

An analysis of plans and legislative influence in psycho-educational assessment for learners with learning disabilities in Brno, Czech Republic

(Scientific paper)

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Abstract: *This research study aimed to analyze the determinants of psycho-educational assessment in particular, psycho-educational assessment plans and legislative influence. In-depth interviews were used to investigate issues and to discover how the psycho-educational assessors, teachers and parents felt about the whole process. Interview data from parents of school-age children with LD who had psycho-educational assessments done within the past one year were used in the current study to find out their experiences with the assessment process. Teachers from elementary and primary schools and psycho-educational assessors were interviewed. This study used descriptive research design and mixed method to collect data from primary and secondary sources. The study applied Critical Disability Theory (CDT) within the paradigm of transformative perspective. ATLAS.ti computer software was used for conceptualization, coding and categorizing of the qualitative data. Findings showed that psycho-educational assessments were done at different times and different levels within the education system. The initial psycho-educational assessments were done for purposes of school entrance at compulsory education or for school postponement. There was substantial variation in both policy and practice across the various PPCC included in this study. This study recommends that the education regulations be explicit to all stakeholders to ensure maximum degree of access to psycho-educational services and inclusion of learners with LD without discrimination.*

Keywords: *learning disability, psycho-educational assessment*

1 Introduction

This study sought to understand the assessment plans, assessment placement practices, legislative influence and challenges facing psycho-educational assessment of learners with LD.

1.1 Significance of the Study

Psycho-education assessment is one of the most extensive and comprehensive ways used to inform educational placement in schools and for career development for learners with special needs. Schools may use the information to develop assessment guidelines for their respective schools. The findings may also be useful to the psycho-education assessors and teachers on how to assess students; they could inform training to improve and enhance the quality of education for learners with LD. The training of teachers on psycho-education assessment is a good proposal but can only be effective if the designers of the training program know what teachers are already doing and what they are not doing well.

Research in this area can inform the design of the training program. For instance, the institution with the Mandate of Curriculum Development and which is responsible for the professional development of teachers may use the results to develop an in-service course on psycho-educational assessment for learners with LD and those with intellectual disabilities. Moreover, the findings from this study add to the existing literature on psycho-education assessment practices. This study provides a different dimension to literature on psycho-education assessment and has the potential to contribute to the development of a system of a more effective and appropriate psycho-educational assessment processes and procedures for learners with LD in Czech Republic. The objectives of the Study were:

1. To examine psycho-educational assessment plans that influence psycho-educational assessments for learners with LD in the Czech education system.
2. To explore educational legislative influence on psycho-educational assessments for learners with LD in Brno City.
3. To borrow good practice in psycho-educational assessment for proper identification and placement of learners with LD in Kenya.

1.2 Review of Related Literature

This chapter presents literature related to this proposed study by focusing on the objectives which are: psycho-educational assessment plans and legislation in psycho-educational assessment and summary.

1.2.1 Psycho-educational Assessment Plans and Learners with LD in the Czech Republic

Psycho-educational assessments are designed to provide greater understanding of a child's cognitive, learning, behavioral or social-emotional difficulties, to make informed treatment decisions. Psycho-educational assessment uses objective, standardized measures to determine the learners' cognitive ability (i.e., intelligence), to evaluate their information processing skills (i.e., memory, attention, graphomotor coordination, processing speed, executive function, phonological processing, etc.) and academic skills. Certain tests will also aid in determining possible behavior, social, emotional, and psychological diagnoses that could interfere with learners' education or relationships. The assessment might lead to a diagnosis or the results may necessitate more testing.

Psycho-educational assessors need to provide concrete and accurate information on learner's abilities to be able to facilitate placement for proper intervention (Tzuriel & Samuels, 2000). The results of the assessment can change a learner's educational future in significant ways, allowing the learner to meet or exceed educational expectations. The report may enable the school to make accommodations during tests and exams, classroom accommodations, access to individual or small-group educational help, the use of assistive technology and software, and modification of the learner's educational program. The specific interventions depend on the learner's profile and are reflected in the learner's educational plans, according to the recommendations found in the psychological report. In addition, the parents get a better idea of how to work with their children at home and what kind of instruction and support they should provide. When a learner's struggles are left unaddressed, the learner may develop dislike for school and this may result in academic delays and low self-esteem.

Moreover, the practitioners should incorporate their skills to prevent blame and misconceptions during feedback sessions with parents and guardians (Scipioni, 2014). The parents have the right to see all of the testing scores and to get a full explanation of all the results, but they may not see the actual testing materials and protocols as they are protected by the publisher's copyrights. While it is helpful to provide parents with hand-outs and the written report generated from the assessment, the verbal information that is conveyed to parents during the feedback sessions and the way it is done have important implications for parents' experiences and subsequent views and opinions about the assessment processes.

Psycho-educational assessment protocol requires that feedback on assessment also be provided in person with the presence of the individuals concerned (American Educational Research Association, 2011). This is imperative since such sessions provide opportunity for interpretation of the written report and other printed sources

that are recommended as deemed to be more reliable forms of a back-up to the recommendations and further information by the assessor. It is critical for the interdisciplinary team to develop and to gain important information about the learner with LD to be able to encourage the learner and the parents to cope with emotional impact of a potential diagnosis and to better understand how to access educational services. Psycho-educational assessment should be focused on the special educational needs of a learner with consideration on a multidisciplinary and holistic approach. The results of the test can shape a learner's education through their entire academic career. Many parents are worried that having a psychological report in their child's file will adversely affect their future. However, in all my years of working with private clients and in school boards, I have never heard of any negative effects of having a psychological assessment done.

In the Czech Republic, the assessment process is carried out either at the PPCC and or at Special Education Centres by trained professionals who include special needs teachers and psychologists. Sometimes psycho-educational assessments are performed both at schools and at the centers depending on the nature and severity of the LD and the underlying factors at the assessment centers (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2010).

