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Educational research from Tanzania 1998–2008 concerning persons with disabilities: What can we learn?



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ABSTRACT

The global Education For All process and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities have increased the attention given to marginalised and excluded groups showing the need to enhance the education of persons with disabilities. In Sub-Saharan Africa a number of poorly disseminated studies investigate education of persons with disabilities. This paper provides an analysed overview of a decade of Tanzanian studies and reports on the education of persons with disabilities produced from 1998 to 2008. Key findings are highlighted and gaps in the research identified and suggestions are offered for future investigations. The education of persons with disabilities needs to be addressed in research, policy and practice to efficiently reduce their clear marginalisation in education.

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“Too often, policy makers and technocrats are more influenced by global frameworks, than indigenous knowledge.”
(Kisanji & Saanane, 2009)

Tanzanian research on education of persons with disabilities

The global Education For All (EFA) process and the realisation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities have increased the attention given to marginalised and excluded groups showing a clear need to enhance the education of persons with disabilities. Also in Sub-Saharan Africa the assessment of policies and their implementation to achieve this goal has become a focus for studies, reports and a growing number of situational analyses. Increasingly, the reports published online have enabled possibilities for greater access. Others, however, are available only in university and civil society organisation libraries and from published collections, often commissioned by local or international organisations with limited editions.

This paper reviews research conducted in Tanzania, among the first states to sign the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007 and ratify in 2009 (UN, 2012). It provides an analysed overview of a decade of studies and reports on the education of persons with disabilities in Tanzania produced from 1998 to 2008, between two significant changes in education of persons with disabilities. In 1998 the first official initiative of *inclusive education* in Tanzania was begun by the Government of Tanzania, Salvation Army and UNESCO. At this time, a joint venture was carried out in Temeke, one of the districts in the capital Dar es Salaam (URT, 2008a,b). The aim was to introduce and pilot inclusive education in

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seven Tanzanian Primary Schools, assess the process and outcomes, and to scale up to other districts and regions in the country. In 2008 several reports were published by the government and non-governmental organisations in preparation for the next significant political and practical change in Tanzania regarding the rights of persons with disabilities to education. In 2009 the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training introduced a strategy for inclusive education, requiring a significant change in education policy. This change deserves its own separate review. Additionally, the reason for limiting the focus on a ten-year period is practical. In 2008 and 2009 an opportunity arose to conduct the time-consuming task to visit libraries and organisations, meet researchers and collect documents, otherwise unavailable. Only a small number of international referee journal publications on education of persons with disabilities in Tanzania were found. One of the questions discussed along the document collection and review process was how access to these documents would have been useful in planning the new policy and programme implementation. More recently, with digitalization of publications and increased access to internet also in Tanzania, the availability and dissemination of research publications has improved. The question, how research, policy and practice could be better linked is discussed in the final section of this paper.

In 2008, the National Bureau of Statistics in Tanzania, in collaboration with the Office of the Chief Government Statistician, Zanzibar and the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, published the first ever Disability Survey Report (National Bureau of Statistics, 2008). The survey applied the UN Convention definition for disability at the community level and used a three-stage systematic random sampling in data collection from 6882 households, a total of 32,000 respondents, with an unusually high 98% response rate. The main result was that 7.8% in the population aged 7 years and above had some form of activity limitation due to a disability. This prevalence rate is significantly higher than in any of the previous studies conducted in the country. According to the survey, there were differences in prevalence rates between regions, but no significant differences between rural and urban populations or among males and females (ibid.).

The 2008 Report on the Development of Education by the government of Tanzania pointed out that, already in 1974, the country's first president Mwalimu Julius Nyerere (Mwalimu in Kiswahili means The Teacher) stated that "all citizens have the right to primary education, including persons with disabilities" (URT, 2008a,b, p. 20). The Government showed its commitment to the global EFA process and recognised that persons with disabilities continue to be marginalised in education, that it is associated with poverty and defined the necessary measures to rectify the situation. The Tanzanian government specified in its second Primary Education Development Plan (for 2007–2011, URT, 2008a,b) that inclusive education was the main approach for reaching children with special educational needs or disabilities.

According to Tanzanian government reports, in 2008 there were 280 primary schools with inclusive practices in 70 Wards (sub-districts) in various regions of the country (URT, 2008a). A total of number of 8,410,094 pupils was reported including 34,661 pupils with special needs (URT, 2008b). Calculating from these government statistics, 0.4% of the children were reported as having special needs or disabilities. The Disability Survey Report (National Bureau of Statistics, 2008) compares the enrolment rates of children in general with those with disabilities. They report that only 38.4% of the primary school aged children with disabilities were attending school. This is well below the target of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which calls for total primary school enrolment by the year 2015 (ibid. 96). The government of Tanzania has been committed to achieving the MDG concerning universal primary education and improving the quality of Education For All. This paper discusses how research contributes to these efforts. The next section of this paper describes an analysis of the research reports produced in 1998–2008 on the education of persons with disabilities.

An analysis of the Tanzanian research conducted in 1998–2008

The documents for the analysis were gathered during 2008 and 2009. The institutions and organisations visited and persons met during the document collection are listed in Appendix 1. The material consists of forty two (42) documents, collected in Tanzania from libraries, universities, national and international organisations, and through consultation with leaders of organisations related to persons with disabilities, professionals and researchers (Table 1). The materials are comprised of government produced reports and plans, scholarly papers, master's theses and doctoral dissertations. Articles in publications, such as the journal 'Issues in Education and Development' by the Faculty of Education of the University of Dar es Salaam, where university lecturers had actively published publications on the education of persons with disabilities, form the majority of the documents analysed. For decades, this journal has been the main channel for Tanzanian researchers to publish their papers. All the international referee journal articles found and published during this ten-year period are included in the reference list of this paper. While newspaper articles and published opinions are important for public discussion, they are not included in this analysis which focuses on the scientific research produced. In other words, our paper does not investigate public debate and dialogue on education of persons with disabilities which would, however, be an important topic for research.

This research review paper focuses on what (1) topics were studied, (2) types of documents were produced, (3) methodological approaches were applied, (4) levels and types of education were studied and (5) key findings were reported in the materials. Content analysis and cross-tabulations with frequencies were produced on the information available (Table 1). Results of the analysis are presented followed by the discussion on the key findings and identified research gaps.

The research reflected a wide range of topics and interests, from inclusive education policy implementation and evaluation, to classroom teaching and learning and enrolment of students with disability. Three quarters of the documents are published reports and journal articles, one quarter unpublished master's thesis and only two doctoral dissertations, both published in 2002. Most research focused on the education of persons with disabilities in general. The policy level however,

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