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Education on an Equal Basis: A Comparison of Persons With and Without Disabilities in South Africa

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ABSTRACT
The South African education crisis is well documented in the literature. While strides have been made to rectify the inequalities in education arising from apartheid era policies, and while South Africa ratified the United Nations Conventions for the Rights of People with Disabilities, these actions have yet to translate into meaningful changes for persons with disabilities. To investigate the status of educational attainment, this article uses South Africa's National Income Dynamics Study to analyse the disparities in education for adults with and without disabilities. Education is a key mechanism of leverage for functionings. The findings show that persons with disabilities fare worse in educational attainment than persons without disabilities, but that race and geographic location play a larger role in predicting educational attainment than disabilities. In addition, age also contributes to educational disparities. The findings of this study are integral in the call from the Presidency to 'strengthen the country's response to the needs of [persons with disabilities] … and to monitor progress' of educational attainment for persons with disabilities (20-year review, 2014, p. 73).

KEYWORDS
Capabilities; disability; education; inequalities; race; poverty; South Africa

Introduction

Evidence reveals that persons with disabilities in various developing contexts continue to struggle to access education, whether through mainstreaming or through special needs mechanisms (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2011). Estimated global literacy rates for persons with disabilities are 3%, with rates for women and girls with disabilities being about 1% (Arnade & Haefner, 2006; Groce, 2003).

During apartheid in South Africa, the Bantu Education Act ensured that non-whites received limited access to education on the basis of their race. The education they received served to inhibit their education and employment potential (Ocampo, 2004). Persons with disabilities and their families were excluded from the mainstream of society and denied their social, political and economic rights, and exclusion of persons with disabilities on the basis of race in special needs education was also evident. Although the democratic state developed policies that sought to address the needs of persons with disabilities and rectify inequalities, implementation of these policies remains a challenge. These policies are inclusive of the *Integrated National Strategy white Paper* (Republic of South Africa, 1997), the

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Broad-Based black Economic Empowerment Act (Republic of South Africa, 2003), the *Education white Paper 6: Special Needs Education* (Department of Education, 2001) and more recently, the *Draft National Disability Rights Policy* (Department of Social Development, 2015). These policies identify persons with disabilities as a target group for employment equity, and are intended to promote economic inclusion, and facilitate access to education.

Overall, education in South Africa faces many constraints. Spaull (2014) indicated teacher quality, resources and language of teaching and learning as some of the major factors inhibiting quality education of people living in poverty in South Africa. In many schools, there is a low coverage of the curriculum (Spaull), and a lack of qualified and skilled teachers, especially in special needs schools, still remains a challenge (Republic of South Africa, 2013). Furthermore, classes throughout the country are large and educators are inadequately trained (Lansdown, 2002). South Africa's 11 national languages make communication of the curriculum complex (Vorster, Mayet, & Taylor, 2013). Gibberd (2007, p. 1) states that 'while some schools have excellent infrastructure, others lack basic services such as water and sanitation'. All of these factors as well as the negative attitudes of schools in terms of attempting to integrate children with disabilities into mainstream schooling makes access to education difficult for persons with disabilities. This negative attitude can largely be attributed to the additional obligations for training of educators and additional support and infrastructure required to ensure that the environment enables education for children with disabilities (WHO, 2011). In 2012, it was revealed that 98% of schools in South Africa did not have access to ramps, and 97% did not have appropriate toilets for learners with disabilities. In addition, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) revealed that there was no accurate data on the number of schools that complied with norms for environmental access for persons with disabilities (Republic of South Africa, 2013).

Additional challenges faced by persons with disabilities in South Africa include physical, social, economic and cultural barriers (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2013), issues of rising unemployment, poverty and overall low levels of education (Graham, Moodley, & Selipsky, 2013). Graham et al. (p. 6) focused on the eight poorest wards of Johannesburg, South Africa, and found that while 34% of persons without disabilities had completed their matriculation (school-leaving) certificate, 'only 20% of persons with disabilities had completed their school-leaving certificate'. Groce, Kett, Lang, and Trani (2011) state that, in developing societies, persons with disabilities do not benefit to the same extent as persons without disabilities from investments in education. This assumption was supported by Loeb, Eide, Jelsma, Ka Toni, and Maart (2008) who showed that in the Eastern and Western Cape, access to education remained lower amongst persons with disabilities, even though equal economic status was assumed amongst households with and without disabilities. Furthermore, the disability grant, which is a means-tested cash transfer available to persons with disabilities, contributed to income of the households without having an impact on education (Loeb et al., 2008). These results imply that there is a possibility of widening the gap in educational attainment, as well as income poverty between persons with disabilities and persons without disabilities. However, there is scant evidence which assesses educational attainment over time between persons with and without disabilities in the South African context.

