

Implementation Status of Inclusive Education in Selected Public Primary Schools in Mbeya City, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the implementation status of inclusive education in two selected public primary schools in Mbeya City, Tanzania. It draws on the first specific objective of a broader study on the implementation and effectiveness of inclusive education. The article was guided by the Social Model of Disability, which directs attention to barriers created by school environments, institutional arrangements, teaching systems, and social attitudes rather than locating disability only within the learner. The study adopted an interpretivist paradigm, a qualitative approach, and a case study design involving Mwenge Primary School and Itiji Primary School. The detailed methodology and findings sections of the parent study report 40 participants, comprising 25 teachers, 10 pupils, 2 head teachers, 2 Ward Education Officers, and 1 District Education Officer. The parent study reports purposive, snowball, multistage, and simple random sampling procedures at different levels of selection. Data were collected through interviews and observation and analysed thematically. Findings show that the two schools enrol learners with varied educational needs, including physical, hearing, visual, intellectual, speech, cerebral palsy, autism-related, and learning difficulties. However, implementation remains partial because some learners continue to learn in separate classrooms under specialised teachers. Teachers use group work, peer learning, demonstrations, repetition, question-and-answer techniques, and individual support to improve participation. The schools also have some specialised materials, ramps, accessible pathways, adapted classroom arrangements, and leadership support, although these provisions remain insufficient. The article concludes that inclusive education is present in the two case-study schools but has not yet reached full classroom inclusion. Stronger teacher preparation, adequate specialised materials, improved accessible infrastructure, reduced classroom congestion, and sustained school leadership and government support are required.

Keywords: inclusive education, implementation status, special educational needs, primary schools, Social Model of Disability, Mbeya City, Tanzania

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is based on the principle that all children should have access to education and should be supported to participate in learning regardless of disability or other differences. International frameworks such as the Salamanca Statement and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities established a rights-based direction for schooling by stressing access, participation, reasonable accommodation, and non-discrimination (UNESCO, 1994; United Nations, 2006). In this view, inclusion is not achieved merely by enrolling a learner with a disability in a school. Schools must also adjust teaching, learning materials, physical facilities, organisation, and support systems so that the learner can participate meaningfully in ordinary educational activities.

The movement towards inclusive education also reflects a shift in the way disability is understood. Earlier approaches often treated disability mainly as an individual medical condition. The Social Model of Disability changed this emphasis by arguing that people experience disability when environments, systems, attitudes, and

institutions create barriers to participation. In education, these barriers may include inaccessible classrooms, rigid teaching methods, a lack of assistive materials, negative attitudes, and school arrangements that separate learners unnecessarily. Contemporary scholarship continues to show that inclusive education requires schools to remove such barriers and organise learning around diversity rather than around a single assumed type of learner (Robertson & Jaswal, 2024; Yang & Lin, 2025).

Inclusive education has therefore become both an educational and a social justice concern. UNESCO (2020) argues that inclusion requires education systems to respond to the needs of all learners and to address exclusion within policy, school organisation, and classroom practice. However, implementation often differs from policy intention. A school may officially be described as inclusive while learners with special educational needs still receive instruction in separate rooms, use limited learning materials, or depend on a small number of specialised teachers. For this reason, assessment of implementation should examine what actually happens in classrooms and school activities, not only whether an inclusive education policy exists.

Evidence from Eastern and Southern Africa shows that progress towards inclusive education has been accompanied by persistent constraints. Sarton and Smith (2018) note that children with disabilities in the region continue to face barriers related to school access, teacher preparation, learning resources, attitudes, and institutional capacity. In Tanzania, Possi and Milinga (2017) describe inclusive education as a developing field that has moved from segregated arrangements towards broader participation in mainstream education, but they also point to continuing difficulties in translating inclusion into everyday school practice. These concerns are important because the effectiveness of inclusion depends on whether schools can provide suitable teaching, support, and accessible environments for learners with different needs.

