

Learning and Learning Difficulties in Africa

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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- ACP Edulink Programme
- Guidelines for Educationalists on Learning Difficulties - Kenya, Namibia and Zambia
- Recommendations for policy makers on Learning Difficulties - Kenya, Namibia and Zambia
- Research abstracts

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Education for the Children with Learning Disabilities: African-European Co-operation for Promoting Higher Education and Research Project

In August 2008 a group of experts in learning disabilities from Kenya, Namibia, Zambia and Finland received excellent news from EDULINK – ACP-EU Cooperation Programme for Higher Education: the project proposal had been accepted for the period of 16 August 2008 - 15 August 2011.

Yippee!

After recovering from the initial shock, the project started with a preparatory visit of the Finnish project team to the five African partner institutions (Kenyatta University, University of Namibia, University of Zambia – departments of Psychology and Educational Psychology, Sociology and Special Education, and Zamise). The visits provided an opportunity to discuss the project in detail with the partners and established good working relations needed for successful collaboration. The atmosphere was excited and I believe that I can speak for all of us and say that we were full of enthusiasm.

The official project launch took place in Windhoek, Namibia, in January 2009, with an opening ceremony organized by the University of Namibia (UNAM).

The overall project objective was to work towards better school attendance and achieve-

ments of primary school children in Kenya, Namibia and Zambia by contributing to the improvement of skills of educationists working within primary education in identification and treatment of learning disabilities amongst school children. In practical terms, the specific objective was to enhance the higher education partner institutions curricula in the area of learning disabilities.



Workshop V in Turku, Finland. (January 2011)

The expected results were: improved quality of teacher and psychologist education and development of a training standard with supporting methods, materials and facilities in the African partner institutions; the development of culturally sensitive understanding and practical skills needed in developing psychological services in African and EU countries; and the establishment of networks of collaboration in three levels (national, African & African-European).

After three years of hard work, the project has now come to an

end. I am extremely happy and pleased to announce that *WE HAVE REACHED ALL SET OBJECTIVES*. A book on training standard in the field of learning disabilities has been published. This together with the introduction of clinical training methods and videoconferencing training has enhanced the quality of teacher and psychologist education. Local and international networks that formed due the course of project will enhance the sustainability. The collaboration will continue especially in the area of research on learning disabilities.

It has been extremely rewarding to have been involved in this project. I am thankful to all partners who believed in it, worked hard and greatly contributed to achieving our aims. I would also like to express our deepest gratitude to Edulink–ACP-EU Cooperation Programme in Higher Education for their invaluable support. I feel nostalgic, but at the same time I am convinced that the collaboration in the field of African-Finnish academic learning disability will continue strong.

Thank you!

*Ms Susanna Kharroubi,
Project Manager
University of Turku, Finland*

The following documents have been written by the *Education for the Children with Learning Disabilities: African-European Co-operation for Promoting Higher Education and Research* project members from Kenyatta University (KU), University of Namibia (UNAM), University of Zambia Departments of Educational Psychology, Sociology and Special Education, and Psychology, and Zambia Institute of Special Education (ZAMISE).

Guidelines for Educationalists on Learning Difficulties

Kenya

- Early Identification and screening
- Need to know early signs and precipitating factors.
- NOTE: Educationists should be able to understand the difference between learning problems and learning disabilities
- Training in Basic skills for assessment, and including management of these children's day to day needs.
- To be aware of the referral services available
- Preparation and acquisition of learning material
- Encourage inclusion where applicable (consider class size, facilities available etc.)
- Preparation of an appropriate curriculum and ensuring its implementation
- There should be a Program to develop their (LDs) special area to enable the child to lead a fulfilling life and to be equipped with social skills to be integrated in society
- Ensure Teachers' competence in the area of LD
- Adequate number of teachers with special reference to the teacher: pupil
- Planning interventions
- Appropriate intervention programs that will
- Evaluation (examination) procedures that will identify the strengths of the child
- A criteria for progression from one level to the next for learners with to motivate the learners, parents and even the teachers
- A criteria for teacher motivation- Improving the working conditions for the teachers
- Improving the physical environment
- Pay package/incentives
- Teacher: pupil ratio
- Continuous update of latest findings in research to improve on the identification management of learners with LDs
- Teacher/parent partnership to improve the welfare of the child
- Use the media to sensitize the society issues related to LDs
- Explore opportunities for new technologies that can enhance learning among learners with LDs.
- Peer sensitization for acceptance
- Sourcing resource persons who are grown up but with similar challenges as role models

- Guidance and counseling programmers in schools to cater for issues related to LDs and help them set realistic goals
- Partnership with hospitals and assessment centers for advice (e.g. nutritional aspects where applicable) continued support, treatment and feedback on any developmental progression of the problem.

