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Ugandan Teachers' Epistemological Beliefs and Child-Led Research: issues for developing inclusive educational practice

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Liz Chamberlain is Senior Lecturer in Education at The Open University, UK, she is Programme Leader for the Education Studies (Primary) qualification and is Co-Director of Children's Research Centre. She is a Trustee of the United Kingdom Literacy Association and is Chair of its International sub-committee. Liz is a case-study researcher who has a focus on capturing what it means for children to be writers. In particular, her main expertise is as a literacy case study researcher with a focus on developing writers' experiences of writing both in and out-of-school.

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Ugandan Teachers Epistemological Beliefs and Child-Led Research: implications for developing inclusive educational practice

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Abstract

There is a complementarity between Uganda's aim for 'education for all' and the pedagogy indicated as underpinning Uganda's child-focused thematic curriculum. However, child-focused pedagogies are rare. The case is made that child-led research is an appropriate model for developing inclusive classroom practice. This research is the first to consider the relationship between Ugandan teachers' epistemological beliefs and child-led research. The findings from questionnaire responses of 187 teachers and educators challenge the argument that Ugandan teachers' epistemological beliefs are the primary barrier to implementing child-focused pedagogies and indicate that a child-led research initiative would complement the epistemological beliefs of many teachers and offer a potential model for an inclusive pedagogical approach.

Introduction

The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was ratified by the Government of Uganda in 1990. Subsequent progress has been identified in relation to children's rights to 'Survival, Development and Protection' (Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development, Uganda Child Rights NGO Network, & UNICEF, 2008). This is aligned to the United Nation's goal of achieving equitable inclusive and quality education (Kameyama, Kuroda, Utsumi, & Hosoi, 2017). The Ugandan constitution is explicit that all persons have a right to education (1995, article 30), with the state taking positive actions to support the education of marginalised groups (Kamoga, 2016). This intention is reflected, for example, in the move to Universal Primary Education (UPE) (1997) which increased the possibilities of access to education for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), and the People with Disability Act (2006). The UPE widened access to education, and gender disparities reduced. However, issues of attrition, poor performance and the quality of pupils' educational experience remain (Altinyelken, 2010; Musisi, 2017), with widespread variation, across Uganda. For example, 62% of children are enrolled in schools in Kampala. However, 500 km north of the capital, this is the case for only 5% and 6% of children in West Nile and Karamoja respectively (UNICEF, 2015). Overall only 40% of enrolled pupils will subsequently enrol in secondary education at 13 years of age (UNICEF, 2015). The group most at risk of exclusion, across the education system, are children with disabilities and SEN (Ojok & Wormnæs, 2013).

Many factors influence children's opportunities for inclusion. Whilst the People with Disability Act (2006) prohibits discrimination within education against disabled learners, it does not address indirect discrimination such as making reasonable adjustments or curriculum adaptation (Kamoga, 2016), and there continues to be exclusion of students with disabilities (Musisi, 2017). Teachers' beliefs about teaching more diverse classes are also an important factors in pupils' access to inclusive educational experiences, with positive beliefs being associated with improved pupil experiences (Kameyama et al.,

2017). These beliefs and attitudes can be mediated by historical and cultural factors. For example, the notion of universal primary education can run counter to regional traditional practices such those of the Karimojong. This semi-nomadic tribe traditionally migrate to find water and grassland for their cattle, and children work rather than attending schools. Where education has been used as an instrument of social oppression, elders once forbade children attending school or learning to use a pen (Ojok & Wormnæs, 2013). Against this backdrop, universal education can be seen as an unwelcome imposition.

Another factor influencing Uganda's realisation of education for all has been the implementation of a thematic curriculum. This seeks to integrate subject knowledge within an interdisciplinary approach (Westbrook *et al.*, 2013) and has been regarded as perhaps the most significant educational development, post UPE (1997) (The National Curriculum Development Centre, (NCDC), 2006). This curriculum includes a focus on "The treatment of concepts holistically, under themes of immediate meaning and relevance to the learner" (Altinyelken, 2010, p154). The importance this gives to children's experiences and interests implies a child-centred pedagogy. Altinyelken (2010) highlights the following pedagogic intentions within the curriculum (NCDC 2006. p3).

