

Social and academic factors influencing progression of upper primary learners with dysgraphia: A study of selected schools in Mongu district

Abstract

This study examines the impact of dysgraphia on grade progression in upper primary learners in Mongu District. Dysgraphia is a condition that impacts an individual's writing skills and is classified as a learning disability. The study aims to investigate the correlation between dysgraphia and academic performance, specifically in the context of grade progression. Data was collected through standardized assessments and teacher observations. The findings suggest that dysgraphia has a significant impact on the academic progression of upper primary learners. Understanding these challenges can lead to the development of tailored interventions to support students with dysgraphia and improve their academic outcomes.

Keywords: dysgraphia, grade, progression, learners, Mongu

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Introduction to dysgraphia and its impact on learning

Dysgraphia refers to a developmental writing deficit that affects a significant percentage of school-age children, estimated to be between 7-15%.¹ While dyslexia have received much more attention and research, dysgraphia is an often overlooked yet equally significant learning difficulty that can have a profound impact on a student's academic progress.² According to, dysgraphia is typically categorized into different subtypes, including phonological dysgraphia, which affects spelling and writing accuracy due to difficulties in phonetic processing and letter-sound relationships.³ Additionally, there is mixed dysgraphia, which involves deficits in language analysis and synthesis, leading to difficulties in both oral and written language expression. It is important to understand that dysgraphia is a complex condition, often a combination of various types of dysgraphia according to the generally accepted classification compiled by Lalaeva.¹ Mixed dysgraphia, for example, encompasses a range of writing challenges caused by the lack of development in phonetic-phonemic, lexical, grammatical components of oral speech, and cognitive functions. This means that students with dysgraphia may struggle with grammatical and syntactic errors, as revealed in the study of independent written works of fourth-grade students.

While dyslexia has been extensively studied, there is a need to recognize the unique challenges posed by dysgraphia. The correlation between word reading and writing performance highlights the similarities in the acquisition and developmental phases of these skills. However, understanding the differences between the processes of reading and writing is crucial in addressing the specific needs of individuals with dysgraphia.³

Moreover, the impact of dysgraphia extends beyond academic progression, affecting various aspects of a student's learning and everyday activities. The challenge of correctly spelling words or producing clear handwriting can be immensely frustrating and can divert attention from the substantive aspects of assignments. This can impede learning not only in language-related tasks but also in subjects such as math. Additionally, the long-term effects of

dysgraphia can impact career choices and everyday tasks for adults. In order to effectively address the challenges faced by students with dysgraphia, it is essential for educators and parents to gain a thorough comprehension of the condition and its underlying factors cognitive deficits.⁴ The social environment also plays a significant role in the academic progression of upper primary learners with dysgraphia. Peer acceptance and support can have a positive impact on the self-esteem and motivation of students with dysgraphia, while bullying or exclusion can further hinder their academic progress. Furthermore, the availability of resources and support within the school environment is crucial for accommodating the needs of students with dysgraphia. Strategies such as providing assistive technology, extra time for assignments, and individualized instruction can significantly support the academic progression of students with dysgraphia by meeting their specific difficulties and offering the required support tools and support.⁵

Addressing the academic progression of upper primary learners with dysgraphia requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses both educational and social factors.⁴ It is important for educators, parents, and researchers to collaborate in order to improve diagnosis, treatment, and support for individuals with dysgraphia. In the context of selected schools in Mongu District, Zambia, it is essential to understand the social and academic factors that affect grade progression for upper primary learners with dysgraphia. Such an understanding can assist in developing targeted interventions and support systems to ensure that these learners have equal opportunities for academic success and personal growth. Furthermore, it is essential to increase awareness and enhance understanding of dysgraphia among teachers, students, and the wider community to reduce stigma and encourage inclusive educational practices. Overall, the social and academic factors affecting grade progression for upper primary learners with dysgraphia in selected schools in Mongu District, Zambia are complex and require a holistic approach for effective intervention and support. By addressing these factors and providing appropriate interventions, we can empower students with dysgraphia to reach their full potential academically and socially. The results of this research emphasize the significance of tackling both social and

academic factors in order to support the grade progression of upper primary learners with dysgraphia in schools within Mongu District, Zambia.