Authors: Dr Tabitha Wangeri, Dr Daniel Muindi, Dr Jacinta Kwena, and Ms Suzanne Otieno Adhiambo, Kenyatta University

Namibia

Conceptual Understanding

- Educators should have a conceptual understanding of both learning and learning disabilities.
- They should have an understanding of the aetiology of learning disabilities. Learning disabilities can be defined as an atypical condition often affecting children of average or above-average intelligence, characterised by difficulties in learning such as reading, writing and mathematics. The condition may result from psychological or organic causes and is usually related to slow development in motor skills, attention deficit disorders, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, and dyslexia. These are mainly regarded as intrinsic characteristics within the child.
- An understanding of learning difficulties is also required. Learning difficulties emanate from external factors which impact on the child's learning. These factors include socio-economic, linguistic, cultural, socio-emotional and other factors within the school and home environment. Educators should first examine these factors before classifying a child as having a learning disability.
- Educators should be aware of the referral system applicable to their situation.

Perceptions and Attitudes

- Children are born to learn and deserve patience, respect and trust. Educators should promote such qualities, irrespective of children's learning abilities.
- In adherence to inclusive education principles, educators should be made aware of their fundamental responsibilities to teach all children, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities. Placement in a special school should be the very last option and in the best interest of the child.
- Educators should recognise and cater for individual differences in learning.
- Educators should be aware of positive and negative labelling as this could encourage or discourage optimal learning.
- Educators should recognise the value of parental knowledge and support as an essential part of their child's learning. This implies that home-school partnership should be employed as far as possible.

Teaching and Learning Strategies

- Educators should familiarise themselves with alternative teaching and learning strategies in order to best cater for the individual learner.
- The curriculum should reflect differentiated teaching and learning and educators should be trained and continuously supported to implement such modifications. These include syllabus adaptations, individual education plans, time allowances, alternative assessment methods, etc.

Assessment and Intervention

- If a teacher suspects that a child has a learning difficulty/disability, then assessment follows taking into consideration the child's progress (academic performance, behaviour, etc). The teacher provides support based on this initial assessment. Identifying factors which may cause learning difficulties can be used as a starting point for intervention.
- Should these intervention strategies prove futile, the teacher should employ the next step as per their referral system. These steps may include a learning support group at school, and a multi-professional assessment team.
- Clinical assessment is a crucial step in providing a comprehensive report that is to inform further intervention and regular monitoring of progress.

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Zambia

Instructional Guidelines

- Instruction must be child-centred: Teachers must strive to have instruction that is focused on the child. Due to the many competing demands of the teacher on time and completion of the syllabus, the teacher may be inclined to go through very quickly in order to satisfy the syllabus. This does not help the child with learning disabilities. It is therefore recommended that the teachers have the child in the centre of instructional planning.
- Teachers must use individualised educational programmes (IEP) where need rises. The school should adjust instructions according to the needs of the learners and not the other way round. Many children with LDs learn differently from the rest of the children and therefore would require a programme tailored to their specific learning styles. This can be a challenge but has to be done. Teachers should offer remedial programmes to learners with learning difficulties. 3. The school should solicit the involvement of the family of the children with learning disabilities at every point.
- Teachers must use a variety of methods of teaching for example, the use of both visual and audio aids.
- Schools should have a child friendly environment, especially for children with special educational needs for example, infrastructure such as ramps were necessary, necessary facilities in the toilets, a safe play area for all learners, attitudes of both the staff and the other learners towards children with special needs, enrolment of children with special needs.
- Heads of schools should provide the necessary support needed by the teachers of children with special educational needs.

General guidelines for teaching children with LDs

- Give reinforcement frequently.
- Encourage the child to think through work by having questions and answers as a way of keeping the child on the task.
- Assist the student, if necessary, lesson notes.
- Ask questions in a clarifying manner, to help the students with learning disabilities describe his or her understanding of the questions.
- Use a chart or piece of paper with an outline of the lesson or unit of the day to help student understand the lesson or unit.