1. Children should have a chance to interact with each other and with the teacher during the lesson;
2. Class activities should be organised so that children learn by doing. They should be able to move around from time to time, and to use their hands;
3. Activities should be organised around a variety of learning materials, and children should be able to handle the materials;
4. Children should have an opportunity, from time to time, to have influence in the direction that the lesson (or day) takes. Allow the lesson to reflect the interests, abilities and concerns of the children.

(Altinyelken, 2010, p.514)

These intentions exemplify a social constructivist pedagogy, which foregrounds social engagement as a pedagogic tool for knowledge development. This type of teacher-facilitated, student-centred pedagogy might include "Small-group, pair and whole-class interactive work, extended dialogue with individuals, higher order questioning, teacher modelling, showing, problem solving, inquiry-based learning" (Westbrook *et al.*, 2013, p12) and NCDC (2006) explicitly promotes cooperative, and self-directed learning. This resonates with international research into the nature of inclusive pedagogy, in which social constructivist approaches (that foreground this type of teaching) are associated with improved outcomes for diverse groups of learners (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Kieron Sheehy *et al.*, 2009). However, delivering this type of curriculum can be challenging for teachers, who need to 'negotiate their way through the mixes and layers brought by pedagogic reform;' (Westbrook *et al.*, 2013, p38) and the practical and epistemological barriers to implementing changes in practice (Sheehy, 2017). This difficulty is reflected in findings that relatively few teachers changed their teaching approach after the introduction of the thematic curriculum and that student group interactions are not typically used as a pedagogic tool (Altinyelken, 2010), and lessons are unlikely to be connected to pupils' experiences (Holland, Long, & Regan, 2012).

This lack of a social constructivist pedagogy, which might underpin the thematic curriculum, may also be because teachers are not familiar with this approach and need exposure to explicit models to support a change in practice. Ugandan teachers have been charged with the responsibilities of delivering a child-centred, inclusive curriculum in demanding circumstances, where for example there can be over-crowded classes (Jones, 2016). In Ojok and Wormnæs (2013) research 40% of teachers were teaching classes of 50-100 pupils) and less than 40% of pupils who start primary education complete it (Dietz, Vink, & Admiraal, 2017). However, large scale research suggests that pedagogical rather than structural

innovations are likely to have the greatest impact (Jones, 2016). In this context one potential innovation which appears to have merit is that of child-led research.

Although operationalised in different ways (Kim, 2016) child-led research is essentially an inclusive research approach in which children are supported to research topics that have relevance and interest for them (Kellett, Forrest, Dent, & Ward, 2004). This approach has developed from a children's' rights perspective. Since the UNCRC was launched, within education, the degree to which children's rights have, and should, inform practice continues to be debated (Gillett-Swan & Coppock, 2016) and its influence and implementation is varied (Kim, 2016). One consequence of the UNCRC, and the right to participation, has been significant attempts to actively involve children in research. Rather than viewing children simply as passive data sources, approaches have been developed that might facilitate children in initiating, directing or even conducting research. Kim (2016) critically analyses the various ways in which the notion of children as researchers has been constructed. This has included children participating as co-researchers with adults or being supported to be 'primary researchers' carrying out their own research. The latter practice has been argued to help children in several ways including an increased participation in decision making about important issues in their own lives and a variety of educational benefits (see Kim, 2016). Government guidance regarding participation was developed in the 'National Child Participation Guide for Uganda: Creating an Environment for Children to be Heard' (Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development et al., 2008). This includes a case study, in which a group of children were given research skills to give feedback on aspects of the Universal Primary Education programme to support its development. This remains a relatively isolated example. Where participatory opportunities for children do exist, they often 'exclude the poorest and most disadvantaged children' (UNICEF, 2015, p11) and are limited for disabled children and those with special educational needs (Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development et al., 2008). If the aspiration for increased inclusion and participation is to be achieved then it becomes a necessity to empower a wider group of children, within schools, with the skills to research aspects of their own lives.

Child-led research has been argued to be an essential and feasible approach for facilitating social justice and inclusion. The World Vision (2017) report concluded that supporting children to carry out their own research, on issues that matter to them, gives them a voice and can significantly impact upon decisions made about those issues—for example concerning violence against children (World Vision, 2017). This type of inclusive research is seen as a way of connecting inclusive education and inclusive research and "makes sense for teachers' and learners' democratic development of education" (Nind, 2014, p525). Inclusive research "must be relevant to the people concerned; it must matter to them and benefit them, 'access and represent their views and experiences', and treat them with respect." (Nind, 2014, p525). Child-led research can do this, whilst also building on and supporting the collaborative, practical, inclusive, pupil-centred experiences that are a core aspiration of the thematic curriculum. The need for, and the positive affordances of, child-led research in Uganda has been acknowledged at national and international level (Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development et al., 2008; UNICEF, 2015). UNICEF (2015) identified the barriers to implementing this practice: that there is a lack of formal or school-based structures to support this type of practice, and adults' beliefs about children's research capabilities.

