

## **Special Needs Education Teachers: Their Roles in the Learning Process of Students with Special Needs in Inclusive Secondary Schools in Dar es Salaam City, Tanzania**

### **Abstract**

*Special needs education is the practice of educating students with special needs in a way that provides accommodations that address their differences, disabilities, and special needs. Special needs education teachers are trained personnel who work with students with special learning needs. This study investigated the roles of special needs education teachers in the learning process of students with special needs in inclusive secondary schools in Dar es salaam city, Tanzania. It was guided by two objectives: to identify the support given by special education to students with special needs in inclusive schools and to examine the roles of an inclusive school environment on the learning of students with special education needs. The study employed a mixed research approach and a case study design. The sample included three public inclusive secondary schools where a total of 417 respondents, including education officers, heads of schools and teachers, were sampled using both probability and nonprobability sampling techniques. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and observation. Data were analysed through descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations. The synthesis of the findings revealed that special needs teachers are reported to be providing support in terms of giving large print notes and setting special exams. However, assessments and IEP programs were not performed effectively. Some schools lacked slabs and ramps to connect important areas such as libraries, offices, toilets, and playgrounds. The study recommends that there is a need for continued provision of assistive devices and modification of schools' infrastructures.*

**Keywords:** *Inclusive, special needs, inclusive secondary schools, teachers, learning process, teachers, students, Tanzania*

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

It is evident that students with special needs and those who are disadvantaged due to their gender, race, income, or other lifestyle choices should receive their education in inclusive settings. Inclusive education has been recognised internationally as a philosophy for attaining equity, justice, and quality education for all children, especially those who have been traditionally excluded from mainstream education for reasons of disability, ethnicity, gender, or other characteristics.

Internationally, the development of inclusive education dates back to the 1950s, when the civil rights movement began to gain traction in the United States. The main objective of the project is to provide students with special needs with the same opportunity for a worthwhile education by developing institutions that support a culture of acceptance and belonging with the aim of meeting the diverse requirements of all students (Al-Shammari, et al, 2019). The World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, Spain, in 1994, which promoted education as a fundamental human right and called for policies that could support all students regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions, provided the foundation for the inclusive education approach.

While inclusive education has been implemented successfully in many countries, other countries are still in the process of achieving this goal (Nguyet and Ha, 2010). Experience in many countries demonstrates that the integration of children and youth with special educational needs is best achieved within inclusive schools that serve all children within a community. Success in an inclusive setting requires a concerted effort, not only by teachers and school staff but also by peers, parents, families, and volunteers. (Salamanca Statement, 1994).

Mittler (2000) stated that the goal of inclusion in education is to restructure and reform the school so that all children can be part of the social and educational opportunities offered in a school. Mittler insists that teachers need to have skills for teaching children with special disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Therefore, for special education needs students in inclusive secondary schools to benefit from learning, each school should have enough competent special

education teachers to cover the entire subject taught. That is, each student will receive support accordingly since each disability category available in an inclusive school will have a teacher to facilitate.

The Finnish Basic Education Act (1998) and the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2004) document the idea that every child has a right to obtain an education in the nearest school and to receive individual support. Many researchers, administrators, and teachers appreciate the flexibility of the present system in that teachers can use their professional expertise to plan individual support. To them, inclusion means guaranteeing the right to meaningful learning, with a focus on the learners' individual needs (Halinen, 2008).

The Swedish Act on Education (1985, 2010) states that "All children should have equal access to education regardless of their gender, place of residence and social economic status". Students who have additional learning needs must have special support (Margret, 1993). Support in academics is intended to be provided or guided by special education teachers in collaboration with regular teachers.

However, knowledge about children with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorders (ADHDs) is not very well developed or widespread in the Norwegian education system. The numbers of children with an ADHD diagnosis vary greatly between schools. Both the diagnosis and treatment of ADHD have been highly controversial in Norway. Therefore, the inclusion criteria for ADHD have not been met (Thyge, 2021). For teaching inclusive classes to be effective, special and regular teachers should be enriched with skills for different types of disabilities, including attention deficit and hyperactivity disorders, which are among the most difficult to address. It is important to know clearly whether teachers in inclusive secondary schools manage to address these kinds of disabilities and meet the objectives planned for each student.

In South Africa, following the Salamanca Statement (1994), the move towards inclusive education started within the discussion of special needs. The National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training and the National Committee on Education Support Services were appointed by the Ministry of Education in 1996. These two bodies joined forces to study the diverse needs of learners within the whole education system. In the system, a screening, identification, assessment, and support strategy was developed to enable South African schools to respond systematically to diverse needs within an inclusive education system.

Emmanuel (2009) studied teachers' attitudes towards including children with special needs and disabilities in mainstream schools in Ghana and indicated that teachers in Ghana were positive towards the inclusion of students with special needs and disabilities. Being positive means that they are ready to provide any needed support to students with education special needs as well as social and behavioral issues, hence directly influencing their day-to-day learning.

