

ESRC-DFID Research for Policy and Practice: Disability and education

Foreword

Sustainable Development Goal 4 aims to ensure that no one should be left behind in education. Having been completely left out of the Millennium Development Goals, disability rights activists advocated for a disability inclusive framework for sustainable development – drawing on increasingly available research to inform this advocacy.

Despite efforts by governments, policymakers and practitioners to ensure inclusive quality education for all learners, disability continues to be one of the primary causes of educational exclusion. We still lack the full picture of why girls and boys with disabilities are more likely to drop out of education and what methods may support their learning processes.

Disability rights activists depend on research-based evidence to shape advocacy and influence education policymakers to develop effective responses. We need research on how children with disabilities learn and thrive from early childhood and how to ensure a foundation for higher learning and employment. We need a nuanced and contextualised picture of challenges and good practices to fill the knowledge gaps.

This collection of ESRC-DFID funded research provides valuable new evidence on what governments must consider in order to ensure that children with disabilities benefit from quality education without discrimination or exclusion. This research contains excellent, globally relevant and contextually grounded evidence of how the education sector can plan and design policies with a lasting impact for children with disabilities. It highlights the value of a study led by deaf researchers in India; explores school-readiness in Malawi; offers greater understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by children with disabilities within the classroom across six countries; and advances strategies on how to support the learning and teaching of children facing multiple disadvantages, including disabilities, in India and Pakistan.

Collectively, the research also highlights how to use available tools to identify children with disabilities in national surveys in ways that can inform planning while avoiding stigmatising families and children with disabilities. The research should be promoted by all disability

rights advocates and read by all planners aiming to implement Sustainable Development Goal.

However, we still need to know and understand more. The World Bank's 2018 World Development Report highlights how girls with disabilities are more likely to drop out of school than their male peers; how the issue of intersectionality between disability and other forms of disadvantage is still poorly documented; and how too many girls with disabilities leave school without basic literacy and numeracy skills. As the clock ticks towards 2030, evidence is urgently needed on how to tackle these challenges.

We must keep our promise to *all* girls and boys who are left behind and respond to the needs of all learners.

Trine Cecilie Riis-Hansen

Head of Advocacy and Policy

PLAN International Norway

Key messages

- Adopt collaborative approaches to working with beneficiaries, partners and stakeholders – including people with disabilities as research partners.
- Adopt a more holistic approach to addressing educational exclusion of children with disabilities, focusing on intersecting disadvantage associated with factors such as poverty and gender.
- Collect data that identifies children with disabilities in household- and school-based surveys to track their progress in learning and access.
- Recognising that children with disabilities are increasingly in mainstream schools, identify and adopt strategies that support them in the classroom and tackle discrimination they may face.

Improving literacy for sign language users in India

Deaf learners have piloted a systemic innovation that could transform learning and literacy for India's estimated 2.5 million sign language users. The country has one of the world's largest deaf communities, yet there is a critical shortage of teachers with sign language skills.

India has several hundred schools for the deaf, generally staffed by teachers without Indian Sign Language skills. A large majority of deaf children, particularly in rural areas, cannot access these schools.

'Peer to Peer Deaf Literacy' was a one-year pilot study looking at new ways of teaching literacy to deaf learners in India. Led by the University of Central Lancashire in collaboration with Lancaster University, deaf organisations and the National Institute of Speech and Hearing in India, the project drew on deaf people's own resources. Its curriculum tackled real-life needs while peer-guided teaching combined online and in-class learning.



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Piloted with 43 young deaf adult learners, the programme was implemented in the virtual learning environment 'Sign Language to English by the Deaf' (SLEND). It used texts such as bank forms to expose learners to key everyday words and expressions. The classes and lab sessions ran five times a week for six months.

SEE ALSO:

Ahereza, N.; Nyarko, M.; Fan, H.R.; Gillen, J. and Zeshan, U. (2016) 'SLEND Sign Language to English by the Deaf: literacy development with Deaf communities using sign language, peer tuition, and learner-generated online content', in U.I. Ogbonnaya and S. Simelane-Mnisi (eds), Proceedings of the South Africa International Conference on Educational Technologies

Gillen, J.; Panda, S.; Papen, U. and Zeshan, U. (2016) 'Peer to Peer Deaf Literacy: Working with young deaf people and peer tutors in India', *Language and Language Teaching* 5, 2.10: 1-7

BLOG POSTS:

Zeshan, U. (2016) 'Interest in deaf-led research soars', October, Islands Centre

Zeshan, U. (2016) 'Thanks to Chinese partners for special visit and discussions on deaf literacy', August, Islands Centre

At the end of the pilot, there was clear potential for improving English literacy learning for young deaf adults previously marginalised in their access to education. The learners, who were evaluated in pre- and post-tests, made significant gains in their written English.

