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A Case Study of the Perceived Impact of Disruptive Behavior among Grades 9 and 11 Students on their Academic Performance at a Corporate High School

Reckonel Simpson

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Email of the Corresponding Author: reckonelsimpson@gmail.com

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Abstract

Educators in schools for the past two decades have been faced with the problem of disruptive behavior in classrooms. The rate and extent to which schools in Jamaica and elsewhere have been experiencing disruptive behavior among students has generated the attention of many within the classrooms and in another places. The present study examined school personnel perceptions of the causes of disruptive behavior among a set of grades 9 and 11 students in a corporate area high school and the impact that disruptive behavior had on their own and their classmates' achievement. It also examined how educators respond to students who are consistently disruptive in the classroom. The primary data collecting instruments used to conduct this case study comprised: semi-structured interviews, observation, and the reviewing of archival data on students' academic performance. The results of the study revealed that school personnel hypothesized several causes of disruptive behavior in classrooms. These were inclusive of parental influence and home environment, community environment, peer influence, socioeconomic status, difficult personal circumstances, illiteracy, learning disability (ADHD), attention seeking, and problems with teaching. Also mentioned, were attitudes of teachers, and structural classroom dynamics. All the participants believed that disruptive behavior had a strong impact on students' performance, a belief borne out by achievement data. The observations revealed that although teachers used a variety of approaches to respond to disruptive behavior, those approaches were almost exclusively responsive. The study suggested that specialized training, regarding classroom disruptive behavior, should be implemented to better equip school personnel with the techniques to deal effectively with classroom disruptive behavior.

Keywords: *Academic achievement, Disruptive behavior, Academic Performance*

1.0 Introduction

The proper manning of classrooms has become a challenge for educators with disruptive behavior increasing in schools across the world. In fact, research results over the past two decades have cited the adverse impact of disruptive behavior on academic performance. Results from research studies have suggested that there is a relationship between classroom disruptive (negative) behavior and academic achievements (Akey, 2006); (Barriga et al. 2002). The research provides evidence to suggest that disruptive behavior in the classroom impacts students' academic achievement (Akey, 2006); (Barriga et al. 2002). Research done by Ghazi et al. (2013), has shown that one of the major concerns experienced by educators and teachers alike is the issue of disruptive behavior in secondary schools. The researchers further posit that classrooms where disruptive behavior occurs oftentimes receive less classroom engagement time and subsequently, those disruptive students tend to achieve lower ranking in achievement tests.

In addition, the related research literature suggests that when disruptive behaviors persist within the classroom environment, it becomes very difficult for the teacher to redirect or discipline students and at the same time provide quality instruction (Wexler, 1992; Williams & McGee, 1994). Additionally, persistent disruptive behavior often times lead to less academic engagement time and as a result, students tend to perform low in their standardized tests (Shinn, et al. 1987). The findings of this study will allow school personnel (Educators, Principals, Guidance Counselors and Deans of Discipline) to have a clearer understanding of how waywardness exhibited by students can affect their learning outcomes. It will provide greater insights as to better understanding disruptive behavior and the ability to respond to these behaviors when they occur. Our schools need strategies and initiatives to deal with disruptive behaviors in classrooms. Effective strategies and policies can also impact classroom management.

Herbert (1998) defines disruptive behavior as 'interference with another person so that he or she is prevented from continuing some ongoing activity or is caused displeasure' (p.105). Charles (1999), defines misbehavior, which in this context is the same as disruptive, as "behavior that is considered inappropriate for the setting or situation in which it occurs" (p.2). Kaplan, Gheen and Midgley (2002) provide a comprehensive description, alluding to what disruptive behavior entails. The researchers opine that disruptive behavior includes: speaking out in class without permission, getting out of seats, using technological gadgets during class time, troubling and bullying students during teaching, and being disrespectful etc.

2.0 Theoretical Framework: Theory Defined

The Social Learning Theory of Bandura (SLT) (Bandura, 1977; 1989) led to the conceptual framework of this study. Bandura coined the SLT based on the premise that individuals learnt appropriate and inappropriate behaviors from interacting with each other. This theory looks at learning that occurs within a social context. Bandura believed that individuals learn from each other through imitation, modelling or observational learning. The environment is seen as crucial in influencing behavior. Hence, this study utilized the SLT as a solid theoretical foundation on which to base this investigation as this theory actually focuses on social interactions within the classroom environment.

