Schools2030 Global Research Partner Report

Holistic learning for SEND students in Ugandan primary schools

Open Development and Education
Ekitabu

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SCHOOLS 2030

PROJECT SUMMARY

The research undertaken by OpenDevEd and eKitabu aims to build more inclusive practice to support the diversity of learners in Ugandan primary school classrooms. In particular, it focuses on enhancing teacher-student relationships, inclusive assessment practices and holistic learning approaches.

Its primary purpose is to provide activities, resources, strategies, and guidance to help teachers and educators address the requirements of students who may have diverse or special educational needs. The research will produce a co-created toolkit which aims to be simple to use, engaging, aligned with Ugandan context, and include relatable examples, activities, and case studies for teachers to utilise in their day-to-day practice. It also seeks to closely align with key ministry documents and guidance on identification and support of students. The project works across four phases:

Phase 1: Adapting formative assessment tools used by Schools2030 to accommodate learners with special education needs and disabilities.

Phase 2: Administering formative assessment tools at four primary schools in Kampala to collect data and produce an overview report with key recommendations on teachers needs on inclusive assessment tools and practices.

Phase 3: Using a co-creation and collaborative approach, working alongside headteachers, teachers and key stakeholders to produce a pilot toolkit that aims to be utilised in Schools2030 schools in Uganda.

Phase 4: After additional rounds of iterations based on feedback and trialling, the toolkit will be utilised within existing Schools2030 teacher professional development courses and scaled to all Schools2030 schools in Uganda.

Figure 1: During pilot 1 workshop - headteachers, teachers and project team members

RESEARCH TEAM

This project is led by **OpenDevEd**, with **Ekitabu** as a key collaborating partner[1]. The project also works in partnership with Crane & Viva, and Cheshure Services Uganda.

Partner organisations

Crane & Viva, working in collaboration

Crane is a network of 150 organisations, schools and churches working with children at risk in the Greater Kampala region.
Viva is a charity passionate about releasing children from poverty and abuse. Viva's vision is to bring lasting change to vulnerable children by growing locally-led networks of churches and organisations.

Cheshire Services Uganda - Cheshire Services Uganda is a local organisation working to uplift the quality of life of people with disabilities through interventions contributing to learning, education and livelihood. In Kampala they have worked in over 300 schools.

METHODS

The research methods for this project involve an initial desk literature review and the collection of qualitative primary data from students, teachers, headteachers and classroom observations. The research adopts an iterative and collaborative approach and is firmly centred on teacher and student needs.
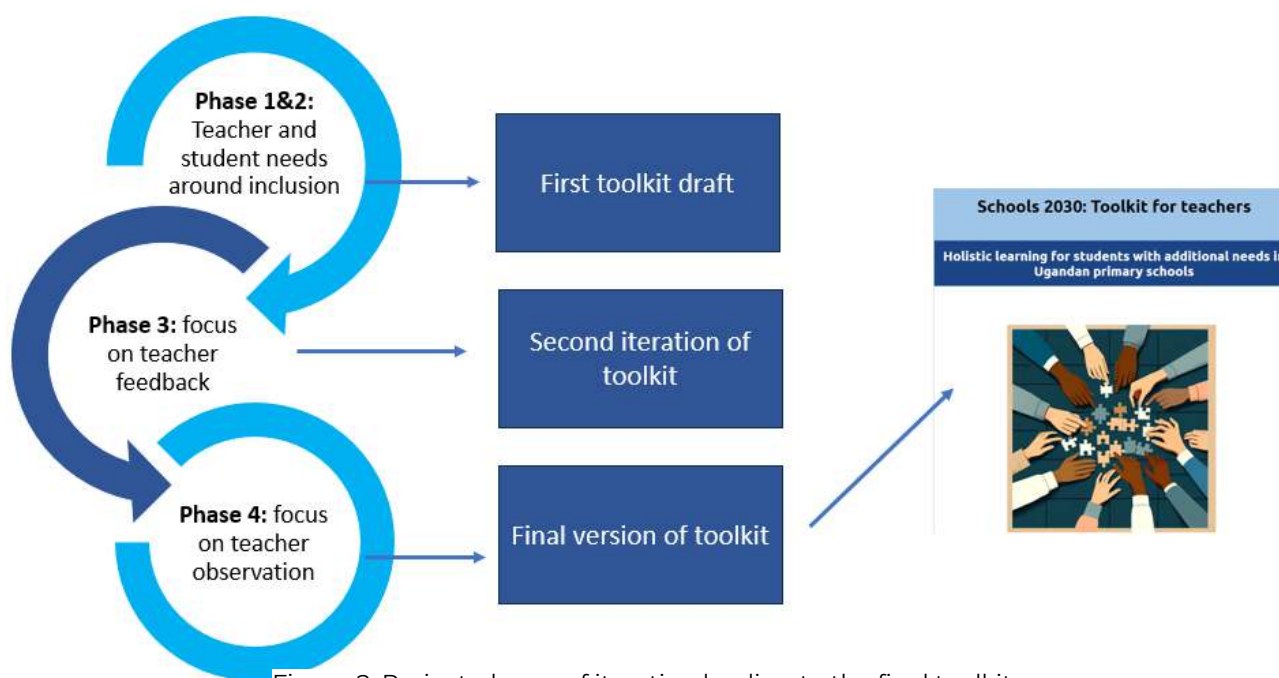

