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Implementation of Inclusive Education in Secondary Schools in Tanzania: A Breather for the Students with Disabilities?

Emanuel Ismael Maphie,

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, College of Social Sciences; University of Dar es Salaam

Abstract

This study is qualitative phenomenological research. A Total of 32 respondents consented participation and were purposively selected. The study key question was: How do students with disabilities benefit from inclusive education settings in secondary schools in Tanzania? In-depth interviews and focus group discussions used to collect data, and the data were analysed thematically. Findings showed varied advantages experienced by students with disabilities in inclusive secondary schools. They include: academic, social and physical/tangible benefits. Nevertheless, despite the benefits available in an inclusive education setting, not all students with disabilities benefit from the inclusive approach. The study findings inform that students with physical impairment seem to benefit more while those with hearing impairment benefit less. A number of factors are associated with the mentioned limitation among students with hearing impairment which includes a lack of teachers capable of handling their needs and shortage of learning and teaching materials to support their needs. The author recommends modification of school systems, infrastructure and in-service training for teachers are suggested.

Keys words: Inclusive education, Tanzania; students with disabilities, special education

Introduction

Education for learner with disabilities has a long history globally, from the times of extermination to asylums, mainstreaming to integration and currently inclusive education approach (Wiener et al., 2009; Taylor & Sunaura, 2017). Winzer (2006) suggests that prior to mid-18th century, individuals with disability were not totally or rarely tolerated and little was done to those who disrupted the norms of the society. People who were perceived as having disabilities, regardless of the degree of disability were placed together under the category of impractical people and despised as the inferior beings and deprived of their rights and privileges (Wiener et al., 2009). According to Winzer (2006), in mid-18th century, people with disabilities experienced utmost changes that were influenced by what was known as European Enlightenment which changed the minds of the people as its focus was on building a sound body of knowledge about the world. Enlightenment came with humanitarian philosophy which prompted the idea of equality to all people and that it was the responsibility of humans to take care of others; particularly, individuals outside the private circle of the home and the family.

Globally, it is the Salamanca Statement of 1994 which evoked the need to provide basic education to children with special needs. (Corbett, 2001). For the purpose of increasing both enrolment and equality of the students with disabilities (SWDs) in education, the Salamanca Statement (1994) suggests inclusive education as a strategy to reach the goals (Gwala, 2006). For that reason, approaches in the provision of education for children with disabilities moved from special to inclusive schools (e.g., a process for increasing participation and reducing exclusion, in a way that effectively responds to the diverse needs of all learners), reflecting a change from the medical to the social model of disability, as well as a growing human right focus in the disability field (MacDonald, 2012).

Tanzania was among the countries that agreed with and adopted the Salamanca Statement as a guide in the year 1998 (MoEVT, 2012). The schools necessitated to adopt an education system that captures the need of individuals, rather than changing the individual to fit in the system. The purpose was to ensure that more learners with special educational needs were served in general education classrooms. The change from special needs/regular education systems to inclusive education poses a number of challenges to teachers and education specialists (Khan, 2012). The move affected also the education system in terms of physical environments including infrastructures. The new approach (i.e., inclusive education) demanded for change to most of

Tanzanian schools' infrastructures and secondary schools in particular so that they can support SWDs (Pima, 2012; Chediell, Sekwao & Komba, 2000; Mkonongwa, 2014).

The commencement of the implementation of inclusive education in Tanzania encountered with key challenges. One of the key challenges in implementing inclusive education was the lack of infrastructure and resources. Many African countries have limited resources and struggle to provide basic educational services to their populations (Paschal, 2022). However, the government of Tanzania has been budgeting for the purchase of equipment/devices for SWDs (MoEVT, 2008) but Danda (2012) noted government's slow pace in facilitating inclusive settings in its schools. Kapinga (2012) observes that there is lack of evidence that teachers in inclusive education settings in Tanzania are prepared to undertake the role of supporting students with disabilities in classrooms. ILO (2009) observed reluctance of teachers in Tanzania to accept learners with disabilities in their classrooms as most of the teachers have inadequate or poor inclusive education training. It is from this background that the presented study questioned the profitability of inclusive education settings in secondary schools in Tanzania for the students with disabilities. Hence, the study focus is to investigate on the advantages SWDs receive in the course of studying in inclusive secondary schools' settings in Tanzania.

Literature Review

Many studies have reported specific positive outcomes of inclusive education systems at global level (Nikora et al., 2004). Research including Armstrong (2005); Mkumbo (2008); Kisanji & Saanane (2009) and James (2014) show that inclusive settings are advantageous to both students with and without disabilities. MacDonald (2012) supports this argument in his study in California, USA where he found that SWDs who were placed in general settings increased their achievements in mathematics compared to those who remained in separate special classrooms. Furthermore, Alqurain and Gut (2012) shows that inclusion provides an opportunity for SWDs to build social skills by establishing relationships with their non-disabled peers. Studies indicate that SWDs who are in inclusive settings experience higher levels of interaction with non-disabled peers than those in special classrooms. The study by Alqurain and Gut (2012) found out those students who were over two years in inclusive schools progressed on measures of social competence whereas their counterparts in segregated schools regressed.

