

THE ROLE OF PHYSICAL FACILITIES ON SUPPORTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN IRINGA MUNICIPALITY, TANZANIA

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Abstract

Even though education is a basic human right it is still difficult for students with special needs to go to school. The study sought to assess how the physical facilities support the implementation of inclusive education in Iringa Municipality in inclusive secondary schools. The study was based on Burrhus Fredric Skinner 1904-1990, behavioural learning theory and used case study design. The target population was 26 head of schools, teachers and students. Data was collected through interview for teachers and head of schools where focus group discussion was used for students. The result showed that the physical facilities in most of the surveyed schools were inaccessible to learners with disabilities in inclusive schools. The study concluded that most facilities in inclusive secondary schools were not suitable for use by learners with disabilities. The study recommended that the government should ensure all schools infrastructure in inclusive schools are favourable to learners with special needs.

Key words: Inclusive education, physical facilities.

1.0 Introduction

Education is a basic human right that should help people reach their full potential and strengthen their respect for human rights and basic freedoms (UNESCO, 2008). According to the Salamanca Declaration of 1994, every child has a right to be educated in an inclusive setting without discrimination, including children with special needs. The essence is that every child has a right to free basic education, and they should be educated in a conducive environment and, more importantly, supported by properly trained personnel in a friendly environment with the required adaptations and physical facilities.

1.1 Background of the Study.

Inclusive education is a child's right, not a privilege. Inclusion promotes quality and equitable education for all, without exclusion including those who may be potentially marginalized by learning need or social position, UNESCO (2020). The active call for inclusivity is boldly stipulated in the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action of UNESCO in 1994 which addresses nations to adopt the framework of action in providing inclusion and equity through education of children with perceived differences. The statement was vigorously defended that inclusion and participation are inherently human rights (UNESCO, 2008). As in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights article 26 declares that everyone has the right to education (UN 1948). Hence, the declaration paves the way to other reaffirmation on the right to education of child as in the convention on rights of the child article 28 state that "every child has the right to education without discrimination" hence this convention creates a knowledge of understanding the child's right to education. Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action, paragraph (3) "schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions" (UNESCO, 1994).

To date inclusive education is conceptualized as the process of addressing and responding to the diversity in the needs of all children, youth, and adults through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities as well as eliminating exclusion within and from education. Inclusive education involves changes and modification in terms of content, approaches, structures and strategies with a common outlook that covers all children of the

appropriate age range and conviction that the responsibility for the regular system was to educate all children (UNESCO, 2008). Recently few attempts have been made to investigate the impact of integrating values and cultures of inclusion in the systems curricular instruction as a concrete action that can be done in response to this call, (UNESCO, 2006).

In Tanzania, education is a right for all citizens. To achieve this goal, the government of the United Republic of Tanzania sets out vision, mission and strategic goal. Vision state that;

“To have an education system which ensure full participation of learners with special educational needs in inclusive settings and form the foundation for an inclusive society.” Mission state that; *“To strengthen the educational system through awareness raising, advocacy, capacity building, policy review, infrastructure improvement and resources mobilisation to enable learners with special educational needs to participate effectively in inclusive educational settings so as to reach their full potential.”*

Also, Strategy goal state that; *“To provide access and quality inclusive education at all learners with special educational needs.”* Hence formulating all the above was for overarching policy and strategic objectives for the education sector and capture it in the Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP) since 1977. The ESDP serves as a holistic framework for the delivery of education and allows to enhance coordination collaboration and synchronizations of education (MoEC, 1995).

Alongside the ESDP a number of specific sub sector development plans and related strategies have developed that aim at meeting specific objectives for education level. In this context, the National Strategies in Inclusive Education (2009-2017) was developed. The strategy aimed to enhance educational services for children with special needs, by adopting an inclusive approach to policy making and services delivery planning, ensuring teaching and learning are favourable and accessible to all, particularly by developing specific staff capabilities providing pedagogical support, promoting community participation, ownership of education and facilitating the use of sign language and braille (URT, 2014).

