

# Accessibility of the Curriculum by Learners with Conduct Disorders in Nkayi Rural Primary Schools in Zimbabwe

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## Abstract

The study sought to find out the challenges and opportunities posed by the current curriculum when including learners with conduct disorders in mainstream primary schools in Nkayi District in Zimbabwe. Using a qualitative approach focusing on a case study design data was generated from Fifteen participants (1 school head, 4 mainstream teachers, and 10 learners with conduct disorder) were purposively selected. All participants were interviewed individually. Theme identification methods were used to analyse data. The findings showed that all students showing signs of conduct disorder were mostly taught by regular class teachers in the mainstream. Despite having mainstream teachers and a specialist teacher, learners with conduct disorders could not perform well in their academic work as all mainstream teachers were not conversant with ways of identifying and managing learners with conduct disorders in primary school. It was revealed that there was a lack of proper guidance and counselling and parental involvement in dealing with learners with conduct disorders. Learners with conduct disorders were socially included but were academically excluded because of lack of measures to manage learners with conduct disorders for them to access the academic curriculum in the primary schools. For learners with conduct disorders to fully access the curriculum, this study recommended that teachers should be fully capacitated to manage learners with conduct disorders, reduced teacher-pupil ratio in primary schools, involve parents in the management of learners with conduct disorders and capacitate school guidance and counsellors.

Keywords: curriculum; conduct disorders; mainstream school

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to find out the level of curriculum accessibility by learners with conduct disorders in primary schools in Nkayi, Zimbabwe like many countries of the world adopted an inclusive approach to education. This development has brought about a shift in educating learners with conduct disorders. Many students who show gross signs of conduct disorders learn together with their peers. As more learners with conduct disorders join the mainstream primary schools there is need for curriculum adaptation to psychologically meet their needs. Learners with conduct disorders at primary level may find it difficult to access the curriculum. The United Nations emerged as a major player in assisting nations to develop inclusive settings by passing a number of declarations and among these are the Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Salamanca Statement (1994). The adoption of UNESCO's Salamanca statement and framework for action

on special needs education (UNESCO 1994) has resulted in inclusive education for children with special educational needs in educational settings becoming a primary service option. Each of the above declarations had implications to psychological inclusion. In Zimbabwe, issues concerning the education of learners with conduct disorders were put into perspective with the introduction of Schools Psychological Services and Special Needs Education. The inclusive education developments implied that learners with conduct disorders were to learn together with their peers offered relevant support in the presence of their peers. The curriculum in the mainstream primary schools had to be streamlined to meet the needs of students with special education needs and psychological needs of relatedness, which include learners with conduct disorders. Since signing the 1994 Salamanca statement and framework for action, performance of learners with conduct disorders has not been encouraging in Zimbabwean primary schools. The pass rate at 'Grade 7' level of learners who show signs of conduct disorders in Zimbabwean primary schools is low as compared to their peers (Ncube, Muranda & Tshabalala, 2015). Students who are hearing impaired seem to experience perpetual failure in most subjects offered at secondary level.

Gaining access to the full curriculum by learners with conduct disorders in mainstream primary schools seems complicated in the absence of specialist teachers and those who would understand learners with conduct disorders.

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Most teachers in the Zimbabwean primary schools seem to have little or no knowledge of handling learners with conduct disorders. This study sought to investigate curriculum accessibility by learners with conduct disorders in rural primary schools. Curriculum accessibility by learners with conduct disorders can also be successful through teacher collaboration and parental involvement. Freeze et al., (2014) argues that a specific style of parenting can contribute to the aetiology of conduct disorder and therefore education is better for the learner with conduct disorder when there is greater collaboration between parents and the classroom teacher. At primary level, the curriculum includes coverage of more than eight learning areas that will be examinable towards the end of the nine year programme. Mastery of such subjects demands good receptive and expressive skills but these learners possess disruptive behavioural traits which might be a barrier in accessing school curriculum. It therefore seems that accessibility of the primary school curriculum is rather complicated for learners with conduct disorders. Different teachers use different approaches to manage learners with conduct disorders and their sensitivity to the learners' needs may also differ. This might have negative implications towards curriculum accessibility by learners with conduct disorders. It is thought that this inadequate level of performance has persisted over such a long time that it has come to be accepted by a majority of educators.