Tanzania has adopted policy commitments intended to strengthen equitable access to education. The Education and Training Policy, including the 2023 edition of the 2014 policy, recognises the need to support learners with different educational needs (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2023). Yet policy commitment does not automatically ensure uniform implementation. Schools differ in staff capacity, infrastructure, teaching materials, class size, leadership practices, and access to specialist services. Mwambe and Mrema (2024), in a study of public primary schools in Njombe Town Council, reported constraints affecting inclusive education, including shortages of suitable facilities and resources. Such findings show why local assessment is necessary.

Mbeya City provides an important setting for examining how inclusive education is implemented at school level. The parent study focused on Mwenge Primary School and Itiji Primary School because they practised inclusive education and enrolled learners with varied educational needs. The study did not treat implementation as a single action. Instead, the first specific objective examined five practical areas: how inclusive education is organised in the schools, the types of learners with special educational needs who are enrolled, the teaching methods used to support different abilities, the learning materials and facilities available, and the contribution of school leadership to implementation.

The problem addressed by the study was the gap between the intended principle of inclusive education and the actual conditions under which inclusion occurs. The field findings show that the selected schools have made important efforts. Learners with different educational needs are enrolled, teachers use a range of learner-centred methods, some supportive learning materials and accessible facilities are present, and school leaders supervise and coordinate inclusive education activities. At the same time, some learners continue to learn separately from ordinary pupils, specialised resources remain insufficient, and teachers face limits in accommodating diverse needs within ordinary classrooms. These patterns raise a central question: to what extent does enrolment within an ordinary primary school amount to full inclusion when classroom separation and resource constraints remain?

This article responds to that question by presenting evidence from the first specific objective of the parent study. It focuses on implementation status rather than the wider set of challenges and improvement measures examined elsewhere in the dissertation. The article therefore provides a focused account of how inclusion is practised in Mwenge and Itiji primary schools and interprets these practices through the Social Model of Disability. The aim is to distinguish between access to an inclusive school, social participation within the school environment, and full instructional inclusion in ordinary classrooms.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this article is to examine the implementation status of inclusive education in two selected public primary schools in Mbeya City, namely Mwenge Primary School and Itiji Primary School. The article addresses the first objective of the parent study, which was to explore how inclusive education is implemented in the selected schools. In line with the interview guide and field findings, the analysis focuses on five areas: inclusive education practices, categories of learners with special educational needs enrolled in the schools, teaching methods used to support learners with different abilities, availability of learning materials and facilities, and school leadership support for inclusive education. The purpose and conclusions are therefore bounded to the two case-study schools rather than presented as representative of all primary schools in Mbeya City.

Significance of the Study

The article provides school-level evidence on how inclusive education is practised in two government primary schools in Mbeya City. For education authorities, the findings identify specific areas where implementation is visible and areas where it remains incomplete. This distinction is useful for planning because it separates the existence of an inclusive programme from the quality and depth of inclusion experienced by learners.

For teachers and school leaders, the findings show the practical role of learner-centred teaching, peer interaction, classroom organisation, supervision, and cooperation with education officers and parents. They also show that teacher effort alone cannot remove all barriers where specialised materials, accessible infrastructure, staffing, and professional support remain insufficient. This supports a school improvement approach that combines classroom practice with institutional investment.

Academically, the article contributes evidence from Mbeya City to the wider discussion on inclusive education in Tanzania. It also applies the Social Model of Disability to distinguish learner impairment from barriers created by educational systems. This perspective supports analysis of whether separate classrooms, limited resources, inaccessible facilities, or weak support systems restrict participation even when learners are formally enrolled in an ordinary school.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The article is guided by the Social Model of Disability. The parent study presents the model as an approach associated with Michael Oliver and disability rights scholarship, developed in opposition to views that located disability mainly within an individual's physical or mental condition. The central claim of the model is that impairment and disability should not be treated as identical. A person may have impairment, but disability is intensified when social and institutional arrangements prevent that person from participating on equal terms. In schools, such arrangements include inaccessible buildings, inflexible teaching, a lack of suitable materials, discriminatory attitudes, and organisational practices that separate learners rather than adapting the learning environment to them (Yang & Lin, 2025; Robertson & Jaswal, 2024).

