



THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS ON IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN TANZANIA

ISKUSTVA NASTAVNIKA SPECIJALNE EDUKACIJE U IMPLEMENTACIJI INKLUZIVNOG OBRAZOVANJA U ODABRANIM OSNOVNIM ŠKOLAMA U TANZANIJI

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ABSTRACT

The current study investigates lived experiences of special education teachers on implementing inclusive education in selected primary schools in Tanzania. Strategies used to build the capacity of the inclusive teachers and the challenges such teachers face in implementing the curriculum were examined. Thirty respondents were selected for the study. Data were collected through the interview and observation method. Data were coded and analysed through content analysis. The findings reveal that special education teachers attended trainings through workshops and seminars as means to enhance their knowledge and skills. These strategies helped them to know how to implement inclusive education. However, inadequate number of teachers, shortage of teaching facilities, curriculum challenges, large class size, lack of pedagogical skills and presence of students with multiple disabilities were reported as hindering factors for effective implementation of inclusive education. As such, there is a pressing need to increase the number of special education teachers, procure adequate teaching and learning facilities and offer continued support through specific and broad trainings using modern technologies.

Keywords: lived experiences, special education teachers, inclusive education, Tanzania.

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INTRODUCTION

Special education in Tanzania has a long history since 1950s, when it became the most prominent critical potential agenda as a basic right for all students, including students with disabilities (SWD), gifted and talented students (Possi & Millinga, 2017; Tungaraza, 2018). Historically, special education efforts in many parts of the world originated from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHRs) in 1948. As such, the government of Tanzania (GoT) started to recognize and respect children rights through signing and ratifying different international declarations to achieve the access of inclusive education (UNESCO, 1994; HakiElimu, 2008; MOEVT, 2016; Mapunda et al., 2017 and Possi & Millinga, 2017). To realize that, the GoT made several efforts to mobilize the support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the World Bank (WB) to ensure maximum participation and equal access to education for SWD (Mbunda, 2017). However, SWD experienced different challenges in their school learning environment calling for the presence of special education teachers and better school environments which help to accommodate the needs of each SWD (Masanja, 2016).

The implementation of inclusive education needs the presence and cooperation for both general teachers and special education teachers to provide effective learning for students with special needs (Allison, 2011). In ensuring students acquire the access of inclusive education; special teachers are the central figures to promoting inclusiveness, quality, equality, and equity as well as progress in curriculum to support students' learning (UNESCO, 2015). In connection to that, Boitumelo, Kuyini and Major (2020) argue that teachers with experience of teaching inclusive classes become more competent to teach pupils with disabilities. Also, Alborn-yilek (2010), Henerico (2015) and UNESCO (2015) argue that special education teachers are the key actors in implementing inclusive education to facilitate students' achievement through developing the best instructional pedagogy that suits students' diversity. In increasing the quality of inclusive education, the government of Tanzania recruited 11,547 special education teachers, of whom 7,928 were primary school teachers and 3,621 were secondary teachers of special education. Furthermore, to fill the gap of scarcity of special education teachers, the government licensed about 347 special teachers, of whom 328 were foreigners and 19 were Tanzanians (URT, 2019). Moreover, GoT trained 402 special education teachers, of whom 84 were specialized teachers who teach blind students, 118 were for the deaf and 200 were specialized in intellectual and visual impairments (URT, 2019).

Accordingly, Tanzania Education and Training Policy 2014 recognized the need of special education teachers through setting the procedures to develop students with talents disparities, learning speed and special needs learning at all levels of education to access education opportunities on an equal basis for all social groups. This is aligned with the 2025 Tanzania Development Vision which aims to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) to eradicate illiteracy at all levels of education (URT, 2014).

On their part, special education teachers need to adapt the correct and effective methods in the teaching and learning process which assist in teaching all students. Also, special teachers are supposed to employ different teaching methods such as learner-centred methods that influence learners' understanding (Uzunboyulu and Ozcan, 2019).

However, special education faces a number of challenges. For instance, Allison (2011) argues that the problems facing special education teachers hinder the success of the implementation of inclusive education. These challenges include insufficient knowledge and skills, insufficient teaching and learning facilities, and lack of a conducive environment which affect the implementation of inclusive education. Also, Alborno-yilek (2011) report that the shortage of special education teachers is a "national epidemic" which affects the implementation of inclusive education and has become a barrier for teachers to fulfil their responsibilities effectively due to the high number of students in inclusive classes. Though, special education teachers struggle in implementing inclusive education; yet there is little awareness from society, teachers and students which create negative attitude towards inclusive education. As it is, most reviews show little evidence in experiences of special education teachers in implementing inclusive primary education. Thus, the study on which this paper is based aimed to investigate the lived experiences of special education teachers especially strategies which help them to implement inclusive education, and the challenges they face in the classroom when implementing inclusive education.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Sample of participant

The study was conducted in Ilala Municipality, which is one of the five (5) districts located in the Dar es Salaam Region, Tanzania. Ilala Municipality was purposively selected because it has a high number of inclusive primary schools and a high enrolment of SWD compared with other districts in Dar es Salaam. There are 13 special schools and others with special needs units (URT, 2019b) in the region. Two schools with many special needs students were selected for the study. The study involved 30 respondents selected using purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling technique was employed because in the selected inclusive schools there were a fixed number of special teachers that had potential to provide in-depth information about the study.

