

Review of: "Challenges of Learners with Disabilities in Open Schools in India"

June Gothberg

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Overall importance:

Thank you for inviting me to review this paper. Addressing the needs of children with disabilities in India is of critical importance. I applaud the authors for their work. In the following, I show areas that need improvement for the reader's clarity and understanding. This is given in a spirit of appreciation and hope that the comments improve the paper and reach the eyes of those with the ability to make the needed changes the authors suggest.

Abstract:

This section of the abstract doesn't make sense or add up. Are children with multiple disabilities a subgroup of children with disabilities? Do you mean that out of the 27% who never attended, children with multiple disabilities make up 54%, or just a statistic of a subgroup? It might be useful to share the statistics for other subpopulations if the latter.

"Census 2011 reveals that 46.2 lakhs is the population of children with disability that lies in the age group of 10-19 years. Out of this population, 27% never attended school, and 12% attended school earlier. Also, 54% of children with multiple disabilities never attended any educational institution."

Then you jump straight to dropouts without a connection to the above and never share if CwD are at a higher risk for leaving or at what rate they leave.

"Furthermore, researchers communicated that after the drop out from mainstream schools, most of the learners either leave education altogether or join the open school system. Hence, it becomes imperative to have a strong open education system in the country so that it welcomes and caters the needs of children with disability in the best possible manner that enhances their academic aspirations."

Introduction

The opening needed some context which seems to be provided in the second section. I would suggest using the following information in your opening to help the reader understand how ODL is used for CwD.

“Primarily, open and distance learning setups have intentions to cater for the needs of the learners belonging to marginalised, under-served or not served at all, by the current education system (Tanyanyiwa, V. et.al., 2021). Open schools provide a platform to those who are majorly affected by the social, emotional, physical, psychological, attitudinal, economic and structural circumstances in life (Abdul Ghafar et.al., 2021 and Gnawali, Yagya et.al., 2022). However, how promising the contributions of open schools in India, there are certain challenges which learners do encounter during the course of study (A.M., 2015).”

Figure 1 is appreciated but difficult to read.

Research Questions

Two of your research questions explore UDL. Please add a section to your introduction/literature review to share with the reader what this concept is and the practices used. Then as you move into this section, provide a rationale for why it may be important.

- Would the content designed on Universal Design of Learning be successful for open school learners?
- What is the effectiveness of the content prepared on UDL principles on the understanding of learners with disability?

Research Methodology

You share “This research had a mixed method research paradigm consisting of qualitative and quantitative tools for data gathering and means of data analysis.” Please share more on this. It is difficult for the reader to understand the steps you took for your research and the reasoning for using mixed methods. Also, what was your research paradigm? It sounds like you may have conducted a sequential mixed methods exploratory design from a post-positivist perspective. There are many good authors to help you fill out your methods. A couple of books that might assist in writing this up more thoroughly are (only using links to Amazon for convenience, you can probably find these at your library or interlibrary loan):

- A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research, John Creswell, 2021 <https://amzn.to/3OuYUtY> and
- Mixed Methods Research: A Guide to the Field, Vicki Plano Clark and Natalya Ivankova, 2015 <https://amzn.to/3i753R9>.

Analysis, Findings and Interpretation

In this section, you share some hypotheses. These should be moved up into the Research Questions or Methodology section. Then report out on it here.

You've used mixed methods for this study, please address how you approached this in your analysis and how you integrated your findings.

You presented four research questions but only report out on three.

Recommendations

I'd like to see more on how educators would embed UDL practices, especially in ODL.

Overall, this paper is an important start for addressing the needs of learners with disabilities. I would suggest adding information to further connect your recommendations with existing international type standards. For example, the UDL recommendations from CAST (<https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>) have been studied and used internationally, as have the practices found in the Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 (bit.ly/3VpL4Lw).