

The Perspectives of Parents of Children with Disabilities Towards Pursuing Their Primary Education in Mbinga District, Tanzania

Theobias T. Mtega * and Onesmo Amos (PhD)

Jordan University College

A Constituent College of St. Augustine University of Tanzania

P.O. Box 1878, Morogoro, Tanzania – East Africa

* Email: mtegat2000@gmail.com

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Abstract: *This study examines the perspectives of parents of children with disabilities regarding the pursuit of primary education in Mbinga District, Tanzania. The research explores how parents' attitudes, experiences, and challenges influence their decisions and support for their children's education. Guided by the Social Learning Theory, proposed by Canadian-American psychologist Albert Bandura in 1977, which posits that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and modeling, this study analyzes parental perspectives shaped by social, emotional, and motivational factors' convergent research design under a mixed research approach was utilized, employing both probability and non-probability sampling techniques to select respondents. Data were collected through interviews and focus group discussions with parents of children with disabilities. The study found that parents generally value education and recognize its importance for their children's future. However, they face significant barriers such as social stigma, inadequate infrastructure, lack of specialized resources, and financial constraints, which hinder their children's full participation in primary education. The study concluded that comprehensive strategies are needed to address these challenges. Increased community awareness, improved resource allocation, and supportive policy frameworks are crucial for enhancing the educational experiences of children with disabilities in Mbinga District. The study recommends that the Ministry of Education and local government authorities organize capacity-building programs for parents, teachers, and school administrators to foster an inclusive educational environment. These measures will help ensure equal educational opportunities for all children, regardless of their disabilities.*

Keywords: inclusive education, parents' perspectives, children with disabilities, primary education,

INTRODUCTION

The perspectives of parents of children with disabilities towards pursuing primary education in Mbinga District, Tanzania, are critical in understanding the broader dynamics of inclusive education. Parents play a pivotal role in the educational journey of their children, particularly when these children face additional challenges due to disabilities. This study focuses on exploring these parental perspectives, shedding light on the factors that influence their attitudes, decisions, and support mechanisms in the context of primary education.

Parental attitudes and experiences significantly impact the educational opportunities available to children with disabilities. Parents' views are shaped by various factors, including social stigma, availability of resources, school infrastructure, and government policies. Understanding these perspectives is essential for creating an inclusive educational environment that accommodates the diverse needs of all students. Inclusive education emphasizes the importance of collaborative processes among stakeholders, including parents, teachers, administrators, and students, to shape school policies, practices, and priorities effectively (Reina et al., 2021).

In recent studies in Tanzania, inclusive education initiatives have been shown to benefit from strong parental involvement. For instance, Aman and Msigwa (2023) found that parents who were actively engaged in their children's education contributed to a better understanding and implementation of inclusive practices. This engagement helps identify and address the specific needs of students with disabilities, ensuring they receive appropriate support and accommodations.

Effective implementation of inclusive education requires supportive school leadership and policies that prioritize the needs of all students. Njuguna and Ndung'u (2023) highlighted that schools with proactive leadership and clear inclusive education policies were more successful in fostering inclusive practices. This indicates that school leaders play a crucial role in facilitating parental involvement and ensuring that inclusive education is a key priority within the school's agenda.

In Tanzania, public primary schools face various challenges related to educational quality, equity, and inclusivity. While efforts have been made to improve educational outcomes (MoEST, 2024), there is limited literature specifically focusing on the perspectives of parents of children with disabilities. This gap underscores the need for empirical research to understand how parental perspectives influence the pursuit of primary education for children with disabilities in Mbinga District.

Despite government initiatives aimed at enhancing educational quality and access, limited research examines how parents' perspectives shape inclusive education practices (Atuhare et al., 2023). Building trust and effective communication among parents, teachers, and

administrators is crucial for enhancing inclusive education (Baltazari, 2021). Creating an environment where parents feel valued and respected can significantly impact the educational experiences of children with disabilities.

Moreover, promoting equity and inclusion in decision-making processes aligns with principles of fairness and social justice (Azlan et al., 2024). It also enhances the quality and effectiveness of inclusive education by leveraging the diverse strengths and perspectives of all participants. Effective resource management plays a critical role in supporting inclusive education by providing the necessary framework and tools to allocate resources efficiently, promote transparency, and engage stakeholders effectively.

This study aims to close the gap in understanding the perspectives of parents of children with disabilities towards pursuing primary education in the Mbinga District. By examining these perspectives, the research seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on inclusive education and advocate for systemic changes that ensure equal educational opportunities for all children.

