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CHALLENGES FACING TEACHERS IN SUPPORTING LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES IN INCLUSIVE PRIMARY SCHOOLS: EVIDENCE FROM RUNGWE DISTRICT, TANZANIA

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education has become a significant global commitment to ensure equitable access to quality education for all learners, including students with disabilities. However, despite policy efforts to promote inclusive education, many teachers in developing contexts still face challenges that limit their ability to effectively support learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. This study explored the challenges teachers face in supporting learners with disabilities in inclusive primary schools in Rungwe District, Tanzania. The study was guided by John Rawls' Theory of Justice, which emphasizes equal opportunity and equitable support for disadvantaged groups. The study used a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences and perceptions of inclusive education practices. The study included 34 participants, including classroom teachers, head teachers, Ward Education Officers, and the District Education Officer. The study collected data through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, and documentary reviews, and analyzed them thematically. The findings revealed that although teachers demonstrated positive attitudes and commitment to supporting learners with disabilities, they faced substantial challenges that constrained the effective implementation of inclusive education. These challenges included inadequate knowledge and skills for applying differentiated teaching strategies, overcrowded classrooms, limited time for individualized learner support, communication barriers, shortages of specialized teaching and learning materials, inadequate assistive devices, inaccessible school infrastructure, insufficient professional training opportunities, and limited administrative and financial support. The study concludes that inclusive education policies require stronger

implementation mechanisms, supported by ongoing teacher professional development, adequate resource provision, improved school accessibility, and stronger institutional support. The study recommends strengthening pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes, increasing investment in inclusive education resources, improving physical learning environments, and establishing stronger monitoring systems to ensure that students with disabilities receive equitable educational opportunities.

KEYWORDS: Inclusive education, learners with disabilities, teachers' challenges, teacher training, assistive devices.

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has gained increasing international recognition as a fundamental approach to ensuring that all learners, regardless of ability or disability, have equal opportunities to participate and succeed in education. The concept is grounded in equity, participation, and removing barriers that prevent learners from accessing meaningful educational experiences. Global commitments, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4), emphasise providing inclusive, equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all individuals (United Nations, 2015). Similarly, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities highlights education systems' responsibility to provide reasonable accommodation and appropriate support to learners with disabilities in inclusive learning environments (United Nations, 2016).

Despite these international commitments, implementing inclusive education remains challenging, particularly in many developing countries where education systems face persistent structural, human resource, and material limitations. Research indicates that teachers are central to translating inclusive education policies into classroom practices; however, their effectiveness depends on their professional preparation, access to teaching resources, class sizes, and institutional support (Ainscow, 2020; UNESCO, 2021). In many contexts, teachers are willing to support learners with disabilities but face challenges due to inadequate specialized knowledge, limited training opportunities, and insufficient resources to address diverse learning needs.

In Tanzania, national education policies have incorporated inclusive education as part of efforts to expand access to education and improve equity for marginalized learners. The country has introduced various initiatives to integrate students with disabilities into mainstream schools, strengthen teacher preparation, and provide specialized support services.

However, evidence suggests that implementing inclusive education in Tanzanian primary schools still faces significant challenges. Many teachers lack adequate competencies in special needs education, classrooms are often overcrowded, and schools frequently lack assistive technologies and adapted learning materials needed to support students with different disabilities (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2023; Mmbaga & Mkimbili, 2022).

Teachers' experiences in inclusive classrooms matter because they shape how effectively learners with disabilities participate in teaching and learning. While positive teacher attitudes provide an important foundation for inclusion, attitudes alone cannot overcome systemic barriers such as inadequate preparation, limited resources, and weak institutional support. Effective inclusion requires teachers to possess appropriate pedagogical skills, including differentiated instruction, learner-centered approaches, classroom adaptation, and assessment modifications that respond to individual learner needs (Florian, 2019; Sharma & Salend, 2016). Without such competencies and supporting conditions, inclusive education risks becoming a policy aspiration rather than a practical reality.