Due to rapid growth of population in basic and tertiary education, an increasing concern about the quality of education, introduction of various education initiatives by both governments and non-governments partners and introduction of the Education and Training Policy of 2014 which amended the structure of education as well as new international commitments. The governments have made different national plans and strategies and issuing the new (ESDP) (2016-2017, 2020-2021) and the new national strategy for inclusive education (2018-2021). Together with all efforts done by the government to change the policy on inclusive education there is still a significant challenge to the government and labour market. Among the children who are at school and those out of school still faced challenges and they are at risk of drop out from school (MOEST, 2021). The persistent challenges in special needs education in Tanzania area exacerbated by the fact that there are global and government requirements that learners with special needs should be taught together with their counterparts without special needs in an inclusive education setting. Data from the Iringa municipal showed that learners with different special needs were enrolled in inclusive secondary schools. This study was thus conceived to explore how physical facilities support the academic performance of students in inclusive secondary schools in Iringa municipality, Tanzania.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Inclusive education is an approach aimed at addressing the diverse needs of all students, including those with disabilities and without special educational requirements, by fostering a learning environment that is accessible, supportive, and accommodating. Despite the government's concerted efforts to ensure the implementation of inclusive education to enhance the academic performance of students, there remains significant outcry regarding its implementation and academic performance of students studying in inclusive secondary schools. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how physical facilities support the implementation of inclusive education towards the academic performance of students in secondary schools in Iringa municipality.

2.0 Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a case study design. This study was done in Iringa municipality in two (2) inclusive secondary schools. The target population was 26. Therefore, two (2) head of schools, six (6) teachers, and eighteen students (18) were included. Purposive sampling was used to select a sample size which comprised of six teachers, two head of schools, and eighteen students. Qualitative data was collected using interview, focus group discussion and observation, where interview data were collected from two head schools and six teachers. Also, focus group discussion was collected from eighteen students. Qualitative data from interviews focus group discussion and observation was recorded and analysed based on the themes.

3.0 FINDINGS

3.1 Physical facilities supporting the Implementation of Inclusive Education

This section aimed to collect information on the availability of physical facilities in inclusive secondary schools. Study findings uncovered that most of the schools implementing inclusive education in Tanzania lack enabling conditions to make the ambition true. Information collected through interview, Focus Group Discussion and observation revealed that there is a need for the government and other educational stakeholders to play their role in making sure that the notion that quality education is the right of every individual is met. However, the question worth of pursuit is do schools implementing inclusive education have enabling physical facilities to make this reality true? The findings are subsumed in the subsequent extracts;

We experience a very difficult condition in teaching inclusive classrooms. This is due to the fact that in most cases our classes lack enabling facilities to make our professional enjoyable. In most of circumstances we are dictated to teach below standards because facilities are few or totally non-existent (Interviewed with a head of school A July 6 2024).

Another participant had the following authentication;

There is a need to improve the physical facilities due to the facilities are too outdated compared to the number of students in our school. Also, there is a need to add resources like books that favour students with visual impairments, (Focus Group Discussion with students July 12 2024).

The above quotation interprets that physical facilities in most schools make the learning unfriendly due to the fact that the physical facilities was insufficient compared to the population within the schools. This implies that they are insufficient toilets, classrooms were unfavourable make the learning environment unfavourable. Furthermore, the findings found that, the bad state of physical facilities it's a source for students' especially with special needs to perform poor in their academic issues. Moreover, the government and other stakeholders should improve the physical facilities within the inclusive schools because are in bad situation.

Similarly, another participant concurred with the idea of preceding informants;

In our school students with hearing impairment had no assistive devices, like hearing aids that support them in hearing also the classrooms it's not accessible due to lacks speaker, added that the school toilets it's not accessible. (Focus Group Discussion with students July 12 2024).