The theory is directly relevant to the first objective because the objective asks how inclusive education is implemented. If a learner is enrolled in an ordinary school but taught separately because the mainstream classroom cannot accommodate the learner, the Social Model directs attention to the classroom and school system rather than treating separation as an inevitable result of the learner's condition. Similarly, when learners require braille, large print materials, accessible pathways, communication support, or adapted instruction, the theory interprets these supports as means of removing environmental and instructional barriers.

A major strength of the Social Model is that it places responsibility for inclusion on institutions and society. This is useful in educational research because it moves analysis beyond individual diagnosis and asks whether schools have organised teaching, infrastructure, materials, and support in a way that allows participation. Robertson and Jaswal (2024) argue that the model remains important for identifying barriers to inclusion; while Yang and Lin (2025) show that disabling environments continue to shape the experiences of disabled people. In the context of the present article, the model provides a clear basis for assessing whether the selected schools have reduced or reproduced barriers.

The model also has limitations. The parent study recognises that a purely social explanation may understate the specific personal and medical support needs associated with some impairments. Learners with cerebral palsy, hearing impairments, low vision, autism-related needs, or intellectual disabilities may require specialised forms of support that cannot be explained only through environmental barriers. For this reason, the article uses the Social Model as an analytical guide rather than as a complete explanation of every educational need. The key question remains whether schools respond to learner diversity by modifying the environment and educational process in ways that expand participation.

METHODOLOGY

Research Paradigm, Approach, Design and Study Area

The study adopted an interpretivist or constructivist paradigm. This paradigm was suitable because implementation of inclusive education was examined through the experiences, perceptions, and practices of participants who were directly involved in the selected schools. Rather than treating inclusion only as a measurable policy output, the study sought to understand how teachers, pupils, school leaders, and education officers experienced and explained the organisation of inclusive education. This orientation supported the use of qualitative methods that allowed participants to describe classroom arrangements, teaching practices, resources, and administrative support in detail.

A qualitative research approach and case study design were used. Creswell (2014) explains that qualitative research is suitable for exploring meanings and processes within their social context; while Yin (2018) notes that a case study permits detailed examination of a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life setting. The design was therefore appropriate for examining inclusive education within Mwenge Primary School and Itiji Primary School rather than separating implementation from the school context in which it occurred.

The study was conducted in Mbeya City at Mwenge Primary School and Itiji Primary School. The schools were selected because they practised inclusive education and enrolled learners with varied educational needs. Concentrating on these two schools enabled the study to obtain focused evidence on implementation and to examine the interaction between classroom practice, specialised support, resources, and school leadership.

Population, Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The detailed methodology and findings of the parent study report a sample of 40 participants: 25 primary school teachers, 10 pupils, 2 head teachers, 2 Ward Education Officers, and 1 District Education Officer. Teachers contributed evidence on classroom instruction and daily inclusive practices. Pupils contributed evidence on classroom participation, learning materials, interaction with peers, and support received from teachers. Head teachers and education officers contributed school-management, supervision, and policy-implementation perspectives.

Sampling operated at several levels. At the first level, Mbeya City was selected as the study area. At the second level, government primary schools implementing inclusive education were identified, after which Mwenge Primary School and Itiji Primary School were selected as the two case-study schools. At the participant level, the parent study reports purposive selection of the 10 pupils, 2 head teachers, 2 Ward Education Officers, and the District Education Officer. The inclusion criterion stated for pupils was direct experience of learning in an inclusive education setting. Head teachers and education officers were selected because their administrative and supervisory roles gave them direct knowledge of inclusive education implementation.

The parent study also reports snowball sampling for pupils and teachers. Initial pupils and teachers were identified through school administration, and referred participants were checked against the study criteria. A pupil had to be learning in an inclusive education setting, while a teacher had to have experience teaching pupils with special educational needs. In the multistage description, the study further states that teachers were selected using simple random sampling at the final stage, whereas head teachers, Ward Education Officers, and the District Education Officer were selected purposively. The dissertation does not state clearly how snowball and simple random procedures were combined for the final teacher sample, nor how purposive and snowball

procedures overlapped for pupils. Therefore, this article reports the procedures exactly as documented and does not reconstruct an unreported sequence. This limitation is acknowledged because a fully auditable recruitment flow cannot be established from the parent study.