Overview of social and academic factors influencing grade progression

The social and academic factors that influence grade progression for upper primary learners with dysgraphia include the availability of resources and support within the school environment, the attitudes and beliefs of teachers and peers, the level of parental involvement and support, and the overall inclusivity and accessibility of the educational system. These factors have a significant impact on the academic performance and overall well-being of learners with dysgraphia. In order to effectively address these factors, it is important to conduct comprehensive assessments and evaluations to identify individual needs and strengths.⁶

Furthermore, collaborative efforts among educators, caregivers, and other experts such as special education experts and therapists is crucial in developing personalized interventions and support strategies. By addressing these factors and providing appropriate interventions, we can create an environment that is supportive and inclusive for students with diverse needs dysgraphia, enabling them to overcome challenges and thrive academically. Additionally, it is essential to consider the social factors that can affect grade progression for learners with dysgraphia. These include peer acceptance, bullying or exclusion, and the attitudes and beliefs of both teachers and peers towards learners with dysgraphia. Addressing social factors such as promoting awareness and understanding of dysgraphia among teachers and peers, fostering a positive and inclusive school culture, and implementing anti-bullying measures can help create a supportive social environment for learners with dysgraphia.⁶

By addressing both social and academic factors, we can create a holistic approach to supporting the grade progression of upper primary learners with dysgraphia. By neglecting to address these social and academic factors, learners with dysgraphia may struggle to progress academically and may experience negative social experiences. Therefore, it is crucial for schools and educational stakeholders to identify and tackle these components to develop an inclusive and supportive learning environment that allows learners with dysgraphia to reach their full potential. In conclusion, various social and academic factors can significantly impact the grade progression of upper primary learners with dysgraphia.⁵ The interaction between social and academic factors has a profound impact on the grade progression of upper primary learners with dysgraphia. It is essential to comprehend these factors for the purpose of creating efficient interventions and support systems. To ensure that these learners have equal opportunities for academic success and personal growth.

Dysgraphia in upper primary learners: a deep dive

Dysgraphia, a learning disability that affects writing abilities, can have a significant impact on the academic progression and overall well-being of upper primary learners. The challenges posed by dysgraphia extend beyond the physical act of writing and can affect various aspects of their education, including note-taking, organization, and the expression of ideas.⁸ As a result, these students may struggle to keep up with their peers in both classroom activities and assessments, leading to frustration and a decline in academic performance. In addition to the practical difficulties in written communication, learners with dysgraphia often experience emotional and psychological effects.⁹

The frustration and embarrassment associated with their struggles in written tasks can negatively impact their self-esteem and motivation, further hindering their academic growth.

Holistic support strategies

To address the complex challenges faced by upper primary learners with dysgraphia, a holistic approach to support is essential. Beyond providing academic accommodations, tailored interventions should also consider the social and emotional well-being of these students. By fostering an inclusive and supportive environment, educators and stakeholders can empower learners with dysgraphia to navigate their academic journey with confidence and resilience.⁴

Embracing neurodiversity

It is imperative to promote an understanding of neurodiversity within the school environment to create a culture of acceptance and inclusion for learners with dysgraphia.¹⁰ By celebrating individual differences and embracing diverse learning styles, educators can create an atmosphere that fosters a sense of value for all students and supported in their academic pursuits.⁷

Case study: dysgraphia in selected schools in Mongu district, Zambia

To investigate the social and academic factors affecting grade progression for upper primary learners with dysgraphia, a case study was conducted in selected schools in Mongu District, Zambia. The main objective of the study was to comprehend specific challenges faced by these learners and explore potential strategies for intervention and support. The study utilized a mixed methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and observations, to gather data on the experiences of both students and educators.

