Usability of Community Awareness Strategy to Boost Enrolment of Pupils with Special Needs: A Case of Public Primary Schools Committees in Mbinga Town Council, Tanzania

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Abstract:
The study examined how school committees at Mbinga Town Council contributed to the enrolment of students with special needs in public primary schools by using a community awareness strategy. The study employed concurrent design under a mixed-methods research approach, and the Social Theory of Disability guided it. The study population comprised 42 public primary schools (PPSs), 42 head teachers (HTs), 1203 students, 546 school committee members (SCMs), 553 teachers (Ts), and 19 Ward Education Officers (WEOs). Probability and non-probability sampling techniques were deployed to sample 12 PPSs, 120 students, 64 Ts, 12 HTs, 55 SCMs, and 2 WEOs, making 253 respondents. Quantitative data were collected through questionnaires, while qualitative data were collected through interview guides and focus group discussion guides validated by education research experts. The reliability coefficients of 0.891 and 0.861 for Ts and SCMs questionnaires one at a time were attained following Likert-type items using Cronbach's Alpha. The trustworthiness of qualitative data was ensured through peer debriefing and triangulation methods. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively and presented in tabular form, while qualitative data were thematically deduced. The study found that school committees highly engage the community awareness strategy in varying ways to boost pupils with special needs enrolment through positive initiatives and partnerships with support services. This approach includes addressing parents' concerns, fostering inclusivity, and collaborating with educators and government for better resources and support. The study concludes that initiatives like school activities and barazas help students' perceptions be positive and that a comprehensive approach to inclusivity is shown by collaborations with outside support agencies and efforts to make information available to all parents. The study recommends prioritizing communication with parents and increasing government funding to ensure accessibility and foster a genuinely inclusive educational environment.

Keywords: Community awareness, inclusive public primary schools, enrolment of pupils with special needs

1. Introduction

Education is a basic human right per the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. The declaration similarly underlines the centrality of education in the development of any country. Thus, every citizen must be allowed to acquire quality education since it is a fundamental right. High-quality education is prioritized in the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 4 (UNESCO, 2015). Sustainable Development Goal 4 emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education for all. Hence promoting lifelong learning education. Therefore, opportunities should be made readily available to all citizens regardless of physical ability or inability. Education should not be discriminative but inclusive. All individuals should be allowed to access education.

According to Parmigiani et al. (2023), inclusive education is the practice of having all children participate in the same classrooms and schools and be provided with equal opportunities for learning, irrespective of exceptional labels. Inclusive education fosters a sense of belonging, acceptance, and understanding among students with diverse abilities. Inclusive education promotes social interaction, empathy, and respect through collaboration and appreciation of differences (Slee, 2019). Despite the importance of inclusive education, pupils with special needs are still ignored in inclusive schools.

The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) proposed the concept of inclusive education at the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990. The member nations were encouraged to initiate inclusive education in their respective countries. Building on this initiative, UNESCO passed the

Salamanca Statement in 1994, which outlined the principles, policy, and practice of inclusive education (Williams, 2021). Similarly, in 2000, the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) universally agreed on the goal of ensuring access to education for all children (EFA, 2015). These various conventions underscore the importance of inclusive education as a fundamental right for all children.

School committees, therefore, hold the obligatory responsibility of ensuring that all children within their vicinity, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, have access to education. Students with special needs who require additional support and accommodations to participate in educational activities include those with physical, cognitive, emotional, or developmental differences or disabilities (Moyi, 2019). These range from learning and intellectual disabilities to autism spectrum disorders, sensory impairments, physical disabilities, emotional or behavioral disorders, and medical conditions. Given the diversity of needs, educational institutions must adopt individualized and inclusive approaches to meet each student's unique requirements, promoting their overall development and success.

However, despite the fundamental right to education for every child, some parents hide their children with special needs and keep them out of school due to traditional beliefs that consider these children a curse. To combat this, Ugalde et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of creating interactive learning environments as a key strategy for promoting instrumental learning, increasing academic involvement through community awareness, and enhancing the cognitive development of children with special educational needs. The effectiveness of these environments is closely tied to the community's collective effort to create an inclusive and supportive educational setting. However, Harrison et al. (2022) highlight that significant challenges arise when not all community members are equally engaged or informed about the needs of these children. This lack of engagement leads to inconsistencies in implementing inclusive practices, leaving some children without the necessary support to thrive. Consequently, despite the community's aim to ensure access to quality education for all, the lack of universal participation and awareness undermines these efforts, underscoring the need for more comprehensive outreach and collaboration to achieve truly inclusive learning environments.

In developed countries, such as Indonesia, school committees (Komite Sekolah) often use community awareness strategies to enhance the enrolment of pupils with special needs in public primary schools. These strategies include organizing outreach programs, workshops, and information sessions to educate parents, educators, and community members about the importance of inclusive education and the resources available for special needs students (Arti et al., 2023). These initiatives highlight the benefits of diverse classrooms, showcase success stories, and often involve collaboration with local organizations, media, and advocacy groups to ensure widespread awareness. By building a supportive community, school committees help create an environment that encourages families to enroll their children with special needs in public primary schools, ensuring they receive appropriate educational opportunities and support (Roldán et al., 2021).

