

Exploring Teachers' Perspectives on the Inclusion of Visually Impaired Children in Primary Schools: A Case Study of Morogoro Region

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Abstract:- The study reported on investigated teachers' perceptions of inclusion of children with visual impairment in primary schools in Morogoro Region. Students with vision impairment have equitable access to education. The research employed a mixed research philosophy, whereby the descriptive research design was used. The sample size used was 49 respondents, where 41 are ordinary teachers, 6 teachers dealing with students having visual impairments and 2 heads of schools. The instruments used were questionnaires and interviews and data was analyzed using SPSS. The study found positive perceptions about inclusion of children with visual impairment, with teachers demonstrating strong support and dedication towards creating inclusive environments. Furthermore, the study revealed that schools demonstrated positive attitudes towards inclusive practices for visually impaired children, emphasizing the importance of creating an inclusive learning environment and professional development. The study recommends that the government and other stakeholders should ensure equitable distribution of resources, including assistive technologies and learning materials to primary schools to support the needs of visually impaired students, and advocate for inclusive education policies at the regional and national levels, emphasizing the integration of children with visual impairments into mainstream classrooms with adequate support.

Keywords:- Vision Impairment, Teachers' Perception, Inclusive, Primary School.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the need to improve the overall inclusivity of educational systems, including primary education. Inclusive education aims to provide equal opportunities and access to quality education for all children, irrespective of their backgrounds, abilities, or disabilities (UNESCO, 2019). This approach recognizes the importance of creating an environment that accommodates the diverse needs of learners and promotes their active participation in the learning process.

Globally, efforts have been made to address the issue of inclusivity in education. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal number four emphasizes the importance

of inclusive and equitable quality education for all (UNDP, 2020). This global commitment has led to various initiatives and policies aimed at promoting inclusive education practices in different countries.

In the African context, inclusive education remains a significant challenge, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. The region faces numerous barriers to achieving inclusive education, including limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of trained teachers (UNESCO, 2015).

East Africa countries like Tanzania have been actively engaged in addressing the problem. In Tanzania, education as an equal right has been expressed in various national policies, legislation and guidelines. This commitment to inclusivity is reinforced by the Education and Training Policy (1995), which endorses primary education as a basic right for all citizens. It also emphasizes the importance of facilitating access to education for socially and culturally disadvantaged groups. To achieve this, the policy recognizes the need for proper training of teachers, including specialized training for those working with children with special needs.

Despite implementations of such national policies, legislation and guidelines to accommodate the unique needs of children with visual impairment, there are still several challenges that are encountered (Robinson & Kwauk, 2021). Such challenges significantly impact the effectiveness of educational efforts for children with visual impairments. A study by Kachweka and Rupia (2022) highlighted several significant challenges in the education system for visually impaired students such as inadequate teaching morale among educators, the poor cooperation among teachers who were responsible for educating visually impaired pupils, and lack of collaboration and coordination among educators resulted in fragmented education systems and inconsistent support for visually impaired students.

The inclusion of children with visual impairment in primary schools not only benefits the individual children but also enriches the entire learning environment. It fosters a culture of acceptance, diversity, and empathy among all students, preparing them for a more inclusive society as they grow (Roldan, 2021). Inclusion can also lead to better academic and social outcomes for children with visual

impairment, as it provides them with opportunities for peer interaction, exposure to a broader curriculum, and access to skilled educators. It is on this basis that this study was conducted to investigate teachers' perception of inclusion of children with visual impairment in primary schools in Morogoro Region.

➤ *Objectives of the Study*

The main objective of the study was to investigate teachers' perception of inclusion of children with visual impairment in primary schools in Morogoro. Specifically, the study sought to investigate the following objectives;

- To determine teachers' willingness towards inclusion of children with visual impairment in primary school.
- To determine teachers' involvement in the identification, assessment, and placement of visually impaired children within primary schools.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

➤ *Teachers' Willingness for Inclusion of Children with Visual Impairment*

Inclusion of children with visual impairments in regular schools is crucial for promoting equality and ensuring that everyone has equal access to a quality education. Teachers play a vital role in facilitating the integration of these children into mainstream classrooms, as their positive attitudes towards inclusion are closely linked to their willingness to include visually impaired students (Avramidis *et al.*, 2000).

Previous studies indicate that teachers who receive specialized training in inclusive education and have access to necessary resources are more likely to embrace inclusion (Kurth *et al.*, 2013). On the other hand, lack of training and knowledge gaps often lead to uncertainty and reluctance among educators to accommodate the needs of visually impaired students. This emphasizes the importance of teacher preparedness for successfully integrating these students.