Rungwe District in Mbeya Region, Tanzania, offers an important context for examining these challenges because, like many rural and semi-urban districts, schools continue to struggle to implement inclusive education. Although students with disabilities are increasingly enrolled in ordinary primary schools, questions remain about whether teachers have adequate capacity and whether schools have sufficient resources to support meaningful participation and learning. Understanding teachers' experiences is therefore essential to identify barriers and develop context-specific interventions that strengthen inclusive education implementation.

This study explored the challenges facing teachers in supporting learners with disabilities in inclusive primary schools in Rungwe District, Tanzania. Specifically, the study examined pedagogical challenges experienced by teachers, assessed the availability and adequacy of teaching and learning resources, and explored the role of professional training and administrative support in facilitating inclusive education. By focusing on teachers' lived experiences, the study contributes to broader discussions on improving inclusive education practices in Tanzania and other developing contexts.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Literature Review

This study draws on John Rawls' Theory of Justice, originally developed in 1971 and later revised in 1999. The theory argues that a just society should ensure fairness by protecting

equal basic rights and supporting disadvantaged groups to reduce inequalities. Rawls proposed two major principles of justice: the principle of equal liberty and the difference principle. The principle of equal liberty argues that all individuals should have equal fundamental rights and opportunities. Applied to education, this principle suggests that students with disabilities have the same right as other learners to access quality education, participate in classroom activities, and benefit from educational opportunities. Therefore, excluding learners because of disability contradicts the principles of educational justice.

The difference principle holds that social and institutional arrangements should be organized to provide the greatest benefit to society's least advantaged members. In inclusive education, this principle implies that learners with disabilities may require additional support, resources, and accommodations to achieve equitable educational outcomes. Equality does not necessarily mean providing identical resources to all learners; fairness requires providing support based on individual needs.

The theory was relevant to this study because learners with disabilities have historically faced educational disadvantages. Facilitating their participation requires deliberate efforts to address barriers related to teaching practices, resources, infrastructure, and institutional support. The challenges teachers face in inclusive schools reflect broader issues of educational justice, where insufficient support may prevent disadvantaged learners from accessing equal educational opportunities. Through the lens of Rawls' Theory of Justice, this study examined whether inclusive primary schools in Rungwe District provided teachers with adequate conditions and resources necessary to support learners with disabilities. The theory helps explain why improving teacher capacity, providing specialized resources, and strengthening institutional support are essential to achieving genuine educational inclusion.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

2.2.1 Inclusive Education and the Support of Learners with Disabilities

Inclusive education is widely regarded as an approach that transforms schools into environments where all learners, including those with disabilities, can participate, learn, and achieve together, regardless of individual differences. Unlike traditional approaches that placed learners with disabilities in separate educational settings, inclusive education emphasizes removing institutional, social, physical, and pedagogical barriers that limit learners' participation (UNESCO, 2020). The approach is based on the understanding that disability is not solely a learner characteristic but is also shaped by environmental and systemic factors that either facilitate or restrict educational participation.

Internationally, global frameworks such as the Salamanca Statement, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and Sustainable Development Goal 4 have strengthened inclusive education by promoting equal access to quality education for all learners. These frameworks require education systems to provide appropriate support, reasonable accommodation, and flexible teaching approaches that address diverse learner needs (United Nations, 2016). Consequently, teachers are expected to adopt inclusive pedagogical practices that recognise learner diversity and provide meaningful learning opportunities for Learners with disabilities within ordinary classrooms.

In African education systems, inclusive education has expanded considerably as governments attempt to address historical inequalities in educational access. However, implementation remains complex because of inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, limited specialist personnel, and inadequate teacher preparation (Abosi, 2019; Chitiyo et al., 2021). Many schools have enrolled learners with disabilities without corresponding improvements in teacher capacity and resource availability, resulting in situations where inclusion occurs physically but not necessarily academically or socially.

In Tanzania, inclusive education has been integrated into national education policies to promote educational equity and increase access for learners with disabilities. The government has established special needs education programmes, trained teachers in disability-related competencies, and encouraged the establishment of inclusive schools. Nevertheless, studies indicate that many inclusive schools continue to experience implementation challenges, including shortages of specialised teaching materials, inadequate assistive devices, limited accessibility of school facilities, and insufficient professional support for teachers (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2023; Mngo & Mngo, 2018).

