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THE PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLBEING OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN INCLUSIVE SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION SETTINGS

ПСИХОСОЦІАЛЬНЕ БЛАГОПОЛУЧЧЯ ДІТЕЙ З ІНВАЛІДНІСТЮ В ІНКЛЮЗИВНИХ СЕРЕДНІХ ШКОЛАХ

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ABSTRACT

Purpose. This study examined the psychosocial wellbeing of children with disabilities in inclusive secondary school education setting in Tanzania. The study particularly aimed to explore the psychosocial challenges which children with disabilities face in inclusive secondary

Meta. Дослідження вивчало психосоціальне благополуччя дітей з обмеженими можливостями в інклюзивній середній школі в Танзанії. Дослідження було спрямоване на вивчення психосоціальних проблем, з якими стикаються діти з обмеженими можливостями в інклюзивній середній школі, що призводить

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school settings, leading to psycho-social impacts on their learning and wellbeing.

Methodology. The study employed a mixed methods approach, adopting a case study design. Interviews and questionnaires were used to collect data from 49 students with special needs, 7 special needs education teachers, and 35 regular teachers.

Results. The study findings revealed that teachers had low expectations on the academic performance of the students with disabilities, consequently rendering them little support in inclusive classrooms. Additionally, discrimination, stigmatisation were issues faced by students with disabilities in inclusive education settings which adversely affected their psychosocial wellbeing. The study recommends awareness creation among the students and regular teachers about the learning needs of children with disabilities in inclusive schools.

Conclusions. The study recommends providing regular teachers who are not knowledgeable about the academic needs of students with disabilities in inclusive education settings with training and providing psychosocial support to students with special needs in inclusive education contexts.

Keywords: psychosocial well-being, children with disabilities, inclusive education, psychosocial support.

до психосоціальних впливів на їх навчання та благополуччя.

Методологія. У дослідженні використовувався підхід змішаних методів із застосуванням дизайну тематичного дослідження. Інтерв'ю та анкети були використані для збору даних від 49 учнів з особливими потребами, 7 вчителів з особливими потребами та 35 звичайних вчителів.

Результати. Результати дослідження показали, що вчителі мали низькі очікування щодо успішності учнів з обмеженими можливостями; отже, надавали їм мало підтримки в інклюзивних класах. Крім того, дискримінація та стигматизація були проблемами, з якими стикалися учні з обмеженими можливостями в умовах інклюзивної освіти, що негативно вплинуло на їхнє психосоціальне благополуччя. Дослідження рекомендує інформувати учнів і вчителів про навчальні потреби дітей з обмеженими можливостями в інклюзивних школах.

Висновки. Дослідження рекомендує забезпечити навчання вчителів, які не знають академічних потреб учнів з обмеженими можливостями в умовах інклюзивної освіти. Воно також рекомендує надавати психосоціальну підтримку учням з особливими потребами в умовах інклюзивної освіти.

Ключові слова: психосоціальне благополуччя, діти з обмеженими можливостями, інклюзивна освіта, психосоціальна підтримка.

INTRODUCTION

Education for all has been a global concern in all UN statements and declarations, including the Jomtien Conference of 1990, Salamanca Statement of 1994, and Dakar Framework for Action, 2000 (UNESCO, 1994, 2000). Children with disabilities have been lagged in accessing education due to stigmatization and discrimination resulting from family and society (UNESCO, 2018).

The United Nations regards education as one of the basic rights all children have to be ensured. The United Nations Declaration for Human Rights underscores that education should promote human personality, dignity and respect for human rights (UN, 2022). Correspondingly, other statements and conferences of United Nations, including the Jomtien Conference, the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action and the Dakar Framework, accentuate the need for education regardless of gender, ethnicity and nationality (UNESCO, 1990, 1994, 2000).

For example, the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action stipulates that inclusive education is the viable way for eradicating all forms of discrimination and stigmatization in the sense that through inclusion, children and teachers will develop a sense of value and acceptance of one another (UNESCO, 1994).

Inclusive education is regarded as a process of ensuring that all children with disability attend regular classroom without discrimination while getting all learning resources and respect (Kearney, 2009; Skrtic, 1991). In the context of the Government of Tanzania, inclusive education denotes the provision of education to all children regardless of their age or disabilities and ensuring that they attend all education programs with equal resources provision with respect to their learning needs without discrimination (URT, 2004).