Additionally, Hehir (2016) argues that students with special education needs are included in inclusive classrooms for them to develop stronger skills in reading and mathematics. Additionally, inclusive classrooms could increase rates of attendance and improve their self-esteem and confidence. However, effectively including a student with a disability requires teachers and school management to develop capacities and support the individual strengths and needs of every student.

Tanzania, a member of the global community, has ratified and signed a number of international treaties, including the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. For example, the government signed a policy statement on education for all (EFA) and passed a measure in 2009 regarding the rules governing children (Karakoski & Stroem, 2005).

Early 1998 saw the official launch of inclusive education in Tanzania, four years after the Salamanca statement of 1994, which served as the impetus for the creation of inclusive education (MoEVT, 2009; Tugaraza, 1994). The Salamanca Statement, which emphasises the need to give basic education to exceptional individuals, was ratified by the Tanzanian government in 1994. For EFA goals to be realised, this is a crucial step. Ratification has played a crucial role in efforts to achieve the objectives of the inaugural Education For All conference, which took place in Jomtien in 1990. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, according to the United Nations (2007), was made open for signature on March 30, 2007, and such activities greatly support inclusive education for people with disabilities.

In seven primary schools in Temeke Municipality, the Tanzanian government and UNESCO launched a pilot project for inclusive classrooms. Following the trial, more inclusive primary schools increased to a total of 208 by 2008, while more inclusive secondary schools expanded to accommodate children with a variety of needs (MoEVT, 2008). These government measures have been implemented in tandem with the formulation of several laws that have aided in the advancement of inclusive education in Tanzania's educational system (Possi, and Milinga, 2017; MoEVT, 2009).

Tanzania has signed a number of international declarations and UN conventions, among other accomplishments. Additionally, since 1998, it has been carrying out a number of programmes, including the Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP I, 2002–2006; PEDP II, 2007–2011) and the Secondary Education Development Plan (SEDP I, 2004–2009; SEDP II, 2010–2015). (MoEVT, 2010). Additionally, the 2008 Teacher Development and Management Strategy (TDMS) placed a strong emphasis on luring, supporting, and keeping qualified teachers. Among other things, the TDMS asks for revising the preservice teacher education curricula and in-service programmes to incorporate special needs and inclusive education. It also calls for increasing the ability of primary and secondary school teachers in special needs teaching approaches (MoEVT, 2009).

Empirical data suggest that the PEDP and SEDP (I and II) have been successful in increasing the enrollment of students with disabilities in primary and secondary schools, respectively, among other things (MoEVT, 2010). Children with disabilities are enrolling in more conventional schools in Tanzania, both for elementary and secondary education, according to MoEVT (2011). According to the data, the number of students with disabilities enrolled in elementary schools climbed from 18992 in 2006 to 26436 in 2011, while the number of students with disabilities enrolled in secondary schools increased from 716 in 2006 to 5534 in 2010 and then decreased to 5008 in 2011. (Mkumbo, 2008; MoEVT, 2011)

The current situation of special and inclusive education in the country indicates an evolution from special to integrated and later on to inclusive education, which has led to an increase in the number of schools and subsequent relatively higher enrolment figures for children with special needs (Mwajabu & Joseph, 2017). According to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology Education Sector Performance Report for 2020/2021, the total number of students enrolled in lower secondary schools was 9,636 in different categories of disabilities.

The provision of help and extra support in an inclusive school is moral, material, financial and technical. These provisions can be obtained from peers/students or colleagues, specialist teachers, parents, relevant professionals such as psychologists, medical teams, speech therapists, physiotherapists, social workers, government ministries, NGOs (nongovernment organisations), and communities (Tanzanian Secondary School Inclusive Education Training Manual, 2006).

The provision of support in academics, behavior, morals, and ethics are the main duties of special teachers in inclusive schools. These provisions influence the smooth learning of students with disabilities. Furthermore, special teachers are experts who train other stakeholders, such as regular teachers, regular students, parents, school owners, and education officers, to establish a strong team that would provide effective support to the additional needs of students to make their learning more meaningful. Not only has that but also overseen the availability of assistive devices and a friendly environment for students with special needs in their respective schools.

Despite successes in including children with physical disabilities in mainstream inclusive schools, there is still a mismatch between the professional competences of teachers and the disabilities that their students have identified. This is because most Tanzanian instructors lack the knowledge and abilities necessary to properly teach both special education and inclusive classes (Kapinga, 2014). According to certain Tanzanian scholars (Possi, 2009; Mkonongwa, 2014; Msuya (2005; Tungaraza (2010)), it is crucial for pupils to learn in an inclusive atmosphere by providing them with the necessary resources, equipment, and environmental settings. To ensure that students with learning disabilities are included in the curriculum and the school's equal opportunity policies, Mkonongwa (2014) suggested that inclusive education must be a part of such policies.

