggests that society disables individuals with impairments and the attitudes imposed on them, eventually limiting them from achieving their full potential. After interacting with the participants, the researcher views disability as socially constructed, and the manifestation is experienced through stigma, discrimination, prejudice, and stereotyping, which negatively impacts individuals' self-esteem. Disability should become a small part of a person, not a defining feature. Thus, a person should come first before disability, hence the use of persons with disability and not disabled persons.

#### Participants

Fifty participants were purposely sampled: eighteen GLwPDs, twenty parents of GLwPDs were selected through convenience sampling procedures, and ten teachers and two opinion leaders were sampled through purposive sampling.

#### Data collection instruments

##### *Semi-structured interviews*

The study used in-depth semi-structured interviews with GLwPDs, teachers, and opinion leaders. The questions were open-ended. This helped provide detailed responses with rich insights beyond yes or no.

##### *Focus group discussions*

This study used two focus group discussions with ten parents in each

group. Focus group discussions encourage the participants to freely discuss their opinions, perceptions, beliefs, and ideas, offering flexibility to address issues of concern.

##### *Document analysis*

This study employed document analysis to collect data on admission, attendance, performance, fee payment, and completion rates of GLwPDs.

##### **Data analysis**

This study analysed the qualitative data through a thematic analysis, where raw data was summarised, categorised, rearranged, and ordered thematically according to the study objectives. The data was then edited. Recorded interviews and focus group discussions were then transcribed. The six steps used in the thematic analysis were followed: familiarisation with data was done, initial codes were generated, themes were identified, reviewed, and defined then finally, writing was done.

##### **Ethical considerations**

All the principles guiding research were adhered to. Informed consent was sought from participants and information was given voluntarily. They were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. The participants were also informed they had the right to withdraw from the study without prejudice. They were treated respectfully, and any risks and benefits were distributed.

### V. RESULTS

#### **Attitudes of GLwPDs toward pursuing education**

##### **School dropping out**

The results showed that most of them dropped out of their schools before they completed primary school education.

*"I was always the last to be taken to school after all my sisters and brothers had gone, and this was always two or three weeks later, and I was also the last person to be collected from school after everyone else had gone home. Reaching class six, I decided I would not return to school"* (GLwPDs A).

*"It was always frustrating going to school and coming back home from school as matatu owners always thought I was wasting their time with crutches while getting into the vehicle and alighting from the vehicles, my mother on the other hand, it never took me up to school but left me in the hands of motorbike riders to reach with me there"* (GLwPD B).

*"I always reached school late, sometimes a month later when others had started learning. I could not catch up with others in class work and experienced many difficulties in learning. I saw it as a waste of time"* (GLwPD C).

##### **Negative attitudes toward education**

The results indicated that most GLwPDs have a negative attitude toward their education. The attitude of people around them highly influences this.

*"Immediately, the school's close people were given report cards, and there was no one time that I performed well. Everyone is treated well because they did well in school except me. It feels so discouraging"* (GLwPD D).

*"It is not that I do not want to take my daughter to school; the truth is that I force her to go to school, which is why she is always the last to go. I even tried engaging someone to coach her at home, but she is not interested"* (Parent 1).

*"My daughter would always want to go to school but not to learn, she just wants to go to school because she has many friends in school but does very poorly; her attitude towards education is very negative"* (Parent 2).

The results suggested that most GLwPDs believed that education was necessary only for non-disabled individuals. This could affect them as they lack educated role models and are in good employment.

*"Only females who are not disabled are employed, like in this school I can see three male teachers with disabilities but no female teacher with a disability, then why are we being subjected to do these difficult subjects, they should be left for people without disabilities"* (GLwPDs E).

##### **Hopeless**

The results found that most GLwPDs were hopeless in gaining employment after completing their education, which results in low self-esteem and a sense of hopelessness.

*"People go to school to get employed; I have never seen GLwPDs working;*

the girls are only beggars. At least some boys are beggars, others are cobblers, and others are teachers" (GLwPD F).

#### Discrimination

GLwPDs face a lot of discrimination against various resources necessary for their access to education, which leads to a lack of enthusiasm for education.

"Some of these learners have severe disabilities and need Individualised Education Programmes to achieve good grades. Still, due to under-staffing, we cannot give them our best" (Teacher 1).

#### Little expectations

Due to low expectations from GLwPDs by their teachers, parents, and peers, they expect little from themselves.