Learners with conduct disorders in the regular primary schools seem to find it difficult to adjust to normally expected behaviours and this is supported by Bandari (2020) who points out that the most basic problem faced when learners with conduct disorders are educated together with their peers is that children with conduct disorders are unable to appreciate how their behaviour can hurt others and generally have little guilt or remorse about hurting others. Gudyanga, Nyamande and Wadesango (2013) postulate that children with conduct disorders are included in the mainstream schools and in most cases the teachers in these schools are not alerted of the disorders when the children are admitted into their classes and this is partly because parents may not be aware that their child has a serious problem or they may fear their child may be refused admission into the school. Administrators responsible for admitting children into the schools cannot tell on admission that a child has a serious problem, unless they are informed by the parents or guardians, meaning that the child with behaviour disorders will be placed in the regular classroom alongside other children.

Marshark, Spencer, Adams and Sapere (2011) cited in the National Council for Special Education Policy Paper (2011) note that there are differences emerging between teachers with and without experience in teaching learners with psychological problems. Most if not all teachers in the mainstream primary schools do not possess any relevant experience in teaching learners with conduct disorders. It is against the above view that this study investigated the challenges faced by learners with conduct disorders in accessing the curriculum in primary schools. It seems learners with conduct disorders find it difficult to access the primary school curriculum in the manner peers do. The complications with conduct disorders is that there is no clear place where these can occur although the disorder is characterized as persistent pattern of conduct in which the basic rights of others and major-appropriate social norms or rules are violated. The behavior pattern typically is present in the home, at school, with peers, and in the community (Herbert 1998). Lack of clear context where these behaviours occur could be a factor that makes it difficult to manage learners with conduct disorders for

accessing the curriculum and this distorts their learning there by rendering their inclusion ineffective.

## ***Theoretical Framework***

### ***Reality Theory***

Reality theory is a theory that was formulated by William Glasser (1965) and posits that humans are not born blank slates waiting to be externally motivated by forces in the world around them but rather all humans have five basic needs that we attempt to satisfy through our behavioural choice. Choice theory is the philosophical framework guiding reality therapy and it depends on the inherent components of the individual. Reality Theory is defined as a biological /psychological theory that offers an explanation of human behaviour as well as guidelines to successful relationship building (Corey, 2013). Choice theory asserts that humans need positive relationships (Glasser, 1998). This theory is relevant to this research paper as it deals with present relationships among learners, teachers and their parents. Accordingly, peers, teachers and parents who show respect, trust, acceptance, support, and encouragement on learners with conduct disorders are detrimental on raising their performance in school work thereby promoting curriculum accessibility. Corey (2013) argues that unsupportive attitude can have repercussions for students that may result in low self-esteem, underachievement, and harmful self-concept. Thus encouragement is one of the strongest tools that peers, teachers and parents have to facilitate learners' responsibility. Learners with conduct disorders might have lost trust and love from others because of their actions towards others and this might increase their need for love. The need for love and belonging can be satisfied through teachers, peers and parents' encouragement as well as peer interaction, enhancing concentration, focus, self-control, spontaneity, and confidence in learners.

Reality theory emphasizes achieving and maintaining personal responsibility (Glasser, 1998). According to Corey (2013) Glasser stresses that we are born with five genetically encoded needs that drive us all our lives: survival, or self-preservation; love and belonging; power, or inner control; freedom, or independence; and fun, or enjoyment. Each of us has all five needs, but they vary in strength. For example, we all have a need for love and belonging, but some of us need more love than others. This means that learners with conduct disorders might need more love as they may be shun by others due to their behaviour. In other words reality theory is based on the premise that because we are by nature social creatures we need to both receive and give love. It is also the most difficult need to satisfy because we must have a cooperative person to help us meet it. According to Corey (2013) misbehaviour is indicative that students' needs are not being met by the peers, parent, teacher or the school. In other words, the parent, teacher and the student are accountable for identifying the need that is being frustrated. Once this happens, the student can choose more responsible behaviour that satisfies the need responsibly. Although we may not be aware of our needs, we know that we want to feel better. Reality therapists teach clients choice theory, so clients can identify unmet needs and try to satisfy them. According to the choice theory, almost all behaviour is chosen, and we can only control our own behaviour. We store information inside our minds and build a file of wants, called our quality world, which is at the core of our life. It is our personal world we would like to live in if we could. It is completely based on our wants and needs, but