In contrast, in Africa, not all community members are easily reachable, posing challenges in efforts to enhance the enrolment of pupils with special needs. Factors such as language barriers, socioeconomic status, geographic location, and differing levels of awareness or understanding about special needs education make it difficult to engage every parent (Egan et al., 2022). For example, some parents in Kenya have limited access to communication channels like the Internet, which means they are not involved in community activities. To address this, school committees often employ various strategies to reach as many parents and other community members as possible, including home visits, collaboration with community leaders, using local media, and providing materials in multiple languages or formats (Rodgers et al., 2023). However, reaching every community member remains a complex task that requires ongoing effort and adaptation.

A study by El-Saadani and Metwally (2019) in Egypt highlights significant inequalities in school attendance between youth with disabilities and those without. The study found that approximately one-third of youth with disabilities were not enrolled in school, pointing to a serious gap in educational access for these children. Furthermore, the study revealed that children with special needs are often undervalued, particularly in terms of education. This was evident during school registration periods, where a low turnout was reported for children with disabilities. Discrimination during registration was also observed, with preference given to pupils without disabilities, leaving many disabled children without the opportunity to enrol in school. This situation raises serious concerns about the awareness among parents, communities, and other stakeholders regarding the fundamental right to education for children with disabilities.

In response to Despite the standards established under Circular No. 1 of 2018, significant disparities in the access to school between children with special needs and those without were discovered during five years (Yusuph & Hussein, 2022). Children with special needs, who make up 2.4% of the population, have more difficulties gaining admission to schools than normal children, who make up 97.6% of the total population. Furthermore, 9.3% of the population is thought to consist of special needs children who are kept hidden from their families and under-represented in the school system.

Table 1 gives an overview of the Enrolment Trend Number of Pupils with Disabilities in Government Primary Schools by Sex, 2016-2020 in Ruvuma.

2016			2017			2018			2019			2020		
M	F	T	M	F	M	F	T	M	F	M	F	T	M	F
2275	1508	3783	1846	1428	2275	1508	3783	1846	1428	2275	1508	3783	1846	1428

Table 1: Enrolment Trend of Number of Pupils with Disabilities in Government
Primary Schools by Sex, 2016-2020 in Ruvuma
Source: Basic Education Statistics in Tanzania (BEST) 2016-2020

The trend of special needs pupils enrolled in government primary schools, broken down by gender, is shown in table 1 from 2016 to 2020. Over this period, there has been a decrease in the overall number of pupils with special needs, according to the statistics. There were 3,783 pupils with special needs in 2016. Each year, this number dropped until it reached 2,327 in 2020. Over the previous five years, the enrolment percentages for children with special needs in primary schools have similarly decreased, falling from 0.35% in 2016 to 0.29% in 2020. Based on the available statistics, it can be observed that the number of pupils with special needs enrolled in primary schools has been declining over time. As of 2023, the most current estimates reported a rate of 0.28% (URT, 2023).

In the Ruvuma region, a study conducted by Kapinga and Aloni (2023) in the Ruvuma region revealed that pupils with special needs, accounting for 91, were not able to complete their primary education between 2018 and 2022. This reveals a large number of children with disabilities who are not enrolled in schools and are thus excluded from the education system. There has been a noticeable decrease in the enrolment rates of children with special needs in primary schools over the last five years, with a considerable number of children not attending school. This encouraged a researcher to conduct the study based on the contribution of the school committee on using a community awareness strategy to enhance enrolment of Pupils with special needs in inclusive public primary schools in Tanzania, particularly Mbinga Town Council.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

In many parts of Tanzania, the low enrolment of students with special needs in inclusive public elementary schools remains a concerning issue. Discouraging enrolment trends of Pupils with special needs, particularly at the primary education level, can be attributed to the inadequate attention given by education stakeholders such as parents, the community, and the government towards inclusive and special education for students with special needs (Dalgaard, 2022). Despite the efforts made by the government of Tanzania and educational stakeholders, including school committees and parents, in addressing the issue of low enrolment of pupils with special needs, the problem of low enrolment of pupils with disabilities persists. Studies by Mkama and Storbeck (2023), Kapinga and Aloni (2023), and Mbua (2023) found that intervention services are desperately needed to address the problem of the declining enrolment of students with special needs, which is highly challenged and has several root reasons. Despite the efforts of school committees to raise community awareness, the strategy it found has not been fully effective. Thus, this study examined how the school committees use community awareness strategies to boost pupils' special needs enrolment in public primary schools in Mbinga Town Council.

1.2. Research Question

This study sought to answer the following question:
- How do school committees use community awareness strategy to enrich enrolment of pupils with special needs in public primary schools in MbingaTown Council?