2.1 Factors Attributed to Students' Disruptive Behavior

One leading researcher, Swick (1980), shared that the conceptualization of disruptive behavior as a problem stemming exclusively from the classroom environment and simply altering conditions that trigger such behavior has proven to be insufficient. In fact, multiple research studies suggest that students' behavioral problem at all levels are influenced by a myriad of factors and educators' responses to these conditions must be based on careful evaluation of each learner's specific circumstance coupled with the educators' roles in the classroom. In addition, Swick (1980) also shared that an individual's behavior stems from various socio-cultural and genetic forces and that having an understanding of the context of students' behavior is paramount. Frank, 1978; Kaplan, Luck, 1977; Neil, 1975, and Read, 1976 as cited in Swick, (1980) shared that from continuous research it has been established that some of the major influences/causes of disruptive behavior include the following list below in Table 1

Table 1: Disruptive Student Behavior in the Classroom

Influence	Related Behavior Often Observed
1. Malnutrition	Hyperactivity Drowsiness Easy loss of temper Irritability
2. Lack of Sleep	Inattentiveness Short attention span Irritability Inability to complete assignments
3. Child Abuse/Neglect	Withdrawn, sullen Aggressiveness; Takes out anxiety on peers and teacher Poor attendance record Excessive seeking of attention
4. Excessive Television Viewing	Short attention span Extreme aggressiveness Difficulty in following directions Inability to complete work assignments
5. Violence in the Home	Extreme anxiety level Withdrawn and very depressed Poor attendance record Constant seeking of attention

These causes of disruptive behaviors among students are similar to those cited in studies conducted on the topic. In a recent study conducted by the Center for Mental Health of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, several key risk factors were highlighted as associated with poor school behavior. These factors from the study includes: poverty, abuse and neglect, harsh and

inconsistent parenting, drugs and alcohol use by caregivers, emotional, physical or sexual abuse, and modeling of aggression, media violence, negative attitude towards school, family transition (death or divorce) and parent criminality (Johnston, 2013). Hence the environment plays a crucial role in the behavior of students. It can therefore be assumed that the SLT is crucial in shaping students' behavior.

Supporting the claim statistics from the study Mendler (1997) showed that approximately 70 to 80 percent of disruptive behavior exhibited in schools accounts from dysfunctional families, drugs, violence, and disjointed communities. Kuhlenschmidt and Layne (1999) attributed the causes of disruptive behavior to physical, emotional and environmental factors. In addition, Ghazi et al., (2013) reported the causes of disruptive behavior to be: socio-economic, parental, quality of teaching, attitude of teachers towards students, lack of teacher motivation, poor ergonomically conditions, psychological issues, constant changing of teachers and repeating class. In addition, a study conducted by Dery et al. (2004) revealed that the most common disruptive behaviors are associated with various disorders including: attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), and Conduct Disorder (CD). The U.S. National Library of Medicine (2011) stressed ADHD as the most common diagnosed behavioral disorder. Furthermore, other studies have reported the common diagnosed behavioral disorders (ADHD, ODD and CD) as the core sources of disruptive behavior exhibited among students (Dery et al., 2004; Ghazi et al., 2013).

2.2 Effects of Disruptive Behavior on Academic Performance

Research indicated that disruptive behaviors exhibited among students in the classroom create barriers to classroom instructions and subsequently, impacts students' academic outcomes (Akey, 2006; Good & Brophy, 1987; Wexler, 1992). In addition, researchers over the last decade or so have mentioned the impact that disruptive behavior has had on academic outcomes. In fact, this research revealed that disruptive behavior can have a negative impact on academic outcomes (Ford, 2013; Bru, 2009; Finn, Pannozzo, & Voelkl, 1995; Public Agenda, 2004). Research also revealed that students who exhibit behavioral problems generally tend to score low on test results (Bru, 2009). In fact, behavioral problems exhibited in the classroom affect classroom instruction (Akey, 2006) and subsequently, students score low in their academic achievements. Additionally, a number of studies have highlighted the relationship between disruptive behaviors displayed in classrooms and academic performance among students (Akey, 2006, Feshbach, Adelman & Fuller, 1977).

