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A review of enabling factors in support intervention programmes for early school leavers: What are the implications for Sub-Saharan Africa?

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ABSTRACT

One of the major problems facing education systems in Sub-Saharan Africa is the phenomenon of young people who leave school before completion. Research has shown that this phenomenon disadvantages young people and exposes them to various forms of social exclusion. Accordingly, there have been increasing calls for the scaling up of support intervention programmes for young people who leave school early. This paper analyses literature on support intervention programmes for early school leavers (ESLs) to identify enabling factors that can be promoted in future or in current less effective interventions. The review revealed that programmes that address the multiple disadvantages and needs of young people through flexible, holistic and intensive support approaches tend to be more attractive and beneficial to the participants. The findings from this review are crucial to policy makers and teachers working in support intervention programmes for ESLs.

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1. Introduction

In the last decade, countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) have made significant progress in providing access to education at both the primary and the secondary school levels, but these countries are far from achieving access to education for all children (Majgaard & Mingat, 2012; Mingat, Ledoux, & Rakotomalala, 2010). Indicators in many countries in this region, however, have shown remarkable improvements in enrolment rates (see Majgaard and Mingat (2012); The World Bank (2013); UNESCO (2014); UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2011)), which is, in large part, due to the introduction of universal primary education in many of the countries and the implementation of programmes such as Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (UNESCO, 2011, 2012). Despite this encouraging trend, there are still many children out of school, the majority of whom are school dropouts or early school leavers (ESLs) (Lewin & Little, 2011, p. 333). Globally 57 million children are out of school, of which 30 million are in SSA (UNESCO, 2013). SSA, South and West Asia have the highest rates of early school leaving (ESLg) to the extent that one out of three children entering primary school will not complete the complete primary cycle (UNESCO, 2013). In its 2011 EFA Global Monitoring Report, UNESCO (2011, p. 47) estimated that 10 million children drop out of primary school every year in SSA. Education systems in SSA are very diverse, but the recurring challenges in the region are related to war-affected areas, poor infrastructure, post-colonial legacies, economic

challenges, diversity of cultures and languages within nations, and exclusion of the poor and the rural (Majgaard & Mingat, 2012; UNESCO, 2013; Zeelen, van der Linden, Nampota, & Ngabirano, 2010).

There are concerns that the aims of education enshrined in the EFA and MDGs agenda may not be realised if the problem of ESLg is not addressed (UNESCO, 2012). The large number of ESLs in SSA threatens development objectives, as these youth leave school without acquiring the skills necessary for life and for future employment. This lack of skills then increases individuals' vulnerability to poverty and social immobility and denies them a chance to enjoy the wider benefits of education. Furthermore, a large number of illiterate and poorly educated youth can be a major burden to the economies of SSA, as it can be considered a wastage of public resources, leads to an absence of skilled labour, low earning power and unemployment (Openjuru, 2010; Woolman, 2002). Accordingly, this situation calls for support intervention programmes to provide alternative sources in education for ESLs to fill the skills gap, thus reducing the vulnerability and social exclusion of ESLs, improving their opportunities to gain employment and making them active citizens in their countries.

Against this background, governments in SSA and international organisations are calling for an investment in second chance education or support interventions for ESLs in addition to retention attempts (Africa Progress Report, 2012). It is imperative that support intervention programmes be established and that existing programmes be enhanced for those who already left school. As most countries in SSA have hitherto not ventured much into support intervention programmes for ESLs (Africa Progress Report, 2012), there is need to learn from other countries on how best such interventions can be designed and implemented.

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Accordingly, this paper analyses available literature on support intervention programmes for ESLs to identify enabling factors that can be implemented in future interventions or current less effective interventions for these youth in SSA. By enabling factors, we are referring to those practices that should be included in support intervention programmes, making such programmes more protective and beneficial to the participants in terms of preparing them for life, for the labour market and for community/national development. This review seeks to answer the following question: What enabling factors, found in the literature, should be considered when developing and implementing effective support intervention programmes for ESLs in SSA? Effectiveness in this case, means achieving the programmes' objectives of combating social exclusion and preparing the youth to become active citizens.

