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Policy Analysis on Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities in Tanzania: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

This study examines inclusive education policies for children with intellectual disabilities in Tanzania, focusing on implementation challenges and opportunities. Although inclusive education aims to provide equitable access to mainstream classrooms, implementation is hindered by limited resources, inadequate teacher training, and weak policy enforcement. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from educators, policymakers, and parents to assess their familiarity with policies, perceptions of policy supportiveness and effectiveness, and support for inclusion. Findings showed moderate policy familiarity and mixed perceptions of policy supportiveness and effectiveness. Multiple linear regression analysis revealed that these factors collectively explained more than 70% of the variation in stakeholder support for inclusive education. Policy familiarity emerged as the strongest predictor, emphasizing the importance of stakeholder awareness in promoting positive attitudes toward inclusion. The study identifies opportunities through awareness campaigns, teacher professional development, and improved monitoring and evaluation. It recommends that the Tanzanian government and education stakeholders prioritize policy dissemination, capacity building, and collaboration. Strengthening stakeholder knowledge and perceptions of policy effectiveness can increase support for inclusive education and improve educational opportunities for children with intellectual disabilities.

Keywords: Policy Analysis, Inclusion of Children with Intellectual Impairment, Conventional Learning Classrooms, Challenges, Opportunities, Tanzania.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, inclusive education has gained significant global traction over the past few decades. The core of Inclusive Education is the human right to education, pronounced in the 1994 Universal Declaration of Human Rights which recognizes diversity as the main characteristic of humanity. Various other international conventions and agreements recognize the need for education policies and practices that accommodate all learners. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has been a strong advocate for inclusive education, highlighting it as a means to achieve Education for All (EFA) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNESCO, 2021). The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different learning styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use, and partnerships with their communities (UNESCO, 2021).

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At the global level, inclusive education policies emphasize the right of every child to receive a quality education without discrimination. Countries like the United States, Canada, and several European nations have developed robust frameworks to support inclusive education, which includes legislative support, teacher training, and resource allocation (Sharma et al., 2024). However, the existing policies and legislation rarely provide sufficient and necessary guidance on how inclusion could be achieved. In Africa, the commitment to inclusive education has been growing, although the pace and implementation vary significantly across countries. Regional initiatives, such as the African Union's Agenda 2063, underscore the importance of inclusive education as a cornerstone for sustainable development. However, the move towards inclusive education in the region has been slow, despite the reduction in enrolment gaps for vulnerable children due to universal primary education in many countries (Pather, 2019).

In Tanzania, education as an equal right has been expressed in various national policies, legislation, and guidelines. Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 2006 urges the Member States to organize education for persons with disabilities without discrimination and based on equal opportunity. Therefore, this right should be granted through an inclusive education system at all levels and aiming at lifelong learning. Tanzania has signed but not ratified the Convention. The government has adopted inclusive education policies as part of its national education framework. For example, the Tanzanian Education and Training Policy (ETP) of 2014 and the National Strategy on Inclusive Education (2009-2017) emphasize the need to accommodate students with diverse learning needs, including those with intellectual impairments (URT, 2017). The National Policy on Disability (2004) also urges the Government, in collaboration with stakeholders, to provide an enabling environment for inclusive education which would take care of the special needs of children with disabilities. The National Policy on Disability further emphasizes the need to improve and increase skills training for persons with disabilities, in settings that accommodate both disabled and non-disabled trainees.

Despite these progressive policies, implementation remains a significant challenge. Schools often face resource constraints, a lack of specialized training among teachers, and widespread societal stigma toward learners with disabilities. These challenges hinder the effective integration of children with intellectual impairments into mainstream classrooms. This study, therefore, seeks to analyze the policy environment supporting the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in conventional classrooms in Tanzania. It aims to uncover the extent to which existing policies are familiar to stakeholders, the perceived effectiveness of these frameworks.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the specific objectives and the conceptual link between policy environment and inclusion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

i. H1: There is a significant relationship between stakeholders' familiarity with inclusive education policies and their support for the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in mainstream classrooms.

ii. H2: There is a statistically significant gap between inclusive education policy recommendations and actual practices observed in Tanzanian mainstream schools.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was grounded in two primary theories: Institutional Theory and the Social Model of Disability. These theories provide a comprehensive lens through which to examine the inclusion of children with intellectual impairments in conventional classrooms in Tanzania. The framework helps in understanding the systemic, organizational, and social factors that influence policy implementation and the practical challenges encountered.

2.1 Institutional Theory

Institutional theory originates from the works of sociologists such as (DiMaggio & Powell 1983), which focuses on the deeper and more resilient aspects of social structure. It considers the processes by which structures, including schemas; rules, norms, and routines, become established as authoritative guidelines for social behaviour. Institutions are the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction (North, 2018). The theory is particularly useful in understanding how educational policies are formulated and implemented within the broader socio-political context. It highlights the role of institutional structures and cultural norms in shaping the behaviour and attitudes of stakeholders. The theory also emphasizes the importance of legitimacy, arguing that organizations, such as schools, adhere to policies and practices that are perceived as legitimate by society. One limitation of the theory is its tendency to focus more on stability and conformity rather than

change and innovation which can be a drawback when examining the dynamic and evolving nature of educational inclusion practices (Willmott, 2015). Additionally, the theory may not adequately account for the individual actors within institutions, potentially underestimating the role of personal initiative and advocacy (Willmott, 2015). In the context of this study, the theory helped to analyze the existing policy framework for inclusive education in Tanzania. It helped to provide insights into how these policies are shaped by cultural norms and societal values, and how they are implemented within educational institutions. The theory also aided in understanding the resistance to change and the barriers to effective policy implementation, such as negative attitudes and lack of resources.