In addition, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2016) enumerates key characteristics of inclusive education, including the provision of education opportunities to all children, those with disabilities, and marginalized groups in order to attain their full potential. The provision of education should go alongside valuing and respecting by eliminating barriers to learning.

Burns (2016) and Eiroa-Orosa (2020) state that inclusive education encompasses the inter- and intra-individual of a person's capacity for positive relationships with self and others and the ability to master personal growth. In this context, it involves the well-being of the children with special needs, which reflects dimensions of affection and judgment of life satisfaction. It is a construct that includes the physical, emotional, social, economic and collective wellbeing.

Correspondingly, the World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as a state of well-being in which the individual has the possibility to realize one's full potential or abilities, cope with the normal challenges of life, work productively and fruitfully without inhibition, and be capable of contributing to his or her community (WHO, 2004; Larson, 1996).

The psychosocial well-being of children with disabilities entails the absence of psychological or social factors such as isolation and low esteem, which consequently contribute to children's inability to function well or realize their full potential within learning and interacting in society (Maxwell et al., 2015; WHO, 2001, 2011). Illustratively, the psychosocial well-being of children with disabilities encompasses emotional, psychological, and social stability of feelings such as happiness, satisfaction, and positive attitudes towards one's own responsibilities and others (Keyes, 2000).

A disability is a complex state involving multidimensional aspects in defining physical and social barriers in various studies (ACPF 2014; WHO, 2011). In this case, disability is any physical limitation that hinders an individual from performing a given task (Graham, 2014). Such barriers and limitations include hearing loss, physical impairment, and visual impairment, which lead a person to fail to do some activities, including learning like other people and attending social interaction.

The discussion on inclusion and education is not a new phenomenon globally. Historically, it began with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) which clearly stipulated that education is amongst the human rights which must be provided like shelter and clothing. Besides this, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities emphasized that the nations must take responsibilities to ensure all children with disabilities are accessed with all rights to live, learn in schools like other children without disabilities (UN Convention, 2006).

Proponents of inclusive education propose that it has many benefits. These benefits are measured in terms of the positive outcomes for all children, those with disabilities, disadvantaged groups such as nomads, street children, ethnic minorities, and those without disabilities.

For example, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE) (2018) has pointed out that inclusive education increases social and academic opportunities and well-being for all groups of children mentioned above regarding enrolment in higher education, better employment, and life outcomes. Categorically, inclusive education is founded on the pillars of access to free and compulsory quality education, with equity, inclusion, and non-discrimination (UNESCO, 2005).

Available studies provide mixed findings about impacts of inclusive education placement to children with disabilities. Some studies have supported the belief that inclusive education is beneficial to children with disabilities (Joshi & Pant, 2016; Yousif Yousif, Yousseff & Abdelrahman, 2021; Kart & Kart, 2021).

For example, a comparative study conducted by Joshi and Pant (2016) about emotional stability among visually impaired students who are in inclusive schools and those who are in special education schools revealed that students in inclusive schools exhibited emotional stability than those in special education schools. Similarly, the study conducted by Kart and Kart (2021) in inclusive schools revealed that children with disabilities in lower grades indicated positive socialization and self-esteem.

Conversely, the study found that even children without disabilities benefited from inclusive education as they learned and accepted diversity in learning and socialization. Correspondingly, a study conducted by Bakhri, Fibrianto, and Hudi (2017) in Indonesian schools revealed that children with disabilities in inclusive schools displayed high self-esteem.

In the same vein, researchers have expressed positive views with regard to the inclusion of children with disabilities in regular schools (Jackson, 2017; Tenerife et al., 2022). For example, a study conducted by Jackson (2017) to parents and teachers in inclusive schools revealed that teachers and parents agreed that children with disabilities benefited in terms of academic development through interaction with peers without disabilities. On the other hand, teachers who had skills in teaching children with disabilities in inclusive classes had a positive perception of inclusive education for children with disabilities (Tenerife et al., 2022).

Similarly, the study conducted by Holahan and Costenbader (2000) found that children with disabilities who were placed in inclusive education functioned at a relatively higher level of social and emotional development in inclusive and self-contained settings. The findings underscored the benefits of inclusion for children with disabilities.

Although there are benefits reported to children with disabilities, some studies show that some children still experience challenges of discrimination, labelling, stigma, and bullying in inclusive schools from teachers and children without disabilities (Makwela, 2020; Rohwerder, 2018).

This situation causes psychosocial problems for children with disabilities in inclusive education. The psychosocial concept refers to the negative interaction of environmental circumstances on individuals' emotional and cognitive dimensions.

