

Measuring Literacy Outcomes for the Blind and for the Deaf: Nationally Representative Results From Kenya

Benjamin Pipera, Jennae Bulatb, Dunston Kwayumbaa, John Oketcha and Lilian Ganglac

A b s t r a c t

Evidence is scarce as to the literacy skills of children with special needs in low- and middle-income countries. Utilizing nationally representative data from Kenya, we present literacy outcomes for the blind and for the deaf in English, and for the blind in Kiswahili in Grade 1 and 2. Although comparisons with children in “regular” classrooms would be inappropriate due to language differences, we used large-scale data available from non-special-needs Kenyan classrooms to investigate the distribution of literacy skills. We found that children served by special schools for the blind outperformed those who were attending special units within “regular” schools, across nearly all estimates of literacy. For the deaf, no meaningful differences emerged in performance scores between children attending special schools and special units. Further, language preferences for the deaf population varied broadly; future research should consider assessing skills in Kenya Sign Language as well as Signed Exact English. Given the low literacy skills of both the blind and the deaf populations, we recommend substantial investment in programs designed to improve literacy outcomes for these populations. We also recommend examining literacy skills among all special-needs learners at scale, because of the complexity countries find in supporting these diverse learners, and because only looking at a handful of schools can mask trends in low performance that would become more obvious at scale.

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