2.2 Social Model of Disability

The Social Model of Disability, developed by disability rights activists and scholars like Michael Oliver (Oliver, 2013), shifts the focus from individual impairments to the societal barriers that disable individuals. It posits that disability is not an inherent trait but a result of the interaction between individuals with impairments and an unaccommodating environment. This model advocates for societal change to remove these barriers and promote inclusion and empowers individuals by shifting the responsibility for change onto society rather than the individual with the impairment. It highlights the need for accessible environments, inclusive policies, and social attitudes that support diversity. This model is effective in promoting legislative and policy changes aimed at improving accessibility and inclusion. Therefore, This model was considered in the present study because it usefully explains issues associated with the instructional practices and learning environment in IE classrooms in Tanzania primary schools.

A potential weakness of the model is that it may underplay the significance of individual experiences of impairment and the need for medical or therapeutic interventions. It can also sometimes overlook the complexity of certain disabilities that require more than just environmental modifications for effective inclusion. The model is instrumental in this study for analyzing the barriers faced by children with intellectual impairments in conventional classrooms. It supports the evaluation of how current policies and practices either facilitate or hinder their inclusion. Therefore, it can help in identifying necessary changes in the educational environment, such as teacher training and curriculum adaptations, to better support these children. This model was combined with the Institutional Theory to provide a robust theoretical framework for this study. While the Institutional Theory offered a lens to examine the systemic and organizational factors affecting policy implementation, the Social Model of Disability highlighted the societal barriers that need to be addressed for effective inclusion. Together, the theories helped in understanding the complex dynamics of inclusive education for children with intellectual impairments in Tanzania and in formulating recommendations for policy and practice improvements.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this research focuses on the policy context and the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in regular classrooms. The central concept of this framework is that inclusive education depends on the quality of policy formulation, dissemination and implementation at various levels of the education system. This policy framework includes national policies, strategic documents, legal texts, and institutional policy documents that promote inclusive education. It also includes the political will and commitment of the administration to ensure equal access to education for all, especially for people with intellectual disabilities. The first part of this framework addresses the understanding, usability, and perceived relevance of existing inclusive education policies in Tanzania. This includes stakeholders' understanding of the most important documents, such as the Education and Training Policy (2014), the National Strategy for Inclusive Education (2009–2017), and The National Disability Policy (2004). The extent to which these policies are perceived as simple and feasible by teachers, school administrators, and parents is an indicator of the strength of the policy environment.

The second section highlights the gaps that are apparent between policy directions and actual school practices. Despite ongoing national policy, schools have varying resources, facilities, and organizational arrangements for integrating children with intellectual disabilities. This gap stems from a mismatch between policy intentions and practices, which is often exacerbated by a lack of funding, poor coordination among stakeholders, and a lack of in-service training for teachers. The third section analyzes the challenges that groups such as teachers, parents, policymakers, and students face in implementing inclusive education. These challenges can be logistical, such as the lack of teaching materials, classrooms, and specially trained staff

to manage them, or attitudinal, such as stigma and misconceptions about intellectual disabilities. School culture and community attitudes determine whether inclusive practices are promoted or hindered.

In this framework, the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities is a dependent variable, determined by the interaction of three key factors in the policy environment: policy effectiveness and knowledge, implementation gaps, and stakeholder issues. The framework also provides a basis for identifying areas for improvement, such as building strategic capacity, policy reform, and strengthening government-civil society partnerships. Through a systematic examination of these interrelated factors, the conceptual framework provides an understanding of the extent to which the current policy context promotes or hinders the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in regular classrooms in Tanzania. It also guides research to identify practical interventions and policy reforms that can promote an inclusive and equitable education system. The conceptual framework of the study is shown in Figure 1.