Teachers' epistemological beliefs

Teachers' beliefs about the nature of knowledge and how children acquire it significantly influence their classroom practices (Schwartz and Jordan, 2011), and are associated with their personal beliefs about disability and inclusion (Sheehy, Budiyanto, Kaye, & Rofiah, 2017) and perceptions of their roles and responsibilities within the classroom (Schwartz & Jordan, 2011). Consequently the success or failure of educational practices designed to supportive inclusive classroom practices is strongly mediated by teachers' epistemological beliefs (Jordan, Glenn, & McGhie-Richmond, 2010).

There is evidence that the dominant conception of learning for rural teachers in Southern Africa is a simple transfer of untransformed knowledge from teacher to pupil through ‘spoon feeding’ (Mafunganyika, 2016, p96). International comparative research frames this as a *traditional model* in which pupil is relatively passive (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCED), 2013). Many Ugandan teachers may struggle, and cease, to implement pedagogical approaches that are less traditional and more pupil centred (Sikoyo, 2010). It has been argued that this is because these approaches are culturally inappropriate and impractical (Guthrie 2013 cited in Mafunganyika, 2016) and that this is why ‘transplanting’ approaches from other educational cultures and contexts is unlikely to be successful (Allen, Hyde, Whannel, & O’Neill, 2017). Mafunganyika (2016) argues that this difficulty can be best understood at the level of teachers’ conceptualisations of learning i.e. their epistemological beliefs. This is an implied explanation for Ugandan teachers’ struggle to teach through pupil enquiry, even in topics where inquiry is central (Ssempala, 2017). This suggests that Ugandan teachers’ abilities and constraints in using particular pedagogical approaches, such as those intended by the thematic curriculum, are not simply produced by external contextual influences, but are shaped significantly by their epistemological beliefs. This may offer insights into the lack of change in classroom pedagogy in response to Ugandan initiatives in policy and curriculum design (Kasule *et al.*, 2015)

There is therefore an explicit complementarity between Uganda’s policies to develop an inclusive education system, (U.P. E., (1997); People with Disability Act (2006)), and the pedagogical assumptions of the thematic curriculum (NCDC, 2006). This complementarity exists because the social constructivist nature of the pedagogy that is framed by this curriculum corresponds with evidence-based approaches that facilitate effective inclusive classroom practices (Nind *et al.*, 2004; Rix, 2015). Child-led research maps well onto the inclusive aspirations and pedagogical intentions of the curriculum, and could potentially contribute the ‘missing’ inclusive structure (UNICEF, 2015) to facilitate teachers delivering child-focused, collaborative, learning. If this approach is to be explored in practice then understanding the nature of Ugandan teachers’ epistemological beliefs, in relation to child-led research and inclusive education should be the starting point. This includes consideration of adults’ beliefs about children’s’ research capabilities and which groups are at risk of exclusion from this approach (UNICEF, 2015).

This research therefore seeks to understand the epistemological beliefs of Ugandan teachers and how these relate to notions of child-led research, inclusion and pedagogy. This is the first time that this relationship has been researched. The research aimed to produce findings that would inform the subsequent development and piloting of a Ugandan Child-led school-based research initiative.

Method

A questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was developed that incorporated existing and new questionnaire items, mindful of ethical guidance (British Psychological Society, 2014) to ask only necessary and justifiable questions. Self-report questionnaires are an established method for researching epistemological beliefs within education (Schraw, 2013)

Questions 1 and 2 asked about current occupation and types of school, both of which have been previously indicated as influencing teachers’ beliefs (Ahmmed, Sharma and Deppeler, 2012)