More recently, the Statistics South Africa report on the Profile of Persons with Disabilities (Statistics South Africa, 2014, p. xii) stated that gender disparities showed females with disabilities were more disadvantaged compared to males with disabilities. Persons with severe

difficulties had the worst educational outcomes and finally, race disparities showed that white persons attained a level of education that was almost four times higher than other population groups. In addition, the South Africa Baseline Country Report on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (Republic of South Africa, 2013) stated that there was 'no reliable system in place to track children with disabilities who are out of school and/or have been denied admission to school' (p. 39). This means that the data available on education for persons with disabilities exclude these groups.

The literature presented shows that understanding education in itself is complex in South Africa, and with overall low levels of education in South Africa, the relationship between disability and education is convoluted and shaped by multiple factors. In order to understand the intricacies, the capabilities framework is utilised as a theoretical lens.

The Capabilities Framework as a Tool for Inspecting Education and Disability

The capabilities framework developed by Sen (1999) ably offers understandings into the way poverty and disability intersect to marginalise people and prevents people from achieving certain functionings. Furthermore, education is identified as a primary means to eradicate poverty (Awan, Malik, Sarwar, & Waqas, 2011; Mitra, Posarac, & Vick, 2011; Mont & Cuong, 2011; Mont & Nguyen, 2013). It is widely known that quality education for populations in general is a challenge, and even more so for persons with disabilities who were exposed to past discrimination. The framework also identifies education as a key mechanism that is viewed both as a capability itself (an opportunity), as well as an asset that unlocks functionings. The capabilities approach makes a case for individual capabilities (such as age and gender) and social capabilities (such as access to education and gender roles) being necessary to enable individuals to convert capabilities into functionings (Sen, 1999). Graham et al. (2013) highlight the fact that for many people, and especially persons living with disabilities, social capabilities are constrained, which limit the opportunity for individuals to achieve particular functionings. Emmett (2006) indicated that persons with early onset disabilities are less likely to find employment than those with late onset disability. 'One possible contributing factor is education, because schools (whether special or mainstream) often do not make sufficient provision for the special educational needs of children with disabilities' (Emmett, 2006, p. 230). In essence, early onset disability results in limited educational attainment. Also, late onset disability in the face of a poor educational capability due to poverty means that when certain functioning (such as the ability to do manual work) is lost, there is a constraint in converting educational capabilities into functionings.

Against this theoretical backdrop, the current research was part of a larger national study on poverty and disability in South Africa. This article, however, has a specific focus on how poverty and disability intersect to shape education outcomes over time for persons with and without disabilities.

Methods

Study Design

This study made use of quantitative research design (Bergman, 2008), which included a secondary data analysis of Waves 1 and 2 of the National Income Dynamic study (South

African Labour and Development Research Unit [SALDRU], 2008, 2011). The NIDS is a nationally representative panel data-set and according to Leibbrandt, Woolard, and De Villiers (2009); sampling for NIDS involved a stratified, two-stage cluster sample design. The target population for NIDS was private households, as well as respondents living in workers' hostels, convents and monasteries. In Wave 1, a total of 7305 households were interviewed. Only adults were asked questions about Activities of Daily Living (ADL) and therefore the analysis is limited to adult participants. There were 16,878 adults in the first wave of data, and 15,491 of these adults were reached in Wave 2. An additional 3080 adults were added to Wave 2 in order to moderate the effects of attrition, and therefore the adult sample in Wave 2 was inclusive of 18,571 participants. These waves of the data were used due to questions on ADLs being omitted from more recent waves of the NIDS.

Variables and Data Analysis

The NIDS data included a number of questions on ADL that could be used to determine disability, including questions related to lower and upper body mobility, sight, hearing and self-care. Self-reporting of disability is subjective, and depending on how questions are asked, relies on an individual identifying as having a disability. For instance, there is evidence that respondents with more income are more likely to self-report difficulties, especially with regard to vision problems, than those with less income (Mont & Cuong, 2011), and that moderate difficulties tend to be under-reported. However, the World Health Organisation promotes assessing disability through a range of questions related to ADL (WHO, 2011). In this study, disability was measured in terms of the presence of difficulties in seeing, hearing, walking and self-care. The self-reporting questions were used as an operational proxy for persons with disabilities, reflected the respondents' own self-reported difficulties in ADL and these functional limitations place them at risk of having a disability.