Dessemontet *et al.* (2012) highlight the significance of support structures for teachers, including administrative support, collaboration with special education professionals and access to appropriate resources. When teachers have robust support systems, they are more inclined to embrace the inclusion of visually impaired students. Conversely, a lack of resources and support hinder teachers' ability to effectively teach and support these students (Ferrell & Bruce, 2005).

Moreover, teachers' self-perceived competence and efficacy in addressing the unique needs of visually impaired students significantly impact their willingness to include these students (Pugliese *et al.*, 2018). Professional development opportunities that focus on inclusive education and visual impairment are crucial for enhancing teachers' confidence and competence in meeting the diverse needs of their students. By addressing these challenges and providing adequate support and training, educators can play a pivotal role in creating inclusive educational environments where all students, including those with visual impairments, can thrive.

➤ *Identification, Assessment, and Placement of Children with Visual Impairment*

Identifying children with visual impairment is a crucial step in providing appropriate educational and support services. Studies identify various methods and tools that are used for identification, including screenings, assessments, and parental reports.

Early identification of visual impairment is essential for timely intervention and optimal developmental outcomes, according to Chinta *et al.* (2018). Screening tools like the Vision Impairment Scale for Children (VISC) and the Cardiff Visual Ability Questionnaire (CVAQ) have been found effective in identifying visual impairment in children (Davies *et al.*, 2019; Rahi *et al.*, 2019). Parental observations also play a significant role in identifying visual impairments, as highlighted by Law *et al.* (2020).

Huurre *et al.* (2017) and Hatton *et al.* (2018) suggest that assessments should cover various domains, including visual acuity, visual field, contrast sensitivity, and functional vision skills such as orientation and mobility. Ongoing and dynamic assessments that take into account the evolving needs of children with visual impairment are also necessary (Strudwick *et al.*, 2021). Standardized tools such as the Functional Vision Assessment (FVA) and the Developmental Profile 3 (DP-3) can provide valuable insights into the strengths and challenges of children with visual impairment (Hyvärinen *et al.*, 2016; Parrila *et al.*, 2017).

III. METHODOLOGY

➤ *Research Design*

The research design was a descriptive research design. Descriptive research design is a research method that aims to describe or document the characteristics, behaviors, or conditions of a particular phenomenon or group of individuals (Mertens, 2014). This design was used because it allowed in-depth understanding of the current situation regarding inclusion of children with visual impairment in primary schools (Creswell, 2014).

➤ *Sample Size and Sampling Procedures*

The sample was chosen by using stratified and purposive sampling. The sample includes; 41 ordinary teachers, 6 teachers dealing with students having visual impairments and 2 head of the schools. Sampling techniques involved purposive sampling approaches which were used to get a sample. Purpose sampling is the type of sampling in which the researcher selects samples based on a certain Purpose (Kothari, 2008).

➤ *Data Collection Instrument and Analysis Technique*

A Likert scale questionnaire consisted of a series of statements questionnaire was a major means of data collection. However, interview was conducted to gather insights from teachers who interact with students facing visual impairments, as well as head teachers. The quantitative data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) while the qualitative data collected were analyzed using content analysis.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section intended to investigate about inclusion of children with visual impairments in primary schools in Morogoro Region. Below are the findings and a discussion of the results;

➤ Teachers' Willingness for Inclusion of Children with Visual Impairment

First specific objective of the study reported in this dissertation was to determine teachers' willingness towards inclusion of children with visual impairment in primary school in Morogoro Region. Table 1 presents data on teachers' attitudes and readiness to include children with visual impairments in educational settings, highlighting their preparedness and openness towards accommodating these students within mainstream classrooms based on surveyed responses and indicators.

Table 1 Teachers' Willingness for Inclusion of Children with Visual Impairment

Statements	Primary School A (n = 18)	Primary School B (n =21)
	M (SD)	M (SD)
I support including children with visual impairments.	3.6 (0.6)	3.3 (0.5)
Including children with visual impairments improves the learning environment.	3.4 (0.7)	3.4 (0.5)
I am dedicated to adjusting teaching methods for children with visual impairments.	3.3 (0.8)	3.2 (0.5)
I understand the need for resources to support inclusion.	3.3 (0.7)	3.1 (0.6)
I am confident in creating an inclusive classroom for visually impaired children.	3.6 (0.5)	3.3 (0.6)
I believe inclusion fosters empathy among all students.	3.2 (0.6)	3.3 (0.6)
I am interested in professional development to support visually impaired children.	3.5 (0.5)	3.4 (0.5)

Key: M = mean, SD = Standard deviation, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree

Source: Field data, 2024.