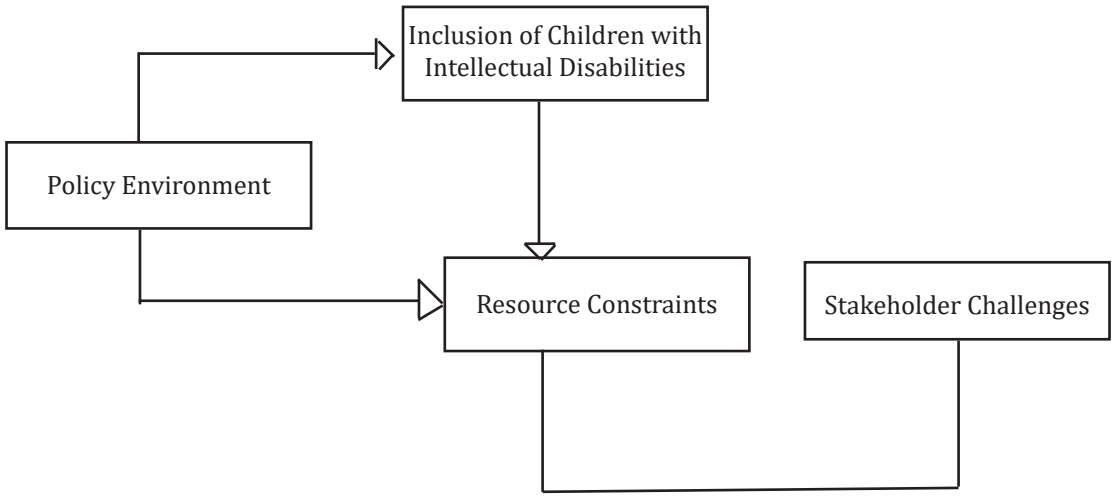


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

3. Methodology

3.1 Study Area

This study was conducted in Temeke District, one of the administrative districts in the Dar es Salaam Region of Tanzania. Temeke is known for its demographic diversity and a mix of urban and peri-urban settings, making it a suitable location for examining the implementation of inclusive education. The district is home to a significant number of public and private schools, including those that practice inclusive education. Its diverse socioeconomic characteristics and education infrastructure provide a relevant context for studying the challenges and successes of inclusive education policies and practices.

3.2 Research Design

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This design was chosen to enable a comprehensive exploration of inclusive education by combining statistical analysis with detailed narratives and lived experiences. The quantitative approach allowed the researcher to assess measurable trends and patterns through the use of structured questionnaires, while the qualitative component facilitated deeper insights into personal perspectives via interviews and document analysis. According to (Creswell 2014), mixed-methods research enhances the validity and depth of findings, especially when dealing with complex social issues like education. This approach allowed the researcher to triangulate data from various sources and increase the overall reliability and richness of the study outcomes.

3.3 Study Population

The target population for the study consisted of four main groups: teachers engaged in inclusive education, policymakers such as District Education Officers, parents of children with disabilities, and students with disabilities. These groups were selected due to their direct involvement and experiences with inclusive education policies and practices. The source of this population was derived from official records obtained from the Temeke District Education Office and school registries of institutions that implement inclusive education programs.

3.4 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis in this study was the individual respondent. Each respondent, whether a teacher, parent, student, or policymaker, provided valuable and unique perspectives on the implementation and effectiveness of inclusive education. By focusing on individuals, the study was able to gather personal experiences and opinions, which are crucial for understanding the practical realities of inclusive education on the ground.

3.5 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

This study employed both probability and non-probability sampling techniques to select participants for the quantitative and qualitative components, respectively. For the quantitative component, the sample size was determined using Slovin's Formula, which is used when the population size is known and a specific margin of error is acceptable. According to the Temeke District Education Office, approximately 1,000 individuals formed the target population relevant to this study (teachers, policymakers, parents, and students involved in inclusive education). The formula is as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N\,(e)^2}$$

Where:

- n = Sample size
- N = Total population (1000)
- e = Margin of error (0.10 or 10%)

$$n = \frac{1000}{1+1000(0.10)^2}$$

$$n = 91$$

The sample size was approximately 91 participants, rounded to 100 to improve representativeness and account for non-response. For the qualitative aspect, purposive sampling was used to select participants based on their role and usefulness in achieving the research objectives. The sample included 10 policymakers, 12 parents of children with disabilities (from different socio-economic backgrounds), and 10 students with disabilities (of different ages and educational levels). The qualitative sample size was guided by the principle of data saturation, which was reached after 12 parent interviews, when no new themes were identified (Guest, 2016). This sampling method allowed the researcher to collect aggregate data from a statistically derived sample and rich and detailed data from strategically selected key informants.

3.6 Data Collection Methods

Three main data collection methods were used in the study: questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis. Questionnaires were administered to 100 teachers. They included open-ended questions (Likert scale and multiple choice) exploring inclusive teaching styles, policy knowledge, and implementation challenges. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with policymakers, parents, and identified students to explore their experiences and opinions on inclusive education. In addition, document analysis was conducted to analyze relevant education policies, teaching guidelines, and government reports. The analysis of data sources confirmed the validity and comprehensiveness of the study findings.

3.7 Operationalization and Measurement of Variables

The key variables in this study were implemented using available measurement tools to ensure consistency and comparability. Policy implementation was assessed using a five-point Likert scale, adapted from (Sharma et al. 2024), allowing participants to indicate their level of agreement with a set of statements related to knowledge and policy implementation. Teachers' attitudes and perceptions were measured using the Inclusion Index, developed by (Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus 2021), a comprehensive approach to measuring inclusive practices in schools. These instruments were selected for their ease of use and proven reliability in inclusive education research.

3.8 Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as means, ranges, and standard deviations were used to describe the data. Variance inflation factor (VIF) was used to test for multicollinearity. In addition, Harman's one-factor test was used to determine the common mode bias. The results showed that no single factor explained much of the variance, confirming the quality of the data (Podsakoff et al., 2013). For qualitative data, thematic analysis was conducted. Interview transcripts were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo software to identify themes and trends observed across different groups of respondents. This combination of manual and computer-assisted analysis enabled a detailed and in-depth interpretation of the qualitative data.