There is also positive evidence that SWDs improve their communication skills in inclusive settings as opposed to segregated classes (Asha & Kari, 2022). Ainscow (1999) points

out that SWDs who are placed in inclusive education classrooms have greater opportunity to develop in terms of communication skills abilities through interactions with peers without disabilities because SWDs experience more communicative interaction in inclusive settings than in any other form of special education needs. In inclusive settings, SWDs develop their physical coordination and social skills by communicating and observing their fellow non-disabled peers (Ainscow, 1999). According to Armstrong (2005) research findings indicate that students placed in inclusive settings get an opportunity to increase and develop a variety of skills in terms of academic, social and communication abilities.

Loreman et al. (2008) found out that among the advantages of inclusive education settings include the social and academic progress of SWDs. This is demonstrated in the study by Fitch 2003, as cited in Loreman, (2008) where six SWDs were tracked for six years. Those who were in segregated schools were identified as outsiders, embarrassed and ashamed, who did not wish to in special settings in all of their life. They also reported feelings of resignation as being stupid or not smart for regular classrooms. They further lacked age-appropriate social interaction and had low level of peers' engagement as opposed to those in inclusive education settings who demonstrated confidence, learned more, made more friends and had higher level of self-concept, including self-efficacy and self-esteem. Chaula (2014) point out that inclusive setting not only favour SWDs but also those without disabilities. Both students develop high degree of friendships and advocacy as well as lowering their degree of abuse and stigmatization towards SWDs. Academically, inclusive education has shown benefit to all students. Both students with and without disabilities in inclusive settings develop stronger academic performance than those in non-inclusive schools.

In the sub-Saharan Africa, the studies show that the implementation of inclusive education has shown positive results to SWDs. The study by Dan et al. (2020) show that countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are poised to make significant gains in inclusive education. Studies carried in South Africa by Dana & Juan (2014) and in Kenya by Mwangi (2014), respectively shows that SWDs who are educated in inclusive settings received higher grades and achieved scores on the standardized tests than those who were placed in separate classrooms. Similarly, studies by Lehtomäki, Tuomi, & Matonya (2014) and Kapinga. O. (2014) revealed that the academic accomplishments for SWDs gained through interaction with peers in integrated environment enabled them to meet their Individualized Education programme (IEP) goals. Maphie (2023)

show that there is evidence from research that SWDs increase their academic performance mainly in academic skills including reading and mathematics when they work in cooperative groups in inclusive settings.

Inclusive education in Tanzania

The state of inclusive education in African countries varies widely. While some countries have made progress in promoting inclusive education for students with disabilities, many still face significant challenges such as inadequate funding, lack of trained teachers and support staff, inaccessible school facilities, and negative attitudes towards disability (Asha & Kari, 2022). Additionally, there are often disparities in access to education based on factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, and geographic location (Aisha, 2020). However, there are also examples of successful inclusive education initiatives in several African countries, and efforts are ongoing to improve access and quality of education for all learners (Asha & Kari, 2022).

In Tanzania, practices of inclusive education include providing accessible learning environments, adapting teaching methods to meet diverse student needs, involving parents and communities in the education process, promoting positive attitudes towards disability, and providing support services such as special education teachers and assistive technology (Aisha, 2020). The government has also implemented policies to promote inclusive education, such as the 2004 Education Act and the 2010 National Inclusive Education Strategy. The 2010 Act for People with Disabilities prohibits discrimination of any form in the provision of education at all levels. It puts clearly the right of educating SWDs in inclusive settings (MoHSW, 2010). For the first time, the act made it necessary for students with disabilities to be educated in inclusive settings. MoEVT (2012) suggests that the government of Tanzania has trained classroom teachers, school inspectors, District Education Officers (DEOs) and Ward Education Officers on inclusive approach as a way forward to full implementation of inclusive education. MoEVT (2011) indicates that the government has conducted several policy reviews and curriculum reforms so as to take on board inclusive education features.

Further, the Government of Tanzania, through its National Examination Council, has made some provisions to facilitate examinations for special education needs where examinations are written in Braille for students who are totally visually impaired while for those with low vision, their examinations are written in enlarged fonts. MoEVT (2011) shows that the target is to make sure that all secondary school students are mainstreamed, although in the same it

acknowledges that there is much to be done in terms of developing more practical secondary school curricular for SWDs, which will concentrate much on life rather than academic skills.