The findings in Table 2 indicate that teachers in both primary schools generally strongly agree inclusion of children with visual impairments, confident in creating an inclusive classroom for visually impaired children and are interested in professional development to support visually impaired children as indicated by mean scores of 3.6 and 3.5 respectively. These findings imply that school administrations and policymakers leverage this positive attitude by implementing policies that encourage and facilitate inclusion, ensuring that teachers are supported in their efforts. These results were supported by Head of school B who revealed the following,

"Embracing diversity enriches our school community and ensures that every child receives the education and support they deserve, fostering empathy, understanding, and a sense of belonging among our students." (HoS B, Face to Face Interview, 2 May 2024).

The results align with study by Dessemontet *et al.* (2012) which highlight the significance of support structures for teachers, including administrative support, collaboration with special education professionals and access to appropriate resources. They also align with study by Pugliese *et al.* (2018) who suggested that, professional development opportunities that focus on inclusive education and visual impairment are crucial for enhancing teachers' confidence and competence in meeting the diverse needs of their students. Foreman and Arthur-Kelly (2014) revealed that, continuous professional development is essential for teachers to effectively support students with visual impairments. They actively participate in

training, workshops, and conferences focusing on topics such as disability awareness, assistive technology, and differentiated instruction.

Teachers from both schools agree with including children with visual impairments improves the overall learning environment, dedicate to adjust teaching methods for children with visual impairments, understand the need for resources to support inclusion and believe in inclusion of fosters empathy among all students. These agreements emphasize the perception that inclusion not only benefits visually impaired students but also enhances the educational experience for all students by promoting diversity and empathy. These results collaborate with study by Roldan (2021) who pointed that, inclusion of children with visual impairment in primary schools not only benefits individual children but also enriches the entire learning environment. It fosters a culture of acceptance, diversity, and empathy among all students, preparing them for a more inclusive society as they grow.

Furthermore, the findings indicate need for targeted professional development that addresses specific challenges and provides practical strategies for teachers to effectively support visually impaired students. These results are in agreement with study by Sacks (2019) who observed that teachers adapt curriculum materials such as use of multisensory teaching methods and incorporate assistive technologies as to meet the needs of students with visual impairments and thus enhance learning experiences. Davies *et al.* (2014) found that, teachers collaborate with external

organizations and specialists to access additional resources and services.

The results were supported by a teacher dealing with students having visual impairments from school A who emphasized the following:

“Embracing inclusive education fosters empathy and social cohesion among all students, regardless of their abilities. By valuing and accommodating diverse needs, we cultivate a community where every learner thrives. Let’s commit to these practices not just for compliance, but to truly enrich our classrooms with understanding and unity.” (HoS A, Face to Face Interview, 23 April 2024).

These results concur with Social Constructivism Theory by Vygotsky (1968) which emphasize the role of social interactions and collaborative learning in fostering understanding and solidarity among students, which in turn reinforces teachers’ dedication to inclusive practices through shared experiences and mutual support within the classroom environment.

➤ Identification, Assessment, and Placement of Children with Visual Impairment

The second specific objective of the study reported in this dissertation was to determine teachers’ involvement in the identification, assessment, and placement of visually impaired children within primary education.

Table 2 Identification, Assessment, and Placement of Children with Visual Impairment

Statement	A Primary School (n = 18)	B Primary School (n =21)
	M (SD)	M (SD)
I support the inclusion of children with visual impairments.	3.6 (0.6)	3.3 (0.7)
I participate in identifying visually impaired children.	3.7 (0.6)	3.3 (0.7)
I participate in identifying visually impaired their learning requirements.	3.3 (0.6)	3.4 (0.6)
I assess visually impaired children to understand their specific needs.	3.4 (0.6)	3.0 (0.6)
I contribute to the decision-making process for placing visually impaired children.	3.5 (0.6)	3.3 (0.5)
I receive adequate support from educational authorities and professionals in my responsibilities regarding visually impaired children.	3.6 (0.5)	3.1 (0.6)
I understand various assessment tools to evaluate visually impaired children’s needs effectively.	3.3 (0.6)	3.1 (0.5)
I use various assessment strategies to evaluate visually impaired children’s needs effectively.	3.5(0.6)	3.2 (0.6)