3.9 Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity of the research instruments, expert opinions were collected and pilot tests were conducted with ten teachers. Recommendations from this initial review were incorporated, and the instruments were refined and modified to improve their understandability and relevance. Reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha, which measures the internal consistency of questionnaire items. All scales were above 0.70, which is generally accepted for research instruments according to (Nunnally 1978).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Information of the Participants

Of the 132 respondents who participated in a study on the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in regular classes in Temeke District, 42 (42%) were male and 58 (58%) were female. This high percentage of females confirms the observations of (Mgaya & Gesase 2023), who also reported a high proportion of female teachers (85%) in inclusive education in Morogoro. This can be attributed to traditional gender roles that place women in support roles, making them more involved in teaching and caring for children with special needs. The results indicate that female teachers and caregivers will be more proactive in promoting the inclusion and care of children with intellectual disabilities.

Age showed that the majority of respondents (63%) were aged 31 to 45 years, followed by those under 30 (22%) and those over 45 (15%). These results suggest that the majority of respondents were of working age, with a mix of experience and sufficient involvement. The presence of younger participants suggests a growing interest in inclusive education among early childhood professionals, which may provide hope for the sustainability of teaching. These findings are consistent with those of (Nyoni 2022), who argues that younger teachers may be more adaptable and receptive to inclusive practices than older teachers, who may have more entrenched attitudes or feel overwhelmed by the additional pressures of inclusive teaching.

Regarding educational attainment, 45% of respondents had a diploma, 40% a bachelor's degree, and 15% a master's degree. This distribution suggests that respondents were well-educated, with most of them having post-secondary qualifications in teaching policy or education. These findings are consistent with those of (Mgaya & Gesase 2023), who also noted that most inclusive teachers had a diploma or certificate. This level of professional training was also important in providing respondents with the knowledge and teaching skills needed for effective implementation of inclusive practices. The professional experience of the respondents also strengthened the validity of the findings. More than half (52%) of the participants had more than ten years of professional experience, 33% had five to ten years, and only 15% had less than five years. This experience enriches the study, as long-term practice in the education sector sheds light on the challenges, as well as the progress, in inclusive education. Interestingly, these findings differ slightly from those of (Zigler et al. 2017), who found that in the municipalities of Tanga, Tabora, and Shinyanga, the majority of inclusive education practitioners had more than 13 years of experience. The slight decrease in experience observed in this study may be explained by recent efforts to recruit new teachers for inclusive positions in urban districts such as Temeke.

In addition, ten policymakers were interviewed to learn more about the development and implementation of inclusive education policies. They were instrumental in enabling us to understand the systemic support and policy environment that influences inclusive practice. The inclusion of such voices is in line with the tradition adopted by (Maphie 2023), who stressed the importance of including institutional and local voices in the evaluation of inclusive education in Tanzania. Twelve parents of children with intellectual disabilities, 75% mothers and 25% fathers, also participated in the study. This imbalance also reflects the cultural expectation that mothers are more likely to assume the role of primary caregiver, a trend also observed in the work of (Lo-oh & Bambo 2023), where mothers were more likely to advocate for their children's right to education. Their voices provided valuable insights into the everyday challenges and support mechanisms needed for effective inclusion from a family perspective.

Finally, ten students with intellectual disabilities aged 10 to 18 years were interviewed: six boys (60%) and four girls (40%). Including these students' voices provided direct insight into the school climate and the extent to which it is inclusive and promotes a sense of belonging and participation. In line with research conducted by (Mkumbo et al. 2023), who prioritized student voices in evaluating inclusion strategies, these students' views revealed key areas for improvement in communication, peer interaction, and teacher support. General, the demographic profile of the respondents reflected a

balanced and diverse mix of individuals with relevant experiences and perspectives. This diversity enriched the study findings and enhanced the validity of conclusions drawn on the inclusion of children with intellectual impairments in mainstream classrooms.

Table 1: The Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Category	Sub-category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender (Quantitative)	Male Female	42 58	42% 58%
Age Group (Quantitative)	18–30 years 31–45 years Above 45 years	22 63 15	22% 63% 15%
Education Level	Diploma Bachelor's Degree Master's Degree	45 40 15	45% 40% 15%
Work Experience	Less than 5 years 5–10 years More than 10 years	15 33 52	15% 33% 52%
Policymakers Interviewed	—	10	—
Parents Interviewed	Mothers Fathers	9 3	75% (of 12) 25% (of 12)
Students Interviewed	Boys Girls Age Range: 10–18 years	6 4 —	60% (of 10) 40% (of 10) —

Source: Field Survey (2025)

4.2 Familiarity, Supportiveness, and Effectiveness of the Existing Policy Environment for Inclusive Education of Children with Disabilities in Tanzania

Tanzania has made significant strides in developing policies for promoting inclusive education, reflecting its commitment to ensuring that all children, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, have access to quality education. The policy environment for inclusive education in Tanzania is shaped by a combination of national policies, international commitments, and strategic frameworks such as the ETP 2014, the NSIE 2009-2017, the NSIE 2018-2021, the ESDP, and the Persons with Disabilities Act. The present study assessed the familiarity and perceived effectiveness of the existing policy environment for inclusive education of children with disabilities in Tanzania. These are further described and discussed in subsections 4.2.1 to 4.2.3 below.