Questions 3-26 were taken from (Budiyanto, Sheehy, Kaye, & Rofiah, 2017) and epistemological questions from the OECD international survey (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCED), 2013). These items are designed to elicit responses in relation to traditional, behaviourist, constructivist, social constructivist perspectives. There are also items that consider issues of inclusive education and school placement (Q6, Q 7, Q 20, Q 22, Q 23, Q 24, Q 25) and beliefs about innate/fixed ability (Lee, Zhang, Song, & Huang, 2013) (Q 16, Q 17, Q 18). Previous research (Budiyanto *et al.*, 2017) as indicated that pupil happiness is viewed differently by teachers with different epistemological and cultural backgrounds, and Q27 explores this. The use of these questions has been established in previous research with teachers (Sheehy & Budiyanto, 2015). Questions 27 to 34 focus on

child-led research (Kim, Sheehy, & Kerawalla, 2016). The questions consider teacher confidence in teaching children to research (Q28), beliefs about primary school children being able to carry out research (Q28), the relevance of independent research for primary school children (Q29), which children should carry out this type of research (Q30, Q31), a desire for training (Q32), space in the school day for children to carry out research (Q33), and if teachers' believed children would enjoy carrying out research projects (Q34).

The questions were mixed together and hard copy questionnaire created, along with a research information sheet and consent form.

Participants

The questionnaire was distributed in Kampala, at Kyambogo University, and Hillside Primary School-Naalya. Each questionnaire was available for collection at a central point within the two institutions and contained information about the project to support participants' informed consent. Participation was voluntary and teachers could choose to return their completed questionnaires to the research assistants that were employed in the aforementioned institutions.

The research followed the British Psychological Society ethical guidance (British Psychological Society, 2014) and was supported by the Ethics committee of the researchers' respective universities.

An estimated 250 questionnaires were distributed, with 184 questionnaires being returned. A return rate of 73.6 %. As Figure 1 and 2 indicate the majority of respondents were teachers within inclusive schools.

Figure 1. Occupation of Respondents about here

Figure 2 Respondents' Type of school about here

Eight respondents worked in tertiary education as teacher trainers or student tutors.

Findings

Descriptive analysis.

The majority of teachers expressed positive beliefs about child-led research. They believe that they would be able to teach children to do it (85% agree or strongly agree), that the children they teach would enjoy it (88% agree or strongly agree) and that they would like to be trained to support children as researchers (93% agree or strongly agree). Responses also indicated that most (72%) disagreed that this activity would only be suitable for intellectually gifted children. However, items concerning special educational needs elicited more divided responses. Whilst the majority believed that 'All children have a right to education with their peers' (96% agree or strongly agree), beliefs about what this meant in practice varied. As Figure 3 shows the majority of respondents felt that pupils with special educational needs would learn most effectively in a special school or within a special class in a regular school.

Figure 3. Respondents beliefs (n=187) about where children with special educational needs learn most effectively about here.

Analysis of the responses indicated that whilst nearly all the teachers (97%) agreed that to learn effectively children should be happy, there was a significant correlation between positive responses to social constructivist and constructivist items and the extent of agreement with the happiness item. (Social Constructivist $r=0.283$, $p=0.0001$; Constructivist $r=.0.155$, $p=0.04$).

Principal Component Analysis

The data were reviewed with regard to conducting a principal components analysis (PCA). Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p > 0.001$) confirmed that the data were suitable for PCA and yielded a Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (sampling adequacy) score of 0.674. Although 'mediocre' (Beavers et al., 2013), it exceeds the 0.6 'threshold' and so a PCA analysis can be supported (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The sample size of 184 and number of questions (34) complies with a recommendation for 5 questionnaire items per respondent (Gorsuch, 1983). The internal consistency of the questionnaire (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.771). was acceptable (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

A PCA with Varimax rotation was carried out and, informed by a scree analysis, values below 0.3 were omitted. Five components were extracted (See Table 1) accounting for 14%, 11%, 7%, 6% and 5% respectively, of the variance.

Table 1 Rotated component matrix about here

Component 1. Research is only for genetically gifted children

This component brought together beliefs about children having a fixed intellectual ability, research being suitable for only the intellectually gifted older children and the nature of teaching. The data showed an association between beliefs about children's educational potential being fixed at birth and not changing with education, 'average will remain average', research being unsuitable for primary school children and only suited for the intellectually gifted. Within this component was a belief that there should be a single teaching method for all learning situations, and a disagreement that children's talk was valuable in class or that children needed to be happy in order to learn effectively. Teachers with these beliefs were also likely to agree that there was not time in the school day for children to carry out research projects.