2. The ESLg problem: an overview

Before delving into support intervention programmes for ESLs, it is important that we first gain insight into the problem of ESLg and its consequences. While consensus exists on the challenges of ESLg, the conceptualisation of the phenomenon has been widely discussed and variedly understood (Zeelen, van der Linden, et al., 2010). The concept of 'early school leaving' or 'school dropout' is a very complex one, especially in regard to its definition. Not only is this concept defined differently by different people, but different countries use different stages or years of schooling to determine at what level one is considered to be an ESL. While 'early school leaver' and 'school dropout' are often used interchangeably, Lally (2009) argues that using the term 'dropout' is inaccurate because some young people leave school after making a conscious decision to pursue other employment or training goals, such as apprenticeships. It is also argued that using the term 'dropout' places blame on the young people who leave school prematurely, yet there are always other contributing factors that may not be of their own making (Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Conen & Rutten, 2003). Therefore, we prefer to use the term 'early school leaving', using Cullen's (2000, p.10) definition which summarises various positions in literature: 'early school leaving can be understood as young people leaving school before the legal school leaving age and/or leaving school with limited or no formal qualifications'. In the context of SSA, this category of young people includes those who have not completed the seven or eight years (depending on the country's education system) of basic education, those who have stopped school to enter a trade or vocation (Ananga, 2011), and those who have not made the transition from primary or secondary school to higher institutions that offer formal qualifications for work. In many SSA countries, even those who have completed the primary or secondary school cycles may also be considered ESLs because many of these young people leave school without the skills and competences, that is, attitudes, knowledge, and practical know-how that are required for social and labour market integration (UNESCO, 2011). Since retention in the global North is commonly followed up through the legal system up to a certain age, the phenomenon and definition of ESLg in SSA include a group of learners without basic learning skills because such a legal framework does not exist in many SSA countries and where it exists, it is often poorly enforced.

Studies have shown that ESLg is one of the biggest problems confronting education systems in many parts of the world (e.g., Bradshaw, O'Brennan, & McNeely, 2008; Lamb, Markussen, Tesse, Sandberg, & Polesel, 2011; NESSE, 2009; Smyth, 2005). In the global South, the school dropout rates are staggeringly high (Graeff-Martins et al., 2006), especially in Africa (Brown, 2010; Lewin, 2009; Lewin & Akyeampong, 2009; UNESCO, 2008, 2011, 2013; Zeelen, van der Linden, et al., 2010). The risk factors, incidence, causes and correlates of ESLg have been widely researched (e.g., Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah, 2009; Baker et al., 2001; Bradshaw et al., 2008; Hunt, 2008; Lee & Burkam, 2003; Lewin, 2009). The causes are mainly due to socio-economic and political factors. In SSA, ESLg is exacerbated by household poverty,

child labour, poor quality education, lack of interest in formal education, pregnancy, non-achievement in school, teacher attitudes, distance from school, use of corporal punishment, age of student, inequalities linked to language and ethnicity, and rural–urban differences (Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah, 2009; Ananga, 2011; Tukundane, Zeelen, Minnaert, & Kanyandago, 2014; UNESCO, 2011). In most cases, a combination of these factors leads to ESLg, which is not a one-time event; rather, ESLg is generally a process (Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah, 2009; Liskó, 2009; NESSE, 2009; Teese et al., 2000) characterised by a series of events that result in eventual leaving. The length and nature of the process largely depend on the type of ESL the student is.

Research has demonstrated that ESLg disadvantages young people and exposes them to various forms of social exclusion (e.g., Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; GHK, 2005; NESSE, 2009). According to Walker and Walker (1997, p. 8) social exclusion is '...the dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political or cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society'. As highlighted by Percy-Smith (2000), social exclusion does not only describe economic disadvantages, but also human rights, physical environment, discrimination and, psychological effects. Moreover in the context of lifelong learning, social exclusion is often associated with lack of skills sets and learning opportunities (Zeelen, 2004). The excluding effect of ESLg can not only disrupt young people's personal development, but it also has detrimental effects on their socio-economic standing in the future (Lally, 2009). Their personal life choices and opportunities as well as the development of their personal attributes and their access to services are severely curtailed. Furthermore, they miss out on the wider potential benefits of education such as a sense of self-worth, improved income and social mobility. According to Schargel and Smink (2001, p. 239), such benefits 'extend beyond the individual, the family, the local community, and transcend the state and national boundaries'. Concerned about the plight of ESLs in Africa, the UNESCO (2011, p. 47) EFA Global Monitoring Report stated the consequences of this problem thusly: 'The school dropout crisis diminishes the life chances of highly vulnerable children, closing down a potential escape route from poverty and reducing education's power to strengthen social mobility'.

The problems and consequences associated with ESLg necessitate interventions that are focussed on young people who have left school early and that offer them the necessary skills and competences that should enable them to live a fully integrated life in society. Such interventions should help in the 'acquisition of social capital and of access to career opportunities and life chances' (The National Economic and Social Forum, 2002, p. 8). However, it is important to note that the causes of ESLg are varied and complex (ACER, 2000; Bhanpuri & Reynolds, 2003; Bridgeland et al., 2006; GHK, 2005; Zeelen, van der Linden et al., 2010), as they range from individual issues to family, school and community problems. Thus, ESLs are a very heterogeneous group in which individuals and sub-groups are faced with different circumstances and challenges. Thus, addressing ESLg demands diversified solutions that take this reality into consideration.