The effectiveness of inclusive education largely depends on teachers' ability to create supportive classroom environments. Teachers are responsible for adapting teaching methods, modifying instructional materials, assessing learners appropriately, and providing individualised support where necessary. Therefore, understanding the challenges teachers face is critical because they directly influence the quality of educational experiences available to learners with disabilities.

2.2.2 Pedagogical Challenges Experienced by Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms

Effective inclusive education requires teachers to possess pedagogical competencies that enable them to respond to diverse learner characteristics. These competencies include differentiated instruction, flexible assessment approaches, classroom management strategies, and the ability to adapt curriculum content according to individual learner needs (Florian,

2019). However, evidence from various educational contexts shows that many teachers struggle to implement these practices because they lack adequate preparation in special needs education.

One major challenge reported in inclusive classrooms is teachers' limited knowledge of appropriate instructional strategies for learners with different disabilities. Learners with visual impairment, hearing impairment, intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities, and learning difficulties often require specialised teaching approaches. However, many mainstream teachers receive limited exposure to disability-specific pedagogical skills during their initial teacher education programmes. As a result, they may rely on general teaching approaches that fail to address individual differences among learners (Sharma & Salend, 2016).

Research in developing countries indicates that teachers often demonstrate positive attitudes towards inclusive education but feel unprepared to manage diverse classrooms effectively. This gap between positive attitudes and professional competence makes it difficult to implement meaningful inclusion. Teachers may accept learners with disabilities in their classrooms but struggle to provide differentiated instruction, prepare adapted learning materials, or conduct appropriate assessments (Mngo & Mngo, 2018; Opoku et al., 2021).

Large class sizes further complicate teachers' ability to provide individualised support. Inclusive classrooms often include learners with varying academic abilities and disability-related needs, requiring more teacher attention. However, overcrowded classrooms reduce opportunities for personalised instruction, learner monitoring, and effective classroom interaction. In Tanzania, where some primary classrooms have large numbers of learners, teachers often struggle to balance the needs of learners with disabilities with those of other students (Mmbaga & Mkimbili, 2022).

Communication barriers also present significant pedagogical challenges, particularly when teachers support learners with hearing or speech impairments. Many teachers lack competence in sign language and alternative communication methods, limiting effective interaction between teachers and learners. This challenge affects classroom participation, assessment processes, and learners' ability to fully engage in lessons (Mugambi, 2020). Therefore, improving teachers' pedagogical competencies is essential to ensure inclusive education moves beyond enrolment to meaningful participation and achievement.

2.2.3 Availability of Teaching and Learning Resources for Inclusive Education

The availability of appropriate teaching and learning resources is critical to successfully implementing inclusive education. Students with disabilities often require specialised

materials and assistive technologies to overcome barriers associated with their disabilities. These resources may include Braille materials, hearing aids, visual learning materials, adapted textbooks, mobility equipment, and digital assistive technologies (UNESCO, 2021).

However, inadequate provision of these resources remains a major obstacle to inclusive education in many developing countries. Schools frequently lack specialised materials, forcing teachers to rely on conventional teaching resources that may not adequately support learners with disabilities. This situation limits teachers' ability to adapt lessons and provide equitable learning opportunities (Chitiyo et al., 2021).

Physical accessibility of school environments is another important factor affecting inclusive education. Inclusive schools require infrastructure that enables learners with physical disabilities to move freely and participate in school activities. However, many schools in Tanzania still face challenges with inaccessible classrooms, unsuitable sanitation facilities, and limited disability-friendly infrastructure (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2023). These environmental barriers limit learners' independence and reinforce exclusion in settings that are supposed to be inclusive.

Resource challenges also increase teachers' workload because they often must improvise teaching materials without adequate support. While teacher creativity can support inclusion, relying primarily on individual teachers is insufficient for sustainable inclusive education. Effective implementation requires coordinated investment from government authorities, schools, communities, and other stakeholders.