- Reduce work load and break down the task into smaller manageable units for student with learning disabilities
- Keep oral instructions short, logical and to the point. Reinforce them with a cue words where possible. Repeat or re-word complicated directions.
- Pace instruction for the learner carefully to ensure clarity.
- Frequently read out what is being written on the chalkboard.
- Remove distracters from the classroom such as, excessive noise, flickering lights, etc.
- Give homework and presentation assignments both in written and oral format.
- Present new and or technical vocabulary on the chalkboard or overhead or flash cards and allow the child to see and learn.
- Provide and teach memory associations (use mnemonic strategies).
- Use and Support one modality of presentation by following it with instruction and then use another modality.
- Talk distinctly and at a rate that the student with a learning disability can follow.
- Use plenty of examples, oral or otherwise, in order to make topics more applied.
- Use straight forward instructions with step-by-step unambiguous terms. (Preferably, presented one at a time).
- Write legibly and use large type; avoid cluttering the blackboard with non-current / non-relevant information.
- Consider using peer tutoring if the student appears unable to keep up with the class pace or with complex subject matter. The more capable reader can help in summarizing the essential points of the reading or in establishing the main idea of the reading.

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Recommendations for Policy Makers on Learning Difficulties

Kenya

- An appropriate policy to guide education for learners with LDs
- To ensure that the rights of these children are respected
- Quality control
 - * Regulatory board to regulate practitioners, assessment tools and curriculum learners with LDs
- Need to have policy makers who are professional
- Creation of a department that deals with learning disabilities to be manned by professionals including, those with disabilities to act as role models.

- Policies on employment to be revised such that a specific fraction goes to people with LDs plus removal of barriers that hinder people with disabilities from participating fully in nation building e.g. educational barriers, coming up with a system of selection in higher learning where a specific number of places go to people with disabilities (academic oriented – system of evaluation to be revised), stigma and discrimination
- Legislation – enacting laws that protect people with disabilities especially those of LDs
- Putting in place legislations that require construction of learning facilities that are compliant with LDs.
- A criteria for teacher motivation
 - * Improving the working conditions for the teachers especially those handling LDs
 - * Improving the physical environment
 - * Pay package/incentives
 - * Teacher: pupil ratio
- Frequent refresher courses to upgrade the skills of practicing teachers.
- Budgetary allocation to the area of special ed. to increase so as to facilitate school equipment where learners with LDs can get specialized learning.
- Allocate more funds to universities for research in the area of LDs
- School administration (e.g Heads of schools) to interpret the policies and facilitate implementation
- Protecting the rights of children with LDs

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Namibia

Conceptual Understanding

- Education authorities should have a conceptual understanding of both learning and learning disabilities and utilise their mandate to promote this understanding in the education sector.
- They should have an understanding of the aetiology of learning disabilities. Learning disabilities can be defined as an atypical condition often affecting children of average or above-average intelligence, characterised by difficulties in learning such as reading, writing and mathematics. The condition may result from psychological or organic causes and is usually related to slow development in motor skills, attention deficit disorders, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, and dyslexia. These are mainly regarded as intrinsic characteristics within the child.
- An understanding of learning difficulties is also required. Learning difficulties emanate from external factors which impact on the child's learning. These factors include socio-economic, linguistic, cultural, socio-emotional and other factors within the school and home environment. Educators should first examine these factors before classifying a child as having a learning disability.
- Education authorities should make the education sector staff aware of the referral system applicable to their regions/districts.

Perceptions and Attitudes

- Children are born to learn and deserve patience, respect and trust. Education authorities should promote such qualities, irrespective of children's learning abilities.
- In adherence to inclusive education principles, education authorities should be made aware of their fundamental responsibilities to educate all children, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities. Placement in a special school should be the very last option and in the best interest of the child. They need to communicate and enforce the inclusive education principles in the education sector.
- Education authorities should make the education sector and the community at large aware of positive and negative labelling as this could encourage or discourage optimal learning.
- Education authorities should foster the recognition and the value of parental knowledge and support as an essential part of their child's learning. This implies that home-school partnership should be employed as far as possible and put tools in place to monitor the implementation of such partnerships.

Teaching and Learning Strategies

- Education authorities should expose education sector staff to alternative teaching and learning strategies in order to best cater for the individual learner.
- Education authorities should ensure that the curriculum reflects differentiated teaching and learning and educators are trained and continuously supported to implement such modifications. These include syllabus adaptations, individual education plans, time allowances, alternative assessment methods, etc.

Structural Support

- Education authorities should promote the recognition and make available human and material resources in order to cater for individual differences in learning.
- Education authorities should put in place monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for the assessment, monitoring and evaluation of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities.
- Education authorities should coordinate, monitor and evaluate programmes and policy implementation with regards to learning disabilities and provide in-service training to education sector staff.
- Education authorities should ensure and sustain communication networks amongst stakeholders in the education sector and line ministries in the area of learning difficulties and disabilities.