In addition, Possi (2009) demonstrates that the majority of instructors in Tanzania's elementary schools lack the necessary comprehensive education skills, while some are qualified to hold the position of teacher. The effectiveness of providing inclusive education depends on the standard of instruction, including the teaching personnel, instructional materials, and school atmosphere. According to Tungaraza (2010), Tanzania currently provides primary and secondary school education for some pupils with various disabilities, including autism, multiple disabilities, mental retardation, physical disabilities, visual impairments, hearing impairments, and more in both special and inclusive schools. In this case, students in inclusive schools can suffer from unequal learning support due to the lack or shortage of appropriate special education teachers because trained special education teachers have been specialised in one category of specialty in which it is difficult to acquire enough skills to handle inclusive classes. To contribute to this scholarly discussion, this study delves into the specific roles of special needs education teachers in the learning process of students with special needs in inclusive secondary schools.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Special needs education is the practice of educating students in a way that provides accommodations that address their differences, disabilities, and special needs. In most developed countries, such as the United States of America, Finland, Denmark, and Norway, educators modify teaching methods and environments so that the maximum number of students serve in general education settings and learn smoothly. They also provide a continuum of services in which students with various disabilities receive multiple degrees of support based on their individual needs.

All students have the right to obtain quality education. Special education teachers are responsible for designing and implementing instructions that help students learn. According to Meier (2018), a special education teacher works hard to create a warm, supportive relationship with students, colleagues, and families. They must help students overcome concerns about receiving additional support, encourage parents who feel nervous or hesitant about IEP, or meet with teachers to collaborate on better strategies to help struggling special education students. Special education teachers serve as managers who are responsible for developing IEP programs. They provide necessary information to classroom teachers before the general education classroom about the students' disability, medical issues, and assistive devices needed. Additionally, develop schedules and plans for para-educator duties. Moreover, they maintain contact with students' parents and families (Boyer & Mainzer, 2003)

According to the Asia Pacific Journal of Education (2016). The Ideal Special Education Teacher in Nigeria, early intervention and early identification of a child with special needs is an important special education teacher's job. The teacher designs, teaches appropriate curricula and assigns work geared toward each student's needs and abilities. Special teachers also prepare students with special needs for daily life skills and, after graduation, for economic empowerment.

NASSET (2021) mentioned that one of the important jobs of special education teachers is to foster positive social relationships between students with disabilities and their peers by preparing nondisabled peers in the classroom so that they understand the needs of their new classmates. The teacher must also establish and maintain a positive and supportive classroom atmosphere. Inclusive classrooms are more successful when their nondisabled peers are accepting and supportive. Many schools are establishing peer-mentor relationships to educate nondisabled peers and help build relationships for emotional and social support.

A special education teacher provides academic interaction and support for children with unique needs (Meier, 2018). Serving as an advocate and a teacher, a special education teacher works with the classroom teacher, counselor, and family members to prepare an individualised education program (IEP) for students who are struggling academically, socially, and personally. Assessment, instructional planning, and teaching are the primary duties of special teachers. Moreover, they might monitor students' progress and give any special assistance or supplemental learning materials. Additionally, pull out of the classroom for one-on-one lessons or sensory activities or arrange for time with counselors, speech therapists, dyslexia coaches, and other specialised personnel.

According to Marjatta (2009), teaching often focuses on giving support to children who have challenges in main academic subjects. Similarly, Gabriel and Kenneth (2020), in their study conducted in two primary schools in Zambia, mentioned that teachers teaching learners with learning disabilities in an inclusive setup need to offer a wide range of support services to learners to benefit meaningfully from the education system. They added that counselling is one of the services that is offered to learners with disabilities in an inclusive classroom. Learners with learning disabilities need counselling services because of the many obstacles they encounter in their academic life.

In addition, Smith (1998) added that teachers working together to combine their knowledge and resources to help plan curriculum and instruction is an important concept related to coteaching, sharing ideas, accepting each other's ideas and concerns, and collaborating to find solutions to their problems will benefit student academic and social success in the classroom. Bigge, et al, (1999) said that collaboration has become a common and necessary practice in special education in the USA. Teachers are better able to diagnose and solve learning and behavior problems in the classroom when they work together. Three ways in which team members can work collaboratively are through coordination, consultation, and team. He also adapted Salend (2011), who found that general education teachers and special education teachers planning and delivering instruction together in an inclusive classroom have become increasingly common. He added that common coteaching formats are one teaching one helping, parallel teaching, station teaching, alternative teaching, and team teaching.

Heward (2012) added that schools must collaborate with parents of students with special needs in the planning and implementation of special education and related services. Parents' input and wishes must be considered in determining IEP goals and related services. Gagare (2018) listed the roles of special education teachers, parents, and schools in inclusive education, which are to encourage special needs students' interests in various areas, help

students develop a friendship with classmates, and share goals and expectations for students before meeting with the administration and deciding upon children's IEP. Additionally, to know the rights of special needs students. Moreover, special teachers should identify students with disabilities through intervention.

Due to the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), special education teachers' role in a general education classroom is to help teach the curriculum, work with assessing and evaluations, and help with classroom management. IDEA added that it is important for the special education teacher to bring a personal set of skills that will help enhance the learning of students Ripley, (1997)

The major challenge among students with special needs to access inclusive primary education in Tanzania is the lack of accessible infrastructure, which involves unsupportive classrooms, laboratories, libraries, washrooms, and sports and game spaces. The lack of physical and social access for disabled young people to primary education is a major barrier to creating a pool of appropriately qualified students to enter secondary and higher education on an equal basis (Croft, 2010).

The Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report 2010 noted that reaching marginalised children with disabilities remains one of the main problems in many African countries, leading to the wide exclusion of the group from quality and inclusive primary education (Macleod, 2014).

The study conducted by Lugome (2018) on "Academic performance impediments among students with visual impairment in inclusive secondary schools in Tanzania examines teaching-learning strategies and methods, teaching adaptation of learning-teaching resources, and examination. The findings indicated that most of the teaching and learning strategies and methods employed in inclusive secondary schools were not adapted for students with visual impairment. Additionally, there was inappropriate or no adaptation of teaching and learning resources to the learning style of those students. This indicates that either the schools had no special education teachers or they were available but had a negative influence on the learning of students with special needs in inclusive classes.

According to Mmbaga (2002), poverty has been a challenge, as budget priority is normally given to areas that do not conduct inclusive education. It has caused a shortage of teaching and learning materials for inclusive schools, few or a lack of infrastructures such as classes, appropriate toilets, laboratories, and a library that are friendly for the disabled.

Various studies (Kapinga, 2012; Kisanji, 1998) have noted that schools that accommodate students with disabilities do not have enough competent special education teachers; therefore, most of the time, special needs students are left alone without any activity.

In Kenya, the study by Joseph, Iteba, and Mosiori (2014) about teachers' preparedness in the implementation of special needs education in primary schools in Nyamira District reported that common problems the teacher faced as they taught students with educational special needs were lack of support, lack of educational resources and adequate teaching and learning facilities. Additionally, there is a shortage of funds to run the integration process. This means that the availability of the mentioned things that are lacking will positively influence the learning of students with special needs in an inclusive setting.

For the special teacher to be great, commitment is needed. Additionally, should love his/her job and students. To meet these skills, the recruitment of special teachers and in-service training should be effective enough to equip them with full knowledge and various techniques to enable the preparation of appropriate lesson plans, instructional techniques, provision of support, the use of technology such as computers and the internet in instructing students as well as dealing with individual differences in and out of the classrooms. However, in most developed countries, most special teachers have those skills. In developing countries, Tanzania is still running behind.

The study conducted by Sandhya Limaye (2016) on factors influencing the accessibility of education for children with disabilities found that the general attitude of society, government officials, school staff and infrastructure, inadequate levels of training of key stakeholders and government policies are among the factors influencing the learning of children with disabilities. In the school setting, school staff and infrastructure are the most important. For inclusion to be effective. Therefore, it is time now to address all the shown areas through in-service training, modifying infrastructure in the school, and setting implementable policies on special needs education.

Similarly, Qinyi (2014) explained that to provide an inclusive school, the physical environment needs to be safe and accessible to all students, including those with physical and sensory disabilities. The school also needs to be structured in such a way that it minimises the effects of individual learning differences on achievement.

Due to their place in community development, the government of the United Republic of Tanzania has taken different measures to facilitate inclusion. Special education courses have been offered in colleges and universities such as Patandi, Sebastian Kolowa Memorial University (SEKOMU), Archbishop Mihayo University College of Tabora (AMUCTA), The Open University of Tanzania (OUT), University of Dodoma (UDOM) and Dar es Salaam (UD) to train enough special education teachers. Studies have been performed to investigate the areas of special needs, such as the performance of special needs students and the perception of teachers, special teachers, and parents about inclusive education and learning of children with disabilities, school environment, and disability. In Dar es Salaam City, little has been done to investigate the roles of trained special education teachers in the learning of students with special needs in public inclusive secondary schools. Therefore, this study investigated the roles of special education teachers in the learning of students with special education needs in inclusive secondary schools in Dar es Salaam. Specifically, it intended to identify the support given by special education to students with special needs in inclusive schools and to examine the roles of inclusive school environments on the learning of students with special education needs.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed research approach (both qualitative and quantitative) and a case study design. The study population was the city special education officer, secondary education officer, head of schools, teachers, and students in three public inclusive secondary schools in Dar es Salaam City. The sample size of this study was 417 from a total population of 4,139 individuals. Purposive and stratified simple random techniques were used to sample the participants. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and observation. Quantitative data were analysed through descriptive statistics with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21, while cross-tabulations were used to analyse qualitative data. Methodical triangulation, content validation and member checking were used to ensure the validity of the instrument results, while reliability was ensured through member checking, credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. Research ethical issues were adhered to through participants' informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, among other ethical issues.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Support given by special education teachers to students with special needs in inclusive schools

Under this objective, the study intended to answer questions about the help and support provided by special education teachers to the learning of students with special needs in inclusive schools in Dar es Salaam city. The study aimed to determine whether special education teachers were helpful for the learning of students with special education needs and the support given to special education needs by special education teachers in inclusive secondary schools in Dar es Salaam City. The investigation was performed through questionnaires with five Likert scale options and statement items that were answered by all respondents, and the responses are shown in table 1.

