Schools2030 Global Research Partner Report

Holistic learning for SEND learners in Ugandan primary schools

Open Development and Education

Research Dissemination Brief
August 2024

OpenDevEd

SCHOOLS 2030

PROJECT SUMMARY

This research undertaken by OpenDevEd – in partnership with eKitabu - aimed to build more inclusive practices to support the diversity of learners in Ugandan primary school classrooms. In particular, it focused on enhancing teacher-learner relationships, inclusive assessment practices and holistic learning approaches.

Informed by key research findings, the project aimed to provide resources, strategies, and guidance to help teachers and educators address the requirements of learners who may have diverse or special educational needs. For this, the project team co-created a **teacher toolkit** which is simple to use, engaging, aligned with the Ugandan context and includes real-life examples, activities, and case studies for teachers to utilise in their day-to-day practice. It also closely aligns with key ministry documents and guidance on the identification and support of learners. The toolkit is available in multiple formats having been adapted into an epub and e-braille format for teachers and educators who are visually impaired.

The project worked across four phases:

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

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

Phase 3: Used a co-creation and collaborative approach, working alongside headteachers, teachers, and key stakeholders to produce a pilot toolkit aimed at being utilised in Schools2030 training programmes.

Phase 4: After additional rounds of iterations based on workshops, feedback, observations and interviews, the finalised toolkit (in multiple accessible formats) has been handed over to the Schools2030 Ugandan team for further piloting and integration.

METHODS

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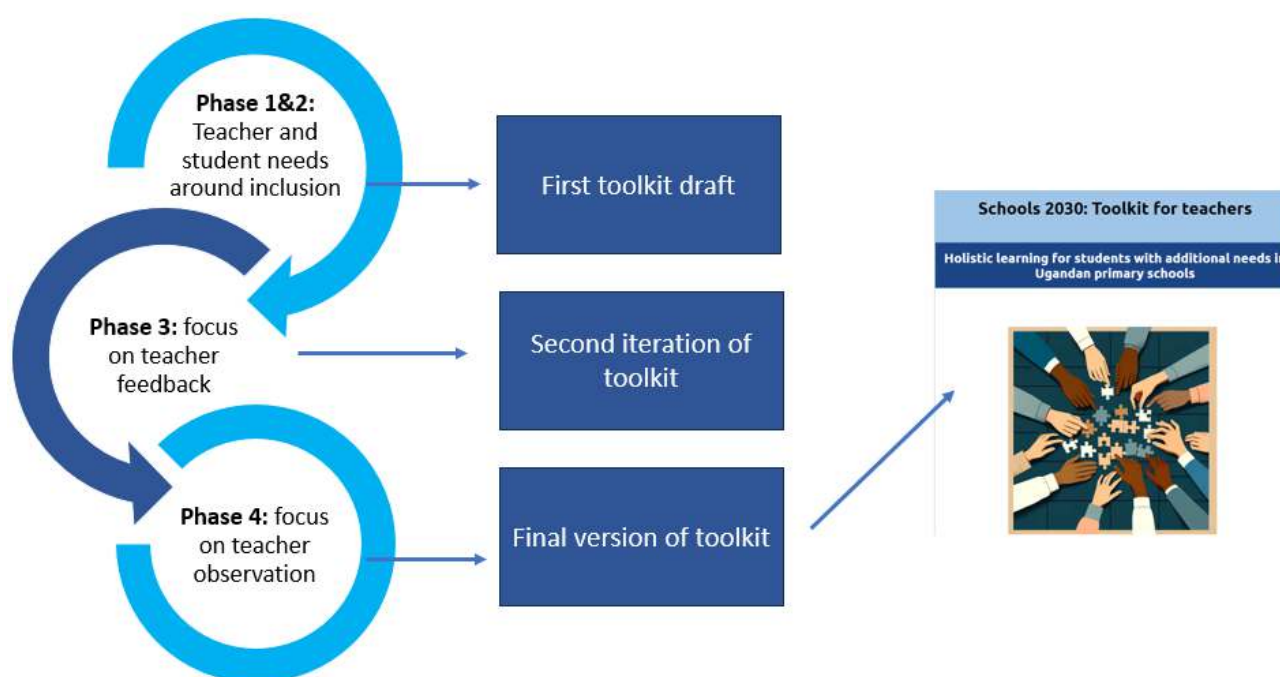

Figure 1: Phases of iteration leading to the final toolkit

Phase 1 & 2 of the project involved collecting data from learners and teachers to understand key needs around inclusion and disability with a focus on assessment and the holistic learning domains selected in Uganda (Literacy, Numeracy, Problem Solving, Empathy and Self-Efficacy). This included testing formative assessment tools with learners 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 learners. This collaborative engagement aimed to foster ownership, buy-in, and a sense of shared responsibility among teachers, headteachers and schools. We also conducted informal school visits to collect further feedback from teachers and headteachers and develop a greater contextual understanding of schools (e.g. physical accommodations for learners and the day-to-day teacher realities).