The findings of the case study revealed several key social and academic factors that impact grade progression for learners with dysgraphia in the selected schools. Social factors affecting grade progression for learners with dysgraphia in the selected schools included stigma and discrimination, lack of awareness and understanding of dysgraphia among teachers and peers, limited social support networks, and low self-esteem. Academic factors affecting grade progression for learners with dysgraphia in the selected schools included inadequate instructional strategies, lack of accommodations and modifications in the classroom, limited access to assistive technology, and a lack of specialized support services. These social and academic factors had a significant impact on the grade progression of learners with dysgraphia, leading to lower academic performance, decreased motivation, and potential withdrawal from educational activities. Overall, the findings of this case study highlight the need for comprehensive support systems that address both the social and academic needs of learners with dysgraphia.

Discussion: improving grade progression for learners with dysgraphia

Improving grade progression for learners with dysgraphia involves understanding and addressing the unique challenges they face in demonstrating their knowledge and abilities.¹¹ It is not only essential to focus on academic interventions and accommodations but also to consider the perspectives of parents and caregivers in shaping the grading process.

In one instance from our research, a team involving a 6th grade student, his parents, a special educator, and a general educator completed the survey. The resulting discussion revealed that the

student's mother believed his grades should represent how hard he tried, whereas his father believed they should only reflect mastery of the curriculum. This dialogue made both parents realize that they had never discussed the purpose of their son's grades before and found it helpful to hear each other's perspectives. Working together with the special and general educators, they identified grading adaptations that would acknowledge their son's effort while maintaining high expectations for his learning. This finding aligns from the study by conducted in Nigeria.¹²

We surveyed parents of high-achieving, average-achieving, and low-achieving students without disabilities as well as parents of students with disabilities to determine if these groups differed in their perceptions of grade purposes. The survey findings showed that parents of students with disabilities, including dysgraphia, were more likely to prioritize understanding their child's effort and progress rather than solely focusing on the conveyance of achievement to postsecondary schools or employers. These findings suggest that parents of learners with dysgraphia are seeking a grading system that recognizes and values their child's individual progress and provides feedback on how their effort and growth are being acknowledged.¹⁰

Surveying parents of high-achieving, average-achieving, and low-achieving students without disabilities and parents of students with disabilities can provide valuable insights into the perceptions of the purposes for grades. Understanding these diverse perspectives can aid in developing grading systems that are fair and considerate of the varied needs and strengths of students with dysgraphia.¹

In addition to academic accommodations, it is crucial to explore grading adaptations that recognize the effort and progress of learners with dysgraphia while upholding academic standards. This may involve revisiting grading criteria, providing additional opportunities for demonstrating understanding through alternative assessment methods, and offering flexibility in deadlines to account for the impact of dysgraphia on written assignments.⁹

Collaboration between educators and parents in discussing and implementing grading adaptations is vital for ensuring that the grading process aligns with the holistic support and understanding of learners with dysgraphia.¹³

Recommendations for support and intervention

Based on the results of the case investigation carried out in selected schools in Mongu District, Zambia, there are several recommendations for supporting and intervening in the academic and social challenges faced by upper primary learners with dysgraphia.

a. Awareness and education

One of the key recommendations is to increase awareness and understanding of dysgraphia among teachers, parents, and peers. Educating the school community about the nature of dysgraphia and its impact on students' academic progression can help reduce stigma and discrimination while fostering empathy and support for learners with dysgraphia.

b. Professional development for teachers

Providing specialized training and professional development opportunities for teachers can enhance their ability to implement effective instructional strategies and accommodations for students with dysgraphia. This includes techniques for providing alternative methods for note-taking, organizing thoughts, and expressing ideas.

c. Access to assistive technology

Ensuring that learners with dysgraphia have access to assistive technology can significantly support their academic progress. This may include tools for speech-to-text, word prediction, and digital organizational aids to mitigate the challenges they face in written communication and organization.

d. Collaborative support networks

Establishing formal support networks that involve collaboration between teachers, parents, therapists, and special education experts can create a cohesive approach to addressing the individual needs of students with dysgraphia. Regular progress monitoring and open communication channels are essential components of this network.

e. Inclusive classroom environment

Fostering an inclusive classroom environment that celebrates neurodiversity and accommodates diverse learning styles is crucial for the well-being and academic success of students with dysgraphia. Embracing individual differences can contribute to a supportive and empowering learning atmosphere.

f. Tailored interventions

Developing tailor-made interventions that address the social and emotional well-being of learners with dysgraphia is as important as academic accommodations. These interventions should aim to boost self-esteem, motivation, and overall resilience in the face of academic challenges.