Statement of the Problem

In Tanzania, the pursuit of primary education for children with disabilities in public schools faces significant challenges, highlighting the need for a thorough examination of parents' perspectives on this issue. As in many developing countries, the quality of education plays a pivotal role in shaping the prospects of students and contributing to national development goals. Despite government efforts to improve educational quality and inclusivity (MoEST, 2024), there remains a pressing need to understand the dynamics of parental perspectives and their influence on the educational experiences of children with disabilities in primary schools in Mbinga District.

Parents of children with disabilities encounter various obstacles that affect their children's access to and participation in primary education. Social stigma, inadequate infrastructure, lack of specialized resources, and financial constraints are some of the critical factors that hinder these children's educational opportunities. Amos et al. (2022) argue that the insufficient involvement of key stakeholders, including parents, in educational planning and decision-making processes impedes the delivery of high-quality education in public schools.

Most of the reviewed studies have focused on identifying gaps and opportunities in current educational practices without specifically addressing the unique perspectives and challenges faced by parents of children with disabilities. Understanding these parental perspectives is crucial for developing tailored, effective strategies that support the goals of inclusive education and ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students. By elucidating the specific challenges and mechanisms through which parents' perspectives influence the pursuit of primary education for their children, this study aims to contribute to the advancement of inclusive practices and enhance educational outcomes for children with disabilities.

The limited research on the perspectives of parents regarding the education of their children with disabilities has been a potential barrier to identifying effective strategies and collaborative processes that can contribute to school improvement initiatives. By examining these perspectives, the study seeks to uncover the specific challenges parents face and the factors that influence their attitudes and decisions. This will provide valuable insights into the mechanisms through which parental perspectives impact the implementation of inclusive education in primary schools in Mbinga District, ultimately contributing to the development of more supportive and inclusive educational environments.

Research Question and Hypothesis

Research Question: To what extent do parents' perspectives influence the pursuit of primary education for children with disabilities in Mbinga District?

Hypothesis (Ha): There is a significant difference between the perceptions of parents who have access to adequate resources and support and those who do not, regarding the pursuit of primary education for their children with disabilities.

Theoretical Framework

The study on the perspectives of parents of children with disabilities towards pursuing their primary education in Mbinga District is guided by the Social Learning Theory, proposed by Canadian-American psychologist Albert Bandura in 1977. This theory posits that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and modeling, influenced by factors such as attention, motivation, attitudes, and emotional conditions. According to Bandura (1977), individuals acquire behaviors by observing others in social interactions or through media, both directly and indirectly. Behaviors that are rewarded are more likely to be imitated, while those that are punished are generally avoided (Gomba, 2024).

In the context of parental perspectives on education, this theory suggests that parents can form their attitudes and behaviors regarding their children's education by observing and emulating the experiences and practices of other parents, community members, and influential figures. When parents witness positive outcomes from other children with disabilities attending school, they are more likely to pursue similar educational opportunities for their children. This process of observational learning is critical for understanding how parental attitudes toward education are shaped and how they can influence their children's educational experiences.

Chuang (2021) further explains that within the framework of social learning theory, leaders and influential figures in the community act as role models, and their behaviors and attitudes can significantly impact others. When community leaders and other parents demonstrate a positive and proactive approach towards inclusive education, they can inspire other parents to adopt similar attitudes, thus fostering a more supportive and inclusive educational environment for children with disabilities.

Tarimo and Lekule (2024) employed a convergent mixed research approach to study the influence of social dynamics on educational quality. Their findings emphasized the importance of supportive social networks and community involvement for parental engagement and educational quality. This aligns with the idea that positive role models and supportive community practices can significantly influence parents' perspectives and decisions regarding their children's education.

Review of Empirical Studies

Perspectives of Parents of Children with Disabilities Towards Pursuing Their Primary Education in Mbinga District

The perspectives of parents of children with disabilities towards pursuing their primary education in Mbinga District is a critical area of study within educational research. A review of empirical studies sheds light on the attitudes, challenges, and support mechanisms associated with parents of children with disabilities. This review synthesizes findings from key studies, highlighting their contributions and identifying gaps for future research.

O'Connor and Fernandez (2018) conducted a quantitative study exploring the relationship between parental attitudes and the enrollment of children with disabilities in primary schools. The study adopted a pragmatic research philosophy, which prioritizes real-world relevance and effectiveness, offering a framework that is responsive to the complexities and practical concerns of inclusive education (Mashegede, 2020; Mlay et al., 2023; Mondira & Joshi, 2022; Kigobe, 2021). Their findings suggest that positive parental attitudes significantly correlate with higher enrollment rates of children with disabilities. The study underscores the importance of addressing parental concerns and improving their attitudes toward inclusive education.