Researchers (Birch and Ladd, 1997; Feshbach and Feshbach, 1987) concluded that positive behaviors displayed by students in classrooms have resulted in positive learning outcomes., Akey (2006) though believed that disruptive behaviors displayed by students are indeed associated with negative learning outcomes. Nelson et al., (2004) found that students who displayed disruptive behaviors performed lower than their peers. In support (Spivack and Cianci, 1987) study showed findings that suggested that students who were not disruptive or inattentive in class had higher academic outcomes when compared to those who exhibited behaviors that were termed disruptive.

2.3 Impact of Disruptive Behavior on Educators

According to McCarthy, et al. (2009) “teaching is a demanding profession” and teacher burnout rate has been a concern in the education world (p.282). Whether or not a teacher has many years of teaching experience or not, there can still be burnout stress. Burnout rate is attributed to educators’ ability to handle classroom stress and their coping skills. Also, the burnout stress that educators face is due solely to them having to deal with challenging children in the classroom (McCarthy et al., 2009). "The ability to manage students' behavior is the number one concern of beginning teachers, and is near the top for most experienced teachers" (Partin, 1995, p. 21). (Mackenzie, 1996, p.9) also notes, "Each year, teachers confront increasing numbers of children who arrive at school unprepared to follow rules, cooperate or respect authority". This makes the task of the teacher difficult. These students hail from varied socio – economic strata of society and different cultural backgrounds and influenced by these many factors, it makes the educators’ job extremely challenging.

Partin (1995) and Cangelosi (1988) studies seem to suggest that classroom disruptive behavior in fact played a crucial role in educators’ level of stress and dissatisfaction and contributed to educators’ leaving the profession. In fact, Smart and Igo (2010) research highlighted that approximately 30-50% of educators leave the teaching profession within five years and of that number, 30% cite disruptive behavior as the main cause for leaving. Thus highly trained and qualified educators are leaving the classroom due to problematic behavior displayed by children within the classroom.

2.4 Responding to Disruptive Behavior

Research suggests that educators lack extensive knowledge of appropriate intervention strategies to deal effectively with disruptive behavior exhibited in classrooms. Studies suggested that strategies used to manage disruptive behavior are mostly reactive and punitive, (Cotton, 2001; Jones, 1996). Other studies indicated that strategies used in managing disruptive behavior are mostly part reactive and corrective (Cotton, 2001; Jones, 1996). Research has shown that typical ways of handling disruptive behavior are punishment and exclusion (Farmer, 1999; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). However, these strategies have been acknowledged as being ineffective (Charles, 1999; Williams, 1998).

Evidence seems to suggest that educators need to become more aware of other alternative strategies that can in effect bring about a healthier classroom environment. Skiba and Peterson (2000) and Maag, (2001) suggested, new ways are needed to move away from the traditional approach to dealing with indiscipline. Skiba and Peterson (2000) suggested that harsh disciplinary actions can lead to a negative school environment rather than improving students’ behavior. Skiba and Peterson (2000) and Townsend (2000) shared that schools have had a tendency of expelling and suspending students due to disruptive behaviors. It is suggested that a healthier classroom environment will positively affect the teaching and learning environment due to less interruptions within the environment.

3.0 Methodology

A qualitative research methodology was utilized in order to provide rich and detailed insights into the situation to be investigated. Babbie (2001) defines qualitative research as the non-numerical examination and interpretation of observations, for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships. Qualitative research therefore seeks to collect, analyze, and interpret data by observing what people do and say. In general, qualitative research methods have the ability to garner in-depth information about specific phenomenon among small groups. Bogdan and Biklen, (2003) and Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state that qualitative research methods are useful in discovering the meanings and interpretations that people provide about events they experienced. A qualitative approach was employed to gain greater discernment and understanding of developing behavior, one has to take a comprehensive approach and look at things holistically, and indeed, a qualitative approach method provides this perspective (Merriam, 1998). Before any sample is selected, the population must first be identified (Champion 1976). Jaccard (1983) defines population as the aggregate of all cases to which one wishes to generalize. Champion (1976) indicates a sample as a portion of elements taken from a population. The school has approximately 64 academic staff excluding the principal and 2 vice principals. The participants of this study were 14 educators in the high school with various backgrounds, positions and experience. In addition, students of grades 9 and 11 on both shifts at the institution were observed in their natural setting. Table 2 presents the summary of the participants

Table 2: Summary of Participants.