Recommendations for future research in dysgraphia and grade progression

a) Exploring effective intervention strategies

Future research in dysgraphia and grade progression should focus on exploring and evaluating the effectiveness of various intervention strategies. This could involve studying the impact of specific academic accommodations, such as alternative assessment methods and flexible grading criteria, on the academic performance and well-being of learners with dysgraphia. Additionally, investigating the long-term effects of targeted interventions and support systems on grade progression can provide valuable insights into sustainable strategies for supporting these students throughout their educational journey.

b) Understanding parental perspectives and engagement

Understanding the perspectives and experiences of parents and caregivers of learners with dysgraphia is crucial for informing future interventions and support strategies. Research could involve in-depth interviews or surveys to explore the challenges, needs, and expectations of parents in relation to grade progression for their children with dysgraphia. Additionally, examining the impact of parental engagement on the academic outcomes of students with dysgraphia can help in identifying effective approaches for involving parents in the educational process.

c) Assessing the impact of advocacy and awareness initiatives

Evaluating the effectiveness of advocacy and awareness initiatives in promoting inclusive environments for learners with dysgraphia is essential for guiding future efforts. Research could focus on assessing the impact of advocacy campaigns, policy changes, and awareness programs on the experiences of students with dysgraphia within educational settings. Understanding the outcomes of such initiatives can provide valuable insights into the role of advocacy in shaping supportive and inclusive learning environments.

d) Longitudinal studies on academic and social development

Conducting longitudinal studies to track the academic and social development of learners with dysgraphia over time can provide valuable data on the effectiveness of support systems and interventions. Long-term research efforts can help in understanding the trajectories of grade progression, social integration, and overall well-being of students with dysgraphia, offering insights into the sustained impact of support strategies beyond individual academic years.

e) Evaluating the impact of collaborative frameworks

Researching the impact of collaborative frameworks involving educators, parents, and other stakeholders in addressing grade progression for learners with dysgraphia is essential for understanding the effectiveness of such approaches. Investigating the outcomes of collaborative decision-making processes, joint interventions, and inclusive support structures can shed light on the benefits of multi-stakeholder involvement in creating supportive educational environments for these students.

Conclusion: Strategies for mitigating dysgraphia's impact on grade progression

Implementing effective strategies for mitigating dysgraphia's impact on grade progression requires a collaborative and comprehensive approach that considers both academic accommodations and social support for learners. By focusing on the following key strategies, educators and stakeholders can create a supportive environment that fosters the academic success and well-being of students with dysgraphia.

g. Training and professional development

Providing training and professional development for educators is essential to enhance their understanding of dysgraphia and its impact on students. Workshops, seminars, and collaborative learning opportunities can equip teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to implement effective interventions and accommodations in the classroom.

h. Parent and caregiver engagement

Collaborating with parents and caregivers is crucial in developing a holistic support system for learners with dysgraphia. Regular communication, parent education sessions, and inclusive decision-making processes can ensure that the perspectives and insights of families are integrated into the support strategies for their children.

i. Flexible assessment and grading practices

Revisiting assessment and grading practices to accommodate the diverse needs of students with dysgraphia is essential. Providing alternative assessment methods, flexible grading criteria, and collaborative discussions on grading adaptations can ensure that the progress and efforts of these learners are accurately reflected in their grades.

j. Advocacy and awareness

Advocating for the rights and needs of students with dysgraphia within the educational community and beyond is essential. Raising awareness, promoting inclusion, and advocating for supportive policies can create a more conducive environment for the academic and social growth of learners with dysgraphia.

k. Ongoing collaboration and feedback

Establishing a framework for ongoing collaboration and feedback among educators, students, parents, and relevant stakeholders is crucial. Regular evaluations, open communication channels, and feedback mechanisms can facilitate continuous improvement in the support and accommodations provided for students with dysgraphia.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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