In the first instance, separate measures for upper and lower body limitations, sight limitations and hearing limitations were developed in order to assess differences in outcomes by type of disability. For upper and lower body limitations, three questions pertaining to upper and lower body mobility were merged into a variable that measures mobility difficulties. Each question asked about the presence of difficulty with a particular activity on a four-point scale from no difficulty (1) to severe difficulty (4). The sight and hearing questions were asked on a six-point scale from no difficulty (1) to cannot see/hear (6). These were recorded into a four-point scale to ensure continuity between the different disability variables. Individuals were considered to have a disability if they scored either 'some level of difficulty' or 'severe difficulty' on any one of the sight or hearing or upper body or lower body difficulties.

A further key variable of interest was poverty. Poverty was conceptualised in this study as multi-faceted including income poverty as well as education deprivation, employment deprivation, living arrangements and access to forms of social and household capital (Noble, 2006). This article focuses on education only.

In order to assess differences in education between persons with and without disabilities, differences in measures of central tendency (usually the mean or median depending on the nature of the data) and Pearson's chi-squared tests and multiple regression analysis (Field, 2005) were conducted.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity of the instruments used in the NIDS study were enhanced during the design and testing of the questionnaires. According to Leibbrandt et al. (2009), a team of experts served as consultants on the development of the questionnaire. In addition, the questionnaire was tested through a pilot phase of the study. Professional services were used to translate the questionnaires into all South African languages to ensure that interviewers did not interpret questions differently.

Ethical Considerations

The NIDS data collection was approved by the Commerce Faculty Ethics Committee of the University of Cape Town (Leibbrandt et al., 2009). The study adhered to ethical principles of confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation and informed consent.

Limitations

One of the main limitations of the NIDS data is that it was not intended specifically for persons with disabilities. Questions to assess psychosocial, emotional and intellectual disabilities were not included in the NIDS study, limiting the generalisation of the findings to all persons with disabilities. Otherwise, the definition of disability used in this analysis closely approximates adherence to the Washington Group's recommendation that a benchmark of some difficulty with sight, hearing, mobility and self-care be used. Furthermore, the NIDS does not differentiate educational outcomes based on the age of onset of disability. To this end, more research on education in South Africa which includes age of onset of disabilities should be conducted. The NIDS data also did not contain information on skills development programmes for persons with disabilities, which is the primary focus of the *white Paper for Post School Education and Training* (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2014). Furthermore, NIDS was subject to non-response bias due to a large number of refusals amongst affluent respondents, which in the South African context still tend to be white. Non-response bias was corrected by the use of weights during the data analysis. Although surveys obscure the complexities in disabilities, they play a crucial role in empirically demonstrating overarching outcomes of inequality for particular groups of people. Despite these limitations, the NIDS is South Africa's only nationally representative panel data-set, and therefore provides a means for longitudinal analysis in relation to education and disability in South Africa to be conducted.

Results

Profile of Persons with Disabilities

The NIDS revealed a disability prevalence of 18% in Wave 1 and 16% in Wave 2. Disability in this study was measured in a narrow sense as the presence of difficulties in seeing, hearing, walking and self-care. On average, persons with disabilities were older (46 years in Wave 1 and 48 years in Wave 2) than persons without disabilities (35 years in Wave 1 and 37 years in Wave 2). The racial and gender profiles of persons with disabilities are presented in Table 1. In both waves, the majority of persons with disabilities were black (85 and 77% in

Table 1. Profile of persons with disabilities in Waves 1 and 2.

	Wave 1 (2008) $N = 2600$ (%)	Wave 2 (2011) $N = 1956$ (%)
Race		
White	4	9
Indian/Asian	3	5
coloured	8	9
black	85	77
Total	100	100
Gender		
Male	27	36
Female	73	64
Total	100	100

Table 2. Average educational attainment for persons with and without disabilities in Waves 1 and 2.

	Wave 1 (2008)	Wave 2 (2011)
Persons with disabilities	6.6*	6.9#
Persons without disabilities	9.2*	9.2#

*Denotes statistically significant differences at the 95% level of confidence.
#Denotes statistically significant differences at the 95% level of confidence.

Waves 1 and 2, respectively). The percentage of white persons with disabilities increased from 4 to 9% between the waves. In addition, the number of males with disabilities was higher in Wave 2 (36%) compared to Wave 1 (27%), and the number of females with disabilities decreased from 73 to 64% between the waves.