For example, the study conducted in South Africa by Hove and Phasha (2023), which examined the status of inclusion for children with disabilities, revealed that classrooms were overcrowded in such a way that it was not easy for children with disabilities to get close attention in learning from teachers. As a result, children with disabilities experience frustrations and demotivation in learning.

Besides, the study conducted by Jackson (2017) found that inclusive schools lacked learning resources for children with disabilities and that Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) were too few to adequately support a large number of children with disabilities. Similarly, Jackson reported that teachers faced time constraints. In that regard, teachers did not get enough time to offer Individualised Education Programmes (IEPs) to children with disabilities. As a result, children with disabilities felt frustrated and discouraged in learning.

Studies have documented that the challenges faced by children with disabilities, such as stigma, unfriendly policies towards inclusive education, and lack of adequate learning facilities, exacerbate the psychosocial well-being of children with disabilities (Meynert, 2014; Olurem, 2015; Kavkler et al., 2015; Ofendi, 2018).

For example, a study conducted by Olurem (2015) in Nigeria found that children with disabilities lacked assistive facilities such as lack of hearing aids, braille materials, and wheelchairs, which could help children with disabilities in inclusive schools to access education adequately. The study by Olurem also found that teachers who lacked training on children with disabilities had negative attitudes towards inclusion.

Likewise, other psychosocial challenges are transitory in that they emanate from children's family background and society, which are carried on to the schools ((IASC, 2008). Psychological issues may be mild or moderate, which lead to serious distress, frustration, and low self-esteem among children with disabilities, which essentially are psycho-social problems in inclusive education settings (Makwela & Smit, 2022).

Despite the psycho-social challenges among Children with Disabilities (CwDs) in schools, especially in developing countries, studies in this area have not been critically examined. Specifically, in Tanzania, there is a research paucity with regard to psychosocial challenges facing students with disabilities in inclusive education setting. It is against this background that this study embarked on examining the psycho-social well-being of children with special needs in inclusive education.

Thus, the general objective of this study was to assess the psychosocial impact on children with disabilities in inclusive secondary schools. Specifically, the study explored the challenges that children with disabilities faced vis-à-vis their psychosocial impacts in inclusive education settings.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed methods approach to collect both qualitative and quantitative data required by the study's objective. According to Kothari (2004) and Creswell (2014), Mixed methods are appropriate when the researcher has both qualitative and quantitative data that complement each other.

In this context, the mixed methods approach necessitated the collection of information about the psychosocial impact of inclusive education to children with disabilities in

inclusive education settings, including peoples' lived experiences and their perceptions and opinions. Besides, the study employed the descriptive case study design to describe the behaviors of people under investigation (Denscombe, 2008) to provide an in-depth account of events, relationships and experiences (Creswell, 2014).

– **Study Area**

The study area comprised seven inclusive schools: Tumaini, Shinyanga, Bwiru Boys, Mkolani, Kazima, Tabora Girls, and Musoma Technical. The schools are inclusive and enroll students with and without disabilities. Similarly, the researchers' easy accessibility to collect data influenced the choice of the schools.

– **Population and Sample of the Study**

The population of this study comprised of 561 regular and special needs teachers, heads of departments and heads of schools and students with disabilities in seven schools, namely Tumaini, Shinyanga, Bwiru Boys, Mkolani, Kazima, Tabora Girls and Musoma Technical.

35 regular teachers were selected through probability proportional sampling from the seven inclusive secondary schools. Similarly, 7 heads of schools (HoSs), 7 special needs education teachers and 49 students with disabilities were purposively selected as they had the required information on the problem under study.

The Table 1 summarises the participants' characteristics of this study.

Table 1
Sample Characteristics

Respondents	Sex		Experience in Teaching Inclusive Classroom		Sampling	Total
	F	M	<5years	>5years		
Heads of schools	√	√	√	√	Purposive	7
Heads of departments	√	√	√	√	Purposive	7
Specialized special needs education teachers	√	√	√	√	Purposive	7
Students with disabilities	√	√	√	√	Purposive	49
Teachers	√	√	√	√	Random	10% teachers

Table 1 involves respondents who were involved in the study. Heads of schools, specialized special needs teachers, and students with special needs were purposely selected because they had invaluable information required by this study based on the nature of the study. Conversely, general teachers who have mastery in specialized subjects were randomly selected.