Data Collection, Thematic Analysis and Trustworthiness

Data were collected through interviews and observation. Chapter Four of the parent study reports interviews with pupils, teachers, head teachers, Ward Education Officers, and the District Education Officer. A separate interview guide was also prepared for pupils. The interviews generated evidence on inclusive education practices, learner participation, teaching methods, learning materials and facilities, school leadership, and administrative support.

Observation was used to examine classroom inclusion, support services, teaching and learning resources, and school infrastructure. The observation guide covered seating arrangements, participation of pupils with special educational needs, availability and use of learning materials, ramps, accessible pathways, classroom entrances, and toilets. Observation evidence was considered together with interview accounts so that reported practices could be compared with visible classroom and school conditions.

The qualitative evidence was analysed thematically. For this article, evidence related to the first objective was organised using a transparent framework-oriented procedure. First, interview and observation material relevant to the implementation-status objective was identified. Second, the evidence was organised under the five areas already established by the research objective and data-collection guides: inclusive education practices, types of learners with special educational needs, teaching methods, learning materials and facilities, and school leadership support. Third, recurring statements and patterns were compared within and across participant groups. Fourth, observation evidence was considered alongside interview evidence to corroborate, qualify, or contextualise reported practices. Finally, the resulting themes were interpreted through the Social Model of Disability and discussed in relation to relevant literature. The analytical structure was therefore primarily deductive because the five main areas were predetermined, while the details used to explain each area were drawn from recurring participant accounts and observations.

Several procedures documented in the parent study supported the credibility and consistency of the evidence. Research instruments were reviewed through expert judgement from supervisors and educational research specialists, and a pilot study was conducted in two schools outside the main study to identify unclear or ambiguous questions. The study also reports pre-testing, consistency checks, clearly worded questions, and triangulation of information from different participants and observation. Triangulation was particularly important because interview accounts about participation, resources, accessibility, and school arrangements could be compared with observation evidence. The parent study does not document formal member checking, independent coding, peer debriefing, or a detailed coding audit trail. These procedures are therefore not claimed in this article.

Ethical requirements included permission from Teofilo Kisanji University, the Mbeya City Education Office, and the respective school heads. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any stage.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings under the first objective are presented in five themes derived from the research areas and thematic analysis. Participant codes are used as in the parent study: T for Teacher, P for Pupil, HT for Head Teacher, WEO for Ward Education Officer, and DEO for District Education Officer. The discussion links field evidence to the Social Model of Disability and the literature cited in the parent study.

Inclusive Education Practices in Primary Schools

The findings show that Mwenge Primary School and Itiji Primary School implement inclusive education by enrolling learners with special educational needs within ordinary government primary school environments. This

represents an important form of educational access because learners who might otherwise be excluded from mainstream schooling are admitted to the same school institutions as other pupils. However, the findings also show that enrolment within an ordinary school does not always mean full instructional inclusion. Some learners with special educational needs continue to study in separate classrooms under specialised teachers.

Learners with special educational needs have their own classrooms and are taught by specialised teachers separately from ordinary pupils. This arrangement helps teachers provide individualised instruction according to the learners' specific educational needs. However, learners also participate in selected school activities with ordinary pupils to promote social interaction and inclusion within the school environment. (T2, interview, 15 April 2026)

This evidence suggests that the schools practise a partial form of inclusion that combines mainstream school enrolment with elements of integration and special education. Learners share the wider school environment, but classroom separation remains for some categories of need. The distinction is important. Physical presence in the same school can increase access and social interaction, but full inclusion requires learners to participate in ordinary classrooms with suitable support wherever this is educationally appropriate.

The reasons given for separate classroom arrangements were mainly institutional. Respondents referred to overcrowded ordinary classrooms, limited specialist knowledge among ordinary teachers, shortages of specialised teachers, limited teaching materials, and inadequate facilities. A teacher explained that it becomes difficult to teach all learners together when some pupils require intensive individual attention and the teacher has not been trained to address a wide range of disabilities. This is consistent with the Social Model of Disability because the barrier arises not simply from the learner's impairment but from the way the classroom is staffed, resourced, and organised.