unlike the needs, which are general, it is very specific. The quality world consists of specific images of people, activities, events, beliefs, possessions, and situations that fulfil our needs (Wubbolding, 2011). Our quality world is like a picture album. We develop an inner picture album of specific wants as well as precise ways to satisfy these wants. We are attempting to behave in a way that gives us the most effective control over our lives. Some pictures may be blurred, and the therapist's role is to help the client clarify them. Pictures exist in priority for most people, yet clients may have difficulty identifying their priorities. Part of the process of reality therapy is assisting clients in prioritizing their wants and uncovering what is most important to them (Wubbolding, 2011).

To promote responsible behaviour, teachers and parents must attempt, either directly or indirectly, to satisfy all five of students' needs. Teachers must satisfy their students' need for love and belonging if they are to convince students that teachers and schools are needs-satisfying sources. Glasser (1998) notes that, "we all need happy, supportive people... It is the job of parents, teachers and employees to be such people. Too many teachers and parents do not realize how much they are needed just to be warm, friendly, and supportive to those they care for, teach and manage. According to Glasser (1998), until students realize that they can satisfy their need for love and belonging in school, classroom management problems may occur because teachers may not be regarded as supportive and caring individuals. Students' performance is a function of both hereditary and environmental dispositions. Within reality therapy, there is much emphasis on a person learning to develop a strong internal locus of control, a belief that one can attain desired results through one's choices, and a strong sense of responsibility for one's behaviour. The main goal of counsellors and teachers is to aid clients in gaining new perspectives and techniques that will help them to manage challenges on their own. The theory emphasises on learners focusing on realistic attainable goals, making choices to change behaviour through self-evaluation and be responsible and know that it is right to have a relationship with a responsible person in order to fulfil one's needs. Being stuck into the past leads individuals gain more irresponsible attitudes. Parents and teachers can assist learners with conduct disorders not get stuck to their past life or reminding them the past circumstances.

### ***Statement of the Problem***

This research sought to answer the following major question:

"How would learners with conduct disorders adapt to the curriculum offered in mainstream primary schools? Regular primary school teachers might be failing to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of learners with conduct disorders".

### ***Research Questions***

1. What are the challenges that inhibit learners with conduct disorders from accessing the primary school curriculum?
2. How can the primary school curriculum be adapted to accommodate learners with conduct disorders?

## **METODE PENELITIAN**

### ***Design***

This was a case study designed to find out the level of curriculum accessibility by learners with conduct disorders in primary schools in Nkayi. The researcher used Tsheli primary school as the participating inclusive school. Since the researcher was interested in finding out themes revolving around the challenges and opportunities situated in the systems, the level of curriculum accessibility by learners with conduct disorders, qualitative methods were used to facilitate the collection of data as a whole.

### ***Sample***

The sample for this study comprised all the 10 learners with conduct disorders students (4 boys and 6 girls) who are in junior grades (Grade 3-7) at Gampinya Primary School. The school was purposefully selected because it has an inclusive system that caters for learners with conduct disorders and the learners without conduct disorders. Five mainstream teachers (2 male and 3 females) into whose classes the learners with conduct disorders were included were conveniently selected into this study. The teacher participants were selected on the assumption that they were aware of the challenges and opportunities of curriculum accessibility by learners with conduct disorders in inclusive education while learners with conduct disorders were selected to represent their own views on curriculum accessibility by learners with conduct disorders in the school systems. The participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity in reporting the case study in order to maintain the integrity of the institution concerned. Informed consent was then sought and given by the parents, school-head, teachers and students. Participants were advised that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time and were promised access to the final research results.

### ***Instruments***

Interviews and focus group discussions were employed. The interviews for the learners with conduct disorders were meant to ascertain whether the learners felt that they had equal opportunity for curriculum accessibility with the other learners without conduct disorders in the same class. The focus group discussions enabled the researcher to find information from the teachers on the levels of curriculum accessibility by the learners with conduct disorders in their classes. The learners' interviews were designed to get information on learners' opinions and perceptions on the levels of curriculum accessibility by the learners with conduct disorders in inclusive classes. The teachers' focus group interviews sought to understand the extent to which the learners with conduct disorders participated in class and in out-of-class activities.