Pedagogical Psychological Counselling Centre PPCC in Brno provides services for children from the age of 3 years to the time they finish secondary education. Special educator (educational assessment) and psychologist (psychological assessment) assess each child. However, they have different roles and use different techniques. The assessment centers provide various services which include educational intervention, re-education which includes services for instance, visual and audio perception, methodological leadership, and cooperation with psychologists and special needs teachers, therapy, and prevention, psychological counseling and therapy, special education and social diagnostic (OECD, 2014). When the learners join the tertiary or university education, the institutions have specific centers within to carry out the assessments for educational access and provisions.

Under guidance, using the expertise provided for further educational steps, the centers offer the following educational courses of action. School entrance or postponement, special school or classroom entrance, integration of students with special needs, proposal of individual education plans, conceding of special conditions for students with SLD testing and final examinations, program for children with their parents and conceding of special conditions for early retirement and remunerations for eligible students with SNE.

The recommendations to undergo psycho-educational assessment are given by the class teacher through the school principal in consultation with the parent, the learner and physician or by another person who is in direct contact with the learner who is suspected of having learning disability. Therefore, recommendations for any

form of psycho-educational assessment made should not be done without the approval of the parent.

The psycho-educational assessment of a learner entails a detailed description of individual learner's needs, the way the needs are to be met, the professional contact person as a consultant, the procedures concerning the process of educational needs and its organization including assessment of the pupils school performance, placement practices and additional necessary support for instance personal, technological, teaching materials and special text books (OECD, 2012). These recommendations are embodied into the individual educational plan of the learner with special needs.

Parents are active participants and need to be encouraged to ask questions and express their feelings during the feedback session (Scipioni, 2014). This is important because parents play a great role in decision making about when their child should start school and the placement option for their children. An early start to schooling is becoming very popular among parents. A survey of parents who moved their children to school at the age of four found out that most were happy with their decision (Blake & Flinch, 2000).

According to the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2014) parents must approve the plans for their child with LD. This means that the respective parent(s) or legal guardian can, however, object to the placement decision made by the practitioners. The head of the school also has the obligation to initiate changes in the placement or educational program of the learner with LD whenever the situation of the learner concerning special needs changes.

Moreover, there should be a 'free track' of the learner's progress and response to intervention, from special school into inclusive school and vice versa (OECD, 2012). Determining whether a learner has LD or SLD, like any other disability determination under IDEA, should not be established on a single report, but rather, a range of criteria.

A thorough and quality assessment of a learner suspected to have LD must therefore include but not be limited to a variety of assessment tools, proper legislations, cultural consideration, proper funding of resources and collaboration of all stakeholders, qualified personnel, and appropriate placement recommendations. Psycho-educational assessment must therefore include a solid input from the learner's parents, learners with LD and all the stakeholders (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2014).

Determination should be made in considering the need for equal opportunity and access to education since each learner has the right to be educated with respect to individual needs. This implies that the curriculum and programs must be adapted to meet the needs of each learner and the diversity of their needs. A positive school environment also needs to be accounted for, to ensure an environment with the ability

to offer the learner an opportunity to improve his or her practical skills, personality and behavior. The classroom atmosphere should be founded on friendly relations, positive social interaction and a feeling of security with the participation of all pupils (Riddell et al., 2010), supporting inclusion of learners with learning disabilities.

According to the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2014), the classroom teacher is the one who, for the majority of the day, deals with the special needs of a learner, in collaboration with resource centers and counseling services. The parents too have the responsibility to fulfill their part according to recommendations and to support the school in the implementations of assessment recommendations.

1.2.2 Legislation and Psycho-educational Assessment in the Czech Republic

The federal legislation is established to protect the rights of children and adults with LD. They ensure that all citizens receive needed and appropriate special education services, as well as fair treatment in public schools, postsecondary education settings and the workplace.

The American Psychological Association (APA) emphasizes the fact that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides guidelines on special education practice and related services for children and youth with disabilities from the age of three years through to the age of 21 years. All measures with regards to psycho-educational assessments should be agreed upon in accordance with appropriate psycho-educational assessment legislative provisions. The learner's parents should receive copies of the assessment reports along with full and precise explanations of the assessment results and how the eligibility group reached its determination.

It was not until 1975 when the Education for All EFA Act was passed to become law. EFA goals assure each learner a free and appropriate education which is tailored to meet the individual needs within the least restrictive environment. Moreover, it guarantees the learner and the parents or guardians the right to timely assessments, access to the meetings, progress documents and planning of individualized education program. Disability Rights Oregon (2012) specifies that children with special needs in education for instance SLD are eligible for the services. The law provides several ways to address disputes between schools and parents which include mediation, due process hearings and written complaints to the state.

According to an independent report prepared by the European Commission (2010), systems may be used to plan additional support and reasonable adjustments but may also be used to stigmatize and segregate. The meaning and use of labels may change over time. This policy implies that countries should examine carefully the cultural meanings attached to the labels they use and their practical implications in terms of education and employment outcomes. In terms of legislative definitions, there are no absolute central definitions and understanding of the position of people

with disabilities. The issues with definition are one of the major factors that make it very difficult to make international comparisons on special education needs policies and assessment and placement practices. Some countries use psycho-educational assessment for identification of learners with disabilities mainly to initiate special school placement. European Commission (2010) indicates that countries within European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (EADSNE) have tried to demonstrate the diversity but have not attempted to recommend any system of classification that is standardized.

The legislations relating to LD are often characterized, to address issues of education at the levels of compulsory or basic education with little emphasis on tertiary and life after school. In contradiction to this, according to the Hungarian Law on Public Education (1993) and the Government Decree 79/2006 on implementing the Higher Education Act, dyslexia-specific official regulation applies to various levels of educational provision including primary, secondary, higher education and even adult training, even though there are no laws that address specifically issues related to adults with dyslexia.

The Education Act No. 29 of 1984 amended as No. 561 (2004) aims at integrating children with disabilities in general schools whenever possible. Where evaluation confirms that the behavior of a learner with LD impedes integration, referrals are made to different settings depending on the type, nature and severity of the condition. Such recommendations may lead to placement in special schools (known as primary or practical schools) for learners with disabilities.