Success was largely attributed to the project's participatory nature. The entire Indian team consisted of deaf people. Deaf people's knowledge and skill base were recognised and validated. The project sparked huge interest, particularly online, with more than 12,000 online views of the research skills workshop with deaf learners.

In consultation with the Rehabilitation Council of India, a curriculum for a one-year training programme for 'language and literacy trainers' has been agreed, to include work with both young deaf adults and deaf children in formal education. The Council expressed willingness to accredit this new qualification – which would be the first time that deaf people specifically benefit from an accredited qualification in India's special education sector. The accreditation would pave the way for sign language-based literacy education to be rolled out more widely.

This peer-led project helps address the huge resource gap of trained teachers who are fluent in Indian Sign Language. By proposing that educational changes are best driven from within deaf communities, underpinned by digital and mobile learning and teaching, the project highlights the potential for a cost-effective, adaptable solution, leading to greatly enhanced class-based and individual learning. The next phase will see the project rolled out in Ghana and Uganda, with possible trials in Nepal and Rwanda.



Project title: Literacy development with deaf communities using sign language, peer tuition and learner-generated online content: sustainable educational innovation.

Principal Investigator: Professor Ulrike Zeshan

Director, International Institute for sign languages and deaf studies
School of Language and Global Studies, University of Central Lancashire, UK

Zeshan, U.; Fan, H.R.; Gillen, J.; Panda, S.; Papen, U.; Tusting, K.; Waller, D. and Webster, J. (2016) Summary Report on 'Literacy development with deaf communities using sign language, peer tuition, and learner-generated online content: sustainable educational innovation', Preston: University of Central Lancashire.

Bhattacharya, T.; Fan, H.R.; Gillen, J.; Mathew, S.; Panda, S.; Papen, U.; Randhawa, S.; Tusting, K.; Waller, D.; Webster, J. and Zeshan, U. (2017) Policy Report on 'Peer to Peer Deaf Literacy' (P2PDL), Preston: University of Central Lancashire.

Zeshan, U. (2016) 'Indian signers build skills at islands deaf-led research week', August, Islands Centre

Prioritising early childhood development and disability in Malawi

By working collaboratively with local community groups and other key stakeholders, researchers from the University of Birmingham, Sightsavers and the University of Malawi are examining factors that could be preventing young children with disabilities from participating in early childhood development programmes in rural Malawi.

Despite its relatively small population (of approximately 16 million), Malawi has potentially up to 192,000 children living with disabilities. Malawi's government prioritised early childhood development (ECD) and education for all children as part of its Growth and Development Strategy II (2012–16). Currently, however, the government and service providers in Malawi are struggling to provide ECD volunteer caregivers with appropriate training on disability and inclusion.

High-quality ECD programmes benefit children's development, life experiences and life chances. Children with disabilities often need support and guidance on practical skills required for their daily environment, and yet education systems still expect them to comply with traditional rules, routines and syllabuses. Are systems failing to adequately support and prepare young children with disabilities for primary education?

Tikule Limodze (Let's Grow Together) is a three-year mixed method study examining the role of ECD pre-school caregivers in supporting children with disabilities in community-based early childhood centres in a rural district of southern Malawi. The study is conducted by the University of Birmingham, with UK-based partners (Sightsavers, Anthrologica, University of Liverpool); Arizona State University in the US; as well as Chancellor College, University of Malawi, the Association of Early Childhood Development in Malawi and the Government of Malawi.

To assess 'school-readiness' skills, the research team developed a curriculum-focused assessment scale based on the Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) developed by UNICEF and the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare in Malawi (2015). They collected data from 920 children in 48 community-based childcare centres, focusing on 'language, literacy and communication' (including emergent reading skills and the ability to communicate effectively) and 'mathematical and numerical knowledge', key areas of the ECD curriculum.

It quickly became apparent during baseline assessments that many of the children aged three to five were unable to perform even the most basic tasks such as holding a book correctly. The assessment also tested a child's ability to talk about pictures in books. As children are not evolutionarily primed to respond to reading, passing these tasks relies on having prior exposure to print, pictures and books. Very few community-based childcare centres (CBCCs) had access to any reading materials. Without these, the centres are unable to help children and families to become 'school ready'.