In our school, pupils with hearing difficulties and autism learn separately during classroom lessons. During outdoor activities, they join other pupils and take part in the same activities. Other pupils with different learning needs learn together with the rest of the class. (P1, interview, 16 April 2026)

The pupil's account shows that inclusion is stronger in social and co-curricular activities than in some classroom settings. Respondents reported that learners with and without disabilities participate together in assemblies, sports, and other school activities. A head teacher explained that these shared activities strengthen friendship, cooperation, and acceptance. Social participation is therefore an important achievement of the selected schools, but it does not remove the need to address instructional separation.

The field evidence is broadly consistent with Tanzanian literature that describes inclusive education as a developing practice that still faces resource and support constraints (Possi & Milinga, 2017; Mwambe & Mrema, 2024). It also reflects the distinction made in international inclusion literature between access and participation. UNESCO (2020) emphasises that inclusion should address the conditions that exclude learners from meaningful participation, not only their formal placement in a school. From this perspective, the continued use of separate classrooms indicates that implementation in the two schools has not yet reached full inclusion.

At the same time, it would be too simple to describe every specialised classroom as evidence of failure. Some learners may require intensive or specialised instruction at particular times. The stronger question is whether separate provision is used flexibly to meet individual needs or becomes a permanent substitute for adapting ordinary classrooms. The field data point to the latter risk because separation was repeatedly linked to overcrowding, insufficient teacher preparation, and limited resources. These are system-level barriers that can be changed through policy and investment.

The findings therefore show a mixed implementation status. The schools have expanded access and created opportunities for social interaction, but institutional conditions still limit full classroom participation. Within the Social Model of Disability, improvement requires changes in teacher capacity, class size, learning resources, and physical accessibility so that the ordinary classroom can accommodate a wider range of learners.

Types of Learners with Special Educational Needs Enrolled in Classes

The selected schools enrol learners with a range of special educational needs. Respondents identified physical disabilities, intellectual impairments, hearing impairments, cerebral palsy, speech impairments, autism or autism spectrum-related needs, and low vision. The diversity of these categories shows that inclusive education in Mwenge and Itiji primary schools is not limited to one form of disability. It requires teachers and school systems to respond to differences in communication, movement, vision, comprehension, behaviour, and pace of learning.

Our classes include learners with physical disabilities, hearing impairments, intellectual challenges, and low vision who require special educational support during learning. These learners have different educational needs, and teachers provide additional guidance, adapted teaching methods, and close supervision to help them participate effectively in classroom activities. However, more specialised resources are still needed to improve their learning. (T3, interview, 15 April 2026)

The evidence highlights an important principle of inclusive education: learners with special educational needs are not a single homogeneous group. A strategy that supports a learner with low vision may not address the needs of a learner with hearing impairment or cerebral palsy. Teachers reported the need for additional time, individual support, adapted methods, assistive materials, and close guidance. The presence of diverse needs therefore increases the importance of flexible teaching and specialised support within the ordinary school system.

A head teacher reported that many learners in inclusive classes have hearing and visual difficulties and those teachers use close assistance, adapted activities, and peer support. A Ward Education Officer also explained that government policy has encouraged schools to enrol learners with different disabilities, thereby increasing access to education. This indicates that policy direction has translated into practical enrolment opportunities in the selected schools.

However, respondents also reported that learners with more severe or complex disabilities continue to face stronger barriers because the schools do not have enough specialised facilities, trained teachers, or assistive learning materials. This is a critical point. An inclusive admission policy can widen access, but if support intensity does not match the learner's needs, access may not lead to effective participation or learning. Inclusion therefore requires both admission and appropriate educational support.

The findings are consistent with Possi and Milinga (2017), who discuss the development of special and inclusive education in Tanzania and the continuing need for appropriate support systems. They are also compatible with the Social Model of Disability because they show that the educational effect of impairment is shaped by the availability of suitable environments, materials, and teaching support. A learner with low vision, for example, may participate more effectively when large print materials and suitable seating are available. A learner with a physical disability may participate more freely where paths, entrances, desks, and toilets are accessible.