Category of Workers at the School	Participants
Principal	1
Vice Principals	2
Teachers	9
Dean of Discipline	1
Guidance Counselor	1
Sub-total	14
School Total	70
Proportion of staff included in the sample	20%

The collection of data for this study included semi-structured interviews and observation of students (grades 9 and 11). In addition, the reviewing of archival data on students' academic performance along with classroom-based data was done to provide evidence for the study being done. The interviews allowed the relevant participants to convey their experiences, viewpoints and perspectives on how they view the disruptive behavior of students and how it has impacted their academic performance. Individuals' experiences are better expressed and captured through a qualitative interview (Berg, 2009). Face to face interviews were conducted which allowed for direct interface with teachers where body language, gestures, moods and attitudes were observed. As Monette, Sullivan, and Delong (2011) alluded interviews are good qualitative research gathering technique that provide accurate responses and allows for clarification of

questions during the interview process. The demographic characteristics of the sample is depicted in Table 3

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Respondent	Professional status	Level of Education	No. of years at Institution	Age Range	Gender
R 1	Classroom teacher	Bachelor's	16-20	35-44	Female
R2	Classroom teacher	Bachelor's	1-5	25-34	Female
R3	Senior Administration	Bachelor's	1-5	25-34	Female
R4	Senior Administration	Master's	26+	45-54	Female
R5	Senior Administration	Master's	21-25	45-54	Female
R6	Senior Administration	Bachelor's	16-20	45-54	Male
R7	Classroom teacher	Bachelor's	1-5	25-34	Male
R8	Classroom teacher	Bachelor's	16-20	45-54	Female
R9	Classroom teacher	Bachelor's	26+	45-54	Female
R10	Classroom teacher	Bachelor's	1-5	25-34	Female
R11	Senior Administration	Bachelor's	1-5	25-34	Male
R12	Senior Administration	Master's	16-20	45-54	Female
R13	Classroom teacher	Bachelor's	6-10	25-34	Female
R14	Classroom teacher	Bachelor's	11-15	35-44	Female

Content analysis theory was used to analyze data. Creswell (2009) stated that qualitative data analysis is a continuous process that involves the continual reflection of data, asking analytical questions and at the same time, writing memos throughout the study. Qualitative data analysis “involves collecting open-ended data, based on asking general questions and developing analysis from the information supplied to participant (p. 184). Strauss and Corbin (1998) added that the process involves continuous interplay of data gathering and analysis. In this study, the data was looked at to identify “patterns, themes, bases, and meanings (Berg, 2009). The analysis of data involved a coding process whereby the data was segmented into content unit. Smith and Strickland (2001) defined a content unit as, “A segment of discourse designed to make a single point” (p.150). The analysis and coding procedures are emphasized in the following steps below

4.0 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Factors school personnel attribute to students' disruptive behavior

The first question of the study was; To what factors do school personnel attribute students' disruptive behavior?

The findings of the research indicated that participants hypothesized several sources of disruptive behavior in the classroom. The results indicated a number of themes that emerged from the data gathering regarding the causes of disruptive behavior. These included: parental influence and home environment, community environment, peer influence, socio-economic status, difficult personal circumstances, illiteracy, learning disability (ADHD), attention seeking, problems with teaching, attitudes of teachers, and structural classroom dynamics, namely poor ventilation. Additionally, the findings from the study also suggested that educators could not readily generalize the causes of students' disruptive behavior as these causes were specific to each individual learner.

These findings relating to research question 1 are consistent with findings from previous studies on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) which illustrated that the environment can have some impact on behavior. In fact, the current study supports the SLT perspective which advocates that the environment can shape behavior, as learning is taking place through what the learner experiences and sees others doing. The SLT perspectives shares that learning occurs within a social context and the environment in which one lives interact can also influence behavior. Carrell and Hoekstra (2010), study discovered that students were affected by just sharing classroom with other children who were exposed to some traumatic experience (domestic violence). The findings indicated that those children exposed to violence were more likely to become disruptive. In addition, a similar study done by Sitler (2008) also revealed that certain students, who actually experienced trauma in their childhood, also exhibited destructive tendencies towards others as well as displaying signs of low academic performance.