Disparities in Educational Attainment Between Persons with and Without Disabilities

As seen in Table 2, persons without disabilities had an average of over two years more education than persons with disabilities ($p < .05$) in both waves of data.

When the different levels of schooling were analysed, a statistically significant difference was found between persons with and without disabilities ($p < .05$) across both Waves 1 and 2 of the NIDS. More persons with disabilities had no schooling than those without, and persons without disabilities were more likely to progress to secondary and post-secondary education than persons with disabilities. Unfortunately, there was no differentiation between mainstream and special schooling in the NIDS data.

Wave 1 data (see Figure 1) show that a larger percentage of persons with disabilities indicated that they did not have any schooling (22%) when compared to persons without disabilities (7%). Persons with disabilities were also less likely to have had secondary-level education. Only 38% of persons with disabilities compared to 53% of adults without disabilities had some secondary schooling. Completion of secondary school was low for all adults, but again only 11% of persons with disabilities compared to 20% of persons without disabilities finished secondary school. Wave 2 results showed similar patterns of educational attainment with a slightly higher percentage of persons with disabilities indicating that they had completed matric than in Wave 1. The completion of tertiary education was very low across both persons with and without disabilities. The South African DBE reported that while school attendance has improved for primary and secondary levels in children with and

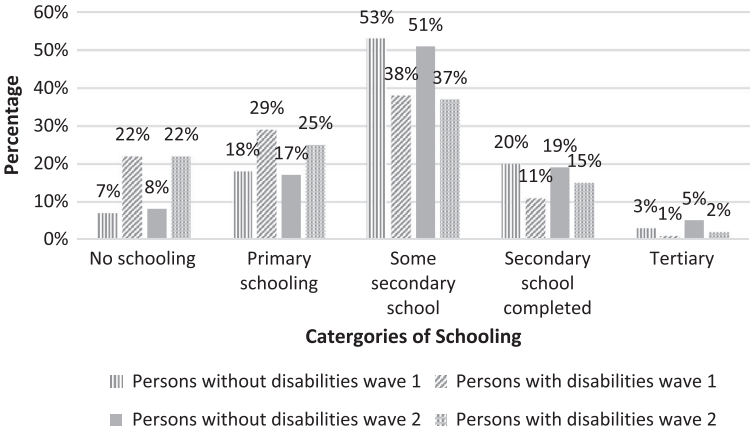

Figure 1. Level of schooling by disability status.
Note: *All differences were statistically significant at the 95% level of confidence, except for tertiary education.

without disabilities since 2002, the main reason for non-attendance at higher education facilities in 16–18-year olds, who have completed secondary school, was 'no money for fees' (DBE, 2013). However, Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE, 1999) pointed out that the lack of attention to special needs in primary school resulted in students with disabilities being unable to reach high school. In the CASE survey of 1998, age of onset information was collected, and the resulting analyses showed a marked difference between early and late onset of disability in terms of educational achievement. Unfortunately, the data needed to conduct this type of analysis were not present in the NIDS, and should be considered for further research on education and disability in South Africa.

Differences in Educational Attainment in Relation to Age

While the contrasts in educational attainment between persons with and without disabilities are stark, it is important to understand what might explain these differences. Given that the sample of persons with disabilities was on average significantly older in both Waves 1 and 2, an investigation into race is important as black and coloured populations in South Africa would have been affected by apartheid era policies on education (Branson & Lam, 2009). In order to test the effects of age on educational attainment, an analysis of education level by age categories and disability status for the adult sample was conducted.

Figure 2 confirms that differences in educational attainment for adults with and without disabilities become more noticeable with increasing age. This finding suggests that disability and age intersected to have a striking effect on education levels. However, it is promising to note that for the younger cohorts (ages 15–34 years), education levels between persons with and without disabilities were very similar. The fact that differences between age groups 15–24 years and 25–34 years were not significant in Wave 1, and yet became significant in Wave 2 was concerning. In order to understand factors which could have contributed to this change, further analysis was conducted.

