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Full Length Research Paper

Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusive Education in Regular Primary Schools in Tanzania

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ABSTRACT: The study sought to investigate Regular primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education in regular primary schools in Tanzania. This study was carried out in Kilimanjaro region, Moshi Municipal Council found in the northern part of Tanzania. It was guided by two research questions namely: How do Regular primary school teachers conceptualize the term inclusive education? And what feelings do regular primary school teachers have with regards to teaching pupils who face barriers to learning and participation in regular classroom? The study used qualitative approach so as to explore in details teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. The study used a sample of 10 teachers through purposive sampling. Data were collected through personal interviews and non-participant observation methods. Furthermore, data analysis was observed through thematic analysis. It was found that most teachers have limited knowledge about inclusive education. The findings also revealed that regular primary school teachers have negative feelings towards teaching pupils who face barriers to learning and participation. It was recommended that, Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST) should provide training to teachers concerning inclusive education to all regular primary school teachers through in-service training.

Keywords: Teachers' Attitudes, Inclusive Education, learning barriers, Learning needs and regular primary schools

INTRODUCTION

Education has been known for thousands of years as a means which prepare an individual for life (Mahona and Pacho, 2022). In recently time, education remains to be an essential field of concern on the globe (Mahona and Pacho, 2022). From this point of view, there have been substantial changes in the teaching and learning process in the twenty-first century. The old methods have been receiving little attention and the new strategies of teaching and learning are being implemented to solve the challenges associated with learning outcome (Paschal and Mkulu, 2020). In order to access to equal right, many countries across the world have been improving their education. In Tanzania, every child has a right to free, compulsory primary education under the Tanzania National Education Act (TNEA) No. 25 of 1978, which reflects the country's commitment to inclusive education (URT, 1978). Tanzania is among countries which agreed to meet the learning needs of all children, youths and adults by 2025 (MoEST, 2018). Furthermore, Tanzania has also ratified several United Nations documents which fight for equal access to and quality of education for all children regardless of their sex, socio-economic status, cultural background, ethnicity as well as disability conditions (TFDPO, 2010).

Additionally, it adopted Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which emphasizes that every child has a fundamental right to receive a high-quality education (Farrell and Ainscow, 2021). The research shows that many children in Tanzania who have been identified as vulnerable, disadvantaged, and disabled face barriers to learning and participation, preventing them from attending school as they are required to do, despite the ratification of international documents and positive statements from national documents like education policy, circulars, and guidelines (Possi and Millinga, 2017). Despite the Tanzanian government's efforts to develop various programs and strategies for inclusive education, teaching and learning are inhospitable to learners who face barriers to learning and participation (Mkonongwa, 2014a).

According to MoEST (2021), the barriers to the implementation of inclusive education in Tanzania can be classified into three categories: policy, culture, and practice. With this background, the researcher was eager to investigate regular primary school teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education in Tanzanian regular primary schools.

Problem statement

According to studies, the successful implementation of inclusive education is not a simple task (Tungaraza and Lyakurwa, 2013). Many factors impede the effective implementation of inclusive education. Public school teachers' negative attitudes toward learners who face barriers to learning and participation are one of the factors impeding the implementation of inclusive education in various parts of the world (Dagnew, 2013). According to a different study, for instance, Paschal, Nyoni and Mkulu, (2020) teachers' ability to foster inclusion in the classroom is greatly influenced by how they view the presence and participation of students who encounter obstacles to learning. The success of inclusive education depends on regular teachers accepting the education of vulnerable, underprivileged, and disabled children as a necessary component of their job (Tungaraza and Lyakurwa, 2013). Few studies in Tanzania focused on inclusive education, specifically on regular primary school teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education in Tanzanian regular primary schools. As a result, the current study was designed to fill a knowledge gap.

General objective of the study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate regular primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education in regular primary schools in Tanzania. To achieve this purpose, the empirical study was guided by two research questions presented below:

Research questions

1. How do regular primary school teachers conceptualize the term inclusive education?
2. What feelings do regular primary school teachers have with regards to teaching pupils who face barriers to learning and participation in regular classroom?

Theoretical literature review

Planned behavior theory

The theory of planned behavior developed by Ajzen in 1985. It was used to guide this study. According to the theory, the central factor is the individual's intention to perform a given task (Ajzen, 2020). The performance of a given task is a function of both intention and perceived behavior control (Ajzen, 1985). The knowledge, skill, and ability an individual has of the attitudes object determines the intention to perform behavior (Cognitive). The intention seeks to capture the feelings and emotions (affective) that influence an individual's behavior (Ajzen, 2019). As a result, if regular primary school teachers are well-versed in inclusive education and have positive feelings about it, they will have the confidence and ability (self-efficacy) (Ajzen, 2019) to foster an inclusive culture and evolve inclusive practices in their classrooms.