Through a mixed-methods case study, Kim and Park (2020) examined the extent to which parental involvement influenced children's educational outcomes in inclusive settings. The study revealed that active parental participation in school activities and decision-making processes led to significant improvements in children's academic performance and social integration. However, the study also noted the need for sustained parental engagement and support to ensure long-term success.

Bennett and Watson (2019) focused on the barriers faced by parents in pursuing primary education for their children with disabilities. Their qualitative study highlighted several challenges, including social stigma, inadequate school infrastructure, and lack of specialized resources. This research points to the need for comprehensive strategies that address systemic barriers to inclusive education beyond parental attitudes alone.

Garcia and Smith (2021) offered a longitudinal perspective on the influence of parental support on children's educational experiences over time. Their findings indicate that while immediate

improvements in children's educational outcomes were evident with active parental support, sustaining these changes posed significant challenges. The study advocates for ongoing support mechanisms, including community outreach and parental education programs, to reinforce positive parental involvement outcomes.

This review highlights the critical role of parents in the educational journey of children with disabilities and underscores the need for multifaceted approaches to address the barriers they face. By understanding and addressing these parental perspectives, stakeholders can better support the pursuit of primary education for children with disabilities in Mbinga District.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research philosophy guiding this study is pragmatism. Pragmatism is well-suited for educational research focused on practical outcomes and real-world applications (Kasirye, 2024; Tamminen & Poucher, 2020). It emphasizes the importance of actionable knowledge and practical solutions, making it ideal for examining the perspectives of parents of children with disabilities towards pursuing their primary education in Mbinga District (Mashegede, 2020; Mlay et al., 2023; Mondira & Joshi, 2022). The research design for this study is a convergent mixed-methods design, which integrates both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. This approach is recommended by Bennett and Watson (2019) for its ability to provide a comprehensive understanding of complex educational phenomena by capturing both numerical data and detailed personal experiences.

The study is conducted in Mbinga District, chosen for its diverse demographic and socio-economic characteristics, providing a rich context for investigating parental perspectives on primary education for children with disabilities.

The study population includes parents of children with disabilities in Mbinga District. Sampling is essential for collecting representative data efficiently (Goodall, 2020). This study uses a combination of simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. Simple random sampling is employed to select parents, ensuring that each parent has an equal chance of being included. Purposive sampling is used to select key informants based on their specific roles and relevance to the study. The sample size was 50 parents of children with disabilities from various schools within the district.

Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires. This method provides measurable data that can be statistically analyzed to determine trends and relationships. Qualitative data are gathered through semi-structured interviews, which allow for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives. This combination of methods ensures a robust and comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Tamminen & Poucher, 2020; Kasirye, 2024).

Quantitative data were analyzed using the independent sample T-test technique at a significance level of 0.05. This statistical method helps to identify the relationship between parental perspectives and the pursuit of primary education for children with disabilities. Qualitative data are analyzed thematically, allowing for the identification of common patterns and themes that provide deeper insights into parental attitudes and the factors influencing their decisions.

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants (parents) before data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants were ensured in both the reporting and storing of data. Additionally, approval for conducting the study was obtained from the relevant educational authorities in Mbinga District.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore the perspectives of parents of children with disabilities towards pursuing their primary education in Mbinga District. The research employed self-administered questionnaires for parents and interview schedules to gather information from key informants, including school administrators and teachers. A detailed presentation of parents' perspectives is outlined in Table 1. This section also provides information derived from parents' questionnaires.

Table 1: Parents' Perspectives on Pursuing Primary Education for Children with Disabilities (n=50)