Governmental Educational Ordinances of 1992, 1994, 1998 provide for Individual Education Plans, Special Education Centres, assistive technologies and other support that are provided by the state to address the barriers to education. Learners with LD are particularly likely to leave school with few or no qualifications. Therefore, the national and local policy makers and schools are in the process of putting in effort to ensure that learners with LD leave school with the considerable educational qualifications for their lives to be more meaningful in involvement and inclusion within the society after schooling.

According to EADSNE (2010), trends in attainment should be monitored over time, with targets set for improvements. Learners with profound LD often need the same level of support for long periods of time while learners with mild learning disabilities tend to require a variable level and type of support. Organizations for and by persons with disabilities have for a long-time united effort to challenge the personal tragedy discourse, campaigning for a new understanding of disability as socially constructed and created, rather than the inevitable outcome of impairment.

Making sure that there is equal access to education, training and lifelong learning has been a fundamental focus for the struggle for human rights and equal educational opportunities. Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with

Disabilities (2014) emphasizes the importance of inclusive education as a means of enabling people with disabilities appropriate and effective participation in the society in general.

Article 24 stipulates that states have a collective responsibility to ensure the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 however the participation is only meaningful with provision of reasonable accommodations and appropriate support tailored to individual learner's needs. The solid mandate of the EU and member countries to improve the social and economic situation of people with disabilities involves the aspiration of creating a barrier-free environment for learning to take place and to achieve their educational goals and expectations (European Commission, 2010).

The development and implementation of inclusive approaches within education, training and employment support systems within Europe and other parts of the developed world is also mired with issues of disproportionalities in psycho-educational assessment of learners with LD in relation to gender, social background, and ethnicity. According to the European Commission (2010) the discourse of inclusion is espoused by all European countries; however, the over-representation of socially marginalized groups within special education raises questions about whether this provision is promoting or undermining social inclusion.

The terminologies special educational needs, re-education, integration and dys-classes are more realized at school level, while the term disability and disadvantaged are common among individuals at a post-school level, reflecting the different discourses which are deployed at different life stages. The dominance of the special educational needs discourse at school level reflects the power wielded by professionals in identifying difficulties and allocating resources, and the discourse of disability as informed by a rights discourse (Riddell & Weedon, 2009).

Statistics on the prevalence of children with special needs reveal different assessment practices that often depend on local decision making within the specific EU member countries (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2014). All EU member countries have their own categorization system of children with special needs in education; hence, international comparison becomes a great challenge when looking at identification policies and assessment procedures, as well as placement practices.

Special educational needs research has tended to be informed by psychology rather than sociology, hence, there is very limited research literature on social class to special educational needs. There is a continuous attention to disability social forces (Riddell et al., 2010), however, professionals have not readily embraced the efforts made to introduce a stronger rights discourse into education. Policy and practice lay more emphasis on how to solve individual learner's educational challenges, rather than identify and change the factors which cause disabilities that hinder learning in the first place.

The European social policy documents, such as the EU Social Agenda (2005–2010) and the Strategy for Social Inclusion (2004), provides for human rights in relation to social policy. The main objective is to diminish discrimination and inequality throughout Europe. The 2010-2020 Strategy in the European Commission (2010) is one of the most recent policy documents, formulated in the advent of the economic crisis. It particularly aims to ensure sustainable and inclusive development by making sure that equity and efficiency are realized. Specifically, the commission indicates the fields of education and training as one of the eight pillars for implementation.

1.2.3 Assessment of Learners with LD in Kenya and Other Parts of Africa

Most African governments' commitment to provide education to learners with SNE began in the 1970s. While countries within the advanced economies have gone beyond categorical provisions to full inclusion, most countries in Africa are still grappling with the problem of making provisions for psycho-educational assessment of learners with LD.

Psycho-educational assessment in Africa remains a challenge to many of its nations. Many African countries have shown theoretical interest in the assessments by formulating policies around psycho-educational assessment to ensure access to funding the education of learners with SNE showing the desire to give concrete meaning to the idea of equalizing educational opportunities for all children. Dissatisfaction with the progress towards SNE has caused demands for more radical changes in many African countries according to (MacDonald & Butera, 2010).

Financing psycho-educational assessment remains one of the core challenges facing many countries in Africa. Most of the governments depend upon donor support, which more often than not, come with strings attached (MacDonald & Butera, 2010). These governments are often financially strained due to a number of factors ranging from political and economic instability to governance. Thus, they are not able to support sustainable implementation of education for all, including the psycho-educational assessment. Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Nigeria, Rwanda are among other African countries that continue to face a number of challenges in psycho-educational assessment. These challenges are mainly associated with lack of human resources, equipment and facilities (physical resources) (UNESCO, 2005). The root cause of all these challenges is lack of adequate financial resources.

In Kenya, psycho-educational assessments are carried out at the Educational Assessment and Resource Centres (EARCs) established on 1st September, 1984, by the government of Kenya. At first the government set up 17 (EARCs) as a national project funded by the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA). Later in 1987, an agreement was signed between the Government of Kenya and the Government of Denmark extending the EARCs project. As a result of this agreement, each of the 41 districts in Kenya established its own EARC in 1988. By 1991,

an additional 250 sub-centres had been established. The EARC's were set up to provide support to children with special needs and disabilities. Due to the success of the EARC's programme, expansion of provision has taken place to a level where currently, every sub-county in Kenya either has an EARC or can access the services provided by an EARC.

The total number of operational EARC's is currently 200. At the sub-county level, EARC's are directly line managed by the District Education Officer (DEO). The EARC's are led and managed by a coordinating assessment teacher assisted by assessment teachers who are trained in different disciplines of special educational needs and disability. These teachers and other professionals form the assessment team. The main objective of the EARC's is to ensure the early identification, assessment, intervention and placement of learners with a disability in an appropriate education or training programme. The assessment of learners involves several resource persons and professionals including referrals to a doctor, nurse, clinician, counsellor, physiotherapist, vision therapist, and special needs education teacher in the school or at the EARC, regular teacher, parents, audiologist and any other relevant professional. The Educational Assessment and Resource Centres consists of a co-ordinator and teachers trained in special needs education who work together and liaise with other professional staff to support learners with SNE.