Empirical literature review

Meaning of inclusive education

Recently, the concept of inclusive education has entered the discussion about educational developments in both developed and developing countries (Ballard, 2016). Due to the lack of a common definition, this concept appears to be complex and problematic (Mitchell, 2013). According to Booth and Ainscow (2011), there is no agreement on what inclusive education means, so different people have different ideas. Some academics define inclusive education based on the fact that it evolved from special needs education, which was created to meet the needs of pupils with disabilities (Mkonongwa, 2014b).

Other scholars, such as Olaleye et al. (2012), Olofintoye (2010), and Ajuwon (2008), define inclusive education as the process of enrolling pupils with disabilities in mainstream schools. Thus, those scholars who conceptualize inclusive education based on pupils with disabilities, have a narrow perception towards inclusive education because they exclude other vulnerable and disadvantaged groups (Tungaraza, 2012). Gifted children, children from the street and those who work, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic, or cultural minorities, and children from other underprivileged or marginalized areas or groups are all considered as a special need group in inclusive education from a broader perspective (MoEST, 2018).

Therefore, the primary argument in the definition above is that inclusive education is not only defined in terms of disabilities; other obstacles and challenges that may limit learning and participation were also taken into consideration (Booth and Ainscow, 2011).

Teachers 'Attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive education

Teachers' attitudes influence whether or not inclusive education can be effectively implemented in regular schools (Frost, 2012). According to Pearce (2008), a teacher's positive attitude toward teaching students with diverse educational needs is a critical factor in becoming an inclusive teacher.

As a result, in order for the school to be an effective inclusive school, its regular teachers must have positive attitudes toward teaching students with a wide range of educational needs (Kitchen, 2017). Their emotions and knowledge will influence their classroom behavior, which will "determine positive pupil learning outcomes" (Wang, 2008).

According to research done in New Zealand, where 763 regular primary school teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education were examined, although inclusive education is a component of a larger human rights agenda (Avramidis and Norwich, 2010), teachers exposed positive attitudes toward inclusive education in theory but do not want students who face barriers to learning and participation to be placed in the class where they teach (Mitchell, 2013).

As a result, the researcher of this study wants to find out how primary school teachers in Tanzania feel about inclusive education.

METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in Kilimanjaro region, Moshi Municipal Council found in the northern part of Tanzania. The region was purposively selected based on two reasons: First, the researcher is familiar with the area. Hence it reduced the costs and time taken.

Second, this region has many primary schools with different characteristics like regular schools which accept all types of learners, special schools with learners with different disabilities, special schools with learners with only one type of disability and regular schools which do not accept learners with disabilities.

This made it easy to get required schools. A sample of 10 teachers were used in this study, which used a qualitative research methodology to gain a thorough understanding of the attitudes of regular primary school teachers toward inclusive education in Tanzania. By using purposive sampling, teachers were chosen. In this study, the observation method was modified to complement the interview method.

The observational method of data collection made a significant contribution to the effort of fostering a deeper comprehension of the phenomenon under study (Borg, 2011). Following the process of gathering data, the audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed, translated, and subjected to thematic analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study's results are presented in this section. Two research questions served as a guide for the findings: How do teachers in regular primary schools conceptualize the term inclusive education? And how do regular primary school teachers feel about working with pupils who have difficulties participating in class and learning?

Knowledge of regular teachers on inclusive education

Results showed that the majority of study participants had little understanding of the idea of inclusive education. The descriptions of the findings under this research question through themes are as follows:

Lack of understanding of the term inclusive education

Most teachers claimed that they know nothing about the concept inclusive education. Teacher 2E said that:

The regional officers told us to implement inclusive education, but they did not tell us what it means. Hence, I do not know what it means and this concept is not common for most of teachers in this school.

According to teacher 2E's responses the term inclusive is not a new term as the regional office told them to implement inclusive education without any training. On other hand, teacher 1C said that:

Inclusive education is not a new term to me, I hear people in this school talk about inclusive education, but really, I do not know what it means.

Therefore, most regular primary school teachers declared that they do not know what the term inclusive education means, this finding is similar to other studies conducted in Temeke and Same districts in Tanzania on inclusive education also found that Regular primary school teachers lack enough inclusive knowledge (Lewis and Little, 2007; Haddock and Zanna, 2011).

On the other hand, few regular teachers mentioned the meaning of inclusive education by relating it to the issue of disability. Also, they claimed that inclusive education is not a new term to them. Their responses were as follows, Teacher 1A said:

When I say pupils with problems, I refer to pupils with disabilities and student without problems means those without disabilities.

