

Education for children with Albinism in Tanzania. A cooperation project of the University College of Teacher Education Styria and the University of Moshi

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Abstract

Based on the Erasmus+ project “Inclusion of children and young people with disabilities in Tanzania – transfer of knowledge and experience in the field of school inclusion” of the University of Teacher Education Styria and Mwenge Catholic University in Moshi in Tanzania, this article briefly describes how transnational cooperation can take place on several levels to achieve a better global understanding of inclusive education. The cooperation between the University of Teacher Education Styria and Mwenge Catholic University is related to a project of the organization Lebenshilfe Graz and Styria, Missio Austria and the government of Styria. On the one hand, the focus of the article is on the situation of people with albinism in Tanzania and on a short presentation of two schools where children and adolescents with and without disabilities (also pupils with albinism) are taught together, the St. Francis Primary School, and the St. Pamachius Inclusive Secondary School. On the other hand, the Erasmus+ project is described in greater detail, thus providing sustainable insights into the professionalization of teachers in inclusive settings as well as into the education system of the two participating countries Austria and Tanzania (Pädagogische Hochschule Steiermark, 2020).

Keywords

Inclusion, albinism, transnational cooperation, human rights, teacher professionalism

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1 Introduction

Since 2011, the University College of Teacher Education Styria has been cooperating with university colleges and universities outside Europe. The project described in this article is the first cooperation with an African university, the Mwenge Catholic University in Moshi, Tanzania. Both the University College of Teacher Education Styria as well as the Mwenge Catholic University in Moshi, Tanzania, are centres for teacher education. Internationalisation in lecturing and in research is an integral part of the strategic orientation of both institutions.

Being Austria's first UNESCO university college, the University College of Teacher Education Styria has a strong focus on sustainable development, on education towards democracy and peace, on human rights and human rights education, and on Global Citizenship Education in the areas of teacher education, advanced training, and in-service training.

That focus is the starting point for the central objectives of the mobility project: The exchange of knowledge and of experience regarding school education of children with disabilities, and the specific training of teachers for children with special needs will contribute to implement the "Sustainable Development Goals by 2030", and the "Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities". The central goal of both agreements that can be brought to realisation timely and sustainable, is the education of people.

According to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, all individuals with disabilities have the right to live on equal footing with others in their social environment, and to have access to inclusive and free high-quality primary and secondary schools (United Nations, 2006).

The "Sustainable Development Goals by 2030" aim for all girls and boys to be able to graduate from free, fair, and high-quality primary and secondary schools by 2030. To achieve that goal requires a distinct increase in qualified teachers, and international cooperation in teacher education (United Nations, 2015).

2 General information about Tanzania and people with disabilities in Tanzania

Tanzania is located on the East coast of Africa on the Indian ocean. Dodoma is the capital city, and the official national language is Kiswahili, with English also being widely used. Tanganyika became independent and a republic on 9th December 1961 and 1962 respectively. Zanzibar became independent on 10th December 1963 and the People's Republic of Zanzibar was established after the Revolution on 12th January 1964. The two sovereign states formed the United Republic of Tanzania on 26th April 1964 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021, p. 1). The population of the United Republic of Tanzania has increased

more than four times from 12.3 million in 1967 to 57.6 million in 2020 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021, p. 20). The prevalence rate of people with disabilities, aged 5–24, is 2.3 percent in Mainland Tanzania and 1.8 percent in Zanzibar. These rates indicate that over 600,000 children and young people in Tanzania have a disability (UNICEF, 2021, p. 39).

Visual impairments and mobility impairments represent the largest proportion of disability types in Tanzania. Difficulties in seeing were with 3.7 percent the most reported form of disability, followed by mobility with 3.1 percent, hearing with 1.9 percent, cognition with 1.5 percent and communication with 0.8 percent (Shughuru, 2013, p. 342).