Table 2
Secondary School Students' Disability Profile

School	Hearing	Visual	Physical	Albinism	Other
Tumaini		√		√	
Shinyanga		√	√	√	
Bwiru Boys	√		√		
Mkolani	√			√	
Kazima	√	√	√	√	
Tabora Girls		√		√	
Musoma Technical	√	√	√	√	

Table 2 indicates the characteristics of students with disabilities in inclusive secondary schools, including students with hearing, visual, physical, and albinism impairments.

– **Instruments**

The study administered questionnaires to regular teachers to gather information about teaching challenges and opportunities they encountered in accommodating students with disabilities in inclusive schools. Another instrument used was an interview guide about, which collected in-depth data from teachers and students with special needs in order to solicit their experiences in relation to the learning situation of students with disabilities in an inclusive setting (Cropley, 2019).

Thus, the interviews paved the way for further engagement with the study participants to enable them to express themselves about how it felt to be in an inclusive class. Informal chatting with a few children at school was conducted informally during the students' free time. The qualitative information aimed to encourage the students to speak out about their lives and learning in inclusive schools.

Furthermore, the observation checklist was employed to collect information on interactions of children with disabilities in natural learning environments in inclusive classrooms. Denscombe (2007) and Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegthe (2010) state that the observation method is good for verifying the information gained by other methods. In the context of this study, the observation method enabled the researchers to check live psychosocial experiences of learning, teaching, and social aspects of children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

– **Validity and Reliability**

Reliability and validity were attained through the use of the triangulation method, that is, the use of different instruments such as questionnaires, interviews, and observation. Gall and Borg (2007) explain that using more than one instrument to collect data bolsters case study findings' validity and reliability. Additionally, the member check method was used to get comments and opinions from colleagues for the purpose of refining the research instruments.

– **Data Analysis Procedure**

Content analysis was used for qualitative data analysis, firstly, by transcribing the data, and then organizing the information into major themes. Quantitative data used both

descriptive analysis and inferential statistics as analytical tools. Quantitative data were managed and stored in the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 11.5-computer software before analysis.

– **Validity and Reliability**

The validity and reliability of this study were adhered to through triangulation of data, in which more than one instrument of data collection was employed, namely, questionnaire and interviews, as advocated by Gall and Borg (2007). Similarly, the member check method was used to solicit comments for improving the study.

– **Ethical Considerations**

The researchers obtained permission from the Regional Administrative Secretary (RAS) in each region through writing who permitted the researchers to collect data in the selected schools. Respondents were requested consent to participate in research after assuring them that the information collected was used only for research purposes. Further, the respondents were free to withdraw from the study if they wished, and for the sake of protecting their identity, respondents' acronyms or other names were used.

RESULTS

The presented findings are based on the research question: What psychosocial challenges are faced by teachers and children with disabilities in inclusive education settings?

The findings showed that teachers encountered many challenges, which affected the nature and quality of taking aboard the specific learning needs of children with special needs when learning in inclusive classes due to a lack of pedagogical skills. This consequently led to frustrations and demotivation among the children.

- Children with special needs encountered various psychosocial challenges in inclusive schools as they were expected to live and study with other children in the same environment despite their limitations. The challenges ranged from emotional and learning problems to behavioural changes in response to the complex environmental or learning situation they experienced daily. Sometimes, teachers, although willing, failed to assist the learners either because they lacked specific teaching and communication skills, lacked extra time for them, or were disinterested.
- Data indicated that teaching in inclusive schools was a challenge for most teachers. Responses from questionnaires indicated that 3 (5.4%) teachers reported difficulty teaching big classes, including Children with Disabilities (CwDs). Similarly, 12 (21.4%) teachers reported that they did not get adequate time to assist effectively CwDs according to their disability-specific needs. Furthermore, 41(73.2) teachers explained that they had limited skills in teaching and assisting CwDs in inclusive classrooms, which included a lack of knowledge in Tanzania Sign Language for easy communication with children with hearing impairment and difficulties in the preparation of teaching aids for children with visual impairment.

Another difficulty was related to using different teaching modes at the same time. Teachers prioritise the normal way of teaching, and some CwDs could not catch up with

the lessons, which led to poor performance at the end of the day, leaving both teachers and students discouraged.