4.2.1 Familiarity with Inclusive Education Policies and Regulatory Frameworks in Tanzania

This study intended to assess teachers' familiarity with inclusive education policies, and to examine their perceptions regarding the supportiveness and effectiveness of these policies in the implementation of inclusive education practices. As indicated in Table 2, the (Persons with Disabilities Act 2010) received the highest mean score (M = 2.85, SD = 1.18), suggesting that respondents were relatively more familiar with this piece of legislation compared to other policies. This could be attributed to the fact that the Act specifically addresses issues concerning persons with disabilities, making it more relevant and visible to educators dealing with inclusive classrooms. The Inclusive Education Strategy (2018–2021) also recorded a high mean of 2.80 (SD = 1.19), reflecting a fair level of awareness among respondents. This finding might be explained by the recency of the strategy and government efforts to promote inclusion through various stakeholder engagements during its implementation period.

Further, The Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP) had a slightly lower familiarity score (M = 2.75, SD = 1.16). This suggests that while respondents had some awareness of the ESDP, it may not be as widely disseminated or directly tied to inclusive education training in schools. The study also found that, the National Education Policy received a mean score of 2.50 (SD = 1.17), which indicates that although it is a foundational policy document, its specific content related to inclusive education may not be well-known or clearly understood by respondents Lastly, the National

Strategy on Inclusive Education (NSIE) recorded the lowest mean score of 2.45 (SD = 1.18). This low level of familiarity suggests that this policy has not been adequately introduced or emphasized to educators, despite its direct relevance to inclusive practices.

While many teachers showed some level of familiarity with key national policies and frameworks for inclusive education, there was a clear need for enhanced training and information dissemination to ensure all educators are well-versed and equipped to implement these policies effectively. The study demonstrated that some teachers were not very familiar with the policies. However, most were somewhat familiar or had a basic understanding of the policies. An interview with the head teacher of one of the schools showed a basic understanding of the policies and the need for more training on the same.

> *"I have a basic understanding of the policies, but I have not received detailed training on them. We follow the Education and Training Policy (ETP) and the National Strategy on Inclusive Education. Our school also adheres to the Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP) and the Persons with Disability Act."* (Head-teacher, School A, Temeke District, April 2025)

Most parents of children with disabilities who were also interviewed in the study and the children themselves were not familiar with the policies. For the few parents who knew, communication about the policies came from the schools and community meetings as described by one parent:

> *"I have some information about the policies through the school my child attends. The teachers and administration have been quite informative about the policies and how they are applied in the school."* (Parent, School A, Temeke District, April 2025)

The District Education Officer confirmed that the policies were communicated through circulars to schools, digital platforms, and other channels as follows:

> *"Policies are communicated through official circulars and updates from the Ministry. We use digital platforms and resources to disseminate policy information. However, there are challenges in ensuring consistent communication of policies."* (District Education Officer, Temeke District, April 2025)

These findings align with those of (Lemke 2020), who noted that a significant number of teachers in Tanzania lack sufficient exposure to policy documents unless they receive formal training. Similarly, (Mboya et al. 2020) observed that limited awareness of inclusive policies hinders implementation in schools.

Table 2: Respondents s' Familiarity with Inclusive Education Policies

Inclusive Education Policy	Mean	STD
Persons with Disabilities Act (2010)	2.85	1.1800
Inclusive Education Strategy (2018–2021)	2.80	1.1900
Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP)	2.75	1.1600
National Education Policy	2.50	1.1700
National Strategy on Inclusive Education (NSIE)	2.45	1.1800

Source: Field Survey (2025)

4.2.2 Perceived Supportiveness of National Policies and Frameworks for Inclusive Practices

The study investigated how teachers perceive the supportiveness of national policies and frameworks in facilitating inclusive education in Tanzania. As presented in Table 3, the overall mean scores ranged between 2.00 and 2.30, indicating that these policies are perceived as minimally supportive. The Education and Training Policy (ETP) was rated with a mean of 2.20 (SD = 1.00), reflecting that most teachers regard it as offering only limited support for implementing inclusive practices in real classroom settings.

Similarly, the National Strategy on Inclusive Education (NSIE) and the new NSIE (2018–2021) were rated at 2.10 and 2.15 respectively, showing slightly lower perceptions of support. These scores suggest that although teachers acknowledge the existence of these policies, they view them as not fully responsive to the challenges they face on the ground. The Education Sector Development Plan

(2016/17–2020/21) received the lowest mean score of 2.00 (SD = 0.95), indicating a perception that this policy, despite its broader developmental focus, has not adequately prioritized or operationalized inclusive education objectives. On the other hand, the (Persons with Disabilities Act 2010) had the highest rating at 2.30 (SD = 1.05), suggesting slightly more confidence among teachers in its ability to support inclusive education, likely due to its legal enforceability and rights-based language.