1.3. Significance of the Study

The study on the school committees' use of community awareness strategy to boost enrolment of pupils with special needs in public primary schools in Mbinga town Council is significant as it highlights how local school committees can effectively leverage community awareness strategies to improve inclusion in education. By examining the role of these committees in advocating for and implementing inclusive practices, the study aimed to showcase successful approaches to increasing enrolment and participation of pupils with special needs. This research provides valuable insights into how community engagement and awareness can address barriers to education, promote equitable access, and ultimately contribute to better educational outcomes for all students.

1.4. Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored in Social Theory of Disability (STD), developed by Mike Oliver in 1983, which posits that social factors like attitudes, laws, and environmental barriers have a more significant impact on disability than individual deficiencies. The theory emphasizes addressing societal disparities and fostering inclusive behaviors to ensure full participation and rights for people with disabilities. By applying this framework, the study aimed to identify and address social obstacles affecting the education of students with special needs, promoting inclusive practices and policies. The strength of STD lies in its focus on social issues, encouraging self-advocacy and group action for societal change, and acknowledging the intersection of disability with other forms of marginalization. However, it may overlook individual experiences and the importance of medical interventions. In educational settings, STD can be applied to create inclusive environments by promoting positive attitudes, removing barriers, and ensuring equitable access to education through inclusive policies, curriculum changes, teacher preparation, and fostering a diverse and tolerant environment.

2. Literature Review

School committees play a crucial role in promoting awareness of inclusive education to enhance the enrolment of Pupils with special needs. By actively engaging in awareness-building initiatives, school committees can create a supportive and inclusive environment that encourages the enrolment of Pupils with special needs.

Göransson and Nilholm (2019) examine how school leaders in Sweden promote awareness of inclusive education and the extent to which they are successful in integrating Pupils with special needs into mainstream classrooms. The study used a qualitative research design, and data were collected through interviews with 12 school leaders from different regions of Sweden. The findings indicate that school leaders in Sweden promote inclusive education by creating a positive school culture that values diversity, providing professional development opportunities for teachers, and allocating

resources to support Pupils with special needs. The findings from the previous study provided a valuable understanding of how school leaders in Sweden promote awareness of inclusive education. Therefore, the current investigation is on how school committees use community awareness strategies to enhance the enrolment of pupils with special education needs.

A study conducted by Okeke-Uzodike and Uzodike (2021) sheds light on the inadequate awareness of the community that hinders the effective implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria and its repercussions on the education of children with disabilities. The study employed a qualitative research design. The researchers conducted interviews with 12 teachers, 28 parents, and 2 policymakers. The findings underscored key obstacles, including the absence of comprehensive policies and guidelines, insufficient funding, inadequate infrastructure, and prevailing negative attitudes toward Pupils with special needs. The insights gathered from the reviewed study significantly contribute to the current study, particularly in terms of sample, methodology, and findings. However, it is difficult to generalize findings from the previous study to a population that does not bear similar characteristics since it was a qualitative study. The current study used a mixed research design to obtain more information from different research tools for triangulation purposes. The current study wants to investigate the practicality of community awareness strategy, collaboration with parents' strategy, and mobilization of physical resources used by school committees to enhance enrolment of Pupils with special needs in the public primary.

Gabriel et al. (2023) conducted a study on the role of inclusion committee members' awareness in increasing the number of Pupils with special needs in primary schools in Kenya. The study provides valuable insights into the strategies used to promote inclusive education in the country. The study used a qualitative research design, including semi-structured interviews with inclusion 8 committee members, 4 teachers, and 8 parents, as well as observations of committee meetings. The study found that inclusion committee members played an essential role in promoting inclusive education by raising awareness about the benefits of inclusive education in their communities, advocating for the rights of Pupils with special needs, and mobilizing resources to support their education. The study also found that the efforts of inclusion committee members led to an increase in the number of Pupils with special needs in primary schools in Kenya. The study provides insight into the current study even though the findings cannot be generalized in the context of Tanzania due to the qualitative research design used and differences in cultural, economic level, and education systems. A mixed research approach was used in the current study. The reviewed study further focused on the efforts of committee members to increase the number of pupils with special needs in schools. Nonetheless, information on the strategies that school committee members used to ensure the enrolment of Pupils with special needs in primary schools in Kenya is not clearly stated. Therefore, this study examined the practicality of community awareness strategy, collaboration with parents' strategy, and mobilization of physical resources strategy used by school committees to enhance enrolment of Pupils with special needs in public primary schools in Mbinga Town Council.

Makule (2019) conducted a study about the role of school committees in promoting awareness of inclusive education in Tanzania and their impact on the enrolment of Pupils with special needs in public primary schools in Kinondoni municipality. The study used a mixed-methods research design. Data were recollected through interviews with 12 school committee members, 56 teachers, 211 pupils, and 8 parents, as well as through a survey of school committee members. The findings indicate that school committees in Tanzania play a critical role in promoting inclusive education by sensitizing parents and community members about the benefits of inclusive education, advocating for the rights of Pupils with special needs, and mobilizing resources to support their education. Nevertheless, the reviewed study identified the existence of the problems based on facilities in Kinondoni. To close this disparity, the school committee in Mbinga town council employed various tactics to raise community awareness and increase the number of special needs students enrolled in public primary schools. In addition, questionnaires, interview guides, and focus group discussion guides were used to gather data for the study, allowing for the triangulation of data from various sources and instruments.