### ***Data Collection Procedure***

Permission to collect data from the schools was sought and obtained from the government through the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. The researcher conducted the interviews and focus group discussions.

## Data Analysis

The data were analysed using theme identification methods. Themes are umbrella constructs which can be identified before, during and after data collection. This means that data analysis and data collection were done simultaneously as advocated by Marshall and Rossman (1989) in Creswell (2009). After reading through all the data to get a general sense of the information and reflecting on its overall meaning, detailed analysis involving coding was done. Theme identification entailed comparing and contrasting material. This method allowed the researcher to examine the teachers', and pupils' points of views.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. What are the challenges that inhibit learners with conduct disorders from accessing the primary school curriculum?

From the data collected, one of the learners with conduct disorders felt that:

"One of the challenges in accessing the curriculum by learners with conduct disorders is prolonged and persistent punishment".

It is believed that punishment for learners with conduct disorders takes most of their time serving punishment whilst others are learning and it restricts them from accessing the school academic curriculum. Gudyanga, Nyamande and Wadesango (2013) postulate that a child with conduct disorders may be expelled from school which would entail committing time to meetings with school personnel about the antisocial behaviours, finding an alternative school and making up for lost time. Thus teachers and peers of the child with conduct disorders may experience significant disruptions of their school activities which disturb ways of managing learners with conduct disorders.

One of the learners with conduct disorders had this to say:

"Accessibility to the primary school curriculum becomes difficult because I have shortage of CALA learning materials and the teacher asks me to go back home when there is nothing at home".

There is shortage of learning resources for learners with conduct disorders especially with this Continuous Assessment Learning Activities (CALA) which has aggravated the situation. The shortage of learning materials might inhibit accessibility to the school curriculum by learners with conduct disorders as this lowers academic performance and might trigger behaviours associated with conduct disorders such as stealing which further hinders accessible learning by others. Shortage of learning materials hinders participation in learning programmes. Lack of educational support in the mainstream like remediation and guidance and counselling make it difficult for learners with conduct disorders to access the curriculum. Doyle and Dye (2002) observed that most teachers in the mainstream feel ill prepared to meet the unique needs of learners with conduct disorders.

Guidance and counselling in schools is done by teachers and most schools do not have rooms for guidance

and counselling and most schools do not have timetables for guidance and counselling as counselling is conducted on the need arise basis (Gudyanga, Nyamande & Wadesango, 2013). Thus curriculum accessibility is a challenge to learners with disorders as the management of learners with conduct disorders through guidance and counselling is not reliably accessible. One of the teachers pointed out that:

"Parents of learners with conduct disorders do not cooperate when called by teachers at school pertaining the learner's behaviour. These learners do not inform their parents when they are needed at school and they lie about responses they get from either the school or parents. This makes it difficult for learners with conduct disorders to access the curriculum".

This is supported by Pfiffner et al. (2005) who argue that excessively aggressive and defiant behaviourally disordered children have interpersonal problems with teachers, peers, parents and significant others. This scenario of communication breakdown and lack of parental involvement has implications to poor curriculum accessibility thereby putting learners with conduct disorders at risk of failure. From the focus group discussion, a teacher raised the point that:

"Learners with conduct disorders come into and leave the mainstream classroom with less content knowledge than their peers".

This automatically has implications to difficulties in accessing the regular curriculum by learners with conduct disorders. One of the learners with conduct disorders pointed out that:

"Most teachers in the mainstream feel ill prepared to meet the unique needs of learners with conduct disorders due to high enrolments and most of the mainstream teachers rarely attend to individual differences of learners. They ignore children with conduct disorders in class because of their inability to deal with their own behaviour".

Negative attitudes of regular teachers because of limited knowledge in assisting learners with conduct disorders are quite rampant in the mainstream schools. Teachers are faced with the demands of larger class sizes, children with less home support, and more substantial problems among students (Vernon, 1999). Adaptation of the broad primary school curriculum is not an easy task considering the demand for good results by education authorities in Zimbabwe. The findings also indicate that most of the female teachers in the primary schools have challenges in dealing with learners with conduct disorders in the classroom.