This implies that there is a big problem of these schools offering inclusive education consequently there is insufficient classrooms, insufficient assistive devices, insufficient braille machine, poor roads and classrooms was not favourable. The above examples imply the reality that in most inclusive schools there was a problem of how to make implementation in inclusive education due to physical facilities was very hardly considering the policy of inclusive education regarding the quality education. Furthermore, students learning was not friendly due to insufficient facilities within their schools as the findings indicates students miss class due to classrooms stairs, also their health was in dangerous because toilets was very poor regarding inclusive education. To make the learning environment friendly the governments and other shareholders should invest in improving the infrastructure within inclusive secondary schools. It was more revealed that the physical facilities should be improved by the government as well as other shareholders so as to improve the learning environment and make it friendly to students with disabilities in inclusive secondary schools.

Similarly, information collected through observation revealed that school physical facilities and materials were not user friendly to most of the students. This is because schools offering inclusive education should be characterized by infrastructures and materials which are different compared to normal schools. For example, those schools having both visual and hearing-impaired students should have entrances, assistive devices, braille machine, lamps and speakers that allow these students to enjoy the learning at school. Also, classrooms should not be located upstairs to make the environment user friendly to all students. In most of the studied schools this factor was not put into consideration.

4.0 Discussion of Findings

Regarding to the findings of this study, it was found that physical facilities in inclusive education was very poor to support the inclusive education. Most of the inclusive schools lacks toilets for special needs students, also classrooms do not support, accessibility challenges, insufficient classroom spaces and resources, inadequate assistive technology and poor maintained facilities so all these was a means to lead to poor academic performance of students.

Also, the researcher found that most inclusive secondary schools still lack the necessary physical accommodations for students with disabilities. the study found there is absence of ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms are frequently inadequate or non-existent in older buildings this not only hampers the mobility of students with physical disabilities but also perpetuates an environment that subtly marginalizes them. The absence of these basic facilities reflects a broader disregard for the needs of all students, undermining the fundamental principles of inclusivity.

Furthermore, the study findings found that the absence of adequate physical facilities is a significant barrier to the successful implementation of inclusive education. It is not only restricting access and participation for students with disabilities but also creates an environment that is not conducive to learning for all students. to ensure that inclusive education fulfills its promise of equal opportunities for every student, its imperative that schools invest in and maintain the necessary physical infrastructure. Without such investment, the goal of inclusive education remains unachievable, and students' academic performance continues to suffer. Also, the researcher found that in assessing the implementation of inclusive education and its impact on students' academic performance, the lack of adequate physical facilities has emerged as a significant barrier. Many schools are not equipped with the necessary infrastructure to support students with diverse needs. For instance, the absence of ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms in many educational institutions severely limits the mobility and participation of students with physical disabilities. This lack of access not only hinders these students' ability to move freely around the school but also affects their academic performance by creating additional challenges that their peers do not face. Without proper facilities, students with disabilities are often excluded from certain learning environments, reinforcing segregation rather than fostering inclusion.

Moreover, the shortage of specialized classrooms and learning aids such as sensory rooms, adaptive technology, and assistive devices further exacerbates the challenges faced by students requiring additional support. In many cases, general classrooms are not modified to accommodate students with different learning needs, leading to an environment where these students struggle to keep up with the curriculum. This disparity in access to essential resources creates a gap in academic achievement between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers.

As a result, the objective of inclusive education is undermined, as the lack of physical facilities directly impacts the ability of these students to fully participate in and benefit from the educational process. The results are in line with the findings by Smith and Johnson (2023) revealed that, physical facilities play significant role in the successful implementation of inclusive education practices. The recommendations made were the availability and accessibility of these physical facilities can greatly influence the learning environment and student's academic performance. For example, classrooms equipped with assistive technology and learning aids can support students with disabilities in accessing the curriculum and participating in classrooms activities effectively.

