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Dyslexia At the Crossroads: Lessons from A Phenomenological Exploration of The Interface Between Dyslexia and Mental Health in Malawian Classrooms

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Abstract

In Malawi, dominant narratives on Developmental Dyslexia - a neurodevelopmental disorder characterised by persistent difficulties in word recognition, decoding, spelling and reading fluency are grounded on teacher perception, policy analysis and pedagogical interventions. Less attention has been paid to the exploration of the primary education system as a space of psychological trauma for dyslexic learners. This paper explores the vivid experiences of dyslexic primary school learners within the construction of mental health in inclusive education. The paper highlights how reading impairments in primary schools pose a threat to a learner's psychological well-being. Considering that academic underachievement negatively affects self-esteem, peer relationship and motivation to learn, the paper underlines the risks to mental health of learners with dyslexia in Malawi education system.

Drawing from critical desktop synthesis of educational data, public health literature, policy infrastructure and global theoretical models, the study highlights the vulnerability of learners with dyslexia in spaces where mental health concerns are least understood. The findings expose the limitations of the education system, early grade reading programs, teacher capacity and underscore the importance of building resilience among learners with dyslexia. Therefore, this paper contends that the classroom is not just a space of instruction, but a site of emotional, psychological, and social negotiation. Most importantly, it calls for early grade reading programs to shift focus beyond addressing cognitive deficits to embedding the Lived experiences of the learner in promoting mental health resilience among learners with dyslexia.

Keywords: Neuro diverse, Dyslexia, Mental health, Inclusive Education, Special Needs, Learning

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