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## Equal Access to Education in Tanzania: Opportunities, Challenges, and Policy Implications of Inclusive Education

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Mr. Silvanus Romanus Mwakila<sup>1</sup> & Prof. (Dr.) Parveenbanu M. Malek<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Education Department, Gujarat University, Ahmedabad-Gujarat, India.

<sup>2</sup>Research Guide, Education Department, Gujarat University, India.

Corresponding Author – Mr. Silvanus Romanus Mwakila

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### Abstract:

*This study explores availability of equal access to education in Tanzania through speculating availability of opportunities for inclusive education, challenges in implementation, policy implications, and conditions for its implementation. The methodology of obtaining relevant information is a documentary review of relevant literatures through description based on credibility. The sources show that there is equal access to education in Tanzania as evidenced through enrolment of students into inclusive or special needs secondary schools regardless of their gender, race, or impairments. Changes in education include issuing education circular on re-entry of students within two years, who dropped out of school. This reform has improved access to equitable learning to all students. Community involvement in education is given priority. There is commitment of government in ensuring access to education through training teachers in colleges and universities on inclusion of all students and international support and partnership with UNICEF and UNESCO. Challenges persist which require significant and deliberate efforts to alleviate include resource shortages such as school infrastructures, teaching materials, poor perceptions of inclusion by some teachers; poverty, inequity, and discrimination; stigmatization toward students with disabilities and weak execution of policy due to limited funding. This calls for strengthening policy implementation, improving infrastructure and resources, conducting awareness campaigns to address stigmatization and foster collaboration between government, non-governmental organizations, and international partners. Mass awareness to stop exclusion and discrimination of special needs children and improve access to elementary and secondary level education through adequate number of inclusive and accessible schools are crucial.*

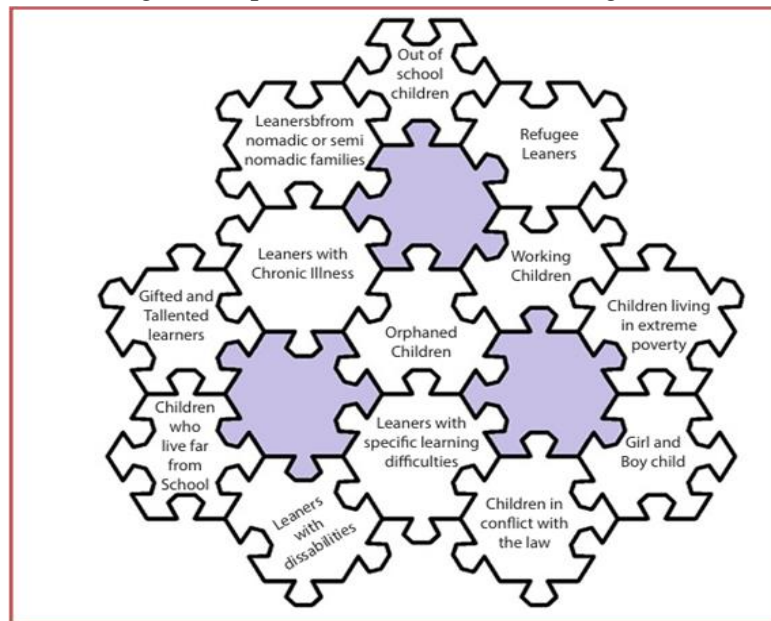
**Key Words:** *Inclusive Education, Re-Entry Education Circular, Policy implementation, Special needs education, Equal access to Education.*

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### Introduction:

Inclusive education is a critical approach of making sure that there is equitable access to education and meant to be beneficial to all learners regardless of their potentials or socio-economic milieu. It has come into consideration based on the previous exclusion of children with disabilities are disproportionately represented among the poor, and their marginalization in the educational system frequently signals the start of a lifetime of marginalization in society at large (United Nations Division for Social Policy Development). In Tanzania, inclusion involves also the dropouts who would have otherwise lost their chance of studying into mainstream education. Tanzania recognizes learners who need special treatment in education as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: Special Needs Education Categories



Source: Ministry of Education-Tanzania

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) states that, “inclusive education is a system that includes all students, and welcomes and supports them to learn, whoever they are and whatever their abilities or requirements are. This means making sure that teaching and the curriculum, school buildings, classrooms, play areas, transport and toilets are appropriate for all children at all levels. Inclusive education means all children learn together in the same schools so that no one is excluded. Every child has a right to inclusive education, including children with disabilities”.