These findings concur with Elias and Mwila (2022) the findings revealed that for students to perform better should be conducive learning environment that could facilitate high academic performance. The majority of students faced with inadequate infrastructure like desks, chairs, laboratories equipment's and text books this leads to poor academic performance. In the same regard, Kabwos (2022) argued that all the listed adapted physical facilities except the accessible classrooms were not available. Hence recommended that, the inaccessible physical facilities in preschool classrooms inhibit the provision of inclusive education and academic performance became poor due to poor infrastructures.

Also, the study findings relate with of Long' ore (2023), revealed that most learning facilities in inclusive schools are in accessible and do not favor learners with special needs. This is because the inclusive learning environment seeks to mitigate stigma among learner's so the facilities should be conducive to favor both students as found by the study is contradicting this intention. With relation to the study findings by Oluremi and Olubukola (2013), conclude that inadequate provision of facilities and materials lead to poor academic performance of students with special needs.

In addition, the behaviourist Skinner in (1958), revealed the role of environment specifically how stimuli are arranged and presented and how responses are reinforced of most important. Moreover, the theory is underlying assumptions about the process of teaching and learning. Whereas there three basic assumptions. First, learning is attributed by a change of behavior. Second the environment shapes behavior. And third, the principles of

contiguity and reinforcement are central to explaining the learning and teaching process. For behaviourism, learning is the adoption of new behavior through conditioning.

Also, this concurs with what was suggested by Tungalaza (2004) that inclusive education always is taken as a commitment to educate each child to the maximum capacity and appropriateness in the school and classroom would otherwise attend in the schools with good learning environment. Similarly, Tarkala (2005) comments that the vast majority of centers of learning are physically inaccessible to many learners, especially to those who have physical disabilities. In poorer, particularly most schools in rural areas, the centers of learning are often unhealthy and unsafe for all learners. Many schools are not equipped to respond to special needs and the community does not provide local backing. Environmental barriers included; doors, passageways, stairs and ramps and recreational areas. A major problem identified by many students is physically getting into school.

Also, the results by Ramli and Zain (2018), revealed on the impact of facilities on student's academic achievement, the results of the study show that E-learning of system management; teaching Aids and library of learning environment; hostels, sports facilities and parking and transportation of infrastructure were all significant to impact student's achievement. Similarly, Barret, Treves, Shmis, Ambasz and Ustinova (2019), revealed on the impact of school infrastructure on learning, the findings show that the infrastructure were not well constructed as the performance of students were poor due to poor school infrastructure. Also, classrooms were not supportive to the learners with the diverse needs. Hence academic performance continuously was poor to students especially those with special needs, due to poor infrastructure within the schools.

Also, this finding concurs with those by Davis (2022) that revealed that all the listed adapted physical facilities except the accessible classrooms were not available. Hence the inaccessible pre-school classrooms inhibit the provision of inclusive education and academic performance became poor due to poor infrastructures. Again, the findings align with those by Mwakasangula and Kombe (2023) revealed on the influence of physical school facilities on learning performance of Students with Physical Disabilities, (SWPDs). The study suggest that laboratories and sports and game facilities have significant ($p < 0.05$) and direct influence on performance of children with physical disabilities. Classrooms, toilets ramps have no significant direct influence on performance of (SWPDs). This is because the classrooms, toilets and ramps have been built away that some crucial features lack of quality needed to support (SWPDs) to use.

Nyangoya, Wachianga and Makori (2020) reported that from the current study findings, it was established that the special schools for learners with PI have inadequate and inaccessible physical facilities. These include infrastructure, specialized equipment, instructional materials and assistive devices. It can therefore be concluded from the current study that physical facilities are significant predictors of academic achievements of learners with disabilities in public secondary special schools for learners with PI. The study therefore recommended that the Ministry of Education (MoE) should facilitate adequate physical facilities. Also, Zubayer (2011) contends that majority of the schools for learners with PI are physically inaccessible to many learners. If school physical facilities for learners with disabilities are not well adapted, they may not operate with ease within the learning or school environment and this may negatively influence their academic achievement.