3. Intervention programmes for ESLs

Retention or designing programmes that assist 'at-risk' students is thought to be more cost-effective and beneficial in achieving the objectives of education (Combat Poverty Agency, 2001; Lally, 2009; NESSE, 2009). Accordingly, most interventions targeting ESLs are preventative and mainly focus on interrupting the process that leads to ESLg. It is envisaged that strategic responses at different stages in the process will lead to a reduction in the number of young people who leave school early. While retention programmes have been emphasised since the 1980s, the literature shows that ESLg is still a problem in many countries (Lamb et al., 2011; Schargel & Smink, 2001), especially in developing parts of the world such as SSA (Lewin, 2009; UNESCO, 2011; Zeelen, van der Linden, et al., 2010). It may also not be accurate to assume

that retention is always good, as education systems in some SSA countries are so dysfunctional and so disconnected from the realities of life that some young people find it irrelevant to remain in such systems (e.g., see Kanyandago (2010); Majgaard and Mingat (2012)).

Because it is impossible to eliminate the possibility that some young people will leave school early, it has been and is incumbent upon governments and communities to implement support programmes that address the needs of ESLs. However, as Olmec (2007, p. 25) notes, 'no one model or intervention can fully address the problem, because each initiative has its own limitations and critiques'. Therefore, both retention and re-entry into mainstream education programmes as well as support intervention programmes are needed to address this problem. Unfortunately, unlike in many countries in the global North where there are some established mechanisms and programmes to encourage re-entry into the educational system, in SSA, 'those who dropout usually become permanently excluded with no pathway back to re-enter' (Lewin, 2009, p. 157). The *Africa Progress Report* (2012) calls for an improvement of the existing strategies and the establishment of new programmes that provide "second chance" education and support training for young people who, for whatever reason, dropped out in their earlier years. In SSA, where economies are mainly informal and agricultural, many of these support programmes would mainly be in the areas of technical and vocational education, skills training in the informal sector, and agriculture-related skills training (Hoppers & Komba, 1995; Minnis, 2006). To inform design and implementation of such support interventions, the following section presents a thematic literature review to identify and describe generic enabling factors that make support programmes effective. With this effort, the paper seeks to strengthen the link between science and practice while reflecting on the lessons learnt from interventions globally and their implications for SSA.

4. The literature search process

The literature review process commenced with the search of five electronic databases, namely, ERIC, PsycINFO, Econ Lit, RePEc/IDEAS, and Google Scholar, to find suitable literature. In order to find evaluative documents of interventions specifically for the unique target group of ESLs, we began by searching for published works with a title and/or abstract that included the term 'early school leavers'. However, because the term is often used interchangeably with 'school dropouts', we searched for 'early school leavers' and/or 'school dropouts'. As our main focus in this review was support programmes for those who have already left school, we combined the above search terms with other terms, such as 'intervention programmes', 'alternative education', 'second chance schools', 're-engaging school leavers', and 'youth training'. To access the most recent studies, the search was restricted to works published after the year 2000. Other inclusion criteria were: empirical research published in journal articles, books, and organisational study reports; works focussing on support intervention programmes for ESLs; and works published in English.

The initial search of the five databases for the terms 'early school leavers' and/or 'school dropouts' and limiting the date of publication to 2001 and beyond produced 1094 hits. By filtering through the titles, 867 publications were eliminated because they did not address intervention programmes. Of the 227 publications remaining, 182 were also rejected after reading through the abstracts because they referred to preventative rather than support interventions. After a thorough reading of the remaining papers, a further 25 were rejected because they described support programmes in a non-evaluative manner and did not focus on the outcomes or experiences of those programmes. Accordingly, only 20 evaluation papers remained after searching the five databases. To these 20, we added 4 papers that evaluated intervention programmes in SSA of which we were aware and were in line with the set criteria, but which were not included in the databases. Consequently, a total of 24 papers were included in this review. These include 6 papers from SSA, 2 from the USA, 4 from Australia, 1 from Canada, 1

from Hong Kong, and 10 from various European countries. A list of all of these studies and their areas of focus is presented in Table 1.

5. Enabling factors that support intervention programmes for ESLs

There are many support intervention programmes in different countries and regions of the world that target young people who have left school early. These intervention programmes include return to education programmes, training programmes that equip young people with the skills necessary to enter employment, vocational and skills enhancement programmes, work-based learning programmes, programmes aimed to provide qualifications for further education, and career guidance programmes. These programmes are sponsored by various organisations/institutions and are structured and managed in different ways. Accordingly, these programmes consider the complex and multi-dimensional nature of the needs of ESLs. Table 1 provides an overview of 24 studies that are included in this review and that have been conducted on some of these programmes in different countries.

A review of the literature identified a number of enabling factors that contribute to enhanced effectiveness of support intervention programmes for ESLs in achieving the intended goals. These factors have been categorised according to the key themes that dominate the literature. While the categorisation of the themes seems to cause some of the factors to overlap, we deliberately want to keep the categories as they are because each factor can stand alone in a programme and it is not possible for any single programme to have all of these attributes. In most cases, it will be a combination of a few of these factors that makes a particular programme effective. The identified factors and their descriptions are presented hereunder.