Method of conducting research

This study employed a phenomenological study design which enables the researcher in capturing in-depth lived experiences of the respondents. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used to gather data from the respondents. The interview was administered by the first author to get information from the interviewees about the research problem. The study sought the opinions, experiences and feelings of the respondents regarding the challenges they face, the capacity building trainings they received and how they implement inclusive curriculum.

Furthermore, the study employed observation technique through partial participant observation. This observation provided a chance to observe the real situation during data collection. The researchers engaged in partial participant observation to observe important information that could not be accessed by other methods. For example, the researcher observed the availability of teaching materials like braille display machines, braille slates, stylus, books for the visually impaired and others on similar reflection. Also, observation

covered the way special education teachers implemented inclusive education. Therefore, this method was found to be powerful in complementing the information given through interviews to verify the respondents' rationality. The trustworthiness in qualitative research were ensured by using credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability (Shenton, 2014; Elo et al., 2014; Gunawan, 2015; Cohen et al., 2018).

Measuring instruments

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to reveal the lived experiences of special education teachers in selected primary schools in Ilala, Dar Es Salaam. Data were collected through interviews and observation checklist with the selected special education teachers. Interviews were done individually for each teacher and lasted for about 30 minutes for each interview. Furthermore, classroom observation to observe what the special education teachers were actually doing in class was done. The researchers observed things like the nature and size of class, the type of interaction between teachers and students, the arrangement of chairs and tables, classroom organisation, the presence of teaching and learning materials and how such materials were used and actual conduction of the lessons.

Data processing methods

Being a qualitative study, data obtained were interview scripts and observation notes. The obtained data were transcribed into a written form and then coded for analysis. The data was analysed and presented through content analysis procedures including, firstly, the preparation of a transcript of the raw data. Secondly, the main theme of the study was identified from the respondents' responses. Thirdly, was the classification of the data information whereby researcher put all the responses depend on similarities and differences of the collected information. Lastly, the findings were presented and discussed accordingly.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study investigated the lived experiences of special education teachers. Specifically, we investigated the strategies used in building the capacity of the special education teachers in the selected inclusive schools in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The study also sought to examine the challenges facing the inclusive teachers. This section presents the results and discussion of the study.

The Strategies Used in building Capacity of Inclusive Education Teachers

The first objective of the study was to determine the strategies used by schools and the government in building the capacity of special education teachers to implement the curriculum. The results of the study show that training through seminars and workshops were used to help to acquire knowledge and skills to enable them to implement inclusive

education. However, the results further show that such seminars and workshops were not regular thus leading to limited knowledge and skills for the trainees. Meanwhile the schools had some arrangements to ensure that the trained teachers get the opportunity to train others. The key informants who provided their responses on how capacity building training were conducted in their inclusive schools reported the following. From interviewing session respondent XHR cemented that;

"The strategies we have as a school are that we have internal strategies and those organized by the central government programmes. In-school strategies include organizing workshops and seminars to empower teachers to teach inclusive education. For the workshops organized by the government, we select a few teachers to get training, and then, when they return, we organize an in-school seminar to train all teachers who have been trained in the organised government seminars" (Interview: Response from XHR;).

Additionally, an interview with XAR respondent evidenced the following: “..here in our school, we have internal training or seminars as strategies to enable us to acquire the expertise that will help all students get what is required in inclusive classes” (Interview: Response from XAR). The findings further show that strategies of capacity-building in inclusive schools were internal and external strategies. These strategies meant to impart knowledge and skills to inclusive teachers to handle inclusive class which help them to all students with difficulties and it assist them feeling valued as regular teachers.

The findings of the study correspond to the study conducted by Kaushik (2016; Mbuji, 2017) which reveal that training assist the in-service teachers to develop various teaching methods that help them in teaching students with disabilities by using learner-centred approaches. Mbuji (2017) argues that teacher’ competences need to be developed over time. Furthermore, the findings of the study similarly to the findings of the study conducted by Dassa (2019) which show that the strategies of capacity building included single course training, cross-circular training, and personalized strategy-based training help special education teachers to implement inclusive classes. However, other studies such as Mumbi (2021) & Pius, & Kamugisha(2023) report lack of training among special education teachers as among the challenges that needs to be addressed for effective implementation of special education.