Despite the Kenya's government efforts towards the realization of success in psycho-educational assessment by setting up EARC's and the funding from (DANIDA), it continues to experience a number of challenges. Most of the screening tools and equipment used in the EARC's are for children with visual impairment, hearing impairment, intellectual impairment and physical disabilities, which are inadequate, and need revision, updating and validation. There are no diagnostic tools for assessing specific cases such as learning disabilities at the EARC's. Hence, most learners with LD end up being misdiagnosed and given an inappropriate placement (MOEST 2003). Some parents opt to go to private and independent assessors; however, they are very expensive due to the limited numbers of qualified assessors and expensive appropriate assessment tools.

Other challenges facing the government in providing special needs education include identifying and rehabilitating all those with special needs, increasing budgetary support for special education, training more teachers, providing more resources and initiating integration programmes for learners with SNE in regular schools (UNESCO, 2005). Because of the challenges facing psycho-educational assessment, a lot remains to be done if learners with LD are to be catered for. Teachers still need practical skills to assess and manage LD and the training of teachers in assessments is more theoretical than practical.

There is also the challenge of collaboration, especially parental involvement in the assessment process, as most parents do not have the awareness of LD and the

assessment processes and procedures. To close the legal framework gap, the Persons with Disabilities Act 2003 was introduced, which, however, does not mention anything about psycho-educational assessment of learners with disabilities.

1.3 Research Design

This study used descriptive survey design. Participants answered questions which were administered in the form of interviews and questionnaires. This enabled the researcher to describe the responses given and to make observations and gain valuable information. Mixed method was used in which both qualitative and quantitative approaches were applied. Critical Disability Theory (CDT), which guided this study has its own methodology, “ideology critique and critical ethnography” (Creswell & Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2009) therefore suggest mixed methods in the approach of a critical paradigm approach. Mertens (2007), states that mixed methods allow dialogue leaned towards improving social justice hence enriching quantitative data collection process. Mixed methods were also used in the assumption that the researcher, by understanding the social and education world, would be able to collect evidence rich data depending on theoretical the orientation of the study. A study using mixed methods involves not only collecting data through interviews but intentional collection of quantitative and qualitative data for the success of the study (Pasick et al., 2009). This study used mixed method to ensure triangulation, using both primary and secondary data sources to examine the same factors as shown in the earlier publication 2020 – Volume 1; Number 16 of this journal publication.

1.4 Target Population

The participants of the study included teachers in pre-schools and elementary/primary school education (Basic Education), psycho-educational assessment practitioners at the Pedagogical and Psychological Counselling Centres, and parents of learners with LD. These respondents were important in the current study because they were major stakeholders in the assessment whose roles were of great importance in psycho-educational assessment of learners with LD.

1.5 Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was used to select teachers and PPCC assessors who had worked with learners with LD for the past three years hence had good information and parents of learners with LD whose children had been assessed in the past 12 months. Sampling of definite cases was reached based on the study purpose. Purposive sampling method (also known as subjective sampling, judgment or selective is a non-probability sampling method and occurs when Elements selected for the sample are chosen by the judgment of the researcher. Purposive sampling according to Mason

(2010) is done in consideration of the total population. Mason adds that to obtain purposive sample being the theoretical sample, selecting participants according to the needs of the study should be done. Researchers often believe that they can obtain a representative sample by using a sound judgment, which will result in proper representation of a population.

1.6 Sampling Size

Purposive sampling was used in this study to select a representative sample that could bring accurate results. The researcher purposefully sampled psycho-educational assessment stakeholders (service providers and parents) and stratified this purposeful sampled by practice settings (pre-primary schools, elementary or primary schools and PPCCs). Hence, 14 pre-primary schools, 7 primary schools and 3 PPCCs that cater for learners with LD were sampled. A stratified purposeful sampling approach lent credibility to this research study since enough information was known to identify characteristics that could influence how the assessment for learners with LD was manifested.

The interviews involved 40 participants from 8 pre-primary schools, 7 primary schools and 3 PPCCs that consented to the request from the contacts sent to the sampled institutions and parents; hence, the group met the homogeneous group criteria. Participants in this study were service providers and parents of learners with LD and were drawn from the larger sample of participants. They were selected from the larger sample because they met the same criteria, in this case, playing a specific role in the psycho-educational assessment of learners with LD as parents, teachers and assessors. Stratified sampling was used to get a sample representation of the total population; this was random within target groups since there were specific elementary schools and PPCC to investigate. Guest, Bunce, & Johnson (2006) states that twelve and above interviews of a homogenous group is enough for saturation.

Three of the five PPCCs in Brno with different personnel participated in the current study. The personnel in the centers included special needs educators and psychologists, guidance and counseling professionals and social workers; however, for the sake of the current research the pedagogical assessors were interviewed. Brno City has about 137 pre-schools and number of teachers in the pre-schools is 987. There are 66 primary schools with 2268 teachers. The total number of children in pre-schools and primary schools is 43084.

1.7 Data Analysis

ATLAS.ti was used for coding and analyzing qualitative data. The software facilitated quick segmentation, annotation and categorization of the documents without fragmenting the original documents.

2 Findings

2.1 General Information to Include the Return Rate and Any Research Problems

Teachers interviewed included male and female. It was not possible to interview equal number of male and female teachers from the participating schools since there were significantly fewer male who were directly involved than female teachers.

A total of 15 schools from across Brno (8 pre-schools and 7 primary schools) and 3 PPCCs were visited for the interviews with the teachers. Parents from 12 schools were interviewed (six parents from pre-school and six from primary schools). From the institutions, 20 teacher (8 pre-school and 12 primary school teachers) and 8 PPCC assessors were interviewed.