5.1. Flexibility of learning approaches and opportunities

Flexibility is one of the key factors emphasised in literature that leads to effective support intervention programmes for ESLs. In their evaluation of six individual alternative education initiatives (AEIs) in the United Kingdom, Kendall et al. (2003) determined that these programmes were sufficiently flexible to accommodate the changing needs and circumstances of the young people attending them, thus contributing to the projects' relative success. In a study conducted by GHK (2005) on second chance schools in Europe, it was ascertained that schools that promoted flexible and multiple pathways to qualification and achievement were more successful in supporting ESLs. Similarly, studies conducted in SSA on support intervention programmes for ESL (e.g., Nampota, 2009; Weyer, 2009; Zeelen, Rampedi, et al., 2010; Zeelen, van der Linden, et al., 2010) attributed the programmes' relative success to the flexibility of their learning approaches. A number of other studies included in this review also emphasised flexibility as an enabling factor in support intervention programmes for young people who have left school early (European Commission, 2001; Leong, 2002; McGregor & Mills, 2012; Olmec, 2007; Schochet, Burghardt, & Glazerman, 2001; WRC Social and Economic Consultants, 2007; Wyn, Stokes, & Tyler, 2004).

Flexibility refers to the way in which the different programmes attempt to accommodate the diverse needs of the young people who are enrolled in them. According to Leong (2002), young people entering the programmes must have a variety of options from which to choose according to their needs, preferences, and abilities, thus leading to various pathways to skills acquisition and qualifications. Flexibility is also emphasised as part of a diversified curriculum with a skills-based rather than a subject-based approach, a combination of theory and practice (Tukundane & Blaak, 2010), flexible schedules and time tables (McGregor & Mills, 2012), a combination of skills development and practical training (European Commission, 2001), flexible teaching methods (Limbacher, 2008), and possibilities for lifelong learning through part-time or distance learning opportunities

Table 1
Overview of the literature included in the review.

Author(s)	Country	Type of publication	Methodology	Focus/domain
Aricò and Lasselle (2010)	France	Organisational ^a	Case study, quantitative, questionnaire, (N = 96)	Impact of two French second chance schools on participants' aspirations towards the labour market through skill-acquisition
Blaak et al. (2013)	Uganda	Journal article	Case study, qualitative, in-depth interviews, field notes, observation, (N = 17)	Exploration of non-formal vocational education and empowerment of ESLs
Currie et al. (2001)	Canada	Organisational	Case study, qualitative, interviews, focus group discussions, observation, document analysis (N = 60)	Evaluations of two work-based training programmes for disadvantaged youth
European Commission (2001)	Europe	Organisational	Aspects of methodology are not covered in this evaluation report because the report is based on several thematic external evaluation sub-reports	Evaluation of second chance schools established to combat social exclusion
Gallagher (2011)	N. Ireland	Journal article	Descriptive case study (N = N/A) ^b	Descriptive analysis of a second chance school serving a multiplicity of out-of-school children
GHK (2005)	Europe and four other OECD countries	Organisational	Quantitative and qualitative contextual data, country level data (N = N/A)	Studied access to education and training, basic skills and ESLs
Kendall et al. (2003)	UK	Organisational	Multiple case study, mixed methods (quantitative, qualitative), interviews, questionnaire (N = 199)	Evaluated six alternative education initiatives for young people who were permanently excluded from school or who left school for other reasons
Leong (2002)	Australia	Organisational	Case study, largely qualitative, curriculum reference group meetings, consultations, desktop research, internal data analysis (N = N/A)	Examined the factors that made technical and further education (TAFE) attractive to young people who left school early
Lim, (2010)	Hong Kong	Journal article	Case study, qualitative, literature, institutional data (N = N/A)	Examined the effectiveness of second chance vocational education programmes that prepare students for the younger end of the labour market
Limbacher (2008)	Hungary	Organisational	Descriptive case study (N = N/A)	Descriptive analysis of an informal second chance school that offers flexible alternative education
McGrath (2006)	Ireland	Journal article	Qualitative, biographies of participants (N = 14)	Examined inclusive social practices and relationships surrounding a second chance education and training intervention known as Youthreach
McGregor and Mills (2012)	Australia	Journal article	Multiple case study, qualitative, observation, individual and group interviews, document collection (N = 71)	Studied five alternative schools/flexible learning centres that support young people marginalised from mainstream schooling
Nampota (2009)	Malawi	Book chapter	Qualitative, participatory methods, calendars, daily activity registers, focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews (N = 133)	Analysed a complementary basic education programme for out-of-school children and youth
Olmec (2007)	England and Wales	Organisational	Multiple case study, qualitative, in-depth interviews, telephone interviews, desk research (N = NA)	Case studies of innovative approaches and programmes for ESLs
Ross and Gray (2005)	Australia	Journal article	Documents and literature analysis (N = NA)	Analysed transitions and re-engagement of ESLs through second chance education
Schochet et al. (2001)	USA	Organisational	Impact analysis, quantitative, survey data, periodic follow-up interviews (N = 11,313)	Studied the impacts of the Job Corps programme on participants' employment and related outcomes
Schochet et al. (2008)	USA	Journal article	Experimental evaluation, quantitative, survey (N = 15,400)	Experimental evaluation of Job Corps, America's largest training programme for disadvantaged youths
The Hybrid Workgroup (2002)	Europe	Book	Multiple case study, qualitative, interviews, questionnaires, observation, document analysis (N = NA)	Evaluated a European hybrid project on innovative approaches to learning for groups-at-risk
Tukundane and Blaak (2010)	Uganda	Book chapter	Case study, qualitative, in-depth interviews (N = NA)	Studied a transitory home that supports young out-of-school girls
UYDEL (2006)	Uganda	Organisational	Case study, qualitative, interviews, focus group discussion, observation, documentary reviews (N = NA)	Evaluation of a non-formal education and livelihood skills training project for marginalised street and slum youth
Weyer (2009)	Mali	Journal article	Case study and household survey data, qualitative and quantitative, semi-structured interviews (N = 45 for qualitative data)	Studied non-formal education and out-of-school learning needs and employment opportunities for youths and adults
WRC Social and Economic Consultants (2007)	Ireland	Organisational	Case study, discussions, document reviews, contextual data analysis (N = NA)	Evaluated the effectiveness of Youthreach and travellers programmes for ESLs
Wyn et al. (2004)	Australia	Organisational	Multiple case study, qualitative, six individual programmes, interviews (N = 90)	Examined the adult and community education (ACE) sector and technical and further education (TAFE) institutes that support young people who re-connect them with education
Zeelen, Rampedi, and Boerkamp (2010)	South Africa	Book chapter	Qualitative, interviews (N = NA)	Examines experiences and lessons from the BASWA project for ESLs