2.2.4 Professional Training and Administrative Support in Inclusive Education

Teacher professional development is recognised as a fundamental requirement for successful inclusive education. Pre-service and in-service training programs help teachers develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to support learners with disabilities. Continuous professional development is particularly important because teachers encounter diverse disability-related needs that initial training may not have covered adequately (UNESCO, 2020).

Studies indicate that inadequate professional training remains a persistent challenge to implementing inclusive education. Teachers with limited exposure to special needs education often report feeling uncertain when teaching learners with disabilities. They may struggle to identify appropriate interventions, adapt instructional methods, and collaborate with parents or specialists (Opoku et al., 2021). Therefore, regular professional development programmes are necessary to strengthen teachers' competence and confidence.

Administrative support also plays a significant role in determining the success of inclusive education. School leaders influence inclusion through resource mobilisation, teacher motivation, supervision, and creation of supportive school cultures. Effective leadership can encourage collaboration among teachers, parents, and education officials while ensuring that learners with disabilities receive appropriate assistance (Ainscow, 2020).

However, in many contexts, teachers receive limited support from school administrators and education authorities due to inadequate funding, insufficient specialist personnel, and weak monitoring systems. Without strong institutional support, individual teachers often bear the primary responsibility for inclusive education, increasing their workload and reducing the effectiveness of inclusion efforts. Strengthening administrative structures is therefore essential for creating sustainable inclusive learning environments.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Approach

This study used a qualitative case study design to explore the challenges teachers face in supporting learners with disabilities in inclusive primary schools in Rungwe District, Tanzania. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study sought an in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of the realities of implementing inclusive education in their classroom contexts. Unlike quantitative approaches that primarily measure the extent of phenomena, qualitative inquiry enables researchers to explore complex educational experiences and understand how participants construct meaning from their daily practices (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

The case study design was selected because it allowed an intensive examination of inclusive education practices within their natural setting. The design enabled the researcher to capture contextual factors that influence teachers' ability to support learners with disabilities, including pedagogical practices, resource availability, professional preparation, and administrative support. According to Yin (2018), case studies are useful when researchers investigate contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts where the phenomenon and its environment are not clearly separated.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Rungwe District, located in Mbeya Region, Tanzania. The district was selected because several primary schools have implemented inclusive education, where learners with disabilities study alongside their peers without disabilities. Despite policy commitments to inclusive education, schools in the district continue to face challenges related

to teacher preparedness, access to specialized resources, and institutional support mechanisms. The selection of Rungwe District was also informed by the need to generate context-specific evidence regarding the experiences of teachers working in inclusive classrooms. Understanding challenges in this setting provides insight into the realities teachers face in districts where educational resources and specialized support services may be limited.

3.3 Target Population

The target population consisted of education stakeholders directly involved in implementing inclusive education in primary schools. These included classroom teachers, head teachers, Ward Education Officers (WEOs), and the District Education Officer (DEO). The study selected these participants because they had direct experience and responsibilities related to teaching, managing, supervising, and supporting inclusive education practices.

3.4 Sampling Procedures and Sample Size

The study used purposive sampling to select participants with relevant knowledge and experience in implementing inclusive education. Purposive sampling was appropriate because the study required participants who could provide detailed information about the challenges encountered when supporting learners with disabilities. The study selected classroom teachers because they directly teach learners with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. The study included head teachers, Ward Education Officers, and the District Education Officer because of their leadership and supervisory roles in supporting the implementation of inclusive education. This approach ensured the collected information reflected classroom, school management, and administrative perspectives.

The study included 34 participants. The participants included classroom teachers who worked directly with students with disabilities, head teachers responsible for school-level management and resource coordination, Ward Education Officers involved in educational supervision, and the District Education Officer responsible for broader education administration within the district. Including participants from different administrative levels enabled triangulation of perspectives and provided a comprehensive understanding of the challenges teachers face in facilitating students with disabilities.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

The study employed multiple data collection methods, including semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, and documentary review. Using multiple methods enhanced the depth and credibility of the findings through methodological triangulation.

3.5.1 Semi-structured Interviews

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with head teachers, Ward Education Officers, and the District Education Officer. The interviews allowed participants to explain their experiences, challenges, and perceptions regarding inclusive education implementation. The flexible nature of semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to ask follow-up questions and obtain detailed information concerning emerging issues.