The presence of varied learner needs in the two schools therefore provides evidence of progress in access while also exposing the limits of a one-size-fits-all approach. The schools require differentiated support systems that recognise the different barriers faced by different learners. Strengthening specialist services should not be understood as returning to segregation. Rather, specialised support should help learners participate as fully as possible in shared school and classroom environments.

Teaching Methods Used to Support Learners with Different Abilities

Teachers reported using a range of participatory and learner-centred teaching methods to support learners with different abilities. The methods included group discussions, cooperative learning, peer learning, peer teaching, role play, demonstrations, repetition, question-and-answer techniques, practical examples, and individual assistance. These methods were used to increase participation and to provide additional explanation to learners who required more time or support.

We normally use group discussions, peer learning, and cooperative learning so that learners can support one another during classroom activities. These methods encourage active participation and help learners

with special educational needs interact freely with their classmates. They also improve confidence and teamwork among all learners. (T4, interview, 16 April 2026)

A pupil also explained that

Our teacher uses group work, pictures and demonstrations during lessons. When a pupil does not understand, the teacher explains the lesson again. We also help each other when we work in groups. (P5, interview, 20 April 2026)

These accounts show that teachers are not relying only on whole-class verbal instruction. They use peer interaction, visual support, demonstrations, and repetition to reduce learning barriers. A head teacher also noted that demonstrations and practical examples help learners understand lessons because they can observe and practise what is being taught. Such strategies can benefit learners with special educational needs as well as other pupils because they provide multiple ways of engaging with lesson content.

The Social Model of Disability is useful in interpreting these findings because teaching methods can either create or reduce barriers. A rigid method that assumes all learners can hear, see, read, process information, and respond at the same pace may exclude some pupils. By contrast, varied methods, additional explanation, peer support, and individual assistance increase the range of learners who can participate. In this sense, instructional adaptation is part of removing barriers from the classroom environment.

Nevertheless, the findings also reveal that inclusive teaching depends heavily on teacher experience, creativity, and personal commitment. Respondents reported that overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teaching materials, and limited professional preparation restrict the extent to which teachers can adapt instruction. Some teachers continue to depend on ordinary teaching approaches because they have not received enough specialised training in inclusive pedagogy. The methods observed are therefore positive, but their consistent use is not guaranteed by the wider system.

This limitation has two implications. First, teacher willingness should not be mistaken for adequate institutional capacity. A committed teacher may repeat explanations or organise peer learning, but some learners also need specialised communication systems, assistive technology, adapted assessment, or individual educational planning. Second, class size affects the feasibility of differentiated instruction. The more learners a teacher must manage, the harder it becomes to provide sustained individual attention.

The findings therefore indicate that inclusive teaching is present but remains uneven and resource-dependent. The schools have developed practical classroom responses to learner diversity, yet full instructional inclusion requires stronger professional development, better teaching materials, and working conditions that allow teachers to use inclusive methods consistently.

Learning Materials and Facilities Available to Support Inclusive Education

The findings show that Mwenge and Itiji primary schools have some materials and facilities intended to support learners with special educational needs. Respondents mentioned braille books and paper, large print books, audio materials, tactile materials and models, pictures, charts, diagrams, captioned video, and computers. Teachers also referred to visual teaching aids, maps, drawings, and other classroom materials that help explain lesson content. However, the field evidence repeatedly states that the available resources are not sufficient for all learners who need them.

Our school has charts, drawings, large print books, and a few specialised learning materials that support learners with special educational needs during classroom instruction. Teachers use these materials to simplify lessons and help learners understand concepts more easily. However, the available resources are still not sufficient to meet the needs of all learners. (T4, interview, 16 April 2026)

Another pupil explained that

We use books, pictures, charts and other materials during lessons in our classroom. Sometimes there are not enough books for all pupils, so we share them. Some learning materials are used by several pupils at the same time. (P7, interview, 21 April 2026)

Physical accessibility was also part of the implementation status. Respondents reported ramps, accessible pathways, special classrooms, adapted seating arrangements, and classrooms located in accessible areas. These facilities are important because participation is restricted when a learner cannot enter a classroom, move between school spaces, sit safely, or reach sanitation facilities. The observation component of the study specifically examined ramps, pathways, classroom entrances, toilets, seating arrangements, and the use of learning materials.