**Table 1: Responses to support given to students with special needs.**

Response Statement	SA		A		U		D		SD	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Special education teachers are working hard to support special needs students in inclusive classes.	193	46	116	28			60	14	48	12
Special education teachers are encouraging special needs students to learn.	60	14	214	51	13	3	84	20	46	11
Special needs students are not much enjoying the presence of special education needs in learning.	64	15	124	30	24	6	129	31	76	18
Special education teachers are doing coteaching with regular teachers to add value to the teaching and learning	3	1	31	7	7	2	287	69	90	22

Response Statement	SA		A		U		D		SD	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
process.										
Special education teachers are providing special needs students with simplified notes and other materials to enable them understand well the lessons.	55	13	208	50	15	4	110	26	29	7
Special education teachers are conducting remedial classes to special needs students.	187	45	126	30			78	19	26	6
Special education teachers are not helping special needs students to use assistive devices such as computers and braille machines.	206	49	145	35	7	2	45	11	14	3

Key: SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, U= Undecided/Neutral, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree. For positive statements SA=5, A=4, U=3, D=2, SD=1 and for negative statements, SD=5, D=4, U= 3, A= 2, SA= 1

Table 1 shows the responses to different statements seeking information on the helpfulness and support given by special education teachers to special needs students in inclusive schools. In the statement “Special education teachers are working hard to support special needs students, the majority of 193 (46%) strongly agreed and 116 (28%) agreed. However, 60 (14%) disagreed, and 48 (12%) strongly disagreed. Under the statement that said special education teachers are encouraging special needs students to learn, 214 (51%) agreed and 60 (14%) strongly agreed, 84 (20%) disagreed and 46 (11%) strongly disagreed while 13 (3%) were neutral.

In addition, in the statement “Special needs students do not enjoy the presence of special education teachers”, the responses were distributed moderately; 124 (30%) agreed, 64 (15%) strongly agreed, 129 (31) disagreed and 76 (18%) strongly disagreed, while 24 (6%) were neutral. Furthermore, in the statement asking if special education teachers coteach with regular teachers to add value to the teaching and learning process, the majority 287 (69%) and 90 (22%) disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively, but 31 (7%) agreed and 3 (1%) strongly agreed. Neutral was 7 (2%).

Additionally, the study wanted to determine whether special education teachers are providing special needs students with simplified notes and other materials to enable them to understand the lessons well. The majority, 208 (50%), agreed and 55 (13%) strongly agreed; 110 (26%) disagreed and 29 (7%) strongly disagreed with the statement. Fifteen (4%) were neutral. Another statement was about whether the special education teachers are conducting remedial classes with students with special needs, where the majority 187 (45%) strongly agreed and 126 (30) agreed. On the other hand, 78 (19%) disagreed and 26 (6%). In the negative statement, “Special education teachers are not helping special needs students to use assistive devices such as computers and Braille machines”, the majority (206, 49%) strongly agreed, 145 (35%) agreed with the statement, 45 (11%) disagreed, 14 (3%) strongly disagreed, and 7 (2%) were neutral. Therefore, the findings revealed that special education teachers give effective support to students with special needs to foster their learning capabilities. In some items, the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, especially those with negative statements. It was noted that the result also shows that there is minimum learning encouragement to special education needs students, and most of the teachers are not conducting coteaching the practice, which mostly strengthens the teaching and learning in inclusive classes.

In concurring with the findings, this was supported by Oxford School District UK (2021), who noted that the duties of special education teachers in the learning of students with special needs in learning include providing direct support to students in a classroom by delivering instruction and ensuring learning through a variety of coteaching models and strategies and ensuring appropriate accommodations for the curriculum, lesson and learning environment.

Through an interview with City Educational Officers, they said the following:

CEO 1 said,

*"Special education teachers usually give support to students with special needs in their daily teaching and learning processes, most of them use their knowledge obtained from colleges to give practices during normal class hours and sometimes at extra time. Special education teachers use different devices, such as a computer, to print materials and sometimes use audiovisual tools to make them easier to understand. In addition, for partial visual impairment, they advise putting them in front of the class for more help. In some schools, physically impaired students with difficulties in holding pens are supported to write by using laptops".*

Similarly, CEO 2 said that special teachers support special needs students in their daily routines. For example, students with low vision are given large print books and large print exams that are normally set by special education teachers in cooperation with regular teachers. He added that the government via the Institute of Education (TIE) has started to supply large print books for all subjects, and teachers use them to teach L. I students. This is in line with what was indicated by the one head of school who indicated that special education teachers do coteaching in supporting practically and theoretically learning to students with special needs. Additionally, we have interpreters who assist hearing-impaired learners. They are doing well in such a way that the special needs students are now happy to be here.