Bhalalusesa and Mnyanyi (2022) conducted a study on parents' social factors and their influence on the enrolment of Pupils with special needs in inclusive public primary schools in Tanga Municipality, Tanzania. The research strategy utilized in the study was convergent mixed-method, utilizing both probability and non-probability sampling techniques. The study's target demographic comprised children with disabilities, district education officials, head teachers, teachers, and parents. The sample for the study was 88 respondents, including 30 students with disabilities, 30 parents with children with disabilities, 24 teachers teaching inclusive education, and 3 head teachers of primary schools offering inclusive education in Tanga municipality. The study used an interview guide, questionnaire, focus group discussion, and observation guide in data collection. The study found that parental social factors do influence the enrolment of Pupils with Disabilities (PWDs) in inclusive public primary schools. The link between the current and the prior study on the impact of parental social factors on school enrolment of children with special needs is provided. Moreover, the current study examined the strategies used by the school committee to enhance the enrolment of Pupils with special needs in public primary schools in Mbinga town council.

2.1. Research Gap

The reviewed studies highlight significant contributions to understanding inclusive education, particularly the contribution of school leaders and committees in various countries. Göransson and Nilholm (2019) emphasize the strategies Swedish school leaders employ to foster a culture of inclusion, while Okeke-Uzodike and Uzodike (2021) explore barriers in Nigeria stemming from inadequate community awareness. Similarly, Elder and Kuja (2019) discuss the influence of inclusion committee members in Kenya, revealing their impact on increasing enrolment among pupils with special needs but lacking specific strategies utilized. Makule (2019) and Baltazari et al. (2021) expand this discourse in Tanzania, illustrating the critical role of school committees and parental social factors in promoting enrolment. Despite these insights, a notable gap exists in systematically applying community awareness strategies and examining their effectiveness across different contexts, particularly concerning how school committees in areas like Mbinga Town Council

operationalize these initiatives to enhance enrolment of pupils with special needs. This emphasizes the necessity of utilizing mixed-method approaches to better understand how school committees contribute to the community awareness strategy used by Mbinga Town Council to increase the enrolment of students with special needs in public primary schools.

3. Methodology

This study used a concurrent design using the mixed methods research approach. Convergent design allows for the simultaneous gathering and examination of qualitative and quantitative data, allowing for a thorough investigation of the issue (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research gathered information from several sources to acquire comprehensive perspectives from experienced participants. The simultaneous collection, individual analysis, and comparison of the quantitative and qualitative datasets determine whether the results agree or disagree (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study involved the participation of 42 elementary schools, 42 head teachers, 1203 students, 546 school committee members, 553 teachers, and 19 Ward Education Officers (WEO). A total of 253 people participated in the study, comprising the sample size of 12 public primary schools, 120 students, 64 instructors, 12 head teachers, 55 members of the school committee, and 2 Ward Education Officers (WEO).

Questionnaires for teachers and school committee members were used to gather data, along with an interview guide for head teachers and WEOs and a focus group discussion guide for students. Education planning and administration research specialists at MWECAU validated the data collection instruments. Three inclusive public elementary schools participated in the pilot research. The Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was used to assess the reliability of Likert-type surveys; for teachers, it was r=0.891, and for school committee members, it was r=0.861. Comparatively, peer debriefing was used to establish the trustworthiness of qualitative data, and triangulation involved taking data from the interview guide and organizing, coding, and developing themes following the study questions. The research was conducted following research ethics guidelines at every stage. With the aid of SPSS version 22, descriptive statistics, primarily frequencies, percentages, and means, were used to examine quantitative data. Qualitative data were analyzed by Creswell and Creswell (2018), which suggested six steps: organizing and preparing material for analysis, reading or looking at, coding, and then describing, which were followed to analyze qualitative data thematically. Themes were then developed and connected, and interpretation was completed as the last phase.

4. Research Findings and Discussion

This study investigated the use of a community awareness strategy by school committees to boost enrolment of pupils with special needs in public primary schools in Mbinga Town Council. The study collected information from education stakeholders, teachers, and members of school committees using questionnaires; the head of schools and ward education officer were interviewed, and focus group discussions for pupils. The findings are presented and discussed under themes from five questions. Data were collected from teachers and members of the school committee using questionnaires, the head of schools and ward education officer were interviewed, and a focus group discussion guide for pupils. A five-level Likert scale was utilized for data analysis, with 1 representing Strongly Disagree (SD), 2=Disagree (D), 3=Undecided (U), 4=Agree (A), 5=Strongly Agree (SA), F=frequencies, % =Percentages. The frequency and percentage distribution of responses were categorized as follows: ≤ 20=extremely minority; 21-49=minority; 50-59=moderate; 60-69=majority; 70-89=very high majority; 90-99=extremely majority; 100=overwhelming majority (Taherdoost, 2019). A mean score greater than 3 indicated that the Community Awareness Strategy effectively improved Enrolment of Pupils with Special Needs, while a mean score lower than 3 suggested otherwise. A mean score exactly equal to 3 implied ambiguities regarding the Community Awareness Strategy to enhance Enrolment of Pupils with Special Needs (Chyung & Hutchinson, 2023). Responses from teachers and members of the school committee are summarized in table 2.