Phase 4 involved a final workshop with the teachers and headteachers focused on inclusive lesson planning. The following week, the research team conducted classroom observations using an inclusive observation tool. Post-observation, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers to: 1. Encourage lesson reflection; 2. Understand key barriers to inclusive pedagogies in the classroom; 3. Understand how the teachers have been utilising the toolkit so far. Informed by this data, the toolkit was finalised and converted into accessible formats to ensure greater inclusion for teachers with disabilities or additional needs.

Throughout all four phases, we centred inclusion and equity at the heart of the work. For example, we ensured that we utilised inclusive practices at the workshops and built positive and meaningful relationships with the teachers involved in the project.

Figure 2: During pilot 1 workshop - headteachers, teachers and project team members

TOOLKIT OVERVIEW

Purpose & Scope: The [toolkit](#) has been developed to serve as a comprehensive resource for supporting learners 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 learners. Notably, the toolkit does not involve diagnosing learners 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 learners with additional needs

Module Two: Teacher-learner relationships

Module Three: Creating an inclusive classroom

Module Four: Identifying and supporting individual learner 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 Cheshire Services Unit (CSU) have ensured integration with these resources, supporting the sustainability of the toolkit and serving the overarching goal of enhancing educational support for learners with additional needs.

Figure 3: A teacher using the toolkit during a workshop

KEY FINDINGS

Phase 1: Support for learners 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 of 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 learners helped calm the learners, and they were able to comfortably take the assessments without being nervous. For example, talking with the learners and getting to know them before the commencement of the exercise helped the learners feel calm.

4. **Across the Schools2030 domains:** results generally show that girls have higher average scores in all the domains compared to boys, particularly in Literacy, Empathy, and Self-Efficacy.

Total number of learners with disabilities across the four schools = 78
- Visual impairment = 15
- Hearing impairment = 46
- Physical Disability = 2
- Learning Disability = 6
- Other = 9

Domain	Girls	Boys
Numeracy (out of 10)	7.3	7.3
Literacy (out of 10)	7.3	6.5
Problem solving (out of 6)	4.9	4.6
Empathy (out of 16)	12.7	11.1
Self-efficacy (out of 9)	7.3	7.1
TSR (out of 7)	5.8	5.6

Table 1: Average learner scores across Schools2030 holistic domains across four schools

Figure 4: At a Primary School, an enumerator administers one of the non-academic instruments with a student

Phase 2: Teacher training needs around inclusion and disability

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 learners 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 learners' learning needs and determining necessary adaptations.

3. **Identifying learning needs rather than just labels:** It's crucial that the identification process supports learners 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 learners.

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 learners.

Phase 3: First draft toolkit feedback

1. **Teachers were highly engaged:** Teachers were very motivated to use inclusive practices to better support their learners in the workshop to improve and further develop the toolkit.
2. **Teachers were happy to share their own experiences:** Teachers were happy to share their own experiences and tips on how they supported learners with disabilities in the classroom.
3. **Teachers asked for multiple workshops at weekends:** Teachers consistently requested more frequent workshops on inclusion at the weekends.

Toolkit feedback:

Teachers liked....	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, 'learner' or 'child' to 'learner') - A longer space for self-reflection	- More examples - More case studies - More pictures - A module only on assessment and exams

Table 2: First stage teacher feedback on the toolkit

Phase 4: Final data collection - observations and interviews

There is a correlation between teachers whose learners reported a positive relationship with their teacher and the score on inclusive observations: i.e. teachers who have an excellent relationship with their learners use more inclusive pedagogical practices.

Teachers are highly engaged in their learning and professional development around inclusive education. Of the three workshops conducted, two workshops had 100% attendance, and the other workshop had 92% attendance (only one teacher did not attend). The teachers used their toolkits frequently and all utilised the lesson planning template.

There are major contextual differences between schools: Between the four schools, there are significant differences in terms of classroom sizes, headteacher support, and school resources. These differences are likely to be more pronounced when working in schools in more rural areas of the country.