Figure 2: Project phases of iteration leading to the final toolkit

[1] The team is comprised of: Hannah Walker (OpenDevEd), Bazil Onen (Ekitabu, Inclusion specialist), Ignatius Kweyu (Ekitabu, Teacher professional development and inclusion specialist), Daniel O'doch (Ekitabu)

Phase 1 & 2 of the project involved collecting data from students and teachers to understand key needs around inclusion and disability with a focus on assessment and the holistic learning domains selected in Uganda. This also involved testing formative assessment tools with students to understand where the gaps and needs were. This formed the structure and content of the first draft of the toolkit.

Phase 3 involved a two-week data collection visit to get feedback from teachers and headteachers on parts of the first draft toolkit and co-create key modules. We adopted a co-collaborative approach in the workshop to ensure that the toolkit reflects the diverse perspectives, needs and experiences of teachers and students. This collaborative engagement will foster ownership, buy-in, and a sense of shared responsibility among teachers, headteachers and schools. We will also conduct informal school visits to collect further feedback from teachers and headteachers and develop greater contextual understanding of schools (e.g. physical accommodations for students and the day-to-day teacher realities).

Phase 4 will be similar to phase 3 in terms of the workshop, but it will also involve more formal teacher observations to understand if and how the toolkit is being used by the teachers in classrooms.

Throughout all four phases, we also have inclusion and equity at the heart of the work. For example, we ensure that we utilise inclusive practices at the workshops and build positive and meaningful relationships with the teachers involved in the project.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Phase 1 key findings: support for students and assessment of holistic learning domains.

1. **There is a particular lack of support for learners with hearing impairments.** This was evidenced by the absence of screening for hearing loss and instruction in Ugandan Sign Language. Hearing screening should be implemented at pre-primary and primary levels, with referrals to audiologists for further examination for identified cases.

2. **Assessment processes can reinforce stigma.** Learners with intellectual disabilities should not be marginalised during assessment processes – for example, the research found that learners with disabilities were often left as last in the assessment process. Where learners need to take assessments one-by-one, the process should respect the needs of learners with disabilities and consider how the process can be more inclusive to avoid reinforcing stigma through the assessment itself.

3. **The environment created by teachers and examiners is very important.** Creating a friendly environment for the students helped calm the students, and they were able to comfortably take the assessments without being nervous. For example, talking with the students and getting to know them before the commencement of the exercise helped the students feel calm.

Phase 2 key findings: teacher training needs around inclusion and disability

Figure 3: At KCCA Primary School, an enumerator administers one of the non-academic instruments with a student.

1. **General inclusion and disability understanding:** Teachers expressed a desire to deepen their understanding of various types of learning needs and disabilities. This presents an opportunity to dispel myths and stereotypes associated with students with special educational needs and disabilities.

2. **Practical and contextual guidance:** Teachers are faced with managing large classrooms and catering to diverse learning needs. Therefore, they require clear and evidence-based criteria for identifying students' learning needs and determining necessary adaptations.

3. **Identifying learning needs rather than just labels:** It's crucial that the identification process supports students in their learning journey rather than simply labelling them, particularly in large classrooms. Additionally, this process should be efficient enough for teachers to implement with all their students.

4. **Misconceptions around disabilities:** There is a need to address misconceptions about disabilities. Including a section in the training with accurate, user-friendly information about different disabilities, their potential causes, expected behaviours and simple classroom adaptations is essential. It's also important to cover myths and misconceptions, appropriate terminology and strategies for fostering inclusive classroom environments.

5. **Holistic domains**: Further guidance for teachers is required on holistic learning domains and how to effectively teach them in the context of

Uganda. The Schools2030 holistic learning domains selected in Uganda are literacy, numeracy, problem-solving, self-efficacy and empathy.