The availability of these facilities indicates that the schools and education authorities have taken practical steps to reduce some environmental barriers. This aligns strongly with the Social Model of Disability, which directs attention to whether the environment disables the learner. A ramp, accessible entrance, suitable desk, or large print material does not change the learner's impairment, but it changes the learner's opportunity to participate. Inclusive infrastructure should therefore be treated as part of the educational process rather than as an optional physical addition.

At the same time, the evidence shows a difference between availability and adequacy. Having some braille materials, charts, specialised classrooms, or accessible paths does not mean that all learners have the resources they need when they need them. Respondents described shortages, sharing of books, limited specialised classrooms, and continuing need for equipment and technical support. The issue is therefore not simply whether a resource exists, but whether its quantity, quality, accessibility, and use are sufficient for the learner population.

The findings are consistent with Tanzanian evidence showing that inclusive education is constrained where specialised resources and accessible facilities are incomplete (Possi & Milinga, 2017; Mwambe & Mrema, 2024). They also correspond with UNESCO's rights-based understanding of inclusion, which requires education systems to respond to diversity through appropriate support and removal of barriers (UNESCO, 2020). The selected schools demonstrate movement in that direction, but the material base remains too limited for full implementation.

A further point is that resources only become educationally meaningful when teachers can use them effectively. Assistive technology, braille materials, visual aids, or adapted classroom arrangements must be linked to teaching strategies and learner needs. This means that resource provision and teacher development should be planned together. Increasing the number of specialised materials without improving teacher competence may leave resources underused, while training teachers without providing materials limits what trained teachers can do.

Overall, the findings show that the schools possess a foundation of inclusive materials and physical access features, but adequacy remains a concern. Continued investment is required to increase specialised learning materials, accessible infrastructure, assistive technology, and support services, with attention to their actual use in classroom learning.

School Leadership Support in the Implementation of Inclusive Education

School leadership emerged as an important enabling factor in the implementation of inclusive education. Teachers reported that head teachers and school administrators supervise inclusive education activities, encourage teachers to support learners with special educational needs, monitor participation, coordinate programmes, and provide professional guidance. Leadership support therefore operates through both administration and instructional supervision.

School leaders encourage teachers to support learners with special educational needs by creating a positive learning environment and ensuring that no learner is excluded from classroom activities. They also motivate teachers to apply inclusive teaching practices and monitor learners' participation during daily school programmes. (T4, interview, 15 April 2026)

A pupil further explained that

The head teacher tells us to respect pupils who have different learning needs. We are asked to include them in classroom and school activities. Teachers also report some problems to the head teacher when support is needed. (P9, interview, 22 April 2026)

The pupil's account is important because it shows that leadership influences the social climate of the school as well as formal administration. Encouraging respect and participation can reduce attitudinal barriers that affect learners with disabilities. Head teachers were also reported to organise meetings and professional discussions where teachers share experiences and identify ways of supporting learners. Parents and education officers were involved in some of these collaborative processes.

A Ward Education Officer stated that school leaders supervise the use of teaching and learning materials, monitor teachers' classroom practice, and provide guidance where improvement is required. The District Education Officer similarly emphasised the role of head teachers in coordinating inclusive education programmes, implementing government policy, identifying school needs, and mobilising available resources. These functions indicate that implementation depends partly on whether school leadership translates policy into everyday school organisation.

Leadership support is especially relevant to the Social Model of Disability because many barriers are organisational. A school leader can influence timetable arrangements, classroom placement, resource allocation, teacher collaboration, referral for support, parent engagement, supervision, and school rules about participation. Leadership cannot remove every barrier, particularly where resources depend on higher levels of government, but it can determine how effectively available resources are organised and whether inclusion is treated as a whole-school responsibility.

The field evidence also shows the limits of leadership. Respondents made clear that supervision and encouragement cannot compensate for inadequate specialised materials, limited teacher preparation, crowded classrooms, or insufficient infrastructure. Leadership is therefore necessary but not sufficient. Effective inclusion requires alignment between school-level leadership and system-level support, including financing, staffing, training, and resource provision.