Teacher interviews and observations:

1. **Teacher perceptions of the impact of the toolkit:**

   - The toolkit has provided a structured approach, including the organisation of learners in specific seating plans and/or into groups, which has created a more organised, inclusive and supportive learning environment.
   - Teachers feel the toolkit - in particular the top tips and case studies - has improved their ability to accommodate learners with disabilities through

individualised approaches, such as adapting materials and using non-verbal discipline techniques.
- Teachers feel they are engaging more learners and building confidence in all learners through the toolkit's strategies.
- Teachers found the tools - such as the lesson planning sheet - extremely useful for thinking about the needs of specific learners for each activity.

2. **Key challenges teachers faced implementing more inclusive teacher practices**

- Ensuring full participation of all learners in the classroom for every activity.
- Managing different levels of ability and motivation, and providing individualised attention in large classrooms remain a significant challenge.
- Teachers face practical challenges such as insufficient class time and inadequate financial support for necessary teaching aids (such as braille, co-teaching and sensory items).

3. **Other Reflections:**

- There is a strong emphasis on the need for continuous professional development, with suggestions for more workshops and demonstration videos to share effective teaching practices.
- Teachers are keen to find ways to refer and identify learners with additional needs, and they requested to be trained on the Ministry identification tool.
- Teachers note that parental stigmas are a huge barrier to learner attendance and progress at school.

Image 5 & 6: Teachers participating in peer-to-peer activities during a workshop on lesson planning

RECOMMENDATIONS

Integrate inclusive pedagogies in teacher professional development programmes: Schools2030 has an opportunity to leverage co-created elements from the toolkit and integrate these in existing teacher professional development and Human-Centred Design sessions. Inclusive practice should be a core pillar of teaching at every stage.

Model inclusive practices: Schools2030 should exemplify inclusive practices in every interaction with teachers, particularly during workshops and training sessions. Just as learners have diverse learning styles and needs, so do adults, including teachers who may have disabilities or additional needs. Trainers should actively use techniques from the toolkit—such as fostering positive relationships, incorporating group and peer work, and accommodating the varied needs of teachers—to create an inclusive learning environment. Demonstrating these practices in workshops not only supports the diverse needs of participating teachers but also provides them with a clear, practical example of what inclusive teaching looks like in action. This approach reinforces the toolkit's principles and helps teachers more effectively translate these strategies into their classrooms.

Collaborate with key disability organisations working in schools in Uganda: Schools2030 should continue to collaborate with special education experts and organisations such as Cheshire Services Uganda (CSU) who already provide targeted training on complex disabilities and specialised teaching methods. These organisations will already have a critical awareness of the challenges the schools and teachers face, and where more capacity is needed.

Promote parental and community engagement: Data from teacher interviews and workshops demonstrated the key challenges and stigmas emerging from parents and communities around learners with disabilities and the impact this has on learners' academic progress and attendance at school. Schools2030 should develop and implement community awareness campaigns to reduce the stigma associated with disabilities, thereby encouraging greater parental involvement in their children's education. Schools2030 should support schools in building stronger partnerships with parents, providing them with tools and knowledge to support their children's learning at home.

Provide and enhance resources and support for inclusive education: Increase the availability of teaching aids for teachers, such as braille materials, sensory tools, and low-vision aids, to ensure all learners have access to the resources they need to succeed. Consider whether technology may or may not have use for learners in these settings. Ensure that teachers receive training on how best to use these

in a classroom setting. This also may include making glasses, crutches or hearing aids for children more accessible.

Focus teacher training on improving teacher-learner relationships: Emphasise the importance of strong teacher-learner relationships in professional development programs, providing strategies for building trust and rapport with learners, which has been shown to correlate with more effective inclusive practices.

Continue to prioritise and utilise co-creation methods with teachers: Using co-creation methods is crucial for ensuring that tools are practical and relevant to the daily realities teachers face. By actively involving teachers in the development process, it creates more usable and effective tools but also empowers teachers to tailor solutions to the specific needs of their schools, classrooms and learners.

Build and develop stronger relationships with key stakeholders:

1. Continue to ensure there is alignment and endorsement with all current ministry policies and guidance.

2. Enhance the involvement of examination and assessment stakeholders to endorse more inclusive practices and support during national examinations.

3. Collaborate with healthcare stakeholders to encourage a stronger link between education and health when supporting children with disabilities.

Conduct an impact evaluation or longitudinal study: Suggestion for Schools2030 to conduct an impact evaluation or longitudinal study that specifically measures impact on learners with additional needs or disabilities to understand the impact of upcoming inclusion interventions on these learners.