S/N	Statement	Resp	SD		D		U		A		SA		Mean
			F	%	F	%	F	%	f	%	F	%	
1	Committee members Collaborate with school management in organizing school events that promote positive belief in children with special needs.	TRs	9	14.1	3	4.7	2	3.1	20	31.3	30	46.9	3.92
		MSC	13	21.0	2	3.2	0	.0	20	32.3	27	43.5	3.74
2	Committee members in conjunction with administration to organize school Baraza to ensure that the pupils without disability appreciate pupils with disabilities	TRs	3	4.7	5	7.8	5	7.8	36	56.3	15	23.4	3.85
		MSC	3	4.8	8	12.9	5	8.1	28	45.2	18	29.0	3.80
3	Committee members, in conjunction with the ward executive officer and village chairman, called the village meeting with villagers to gain a way to identify children with special needs donations.	TRs	4	6.3	8	12.5	13	20.3	25	39.1	14	21.9	3.57
		MSC	2	3.2	8	12.9	16	25.8	20	32.3	16	25.8	3.64
4	Committee members, in collaboration with the administration, use the local language to ensure that all messages sent are understood by all, including those who cannot use Kiswahili.	TRs	6	9.4	10	15.6	7	10.9	31	48.4	10	15.6	3.45
		MSC	7	11.3	9	14.5	8	12.9	26	41.9	12	19.4	3.43

S/N	Statement	Resp	SD		D		U		A		SA		Mean
			F	%	F	%	F	%	f	%	F	%	
5	Committee members collaborate with school administration to establish partnerships with external support services, such as special education professionals, therapists, and counsellors.	TRs	4	6.3	7	10.9	0	.0	28	43.8	25	39.1	3.98
		MSC	4	6.5	8	12.9	0	.0	24	38.7	26	41.9	3.96
6	Committee members ensure that information is accessible to all parents, including those with different language abilities or literacy levels	TRs	2	3.1	4	6.3	7	10.9	30	46.9	21	32.8	4.00
		MSC	2	3.2	5	8.1	11	17.7	22	35.5	22	35.5	3.91
7	Committee members, in conjunction with school administration, highlight specific accommodations and support services available to support pupils with special needs.	TRs	2	3.1	7	10.9	0	.0	29	45.3	26	40.6	4.09
		MSC	6	9.7	7	11.3	1	1.6	18	29.0	30	48.4	3.95
8	Committee members collaborate with teachers to implement feedback from both teachers and parents to gather input from parents on the effectiveness of inclusive practices	TRs	2	3.1	8	12.5	6	9.4	24	37.5	24	37.5	3.09
		MSC	2	3.2	9	14.5	4	6.5	23	37.1	24	38.7	3.93
9	Committee members, in conjunction with school administration, facilitate partnerships with medical professionals who can support parents in understanding and addressing their child's unique needs	TRs	0	.0	14	21.9	5	7.8	22	34.4	23	35.9	3.84
		MSC	2	3.2	13	21.0	4	6.5	22	35.5	21	33.9	3.75
10	Committee members, in conjunction with school administration, acknowledge and address specific fears or concerns that parents may have, such as worries about their child's safety, academic progress, or behavior.	TRs	2	3.1	2	3.1	4	6.3	35	54.7	21	32.8	4.10
		MSC	5	8.1	2	3.2	5	8.1	28	45.2	22	35.5	3.96
	Grand Mean												3.79

Table 2: Teachers (TRs) and Members of School Committee (MSC) Responses on the Committees Use Community Awareness Strategy to Enhance Enrolment of Pupils with Special Needs in Inclusive Public Primary Schools in Mbinga Town Council, Tanzania (n=64 teachers and 47 school committee members respectively)
Source: Field Data (2024)
1=Strongly Disagree (SD), 2=Disagree (D), 3=Undecided (U),
4=Agree (A), 5=Strongly Agree (SA), F=frequencies, % =Percentages

Data in table 2 indicate that a very high majority (78.2% and 75.8%) of teachers and Members of the School Committee respectively agree and strongly agree that committee members Collaborate with school management in organizing school events that promote positive beliefs about children with special needs. Conversely, an extreme minority (18.8%) of teachers and a majority (24.4%) of Members of the School Committee disagree and strongly disagree that committee members Collaborate with school management in organizing school events that promote positive belief in children with special needs. The mean score is 3.93 and 3.74 for teachers and Members of the School Committee, respectively. The information suggests that educators and School Committee members work together with the administration of the school to plan activities that promote good attitudes toward students with special needs. The high mean scores further support this positive outlook. However, the existence of a significant minority that disagrees suggests there are some perceived issues or areas where the collaboration could be improved. This indicates that while current practices are generally effective, school management should investigate and address the concerns of those who view the collaboration less favorably to ensure a more universally positive and inclusive approach. The researcher, during a face-to-face interview with the headteacher, had this to say:

> *I'm very encouraged by the strong support from both teachers and School Committee members regarding collaboration on events that promote positive beliefs about children with special needs. These events not only foster a more inclusive environment for all students but also empower our children with special needs to feel valued and supported (HT1, personal communication, March 13, 2024).*

According to the information provided, teachers and members of the School Committee are strongly in favor of working together to plan events that foster good perceptions of kids with special needs. This strong support suggests that these events are seen as effective in fostering inclusivity within the school community. By organizing such events, educators and committee members aim to create an environment where all pupils, including those with special needs, feel accepted, valued, and supported. This approach not only helps to dispel stereotypes and myths but also encourages empathy, understanding, and a sense of belonging among all students. With school management organizing school events that promote positive belief in children with special needs, WEO had this to say:

> *I'm very pleased to see the strong commitment from both schools and School Committees within our ward when it comes to collaborating on events that promote positive beliefs about children with special needs.*

> *These events play a crucial role in building inclusive school environments where all pupils feel valued and empowered (WEO1, personal communication, March 18, 2024).*

The information implies that there is a strong commitment and collaboration between schools and School Committees within the ward to organize events that promote positive beliefs about children with special needs. These events were integral to a community awareness strategy aimed at enhancing the enrolment of pupils with special needs in inclusive public primary schools. By actively promoting positive beliefs, the schools and School Committees are fostering an inclusive school environment where every pupil feels valued and empowered. This strategy tries to foster a friendly environment that promotes the enrolment and involvement of students with special needs in addition to raising awareness and understanding within the community. The findings of the study were in line with those by Anindyawardhani et al. (2023), who affirmed that Collaborative communication between inclusive schools and parents was important for profiling the talents of pupils with special needs and promoting positive beliefs about them. The findings align with the Social Theory of Disability, which emphasizes the role of societal barriers and attitudes in disabling individuals. Collaborative communication between inclusive schools and parents helps profile the talents of students with special needs and promote positive beliefs about them. This aligns with the social model, which views disability as stemming from environmental and attitudinal factors rather than individual impairments.

Data in table 2 indicate that a very high majority (79.7% and 74.2%) of teachers and Members of the School Committee respectively agree and strongly agree that the Committee's members, in conjunction with the administration, organize the school Baraza to ensure that the pupils without disability appreciate pupils with disabilities. Conversely, an extreme minority (12.5% and 17.7%) of teachers and Members of the School Committee disagreed and strongly disagreed that the Committee's members, in conjunction with the administration, organize school Baraza to ensure that the pupils without disability appreciate pupils with special needs. The mean score is 3.85 and 3.80 for teachers and Members of the School Committee, respectively. The data imply a strong consensus among teachers and Members of the School Committee that the collaboration between committee members and administration in organizing school Barazas was effective in promoting appreciation of pupils with special needs by those without special needs. This is reflected in the high mean scores. However, the presence of a minority who disagree indicates that there are still some areas that need improvement. This suggests that while the efforts to foster inclusivity and appreciation are largely successful, there was a need for ongoing evaluation and enhancement to address any remaining concerns and ensure that the initiatives are fully effective and universally supported. The researcher, during a face-to-face interview with the head teacher, had this to say:

> *…see strong support from teachers and the School Committee for our school Barazas; it shows we're on the right track to building a more inclusive environment. Of course, there's always room to improve. We'll listen to any concerns and work together to make the Barazas even better. By collaborating, we can ensure all our pupils feel valued and appreciated (HT7, personal communication, March 22, 2024).*

The report suggests that the school committee and teachers strongly support the school's Barazas, which are events meant to foster inclusivity and positive attitudes toward all students, including those with special needs. This support signifies that these events are contributing positively to building a more inclusive environment within the school. The mention of continuous improvement and willingness to listen to concerns reflects a commitment to ongoing collaboration and improvement of the Barazas to better meet the needs of all pupils. With the administration organizing school Baraza to ensure that the pupils without disability appreciate pupils with special needs, HT11 had this to say:

> *This is thrilled to see such strong support for our school Barazas from both teachers and School Committee members! There's a shared belief in the power of these events to create a more inclusive environment where all pupils feel valued and understood. The Barazas offers a fantastic opportunity for pupils without special needs to connect directly with their peers with special needs, fostering an appreciation for their unique strengths and perspectives (HT11, personal communication, March 29, 2024).*

The statement implies that both teachers and School Committee members are highly supportive of the school Barazas, recognizing them as powerful events that contribute significantly to creating a more inclusive school environment. The strong support suggests a shared belief in the positive impact of these events in fostering a sense of value and understanding among all pupils, regardless of their abilities. By providing a platform for direct interaction between pupils with and without special needs, the Barazas facilitate opportunities for mutual connection and appreciation. This exchange fosters inclusivity and fosters empathy, respect, and an understanding of each student's distinct skills and viewpoints. The study's conclusions align with those of Ainscow (2020), who confirmed that local administrative structures are essential in shaping inclusive education policies and inclusive learning environments for students with special needs. The findings concur with the local administrative arrangements, which play a crucial role in developing inclusive education policies and reinforce the importance of the community-based approach advocated by CBR theory. The local-level engagement and decision-making processes are essential in translating national-level inclusive education policies into tangible outcomes for students with special needs and special educational needs.