Through focus group discussions, students said the following:

Students from school A commented that *"Special need teachers give us support on learning, sometimes they call and teach us after class hours. We feel happy to be recognised, God bless them!"* Additionally, students from school B added by saying,

*"Special education teachers give us support by preparing special large printing size notes, specifically for students with partial visual impairment. We are also given special exams, especially for students with difficulties in writing that focus on blank filling, true and false, and multiple choice. Additionally, we are involved in sports and games, although it is not to the maximum".*

Other participants reported that special education teachers give support to special needs students through simplified notes that assist students with special needs. They provide materials that facilitate understanding during teaching and learning processes; furthermore, for students with hearing impairment, some teachers use sign language to support effective and efficient understanding. The students pointed out that they have interpreters who help support them in class. In this case, the study's observation witnessed the regular students cooperating very well with special needs students. One of the students reported,

*"At every beginning of the new academic year our special teachers used to orient us about inclusive and our responsibilities to our fellow students with special needs, we love and support them in learning, taking birth, washing, drying, ironing clothes, and playing".*

However, it was noted through discussion that students with hearing impairment in school A lacked specialised teachers in hearing and speech. This means that although they need support in the area of sign language, nothing is done to help. Both regular and disabled students suggested that H. I specialised teachers should be employed. Moreover, in all three inclusive schools, the number of physically impaired students is higher than in other categories of disabilities, but they have no therapists or occupational personnel employed to support them. A study performed by Gagare (2018) also posited that the roles of special education teachers, parents, and schools in inclusive education are to encourage special needs students' interests in various areas, help students develop a friendship with classmates, share goals and expectations for students before meeting with the administration and decide upon children's IEP.

Data collected from the focused group discussion indicated that most students were happy with the support given by special education teachers. In school B, for example, they said special education teachers have been working close to them and their families. Special needs students are divided into special education teachers in such a way that each teacher has a group of students to take care of every day. In school C, one of the special needs students witnessed that special teachers were teaching them in a friendly way. Additionally, they said that teachers were checking their health development frequently and providing advice to parents. However, in school A, special needs students were

not happy enough due to the challenges they faced. They said that they were facing some social challenges, such as a lack of pocket money, assistive devices, and fares during school holidays.

Although the students were boarding scholars, the schools were reported not to be offering breakfast to students; they were not comfortable at all. They added that teachers have been seeking support from different stakeholders for them, and they have been receiving wheelchairs, girls' pads, exercise books and pens, lotions for albinism, and others. Moreover, special education teachers in all schools had neither a written individualised education program (IEP) for close students' academic and social follow-up nor clear records of the names and information of each student, including healthy students and academics, which can be used for planning assistive programs. With reference to Boyer & Mainzer (2003), one of the special teachers' jobs is to maintain contact with students' parents and families. This will enable the changing of ideas and information on the student's academic and social progress. According to the Asia Pacific Journal of Education (2016). The Ideal Special Education Teacher in Nigeria, early intervention and early identification of a child with special needs is an important special education teacher's job.

Generally, the findings in this objective show that special education teachers are helpful and have much support for the learning of special education needs students. The challenge noted was the lack or inadequacy of special teachers in the category of H. and V.Y. This results in hearing and visually impaired students, especially in School 'A', who lack support and hence depend on the students themselves to help. The shortage of special education teachers might be attributed to the provision of a single subject for special education teachers. For example, in the university, student teachers are required to specialise in one area: visual impairment or intellectual impairment. In this case, they manage to teach only one thing. This implies that there will be a need for more teachers in one school with different specialities. To provide enough support to students with special needs, inclusive schools should have special teachers in at least every category of disability because it is difficult for one special education teacher to teach students with visual impairment, hearing, deaf or physical impairment. In this case, in-service training to equip regular teachers with basic knowledge about teaching students with different disabilities is very important. Additionally, the philosophy of cognitive inclusive education practises stresses the use of various instructional approaches that are centred on learning tasks such as taking notes and summarising (Qambaday & Mwila, 2022)). According to behaviourists, "shaping," which divides difficult tasks into several steps and ensures that each step is reinforced in a specific order, should be used as a strategy to maximise students' learning of new behaviours (Janice, 2016).

### **School environment and learning process of students with special needs**

This study was interested in assessing the role of the school's environment on the learning of students with special education needs in Dar es Salaam City. To achieve this objective, the CEO (N=02) and HOS (N=03) were provided the interview, teachers (N=23) were provided the questionnaire, and students (N=389) were provided both the FGD and the questionnaire by using Likert scales.

The frequency of responses to items about the availability of basic assistive devices and a friendly environment to influence learning for special needs students is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Response to the availability of an assistive and friendly environment**

Response statement	SA		A		U		D		SD	
	F	%	f	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
The school has all special needs teachers required in every category of disability.	8	2	65	16	9	2	192	46	143	34
The school has basic assistive devices for students with special needs.	92	22	146	35	20	5	120	29	29	7
School buildings are friendly enough for special needs students to learn freely.	76	18	239	57	9	2	74	18	19	6
There are no slabs and ramps for wheelchair students to pass.	5	1	16	4			316	76	80	19
The school management never cares			5	1	7	2	16	4	389	93

Response statement	SA		A		U		D		SD	
	F	%	f	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
about the welfare of special needs students in school.										
The maintenance of assistive devices like wheelchairs is done frequently.	9	2	33	8	18	4	234	56	123	30
Students with educational special needs are satisfied with the school learning environment.	25	6	32	8	26	6	320	77	14	3
Furniture is not conducive to all students with special needs.	60	14	315	76	14	3	22	5	6	1