2.1.1 Teachers Age, Education and Experience

Twenty teachers were interviewed, of whom eight were pre-school teachers and 12 were primary school teachers. All the teachers in the study held a wealth of experience, with 90% of them having experience of more than 5 years. 60% of teachers' age ranged between 30 and 40 years which forms most teachers. 30% teachers had Bachelor level of education from the universities, 60% with Masters in pedagogical studies showing most teachers had higher level of education, however only 40% of teachers had training in special needs education (see Table 1).

Table 1: *Teachers Age, Education and Experience*

Respondent Teachers													
School	N	G	No. of Resp	Age			Level of Education			Experience			
				20-30	30-40	40-50	B. Ed	M. Ed	Sp. Ed	0-5	6-10	11-15	15 <
Pre-School	8	M	2	0	2	0	1	1	1	0	2	0	0
		F	6	1	3	2	2	4	3	1	3	1	1
Total			8	1	5	2	3	5	4	1	5	1	1
Primary	7	M	4	0	3	1	1	3	0	0	3	1	0
		F	8	2	4	2	3	5	4	1	4	1	2
Total			12	2	7	3	3	7	4	1	7	2	2
G total			20	3	12	5	6	12	8	2	12	3	3

2.1.2 Psycho-educational Assessors' Age, Education and Experience

Eight psycho-education assessors from the Pedagogical-psychological and counseling center participated in the interviews, of whom six were male special educators and two female psychologists. The majority of the assessors ages range between 40 and

50 years. Six assessors out of eight of those, 80% had more than 10 years of experience in assessing learners with LD. Moreover 80% had Masters and above of training in assessment (see Table 2).

Table 2: Psycho-educational Assessors' Age, Education and Experience

Respondents Assessors										
Gender	No. of Resp	Age		Level of Ed			Experience			
		30–40	40–50	B. ED	M. ED	Doc	1–5	6–10	11–15	15 <
Male	6	2	4	2	2	2	0	2	0	4
Female	2	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	1	1
Total	8	3	5	2	4	2		2	1	5

2.1.3 Parents, Age, Education and Employment

A total of 12 parents; 3 fathers and 9 mothers provided information about their children's psycho-educational assessment, which had been conducted within the last 12 months prior to the interview with the fathers at 25% and mothers making 75% of the parent respondents. The parents interviewed had tertiary education and all had full-time employment.

Table 3: Parents Age and Education

Respondents								
		No. of Resp	Age		Level of Ed		Employment	
			30–40	40–50	Basic	Tertiary	Part-time	Full-time
Parents	M	3	0	3	0	3	0	3
	F	9	6	3	0	9	0	9
Total		12	6	6	0	12	0	12

2.2 Psycho-educational Assessment Plans for Assessing Learners with LD in the Czech Republic Education System

The first task was to examine psycho-educational assessments plans for learners with LD within the Czech Republic Education System. Annual reports by the Ministry of Education on primary schools were studied, interviews with teachers in the primary schools were administered and the White paper – National Program for the development of Education the Czech – Government strategy in Education was analyzed.

2.2.1 Education System and Student Age

Findings showed that psycho-educational assessments were done at different times and different levels within the education system. The initial psycho-educational as-

assessments were for school entrance at compulsory education or postponement. When proper intervention model is implemented, schools can gain more confidence in terms of their educational service provision as appropriate to all students while ensuring early identification of students with SNE.

'We carry out psycho-educational assessment at different times and depending on the learner's level, depending on the parents or teachers request, for reasons associated with government funding, placement reasons or for entry or postponement of schooling, the education system is structured in that manner that we can conduct assessments as requested'. A psycho-educational assessor explained.

The findings also indicated psycho-educational assessment for learners with LD done at a later age when the students were to join grade two level of education at 8 years. School referred students whom were already within the education system for psycho-educations assessment when they suspect LD. The recommendations from the PPCC determined the school placement for the learners.

2.2.2 Preferred Assessment Tools

Assessment tools commonly used and preferred by the assessors at the centers are the Woodcock-Johnson Tests and the Yale Children's Inventory. Psycho-Educational Assessor

'There is a scale for children, for instance the Woodcock-Johnson Tests for Identifying Students with Special Needs new edition, Yale Children's Inventory (YCI); to evaluate students with ADHD and LD. These two are the most commonly used and most preferred and there are lots of other further tests in which we may choose to use based on what we want to assess. So, in the case of LD there are also some standardized tests and this PPCC, this year completed a specific European Union project which was focused on the testing battery which is used for children from pre-school age till 4th grade and it is a diagnostic tool which majorly focuses on LD'. PEA03 explained.

The tests have been widely praised by leading figures in the psycho-educational assessment arena as a cleverly-produced mechanism for the measurement of cognitive abilities. Considering that the Woodcock Johnson Tests of Achievement are already in their third edition, this therefore means they are being well used by teachers across the USA and other parts of the world, however, there is still demand for vigorous improvement.

'We have to understand validity and reliability to be able to locate and interpret relevant information. We also must understand the effect of reliability in limiting interpretation of scores and how validity must be interpreted in reference to specific use of assessment batteries'. Psycho-Educational Assessor PEA01 explained.

All the validity data of the Woodcock-Johnson Battery appears to be somewhat questionable (Reynolds et al., 2006). The test is designed to assess the upper levels of knowledge and skills of the test taker using both power and speed to obtain a large amount of information in a short period of time. It becomes questionable to explore issues that lie at the heart of human development, for instance, growth, advancement, positive change, achievement, and standards for improved performance and the learning experience.

2.2.3 Parental Responsibility

Findings showed that parents had the responsibility to decide to take their children to the recommended placement option or to a different school placement. Whereas parents were a key stakeholder in the assessment process, some parents were likely to make a wrong placement decision if they went against the recommendations given by the assessors. According to the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2014) parents must approve the placement of the child into special education and or placement alternatives into any of the Special Needs Education models. This brought a challenge to the schools since the teachers had to create adjustments to meet students' needs where the resources were sometimes not available. The teachers felt that parents did not want to take responsibility to meet the academic requirements in fulfilling the recommendations by the assessors.