In developing countries like Tanzania, poverty and diseases are still widespread. In these countries, people with disabilities are particularly affected by poverty, and consequently live a life on the margins of society. 80 percent of all people with disabilities worldwide are living in developing countries. The culturally specific definitions of disability and the treatment of individuals with disabilities in different cultures show a worldwide alignment with the medically shaped concept of disability in the dimension that disability is also a social phenomenon. What differs considerably between the different cultures, however, is the concrete social situation of people with disabilities (Neubert & Cloerkes, 2001, pp. 5–6). The treatment of people with disabilities in Tanzania is still strongly influenced by the traditional worldview, and disability is tried to be explained with associated ideas, such as superstition. The behaviour towards people with disabilities is determined by the life within the extended family and the associated obligations. Within these extended families, individuals with a disability are mostly equal members, with the family providing the framework for their support and for being responsible for their care, upbringing, education and employment. However, due to the increasing rural exodus, extended families are increasingly dissolving. In the cities, institutionalized support services are not always available, with the consequence that the nuclear family must bear the burdens and challenges resulting from a disability (Müller-Mbwilo, 2008, p. 44). The differences in the response towards individuals with disabilities are influenced by society. Furthermore, in the different regions of Tanzania the reaction towards individuals with disabilities is different and, for example, depends on the type, but also on the visibility of a disability. Reactions towards individuals with disabilities have a wide range, reaching from highly negative reactions such as neglect and discrimination, to overprotection of individuals with disabilities (Kern, 2013, p. 66).

Tanzania signed and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) on 30 March 2007 and on 10 November 2009 respectively, and the Optional Protocol to the (CRPD) on 29 September 2008 and 10 November 2009 respectively (Shughuru, 2013, p. 342).

Against the background of the state of Tanzania having committed itself to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, there are some attempts to implement this very convention. For example, there are organizations representing and advocating

for the rights and welfare of persons with disabilities. In Tanzania, there are a total of ten Disabled Peoples' Organizations (DPOs) working for the rights and welfare of people with a wide range of disabilities, for example in the areas of visual impairment and blindness, hearing impairment, cognitive impairment and others, but also specifically for albinism, called Tanzania Albino Society (TAS) (Shughuru, 2013, p. 352).

3 People with albinism in Tanzania

Albinism is a genetically inherited condition resulting from a lack of (or the transport of) melanin pigment in skin, hair, and eyes, occurring worldwide, though in varying prevalence, regardless of ethnicity or gender (Brockmann, 2011, p. 15). There are two types of albinism, one being the oculo-cutaneous type with both skin and eyes being affected by the lack of melanin, the other type being the ocular type with only the eyes being affected (Brockmann, 2011, p. 21). Common to both types is the vulnerability to sun exposure and the increased risk of getting skin cancer. The different types of albinism also differ in the degree of the affected individuals' visual abilities. The lack of melanin displays itself in the iris, the retina, and in the visual nerve, leading to various forms of visual impairment. Individuals with albinism often compensate for the increased sensitivity to light with strong sunglasses (Käsmann-Kellner, 2005, p. 13).

In some parts of the world, especially in some African countries, albinism is still profoundly misunderstood, both socially and medically. The physical appearance of persons with albinism frequently is the object of erroneous beliefs and myths influenced by superstition, which foster their marginalization and social exclusion (Ero et al., 2021).

In Africa, Tanzania scores highest in the birth rate of people with albinism. Current estimates indicate that 18,000 people with albinism are currently living in Tanzania (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2021, p. 18). In some African countries, and in Tanzania in particular, people have different perceptions about individuals with albinism. The major problem seems to be the lack of education and missing experiences regarding interactions with individuals with albinism. "Zeruzeru", a swearword for colored persons with white skin, literally means "double zero" and sometimes is used to replace the birthname and is extremely shameful for the affected individuals (Bieker, 2003, p. 47). Superstition, prosecution and repudiation from society lead to affected individuals being the target of so-called witch doctors. Based on the belief that individuals with albinism own magical powers, their skin, blood and hair are used sometimes for making potions (Neumann, 2009, p. 11). In some areas the hair is used to knit fisher nets, supposedly leading to a good catch (Van der Horst-Tenberken, 2011, p. 27). Another belief is that persons with individuals are spirits rather than human beings, yet another reason for discrimination and threat to their lives (Kajiru & Nyimbi, 2020).