Key: SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, U=Undecided/Neutral, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree. For positive statements SA=5, A=4, U=3, D=2, SD=1 and for negative statements, SD=5, D=4, U= 3, A= 2, SA= 1

Table 2 presents the responses about the availability of assistive devices and a friendly environment in inclusive schools, which have a large role in the learning of students with special educational needs. In the first statement that asked if the school had all special needs teachers required in every category of disability, the majority, 192 (46%), disagreed, 143 (34%) strongly disagreed, 65 (16%) agreed and 8 (2%) strongly agreed, but 9 (2%) were neutral. In the statement about whether the school has basic assistive devices for students with special needs, the majority 146 (35%) and 92 (22%) agreed and strongly agreed, respectively, while 120 (29%) and 29 (7%) disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively, and 20 (5%) were neutral.

In addition, regarding whether the school buildings were friendly enough for special needs students to learn freely, 239 (57%) agreed, and 76 (18%) strongly agreed; 74 (18%) disagreed, and 19 (6%) strongly disagreed, while 9 (2%) were neutral. Furthermore, 316 (76%) disagreed, and 80 (19%) strongly disagreed with the statement that there are no slabs and ramps for wheelchair students to pass, while 16 (4%) agreed and 5 (1%) strongly agreed. Another statement was “The school management never cares about the welfare of special needs students in school”. In this statement, the majority, 389 (93%), strongly disagreed, 16 (4%) disagreed, 5 (1%) agreed and 7 (2%) were neutral. Moreover, the response to the statement “The maintenance of assistive devices like wheelchairs is done frequently”, the majority 320 (77%) and 123 (30%) disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively, while 33 (8%) and 9 (2%) agreed and strongly agreed, respectively, but 18 (4%) were neutral. Under the statement “Students with educational special needs are satisfied with the school learning environment”, 320 (77%) disagreed, 14 (3%) strongly disagreed, 32 (8%) agreed, 25 (6%) strongly agreed, and 26 (6%) did not respond. Additionally, regarding whether furniture is not conducive to all students with special needs, the majority, 315 (76%), agreed and 60 (14%) strongly agreed, while 22 (5%) and 6 (1%) disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. Fourteen (3%) were neutral.

The responses showed that the availability of assistive devices and a friendly school environment is a challenge in our inclusive schools. There is no denying that the school setting plays a significant role in how well students with special needs learn, and special education teachers are the ones who must be on the front lines of assessment and advice to the administration of the school and the government regarding the necessary building or modification of infrastructure that will support disabled students in learning.

The replies generally showed that inclusive schools are not welcoming. According to the majority, there are not enough teachers to cover all types of disabilities; hence, some categories of special education teachers are in short supply in schools. Basic assistive devices have also been considered insufficient in helping children with special needs learn. For instance, a student who does not have a wheelchair will not be able to attend class and will thus be unable to learn, or a student who does not have glasses or a braille machine will not be able to read. The responses for buildings and upkeep also showed that the difficulty is not yet very great. Despite some disagreement, the majority of participants believed that there was enough furnishings.

The study evaluated the environments of the schools and discovered that they are rather welcoming. For instance, pathways with slabs and ramps are necessary to connect all key locations so that students in wheelchairs can navigate and access them with ease. The network of slabs in all three inclusive schools was incomplete, making it

challenging for students to move from one location to another. Additionally, there were no resource rooms or centres that could be used to run additional special programmes and offer greater help.

Wheelchaired students need to move from either the dormitory to the classroom, toilet, offices, laboratory, or library. The shortage of connected slabs in inclusive schools hinders wheel-chaired students from easily moving to access services, which can affect their learning. For example, both schools A and B, which accommodate many wheel-chaired students, have no slabs to the library. In school B, most of the administrative offices are on the upper stairs where there were steep steps. Special education teachers should be advocates to advise administrators to improve the infrastructure to facilitate the smooth learning of special education needs students.

Moreover, the study's observation noted that there were 02 paraprofessionals in school A employed by the City Council. However, they were not performing their duties effectively. For example, during the visit, one of them was absent without any notice to the management. Moreover, they were living outside the school while the school was boarding. In that case, special needs students were not prepared on time to match the school schedule, such as attending class on time or being supervised in evening preparations. Likewise, in school B, they lacked a patron; instead, there was a matron while it was a boarding boy's school. In such a case, she could not be able to provide close support as needed. Therefore, regular students were the most likely to support disabled students, as they spent much time supporting their fellows and were sometimes affected academically.

In addition, respondents were asked to give recommendations about special needs teachers on supporting students with special needs in inclusive classes. CEOs and HOS recommend the following:

1. More seminars and workshops are needed for both regular teachers and special needs teachers to teach them techniques for dealing with students with special needs to make them learn effectively.
2. Motivation is highly needed as well as teaching materials and new teaching aids for facilitating effective and efficient teaching of students with disabilities.
3. Assistive devices such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, computers, Braille machines, lotion for albinism, crutches, and armpits need to be supplied in inclusive schools because most parents fail to buy for their children.
4. Vocational skills should be prioritised for disabled students' future lives.
5. There is a need to train special teachers who will fit at least two or three categories of disability to overcome a shortage of special teachers in our schools.