Conversely, challenges remain in ensuring that all students have equal access to education, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds (Maphie, 2023). Notwithstanding the fact that the National Disability Policy and the Act for People with Disabilities require all public places, including schools, to be accessible to people with disabilities; one notable and notorious challenge indicated by different literatures is inaccessibility to building as well as poor physical infrastructures (Masenga, & Mkandawire, 2007). Mbagga (2002) suggests that most of the Tanzanian public-school buildings are inaccessible. Kapinga (2012), on the same, attributes the challenges on inclusive and special needs education to the government. The author contends that even during the years 2002-2006, when many reforms took place in the sector of education, the question of inclusive and special needs education was ignored. The author also reports lack of qualified teachers for special needs education, inaccessible facilities, and shortage of teaching and learning materials, overcrowded classrooms as well as lack of assistive devices for SWDs as common problems in schools (Kapinga (2012).

Despite successful element of inclusion in Tanzania such as change of school infrastructures and the change of different education policies to accommodate the needs of SWDs, Sreenath (2012) suggests that one of the important elements for successful inclusion is teachers' attitudes. If teachers feel that they are not recognized and motivated for the work they perform, inclusive education may not be implemented with success. ILO Report (2009) enlightens that teachers in Tanzania are unwilling to accept learners defined as having disabilities in their classrooms since most of the teachers have not received adequate and quality special education training at their teacher training colleges. Teachers confidently use traditional methods to teach as defined before the concept of inclusive education (Giangreco, 2013). Inclusive education requires flexible methods which allow learning of social skills more compared to learning academic/content (MacDonald, 2012). Furthermore, inclusive education system requires dedicated and responsible teachers in the front line to display positive attitudes towards learners with disabilities (Meijer, 2005). Gwala (2006) observes that teachers in Tanzania show resistance to take additional roles and are unwilling to adopt inclusive approaches in their teaching with feelings that they are not supported by the government and non-government authorities hence being overwhelmed.

Student-teacher proportion is another essential element in inclusive education. SWDs need quicker assistance from their educators, henceforth prerequisites for lower student-teacher ratio. According to Cornodi et al (1998) inclusive class size need not to exceed 20 students. Bigger classes increase more responsibilities to instructors and therefore less time and attention to students with disabilities at the reinforcing stage. Lewis (2007) shows that, the increase of enrolments in Tanzania secondary schools as a response to MDGP under SEDEP has led to over crowdedness in schools. Consequently, it was important for one to find out the student-teacher ratio in inclusive secondary schools in Tanzania and the way it challenges SWDs. Likewise, Pima (2012) advocates that inclusive education in Tanzania falls in the hands of teachers who are unaware of various impairments and how to deal with most common learning difficulties. The findings support that of Possi (1996) who shows that teachers in Tanzania are not informed on how to adapt the classroom and school environment to overcome barriers to learning. Further, most teachers in Tanzania are unaware of how to respond to students' diversity and how to adapt the curriculum to suit the needs of SWD. Pima (2012) suggests that inclusive education principles encourage the involvement of parents/community so that they become aware of diversities and support inclusion. However, parents/communities in Tanzania are neither involved in planning of inclusive programmes nor are they aware of diversities within their children. Statistics from different sources on inclusive education as potted by Massenga and Mkandawire (2012) specifies that teachers, educators and experts in the education system in Tanzania do not work supportively. The coordination goes contrary to inclusive education advocates and principles which call for relationship between education system and communities (Osgood, 2005). Inclusive education system aims to provide equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their background or abilities.

Inclusive education in Tanzania aims to provide equal educational opportunities for all learners, regardless of their abilities or disabilities (MoHSW (2010). The government has implemented policies and programs to promote inclusive education, including providing support for special needs students and training teachers to work with diverse learners (Kapinga 2012). However, there are still challenges to fully implementing inclusive education, such as a lack of resources, inadequate teacher training, and societal stigma towards people with disabilities (Maphie, 2023). Several studies have been carried to explore various aspects of inclusive education in Tanzania, such as policy and practice, challenges faced by teachers, and attitudes

towards inclusion (Aisha, 2020; Kapinga 2012; Maphie, 2023; Masenga, & Mkandawire, 2007; Mbagga, 2002; Mkonongwa, 2014; Pima, 2012). The studies provide insights into the current state of inclusive education in Tanzania and suggest ways to improve it. Yet, no study has been carried specifically to study how students with disabilities in inclusive secondary schools benefit from inclusive setting approach. The current study focus was to fill this gap by exploring how students with disabilities benefit from the implementation of inclusive educating policy in secondary schools in Tanzania.