3.5.2 Focus Group Discussions

The researcher conducted focus group discussions with classroom teachers to explore shared experiences of teaching learners with disabilities. The discussions gave teachers opportunities to exchange views, identify common challenges, and describe practical experiences in inclusive classrooms. Focus groups were particularly useful because teachers often face similar classroom realities, and collective discussion helped reveal common patterns and differences.

3.5.3 Classroom Observations

Classroom observations examined actual teaching practices and classroom conditions. The observations focused on teacher-student interactions, teaching strategies, classroom arrangements, accessibility issues, use of teaching materials, and participation of students with disabilities during lessons. Classroom observation helped verify information obtained through interviews and discussions by providing direct evidence of classroom realities.

3.5.4 Documentary Review

Documentary review involved examining relevant documents related to the implementation of inclusive education. These included education policies, school records, teaching documents, and reports related to special needs education. Documentary evidence provided additional context on policy expectations, available support systems, and institutional practices.

3.6 Data Analysis

The study thematically analyzed data collected through interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and documentary review. Thematic analysis was selected because it provides a systematic process for identifying, organising, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis process involved several stages. First, the researcher transcribed and organized recorded interviews and discussions. The researcher

then familiarised himself with the data by repeatedly reading the transcripts. This was followed by coding of meaningful sections related to teachers' experiences and challenges. The researcher then grouped similar codes into broader categories, which were later developed into major themes and sub-themes.

The analysis generated three main themes: pedagogical challenges in inclusive classrooms, inadequate teaching and learning resources, and limited professional training and administrative support. The findings were presented using thematic descriptions supported by participants' quotations to preserve the authenticity of their experiences.

3.7 Trustworthiness of the Study

The study ensured credibility and dependability through several strategies associated with qualitative research trustworthiness. First, the study used multiple data collection methods, including interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and documentary review, to achieve methodological triangulation. This helped compare information from different sources and reduce potential bias. Second, the researcher applied member checking by allowing participants to confirm whether the interpretations accurately reflected their experiences. This enhanced the credibility of the findings. Third, the study provided detailed descriptions of the context and participants' experiences to support the transferability of the findings to similar educational settings. Furthermore, the researcher maintained an audit trail documenting the data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes. These procedures enhanced dependability and confirmability by ensuring that the findings were based on participants' accounts rather than researcher assumptions.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The researcher observed ethical principles throughout the research process. The researcher obtained permission from relevant educational and institutional authorities to conduct the study. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, that participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any stage without negative consequences. The researcher maintained confidentiality and anonymity by not disclosing participants' personal identities in the presentation of findings. The researcher used participants' responses strictly for academic purposes and obtained informed consent before collecting data. The researcher also engaged with participants respectfully throughout the study.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study explored the challenges teachers face in supporting students with disabilities in inclusive primary schools in Rungwe District, Tanzania. The findings revealed that although teachers demonstrated positive attitudes and commitment to inclusive education, several contextual, pedagogical, and institutional challenges limited their capacity to effectively support learners with disabilities. The study identified major themes: pedagogical challenges, inadequate teaching and learning resources, and limited professional training and administrative support.

4.1 Pedagogical Challenges Experienced by Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms

The findings revealed that teachers experienced considerable pedagogical difficulties when supporting students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Although teachers recognised the importance of providing equal learning opportunities, many experienced challenges in adapting instructional strategies to meet the diverse needs of learners. The main pedagogical challenges included limited competence in differentiated instruction, difficulty modifying teaching materials, inadequate knowledge of disability-specific teaching approaches, communication barriers, overcrowded classrooms, and limited time for individualized learner support.

The study found that many teachers relied largely on general teaching approaches because they lacked adequate preparation in inclusive pedagogies. Inclusive classrooms require teachers to adjust content, teaching methods, classroom activities, and assessment procedures according to individual learner needs. However, insufficient knowledge of these practices limited teachers' ability to provide meaningful support to learners with disabilities. This finding aligns with Florian (2019), who argues that effective inclusion depends on teachers' ability to adopt flexible pedagogical approaches that recognize learner diversity rather than expecting all learners to learn in the same way.