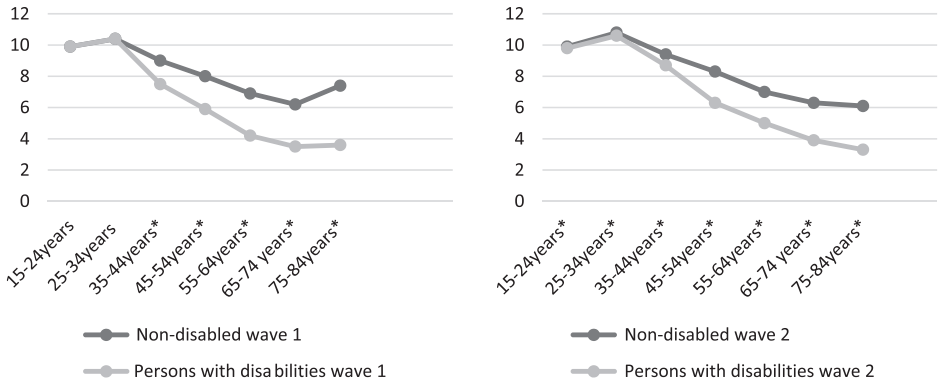

Figure 2. Average education attained by 10-year age intervals (NIDS adult respondents, 2008, 2011).
Note: *Denotes statistically significant differences at the 95% level of confidence.

Factors Contributing to Educational Attainment

Multiple regression analyses were conducted in order to assess the relative effects of race, age, geographic location, gender and disability on educational attainment. There were no differences in the regression models between Waves 1 and 2 of the data. The models explained 36% of the variance in educational attainment and demonstrated that while disability had a significant effect on educational attainment, race exerted the greatest effect on this outcome, followed by geographic location.

Persons with disabilities were shown to lag in education by approximately 9 months when compared to persons without disabilities. However, white people were likely to have an average of four years more education than blacks. In addition, persons living in urban areas attained an average of two years more education than those in rural areas. Further results indicate that average education decreased by an average of 1 month as age increases. The results point towards the fact that an intersection of disability, race, age and geographic location results in compounding effects and marginalisation in educational outcomes for persons with disabilities.

Discussion and Conclusion

> Persons with disabilities can access … quality and free … education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live. (Department of Social Development, 2015)

Viewed from the capabilities framework, education is a key point of leverage for functionings, and is a crucial aspect for lifting people out of poverty. Education is further impacted by both early and late onset disabilities, resulting in limited educational outcomes or loss of functionings and therefore a constraint in converting educational capabilities into functionings (Emmett, 2006). The findings of the current study reveal that persons with disabilities fare worse in educational attainment in South Africa when compared to persons without disabilities. Furthermore, the data indicated that while secondary school completion and access to tertiary education for adults with disabilities seemed to marginally increase between Waves 1 and 2 (by 4 and 1%, respectively), the number of persons with disabilities not accessing education remained the same. These findings suggest that greater efforts

need to be made to ensure education on an equal basis for all people, which would warrant that people have the capabilities to partake in a life that could enhance functionings, and enable them to live a life that they value.

Even though disability contributed significantly to lower levels of education, the NIDS also revealed that the effects of race and geographic location were larger contributors to variation in educational attainment than disabilities. On average, white individuals attained approximately four years more education than blacks, and people in urban areas attained approximately two years more education than those in rural areas. Age also had a marginal impact on educational attainment with older persons receiving less education. In contrast to previous evidence, gender disparities did not seem to be a significant contributor to adult educational attainment in this study. The findings therefore show that there is a complex interaction between race, gender and age in South Africa, and that disability interacts with these factors to result in negative educational outcomes for persons with disabilities.

The findings and conclusions of this study need to be evaluated in the light of the limitations of the NIDS data. Firstly, disability in this study takes on a narrow categorisation relating to physical and sensory disabilities, and excludes psychosocial, emotional and intellectual disabilities. While the Washington group on Disability Statistics has endorsed some of the questions selected for use in this survey, the complexity of disability, in terms of types of impairments, as well as severity, was masked. This limitation highlights the need to advocate for different levels and types of disabilities to be incorporated in future tools developed for measuring disability. Secondly, due to the lack of data on age of onset of disabilities, the study cannot comment on the relationship between age of onset of disabilities and educational attainment. These gaps are crucial points to be taken into consideration for further research on disability and education in South Africa, so that researchers are able to fully understand the relationship between disability and educational attainment.

Despite these limitations, however, this study augments important knowledge to understandings around disability and education in South Africa. The country is far from reaching education on an equal basis for persons with and without disabilities. While persons with disabilities still lag behind in terms of educational attainment, it is important to understand the complexities and interactions of disability with race, geographic location and age which result in lower levels of education. While policies are in place to rectify some of these inequalities, it is clear that implementation of the policies is a challenge. Even so, this study contributes to the planning, implementing and monitoring of policies on education for persons with disabilities, as it identifies robust factors which impact low educational attainment. Taking these factors into consideration, and conducting further research to account for all types of disabilities and age of onset of disabilities, would reveal even greater understandings of educational attainment, and what needs to be done to improve educational attainment for persons with disabilities in South Africa.

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