These quantitative findings are reinforced by qualitative data from key informant interviews. A head teacher in Temeke District commented:

> "The policies are there, yes, but in many cases they are not implemented properly. Most teachers have not even been oriented on what inclusive education really means according to these frameworks. We often receive guidelines from the ministry, but without the necessary training or resources, schools are left to figure things out on their own" (**Head Teacher, School B, Temeke District, April 2025**)

Such insights underscore a significant gap between policy formulation and its execution at the school level. The data reveals that many education stakeholders view national policies as existing in theory but lacking in practice due to poor dissemination, minimal training, and inadequate resources. Teachers continue to express a strong need for better capacity building, policy orientation, and infrastructural support to effectively translate inclusive education policies into meaningful classroom actions. While the existing policies and frameworks suggest a national commitment to inclusive education, their perceived effectiveness remains low. This calls for urgent policy revisions, strategic dissemination, and improved implementation mechanisms to ensure that inclusive education becomes a practical reality rather than a policy ideal.

Table 3: Perceived Supportiveness of National Policies and Frameworks for Inclusive Practices

Policy/Framework	Mean	STD
Education and Training Policy (ETP)	2.20	1.00
National Strategy on Inclusive Education (NSIE)	2.10	0.98
New National Strategy for Inclusive Education (2018–2021)	2.15	1.02
Education Sector Development Plan (2016/17–2020/21)	2.00	0.95
Persons with Disabilities Act (2010)	2.30	1.05

Source: Field Survey (2025)

4.2.3 Perceived Effectiveness of National Policies and Frameworks for Inclusive Practices

The study further assessed how respondents perceive the effectiveness of national policies and frameworks in promoting and sustaining inclusive education practices in Tanzania. As illustrated in Table 4, the mean scores for all policies ranged between 1.45 and 1.60, reflecting a generally low level of perceived effectiveness. These results imply that although such policies exist, their actual influence in driving effective inclusive education remains limited.

The Education Sector Development Plan (2016/17–2020/21) received the lowest mean score of 1.45 (SD = 0.74), suggesting it is regarded as the least effective in achieving inclusive goals. Similarly, the National Strategy on Inclusive Education (NSIE) and its updated version (2018–2021) were scored at 1.48 and 1.50 respectively, showing that teachers view these frameworks as only marginally effective. The Education and Training Policy (ETP) was rated at 1.55, while the Persons with Disabilities Act (2010) scored slightly higher at 1.60, indicating it is considered the most effective among the listed frameworksyet still below a moderate effectiveness threshold.

These findings are supported by qualitative responses from key education stakeholders. A school inspector from Temeke District commented:

> "The challenge is not just about having policies on paper; it's about what happens in

schools. We rarely see follow-up or monitoring that ensures these policies are implemented as intended. Many of these policies have good intentions, but the lack of teacher training, poor infrastructure, and low community awareness make them ineffective in practice" (**School Inspector, Temeke District, April 2025**)

Such views reveal a disconnect between policy intentions and practical implementation, with teachers and education officers alike pointing to insufficient training, lack of resources, and weak institutional support as the key barriers to effectiveness. While the legal and strategic frameworks are in place, their operationalization at the school level remains inadequate, leaving many children with special needs underserved. The data shows that despite the presence of various national policies and strategies aimed at promoting inclusive education, their perceived effectiveness is very low. This underscores an urgent need for stronger implementation strategies, increased accountability mechanisms, and targeted resource allocation to turn policy ambitions into tangible outcomes in inclusive education.

Table 4: Perceived Effectiveness of National Policies and Frameworks for Inclusive Practices

Policy/Framework	Mean	STD
Education and Training Policy (ETP)	1.55	0.8
National Strategy on Inclusive Education (NSIE)	1.48	0.75
New National Strategy for Inclusive Education (2018–2021)	1.50	0.77
Education Sector Development Plan (2016/17–2020/21)	1.45	0.74
Persons with Disabilities Act (2010)	1.60	0.79

Source: Field Survey (2025)

4.2.4 Regression results

The study sought to examine the relationship between stakeholders' familiarity with inclusive education policies, their perceptions of the supportiveness and effectiveness of these policies, and their support for the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in mainstream classrooms. To test this hypothesis, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted, with stakeholders' support for inclusion as the dependent variable and familiarity, perceived supportiveness, and perceived effectiveness of policies as independent variables. The regression model results in the Table 5 indicated a strong and statistically significant relationship between these factors and support for inclusion. The overall model was highly significant ($F(3, 96) = 77.64$, $p < 0.001$), showing that the combined effect of familiarity, perceived supportiveness, and perceived effectiveness significantly predicts stakeholders' support for inclusive education. The model explained approximately 70.4% of the variance in support for inclusion ($R^2 = 0.704$), which is a substantial proportion. This suggests that these three predictors together are very influential in shaping stakeholders' attitudes towards including children with intellectual disabilities in mainstream classrooms.

Table 5: Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.839	0.704	0.693	0.498

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Looking at the individual predictors, familiarity with inclusive education policies was the strongest and most influential factor. The standardized regression coefficient in Table 6 ($\beta = 0.647$, $p < 0.001$) indicates that respondents who reported higher levels of familiarity with these policies were much more likely to support the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities.