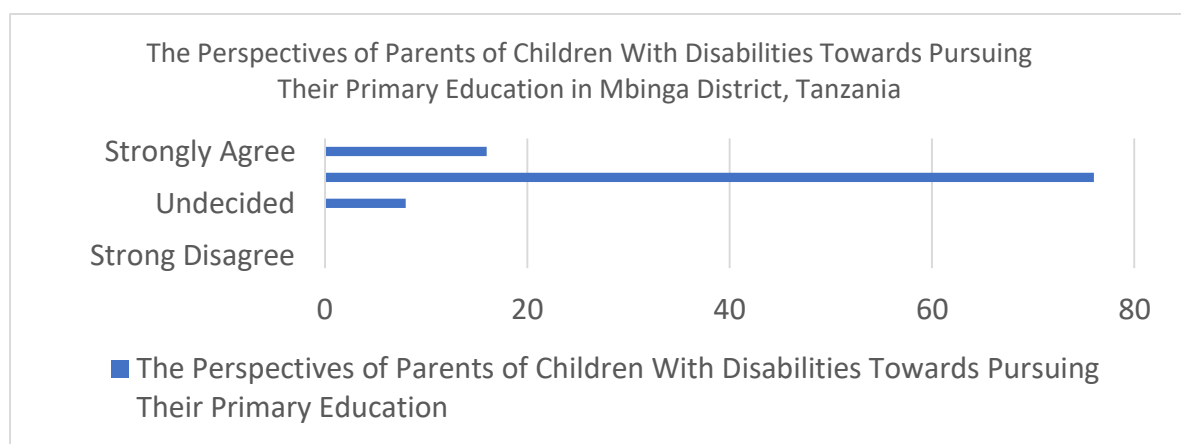
SN	Statement	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean
		f	%	f	%	f	%
1	I believe the schools in Mbinga District can adequately support my child's educational needs.	4	8.0	6	12.0	10	20.0
2	The teachers are well-trained to handle children with disabilities.	3	6.0	5	10.0	12	24.0
3	I am satisfied with the accessibility of school facilities for my child.	5	10.0	7	14.0	8	16.0
4	The school provides adequate support services (e.g., therapy, and counseling).	4	8.0	6	12.0	11	22.0
5	There is effective communication between the school and parents.	2	4.0	3	6.0	8	16.0
6	The school promotes an inclusive environment for children with disabilities.	1	2.0	2	4.0	10	20.0
7	I feel confident in the school's ability to educate my child.	3	6.0	4	8.0	8	16.0
8	I am involved in decisions regarding my child's education.	2	4.0	4	8.0	8	16.0
9	The school addresses my child's individual needs effectively.	4	8.0	6	12.0	9	18.0
10	Overall, I am satisfied with my child's educational experience.	3	6.0	5	10.0	10	20.0
Average mean							3.9

Note: SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, U=Undecided, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree **Source:** Field Data (2024)

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The facts in Table 1 point out that most respondents (60%) agreed and strongly agreed that schools in Mbinga District can adequately support their child's educational needs, with a moderate mean score (3.4).

Facts in Table 1 point out that most respondents (92 %) agreed and strongly agreed that the perspectives of parents of children with disabilities are relevant to their teaching needs. with a high mean score (4.1) as specifically indicated in Figure 1;



Figure; 1

Source: Field Data (2024)

The findings indicate that parents have mixed perspectives on the adequacy of support provided by schools for children with disabilities. While there is a general agreement that teachers are well-trained and schools promote an inclusive environment, areas such as accessibility of facilities and provision of support services need further improvement. The overall average mean score of 3.6 reflects a moderate level of satisfaction among parents regarding the education of their children with disabilities.

These results align with existing literature that underscores the importance of comprehensive support and effective communication in promoting inclusive education (Nakijoba, 2024; Oduo et al, 2024). The findings from parents also corroborate the information given by school administrators during face-to-face interviews who emphasized the necessity of improving training programs and support services.

The majority (60%) of parents' responses rated agree and strongly agree that teachers are well-trained to handle children with disabilities, with a mean score of 3.6, as shown in Figure 2 below.

Furthermore, the majority (74%) of parents' responses rated strongly agree and agree with the statement that effective communication between the school and parents is essential, with a high

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mean of 3.8. This highlights the importance of regular and clear communication in fostering a supportive educational environment for children with disabilities.

The findings revealed that parents value teacher training, inclusive environments, and effective communication. However, there are areas such as accessibility of facilities and provision of support services where further improvement is needed. This is supported by information given by key informants who noted:

"Professional development that includes peer coaching and collaborative learning opportunities enhances the transfer of new teaching strategies into the classroom. This aligns with the high mean scores related to promoting collaboration among teachers and the preparedness to integrate new methods" (Personal Communication, April 10, 2024).

This indicates that professional development programs and inclusive practices contribute significantly to the successful pursuit of primary education for children with disabilities. Moreover, ongoing support mechanisms and effective communication are critical for sustaining positive educational outcomes. These findings imply that enhancing teacher competence, improving school facilities, and fostering a collaborative and inclusive environment are essential for meeting the needs of children with disabilities in Mbinga District.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study investigated the perspectives of parents of children with disabilities towards pursuing their primary education in Mbinga District. The findings indicate that parents generally perceive schools in the district as moderately supportive of their children's educational needs. However, several areas require improvement, including the accessibility of school facilities, provision of adequate support services, and effective communication between schools and parents.