6. **Collaboration and cohesion of approach with other organisations is needed:** Other NGOs have also been supporting the schools in inclusion and disabilities – such as Cheshire Services Uganda (CSU). It is important to make sure it is a collaborative approach to ensure the maximum impact for teachers and students.

Findings Phase 3: First draft toolkit feedback

Teachers were very engaged: Teachers were highly motivated to use inclusive practices to better support their students in the workshop to improve and further develop the toolkit.

Teachers were happy to share their own experiences: Teachers were happy to share their own experiences and tips on how they supported students with disabilities in the classroom.

There was a disconnect with the beliefs of teachers in the workshop with their actions in school setting: While the teachers in the workshop were confident about how to support students, this was not as clear during the observations. This area is going to be examined in more detail in Phase 4.

Toolkit feedback:

Teachers loved….	Teachers wanted to change….	Areas to add…
- The length of the toolkit - The colours and layout - The clear content, including the top tips and case studies - The useful tools and games - The five holistic domains	- The font and picture size - Change of terminology (for example, 'student' or 'child' to 'learner') - A longer space for self-reflection	- More examples - More case studies - More pictures - A module only on assessment and exams

Figure 4: Teachers brainstorming in groups at the Phase 3 workshop

TOOLKIT OVERVIEW

Purpose & Scope: The toolkit has been developed to serve as a comprehensive resource for supporting students with additional needs in educational settings. Primarily, it aims to equip teachers and educators with resources, strategies and guidance to effectively address the diverse learning needs, disabilities and challenges encountered by students. Notably, the toolkit does not involve diagnosing students with disabilities or additional needs and only tangentially touches on subject-specific support.

Format: The users, teachers and educators, remain at the core of the toolkit's design. It prioritises simplicity, ensuring ease of understanding, navigation and utilisation. To enhance engagement, the toolkit employs interactive elements and presents practical tips for immediate implementation. Reflection is integrated throughout, offering users a space to contemplate their learning journey, insights gained and areas for growth.

Structure: Each module within the toolkit follows a consistent structure:

- Objectives: Offering an overview and delineating clear learning goals.
- Key Information: Providing essential insights into the topic at hand.
- Top Tips: Furnishing practical guidance for effective implementation.
- Activities or Case Studies: Drawing from real-life scenarios to facilitate understanding, accompanied by reflection questions.
- Classroom Activities and Resources: Offering tangible tools and resources for classroom use.
- Self-Reflection Space: Encouraging personal introspection and identification of areas for improvement.

Modules: The toolkit comprises nine modules, each interlinked but allowing flexibility for users to navigate based on their needs and preferences. The "Whole School Approach" module is intentionally left open for co-creation with the teachers and headteachers during the pilot week. This is to ensure alignment with

the dynamic needs of educational environments as well as establish 'buy-in' from the teachers and headteachers.

Module One: Introduction to holistic learning for students with additional needs
Module Two: Teacher-student relationships
Module Three: Creating an inclusive classroom
Module Four: Identifying and supporting individual student needs
Module Five: Holistic learning
Module Six: Inclusive Assessments
Module Seven: Engaging families and communities
Module Eight: Safeguarding
Module Nine: Whole school approach

Contextual Alignment: Alignment with existing tools and processes in Uganda, such as terminology, referral mechanisms and safeguarding protocols is paramount. The toolkit is meticulously designed to complement the national learning needs identification tool and accompanying resource guide. Collaborative efforts with Crane Viva and CSU ensure seamless integration and sustainability, serving the overarching goal of enhancing educational support for students with additional needs.

NEXT STEPS

Phase 4 of the project involves conducting a second piloting testing round to refine and enhance the toolkit further. This will entail organising another workshop with teachers and headteachers to gather feedback on their experiences and perceptions of using the toolkit. Additionally, we will conduct comprehensive school observations to observe firsthand how teachers integrate the toolkit into their daily practices within educational settings.

These observations will provide valuable insights into the toolkit's usability, effectiveness, and impact on teaching practices and student outcomes. Based on the feedback and observations gathered during this phase, further iterations and refinements will be made to ensure that the toolkit meets the specific needs and contexts of teachers and students.

We are also focused on making sure that the toolkit is designed from the outset with inclusion at the centre of the structure, format and content. There are multiple versions of the toolkit planned to ensure that teachers or any educators with additional needs are able to access and engage fully with the toolkit.

As we further develop the toolkit, we are giving consideration to the sustainability of the tool, for example, by seeking endorsement from key policy-makers.

This iterative process will culminate in the finalisation of the toolkit for integration into existing Schools2030 teacher professional development courses and subsequent scaling to all Schools2030 schools in Uganda.