'If your child has problems with sight, or vision, and he or she does not see the writings from the writing board, you buy him or her the glasses, and if he or she breaks them you buy him or her new, and in this rare moment when your child has dyslexia you just change the system of picking the syllables, using the words and working with the words because he or she is unable to use the them in this particular situation'. Teacher TR07 explained.

Psycho-educational assessment must therefore include a solid input from the learner's parents, learners with LD and all the stakeholders (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2014).

2.2.4 Professionals in LD Diagnosis

There were wide variations across PPCC regarding the range of the professionals involved in the diagnosis of LD. The findings showed that the plans were easily influenced by forces and interests from outside the assessment guidelines. Some reports from assessors did not accurately portray the reality about the learner's educational needs but of other parties especially the parents.

'I really remember a particular mother of a child who really wanted her child to be assessed with specific learning difficulties because their child had not been successful by (sic) schoolwork'. Teacher TR12 explained.

Grigorenko (2009) emphasizes that when trained professionals are adequately staffed, they identify and intervene early enough in the educational process, thereby eliminating academic gaps among students.

2.3 Legislation Influence on Psycho-educational Assessment of Learners with LD

2.3.1 Policy on categorization of LD

There was substantial variation in both policy and practice across the various PPCC included in this study. The policies were not elaborate on categorization. Variation also occurred across school and centers within Brno terminology and categorization of disabilities and the international provisions in defining LD.

In the Czech Republic Act (2005) the term *medical disadvantage* is used for what is a CNC B and at the same time what appears in the Czech educational documents as medical disadvantage is translated as LD. It was convenient to use the expression LD, instead of verbatim translation of what belongs in the Czech education system under CNC B. This was because the expression medical disadvantage was used also for adults, beyond education, for a different situation, definition of and recognition of a handicap and disability. LD was a continuously discussed issue for which there was no straightforward solution. The attempts to define LD usually depend on the purpose of the definition thereby creating an incomplete image of the terminology issue (Country background report, Czech Republic 2013). The legislation provisions targeted significantly, severe and profound disabilities and could be a compromise to learners with LD. For a learner with LD to receive accommodations within the classroom, assessments were carried out to specifically point out disability.

'He was not able to sit for the same exam as the rest of the peers in the class because he wouldn't score anything from it and the teacher wouldn't give him another test because she was not allowed to do that without an assessment to state that. Once the assessors write on the report that the child had learning disability it's difficult for teachers too because of low expectation from the labeling. She thought my son lacked some skills and this was making learning difficult for him...' Parent PR03 explained her experience with such restrictions.

Legislation which accounts the LD through appropriate measures to eliminate the challenges should be put in place to enable the learner with LD equal opportunity to participate (Shima & Rodrigues, 2009).

The findings also showed that all professional respondents in the current study acknowledged there was medicalization of disabilities in the Czech Republic.

'We are using a definition which is because LD is described as partial destruction in structural abilities of the child so the way from which we are working based on my many years of practice and experience on assessments. I think that the definition, of (sic) which we are working, really has medical bearing how it is. I believe that the abilities are somewhat partial difficulties or partial development, it is the way in which students' function'. Teacher TR02 explained.

The attempts to define the terms depend on the purpose of the definition, thereby creating an incomplete image of the terminology issue. Labeling a learner can be extremely perilous and may lead to social segregation and identity destruction (Shima & Rodrigues, 2009). Some labels may generally culminate to social stigmatization, which diminishes future life opportunities while others may lower the self-esteem and create negative perceptions of students with LD. They can actively be a creation of schools and pursued by parents for example the use of the term 'dysclass' for learners with dyslexia.

2.3.2 Policy on Schooling Onset

Parents strongly showed that schooling should start at later years;

'I think that a child's future academic success is dependent on readiness and successful kindergarten experience. But it can be a difficult effort because when the child goes to school there are many requirements on the homework and many things as a parent. Children enter kindergarten with widely varying skills, knowledge, and levels of preparedness but they level up well when they start schooling early'. Parent PR05 explained.

'I know that in every school teacher (sic) think that it isn't a good idea to postpone the start of schooling, but we requested for it to allow us time to bond with our child because we were going to be busy in the future. Most parent were happy with their decision to postpone schooling'. Parent PR08 explained further.

A majority of parents may need to postpone schooling to have more time with the children as this is critical aspect of child development (Blake & Flinch, 2000). However, most teachers felt that there was a problem with postponing the school year and this caused inequality and reduced educational outcomes. Teachers in the preschool preferred no postponing to the time of starting schooling even though some teachers preferred postponing especially teachers in the primary schools and for teachers this was a problem at the psycho-educational centers.

'Another case of difficulty with psychological educational assessment centres relates to postponing of compulsory education because sometimes it can happen that the parent is ... you know... Just really begging the psychological education assessors so much that they are writing the recommendation that their child should have the postponing of the education itself. So sometimes it can happen that parents want to postpone the compulsory education and they are really begging, begging and begging till the end of the psycho-educational assessment till they decide to write the recommendations, oh your child should stay home for one year longer.' I really remember a particular mother of a child who really wanted her child to be assessed with specific learning difficulties because their child had not been successful by school work... Teacher TR10 explained.

'Many parents take their children to PPCC for assessment, they then insist for postponement of schooling and this challenges the learner's ability when they join school as their peers will always be ahead under normal circumstances'. Teacher TR04 added.

The Centre for International Cooperation in Education (2014) indicates that the first stage (internationally recognized as ISCED 1) covers the first five years of formal education (starting at 6 years of age and could be postponed to 7 years of age). There is value of an extended period of playful learning before the start of formal schooling. Teachers felt that an early start to school empowered learners to be powerful learners and problem-solvers.

2.3.3 Placement Policy

The findings showed that teachers felt that some assessors did not necessarily follow legislation on placement when making recommendations on placement options for learners with LD. The teachers reported that some of the recommendations did not elaborate or depict the needs of specific learners with LD even though there were some set standard procedures for report writings for all learners diagnosed with LD.