Component 2. Grouping by dis/ability to learn facts quietly

This component reveals the association between beliefs about special educational needs and pedagogy. The belief that children should be taught in classes according to their intelligence was associated with beliefs that children with special educational needs should be taught alongside children with similar needs in a special class or in a special school. The pedagogical beliefs associated with this were that the teacher's role was to teach facts and demonstrate the correct way to solve problems and that a quiet classroom was needed for *[this type of]* learning. This grouping would match features of *traditional* epistemological beliefs identified in other countries (Lee et al., 2013).

Component 3. Inclusive social constructivist 'noisy' learners

The third component contains the belief that all children have a right to education with their peers. Associated with this is a belief that educational potential is *not* fixed at birth. In terms of pedagogy, this component contains beliefs that thinking and reasoning processes are more important than specific curriculum content, that children learn best by finding solutions themselves and that the teacher's role is to facilitate this process. This seems to fit with a *social constructivist* epistemological perspective (Sheehy & Budiyo, 2015) because of the associated belief that children learn best through collaborative activities. Consistent with this is the associated belief that quiet classrooms are *not* effective for learning.

Component 4. Research is a social process that children would enjoy and I could teach

This component brings together a belief that knowledge is socially created with beliefs about child-led research. The belief that respondents could teach children to carry out research projects was associated with a belief that primary school children can be taught to carry out research and that they would enjoy doing this.

Component 5. Constructivism and correct answers

The teaching approaches associated with the beliefs in the fifth component are ones in which children should be allowed to find their own solutions to problems before they are told the 'real' answers, talking with other pupils and where pupil effort influences what they learn. This corresponds with a belief in the importance of thinking and reasoning. However, this is not an open-ended process as there is a belief that the teacher should teach facts and confirm the correct solutions. This seems to match to some extent with a *constructivist* view of knowledge creation in which a knowable reality is understood through personal enquiry (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCED), 2013). The link between problem solving, thinking and the importance of effort has also arisen in epistemological research with Malaysian science education (Abedalaziz, Leng, & Song, 2013), and more broadly focused Turkish research has suggested that a belief that learning depends on effort reflects the respondents disciplinary background (Tumkaya, 2012).

International Comparison

The questionnaire included all eight items from the OCED international teacher survey, which addressed direct transmission and constructivist beliefs. This allowed a comparison with the Ugandan sample. The recommended approach is to use ipsative means (OECD, 2009, p94). These means indicate the relative endorsement of traditional/direct transmission and constructivist beliefs in the sample. "Positive score values indicate that one set of beliefs receives a relatively stronger support than the other" (OECD, 2009, p. 94). Ipsative means were calculated for the Ugandan data (direct transmission mean = - 0.09; constructivist mean = 0.09). This reveals that Ugandan teachers, overall, endorse constructivist beliefs more strongly than traditional/direct transmission beliefs.

Comparison of responses to traditional/direct, constructivist and social constructivist items indicated that a significant difference existed between them (Freidman's Analysis of Variance by Ranks, $\chi^2(2)=10.2$, $p=0.006$). A post hoc analysis, adjusting for type 1 errors using a Bonferroni correction, (setting a significance level at 0.017) found that significant differences existed between social constructivist and constructivist beliefs ($Z= -3.484$, $p= 0.0001$) and social constructivist and traditional beliefs ($Z= -2.879$, $p= 0.004$). The difference between the constructivist and traditional beliefs narrowly failed to reach the adjusted level of significance ($Z= -2.373$, $p= 0.018$). The median response for each set of items was 2.

Discussion

The research findings offer original insights into the epistemological beliefs of Ugandan teachers, and how these relate to beliefs about inclusion and pedagogy, and also the relationship between epistemological beliefs and child led-research.

There is overall support for the notion of child-led research, and beliefs about child –led research appear to be associated with, and mediated by, teachers' epistemological beliefs. Teachers with beliefs in a traditional/direct transmission model of knowledge development are less likely to see child-led research as a possible educational activity (Component 1). In contrast, seeing research as a social activity was associated with positive beliefs about child-led research and agreement with social constructivist items was significantly associated with a belief in inclusive education (Component 3).