According to UNICEF, in order to achieve inclusive learning, all components of educational framework such as rules and regulations, the financial, administrative, and design procedures must be altered. Education that is inclusive requires the following as shown in the following figure: -

Figure 2: Inclusive Education



Source: UNICEF

Historically, misconceptions regarding children with impairments’ ability participate in and benefit from education have been the basis for their exclusion. Effective incorporation of people with impairments in education is still hampered by attitudes that are shaped by

unfavourable views and are present in all communities. These attitudes can be found among different education stakeholders in different societies in the world.

As a key component of sustainable development, education is one of fundamental keys to success and a human right. Inclusive education integrates learners with diverse abilities into mainstream schools, is essential to achieving this goal. In Tanzania, the government has committed to inclusive education through policies such as ‘Education and Training Policy of 2014’ and the ‘National Strategy on Inclusive Education of 2009 – 2017’ (URT, 2010). Despite efforts made, secondary schools’ adoption of inclusive education remains uneven and fraught with challenges.

There are growing disparities in income distribution in today’s globalized world, with 60% of people living on 6% of global income, roughly half of people in the world live on 2 dollars per day and over 1,000,000,000 people living on less than 1 dollar daily (UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization). Education is negatively hampered by exclusion, which is a result of poverty and other causes. Efforts are made to make education available to all so that Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) objectives are achieved. Today, the world makes an attempt to reach students who are difficult to reach or who are still not enrolled in school. The large number of kids and teens who go to school but are not able to learn. Attention is also being paid to those who might not complete their elementary and secondary education or who do not have a top-notch education. Seven out of ten live in South and West Asia or sub-Saharan Africa, and more than half of the 75,000,000 primary school-age children who do not go to school are female learners. In most world regions, the main reasons of exclusion are poverty and marginalization children living in rural or remote places or in urban slums have fewer educational chances than others.

Inclusive education in Tanzania’s secondary schools presents both opportunities and challenges, particularly for students with disabilities. The government has made strides in promoting access to education through policies like fee-free secondary education, aiming to achieve universal education by 2030 (Kapinga, 2023). However, significant gaps remain implementation of practices for inclusion, particularly for learners with disabilities, including a lack of trained teachers and resources (Philip, 2024 & Namirembe, 2019).

### **Objective:**

The study explores inclusive education in secondary schools, with relevance in the Tanzanian context, the opportunities and obstacles in implementation of inclusion practices in secondary schools and provides recommendations for policymakers to strengthen inclusive education initiatives.

### **Methodology:**

This is a documentary review of existing literatures in the subject of inclusive education by obtaining information from the available sources of literatures from Tanzania Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Prime Minister’s Office for Regional Administration and Local Government, and from relevant sources such as the UNICEF, which deals with education and empirical study done in Tanzania. Description of the relevant concepts is done based on credibility of information.

### **Discussion:**

#### **Opportunities for Inclusive Education in Tanzania:**

Policy Framework: Tanzanian government has established policies that advocate for inclusive education, aligning with international standards such as the UN Convention on the

Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Namirembe, 2019). Entitlement to education is one of the fundamental legal privileges that are safeguarded by Tanzania through its Constitution of 1977 Chapter One Part II 11(2) and (3) states that “every person has the right to access education and every citizen shall be free to pursue education in a field of his or her choice up to the highest level according to his/her merits and ability; and that the Government will make efforts to ensure that all persons are afforded equal and sufficient opportunity to pursue education and vocational training in all levels of schools and other institutions of learning” (URT, 2005). In this matter, Tanzania is fully committed to providing fee free basic education to its citizens from Pre-Primary and Primary School, Ordinary and Advanced level secondary schools. The government has constructed secondary schools in every ward with exception of some wards which will also have secondary schools per plan, in order to enable free and equitable access to all children.

**Increased Enrolment:** The shift from special to inclusive education has led to higher enrolment rates for children with special needs (Possi & Milinga, 2017). Tanzania had 28% gross enrolment in 2021 according to UNESCO Institute for Statistics-UIS. In 2023 enrolment of students in secondary education included 1,469,153 boys and 1,608,202 girls summing up to 3,077,355 in both government and private schools (URT). Enrolment of students in secondary schools in Tanzania is inclusive since eligible students are all enrolled indiscriminately.