^a Refers to empirical study reports published by, for or on behalf of organisations (such as UNESCO, OECD, European commission, and Research Centres).

^b N/A means that sample size is not specified or not applicable.

(GHK, 2005). Thus, flexibility must address the versatile needs of these young people. Most successful programmes have flexible curricula and pedagogy that allow young people to make choices according to their needs, thereby allowing them to exercise some level of personal autonomy.

5.2. Intensive support through guidance, counselling and follow-up

Intensive support has also been identified as one of the key enabling factors in support programmes for ESLs. Studies by McGrath (2006) in Ireland, Currie, Foley, Schwartz, and Taylor-Lewis (2001) in Canada and Blaak, Zeelen, and Openjuru (2013) in Uganda have all emphasised the importance of guidance, counselling, coaching and emotional support in such programmes. Guidance and counselling are essential in contending with those young people who have left the mainstream school system because of the enormous challenges and pressures they face both from the school system that they left and from the community from which they come. Therefore, according to Zeelen, Rampedi, et al. (2010), who conducted their study in South Africa, when such young people join alternative or second chance programmes, counselling, guidance and emotional support become paramount.

According to Leong (2002), young people in Australia were leaving school to join technical and further education (TAFE) programmes, which were perceived as being successful and liked by young people, because, among other features, these programmes offer student support and counselling services. Not only do these young people require counselling, but they also benefit from follow-up services after they have completed their training (Tukundane & Blaak, 2010). The support services are provided for various reasons and on different issues including personal problems, choice of study options and career pathways, relationships, options for further training and job-related matters. Conclusively, it is clear from the literature that for intervention programmes for ESLs to succeed, guidance, counselling and follow-up services must be mainstreamed into the programmes. To a great extent, such prerequisites are needed because ESLs are a special group of young people with unique problems that require maximum attention.

5.3. Delivery of learner-centred curricula

Olmeck (2007) studied interventions available for ESLs and under-achievers in England and Wales within the restart project, and the results showed that a curriculum tailored to the unique characteristics and circumstances of the individual was more effective. Individual ESLs have unique backgrounds and needs that must be addressed in a special and personalised way. These results are further supported by a study conducted in Australia by Ross and Gray (2005) on transitions and re-engagement through second chance education. Student-centred approaches to learning are encouraged in support interventions for young people who have left school early, as such approaches allow self-paced learning (GHK, 2005; Schochet, Burghardt, & McConnell, 2008), build on each individual's strengths and support the individual's areas of weakness. Similarly, individualised learning plans (UYDEL, 2006) must be constructed by the learners with the support of their tutors. Accordingly, such needs demand small class sizes where each student can be given individual attention (Gallagher, 2011) as most of the reviewed studies indicated that a 'one-size fits all' approach does not work in support programmes. Not only do individuals enter these programmes with different needs, abilities and interests and therefore require differentiated learning curricula, as previously mentioned, but ESLs sometimes join at different levels of academic, mental and social development, a situation that warrants varied study requirements apart from the general curriculum. Therefore, the curriculum must be relevant to their local contexts (Weyer, 2009) and be geared towards their future aspirations.