The findings suggested that socio-economic status along with specific difficult circumstances affected students' ability to learn at school. The educators shared that a number of students were deprived of basic physiological needs in particular food. They indicated that most parents are poor and receive minimum wage. In the findings students who are deprived of the basic needs were usually the ones who walk around giving trouble in the classroom. The response of a respondent in regard to meeting students' basic needs stated that the "students' basic physiological needs must first be satisfied for learning to take place." (R9).

In addition, the findings supported a similar study done on ADHD by Derby, et al. (2004) which stated that the most common disruptive behaviors are in fact associated with various disorders of which ADHD is one. The U.S. National Library of Medicine (2011) highlighted ADHD as the most common diagnosed behavioral disorder and the number one diagnosed mental health disorder affecting children (Akinbami et al. 2011). The findings on the attitude of teachers revealed that senior administration felt that educators were not working hard enough to curtail the prevailing disciplinary issues at the school. Data in the study revealed that the concerted responses of Senior Administration were that some teachers were working while others could do more in their effort to deal with disruptive behavior. In addition, the survey revealed that senior administration felt that disruptive behavior had a negative impact on the general school community.

The views of educators based on the findings from the data revealed that educators felt that the current policies in place have been followed. According to educators, they have tried their best to deal with disruptive behaviors but the lack of resources coupled with lack of adequate training hampered their effectiveness in the classroom. All educators indicated that disruptive behavior exhibited by students negatively affected the school's image. Educators shared that greater support is needed on the part of senior administration, as well as parents. Another important finding of the

study was that educators consistently mentioned that they lack the training to effectively deal with problematic behaviors in the classroom and wanted the needed skills to effectively address classroom disruption.

4.2 Students' disruptive behaviors and academic performance

The second question of the study was; To what extent do students' disruptive behaviors impact their academic performance?

The findings revealed that disruptive behavior affected students' academic performance at the school. Based on the responses of the 14 participants interviewed, it was revealed that disruptive students tend to score low on their test scores. In fact, the findings of the study also suggested that disruptive behaviors in classroom are strongly related to academic performance as this behavior is not conducive to learning. The findings relating to research question 2, are supported by those of earlier studies in chapter 2 which suggested that disruptive behavior impacted academic outcomes of students (Akey, 2006; Good & Brophy, 1987; Wexler, 1992). Additionally, the findings generated from this study support other research done which revealed that disruptive behavior can have a negative impact on academic outcomes (Ford, 2013; Bru, 2009; Finn, Pannozzo, & Voelkl, 1995;).

The current study revealed that disruptive behavior had an impact on the completion of lessons. Educators reported that disruptive behavior affected the ability of other students in the class to learn. They mentioned that these students cannot concentrate properly in class and that the constant interruption of lessons to deal with off task behavior made it impossible for educators to teach. Teachers in the study discussed that they have to be constantly interrupting lessons to regain class control and to redirect students' attention. In addition, these findings support earlier studies done on SLT perspectives which formed the theoretical framework of this study (Bandura, 1973; 1977). Kauffman, 2005; Patterson, Reid and Dishion, 1992 studies support the SLT as they affirmed that many behavioral disorders exhibited in classrooms are worsened through behavioral practices be it modeling, reinforcement, extinction and punishment.

4.3 School personnel response to students constantly disruptive in class

The third question of the study was; How do school personnel respond to students who are constantly disruptive in class?

The findings of the study, relating to research question 3, are supported by other studies discussed in chapter 2 (Coates, 1989; Elam, Rose & Crallup, 1996). The findings indicated that disruptive behavior was the number one problem facing educators in the classroom. The respondents communicated that their jobs were demanding, again similar to Lambert, O'Donnell and Melendres (2009) study that asserted that "teaching is a demanding profession" and teacher burnout rate has been a concern in the education world (p.282). Hence the findings of the study are consistent with other studies as teachers have indicated that their jobs have become very demanding.