'Every child who comes here we must have a confirmation from the parents, so they have to fulfill the agreement concerning providing services and the using of the private data, so it is the information agreement or confirmation that the parents agree with the assessment. And then the client is also added into the evidence of this psycho-educational centre which list part of the activity which shows that the child came into this psycho-education centre has to visit the entry office and then in that office he/she has to give the evidence (sic)'. Teacher TR14 reported.

In addition, Teacher TR16 commented on the recommendations from the PPCC, *“These recommendations are also still more or less the same. It seems that they are not preparing them for the individual child. It seems they are just the same.”*

Victoria Schmidt and Jo Daugherty Bailey (2014) in their Case of Path Dependency study emphasize that appropriate and effective psycho-educational assessment needs to be provided to ensure factors that contribute to the success of the PPCC can be continued for institutions to achieve successful assessment domains. Through this, legislation on placement options should be student-centered, and the recommendations must depict the needs of specific learner to be able to provide appropriate intervention. The findings also indicated some denial form of negative attitude towards special schools and dysclasses. Parent PR04 stated.

‘I don’t think there are proper instructions in classes for students with the condition. I think it’s too simple work they are given, and my son would easily start losing touch with reality about life. He may think he is different from what is true about the whole society. I don’t want that for him. He may stop having interest and to work hard in his education’.

This reflects a deep-rooted reaction; usually a temporary stage in the process of acceptance of a child’s LD, but it could be persistent and could reflect justification, for example in protecting the child from labeling and negative stereotyping.

‘I never expected any damaging news. The only part I did not agree with was the group integration. You see..... today my son is not separated but he is doing well. I believe with time he will adjust and will not require even the teacher assistant’. Parent PR06 highlighted.

The denial of some of the parents as to the seriousness of the disability may place the child at risk for inappropriate or inadequate treatment or intervention. European social policy documents, such as the EU Social Agenda (2005-2010) and the Strategy for Social Inclusion (2004), provides for human rights in relation to social policy. The main objective is to eliminate discrimination and inequality throughout Europe. The parents through legislative provisions had the upper hand in determining or making the decision on the educational destiny or avenues. They could decide not to follow the learner’s placement option at any given point.

Teachers felt that the parents who were in denial of the conditions of their children were seeking means to justify their own interests to evade the stigma of disability hence insisting on regular schools without necessarily taking into consideration the needs of the children.

2.4 Good practice transferable to Kenyan context for proper identification and placement of learners with LD

In 2016, the Czech Republic implemented major amendments to the Education Act of 2015 (Act No. 82/2015 Coll.), which significantly modified the rules for education, especially regarding inclusion. These subsidiary regulations included the Decree No. 27/2016 Coll., on the education of student with special educational needs (SEN). The amendment removed the unreasonably strict definition of SEN, which took the form of a list of specific types of disabilities; an approach that significantly restricted the support measures available to students who truly needed them.

It was evident that there were clear assessment policies and a lot of effort had been made to ensure the implementation of the assessment processes in the Czech Republic. The School Act reinforced the trend towards the inclusion of students with LD in mainstream schools. It recognizes that students with SEN should attend their local school, unless their parents choose another school. Parents have a crucial role in making decisions about their children's education and the parental involvement in psycho-educational assessment is significant as there is proper awareness on the assessment process.

Findings showed that in the Czech Republic the in-service teacher training, counselling and guidance system has an important role in developing inclusive education as they all share important role in psycho-educational assessment for learners with LD. Multi-disciplinary teams in pedagogical and psychological counselling centres provide counselling and guidance support. These teams consist of psychologists, special education teachers, speech therapists and social workers. They co-operate with professionals from other sectors, such as medical doctors and family/ students social care professionals in the area. Close co-operation with parents and class teachers is essential.

The Education Act of the Czech Republic codifies the teaching of pupils with special needs through additional provisions and support measures that may be described in each student individual educational plan. The support measures include, for example: specific assessment arrangements.

The assessment centres PPC in the Czech Republic are well equipped for proper assessment even though the numbers of students needing the services are high hence the need for more resources including assessment tools and human resources. The assessment practitioners are highly trained to provide the assessment processes.

3 Conclusion

The main determinants of the psycho-educational assessment of LD included a high level of parental involvement in the assessments of their children. Community back-

ground had an influence on the psycho-educational assessment process and placement option with more students diagnosed with LD from the Roma Community.

The policies needed to be clearer to ensure effective psycho-educational assessment process. The time taken in carrying out the assessment were also a challenge considering the number of students requiring the assessment services. There was substantial variation in both policy and practice across the various PPCC. There were plans for assessing learners with LD. Czech Education System provided for assessment of learners at different educational levels and times.

4 Recommendations

The following are the recommendations of the current study.

4.1 Funding Education

The Ministry of Education and Sports should keenly monitor all its departments in order to realize the obligation of enabling students with LD to acquire appropriate and effective psycho-educational assessments. This involves funding assessment needs such as resources for instance a variety of research-based assessment tools for use by the psycho-educational assessment assessors, recruitment of more psycho-educational assessment experts and teacher assistants at school. Moreover, the remuneration of the teachers dealing with learners with SNE in general and including the assistant teachers should be reviewed.

The Government should increase the education budget for provision of better educational programs and services. There should be an equal distribution of funds to learners with different types of disabilities based on accommodation of the needs of individual learners ensuring that each student irrespective of type of disability has fair access to education. Proper adequate funding will enable education institutions to effectively implement inclusive education.

4.2 Policy Recommendations

Education regulations need to be explicit to all stakeholders. Amendments to the Education Act, especially explaining requirements for students with LD on placement alternatives to ensure the maximum degree of integration and access is necessary.

In line with Article 3 of the Salamanca Statement on inclusive education, the government should introduce legislation that unequivocally protects students' rights. There should be a policy that regulates the salary scales of the assistant teachers and the extent of their role. The regional governments should intensify supervision in relation to assessment procedures at the assessment centers.