5.4. Holistic approach to learning

ESLs experience multiple disadvantages that require such learners, when they enter support training programmes, to receive holistic education. This was one of the major findings of a study by Olmeck (2007) on interventions and good practices in five innovative initiatives for ESLs in England and Wales. The findings are consistent with an earlier study by Leong (2002) on why young people in Australia were more interested in technical and further education (TAFE) programmes and in another study in South Africa by Zeelen, Rampedi, et al. (2010) on the BASWA youth project. The programmes must provide a 'whole person' approach that offers a wide range of vocational and academic education as well as emotional and psychological support. Studies have revealed that this holistic approach encompasses training for academic achievement and for skills and competence development (European Commission, 2001; Schochet et al., 2008) as well as professional training (Weyer, 2009) and personality or character development (Limbacher, 2008). Successful programmes have also been found to provide beneficial and enjoyable experiences by promoting young people's self-esteem and sense of self-worth (Kendall et al., 2003).

5.5. Conducive programme environment

The literature reviewed overwhelmingly emphasises the role of a good programme environment in the success of interventions for young people who have left school early. This feature primarily depends on the quality of the teacher–student relationships (Aricò & Lasselle, 2010; GHK, 2005; Lim, 2010; Wyn et al., 2004). When The Hybrid Workgroup (2002) conducted a study on hybrid forms of learning in Europe, they found that learners were attracted to those programmes that had pleasant and patient teachers and where good communication existed between participants and teachers. The hybrid project was implemented to support educational trajectories for low-qualified groups in different countries in Europe, to articulate with the labour market and to prevent social exclusion. The aforementioned relationships between teachers and students must be nurtured in a culturally sensitive and safe environment (McGrath, 2006; Olmeck, 2007) where learners feel at ease and where there exists mutual respect between teachers and participants (Leong, 2002), which, of course, is a concept within the context of the realisation that some young people leave mainstream education due to an unfavourable school environment. For such an environment to be created it is important that teachers in support programmes are committed, possess broad expertise, and receive special training on how to work with this particular category of young people (Tukundane & Blaak, 2010). Such an environment must also allow and encourage the active participation of young people in processes of decision making, planning, organising and evaluating the programmes in which they participate through respectful relationships and the creation of a 'sense of community and belonging' (McGregor & Mills, 2012).

5.6. Whole community approach

Another essential factor identified in the literature is the adopting of a work method involving all stakeholders in a community in identifying, designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the interventions (European Commission, 2001; Nampota, 2009; Zeelen, Rampedi, et al., 2010). Because ESLg affects individuals, families, communities and nations at large, it is necessary to engage all parties in finding solutions to the problem. At the same time, as these young people return to the community after their training, community input into what they learn and how they learn is imperative if these communities are to benefit from the support programmes. The community actors to engage in such initiatives include the learners, parents, community leaders, government officials, employers and trade unions. Studies have shown

that when supporting ESLs is regarded as a shared mutual responsibility, support programmes tend to be more effective (e.g., [McGregor & Mills, 2012](#)).

5.7. Providing a link to the labour market and possible further education

Research has established that participants in support programmes appreciate learning skills and information that are related to what they envisage doing after completion of the programme. In Malawi, out-of-school youths who attended the Complementary Basic Education (CBE) pilot programme were pleased that they were being taught entrepreneurial skills that would enable them to improve their livelihoods by either starting their own small businesses or obtaining a job upon completion of the programme ([Nampota, 2009](#)). Those who complete the three-year course also have an opportunity to re-enter the mainstream education system if they wish. The Job Corps programme in the USA was found to have improved the outcomes for disadvantaged youth, partly because it had a component 'providing placement services to help participants find a job or pursue additional training' and also because, in this programme, 'the vocational curricular were developed with input from business and labour organisations, and emphasise the achievement of specific competences necessary to work in a trade' ([Schochet et al., 2008, p. 1866](#)). Additionally, according to [Weyer \(2009\)](#), there is a need to combine basic education and professional training so that learners are later able to enter the labour market.

The exposure to the labour market can be provided through internships, work-placements, apprenticeships and/or career guidance and sometimes by establishing partnerships with potential employers so that those who complete the programme have access to jobs. The Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL) project, which was partly funded by UNESCO, provided such services to the youths who participated in the project, and consequently, the project has been well received ([UYDEL, 2006](#)). The project aimed at providing marketable skills and innovative livelihood practices for marginalised youth in select urban and rural areas. Young people who have the potential to continue with further education and are interested in so doing should be encouraged and supported by these programmes to work towards

that goal ([Lim, 2010](#)). A measure study that evaluated the appropriateness of educational provision in the YouthReach and Travellers programmes, which admit school leavers in Ireland, determined that the programmes were not significantly effective because of the 'low rates of transfer and progression to further education and training' ([WRC Social and Economic Consultants, 2007](#)).

5.8. Certification and recognition of qualifications

Another enabling factor identified in the literature on intervention programmes for ESLs is the certification and recognition of the participants' achievements ([UYDEL, 2006](#); [WRC Social and Economic Consultants, 2007](#)). Many young people joining support programmes have a low self-image due to the difficulties they have encountered in mainstream education and/or in the community. Additionally, the support programmes are sometimes perceived negatively and are considered to be 'programmes of failures' by society ([Tukundane & Blaak, 2010](#)). In some cases, however, the programmes are perceived in a more positive light. Nevertheless, the young people who enter into these programmes and succeed must be recognised for their achievements. Secondly, the formal labour market, in most cases, demands qualifications and certification. Therefore, to not place young people from these programmes at a disadvantage in this labour market, their achievements and qualifications should be certified.