Theoretical Framework

Two theories (Critical Disability Theory and universal design learning framework) have been used to inform the current study. Critical Disability Theory (CDT) analyzes disability as a cultural, historical, relative, social, and political phenomenon (Goodley & Cole, 2018). It further examines the ways in which disability is socially constructed and influenced by various forms of power and oppression, such as ableism. CDT challenges dominant narratives about disability and aims to promote social justice, equity, and inclusivity for disabled individuals (Minich, 2016). CDT found essential in the study as it provides a theoretical lens to examine and understand disability in a broader social context. CDT helps a researcher move beyond individualistic models of disability and recognize the impact of societal structures, attitudes, and practices on disabled individuals. CDT perceives disability as a socially created problem, not an attribute of individual and pinpointed the society as the one which disables people through having inaccessibly designed infrastructure and disabling attitudes (Meekosha & Shuttleworth 2009; Vehmas & Watson 2014). The CDT focus is therefore on the barriers of society that limit individuals to their full potentials. CDT further promotes positive attitudes and perceptions, modifying the built environment, providing information in accessible manners and making sure that laws and policies support the exercise of full participation and non-discrimination. Social model sees the education systems as the one brought about disadvantages for SWDs' learning prospects (Schalk, 2017; Hamraie, 2016). The selection of the model gave light on the barriers within the society and the way they affect education for SWDs (Rieser, 2002). The barriers included the environment (inaccessible buildings and services); peoples' attitudes (stereotyping, discrimination and prejudice) and organizations (inflexible policies, practice and procedures). Whereas the barriers are eliminated, it creates conducive environment for SWDs to learn and achieve their educational goals (Rose & Strangman, 2007). The framework also encouraged the

researcher to center the lived experiences and perspectives of disabled learners in their studies, ensuring that their voices are heard and their needs are addressed. By adopting a critical disability studies approach, the current study can contribute to the development of more inclusive and equitable policies, practices, and interventions that promote social justice and improve the lives of disabled individuals (Hamraie, 2016).

On the side Universal Design for Learning (UDL), it was also important in guiding the study as it establishes fundamental requirements in the inclusive educating settings. UDL is an educational framework that aims to provide all students, including those with disabilities and diverse learning needs, equal opportunities to (Dalton, 2005). UDL promotes the use of flexible teaching methods and materials that can be customized to meet the needs of diverse learners. UDL principles involve providing multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement in learning activities to meet the needs of a wide range of learners. This approach recognizes that students have different strengths and challenges and seeks to create flexible learning environments that can accommodate these differences (Dalton et al., 2014). Where UDL is often used in conjunction with assistive technology, it supports inclusive learning environments. In the current study, the use of UDL principles provided opportunities for learners with disabilities to enjoy learning environment and attain their educational goals (National Centre on UDL. 2014).

Methodology

The subsequent sections present the research methodology or methodological applications. Guba (1981) refers to it as a system of rules in scientific work. The research design data collection methods, sample and sampling techniques as well as the concept of trustworthiness and ethical issues are discussed intensively.

Research design

The current study is qualitative by nature and employed phenomenological as a design to guide it. Phenomenology is the study of the appearances of things in people's experience, or the way people experience things, thus, the meaning things have in our experience (Groenewald, 2004). As stipulated by Strauss and Corbin (1990), phenomenology acknowledges that a person's life world is a social, cultural and historical artifact, as well as extremity of individual subjectivity. The current research, through interviews and focus group discussions, yielded experienced perceptions and concerns of participants on their real lived experiences concerning inclusive education settings (Groenewald, 2004). The design illuminated specific advantages in

inclusive secondary schools' settings. The design allowed the researcher to study inclusive secondary schools' settings extensively, gathering participants' experiences on inclusive education; develop patterns and relationships of the lived experiences by the participants concerning inclusive education. Students had the chance to describe their experiences on inclusive education as they perceive.

Sampling and sample size procedures

The study was carried in two regions of Dar es Salaam and Kilimanjaro covering three inclusive secondary schools. A total of 32 students consented to participate in the study and purposively and quota sampling used to form the study sample. Thirty-two participants were classified into quotas, that is, students with disabilities (50%) and those without disabilities (50%). Sixty-five percent of the students with disabilities were boys while thirty-five percent were girls. In the case of students without disabilities, sixty-two percent were girls while boys were thirty eight percent. Generally, the student sample had fifty six percent boys and forty four percent girls. In terms of age, forty four percent ranged 10 – 12, thirty one percent 12 – 14 and twenty five percent had 14 – 17 years.

Data collection methods

Interviews and focus group discussions aided to yield experienced perceptions and concerns of participants on their real lived experiences concerning inclusive education settings (Groenewald, 2004). The researcher made an appointment with each participant at a time which suited them, created a quiet room conducive to conversation, arranged chairs to enhance face-to-face interviewing, prepared a voice recorder and had a bottle of water available for the interviewee and interviewer. Interviews were held in a specific room within the health service or at their respective homes. Interviews were conducted individually for 30 to 40 minutes. The technique allowed interactive conversations between the interviewer and informants (Patton, 2001). This assured the study with rich and in-depth descriptions from the participants on their experience, opinions and views concerning inclusive education (I-TECH, 2008).