Perceived supportiveness of national policies also had a meaningful and statistically significant positive effect on support for inclusion (β = 0.251, p = 0.007). This suggests that when stakeholders view policies as helpful and accommodating toward inclusive education, their likelihood of supporting the integration of children with intellectual disabilities into regular classrooms increases. Additionally, perceived effectiveness of the policies was found to positively influence support for inclusion (β = 0.195, p = 0.027), although its effect size was smaller compared to familiarity and supportiveness. This indicates that when respondents believe that the policies are effectively implemented and are achieving their intended goals, their support for inclusion grows. It underscores the importance not only of having supportive policies but also of ensuring their successful execution to build confidence among stakeholders.

The constant term in the regression model was also significant (p = 0.005), which implies that there is a baseline level of support for inclusive education that exists independently of familiarity or perceptions of supportiveness and effectiveness. This baseline may reflect a general positive attitude towards inclusion regardless of detailed policy knowledge or evaluation. These findings emphasize that stakeholders' support for including children with intellectual disabilities in mainstream schools is strongly influenced by their familiarity with inclusive education policies, as well as their perceptions of how supportive and effective these policies are. The strong predictive power of these factors indicates that efforts to increase policy awareness and improve perceptions of policy supportiveness and effectiveness could significantly enhance stakeholder support. This could be achieved through targeted training, awareness campaigns, and demonstrating the successful implementation of policies on the ground.

Table 6: Coefficients Results

Predictor	B	Std. Error	t	Sig. (p-value)
(Constant)	0.615	0.212	2.9	0.005
Familiarity	0.647	0.075	8.63	0.001
Perceived Supportiveness	0.251	0.091	2.76	0.007
Perceived Effectiveness	0.195	0.087	2.24	0.027

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

4.3 Perceived Gaps between Policy Recommendations and Actual Practices in Schools

The findings of this study revealed that respondents perceived noticeable gaps between national policy recommendations and actual practices in implementing inclusive education in schools. The highest perceived gaps were reported in the identification of children with abnormal developmental patterns and the formulation of special programs for them, with a mean score of 2.30 and a standard deviation of 1.02. This suggests that the mechanisms for early identification and intervention are not sufficiently implemented in schools. Respondents also indicated a similar gap in the training of in-service teachers on special education needs, which registered a mean of 2.30 and a standard deviation of 1.03. This implies that many educators are not adequately equipped with the specialized knowledge and skills needed to teach students with diverse learning needs effectively.

Another area with significant perceived gaps was the provision of a conducive environment for inclusive education, also showing a mean of 2.30 and a standard deviation of 1.04. This includes physical infrastructure, classroom arrangements, and accessibility features, which many schools reportedly lack. Respondents expressed concern that such shortcomings hinder the full participation of children with disabilities in the learning process. The creation of a more inclusive education system, facilitating in-service training and short courses for regular teachers, and training for teachers on inclusive education were all rated with a mean score of 2.25 and standard deviations ranging from 1.00 to 1.02. These findings highlight systemic deficiencies in institutional efforts to develop an inclusive culture in schools. Despite policy recommendations emphasizing teacher development, the actual implementation appears inconsistent and inadequate.

Moderate gaps were also observed in the provision of pedagogical support for inclusive education (mean = 2.20, SD = 1.00), promoting access and equity in education for children with disabilities (mean = 2.20, SD = 1.00), and proper training for teachers in pre-primary schools (mean = 2.20, SD = 0.99). These results point to a lack of alignment between policy goals and classroom-level support, particularly in early childhood education settings where early intervention is most impactful. Slightly lower but still relevant gaps were reported in facilitating access to education for disadvantaged groups (mean = 2.10, SD = 0.98), promoting community participation for inclusive education (mean = 2.10, SD = 0.97), and the provision of special assessment kits, learning equipment, and assistive devices (mean = 2.10, SD = 0.97). These findings indicate that while there may be some progress in these areas, the efforts remain insufficient, and many schools continue to operate without the necessary tools for inclusive education. Respondents also noted that most schools lacked equipment such as Braille machines, making it difficult for students with visual impairments to access learning materials, a situation similarly observed in Morogoro Municipality as reported by (Saidi 2017). This points to a critical gap in support for students with hearing and visual impairments, suggesting that these learners may be systematically excluded from meaningful participation in education despite policy directives. Additionally, when respondents were asked about their confidence in integrating inclusive education practices as outlined in national policies, varying levels of confidence were reported. While a portion of respondents expressed moderate or high confidence, many indicated limited confidence in effectively applying inclusive practices. One head teacher stated,

> "I am moderately confident that we are making progress but still have areas to improve," emphasizing the ongoing challenges in implementation. Similarly, some respondents pointed to a lack of training and appropriate resources as major limitations." (**Head-teacher, School B, Temeke District, April 2025**)

Overall, the findings underscore a widespread perception of gaps between inclusive education policies and their actual implementation in schools. Despite existing frameworks and strategies, these gaps remain evident across various areas including training, resource provision, early identification, community involvement, and the physical learning environment. Addressing these gaps requires coordinated efforts from all stakeholders to align practice with policy and promote equitable and inclusive learning opportunities for all students.