International comparative research has debated the appropriateness of constructivist approaches in non-European countries (Allodi & Carstens, 2013), partly because there are large differences between teachers', in different countries, relative endorsement of traditional and constructivist epistemological

perspectives. For example, in some countries teachers may not differentiate greatly in their beliefs regarding direct transmission and constructivist teaching (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCED), 2013). This is not the case in this sample of Ugandan teachers and their differential strength of endorsement for constructivist items is similar to that seen in Australia, north-western Europe and Scandinavia (OECD, 2009). As in these countries, “teachers believe that their task is not simply to present facts and give their students the opportunity to practice, but rather that they should support students in their active construction of knowledge” (p 94). A caveat to this comparison is that the Ugandan sample is much smaller than the OECD samples (n = 4000).

Because of the significance of social constructivist pedagogy in facilitating inclusive education, it is important to distinguish between constructivist and social constructivist beliefs (Sheehy et al., 2017). This research indicates that the Ugandan teachers were significantly more likely to endorse positive responses to social constructivist beliefs than constructivist or traditional beliefs. These results challenge previous research, in rural areas, which suggested that Ugandan teachers held predominantly traditional/direct transmission epistemological beliefs (Mafunganyika, 2016). This work in Kampala, implies this sample of educators largely hold epistemological beliefs that would complement child-led research. This suggests that the barrier to implementing child-focused teaching cannot be attributed solely to the nature of teachers’ beliefs, rather it supports an argument that teachers require explicit models of practice to facilitate the expression of existing social constructivist beliefs as ‘real world’ teaching approaches. The issue of regional variations of epistemological beliefs in Uganda is raised as an issue for further investigation. In the context of considering the potential for child-led research work in Kampala, teacher’s epistemological beliefs and their attitudes towards child-led research appear to be largely supportive.

However, there appears to be an issue about the possibilities for developing *inclusive* child-led research, in which children with special educational needs might engage as equal members of the class. The majority of teachers believe that children labelled in this way would learn best within special schools and special classes. This issue merits further investigation. One possibility is that this again reflects a lack of experience with pedagogical models that support inclusive classroom practice and that, without these models, the prevailing practices act as barriers to inclusion (Arbeiter & Hartley, 2002). Additionally this may be influenced by the stigmatisation of children with special educational needs (Arbeiter & Hartley, 2002; Jagire, 2015; Mbazzi, 2017). Previous research has concluded that ‘There is no evidence to date that differences in belief patterns are related to length of teaching experience, to class size or elementary school grade level’ (Jordan, 2013, p11). However, this research occurred within western nations, where the large class sizes that can occur in Uganda are not typically found. Therefore, there is need to examine further the influence of non-western (outside North American or Europe) school environments on teacher epistemological beliefs, and how this influences their beliefs about inclusive practice. This will help gain insights into the influence of, and interplay between, attitudes to inclusive education and class size (Ojok & Wormnæs, 2013) and teachers’ pedagogic approaches (O’Sullivan, 2006; Westbrook *et al.*, 2013).

The findings support research that has suggested that there is a relationship between epistemological beliefs and notions of happiness in learning (Budiyanto et al., 2017). In particular, that social constructivist beliefs correlate significantly with beliefs that children’s happiness is important in relation to learning. Previous research indicates that cultural and linguistic differences exist in how the notion of happiness is constructed (Shaver, Murdaya, & Fraley, 2001). Having revealed that happiness and epistemological beliefs are associated, future research is needed to understand the notion of happiness, in the context of learning, as perceived by Ugandan teachers.

Conclusion

At policy level there is a clear complementarity between Uganda’s aim for educational for all and the nature of the school curriculum. There is also a synergy between the pedagogy implied for the thematic curriculum and that which has been identified as supporting inclusive practice. Child-led research fits

well with Ugandan policy aspirations and merits consideration as a pedagogical model for Ugandan classrooms. This research is the first to consider the relationship between Ugandan teachers' epistemological beliefs and child-led research. It indicates that teachers' epistemological beliefs are important in relation to beliefs about child-led research, and challenges the argument that Ugandan teachers' typical epistemological beliefs are the primary barrier to implementing more thematic child-focused pedagogies. It suggests a more nuanced picture, in which teachers need accessible models of practice in order to develop innovative classroom pedagogies. These models can potentially help deliver an inclusive thematic curriculum in the context of Ugandan schools, which will reflect, and allow the expression of, the existing epistemological beliefs of many teachers. However, if this potential is to be realised then further understanding is needed about the interplay between beliefs about special educational needs and disability, structural factors and current pedagogical practices.

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