The study also revealed that most respondents believed that current methods being utilized to deal with students' disruptive behavior were reactive and punitive and based on observations were

ineffective. In addition, the results showed that for more severe cases, students would be given conduct card, sent directly to the dean of discipline, put on suspension or even expulsion. Also, the findings illustrated there were variations in disruptive behavior based on age/ grade level, gender, or the teacher's approach to classroom management. For example, some respondents mentioned that the grade 9 students were more unsettled and tend to give more talking that the grade 11 students while on the other hand, other respondents disagreed and believed that there was no significant difference in age or performance among students

The findings from observation revealed that students frequently disrupted classes during teaching contact time. It also revealed that students continuously shared with peers while teachers were teaching content and they constantly used technological gadgets during class time. The findings of this study, therefore supported the literature review in chapter 2, which indicated that studies have shown that the strategies used by educators by far have been more reactive and punitive (Cotton, 2001; Jones, 1996). From observation, if the students shouted, the teacher also shouted. If the students became disruptive, the teachers would react by either sending them outside or administering some other punitive form of punishment. In sync with the research findings is the ideology that the teachers at the school were engaging in strategies regarding classroom disruption that were ineffective. Similar to previous studies, suggestions as to new ways are needed in order to move away from the traditional approach to dealing with indiscipline (Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Maag, 2001).

The findings indicated that educational leaders (principal, vice principals) believed that the teachers were the ones to set the tone in their classroom. On the other hand, most of the teachers interviewed strongly stated the need for greater support from Senior Administration. They unanimously agreed that more collaboration is needed on the part of Senior Administration, as well as parents in order to effectively deal with the phenomenon at the school. Based on the above, it is necessary for senior administration to address this issue and properly sensitize teachers on how to effectively manage disruptive behavior in classroom.

The findings support the Social Learning Theory (SLT) perspectives. It was the intention of the researcher to use the social learning theory as a solid theoretical foundation on which to base this investigation as this theory not only focuses on social interactions within the classroom environment, but also enables individuals to better understand how to adapt to the varied cultures and learning styles of learners and at the same time promoting expected learning outcomes (Taylor, 1992). Hence, the need to conduct empirical studies to determine the degree to which social learning theories impact children's behavior is merited. Notwithstanding, the findings of this study supported the SLT perspectives.

5.0 Conclusion

Although there exists a vast body of literature on disruptive behavior and its impact on students' academic performance, from a Jamaican perspective, the factors that contribute to disruptive behavior and how educators handle disruptive behaviors within the school settings have not been completely examined. In summary, this study supported the notion that disruptive behavior in the classroom based on the research findings existed at the institution. Surprisingly to the researcher, many educators expressed during the interviews that there were various sources of factors that

were attributed to students' disruptive behavior. The current study investigated the impact of disruptive behavior on students' academic performance, which was consistent with the literature. All the respondents from the school emphasized that there is a connection between disruptive behavior and academic performance and that greater effort among stakeholders is needed in working collectively and interdependently in promoting a more positive learning environment. The lack of achievement coupled with the lack of discipline is evident as the school is seen in a negative manner and some parents want transfers for their children

6.0 Implications for Research

The following are implications with respect of the data in this study:

1. The population and sample for this study were small and constrained. Only one school was chosen and only 14 participants at the school were interviewed. Hence further studies should be replicated in different settings using a larger population and sample size over a wider geographic region
2. Further research should continue into effective classroom management strategies. The educators expressed being frustrated because of the types of disruptions they were faced with. Research exploring effective classroom strategies can allow educators to become knowledgeable of the different steps to take in addressing behavioral problems in classrooms
3. Surprisingly to the researcher, many of the respondents mentioned that ADHD was the main learning disability affecting students in the classroom. They also mentioned that trauma impacted students' overall behavior at school. In fact, in recent years, there has been a national focus on students with learning disabilities in Jamaican schools especially at the primary level.
4. Teachers reported that the high level of illiteracy at the school hampered students' ability to learn. In addition, it was mentioned that students were unable to engage in meaningful class activities or assigned tasks due to their poor level of reading and comprehension. Special assistance should be given to students having this challenge. Employing a specialist teacher of reading would be a positive move for the school as this person's function would be to focus on literacy within the school community. Majority of the participants from the study mentioned this as a severe factor affecting students' academic performance. It would be beneficial to the school as students reading levels would improve. When students reading levels are improved there will be improvement in academic achievement.

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