4.3 Recommendation for Psycho-educational Assessment for Learners with LD in Kenya

Kenya can derive from the parental involvement in the assessment process as identified in Brno in the Czech Republic. There was awareness of the processes and procedures involved and parents had made significant efforts to ensure psycho-educational assessment for their children. Stakeholders should develop an operational definition of LD and objective diagnostic criteria in Kenya and sensitize all stakeholders on the prevalence of learners with LD and ways of managing the challenges.

Even though there were challenges with placement policies in the Czech Republic, it was evident that there were clear assessment policies and a lot of effort had been made to ensure the implementation of the policies. Kenya can create and implement clear policies, which are lacking in the area of psycho-educational assessment to help guide how psycho-educational assessments are administered. The funding of psycho-educational assessment in Kenya should be streamlined to ensure provision of adequate resources for proper assessments of learners with LD. The assessors at the EARCs in Kenya should be properly trained in psycho-educational assessments to ensure no misdiagnosis of learners with SNE and any discriminative aspects hence, promoting proper placement and recommendations for learners with LD.

4.4 Inclusive Psycho-educational Assessment System for Learners with LD

The Ministry of Education and Sports may reform the assessment process for learners with LD by ensuring compulsory inclusion of students with LD, encouraging and closely monitoring all stakeholder participation in the assessment. Assessment should be student-centered paying more attention to the needs of learners with LD. The vast majority of children categorized as having 'special educational needs' in mainstream schools are actually those with LD, however, only a fraction of them are children with disabilities. Historically, Romani children as well as children diagnosed with disabilities have been diverted to this situation (Schmidt and Baily, 2014). The researcher therefore proposes an inclusive psycho-educational assessment systems model where all stakeholders are involved for effective administration of psycho-educational assessment (see Figure 1).

The participation of a multidisciplinary team in decision making should be more interactive and consultative. The voice of the learners with LD should be put into consideration. The Ministry of Education and Sports should discourage the use of negative terms and labels for instance "dysclass" and enact in all policy and legislation a terminology replacement that is more positive in connotation, such as "progress classes, elevation classes" or "remediation plan". Typically, the psycho-educational assessment is a process that cannot simply be completed in a onetime sitting.

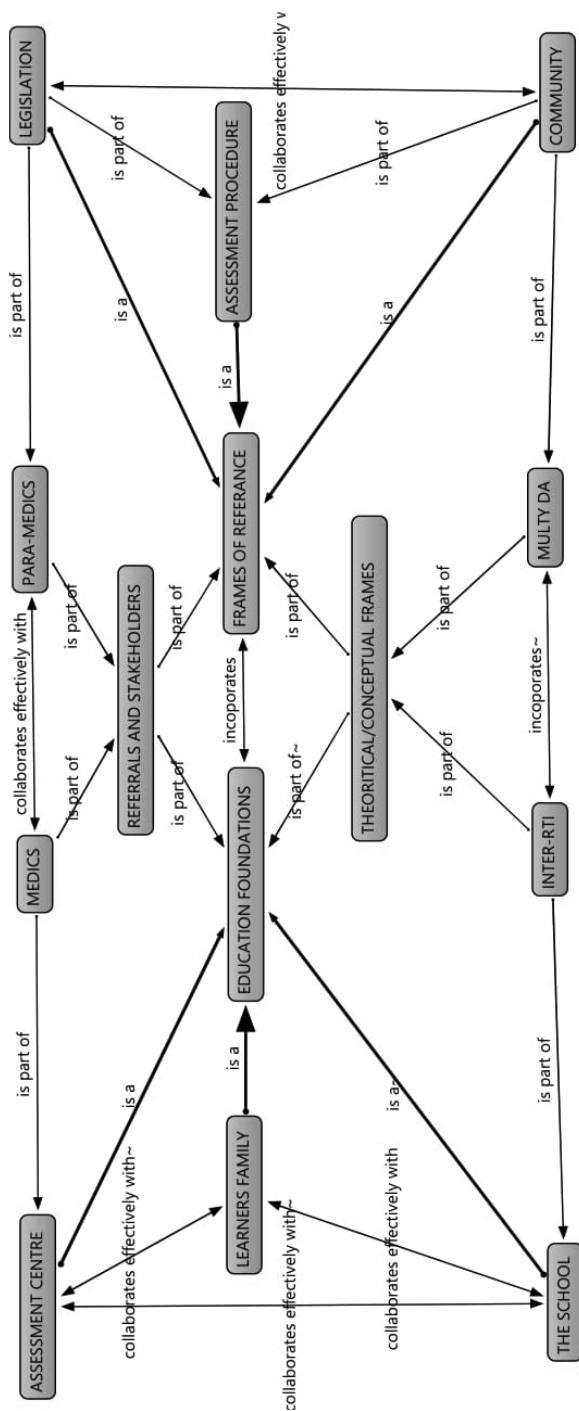


Figure 1: Inclusive Psycho-educational Assessment System Model (IPAS Model). Source: Researcher on emerging theory

The inclusive psycho-educational assessment system model IPAS Model is a theory that emerged from the current research that emphasizes the collaborative efforts of all the stakeholders in psycho-educational assessment and the link between assessment processes, programs, activities, and concepts. The assessment centres and schools are the major focal points in the assessment process from which assessment and intervention processes are coordinated. Education foundations and the frames of reference play a major part of the IPAS Model (see Figure 1) and the two are intertwined, for instance they incorporate each other. It takes the efforts and commitment of all the stakeholders to accomplish the assessment tasks.

The assessment results and recommendations should be shared with the school during a “team meeting.” This meeting should incorporate a range of stakeholders – professionals from the school and in different fields. It should include the learner, learner’s teacher, the special educator, a school psychologist and the parents. The meeting psycho-educational assessment is review to determine how the learner’s needs can best be accommodated and the possible interventions that are effective and realistic. Several accommodations can be implemented and or support services provided depending on the outcome of psycho-educational assessment.

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