While the body parts are said to bring good luck and wealth, living people with this genetic defect are considered a bad omen or cursed. As a result can be, that people with albinism avoid living in public, children with albinism (often) do not attend school, and their special needs are not considered. Without education, they have little chance of finding a job as adults and are therefore exposed to a particularly high risk of poverty (United Nations, 2019, p. 12). Even the simplest aids, such as sunscreen to protect against the increased risk of skin cancer or eyeglasses to prevent impaired vision, are not available. Around the years 2007 and 2008, people with albinism, particularly in rural Tanzania, were murdered because their body parts were irrationally believed to have the potential to lead to economic wealth. Nearly 60 incidents were reported, and criminal charges were filed against the suspects. Many people continue to express anger at the way the government has responded to the incidents and the way the cases have been delayed in the justice system (Shughuru, 2013, p. 354). Because of the high incidence of persons with albinism in Tanzania compared to other African countries, a self-help organization called “Tanzania Albinism Society” aims to fight for the rights and needs of individuals with albinism, to support the families, to explain the etiology of the disorder, and to fight against disadvantage, mistrust and prejudice in the society (Bieker, 2003, pp. 47–48). The International Albinism Awareness Day on June 13, established by the United Nations, has been very welcome, creating a platform of awareness. This internationally recognized day aims to raise awareness of the sometimes-serious human rights violations, stigma and discrimination faced by individuals with albinism in many countries around the world and to show that affected persons are human beings just as any other persons in the world (United Nations, 2019).

4 Transnational cooperation on multiple levels

The cooperation of the University College of Teacher Education Styria with the Mwenge Catholic University is connected to a project of the organisation “Lebenshilfe Graz and Styria”, Missio Austria and the government of Styria. Within this project, two schools where children with and without disabilities are educated together, the St. Francis Primary School and the St. Pamachus Inclusive Secondary School, are accompanied and supported. Both schools also educate children with albinism who frequently also display impairments in the areas of vision and hearing. The cooperation of those two schools will be strengthened even more with the aim to facilitate the transfer from primary to secondary school also for children with disabilities or albinism.

4.1 “Love, Live, Hope” – the lived school vision of the St. Francis Primary School

The educational programme at the Primary School St. Francis of Assisi has a wide range. There is an intensive elementary education programme for children with and without disabilities as well as for children with albinism starting at the age of three. The focus is on early intervention in the areas of distinct disabilities (blindness, hearing loss and elements of Montessori education). In the regular primary school, work is done on 8 school levels on another inclusive issue – expressed in an excerpt from the mission statement: “Can we tell a blind or deaf child that he or she cannot learn in school?”. Intensive school and extra-curricular support are guaranteed as a large part of the pedagogical staff also lives on “campus”, and the pedagogical staff also includes blind and deaf teachers who are treated and employed equally to their colleagues without disabilities. In addition, there are separate support conferences for individual children with special support needs. Still, quite a few children with albinism are not admitted until they are 10 or 12 years old. They have not had the opportunity to receive school education, although just like for all children it is important for them, too, to receive basic education. Their education is also accompanied by internal differentiation and individual support. Some children are orphans because their parents had died prematurely due to the still widespread HIV-disease or the enormously rampant malaria. For these children, but also for those who come from distant villages, full accommodation in the school and the associated school home is necessary.

At the same time, there is a large influx of children with albinism. Accommodations must be created also for these children; therefore, work is currently underway to expand the number of school home places. With the support of Missio Austria, the province of Styria, and the organisation “Lebenshilfe Graz and Styria”, new places are currently being created.

Under difficult external conditions, another school motto is being followed in an admirable way: “Don’t be afraid to be who you are, someone out there needs to meet someone like you”.

4.2 St. Pamachius Inclusive Secondary School

Under the guiding principle “Building a community that is properly educated with discipline and respect for all” and the vision “to be a diverse inclusive secondary school committed to academic excellence and integrity”, this school has been run by the Diocese of Moshi since February 2019. At this secondary co-educational inclusive school for young people aged 14 and above, around 240 students are currently taught in English, Kiswahili and sign language in relation to all the subjects prescribed for a secondary school, and are thus also prepared for university studies.