Focus group discussion conducted in a non-frightening environment whereby participants had freedom of discussion and degree of trust among themselves and even to the researcher. Chairs were arranged in a circle to allow communication and interaction among group members. Groups of five to six members were formed and issued with different topics on inclusive education ready for discussion. The researcher was moving around to give clarifications where

need arose but also recording the sessions. Assessment of the emotional tone of the meeting and the group process enabled the researcher to judge the validity of the information collected during FGD. Four sessions of FGDs (two for males and two for females) were held and each session ran for an hour and a half. This made it possible for the researcher to ensure consistency and representation of information brought in by group members. The technique allowed free flowing of group members, to hear each other's responses, to carefully prepare questions and construct their own responses and synthesize other participants' comments. It helped to provide valuable spontaneous and in-depth information with high quality data on concepts, perceptions and ideas of a group in a short time. Interaction of respondents also stimulated a richer response or new and valuable thoughts.

Triangulation techniques (multiple sources of data) to increase the rigour of the data and use of member checking such as taking report back to participants and determine whether they feel that the findings provided transferability and credibility to the narrative accounts were used to assured trustworthiness of this study. Further, the researcher spent a reasonable time in the field that help him develop an in-depth understanding of the site (inclusive education schools) the process which increased trustworthiness of the study (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

Data analysis

Data of this study are analysed thematically where the steps for formal data analysis were employed starting with re-reading of the transcripts, categorizing and coding of the data as well as identifying and creating themes. Words, phrases, and statements that addressed the participants' description of feelings related to inclusive settings were marked using a highlighter. The developed codes were assigned for different types of statements whilst identification of statements of significance were grouped into meaningful units (Van Manen, 1990). Themes and sub-themes generated from the analysis are reported.

Study limitation

One limitation of this research study is that it focused on four categories of disabilities only, namely, hearing, physical, intellectual and visual impairments. The limitation makes it difficult for its findings to be generalized to other forms of disabilities. Further, the study was conducted in secondary schools, thus its findings are bound within that context. They cannot be applied to other levels of education. In addition, the small sample size of the study is a limitation in that there were three schools involved with a total of thirty-two (32) participants.

Findings

The study aims to explore opportunities available for students with disabilities in inclusive secondary schools in Tanzania. The data analysis emerged with themes and subthemes as presented here below.

Advantages of inclusive education settings

Regarding advantages of educating SWDs in inclusive education settings, a research question formulated to establish the advantages. It tapped the experience of students on whether or not inclusive education systems add value to their learning. The study findings show that both students with and without disabilities narrated that inclusive education system is important and adds value in their learning. From the findings, students explained that inclusive education provides access to curricula and textbooks in which most are not available in general or special schools. It was also revealed that inclusive education settings were a stepping point to a standardized and eligibility procedures for students. It also decreased segregative settings, that is, settings targeted for SWDs only. During an interview session, one female participant with disability aged 15 years commented as follows:

We see many advantages of inclusive education settings: We acquire more social skills, get more experiences, and learn about how to manage the real world, interact and get friends with and without disabilities.

However, although participants showed interest in inclusive education, the magnitude of benefit differed from one participant to the other. The findings show that, students who are physically impaired, for example, are likely to have more advantages in inclusive education settings than those with hearing impairment. In one of the interviews, one participant with hearing impairment aged 16 years said as follows:

In inclusive education settings we benefit very little compared to special schools where there is good relationship between us and teachers. Teachers in special schools understand our needs and situations. Academically things are not ok here; teachers are not friendly to us because they are unable to communicate. For me, it is better to be in a special school where teachers know our needs. This will enhance my growth academically.

Generally, the findings from the study seem to suggest that the advantages for SWDs in inclusive education settings in secondary schools are in three categories; academic, social and tangible/physical advantages.

Academic advantages.

In this theme, the findings show that SWDs appreciate inclusive education in secondary schools as it signals opportunities for them to grow academically. The findings show that students without disabilities help their colleagues with disabilities through reading notes and interpreting for them what teachers teach and give notes to them. In addressing this as an opportunity of inclusive education settings, one of the students with hearing impairment in an interview said the following:

Most teachers don't understand sign language. It is our fellow students without disabilities who help us to interpret what they are teaching. This is an opportunity only found in inclusive education settings.

Further, the findings from focus group discussions with students without disabilities evidenced how inclusive education settings give advantages for SWDs to progress academically.

From one of the focus group discussions, they wrote the following:

In classes where teachers do not understand sign language, we become interpreters for students with hearing impairment. We enjoy the assignment because we love our colleagues with disabilities although sometimes it costs the interpreters as she/he may miss what the teacher is teaching or fail to take their own notes.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that students without disabilities help those with disabilities specifically those with visual impairment by taking notes for them due to the fact that visually impaired students lack Braille machines to enable them take class notes on their own. The findings from the study indicate that when a student with disability misses a class for any reason, he/she is assisted to take notes and that there are readers who read for visually impaired students during extra time after classes. In response to this, one of the visually impaired respondents in an interview commented as follows:

An inclusive education setting has a lot to add in my academic progress. Students without disabilities for example read notes for me in the dormitory and I transcribe them into the Braille. Even when I am not in

the classroom, they bring and read notes for me. This is a plausible opportunity available in inclusive education settings.