The quality of ECD programmes may also depend on:

- the opportunities for children to develop literacy skills in social and cultural contexts that are conducive to such learning;
- the intensity and duration of the teaching;
- developmental approaches to understanding and developing literacy skills that are inclusive of children with disabilities;
- the opportunities for children to develop literacy skills at home, in the community and at the centres;
- the skills/literacy levels of staff in the centres;
- parents' and carers' own literacy levels;
- the ECD standards around literacy being inclusive of diverse needs, and the validation process.

In response, the project's next step is to develop a 'bio-ecological systems theoretical framework' to help organise the environmental factors and understand their influences on inclusion by placing the child at the centre of the system. A key aim is to increase the chances of children with disabilities being 'ready for school' through a tripartite process involving the child, the parents and community, and the school. Survey and assessment tools have been made available for use to the Malawi government and have been used in a Sightsavers project 'Leave no child behind', funded by Comic Relief.



Project title: Improving curriculum and teaching methods to influence policy and increase the quality of ECD provision for children with disabilities in Malawi.

Principal Investigator: Dr Paul Lynch

Senior Lecturer in Inclusive Education

School of Education, University of Birmingham, UK

SEE ALSO:

McLinden, M.; Douglas, G.; Hewett, R.; Cobb, R. and Lynch, P. (2017) 'Facilitating participation in education: The distinctive role of the specialist teacher in supporting learners with vision impairment in combination with severe and profound learning difficulties', in *Journal of Blindness Innovation and Research*, 7, 2

BLOG POSTS:

Lynch, P. (2017) 'Disability and school readiness in Malawi', April, *The Impact Initiative*

Tackling barriers to learning for children with disabilities

Researchers from Washington University in St Louis argue that education is failing the most vulnerable children, particularly those with disabilities. Their global findings, based on evidence collected from the past decade, highlight an urgent need to improve the inclusion of these children in education.

According to data collected from six countries (Afghanistan, India, Sudan (Darfur State), Sierra Leone, Morocco and Tunisia), disadvantaged children are increasingly accessing schools and education in low- and middle-income countries, but they are not learning effectively due to social exclusion within the classroom and out-of-date teaching methods that perpetuate inequality. The research was conducted as part of the project 'Constructing a Global Framework for Analysis of Social Exclusion From and Within Learning Systems'.



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Among the six countries are some affected by conflict and crisis, where children, particularly those with disabilities, are far less likely to attend school. Many of these countries have limited education budgets, resulting often in little or no pay for teachers, poor infrastructure and learning equipment and overcrowded classes – which in turn affects the nature and quality of education received. These factors affect the progress of children with vulnerabilities who do manage to attend school more than their peers. In Afghanistan, for example, children who became disabled below school age risked never attending school at all and once in school struggled with retention and completion.

Drawing from initial data, the researchers argue that current benchmarks to assess the quality of learning are too narrow and that a fundamental shift is needed in how the quality of education

is defined, implemented and assessed. There is an urgent need to design and build evaluation systems that look at participation rather than individual educational achievement.

They also recommend a clear policy need to focus on children still out of school, especially those with disabilities. They urge that work to tackle practices and beliefs that perpetuate stigma, prejudice and discrimination of vulnerable children is aimed at both local and national levels.

By enhancing understanding of the classroom experiences and challenges faced by children with disabilities, the study has had a number of impacts, both locally and more widely:

- By working closely with field local partners, the researchers are designing a teacher-training framework on inclusion of all children in the classroom.
- Researchers have engaged with international NGOs and ministries of education in Afghanistan, Morocco, Sierra Leone and Tunisia to raise awareness about barriers to learning faced by children with disabilities – especially stigma – and ways to tackle these.
- The research is contributing to global policy discourse on education and disability, providing insights on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The research provided guidance on defining and assessing inclusion in international education policies.
- With UNESCO, researchers provided input for the Guide to Inclusion and Equity in Education, to support governments in making the shift from access to equity and inclusion (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002482/248254E.pdf>). The researchers are currently part of an expert panel working on the UN Flagship Report on Monitoring and Evaluation for Disability-inclusive Development, to be released in 2018 (https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/resources/monitoring-and-evaluation-of-inclusive-development/egm_monitoring-and-evaluation_geneva_may2017.html).