The strongest interpretation of the findings is that leadership in Mwenge and Itiji primary schools provides a supportive organisational base for inclusive education. Head teachers encourage participation, coordinate stakeholders, supervise practice, and help manage resources. To strengthen this role, school leaders need continued access to professional guidance, adequate resources, and responsive support from ward, district, and national education authorities.

Study Limitations

This study was a qualitative case study of two selected public primary schools that were already implementing inclusive education. The findings therefore provide detailed evidence about Mwenge Primary School and Itiji Primary School, but they should not be interpreted as statistically or institutionally representative of all primary schools in Mbeya City. Schools operating under different staffing, infrastructure, resource, or programme conditions may show different patterns.

The analysis relied on interview and observation evidence rather than standardised measures of learner achievement, classroom inclusion, or resource adequacy. The five themes also closely followed the predetermined research areas and data-collection guides, so the analytical structure was mainly deductive. In addition, the parent study gives overlapping descriptions of sampling procedures for teachers and pupils without providing a complete recruitment flow. This limits the ability to reconstruct precisely how each technique contributed to the final sample. The study documents expert review of instruments, pilot testing, consistency checks, and triangulation, but it does not document formal member checking, independent coding, peer debriefing, or a detailed coding audit trail. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings and comparing the two cases with other settings.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Within the two case-study schools, inclusive education is being implemented, but the evidence indicates partial rather than full instructional inclusion. The schools enrol learners with a wide range of special educational needs and provide opportunities for them to participate within ordinary school environments. Teachers use learner-centred methods, peer support, demonstrations, repetition, question-and-answer techniques, and individual assistance. Some specialised learning materials, accessible facilities, and support services are available, while school leadership contributes through supervision, coordination, guidance, and stakeholder cooperation.

However, the evidence also shows a continuing gap between access to an inclusive school and full participation in ordinary classroom learning. Some learners continue to be taught separately under specialised teachers. Resource shortages, classroom congestion, limited specialised teacher capacity, and incomplete accessibility restrict the extent to which ordinary classrooms can respond to learner diversity. The implementation status is therefore best described as a developing form of inclusion that combines progress in access and social participation with continuing instructional and institutional separation.

The Social Model of Disability helps explain this gap. Many barriers identified in the study are located in the educational environment rather than in the learner. When classrooms are overcrowded, teachers lack specialist preparation, learning materials are insufficient, or facilities are inaccessible, the school system limits participation. Full implementation therefore requires systematic changes that make ordinary classrooms more responsive to varied educational needs.

Recommendations

- The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and local education authorities should strengthen continuous professional development in inclusive pedagogy. Training should cover differentiated teaching, communication support, classroom adaptation, use of assistive and specialised materials, and practical strategies for supporting learners with different disabilities within ordinary classrooms.
- Mbeya City education authorities should increase the provision and maintenance of specialised teaching and learning materials, including braille and large print resources, visual and tactile materials, suitable assistive technology, and adapted instructional resources. Provision should be based on the actual needs and number of learners in each school rather than on the presence of an inclusive programme alone.
- School infrastructure should be reviewed and improved to reduce physical barriers. Ramps, pathways, classroom entrances, toilets, seating arrangements, and other facilities should allow safe and independent access for learners with physical disabilities and other mobility needs.
- Education authorities should address classroom congestion and staffing limitations that make it difficult for teachers to provide individual support. Where specialised teachers are required, their role should support participation in mainstream learning rather than create permanent separation from ordinary classrooms unless a learner's assessed educational needs require temporary specialised instruction.
- Head teachers should continue strengthening whole-school leadership for inclusion through classroom supervision, teacher collaboration, parent engagement, learner participation, and regular review of barriers affecting pupils with special educational needs. School-level monitoring should focus not only on enrolment but also on actual participation in ordinary classroom and school activities.
- Further research should examine the experiences of learners with different disability categories over a longer period and compare inclusive education implementation across a wider number of primary schools in Mbeya City. Such studies could help distinguish barriers that are school-specific from those that reflect broader district or national implementation conditions.

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