"Most GLwPDs cannot make it in class work; you will teach and teach and repeat, but after a short while, they forget everything" (Teacher 2).

"Teaching learners with special needs is an uphill task. You will teach for a whole term, but when schools close, and they return from holidays, they will have forgotten everything, and you will have to start afresh. It is very frustrating" (Teacher 3).

"Some of these learners are very good at it, but the parents are not serious about their education. Some of them are brought to school by motorbikes hired by their parents, and they are instructed to take them straight to the dormitories without even passing through the office. They are brought to school without basic needs, no fees, pads, soap, or pocket money" (Teacher 4).

### VI. DISCUSSION

Negative attitudes and perceptions of family members and the general community, accompanied by popular superstitious beliefs, significantly contribute to the lack of enthusiasm for education by GLwPDs. Weiss, Ramakrishna, and Somma (2006) recorded that in most African communities, disability was believed to be a punishment from God for sins committed by parents. Most parents with such children hide them from the community because of social stigma. Due to ignorance, illiteracy, and beliefs in supernatural powers, the common attitude of people towards persons with disabilities has been that disability is a consequence of wrongs done by parents and not because of a disease or an accident.

It emerged that GLwPDs are themselves reluctant to go to school, and even when they are taken to school, they tend not to take their education seriously. This revelation agrees with Mishra (2014), who records that due to stigmatisation experienced by GLwPDs, their lives tend to revolve around their disabilities instead of their abilities. The result is low self-concept and self-expectation, which diminishes their aspirations. GLwPDs, therefore, give up easily as they become more vulnerable to anxiety as compared to their non-disabled peers.

The lack of role models was another factor in the lack of seriousness in educational achievement among GLwPDs. Burchadt et al. (2002) recorded that negative coverage of disability in the media, where they are portrayed as beggars, depicts persons with disabilities as bad characters. However, GLwPDs who have gone through education successfully and have secured gainful employment opportunities are rarely shown in the media.

GLwPDs face multiple discrimination as females, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerabilities combined. All these are barriers to achieving their educational goals. Due to biases, discrimination, and stereotyping, GLwPDs face the consequences of low educational levels and high poverty rates.

Gilson and DePoy (2002), in agreement with other researchers, record that most girls with disabilities experience negative stereotypes and unfriendly social environments. The researchers further explain that feelings of discrimination among girls with physical disabilities start right from the family and escalate to society at large. These feelings of discrimination make girls with disabilities lose their self-esteem, hence negative attitudes towards their education.

The study findings revealed that GLwPDs are usually taken to school later after every other child in the family has been taken to school. This is attributed to scarce resources in the family whereby non-disabled

children are taken to school first, and whatever is remaining is used to take the child with a disability to school. This corroborates with Weiss et al. (2006), who states that parents of GLwPDs feel heavily burdened taking care of their daughters with physical disabilities as compared to able-bodied ones. Parents, therefore, prefer taking their non-disabled girls to school to those with disabilities.

As a result of the social construction of disability, GLwPDs and economic security are highly threatened. High academic performance expectations and unrealistic educational performance requirements for employment opportunities have closed doors to many GLwPDs. This has been identified as the main cause of negative attitudes towards education among girls with physical impairments.

### VII. CONCLUSION

The most prominent factor that affects GLwPDs' attitude toward education is the general populations' attitude toward disability, and many people regard disability as some punishment for wrongs done by either parents or grandparents of people with disabilities. As females with physical disabilities observe other people's attitudes toward their education, they lose hope and render themselves educationally unfit.

The attitude of people around them highly influences the attitude of females with physical disabilities towards their education. When societal expectations do not match with the actual performance of females with physical disabilities, this interferes with their self-esteem, which leads to a negative attitude towards education.

GLwPDs lack exposure to other females with disabilities in promising careers who would act as their role models.

The result of this study suggests that the strength of the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement is partly dependent on societal context, which results in the development of either a positive or negative attitude towards education. However, having an education is crucial for every girl with a disability, as a lack of education is just another form of disability.

### VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Parents, teachers, and peers of females with physical disability should collaborate with other stakeholders in education to recognise the challenges faced by females with physical disabilities in accessing education and provide strategies to meet and overcome the obstacles.

Females with physical disabilities should be exposed to opportunities to interact with female role models with physical disabilities in promising careers to motivate them to complete their education. The government and the Ministry of Education should put more effort into advancing gender equality in Special Needs Education and inclusive education.

### IX. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest.

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