**Community Engagement:** Collaborative action research has shown potential in enhancing teacher practices and fostering inclusive environments (Juma, 2018). In Tanzania, although the Government provides fee free education to pupils and students, the community has the obligation of participating in the education of their children including purchasing school uniforms and providing basic needs to students. Likewise, in construction of school buildings in community secondary schools the community participates in provision of manpower for various activities. This fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility to ensure the schools are safe environments for all students to learn and reach their potentials in education. Community engagement in education is a part of ensuring that education is inclusive to all children as members of the community have a chance in providing their views on the education of their members. Community engagement ensures that local communities increasingly recognize the importance of inclusive education, which in turn fosters a more supportive environment for learners with diverse backgrounds.

**Policy Frameworks and Commitments:** Tanzania has established policies supporting inclusive education such as the education circular number 02 of the year 2021 on re-entry of dropouts who were out of school within two years of dropping out. The circular states that all school dropouts should be re-enrolled into schools where they previously studied with flexibility in transfer to other schools. The conditions stated include re-entry into school at the same level of education where the dropout left school for all with exception of those who dropped out due to criminal offences. All dropouts are given priority. School administration and teachers, are given responsibility to ensure conducive learning environment and offer guidance and counseling to the returning students. The circular provides a second chance for learners to complete their desired levels of education. It gives chance to all students indiscriminately, an opportunity which was not there before the year 2021. A student who dropped out of school would have lost his or her chance of fulfilling one's goals and potentials in life. The circular and other policy frameworks lay inclusive practices groundwork as evidenced in the provision of fee free primary and secondary education to students.

**International Support & Collaboration:** Tanzania benefits from partnerships with international organizations, such as UNESCO and UNICEF, which provide technical and financial support for inclusive education programs. This opportunity gives the country strong morale to continue providing inclusive education to children by creating conducive learning

environments to students through renovation of school buildings and construction of friendly and attractive learning environments.

**Teacher Training Initiatives:** Efforts to provide training to student teachers and those already in service on inclusion of education practices are gaining momentum, equipping teachers with skills to support diverse learners. In teacher colleges and universities which prepare teachers, inclusivity of education is emphasized in the course contents and the curriculum or modules on inclusive education, and special education are given importance.

### **Challenges in Implementation:**

**Resource Shortages:** Schools often lack the necessary instructional materials and trained personnel to support diverse learning needs (Philip, 2024 & Kapinga, 2023). The presence of challenging inadequate resources is a setback which face secondary schools in Tanzania whereas lack or shortage of some infrastructures, teaching materials, and assistive technologies required are inadequate in numbers to support the need and demands of providing quality education that is in line with demands of the society.

**Stakeholder Participation:** There is a need for greater involvement from all stakeholders, including parents and community members, to support inclusive education initiatives (Kapinga, 2023). Stake holder participation is voluntary which does not hold them accountable when they don't participate. The voluntary participation sometimes hinders inclusivity of education especially when the stakeholders' participation is lagging behind.

**Perceptions of Inclusion:** Teachers often view the inclusion of students with disabilities as burdensome, which can hinder effective teaching practices (Namirembe, 2019). It is expected that teachers are aware of the diversities of learners. However, some of them are not well trained to deal with students with special needs thus fail to help such learners.

Susan & Shapiro (2017) highlight that in Tanzania, inclusive education faces challenges such as poverty, inequity, and discrimination. UNESCO's strategy aims to empower teachers and create learner-friendly environments, addressing these barriers to improve educational access for all students in secondary schools.

A study done by Bertha & Ngowoko (2024) identifies diverse challenges in implementing inclusive education in Temeke District, Tanzania, emphasizing the need for supporting devices and teacher training. It suggests collaboration between the Ministry of Education and stakeholders to enhance educational outcomes for special needs learners.

**Limited Teacher Capacity:** Teachers often lack sufficient training to meet the requirements of learning-disabled students or those with learning difficulties effectively. This calls for in-service training to equip teachers on how to deal with students of special needs and likewise including a lengthy time of training in teacher's colleges for the pre-service teachers on special needs education.

**Cultural and Social Barriers:** Stigmatization and negative attitudes toward students with disabilities hinder their integration into mainstream schools. The societies need mass awareness on how to facilitate students with special requirements to realize their full potentials. Parents likewise need education in order to make them realize the importance of special needs education for their children unlike the current situation whereby some of them hide their impaired children taking it as a shame or curse.