Challenges Facing Special Education Teachers in Implementing Inclusive Primary Education

The second objective of the study was to determine the challenges facing special education teachers in implementing inclusive education in the selected primary schools. Interviews and observations were made to investigate the challenges. The findings of this study reveal that in implementation of inclusive education special teachers faced difficulties whereby most respondents identified different challenges such as; inadequate number of teachers, insufficient number of teaching facilities, curriculum challenges, large class size, lack of pedagogical skills and presence of multiple disabilities in a classroom. The study found that many special education teachers failed to implement effective inclusive education due to the challenges they facing during in teaching process. In an interview with respondent XHR about implementation of inclusive education, the following evidence related to shortage of inclusive teachers is reported:

"In my experience, the biggest challenge we have in our school is an inadequate number of special teachers based on existing responsibilities. For example, the curriculum shows that when a subject teacher teaches an inclusive class, there should be an assistant special teacher in the class, depending on the number of students with special needs in the class..."

Regarding availability of the teaching materials, the following excerpt from interview tells more: *"In our school, the teaching materials are not enough especially for students with special needs to achieve their learning. This leads us to fail to implement inclusive education effectively. Also, the teaching materials we have are not of good quality which leads to being easily destroyed "* (Interview: Response from XTR04). As such, the visited schools lacked both, human resources and materials to implement the curriculum. Researchers' observation confirmed the shortage of materials and witnessed a few special education teachers in the visited schools. The available materials in the schools were also old and not very useful as reported in the interviews.

The results of this study further showed that there were challenges related to the curriculum itself. On this, a teacher respondent raised a challenge related to the curriculum itself: *"The existing curriculum poses a challenge to students with special needs because it directs students to learn many things that students with special needs may find difficult to learn. For example, the curriculum directs Standard I-II students to study six skill areas, including reading, numeracy, writing, health and environmental care, sports and arts development, as well as Religious Education, thus making students with special needs unable to handle all the items as directed in the curriculum..."*(Interview, XTR03). This response shows that the curriculum itself may need some adjustment to enable special education children learn better. Moreover, presence of students with multiple disabilities and overcrowding of the classes was sighted as a challenge with regard to implementing inclusive curriculum in the visited schools. In an interview with one special education teacher, the following response was made:

"Teaching students with more than one disability makes it difficult to choose the type of teaching method based on the types of disabilities they have.... The challenge I face is having a number of students with different disabilities, I don't know how to teach them. For example, having a student with more than one disability in class makes it difficult for us to identify the best teaching method that will help the student understand what is being taught in the classroom, so it makes it difficult for us to teach effectively" (Interview: Response from XTR04). Regarding class size and overcrowding of students, the following response was obtained from an interview:

The challenge of overcrowding in the classroom at our school contributes to hampering effective implementation of inclusive education and that is due to repeating the same class for students with special needs, which leads to overcrowding in the inclusive classes. For example, you may have inclusive classes with more than 60 students, which may lead to difficulty for special education teachers administering the class" (Interview: Response from XTR02). Field observation data confirms the above statement. The researcher found many students in one visited class such that it was difficult for the teachers to engage the students in the learning. The challenges facing special education teachers such as shortage of teachers were reported by Mbwapo (2015); lack of skills by Ridings (2017) and Philips (2024), shortage of facilities by Philip (2024); Mbuji (2017) and Mapunda *et al.* (2017). The findings

of the current study are also similar to those of a study conducted by Mbunda (2017) which shows that the curriculum that is used to implement inclusive education is the same for both students, though the assessment is quite different. The findings matched with those of a study conducted by Masanja (2016) who showed that 50% of special teachers support inclusive education and others do not because they feel incompetent due to lack of inclusive pedagogical skills which hindered the effective implementation of inclusive education. Studies of Starks & Reich (2023) report lack of skills related to the use of technology in teaching and learning for both students and special education teachers. The presence of multiple disabilities in inclusive classrooms has been related to caseloads especially where there are no paraprofessionals to assist in the classroom, this causes special teachers' frustration with the implementation of inclusive education. As such, for effective implementation of inclusive curriculum, the government and education stakeholders need to address the indicated barriers.

CONCLUSION

The study focused on the exploration of the lived experiences of the special education teachers in the selected schools in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The study first examined strategies related to capacity building for special teachers in implementing inclusive education, and then explored the challenges special teachers face when implementing inclusive education at primary school level.

The study makes two major conclusions; first, special education teachers attended capacity building workshops and seminars which promoted their professionalism. However, the trainings were rare and limited in terms of skills and training time. Therefore, special education teachers need more professional training to adapt and cope with new technological development skills to ensure effective implementation of inclusive education.

Secondly, shortage of special education teachers, lack of special education skills, overcrowded classrooms and presence of multiple disabilities in inclusive classes were the main challenges special education teachers reported. To ensure effective implementation of inclusive education it is necessary to address all the challenges that encounter special education teachers. Doing so may facilitate special teachers to implement special education, leading students to gain the required knowledge and skills. Finally, further research is needed to explore innovative strategies for addressing the challenges faced by special education teachers in implementing inclusive education, particularly in resource-constrained settings.

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