Data in table 2 indicate that a very high majority (82.9% and 80.6%) of teachers and Members of the School Committee respectively agree and strongly agree that committee members, in collaboration with school administration, establish partnerships with external support services, such as special education professionals, therapists, and counselors. Conversely, extremely minority (17.2% and 17.4%) teachers and Members of the School Committee disagree and strongly disagree that Committee members in collaboration with school administration establish partnerships with external support services, such as special education professionals, therapists, and counselors. The mean scores are 3.98 and 3.96 for teachers and Members of School Committee, respectively. This implies a strong consensus among both teachers and Members of the School Committee on the effectiveness of the collaboration between committee members and school administration in establishing partnerships with external support services like special education professionals, therapists, and counselors. The high mean scores reinforced this favorable impression. The existence of a tiny minority that disagrees,

meanwhile, indicates that there are still certain things that need work or development. The researcher, during a face-to-face interview with the WEO, had this to say:

> *Great to see schools and School Committees across my ward teaming up with outside experts! It's awesome that so many folks recognize the difference these partnerships can make for pupils, especially those who need a little extra help. Working with special education folks, therapists, and counselors gives schools a whole toolbox of resources to support all learners (WEO2, personal communication, March 20, 2024).*

The information implies that schools and School Committees within the ward are actively engaging in partnerships with external experts, such as special education professionals, therapists, and counselors. These collaborations are seen as highly beneficial for pupils, particularly those who require additional support. The mention of "teaming up with outside experts" suggests recognition of the diverse needs of pupils and the value of specialized knowledge and resources these experts bring. Collaborating with experts in the fields of special education, therapy, and counseling, schools can get access to an array of resources and tactics that enhance the education and growth of every student. This collaborative approach indicates a commitment to providing comprehensive support and fostering an inclusive environment where every pupil has the opportunity to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. The findings of the study are in line with those by Gabriel et al. (2023), who affirmed that committee members played an essential role in promoting inclusive education by raising awareness about the benefits of inclusive education in their communities, advocating for the rights of Pupils with special needs, and mobilizing resources to support their education led to an increase in the number of Pupils with special needs in primary schools. The findings align with the community-based rehabilitation (CBR) theory, which emphasizes the involvement of local communities in supporting the inclusion and empowerment of individuals with disabilities. The finding highlights how committee members, as part of the CBR theory, played a crucial role in promoting inclusive education by raising awareness, advocating for rights, and mobilizing resources, leading to an increase in the enrolment of students with special needs in primary schools.

Data in table 2 indicate that a very high majority (79.7% and 71%) of teachers and Members of the School Committee respectively agree and strongly agree that Committee members ensure that information is accessible to all parents, including those with different language abilities or literacy levels. On the other hand, teachers and school committee members who belong to the extreme minority (9.4% and 11.3%) strongly disagree and do not think that the committee members should make sure that information is available to all parents, especially those who have varied reading or language skills. The average score for school committee members and teachers is 3.95 and 4.00, respectively. According to the statistics, there appears to be a broad consensus among teachers and school committee members regarding how best to guarantee that information is accessible to all parents, regardless of their literacy or language proficiency. The high mean scores corroborate this favorable opinion. However, the presence of a small minority who disagree highlights that there are still areas where improvements could be made. During the face-to-face interview, the head teacher had this to say:

> *It's fantastic that everyone sees the importance of reaching families who may speak different languages or have trouble reading. Working with the School Committee, we'll keep looking for ways to make sure all our families have the information they need. This could mean more translations, different ways of presenting information, or anything else that helps (HT5, personal communication, March 19, 2024).*

The statement suggests a strong commitment to making sure that all families have access to vital information, irrespective of their literacy or language proficiency levels. It highlights the recognition of the diverse needs within the school community and the importance of inclusive communication. By collaborating with the School Committee, there is a dedication to continually seeking and implementing effective strategies to bridge communication gaps. This involves translating materials into various languages, using different formats to present information, and exploring other innovative methods to ensure every family can stay informed and engaged. With committee members ensuring that information is accessible to all parents, including those with different language abilities or literacy levels, WEO had this to say:

> *Schools and School Committees are working together to make sure all parents have the information they need, regardless of language or reading skills. We can work together on things like translation services, different information formats, or maybe even special meetings (WEO1, personal communication, March 18, 2024).*

The information suggests that schools and School Committees work closely together to make sure that all parents, irrespective of language or literacy levels, have access to the information they need. This initiative underscores a commitment to inclusivity and effective communication within the school community. The mention of receiving suggestions from various stakeholders indicates a willingness to listen and adapt strategies to meet the needs of all families. Possible solutions such as translation services, alternative information formats, and special meetings are being considered, demonstrating a proactive and flexible approach to overcoming communication barriers. The findings of the study are in line with those by Yan (2022), who affirmed that Committee members ensure information is accessible to all parents, including those with different language abilities or literacy levels, by focusing on readability, clarity, complexity, and structure to increase the enrolment of a student with special needs.