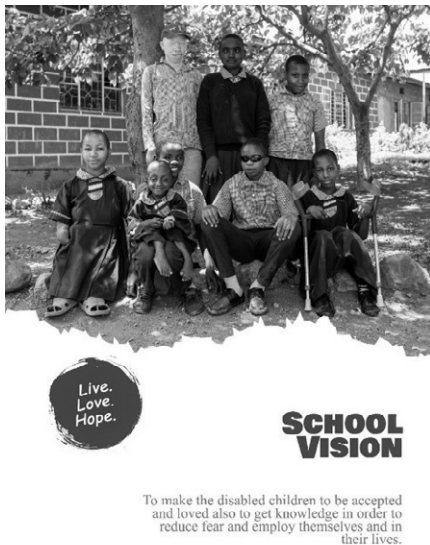


Figure 1: School Vision – St. Francis Inclusive Primary School, Tanzania

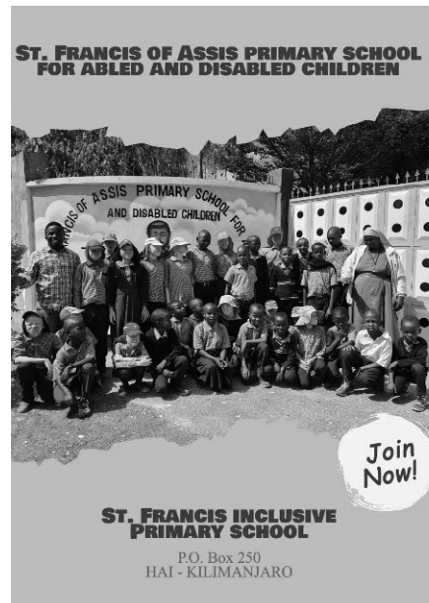


Figure 2: Folder St. Francis Inclusive Primary School, Tanzania

Sign language is used not only throughout the lessons, but also in leisure time; all young people, whether deaf or not, learn sign language, thus creating the possibility of a true encounter at eye-level. The offer to acquire sign language skills also is open for young people with albinism. Currently, more than 50 young people with sensory disabilities are being taught, and there is a strong focus on individual learning support for all pupils. After-school assistance is available for pupils with special care needs.

All facilities – school classrooms, school dormitories for girls and boys, public spaces, library, church, and leisure facilities – are designed to be barrier-free. Such an ambitious concept is cost-intensive. The school operation as well as the expansion of the school dormitory and further school classes are financed, among others, by church organisations, such as Missio Austria, and by private donors.

The headmaster's motto is: "Inclusion is the best option for Tanzania, Africa and the world". Due to the great success of this school model, an expansion of the school classes and of the school home currently is in progress.

4.3 Expansion of the school network

The next step in the expansion of inclusive school models is the project “Inclusive eco-social vocational school on Kilimanjaro”. The aim is to provide training for young people with and without disabilities in “rainforest protection” and “forestry and reforestation” as a contribution to averting climate catastrophe in the vast savannahs and steppes around Kilimanjaro.

4.4 Charta for children’s rights

Furthermore, in cooperation with the Austrian organisation “Lebenshilfe” (described above), Missio Austria, and the local school administrations, a Children’s Rights Charta is being drafted for all inclusive church-schools, and subsequently for all schools and school homes of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Moshi. A draft is already available. The next step is to involve the new church leadership of the Diocese of Moshi in the recognition process. In this context, according to the project initiators Patrick Asanterabi and Martin Hochegger, it is envisaged that after completion and acceptance of this charter by the new bishop, all teachers and educators should be enrolled at Mwenge Catholic University through further training on child rights issues.

5 Key points of the Erasmus+ project

5.1 Project goals

The focus of the Erasmus+ project – Higher education student and staff mobility between Programme and Partner Countries – in the first phase from 2020 to 2023 is the mobility of teachers from the two universities with the aim of establishing a transfer of experience and knowledge with regards to school and university education. The participation of teachers in study programmes by both universities is seen as an important factor for the internationalisation of higher education. The participants in the mobility programme should enable sustainable insights both into the professionalization of teachers and into the education system of the respective other country; thus, the participants are to become active mediators of intercultural competences.