Assessment and Intervention

- There should be a sound referral system by which learners are assessed for learning difficulties and disabilities. This referral system should be familiar to all the stakeholders.
- The referral system should incorporate regular reassessment to monitor the child's progress and determine the suitability of the current intervention plan.
- Education authorities should ensure that the multi-disciplinary approach in the assessment and intervention of learning difficulties and disabilities is adhered to.
- Clinical assessment is a crucial step in providing a comprehensive report that is to inform further intervention and regular monitoring of progress. Suitably trained staff and suitable assessment batteries should be available to assess learning difficulties and disabilities.
- Assessment batteries should be standardised to obtain local norms.
- Education authorities should ensure that adequate record-keeping forms part of the assessment and intervention process and a data-base compiled which is regularly updated and monitored to ensure that the intervention strategies are adhered to and best practices shared across the education sector.

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Zambia

1. Specific policy on SEN should be enacted in consultation with SEN stakeholder (parents, teachers, special education teachers and teacher trainers)
 - * Assessment of disabilities
 - * Skills training
 - * Definitions and classifications
 - * Placement and Rehabilitation and IEP
 - * Home education
2. Training of teachers in basic identification and intervention strategies. Adequate training of teachers working with children with learning disabilities. This should include an understanding of the factors that contribute to the effects of the learning disability. This could include such issues as motivation, classroom setting, time of instruction and duration, monotony of method of instruction and so forth.
3. Assessment and identification services. These are below the appropriate level in the country. Urgent work in developing or adaptation of assessment tools must be commissioned.
4. In addition, currently, there only a few places offering assessment and identification services. There must be decentralization of assessment services to provide easy access for those who may require the services. For a start, establishing LD information centers in the Zonal Resource centers will help disseminate information about learning disabilities.
5. Strengthening the Home Education Programme
6. The rights and regulations pertaining to discrimination of children with special educational by both teachers and fellow learners should be reinforced in schools.
7. The class size should be drastically reduced. Alternatively, more teacher assistants must be recruited to support the work of teachers.
8. Teaching and learning materials for children with learning disabilities should be made available in adequate quantities.
9. Special education teachers should have specific resources centers for the field of special education
10. A multidisciplinary approach must be adopted when approaching the issue of learning disabilities in schools. The multidisciplinary team should include the following; teacher, head teacher, school counsellor, psychologist, school nurse and doctor.
11. Provisions should be made to increase the number of skills training facilities for children with special needs, especially those who are not admitted to higher institutions of learning.

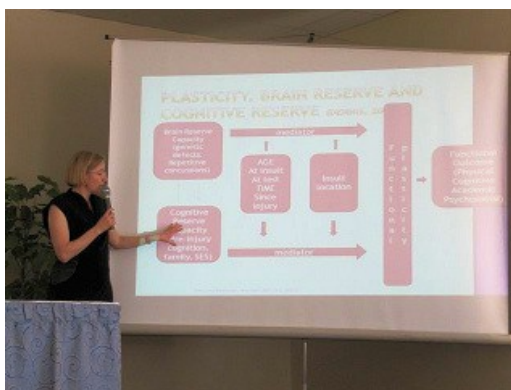
13. More sensitization should be conducted around the area of learning disabilities and information about learning disabilities and where to get help in this area must be made available to parents.

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The Project ...



Literacy skills of Kiswahili speaking children in rural Tanzania: The Home Environment.

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), University of Vaasa, Finland, Dr Damaris Ngorosho (2010)

Abstract

This thesis investigated the role of home environment in literacy skills (phonological awareness, and reading and writing ability) of Kiswahili speaking primary school children in a rural area in Tanzania. The thesis has *three specific aims*:

Firstly as a basis for the whole study, to analyze the reading and writing ability of Kiswahili speaking children from a rural context of Tanzania.

Secondly, to identify indicators that could best describe the home living environment (social and physical environments) and home literacy environment in a rural setting in Tanzania.

Thirdly, to identify home environment variables, which significantly relate to and predict children's phonological awareness, and reading and writing ability in the Tanzanian rural context.

Data were collected in five studies and reported in six articles. Tasks to measure phonological awareness and reading and writing ability were administered to samples of children from grades

2 to 6 during school activities. Parents responded to questionnaire-based interviews about the home environment.