Students recommend the following:

1. Special teachers should put more effort into the provision of devices such as hearing aids, wheelchairs, lenses, and glasses for albinism and computers to make them easy to understand.
2. Special and regular teachers should avoid the stigmatisation of learners with special needs by providing inclusive seminars to all teachers and learners.
3. Continue preparing and giving them simplified notes for learning as well as having large printing size words for visually impaired learners.
4. Kiswahili to be used in teaching or teachers to translate some English difficult words to make special needs students more understanding.

Generally, most of the respondents recommended that the conducive learning environment should be prioritised in all-inclusive schools to make special needs students learn freely as regular learners. In addition, assistive devices should be ensured in these schools to facilitate easy learning for students with special needs. Boyer & Mainzer (2003) noted that it is highly odd to bring the required information to the classroom of students with disabilities; for instance, the most important things are medical issues and assistive devices. Additionally, paraeducator schedules and plans are created by special education teachers. Additionally, they stay in touch with the families and parents of the pupils. According to a study by Qinyi (2014), a school's physical environment must be secure and open to all students, including those with physical and sensory impairments, to provide an inclusive learning environment. Additionally, the organisation of the school must be such that it reduces the impact of student learning differences on achievement.

A school-friendly environment and the availability of required assistive devices for learners with special education needs were also mentioned as intervening variables in the study conceptual framework. However, the required facilities are full cost, and parents themselves cannot afford to buy. Moreover, many schools lack proper buildings with friendly ways to accommodate the different needs of people with disabilities. The community and government should focus on ensuring the availability of assistive devices and regular modification and maintenance to enhance the policy of equal education opportunities for all children.

Another important factor in the school environment that was viewed as an important factor by the participants was the collaboration between special education teachers and other stakeholders in the learning of students with special needs. The interview with the head of the school concluded that the collaboration in lesson preparation and teaching among teachers is minimal. However, special teachers have been establishing cooperation with outside stakeholders, such as CCBRT and Muhimbili National Hospital, where students receive assistive devices and health support.

The findings implied that special education requires teachers to collaborate with regular teachers on average, and sometimes teachers have no time to share ideas or prepare lessons to add value and make special needs students understand. In addition, verbatim quotes show that special needs teachers need extra time and extra methodologies as well as materials and resources to make learners understand better. On the other hand, special education teachers are doing their best to collaborate with other stakeholders who have been providing different support that influences students' learning. However, on the days of data collection, the study spent a great deal of time in all schools, but there were no coteaching practices observed in inclusive classes.

Collaboration between general and special education teachers is essential, according to Elizabeth et al. (2004), to satisfy the requirements of children with disabilities in general education classes. Additionally, Oxford School District - UK (2021) states that special education requires instructors to collaborate with other staff members, especially in grade-level teams, to lead coteaching, share student work, and ensure that instruction is in line with established standards and curricula.

For special education teachers to implement their work efficiently, they need support from different stakeholders who are able to give it, as they are not specialists in all fields. There are some issues that they cannot solve alone, and they need help from other professionals. Therefore, collaboration of all systems is very important, i.e., special teachers, regular teachers, school management, students, parents, other institutions, and NGOs. These groups should team and work together for effective learning of special education needs students. Addressing obstacles to learning and engagement is a joint responsibility of all parties involved in education. According to Landsberg et al., Calitz (2000) claims that learning assistance entails a team of coworkers who are available to help students who are having trouble learning. As a result, teachers of special education must organise the roles of each participant in the execution of inclusive education.

The constructivist approach places a strong emphasis on leveraging practical experiences to make learning more relevant. Collaboration between educators and other professionals will benefit students with disabilities as well as other participants by enhancing the value of real-world experiences. Collaboration will enable special education teachers to receive the support and counsel they need to ensure that students with special needs are retained, learn effectively, and ultimately achieve the highest level of independence possible in life. This is what the study's conceptual framework suggests would happen.

## **V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

The study concludes that special education teachers in inclusive secondary schools are aware of their obligations based on the data collected, analysed, and observed situations. The majority of special education teachers in inclusive secondary schools put in much effort in regard to providing support. To aid students with special needs in learning, they provide remedial instruction, table teaching, and simplified learning materials. Additionally, they oversee groups and promote cooperation among all pupils. However, some of them lack commitment, which causes crucial tasks such as student assessment and IEP development to be ineffectively completed.

## Recommendations

The efforts of the United Republic of Tanzania to set policies that direct the establishment of inclusive schools rather than integration schools are commended, as well as the introduction of courses for special education teachers in colleges and universities. From the findings of this study, it is recommended that curriculum developers and policy makers introduce courses that will enable special education teachers to specialise in more than one course to reduce the shortage of special education teachers in schools. Additionally, the employment of paraprofessionals and therapists is indispensable. Moreover, the government and community should improve the environment of schools to enable better access to and/or availability of assistive devices such as wheelchairs, crutches, and hearing aids that are too expensive for parents to buy.

## Consent

As per international standard or university standard, respondents' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

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