Key: M = mean, SD = Standard deviation, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree

Source: Field data, 2024

Findings in Table 2 indicate that teachers’ support for inclusion of children with visual impairments is a crucial aspect of fostering an inclusive educational environment. Teachers from both schools generally strongly agree on supporting the inclusion of children with visual impairments, participation in identifying visually impaired children, and contribution to the decision-making process for placing visually impaired children. However, they strongly agree on receiving adequate support from educational authorities and professionals and use various assessment strategies to evaluate visually impaired children’s needs. The results are supported by a teacher dealing with students having visual impairments from school A who emphasized the following,

“Accommodating students with visual impairments is not just about meeting their needs; it’s about creating an environment where every child can succeed.” (HoS A, Face to Face Interview, 23 April 2024).

The results also concur with the study of Avramidis *et al.* (2000) who found that, teachers play a vital role in facilitating the integration of these children into mainstream classrooms, as their positive attitudes towards inclusion are closely linked to their willingness to include visually impaired students.

The results were also supported by a head of school A who pointed the following,

“By actively participating in the identification process, schools demonstrate their commitment to early intervention and ensuring every student receives the support they need to thrive academically and socially.” (HoS A, Face to Face Interview, 23 April 2024).

This proactive approach not only benefits the individual student but also enhances our overall ability to create inclusive and supportive learning environments where every child can reach their full potential. In addition to that, a head of school B revealed the following,

“Schools often delay in proactive efforts to identify students with visual impairments, which can hinder early intervention and support crucial for their academic success.” (HoS B, Face to Face Interview, 2 May 2024).

Kachweka and Rupia (2022) identified one of the major issues in the education system for visually impaired students was the inadequate teaching morale among teachers. This could be attributed to a lack of resources and training specific to teaching visually impaired pupils. Kurth *et al.* (2013)

revealed that, teachers who receive specialized training in inclusive education and have access to necessary resources are more likely to embrace inclusion.

Adequate support is crucial for teachers to effectively fulfill their responsibilities towards visually impaired children, indicating a potential area for policy intervention or professional development initiatives. Dessemontet *et al.* (2012) suggested that, when teachers have robust support systems, they are more inclined to embrace the inclusion of visually impaired students.

Furthermore, using various assessment strategies to evaluate the needs of visually impaired children effectively is another critical role for teachers. The results were supported by a teacher dealing with students having visual impairments from school A who emphasized the following,

“By learning specific techniques like tactile diagrams and braille adaptations, we can truly individualize instruction and make concepts more accessible.” (HoS A, Face to Face Interview, 23 April 2024).

Another teacher from school B noted the following,

“Understanding the technology and tools available opens doors for our visually impaired students, allowing them to participate fully in classroom activities.” (HoS B, Face to Face Interview, 2 May 2024).

These results indicate that, strengthening teachers' expertise in these areas undoubtedly improves our ability to meet the diverse learning needs of visually impaired students with greater efficacy and inclusivity. These results are in agreement with Social Constructivism Theory by Vygotsky (1968) which suggests that learning is socially mediated and occurs through interactions with more knowledgeable others, such as teachers. Strengthening teachers' knowledge and skills can enable them to create supportive learning environments and provide appropriate support, which are crucial for meeting the specific learning needs of visually impaired students effectively.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study explored teachers' perceptions of inclusion for children with visual impairment in primary schools across Morogoro Region. Findings have revealed that teachers in both Primary School A and B have positive perceptions about inclusion of children with visual impairment in primary schools, with teachers demonstrating strong support and dedication towards creating inclusive environments.

Findings revealed that teachers are willing for inclusion of children with visual impairment across the two primary schools. Both schools demonstrated positive attitudes towards inclusive practices for visually impaired children, emphasizing the importance of creating an inclusive learning environment and professional development. Moreover, findings have showed that teachers in both schools support and are active participating in identifying and assessing

visually impaired children.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were suggested, that schools should review their school development plan to include matters related to inclusion of children with visual impairment in primary schools. This should go hand in hand with ensuring equitable distribution of resources, including assistive technologies and learning materials, to primary schools to support the needs of visually impaired students and advocate for inclusive education policies at the regional and national levels, emphasizing the integration of children with visual impairments into mainstream classrooms with adequate support. The government through the Ministry of Education Science and Technology should regularly provide professional development opportunities for teachers to enhance their confidence and skills in creating inclusive classrooms.

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