5.9. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are key features in the effectiveness of support intervention programmes. The progress of the participants and the implementation of the programmes in general must be constantly monitored and evaluated against the set objectives and the desired outcomes ([Currie et al., 2001](#); [Gallagher, 2011](#)). It is important that all major stakeholders mentioned in [Section 5.6](#) participate in the monitoring and evaluation exercises because, without proper monitoring and evaluation, the programmes are bound to fail to achieve their objectives.

Table 2

Enabling factors emphasised by the various authors.

Author(s)	Country	Enabling factors*								
		F	IS	LC	H	CE	CA	LM&FE	QR	M&E
Aricò and Lasselle (2010)	France	x	x	x		x	x	x		
Blaak et al. (2013)	Uganda	x	x			x		x		
Currie et al. (2001)	Canada		x				x	x	x	x
European European Commission (2001)	Europe	x	x	x	x		x	x		
Gallagher (2011)	N. Ireland		x	x	x	x				x
GHK (2005)	Europe	x		x		x		x	x	
Kendall et al. (2003)	UK	x	x		x					
Leong (2002)	Australia	x	x	x	x	x				
Lim, (2010)	Hong Kong	x		x		x		x		
Limbacher (2008)	Hungary	x	x	x		x				
McGrath (2006)	Ireland	x	x	x	x	x				
McGregor and Mills (2012)	Australia	x	x	x		x		x	x	
Nampota (2009)	Malawi	x			x		x	x		
Olmeck (2007)	England & Wales	x		x	x	x				
Ross and Gray (2005)	Australia	x	x	x			x	x		
Schochet et al. (2001)	USA	x	x		x	x				
Schochet et al. (2008)	USA			x	x			x		x
The Hybrid Workgroup (2002)	Europe	x	x	x	x			x		
Tukundane and Blaak (2010)	Uganda	x	x			x		x		
UYDEL (2006)	Uganda	x	x	x				x		x
Weyer (2009)	Mali	x		x						
WRC Social and Economic Consultants (2007)	Ireland	x	x					x	x	
Wyn et al. (2004)	Australia	x	x	x		x				
Zeelen, Rampedi, et al. (2010)	S. Africa	x	x		x		x	x		

* F = Flexibility, IS = Intensive Support, LC = Learner-Centred, H = Holistic, CE = Conducive Environment, CA = Community Approach, LM&FE = Link to the Labour Market and Further Education, QR = Qualification Recognition, M&E = Monitoring and Evaluation.

6. Summary of the studies indicating the enabling factors identified

Table 2 provides a summary of the key enabling factors in support intervention programmes for ESLs, as identified in the different studies reviewed. Overall, these studies have shown that there are certain generic enabling factors that must be embedded in support programmes to make them effective. Although it is rare for a particular programme to have all of the factors that were previously identified in Section 5 above, there is a clear indication that effective programmes, irrespective of where they are located, will exhibit values of flexibility and learner-centredness in a conducive and supporting environment. However, context-specific issues must be considered at the time of implementation, and specific contexts may require specific enabling factors that are dependent on the various needs of individual ESLs and their communities. In general, the analysis in Table 2 shows that across the cultures, effective programmes are those that possess the following enabling factors: flexibility, intensive support to the learners, learner-centred curricula, conducive environment and link to the labour market and further education.

7. Implications for SSA and discussion

In SSA, the problem of ESLg is of immense magnitude, as it affects many young people and has implications for entire educational systems, while in the global North ESLg affects only a small percentage of school populations. Accordingly, countries in the global North find it easier and have the resources to design interventions and implement comprehensive policy frameworks that deal with the problem at both the prevention and support intervention levels. Therefore, most of these countries have relatively well-established support interventions for ESLs, and in most cases, these programmes are institutionalised and supported by clear policy frameworks. In SSA, however, interventions mainly exist on a small-scale and are run by either community-based organisations or non-governmental organisations, rather than by the government, and they seldom operate within clear policy frameworks. Additionally, in recent years, most of the support interventions in the West have been assessed or evaluated, while most of the existing interventions in SSA have not been subjected to such evaluations. This could partly explain why we were unable to find more papers from SSA. Although most of the papers included in the review were from outside SSA, the enabling factors identified are generic and are relevant to support interventions for ESLs implemented anywhere, provided context-specific issues are taken into account. In fact the few papers included from SSA also point to similar enabling factors as those in other countries as Table 2 shows. Moreover, Woolman (2002) who conducted a comparative study of ESLg in India, Nigeria, the United Kingdom and the United States found that in spite of huge cultural and economic differences between these countries, there were some common underlying causes of the ESLg problem and that these countries could inform each other and transfer some solutions. Thus, intervention programmes for ESLs in SSA can also learn and contextualise enabling factors that have been seen to make support programmes elsewhere effective.