Project title: Constructing a Global Framework for Analysis of Social Exclusion From and Within Learning Systems

Principal Investigator: Dr Parul Bakshi

Assistant Professor

Washington University in St. Louis, USA

SEE ALSO:

Bakshi, P.; Babulal, G.M. and Trani, J. (2017) 'Education of children with disabilities in New Delhi: When does exclusion occur?' PLOS One September

Trani, J.; Babulal, G.M. and Bakshi, P. (2015) 'Development and Validation of the 34-Item Disability Screening Questionnaire (DSQ-34) for Use in Low and Middle Income Countries Epidemiological and Development Surveys,' PLOS One December

Trani, J.; Bakhsji, P.; Lopez, D.; Gall, F. and Brown, D. (2017) 'Socioeconomic situation of persons with disabilities in Morocco and Tunisia: Inequalities, cost and stigma,' European Journal of Disability Research, 11.4: 215–233

Strengthening teaching for children with disabilities: India and Pakistan

Researchers from the University of Cambridge and partners in India and Pakistan are working to identify strategies to support the learning and teaching of children facing multiple disadvantages notably related to disability, poverty and gender. By engaging key local, national and international stakeholders, the research is shaping policy debates on education and disability.

Children who face multiple disadvantages related to disability, poverty, gender, caste, religion or where they live, are among those least likely to be learning. In many low- and middle-income countries, disadvantaged learners often receive poor quality teaching. Many teachers are recruited without basic subject knowledge and are inadequately trained to support these children.

Using a household survey, University of Cambridge researchers, together with partners CORD (India) and IDEAS (Pakistan), constructed a unique data set offering insights into prevalence of disability. By assessing children's literacy, numeracy, non-verbal reasoning and social and personal skills, researchers identified who is in school and who is learning. The data shows that in the areas covered by the survey (rural Haryana in India and rural Punjab in Pakistan), many children with disabilities are gaining access to government and private schools. The challenge is that they are less likely than peers to be learning.

Qualitative data from classrooms help researchers to understand the challenges teachers face in teaching diverse classes and the practices they adopt to teach all children effectively. The research identifies that these strategies, though limited, could be a catalyst for governments to help teachers to better respond to the learning needs of all children, including those with disabilities.

The emerging findings suggest that to meet the Sustainable Development Goal for education (SDG 4) there is a need to:

- adopt a holistic approach to addressing intersecting disadvantage;
- collect data on children with disabilities in household and school-

based surveys to track their progress in access and learning, and identify policies for improving their educational opportunities;

- recognise that many children with disabilities are attending mainstream government schools, and ensure teachers are trained to address diverse learning needs.

Project team members have joined a number of high-level international policy discussions to ensure that their evidence influences global debates. Their evidence has informed approaches to tracking progress towards SDG4 to ensure no one is left behind. The UK's Select Committee on International Development has drawn on the evidence, which could influence DFID's work. It has also informed the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity's message on 'progressive universalism'.

In Pakistan, the team is closely engaged with government officials and DFID on framing a new strategy for inclusive education.

This research is providing an important evidence-based contribution to identifying different types and severities of disabilities in large scale surveys, how to develop more inclusive learning assessment tools, and how to support teachers to adopt effective teaching practices in diverse classrooms.



Project title: 'Teaching Effectively All Children (TEACH): Learning outcomes and teacher effectiveness for children facing multiple disadvantages, including those with disabilities in India and Pakistan.'

Principal Investigator: Professor Pauline Rose

Professor, International Education

Director, Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL)
Centre, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, UK

SEE ALSO:

Malik, R. (2016) 'Education's missing priorities', Dawn newspaper

Samson, M. and Rose, P. (2016) 'Teaching, learning and disadvantage: from policy to practice', August, The Impact Initiative.

De, A. and Singal, N. (2016) 'The paradox of disability and education in India', August, The Impact Initiative.

Rose, P. (2016) '1, 2, 3 testing: Assessing learning of what, for what, and for whom?'

November, Global Partnership for Education

Raza, F. (2017) 'The missing voice of teachers: Evidence from Pakistan', October, UK Forum for International Education and Training (UKFIET)

THE IMPACT INITIATIVE

For International Development Research

This summary highlights the key messages from research focusing on disability and education from the ESRC-DFID Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme and is an output of the Impact Initiative for International Development Research.

It is written in collaboration with research teams and edited by Elizabeth Tofaris, Impact Initiative Communications Specialist based at the REAL Centre, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge.

The Impact Initiative seeks to connect policymakers and practitioners with the world-class social science research supported by the ESRC-DFID Strategic Partnership, maximising the uptake and impact of research from: (i) the Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research; and (ii) the Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Programme. We seek to identify synergies between these programmes and their grant holders, support them to exploit influencing and engagement opportunities, and facilitate mutual learning. The Impact Initiative is a collaboration between the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and the University of Cambridge's Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre.

Email: info@theimpactinitiative.net

Website: www.theimpactinitiative.net

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Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Programme: aims to provide policymakers and practitioners with concrete ideas on how to improve learning outcomes and to inform relevant policy and programme decision.



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