- Results from interviews revealed that regular teachers had low expectations from Children with Disabilities (CwDs) in terms of their academic achievements. When those students performed well, regular teachers reported being surprised or even shocked to see good academic performance from them. A regular teacher from School 1, who had a very good performance from a child with multiple disabilities exclaimed, *“Aah! this is not possible, so also these children can perform well like the others, I cannot believe!”* (Teacher-School 1).
- Another challenge faced by regular teachers was a lack of communication skills in sign language in interacting with students with hearing impairment. They could not understand the sign language, which hampered their communication with CwDs in the classrooms, thereby leaving them frustrated. They lacked sign language interpreters to assist those children with hearing impairment in their classes as revealed when a teacher said:

“... I get difficulties to clarify concepts in science because I cannot use sign language. In this situation, I need sign language interpreters. For assistance, sometimes I ask other students to assist me in interpreting what I am teaching (case I do not get such children to try to assist them). However, honestly, teaching a class with children with hearing impairment is very difficult and frustrating.” (Teacher-School 2)

Children with disabilities felt frustrated and discouraged to learn in inclusive education. This was captured when one of the students said:

“... When you have a disability and have to learn, live and you are expected to produce the same results as that of the normal children is very difficult... When you can't cope you feel discouraged to continue with schooling, angry why God who created you this way... but we are fighting to accomplish our goal. (SwD 2)

- Other psychosocial challenges were associated with infrastructural issues. In one of the schools visited, only four braille machines were in good condition while the rest required repairs. One respondent explained:

“... We have only two teachers who have specialized in Visual Impairment. The teachers have to type tests and notes in braille in all subjects. At the same time, produce notes, make repairs on the machine. The unavailability of spares for the machine is a challenge due to lack of funds in the school. As a result, students with visual impairment have to scramble for the few machines available. (Teacher-School 3).

Findings from the observation checklist revealed that regular teachers who were specialists in subject content lacked skills in assisting students with disabilities due to a lack of pedagogical skills appropriate for catering to the learning needs of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. The IEP was solely left to special needs education teachers, who obviously could not master the content of all subjects.

DISCUSSION

The discussion focusses on the findings above about the psychosocial well-being of children with disabilities in an inclusive secondary school education setting in Tanzania.

- Teachers expressed low expectations on the academic performance of the SwDs as they mostly believed that the students were incapable of achieving compared to those without disabilities. This finding concurs with that of Kisanga (2019), Philip (2022), and Makwela and Smit (2022), who indicated that in inclusive schools, cases of stigma and discrimination were prevalent among students with disabilities, which in turn affected their academic performance, social functioning, development and general well-being.

Correspondingly, this study's findings support those of the previous study conducted by Yousif, Yousef, and Abdelrahman (2021). The findings by Yousif, Yousef, and Abdelrahman revealed that inclusion affected the psychological compatibility of deaf and hard-of-hearing students about self-confidence, particularly in dealing with others.

- Findings from the observation checklist revealed that regular teachers who were specialists in subject content lacked skills in assisting students with disabilities due to a lack of pedagogical skills appropriate for catering to the learning needs of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms (Dovzhenko, 2022) (Kazachiner, 2020). Findings on the scarcity of personnel to assist children with disabilities concur with a recent study conducted in Kilimanjaro, Tanzania, by Swai, Moshi, et al. (2022) among children with cerebral palsy, which was reported that the schools lacked specialists for rehabilitation and learning support.
- Findings revealed that teachers displayed low academic expectations and stigma towards children with disabilities, which predisposed various psychosocial issues leading to poor academic performance, lack of motivation in school, loss of interest in schoolwork due to difficult learning environment, or poor relationships with peers or teachers which aggravate their already precarious self-esteem (Makwela & Smit, 2022).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research findings, the study concludes that children with disabilities faced psychosocial problems due to a lack of acceptance and valuing of such children among teachers and other children without disabilities. Furthermore, in inclusive education, children with disabilities face the problems of stigma and discrimination from teachers who lack skills in attending to the learning needs of children with disabilities. Cases such as low expectations of the academic performance of students with disabilities among the teachers reduced their commitment to assisting them. Lastly, the lack of inclusive culture in the schools led to psychosocial problems among children with disabilities in inclusive education settings. To address the psychosocial problems of children with disabilities in inclusive education settings, the study makes some recommendations:

Firstly, inclusive education schools should promote an inclusive culture amongst children and teachers by building a conducive atmosphere of acceptance and valuing children with disabilities. This, consequently, can enable all children and teachers to provide appropriate assistance to children with disabilities. Secondly, since most regular teachers who teach children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms lack the requisite

skills and awareness about the needs of children with disabilities, in-service training is important to enhance their skills and knowledge about children with disabilities in inclusive education schools.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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