The findings also indicated that teachers found differentiated instruction difficult to implement because they managed classrooms with diverse learning abilities and limited instructional time. Students with disabilities often required additional explanations, alternative learning activities, and closer monitoring compared with their peers. However, large class sizes reduced teachers' opportunities to provide individual attention. Similar concerns have been reported in developing education systems where overcrowded classrooms limit teachers' capacity to personalise instruction and respond effectively to learners with additional needs (Ainscow, 2020).

Communication barriers were also identified as a significant challenge, particularly in classrooms involving students with hearing impairments. Many teachers had limited knowledge of sign language and other alternative communication approaches, which affected classroom interaction and learners' participation. Effective communication is central to inclusive education because it enables learners with disabilities to engage actively in teaching and learning processes. Previous studies have similarly identified inadequate teacher competence in communication strategies as a major barrier to effective inclusion in African schools (Mngo & Mngo, 2018).

Overall, the findings indicate that limited pedagogical preparedness and challenging classroom conditions constrained teachers' willingness to support learners with disabilities. From the perspective of Rawls' Theory of Justice, providing equal access to education requires more than placing learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms; it requires ensuring that teachers possess the skills and support necessary to provide equitable learning opportunities.

4.2 Challenges Related to Teaching and Learning Resources

The study established that inadequate teaching and learning resources significantly affected teachers' ability to support learners with disabilities. Schools experienced shortages of specialised instructional materials, assistive devices, adapted learning materials, and accessible infrastructure required to support learners with different disabilities.

The findings showed that many teachers lacked the resources to adapt lessons to learners' specific needs. Students with visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical disabilities, and other learning difficulties often require specialised materials such as Braille resources, hearing support technologies, adapted textbooks, and visual learning aids. However, limited availability of these resources forced teachers to rely mainly on conventional teaching materials, which did not adequately address learners' diverse needs. UNESCO (2021) emphasizes that inclusive education requires adequate investment in assistive technologies, specialized materials, and supportive learning environments.

The study also revealed that inadequate assistive devices created additional barriers to learner participation. Without appropriate equipment, some students with disabilities struggled to access instructional content and fully participate in classroom activities. These challenges highlight a gap between inclusive education policy aspirations and the conditions of implementation. Similar findings have been reported in Tanzania, where insufficient funding, limited specialised materials, and inadequate support services continue to affect inclusive education practices (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2023).

Physical accessibility was another resource-related challenge identified in the study. Some schools lacked disability-friendly facilities such as ramps, accessible sanitation facilities, and appropriate classroom arrangements. Such environmental barriers reduced the independence and participation of students with physical disabilities. According to the social model of disability, educational exclusion often results not from learners' impairments themselves but from environmental and institutional barriers that prevent participation.

The findings therefore suggest that successful inclusive education requires systematic investment in resources, infrastructure, and support services. Consistent with Rawls' Theory of Justice, disadvantaged learners require additional support mechanisms to achieve fair educational opportunities.

4.3 Professional Training and Administrative Support Challenges

The findings indicated that limited professional training opportunities and inadequate administrative support constrained teachers' effectiveness in supporting students with disabilities. Although inclusive education requires teachers to possess specialised competencies, many teachers had received insufficient preparation in areas such as disability identification, differentiated instruction, classroom adaptation, assessment modification, and the use of assistive technologies.

The study revealed that gaps in teacher preparation affected teachers' confidence and ability to respond effectively to diverse learner needs. Teacher education programmes that provide limited exposure to inclusive education practices may leave graduates inadequately prepared for the realities of inclusive classrooms. This finding supports Sharma and Salend (2016), who highlight that teacher competence is a critical determinant of successful inclusive education implementation.

Continuous professional development was also inadequate. Although some training opportunities existed, they were often irregular and insufficient to address the practical challenges teachers encountered. Effective inclusive education requires ongoing learning opportunities, professional collaboration, mentoring, and access to specialists who can help teachers address complex learner needs (UNESCO, 2020).