**Policy-Implementation Gap:** While policies exist, their execution is often weak due to limited funding, poor coordination, and lack of monitoring mechanisms. This calls for serious implementation of education policies. Tanzania government should monitor and track implementation of education circular number 02 of the year 2021 as some dropouts, students, and parents are not aware of this opportunity.



Language Barriers: Language of instruction and communication challenges can impede the involvement of hearing or visual impaired students. Moreover, differences between mother tongue of students with the language of instructions and communication discourage students who find difficulties in languages.

### **Policy Implications:**

Despite these challenges, the ongoing reforms and community efforts indicate a commitment to improving inclusive education in Tanzania. However, the need for comprehensive training and resource allocation remains critical for achieving true inclusivity.

According to one study in on research innovation, education policies in Tanzania have not effectively enhanced the involvement of special needs students into secondary schools, highlighting challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and resources, while recommending equitable distribution of resources and teacher capacity building (Journal of Research and Innovation).

Kambuga & Mgonja (2023) in their study identify opportunities in Tanzania's inclusive education policies, such as established inclusive schools and legal frameworks. However, challenges persist, including insufficient funding, inadequate infrastructure, and societal stigma, necessitating enhanced government support and community awareness for effective implementation.

Grayson et al., (2024) in their study highlight positive teacher perceptions of inclusive education in Tanzania, yet identifies challenges such as inadequate professional development, lack of sign language skills, insufficient assistive technology, poor infrastructure, and curriculum inadequacies, necessitating policy reforms and targeted training for effective implementation.

According to the Journal of Education and Practice (2023) awareness of equity-based practices in Tanzanian secondary public schools reveals that stakeholders are familiar with free fees and inclusive education, but lack awareness of inclusive education, highlighting the need for further sensitization to enhance implementation effectiveness.

**Strengthening Policy Implementation:** Establish clear implementation guidelines, allocate adequate resources, and monitor progress to ensure inclusive education policies translate into practice.

**Capacity Building for Teachers:** Enhance teacher training programs to include inclusive education strategies, focusing on practical skills and attitudes.

**Improving Infrastructure and Resources:** Invest in building accessible classrooms, providing assistive technologies, and developing inclusive teaching materials.

**Community Awareness Campaigns:** Conduct awareness campaigns to address stigmatization and promote the benefits of inclusive education.

**Partnerships and Collaboration:** Foster collaboration between government, non-governmental organizations, and international partners to pool resources and expertise.

### **Conditions for Implementing Inclusive Education:**

UNICEF states that in order to make education accessible, the following factors need to be taken into account: Stopping exclusion and discrimination of special needs children, improving access to elementary and secondary level education in emergency situations and an adequate number of inclusive and accessible schools. Likewise support through 'reasonable accommodation' of modifications or practical assistance that pupils need in order to learn is needed. Children with disabilities should have individual education plans that include the assistance and accommodations they require. Services for particular disabilities including

accessible learning materials, classroom restructuring, and instruction in braille or sign language need to be provided. Finally, teachers should receive necessary training to operate in inclusive classrooms.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation:**

#### **Conclusion:**

Education that is inclusive in Tanzania's secondary schools holds great potential to transform lives and promote social equity. While challenges persist, a concerted effort from policymakers, educators, communities, and international partners can pave the way for an inclusive education system that leaves no child behind. There is a need to provide mass awareness education to communities in Tanzania in order for them to stop stigmatization of children with impairments. Strengthening policy implementation through provision of required resources through adequate funding of trainings and learning environment is necessary for the provision of equal access to education. Careful utilization of fundings from stakeholders and international partners is necessary on ensuring that resources are carefully allocated to improve teaching and learning environment. Teacher training on inclusion of all students in schools is very important. It can be done through in-service training and include it in the curriculum of teacher education. By addressing resource gaps, strengthening teacher capacity, and fostering a supportive social environment, Tanzania can advance toward achieving its inclusive education goals and Sustainable Development Goal 4 of ensuring the provision of equitable quality education for all students. Since inclusive education cannot be implemented in a vacuum, it should be considered in conjunction with other children's rights.

#### **Recommendations:**

The study recommends that the government of Tanzania needs to track and monitor implementation of policies and especially with the education circular number 02 of the year 2021 on re-entry. Some students, dropouts and their parents may not be aware of the circular. Mass education and campaigns on awareness are needed.

Other studies can be made on the flexibility of punishment regulations which still exist and implement dropout/ expulsion of students in order to harmonize with the re-entry circular.

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