### 2. How can the primary school curriculum be adapted to accommodate learners with conduct disorders?

The teachers who participated in this research felt that collaboration in teaching the learners with conduct disorders is crucial in enabling access to the primary school curriculum. Collaboration can broadly be defined as the interaction among two or more individuals encompassing a variety of behaviours, including communication, information sharing, coordination, cooperation, problem solving and negotiation (Sibanda and Chimhenga, 2016).

Thus school based collaboration can be defined as joint planning, decision-making and problem solving that may occur in variety of formal or informal group configurations for the purpose of accomplishing a common goal. One of the teachers had this to say:

“School guidance and counsellors can serve as effective collaborators in designing, implementing, and evaluating strategies for managing learners with conduct disorders. Teachers and parents should be a part of a team when working with learners with conduct disorders”.

According to Stinson (2019) the team approach is helpful in two ways: teachers feel supported, which may alleviate some of their job-related stress; and the students will receive consistent treatment from various members of the school system that are involved with them. Team approach is a comprehensive collaborative effort that could assist learners with conduct disorders adapt to the demands of the curriculum so that they easily access the curriculum.

The school administrator had this to say, “to fully benefit from education, learners with conduct disorders, there is need for support from varying expertise who include psychologists, guidance and counsellors, parents, general educators and specialist teachers”.

The varying experts should have specific training, knowledge and skills for identifying and managing learners with conduct disorders in and outside the classroom. One of the learners with conduct disorders pointed out that:

“Parental involvement is also critical in determining positive outcomes for learners with conduct disorders in mainstream environments”.

Smith and Heflin (2001) concur that it is important that teachers collaborate with others in the school system early in the process in order to design and evaluate interventions. Bandari (2020) argues that counsellors should assist families make changes in the family systems as improving communication skills and family interactions. Thus parents should have access to information regarding all education programming and communication options as well as all educational services to their child. Learners with conduct disorders have a range of abilities that require different services and needs that may demand a variety of supports to meet their educational goals. The teachers who participated in this study felt that the students with conduct disorders can benefit academically in inclusive environments when collaborative teaching is properly implemented. Pugach and Wesson (1995) in Stinson (2019) point out that student perceive the different roles of different teachers in collaborative teams and select whom to consult under different situations and for different purposes. For instance, learners with conduct disorders may need to be understood or clarify issues that affect them and they can consult teachers who are free to accommodate and listen to them. It is also thought that the incorporation of specialist teachers as part of the collaborative team enables learners to access the curriculum. Stinson (2019) observed that teachers felt that having a partner with whom to communicate allows for better address of the needs of learners with conduct disorders.

## CONCLUSION RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that learners with conduct disorders in mainstream primary schools are taught by teachers who have no professional qualifications in psychological background and special needs education thereby compromising the quality of education for these learners. The classroom environments are not conducive to the smooth learning of children with conduct disorders restricting them from benefitting from everyday learning. The high teacher student ratio in mainstream primary schools is not conducive for individualised teaching thereby limiting the learners with conduct disorders from accessing the curriculum. In addition the mainstream primary school teachers cannot interact well with learners with conduct disorders thereby restricting the flow of necessary information key to their learning. The parents of learners with conduct disorders are not actively involved in the education and management of their children thereby compromising their education. However it emerged that the primary school teachers closely collaborate with the specialist teacher and guidance and counselling teacher thereby benefitting learners with conduct disorders educationally. This study also concludes that learners with conduct disorders are not fully accessing the primary school curriculum. Furthermore, the failure by primary school teachers to fully manage learners with conduct disorders leaves learners with conduct disorders at a serious disadvantage in terms of accessing the curriculum. Parental involvement and a team approach towards the management of learners with conduct disorders have been advocated for as ways of enhancing accessibility of the curriculum by learners with conduct disorders in primary schools in this study. For learners with conduct disorders to fully access the curriculum, this study recommended that teachers should be fully capacitated to manage learners with conduct disorders, reduced teacher-pupil ratio in primary schools, involve parents in the management of learners with conduct disorders and capacitate school guidance and counsellors.

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