From the focus group discussions with students without disabilities, a similar argument was raised by one group where they commented as follows:

We contribute highly to make sure that our fellow SWDs do not miss what happens in classes. For example, in the situation where students who are visually impaired are unable to take notes while teachers are teaching, we take notes for them. We read the notes for them in dormitories, and they transcribe them in Braille.

Moreover, the findings revealed that it is not only SWDs who benefit academically in inclusive education settings but also those without disabilities. From the focus group discussions with students without disabilities, participants narrated how they benefit from those with disabilities. The findings suggest that by educating students without disabilities along with those with disabilities, the two share different experiences. One group of focus group discussion commented the following:

Students with disabilities have many things to share with us. They have different abilities. From them, for example, we learn sign language and braille skills. These are things that we were unable to learn in our general or ordinary schools.

Social advantages.

Social advantages emerged out of the findings as another important opportunity of inclusive education settings. Responses from participants, particularly those with disabilities evidenced how much they enjoy school life in terms of social issues while in inclusive education settings. On the basis of the study findings it suggests that there is a positive social interaction that SWDs experiences in inclusive education settings. For instance, the findings revealed that in inclusive education schools there are mutual relationships between students with and without disabilities. It was further learned that SWDs exposes their abilities hence reducing stigma and stereotypes regarding them from their fellow students without disabilities. In one of the interviews with SWDs, one of them commented the following:

One of the best advantages in inclusive education settings is the exposure I get from other students. They have come to understand that I am normal

just like them. What I have is just some limitations. This to some extent, reduces negative thinking about me as well as for other SWDs that we are helpless people, beggars and people who can do nothing. For sure, inclusive education settings reduce stigma and negative stereotyping about me and the people with disabilities at large.

The findings also show that inclusive education settings create an environment for SWDs to experience sense of love from students without disabilities and the school community at large. The findings inform that inclusive education settings encourage friendship among SWDs and those without disabilities, hence strengthening the scope of social interaction. The findings indicate that having friends who own different abilities and characteristics, exposes SWDs to different social activities, hence feeling a sense of being loved by their friends and the school community in general. The study findings also revealed that in the situation where SWDs feels a sense of being loved motivates them and increases their participation in school activities including learning. In one of the interviews with students with disabilities, one of them stated the following:

I feel loved here at school. I get friends who join me in different social activities. I play and chat with them and this for me and my fellows with disabilities is a marvellous thing. We lack this opportunity in special school settings.

Similarly, one respondent with hearing impairment from an interview was recorded saying the following:

Despite the fact that inclusive education settings for us with hearing impairment are poor academically, socially we are benefiting much. It is the only opportunity we get here. We enjoy being together as one family with students without disabilities. We play together and entertain each other through jokes and amusements. We can note the social difference between students enrolled in inclusive education schools and those in special schools.

Physical advantages.

Physical or tangible advantages arise from the findings as an important benefit for SWDs in inclusive education in secondary schools. From the findings, respondents informed how they

enjoy in inclusive education settings. The findings show that SWDs benefits tangible/physical environment of inclusive education settings by receiving help in fetching water, being assisted in pushing their wheelchairs, washing their clothes, accessing classrooms and being helped to carry their luggage (books, etc.) One of the respondents with physical impairment from the interview commented as follows:

Among the advantages I have enjoyed here in this school is the help I receive from my fellow students without disabilities. They help me in so many things, including fetching water, washing clothes and so many other types of help. It is difficult to mention them all. In fact, they do much for me. Even at times when I face difficulties with my wheelchair, they push me so that I do not get late for my classes. God will pay them. I have been in a special school during my primary education. This kind of support and help was not there! Here at school sometimes we (students with disabilities) forget about our disabilities. We feel normal as if we do not have any disabilities.

In addition, the study findings show that it is safer for SWDs to get their education in inclusive schools. The findings show that in the situation where there are reports of harassment and killings of people with albinism in Tanzania (Daghar, 2022), the students with albinism reported that they were more secure in inclusive schools rather than in any other forms of education system. From an interview with students with disabilities, one student with albinism responded as follows:

In inclusive education settings, not only that I benefit socially or academically but also my security is assured. I live with the community which understands my limitations and they love me. They are my guardians who guard me from any threat. I am free to inform them of any worry. It is also difficult for the killers to target us when we are in inclusive education settings. It is difficult for them to spot us compared to when we are in our own schools.

Another essential point from the findings is that students without disabilities play a role of leading SWDs particularly those with visual impairment. The findings from the study inform that some students with visual impairments lack supportive devices such as white canes and in that particular case, students without disabilities lead them. To emphasize on this, one of the respondents with visual impairment in an interview said the following:

My fellow students are very helpful to me. They escort and lead me most of the times. I can conclude that without their help my life here at school would have been very difficult. I don't have a white cane; they are my white canes.