This conforms to a study by Njoroge (2015) which revealed that facilities and resources for learners with special needs were available but not adequate. This finding is in line with Maingi (2016) which revealed that adequate physical facilities predict academic achievement. The findings imply that adequacy of physical facilities such as infrastructure, equipment, assistive devices, and teaching learning materials in schools for learners with disabilities are associated with the academic achievements of learners with disabilities. There is therefore need for schools of learners with disabilities to have adequate and accessible physical facilities. Similarly, Kogei (2013) revealed that lack of structured physical facilities has hindered enrolment of learners. The study concludes that pupil's enrolment has hindered implementation in terms of straining of physical facilities, of straining of physical facilities.

With reference to the findings by Agbor, Onnoghen, Olorube and Esu (2022) reported that availability and adequacy of physical facilities found within schools could immensely enhance students' academic performance. Also, the above findings concur with Goyal and Pal (2023) revealed that if the physical facilities were excellent, teaching and learning also will be better as well as living needed to be better for children with special needs in inclusive settings. Furthermore, Azzahra, Diana, Nirwana, Wiranata and Andriani (2022) the study's results found that each characteristic of children with special needs has different needs for facilities and infrastructure. In addition, it was found that several infrastructure facilities could be designated for other different types of children with special needs characteristics, such as rooms, equipment, media, and student learning resources. The conclusion is that inclusive secondary schools need to provide modified infrastructure based on each characteristic of children with special needs so that they can be used inclusively.

Also, Odey (2018) revealed that inclusive secondary schools have staff rooms that is adequate for the implementation of inclusive education policy based on the bench mark ratio. However, other facilities like classrooms, libraries, tables and chairs, laboratories, workshops, desks, recreational facilities, sources of water supply, conveniences, school clinics and power generating sets were available but not adequate for the implementation of inclusive education policy.

Also, the above findings align with that of Sowiyah, Zulaikha and Fitriyanti (2022) observed that the influence of teaching facilities and infrastructure on student learning outcomes by 39.6%, meaning that if teaching facilities and infrastructure are good, student learning outcomes will also increase. The findings corroborate with the result of Yasin (2010) observed that the physical infrastructural facilities like space, access to wheelchair and barrier free environment are significant to students with disabilities not only for teaching-learning process but also to attain higher level in education. Furthermore, the researcher also observed that many schools lacked essential infrastructure such as ramps, accessible washrooms, and specialized classrooms that cater to students with disabilities. In cases where facilities were present, they were often inadequate or poorly maintained, limiting their effectiveness in fostering an inclusive environment. These deficiencies directly impacted the ability of schools to provide equitable education for all students, highlighting a crucial gap in the implementation of inclusive education.

Moreover, the researcher noted that schools with well-developed physical facilities demonstrated a more successful implementation of inclusive practices. These schools were able to accommodate students with various needs more effectively, resulting in a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. The availability of appropriate physical facilities not only enabled the participation of students with disabilities but also promoted a culture of inclusivity that benefitted all students. The findings underscore the importance of investing in and maintaining adequate physical facilities as a foundational element in the successful implementation of inclusive education.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

In view of the research findings the following conclusion can be made; first, revealed that most of inclusive secondary schools often lack adequate infrastructure, such as accessible classrooms, and specialized resources for students with disabilities, hindering the effective implementation of inclusive education. The insufficient physical environment creates barriers that negatively impact students learning experiences and academic outcomes. Additionally, the assessment highlights the prevalent neglect of necessary physical modifications to accommodate diverse learners. This lack of commitment to improving physical facilities exacerbates educational inequalities, leaving students with disabilities at a disadvantage. As a result, the potential benefits of inclusive education are undermined and the academic performance of students in secondary schools continue to suffer due to inadequate support infrastructure. Based on the findings of the study its recommended that the government should allocate enough funds for inclusive secondary schools to make the implementation of inclusive education is effectively. By allocating funds for the purpose of building classrooms. Generally keeping infrastructure suitable for students with special needs.

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