The study further identified limited administrative and institutional support as a challenge. Teachers reported difficulties with insufficient monitoring, limited availability of special needs education specialists, inadequate financial support, and weak coordination among education stakeholders. School leadership is essential in promoting inclusive cultures, mobilising resources, and supporting teachers through professional development opportunities (Ainscow, 2020).

These findings show that implementing inclusive education requires a whole-school approach involving teachers, school leaders, education authorities, communities, and policy actors. From Rawls' perspective, ensuring justice for students with disabilities requires institutional arrangements that provide additional support to overcome educational disadvantages.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study explored the challenges facing teachers in supporting learners with disabilities in inclusive primary schools in Rungwe District, Tanzania. The findings showed that teachers were generally committed to inclusive education and recognized the importance of providing equal learning opportunities for learners with disabilities. However, various pedagogical, material, professional, and institutional challenges significantly constrained their efforts.

The study concludes that effective implementation of inclusive education requires more than enrolling learners with disabilities in mainstream schools. Meaningful inclusion depends on teachers' capacity to apply appropriate instructional strategies, access to adequate teaching and learning resources, accessible school environments, and ongoing institutional support. The findings showed that inadequate preparation in inclusive pedagogies limited teachers' ability to implement differentiated instruction and respond effectively to diverse learner needs. Furthermore, shortages of specialised teaching materials, assistive devices, and accessible infrastructure reduced opportunities for students with disabilities to participate fully in classroom activities.

The study also concludes that limited professional development opportunities and insufficient administrative support remain major barriers to sustainable inclusive education implementation. While Tanzania's policy frameworks promote educational inclusion, gaps between policy expectations and classroom realities continue to affect the quality of support available to learners with disabilities. Therefore, achieving genuine inclusion requires coordinated efforts among government authorities, schools, teachers, communities, and other education stakeholders.

Viewed through the lens of Rawls' Theory of Justice, the findings suggest that educational equity for learners with disabilities requires deliberate interventions that address existing disadvantages. Equal opportunity does not mean treating all learners identically; it means ensuring that learners facing additional barriers receive appropriate support to participate and succeed in education.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study proposes the following recommendations:

Education authorities should strengthen both pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes by integrating comprehensive inclusive education content. Training should focus on practical competencies such as differentiated instruction, disability-specific teaching strategies, classroom adaptation, inclusive assessment approaches, and communication skills such as sign language. Organize regular professional development programs to help teachers continuously improve their capacity to support learners with disabilities.

The government and relevant education stakeholders should increase investment in specialised teaching and learning resources required for inclusive classrooms. Schools should have assistive devices, adapted learning materials, specialized textbooks, and other instructional resources that meet the needs of learners with different disabilities. Adequate budget allocation for inclusive education is necessary to ensure policy commitments translate into practical classroom support.

Education authorities should prioritize developing disability-friendly school environments. Schools should improve by building accessible classrooms, ramps, appropriate sanitation facilities, and other infrastructure changes that enable students with physical disabilities to participate independently in school activities.

School leaders and education officers should strengthen support mechanisms for teachers working in inclusive classrooms. This should include regular supervision, professional guidance, coordination with special needs education specialists, and collaborative school environments where teachers can share experiences and solutions related to inclusive teaching.

Although Tanzania has established policies supporting inclusive education, stronger monitoring systems are required to ensure effective implementation at the school level. Education authorities should regularly assess resource availability, teacher preparedness, and accessibility conditions in inclusive schools. Such monitoring would help identify implementation gaps and guide appropriate interventions.

6.0 Recommendations for Further Research

The study focused on teachers' experiences regarding challenges in facilitating students with disabilities in inclusive primary schools. Future studies may explore the perspectives of learners with disabilities and their parents to provide a broader understanding of inclusion experiences from learners' and families' viewpoints. Further research may also examine the

effectiveness of specific teacher professional development programmes in improving inclusive teaching competencies. Additionally, comparative studies across regions of Tanzania could provide deeper insights into how contextual factors shape inclusive education implementation. Future research may also examine how assistive technologies and digital learning resources can improve participation and achievement among learners with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

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