This is further supported by the comments from focus group discussions with students without disabilities, in which one group commented as follows:

Many students with visual impairment in our school lack white canes to help them in their movements. For them to move from dormitories to classrooms, we assist in showing them the way. We arrange ourselves in way that every one of us has a person to support in a very flexible allocated schedule.

Discussion

The study findings show that both students with and without disabilities benefits from inclusive education system. From the findings, students explained that inclusive education provides access to curricula and textbooks to which most are not exposed to while in general or special schools. It was also revealed that inclusive education settings were a stepping point of standardized and eligibility procedures to students and decreases segregation. Generally, findings from this study suggest that advantages for SWDs in inclusive education settings in secondary schools are in three categories: academic, social and tangible/physical advantages.

Academic advantages

The findings show that SWDs appreciate inclusive education in secondary schools as it signals advantages for them to grow academically. Student with disabilities enjoy help they receive whereby fellow students take notes for them by transforming what teachers teach into a language that SWDs understand. They also read notes for SWDs so that they can transcribe them into Braille. From the findings it is evident that both SWDs and non-disabled ones benefit from inclusive education settings. There is much evidence from different studies which support the study findings that inclusive education settings benefits SWDs academically. Asha & Kari (2022) is in odd with this study findings as suggested that Inclusive education provides students with disabilities access to the same curriculum and teaching methods as their peers, which can lead to improved academic performance. Aisha (2020) agrees that with inclusive education, SWDs increase academic performance in main academic skills such as reading and mathematics. This is observed when they are in cooperative groups in inclusive classrooms. The findings are also broadly in harmony with those of Kilimo (2014) and Eleweke & Rodda (2002) who agreed

that inclusive education settings provide different academic advantages for both students with and without disabilities. On the same, Loreman et al. (2008), in line with these findings comments that among the advantages found in inclusive education settings is the academic progress of SWDs. Moreover, the study findings are in line with the study by Fitch 2003 as cited in Loreman et al. (2008). In their study, SWDs were categorized into two groups; the experimental group (those that were exposed into inclusive education settings) and the control group (those that were placed in special education settings and traced for six years, the results showed that students who were in inclusive education settings demonstrated academic change and growth as they were more confident, had higher levels of self-concept, self-efficacy and self-esteem as opposed to those in segregated settings who were less confident, poor in learning, with low self-esteem and being less smart in the classroom.

In addition, Alqurain and Gut (2012) show boldness with the current study findings as it recorded that SWDs who were in inclusive education settings increased their achievements in mathematics compared to those who remained in separate special classrooms. In line with this study's findings, Farrel (2004) adds that SWDs educated in inclusive settings received higher grades and achieved scores on the standardized tests than those who were placed in separate classrooms.

Social advantages

The findings clearly revealed the way SWDs get advantages to participate in different social activities in inclusive education settings. Various social advantages and interactions in inclusive education settings for SWDs have been noted such as receiving positive interaction from their colleagues without disabilities, experiencing sense of love from their fellows and increased scope of friendship. Others include opportunities to play together with those without disabilities and forming social clubs. All these improve social behaviour of SWDs. Moreover, social advantages in inclusive education settings reduce the distance that has existed for a long time among the students with and without disabilities, hence, eliminating stigma and negative stereotyping toward people with disabilities. From the findings of the study, it is obvious that SWDs enjoy social advantages in inclusive education settings and students without disabilities become role models of those with disabilities hence facilitating communication, social and adaptive behaviours.

Inclusive education settings also enabled SWDs to develop strong friendships with their non-disabled peers at school, but also, in their neighbourhood. Students without disabilities also enjoy inclusive education settings socially as they become conscious and aware that what matters first for a student with disability is that he/she is a person first and this reduces tendency of labelling (Tungaraza, 2007). In the same vein, the findings show that socially, SWDs are enhanced with self-respect and self-esteem when they are in inclusive education settings. When they interact with students without disabilities and teachers, they feel a sense of self-worth. They feel good about themselves and enjoy the overall school experiences. They also see themselves as individuals with something to share with other people.

The findings are supported by previous one such as that of Aisha (2020) who finds that students with disabilities who are included in mainstream classrooms have more opportunities to interact and socialize with their non-disabled peers, which can help them develop important social skills. Also, the findings agree with Mkumbo. (2008) who showed that students who were exposed to inclusive education settings showed progress in social competence whereas their counterparts in segregated schools regressed. Mwangi (2014) is in line with this study's findings as he pointed out that SWDs placed in inclusive education classrooms have a greater opportunity to develop in terms of communication skills abilities through interactions with peers without disabilities. The author continues to show that SWDs experienced more communicative interaction in inclusive settings than in any other form of education. Students with disabilities learn and develop physical coordination and social skills by communicating and receiving help from their fellow non-disabled peers. Further Maphie (2023) agreed that SWDs being included in mainstream classrooms can help students with disabilities feel valued and accepted which can improve their self-esteem and confidence. In addition, the findings are in odd to Dana & Juan (2014) who suggest that inclusive education can help reduce the stigma associated with disabilities by promoting understanding and acceptance of individual differences among students. Students with disabilities from social interaction the experience in inclusive schools them to develop the skills they need to succeed in the workforce and live independently as adults.