While the enabling factors are generic, Table 2 demonstrates that there are no unique patterns in the effectiveness of these factors in SSA or other regions. However, this does not mean that a programme that works in the USA will work in SSA in the same way. Earlier in this article, we highlighted several unique factors about the education systems, context, and phenomenon of ESLg in SSA that have implications for the use of these findings. Countries in SSA are very diverse and the context, not only at national but also local level, should be considered when designing, implementing and evaluating support interventions. Things to take into consideration are local power relations, roles of gender, culture, language and economic status. Moreover implementers of interventions for ESLs in these countries will face some of the same challenges as the mainstream education systems face, such as war-affected areas, post-colonial legacies, and poor infrastructure, diversity of culture

and languages and inadequate financial resources. While in other countries, especially in the global North, ESLs make up a minority of children and youth, countries in SSA already have large numbers of ESLs and the question is how the enabling factors can be guaranteed in interventions while targeting large heterogeneous groups in an environment characterised by these challenges. Given that ESLs in SSA form a diverse group, it might be necessary that interventions target them at different levels, for example different age groups, education levels, and skills needs.

At the same time, ESLg in SSA happens on a large scale before completion of primary education; therefore interventions have to cater for learners with limited basic skills including learning skills and strategies. It could also be argued that even those who finish a full cycle of primary and secondary school lack relevant skills for work and for other livelihood opportunities. Accordingly, intervention programmes in SSA will have to include basic skills such as literacy and numeracy in their curricula, as well as technical and soft skills. ESLg in SSA demonstrates similarities to ESLg in other regions, though when comparing it to for example Europe, ESLg in SSA is more related to processes and experiences related to the individual, family and communities while in Europe ESLg is more related to 'processes and experiences highly specific to the individual' (GHK Consulting et al., 2011, p. 7). It is in this context that objectives of support intervention programmes in SSA should be formulated. As countries in SSA grapple with challenges of providing access to education to children and retention efforts, it might be difficult for these countries to design and implement large scale support interventions for ESLs like the Job Corps in the United States or the YouthReach programme in Ireland. Support interventions in SSA may for some time remain on a small scale mainly implemented by non-governmental organisations, community and faith-based organisations and individuals.

The predominantly informal and agricultural economy in SSA requires a focus on technical and vocational skills as well as entrepreneurial and business skills. Therefore, support interventions and enabling factors must be tailored to such needs of the local economy, the labour market, youth employment, cultural values and food security. In this respect, interventions in SSA must make major strides in linking businesses in the informal sector where their graduates would most likely work, thus linking non-formal education to work in the community (for example, to agriculture), with developing technical and vocational skills. The intensive training of teachers in guidance and counselling is also crucial, as is improving the programmes' infrastructure and facilities. The interventions must also be assisted by favourable policy frameworks that are geared towards combating social exclusion and promoting active citizenship. For such to happen, there is need for the adoption a 'whole community approach' so that the different stakeholders join in efforts to provide the ESLs with relevant skills that will help to improve not only their lives but also the plight of their communities.

Overall, this review of literature has ascertained that programmes that address the multiple disadvantages and needs of young people through flexible and holistic approaches tend to be attractive and meaningful to ESLs. Accordingly, interventions that seem to be effective are those that cautiously work towards combating social exclusion and preparing young people to become active citizens through acquisition of skills and the expansion of their future opportunities and choices. The results of this review are very crucial to practitioners in support intervention programmes for ESLs and those that will be engaged in future interventions, especially in SSA where such programmes are being scaled up. The enabling factors described in this paper can serve not only as benchmarks for designing and implementing interventions for ESLs but also for evaluating such interventions in areas like SSA where evaluations of intervention programmes for ESLs are scarce.

However, the results of this study should be understood within its limitations. The first limitation is that we narrowed down our study to specifically look at support interventions for ESLs and this could probably have led to the limited number of papers included in the review. It is

possible that if we had also looked at other intervention programmes other than support interventions, we could have found more papers. Secondly, there were a few papers from SSA and it is possible that the method we used of searching for literature in specific databases could have made us miss some papers from SSA as they might not be available in those databases but elsewhere. Last but not least, most of the studies included in this review were case study evaluations of support programmes in different countries (see Table 1). Longitudinal and quantitative evaluations of these programmes are not readily available. More longitudinal and quantitative studies need to be conducted on support interventions for ESLs and probably a meta-analysis of such studies could give deeper insights into the effectiveness of the programmes and lead to the identification of best practices. The results of the current study are not an indicator that the evaluated programmes are high quality or best practices. Rather, they only point to enabling factors in the different programmes that have contributed to their effectiveness, thus identifying elements that are more attractive to ESLs and could, therefore, provide important information to other programmes. More research should be done in SSA to establish the role played by these enabling factors in the specific context of the region.

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