Table 7: Perceived gaps with the actual practices on regarding the listed policy recommendations

Policy Statement	Mean	STD
Identification of children with abnormal patterns of development and devising special programs for them	2.30	1.02
Access and equity in education for children with disabilities	2.20	1.00
Promote and facilitate access to education to disadvantaged groups	2.10	0.98
Creating a more inclusive education system	2.25	1.01
Enhance educational services for children with special needs through inclusive service delivery planning	2.15	0.95
Providing pedagogical support for inclusive education	2.20	1.00
Promoting community participation for inclusive education	2.10	0.97
Facilitating the use of sign language and braille for children with disabilities	2.05	0.94
Facilitating training for teachers on inclusive education	2.25	1.00
Early identification and assessment of children with special needs	2.15	0.96
Training in-service teachers on special education needs	2.30	1.03
Provision of special assessment kits, learning equipment and assistive devices	2.10	0.97

In-service training on inclusive education and short courses for regular teachers	2.25	1.02
Proper training of teachers for pre-primary schools	2.20	0.99
Providing a conducive environment for inclusive education	2.30	1.04

Source: Field Survey (2025)

4.3.1 Regresion Results

A simple linear regression was conducted to examine whether the perceived gaps between policy recommendations and actual practices significantly exist among respondents in Tanzanian mainstream schools. In this model, the independent variable was the perceived gap score (which reflects the extent to which respondents believe there are discrepancies between policy and practice), and the dependent variable was the observed actual implementation of inclusive education practices. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 98) = 85.37$, $p < 0.001$, indicating that perceived gaps are a significant predictor of the level of actual inclusive education practice observed. The R^2 value was 0.465, meaning that about 46.5% of the variance in actual inclusive education practices could be explained by the perceived gaps reported by respondents. This R^2 value reveals a moderately strong relationship, suggesting that perceptions of gaps are closely linked to how inclusive education is actually being practiced in schools. It reflects a substantial recognition among respondents that what policies recommend and what happens in practice are not fully aligned.

Table 8: Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.68	0.47	0.46	0.55

Source: Field Survey (2025)

The standardized regression coefficient for the perceived gap variable was $\beta = -0.682$ ($p < 0.001$). The negative sign of the coefficient indicates an inverse relationship between the perceived gap and actual practice level. In other words, the larger the perceived gap between policy and practice, the lower the actual level of inclusive education practice observed in schools. This finding aligns with expectations: when respondents perceive greater discrepancies or shortcomings in the application of inclusive education policies, the practical implementation of inclusive education in classrooms tends to be weaker. This confirms the existence of a statistically significant gap between policy and practice.

The presence of significant gaps highlights challenges faced in mainstream schools regarding the full realization of inclusive education principles. These gaps may stem from a range of issues, including insufficient resources, inadequate teacher training, lack of infrastructural support, and limited community involvement concerns that were also voiced by respondents in qualitative interviews. For example, both educators and parents noted difficulties in applying policies due to lack of practical support, which corroborates the quantitative finding of this gap. The negative impact of these gaps can affect the quality of education and the inclusiveness of schools, potentially limiting access and equal opportunities for children with special needs.

Table 9: Coefficients for Results

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	3.1	0.15		20.67	0.001
Perceived Gap	-0.58	0.06	-0.68	-9.24	0.001

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The study concludes that stakeholders' support for the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in mainstream classrooms is significantly influenced by their familiarity with inclusive education policies, as well as their perceptions of the supportiveness and effectiveness of these policies. Descriptive findings revealed a generally high level of familiarity among stakeholders, which regression analysis confirmed as the strongest predictor of support. Perceived supportiveness of policies also showed a significant positive effect, indicating that when stakeholders view policies as helpful and accommodating, they are more likely to support inclusion efforts. Although the perceived effectiveness of policies had a smaller effect size, it still played a meaningful role in shaping support, emphasizing the need for visible and successful implementation. The model explained a substantial portion (70.4%) of the variance in stakeholder support, underscoring the importance of these three factors. Overall, the findings suggest that promoting awareness of inclusive education policies, ensuring these policies are seen as supportive, and improving implementation outcomes are critical strategies for enhancing stakeholder support for inclusive education.

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 Policy Recommendations

To enhance stakeholder support for inclusive education, the following policy recommendations are proposed: First, the government should prioritize the integration of inclusive education principles into national education policy frameworks with clear guidelines specifically addressing the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities. Second, policy makers should ensure that inclusive education policies are regularly reviewed and updated through participatory processes that involve teachers, parents, and disability rights organizations to reflect current needs and practical realities. Third, policies should mandate systematic dissemination of inclusive education information through official channels, including training institutions, district education offices, and school management bodies, to improve stakeholders' awareness and familiarity. Fourth, national policies should include provisions for regular monitoring, evaluation, and public reporting on the implementation of inclusive education to enhance transparency and accountability. Finally, the government should ensure that policies are backed by adequate funding and resource allocation to support effective implementation at all levels of the education system.

5.2.2 Future Research

Future research should explore the longitudinal impact of stakeholder familiarity, perceived supportiveness, and perceived effectiveness of inclusive education policies on actual classroom practices and student outcomes for children with intellectual disabilities. It is also important to investigate these relationships in different geographical and cultural contexts across Tanzania to understand regional variations in attitudes and policy implementation. Additionally, future studies should include qualitative approaches such as interviews and focus group discussions to capture in-depth perspectives and lived experiences of key stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and students with disabilities. Further research could also examine the role of training institutions and professional development programs in shaping stakeholders' understanding and commitment to inclusive education.

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