Physical advantages

Study findings pointed out the extent to which SDWs enjoy physical/tangible support available in inclusive education settings. The advantages include getting help in fetching water,

assistance in pushing their wheelchairs, washing clothes, accessing classrooms and being carrying their luggage (e.g., books etc.). It is clear that SWDs receive a variety of physical assistance from different individuals, in particular from their fellow students without disabilities. As noted in this study, it is in inclusive education settings only where SWDs receive such support which also include in fetching water and pushing wheelchairs for those who are physically impaired. Their safety is also assured especially for students with albinism whereby their fellow students in inclusive settings are their guardians. There are many guards in inclusive education settings compared to segregate the settings.

The study findings bring in what other researchers such as MacDonald (2012) and Ainscow & Miles (2009) had pointed out when they showed that there is an increase of functionality and general knowledge to SWDs who were stimulated into inclusive education classes as a result of tangible support they receive from those without disabilities. The study adds that within inclusive education classrooms, SWDs have an advantage that there is increase in the amount of instruction on functional activities as well as basic academic skills such as literacy for SWDs compared to those in special needs education schools.

Nevertheless, despite the general advantages available in inclusive education settings, the findings show a variation of the levels of advantages among SWDs. It was noted for example that, on social and physical advantages, all SWDs are benefiting. With the academic advantages, students with hearing impairment expressed their concern that they were not benefiting, if anything, it was very little. The issue is not that students with hearing impairment do not support the idea of inclusive education settings but it is inclusive schools' settings that do not support their needs (Uromi & Mazagwa, 2014). These variations in advantages among SWDs in inclusive education settings are most likely caused by poor school environments which fail to cater for the needs of SWDs according to their disabilities. Students with disabilities especially those with hearing impairments found it difficult to be in inclusive education settings. Arguing on the same, Uromi & Mazagwa (2014) describes that given the advantages that have been demonstrated by the inclusion system as the only approach that fits education for SWDs, there are many views on the other side of inclusive education settings. James (2014) support this finding through their comments that if inclusive education schools are not well prepared, they may fail to meet the needs of students according to disability and therefore lack of practicability as far as inclusion is concerned. Dana, & Juan (2014) had a concern in that despite the

advantages in inclusive education settings, not all SWDs fit in the general education classrooms. It was found out that inclusive education settings deny some students the benefit of intensive and individualized instruction that they could receive in special education settings. A possible explanation for this might be that general education teachers do not have enough knowledge on the nature and characteristics of SWDs as most of pre-service teachers complete their courses with limited training and experience on how to teach SWDs and feel that they are inadequately prepared to teach inclusive classrooms. All in all, this study as it was suggested by Armstrong (2005), concludes that students who are placed in inclusive education settings get an opportunity to increase and develop a variety of skills in terms of academic, social and communication abilities only if the school environments are prepared to accomplish this task.

Conclusion

The study findings have showed that inclusive education has several advantages, including promoting social inclusion and reducing discrimination, improving academic outcomes for students with disabilities, enhancing teacher professional development, and preparing all students for living and working in a diverse society. Additionally, inclusive education fosters a sense of community and belonging among all students, which can lead to increased self-esteem and positive attitudes towards others. Nevertheless, not all students neither all disabilities that fit in the inclusive education system. Students with hearing impairment for example find it difficult to be in inclusive education systems. The scenario is attributed to a number of factors including lack people who can support their needs. Strain on resources to facilitate provision of appropriate accommodations and support services for students with disabilities is also a reason. Some students also without disabilities suggest that inclusive classrooms have a negative impact on the academic outcomes as teachers need to devote more time and attention to supporting students with disabilities. It's important to note, however, that many of these potential disadvantages can be mitigated through effective planning, collaboration, and support for all students and educators involved in inclusive education programs. It therefore a call to carry out another study to empirically establish mechanism/strategies appropriate to mitigate few disadvantages of inclusive classroom as raised in this study.

Implications for Future Research

The current study has analyzed the advantages students with and without disabilities receive while in inclusive education settings. The findings can help to provide evidence-based

recommendations for policymakers, educators, and families, ultimately leading to the development of more inclusive educational systems to benefit all students. Nevertheless, the current study shows that inclusive education has positive effects on students with disabilities, but there is a need to investigate its impact on non-disabled students as well. Research can delve for example into the advantages of inclusive education for promoting empathy, tolerance, and acceptance among all students, as well as its potential to enhance learning experiences for typically developing students. Further, current study has shown that not all students benefit in inclusive education settings. Students with hearing impairment for example had some grievances. Another research can be done focusing on identifying the most effective strategies, teaching methods, and supports that can be implemented in inclusive classrooms to ensure the success of students with disabilities. This can include analysing the impact of differentiated instruction, individualized educational plans, and assistive technologies on student outcomes.

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