Mwenge Catholic University (MWECAU) became a full-fledged university in 2014 and comprises the faculties of Education, Science and Arts and Social Sciences. Courses offered by these faculties include education, sociology and social work, geography and environmental studies, mathematics and statistics, business administration, project planning and management, master’s degrees in business administration and education, and a doctoral programme in education. The university has a policy of open access and equal opportunities for students and staff. MWECAU has started to establish a new programme to train teachers for students with special needs. Since there is only one university that trains

such teachers the demand is great. Having started with 31 students at the beginning, the university currently is attended by around 5,000 students.

The teachers of the University College of Teacher Education Styria will provide courses at Mwenge Catholic University in the areas of inclusive education and support for children with motor and sensory disabilities, and will support the university in developing programmes for the education and in-service training of teachers and educators with a focus on human rights education, inclusion and special education. Another objective will be advising the teachers of the university with regard to accompanying the two schools described above in their school development.

The teachers from Mwenge Catholic University will attend courses at the University College of Teacher Education Styria with a focus on human rights education, inclusion and special needs education. Furthermore, they will visit schools with long-term experience in supporting children and adolescents with motor and sensory disabilities.

The student mobility envisaged in the second phase focuses on the development of international educator competences such as cultural empathy and open-mindedness in a global context in order to develop a mutual understanding of each other's culture and to contribute to reducing the potential for global conflicts. Furthermore, the acquisition of competences in the field of inclusive education and special needs education against the background of different cultures and educational policy frameworks is to be promoted.

As participants in the teacher mobility on the part of the University College of Teacher Education Styria, a team of six persons will cover the following fields of expertise: organisational development, human resources development, inclusive education, human rights education, support areas of vision, hearing, and motor skills. Furthermore, teachers and students from Mwenge Catholic University will be introduced to possibilities of augmentative and alternative communication modes to support children and adolescents with complex communication needs.

Participants in the teacher mobility of Mwenge Catholic University are persons who are responsible for the development of study programmes and for further training in inclusion and special needs education, as well as persons who are involved as lecturers in the in-service training on the Children's Rights Charter for the teaching staff of the two project schools.

5.2 *Project activities to date*

Due to Covid-19, the meetings between the participants of the two universities so far have been exclusively virtual. The first meeting took place in January 2021, the second in April 2021, the third in July 2021, and the fourth meeting is planned in November/December 2021. Each meeting had a different focus. While the first meeting focused on getting to know each other personally and introducing the respective institution, the



Figure 3 and 4: Screenshots of third meeting of the project partners in July 2021

second meeting presented the school system of the respective country as well as the school support for children with disabilities. In the third meeting, the expectations of the teachers at the University of Moshi were discussed. Objectives are insights into the curricula of the University of Teacher Education Styria, how student teachers can acquire a basic understanding of inclusive education as well as competences for supporting children with disabilities at school. Furthermore, concrete examples are expected of how materials and specific aids can be used to teach pupils with physical and sensory disabilities. The fourth meeting will focus on the concrete planning of the 10-day mobility of the teachers of the University College of Teacher Education Styria, including school visits and meetings with regional persons responsible for the implementation of inclusive education for children with albinism.

The mobility of teachers of the University College of Teacher Education Styria in November/December 2021 cannot be specifically reported on here, as at the time of writing this article it is yet to come.

6 Outlook

The project aims to support the international conventions mentioned at the beginning of this paper – “Sustainable Development Goals by 2030” and “Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” – in the field of education, and to actively contribute to teacher education at Mwenje University in Moshi focusing on the acquisition of inclusive competences. Professional competencies of teachers are considered indispensable for the design of an inclusive school system (UNESCO, 1994). Without a systematic reform of pedagogical competencies, an inclusive school system cannot be realised.

Furthermore, an important objective of the mobility programme is to contribute to a better global understanding, and to facilitate the development of international teacher

competences such as cultural empathy in a worldwide context. Styrian and Tanzanian teachers and students should develop a mutual understanding of each other's culture, gain international experience and knowledge, and build a mutual understanding of Europe and Africa respectively. Finally, the mobility represents a broadening of one's own linguistic, cultural and political perspective and a big step towards global understanding as well as professionalization for the profession of teachers.

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