The results revealed that in the process of learning to spell by writing words, children make errors (e.g. confusion between, omission and addition of letters) that are phonologically equivalent to errors made in English, although Kiswahili is a consistently spelled language. Learning accurate writing in Kiswahili requires acquisition of linguistic knowledge about dialects, phonology, orthography and grammar which seems to be needed also for learning inconsistent languages.

Five key variables (fathers' and mothers' education, house wall material, light source, and the number of books for school subjects in the homes) were found and regarded as significant indicators of home environment in rural eastern Tanzania. The home environment was not significantly related to reading and writing when a summary index of socioeconomic status

was used in the analyses in a large study. However, when the home environment variables were separately used in other studies, parents' education and occupation, housing variables and literacy facilities showed significant relationship with phonological awareness, and reading and writing ability. Measures of home environment should be culturally valid for the area under study. It is obvious that there is a need in Tanzania for early screening and support of children with potential reading and writing difficulties. Strengthening the plans for improving the home literacy environment is suggested.

Key words: Home environment; literacy skills; reading and writing ability; consistent orthography; Kiswahili; Tanzania.

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*Wishing You All a Joyful Festive
Season And Prosperous Year 2012!!!*

Inclusive Education: Challenges of Students with Disabilities in Institutions of Higher Education in Namibia.

Doctor of Education (Inclusive Education), Dr Cynthia Haihambo, University of South Africa, 2010.

Abstract

This study was aimed to explore challenges of students with disabilities in higher education institutions in Namibia, as narrated and illustrated by themselves. Mixed methodologies, with specific reference to a small-scale quantitative survey and extensive qualitative design were employed as tools to understand the prevalence, extent and nature of challenges of students with disabilities in their pursuance of higher education in Namibia. Data was thus collected in two phases. The first phase consisted of a ten-item quantitative survey which was largely used to determine the prevalence of students with disabilities in higher education institutions, and basic information regarding institutional standpoints pertaining to students with disabilities. Data acquired through this survey confirmed the prevalence of students with disabilities in Namibian higher education institutions.

The second phase represented the qualitative design whereby data was collected through three main methodologies namely a narrative diary-based approach, a photo-voice and individual interviews. These methodologies ensured reliability of the data through triangulation.

The study confirmed that inclusive education at the higher education level in Namibia was largely achieved through the goal of access, as all higher education institutions have admitted students with observable as well as hidden disabilities. However, a major finding of the study was that support and provision for students with disabilities was rendered in fragmented portions within and across institutions, and that the goals of equity and equality have not yet been achieved to the desired degree, if inclusive education was to become a reality for students with disabilities in higher education in Namibia.

Students reported challenges related to physical accessibility of institutions; unavailability of educational material in alternative, as opposed to traditional formats; lack of sensitivity and skills of staff; as well as lack of structured support systems. The study also revealed that, notwithstanding the challenges students faced in their institutions, students with disabilities continued to perform their academic duties to the best of their abilities and were driven by their individual personal philosophies, many of which spoke of perseverance and courage, to make a success of their studies.

Key concepts:

Inclusive education, students with disabilities; physical, social and academic accessibility; visual impairment; physical disability; Braille; support structures, special needs education, narrative research, photo-voice.

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Education for the Children with Learning Disabilities: African-European Co-operation for Promoting Higher Education and Research Project publication ***Assessment of Learning Disabilities: Cooperation between Teachers, Psychologists and Parents (African Edition)*** is now available online free of charge at Niilo Mäki Institute's web site http://www.nmi.fi/kehitysyhteistyö-en/materiaalit?set_language=en



Assessment of Learning Disabilities:

COOPERATION BETWEEN TEACHERS, PSYCHOLOGISTS AND PARENTS

—— African edition ——

Edited by Tuija Aro and Timo Ahonen



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NMI Niilo Mäki Instituutti
Niilo Mäki Institute

Newsletter details

The Newsletter is a joint publication of Niilo Mäki Institute, Finland and EU funded Edulink project. The aim is to provide a forum to network and exchange knowledge on learning difficulties. Niilo Mäki Institute has been working in Africa for 20 years, providing neuropsychology training for education professionals in the continent. The Newsletter links partners and colleagues from previous and present NMI Africa projects.

The aim of the Edulink project is to enhance the skills and knowledge of educationalists in the area of learning disabilities.

We are always looking for contributions, articles and comments for next issue. Those interested in contributing to the next issue, please contact: Pia ([pia.krimark\(at\)nmi.fi](mailto:pia.krimark(at)nmi.fi)).

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this Newsletter are the views of the authors and are not the views of any organisation or institution.