The later findings are related to other scholars who agree with the arguments made above. For instance, Olaleye et al. (2012), Olafintoye (2010), and Ajuwon (2008) define inclusive education as instruction given to pupils with disabilities in a regular classroom using teaching and learning materials that are appropriate for their needs. In the same question, other participants defined inclusive education based on cross-cutting issues such as HIV/ AIDS, Science subjects especially for girls and co-education. Their responses were as follows: Teacher 1D defined inclusive education as:

I said inclusive education is the education system which includes many science subjects, computer, and HIV/AIDS plus those common subjects.

Thus, findings indicated that teachers have limited knowledge and understandings of the term inclusive education. Thus, inclusive education is a complex and problematic concept that lacks a common understanding (Mitchell, 2013; Booth and Ainscow, 2011). In order to improve understanding, Paschal (2022) emphasises that teachers should be empowered by being given training and resources to help them teach and help their students effectively.

Negative attitude of teachers towards teaching pupils who face barriers to learning and participation in regular classroom

The main intention of this question is to examine the attitude of regular teachers with regards to teaching pupils who face barriers to learning and participation in regular classroom.

During the analysis responses of teachers were categorized into four sub-themes namely;

Teachers' Feelings towards Pupils with behavioral problems

Most of teachers showed negative attitude on teaching pupils with behavioral problems. Teacher 1A said:

I love them except one boy who has behavioral problems, I have tried to punish. him but he never changes. He is aggressive to his fellow classmates. Sometimes he steals his classmates' properties. I do not want this boy in my class.

On the other hand, other teachers associate negative attitude with other factors such as lack of knowledge, teaching and learning materials, low motivations. Teacher 2A responded that:

The only problem we have in this school is the lack of inclusive education as well as teaching and learning materials. So, this makes most of the teachers have negative feelings towards kids who face barriers to learning and participation.

The above utterance indicates that teachers' negative feelings towards learners who face barriers to learning is associated with other factors; lack of inclusive education knowledge as well as appropriate teaching and learning materials to suit the diverse needs of the learners.

Teachers' feelings towards pupils from poor families

On responding to the question on feeling towards teaching pupils from poor family teacher 1E claimed that:

In my classroom I have one orphan girl who lives with her grandmother. Her grandmother is very old. She has no money to buy the school requirements for her grandchild. So, she is a real problem as sometimes I buy books, pens and notebooks forher.

The above statement revealed that teachers were complaining about having pupils from poor economic status. They indicated that they have negative feeling towards the situation which demands them to provide financial assistance to the kids.

Teachers' feelings towards learners who score below average

When the participants were asked about their feelings towards teaching pupils who score below average, teacher 1B said that:

They call our school inclusive so they bring those stupid kids here. But we have decided to arrange a class for them. In their class we do not teach. They just play, make noises and wait for their lunch, and then they go home.

To solve the challenge of poor performance, Paschal and Mkulu (2020) noted that teachers should create a good and professional teacher-students' relationships that can increase the performance of the learners. From this teacher's responses it can be realized that regardless of the effort of the government to introduce inclusive education learners with cognitive disabilities do not receive intended quality education.

Teachers' feelings towards pupils with poor school attendance and other related problems

On responding to the question about the feelings towards teaching pupils with poor school attendance teacher 1C argued that:

In my classroom I have two kids who are seriously sick. One is HIV positive and another has skin cancer. These kids do not come to school all days. They make my teaching difficult because they need me to repeat what I have covered when they were absent but, in this school, we have a shortage of teachers so we have a lot of hours to teach and notime for repetition.

...This is not your mothers' school so when you come late you will be punished; you are so lazy (observation note book).

Findings showed that teachers have a bad attitude toward instructing students who have challenging behavior. This is in line with the theory being investigated, according to which an individual's knowledge of an attitudinal object is crucial in determining whether they

intend to engage in a particular behavior (Ajzen and Kruglanski 2019). In this regard, regular teachers will have a strong desire to implement inclusive education if they have sufficient knowledge in this area.

Conclusion

The results indicate that compared to the wider perspective of inclusive education used in this study, the majority of regular primary school teachers who took part in the study had a limited understanding of the term. Additionally, because of things like a dearth of inclusive education, resources, and motivation, the majority of them have negative attitudes toward inclusive education in practice.

Recommendations

First and foremost, MoEST should train all regular primary school teachers in inclusive education. As was already mentioned, teachers asserted that a lack of inclusive knowledge makes it challenging to implement inclusive education. Second, the development of explicit frameworks and policies will increase teachers' awareness of inclusive education. Again, large sample sizes should be used for similar studies to allow for generalization of the results.

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