Data in table 2 indicate that a very high majority (87.5% and 80.7%) of teachers and Members of the School Committee respectively agree and strongly agree that Committee members, in conjunction with school administration, acknowledge and address specific fears or concerns that parents may have, such as worries about their child's safety, academic progress, or behavior. Conversely, an extreme minority (6.2% and 11.3%) of teachers and Members of the School Committee disagree and strongly disagree that Committee members, in conjunction with school administration, acknowledge and address specific fears or concerns that parents may have, such worries about their child's safety, academic progress, or behavior. The mean scores are 4.10 and 3.96 for teachers and Members of the School Committee,

respectively. The data imply a strong consensus among both teachers and Members of the School Committee that committee members, in collaboration with school administration, effectively acknowledge and address parents' specific fears or concerns regarding their child's safety, academic progress, or behavior.

Pupils with and without disabilities also had similar views. They agreed that parents' specific fears or concerns regarding their child's safety, academic progress, or behavior. For example, the Focus Group Discussion in school 'A' generated the following remark:

> *In our experience, when it comes to pupils' safety, behavior, and academic progress, Administrators understand parents' concerns about pupils' safety, academic progress, and behavior, prioritizing well-being and encouraging open communication between parents and teachers. Counseling, mentoring, and robust security measures, including secure access, trained staff, and regularly reviewed emergency protocols, are in place" (FGD with and without Disabilities Pupils, School 'A', 19th March 2024).*

The high level of agreement among participants, along with the notable mean scores, suggests that the school's efforts to cater to the needs of students with disabilities have been well-received and appreciated. The results indicate that the school is making concerted efforts to be responsive to the concerns of parents, including those with children who have disabilities and is implementing inclusive practices to support the full participation and well-being of all students. These findings align with the principles of the Social Theory of Disability, which emphasizes the importance of addressing social inequalities and promoting inclusive practices to ensure the full participation and rights of individuals with disabilities.

The study indicated that school Committees use the Community Awareness Strategy to Enhance Enrolment of Pupils with Special Needs in Inclusive Public Primary Schools in Mbinga Town Council, with a grand mean of 3.79 for all ten items. There is significant support for organizing school events that promote positive beliefs about children with special needs, as well as for the school Barazas aimed at ensuring that pupils without special needs appreciate pupils with special needs. Additionally, there is strong agreement on the establishment of partnerships with external support services and the accessibility of information to all parents, regardless of language abilities or literacy levels. Furthermore, there is a shared belief in the importance of acknowledging and addressing specific fears or concerns that parents may have regarding their child's safety, academic progress, or behavior. The findings suggest that the collaborative efforts between teachers, school committees, and administration are contributing positively to building inclusive environments within the schools. The commitment to ongoing collaboration and refinement of initiatives reflects a dedication to ensuring that all students, including those with special needs, feel valued and supported. The recognition of the diverse needs within the school community and the proactive approach to overcoming communication barriers indicates a strong commitment to inclusivity and effective communication.

In summary, the study found that school committees use the community awareness strategy to enhance enrolment of pupils with special needs in inclusive public primary schools in Mbinga Town Council, with a grand mean of 3.79 for all ten items. There is significant support for organizing school events that promote positive beliefs about children with special needs, as well as for the school Barazas aimed at ensuring that pupils without disabilities appreciate pupils with disabilities. Additionally, there is strong agreement on the establishment of partnerships with external support services and the accessibility of information to all parents, regardless of language abilities or literacy levels. Furthermore, there is a shared belief in the importance of acknowledging and addressing specific fears or concerns that parents may have regarding their child's safety, academic progress, or behavior. The findings suggest that the collaborative efforts between teachers, school committees, and administration are contributing positively to building inclusive environments within the schools. The commitment to ongoing collaboration and refinement of initiatives reflects a dedication to ensuring that all students, including those with special needs, feel valued and supported. The recognition of the diverse needs within the school community and the proactive approach to overcoming communication barriers indicates a strong commitment to inclusivity and effective communication.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The study revealed that school committees in Mbinga Town Council are effectively using a community awareness strategy to boost the enrolment of pupils with special needs in inclusive public primary schools. Positive views of pupils are being fostered by programs like Barazas and school events, and a comprehensive commitment to inclusivity is shown by collaborations with outside support groups and efforts to make information easily accessible to all parents. The proactive handling of parents' concerns about their children's safety, academic progress, and behavior reflects a commitment to creating a supportive school environment. These efforts, involving teachers, school committees, and administrators, emphasize a dedication to ensuring that all students, including those with special needs, are valued and provided with equal opportunities to succeed. According to the study, teachers should prioritize ongoing professional development in inclusive education, improve parent-teacher communication, work with special education professionals, support peer support programs, involve parents in decision-making, and lobby the government for more funding and streamlined procedures to guarantee the resources and accessibility needed for an inclusive classroom.

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