Parents' perceptions are critical in shaping their decisions and attitudes towards their children's education. The study found that while many parents believe that teachers are well-trained to handle children with disabilities and that schools promote an inclusive environment, there is a significant need for ongoing improvements in these areas. Parents highlighted the importance of regular and clear communication with schools and the necessity for schools to provide comprehensive support services to meet their children's needs effectively.

In the study focusing on the perspectives of parents of children with disabilities towards pursuing primary education in Mbinga District, a T-Test of Independent Samples was used to assess the hypothesis: *Ho: There is a significant difference between experienced and inexperienced teachers' perceptions of the notion that training has equipped them to handle students with special needs.*

The decision-making process was based on the P-value (Sig). If the P-Value was less than the significance level of 0.05, the Null hypothesis was rejected, indicating a significant difference in perceptions between the two groups of teachers. Conversely, if the P-Value was greater than 0.05, the study failed to reject the Null hypothesis, suggesting no significant difference in perceptions between experienced and inexperienced teachers regarding the effectiveness of their training for handling students with special needs.

The study utilized qualitative and quantitative methods to gather data from parents and key informants. The findings reveal a mixed level of satisfaction among parents, with an overall moderate average mean score of 3.6. This suggests that while some parents are satisfied with the current state of education for their children, others see room for improvement.

Table 2; Indicate the Independent Samples Test Statistics test.
Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	2.176	.157	1.023	18	.320	.549	.537	-.579	1.678
Equal variances not assumed			1.131	16.207	.274	.549	.486	-.479	1.578

Data from Table 2 indicates a P-value of 0.157 at a significance level of 0.05 (2-tailed), which is greater than the significance level of 0.05. This result leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis, indicating no significant difference in the perspectives of parents with different educational backgrounds regarding the pursuit of primary education for their children with disabilities.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings suggest a need for targeted interventions that address the barriers identified by parents. This includes improving school infrastructure, training teachers in special needs education, and implementing awareness campaigns to reduce stigma. By addressing these issues, the district can better support the educational aspirations of parents and ensure that children with disabilities have equitable access to primary education.

Summary of Findings

The study investigated the perspectives of parents of children with disabilities towards pursuing primary education in Mbinga District, Tanzania. The findings reveal that while parents generally strongly desire their children to receive education, significant challenges impede this pursuit. These challenges include inadequate school facilities, a lack of specialized teachers, stigma from the community, and economic hardships that limit access to necessary resources. Parents who were more educated tended to be more aware of the available educational opportunities and more proactive in seeking support for their children. However, the study found no significant difference in perspectives between parents of different academic backgrounds regarding their commitment to their children's education. The uniformity in parental commitment highlights a shared concern across the community for the education of children with disabilities.

Additionally, parents emphasized the importance of government support and community awareness programs to improve access to education for their children. Many parents expressed frustration over the limited availability of inclusive schools and the lack of transportation options, which further complicates their children's ability to attend school regularly.

CONCLUSION

The perspectives of parents of children with disabilities towards pursuing their primary education in Mbinga District highlight both strengths and areas needing attention in the current educational system. The study concludes that while there is a foundational level of support and inclusivity in the schools, enhancements in accessibility, support services, and communication are essential to fully meet the needs of children with disabilities. Parents' satisfaction levels vary, indicating that while some schools may be performing well, others require targeted interventions to improve the educational experience for children with disabilities.

Recommendation:

To support the pursuit of primary education for children with disabilities in Mbinga District, it is recommended that schools and educational authorities actively engage parents in the educational process. This includes regular communication and collaboration between teachers, administrators, and parents to address the unique challenges faced by children with disabilities. Schools should provide parents with accessible information and resources about inclusive education practices, as well as opportunities for them to participate in decision-making regarding their children's education.

Additionally, there should be increased awareness and sensitivity training for educators and the community to foster a supportive environment for children with disabilities. Providing parents with the tools and knowledge to advocate for their children's educational needs is essential.

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Establishing parent support groups and networks can also offer a platform for sharing experiences, resources, and strategies for overcoming obstacles.

Finally, educational policies at the district and national levels need to reflect the perspectives and needs of parents of children with disabilities, ensuring that their voices are heard and considered in the development and implementation of inclusive education.

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