

## Examination of Learning and Participation of Visually Impaired Students in Inclusive Schools Brief



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# **Brief Research Report on Examination of Learning And Participation of Visually Impaired Students in Inclusive Schools in Tanzania**

## **1.0. Background and Rationale of the Study**

HakiElimu is currently implementing its New Strategic Plan (2017-2021) which amongst other things advocates for improved inclusive learning and teaching environments in schools. In 2017 as the Strategic Plan's commencement year, HakiElimu commissioned a study to inquire on the inclusivity of our schools and specifically examining the "Learning and Participation of Visually-Impaired Pupils/Students in Inclusive Schools in Tanzania". The objective of the study was to establish whether, inclusive schools in Tanzania have the required settings to accommodate children with special needs and whether education policies and programmes, respond to the diverse needs of learners during teaching and learning.

## **2.0. Methodology and Participation**

The study was conducted in public primary and secondary schools with visually-impaired learners in nine regions of Mainland Tanzania namely; Dodoma, Iringa, Lindi, Morogoro, Mwanza Ruvuma, Shinyanga, Tabora and Tanga. Primary pupils and secondary students who are visually-impaired and non-visually-impaired, classroom teachers, heads of school, parents and guardians of visually impaired learners, and education officers participated in the study. The study employed a mixed methods approach, both qualitative and quantitative in enhancing effective data collection.

## **3.0. Key Findings from The Study**

Key findings of the study are based on examination of five key areas derived from the objectives of the study. They include,

Learning Environment and Materials for Visually Challenged Learners; Teachers' Facilitation for Learning of Visually Impaired Children; Learning Required Skills and Performance of Visually Impaired Children; Social Interaction and Participation of Visually Impaired Children in Inclusive Schools and Education officers' knowledge on inclusive education strategy.

### **3.1. Learning Environment and Materials for Visually Impaired Children**

This part examined how the learning environment can influence learning effectiveness for visually impaired students by looking at three areas, which are;-

- Teaching and learning environment,
- Adequacy and quality of teaching and learning materials and
- Support for visually impaired children on using the learning materials and living in inclusive settings

#### **3.1.1. Learning Environment**

##### **3.1.1.1. Mobility within school compound**

- According to the study, most of the visually impaired children interviewed were not satisfied with the learning environment which they categorized as unfriendly that limits movement. These barriers in their movement include rough pathways, indecent toilets and long distances from hostels to classrooms.
- However, teachers (mostly not visually challenged) had different opinion from what was given by majority of the interviewed visually

impaired children, for 81% of teachers were of the view that visually impaired children are able to move around comfortably around the school.

### **3.1.1.2. Classroom arrangement:**

- 66% of teachers confirmed that classroom arrangement is unfavorable and still poses impediments in learning, development and participation for visually impaired children.

### **3.1.1.3. School infrastructure**

- 69% of teachers confirmed that school infrastructure such as classrooms, toilets, pathways and other related facilities are not designed to cater for the needs of visually impaired children.
- 81% of teachers suggested that such children would learn better if placed in special schools rather than in inclusive schools.

## **3.1.2. Adequacy, quality and support for teaching and learning materials**

Regarding the adequacy and quality of teaching and learning materials for inclusive schools and key findings included the following:-

- 87% of teachers and 60% of visually impaired children pointed that special learning resources designed for visually impaired children don't suffice the demands of the group.
- The quality and design of teaching and learning materials doesn't appeal to the needs of the group as some books have images as if they were meant

for non-visually impaired learners. Furthermore, the design of some books which are spiral bound with light plastic materials makes them more susceptible to damage.

- There is need to allocate and disburse adequate funds in inclusive schools to support purchase of required learning and teaching materials for visually impaired children.
- On who supports the learning and teaching materials for visually impaired children, 55% of the interviewed heads of school reported that such resources were provided by the government. Another 34% are provided by NGOs and 10% are provided by individuals.

### **3.2 Teachers' Facilitation for Learning of Virtually Impaired learners**

This part examined teachers' competence in teaching inclusive classrooms, availability of teachers with required skills, teachers' sensitivity and support to visually impaired children in the classroom. It also looked at the participation of visually impaired children in the lessons and treatment received by these children in classrooms.

#### **3.2.1. Teachers' competences to teach in inclusive classrooms**

After assessing teachers' qualifications and competences to teach in inclusive learning environment, a number of findings were revealed.

- 49% of teachers believed they possessed required skills for teaching in inclusive classrooms while 44% admitted

to lack necessary skills to accommodate the learning needs of visually impaired children .7% teachers were not sure of whether they possess the requisite skills.

- The majority of teachers interviewed admitted to have not received any training to teach in inclusive classrooms.
- 33% of visually impaired children believed that teachers don't have required skills to teach in inclusive classroom. Some gave an example of such teachers who teach in inclusive classroom and yet cannot read Braille.. Furthermore, they said that they were being taught by normal teachers and their exams are submitted to special teachers with required skills for marking.

### **3.2.2. Availability of teachers**

- 67% of head of schools admitted to have inadequate numbers of specialized teachers for teaching visually impaired children. Only33% indicated to have sufficient number of teachers.

### **3.2.3. Teachers' sensitivity, treatment and support to visually impaired children in the classroom**

This part examined the ability of teachers to recognize and respond to the needs of visually impaired children in inclusive classroom. The findings were as follows;-

- While 10% of teachers admitted not to consider the special learning needs of visually impaired children in the classroom, 86% of teachers admitted to consider special needs of this group and 4% were not sure if consideration of special needs was of much importance.
- 80% of visually impaired children admitted to receive learning support from teachers in classrooms. 10% were

not satisfied with the treatment and raised concern that teachers offer same treatment to both visually and non-visually impaired children irrespective of their diverse of learning needs.

- 65% of teachers admitted to offer the same treatment and assumed that visually impaired children learn in the same way as other learners and that they used the same teaching approaches in their lessons.
- On the other hand 80% of teachers admitted to ensure that classroom arrangement was suitable for visually impaired children and further ensured that such learners used learning resources that were specifically designed for them.
- 61% of visually impaired students acknowledge receiving satisfactory treatment from their non-visually impaired peers.

### **3.3. Learning Required Skills and Performance of Visually Impaired Children**

The third area examined whether visually impaired children learnt required skills at their level of education. It also assessed their performance in the national examinations compared to their non-visually impaired peers.

- 75% of teachers believed that visually impaired children learnt the required basic skills including writing, reading, and arithmetic in inclusive classrooms.
- 49% of teachers believed that visually impaired children needed special attention in a classroom as they cannot learn new skills as fast as other non-visually impaired children.

- 90% of the parents reported that they were satisfied with the education their children received from inclusive schools.
- It was generally observed that the performance in national examination was good in some years and poor in other years.

### **3.4 Social Interaction and Participation of Visually Impaired Children in Inclusive Schools**

The fourth area aimed at exploring the social interaction of visually impaired children in learning and participation in inclusive schools. Specifically, the focus was on how these learners interact with teachers and their peers in and outside the classroom activities i.e. sports and games.

- 43% of teachers observed that visually impaired children do not participate in activities conducted outside the classroom with other students for the environment was not favorable to them.
- 79% of teachers admitted that visually impaired children were stigmatized by fellow students.
- 52% of visually impaired children admitted to be participating in outdoor activities and that they are involved in various sports such as goal ball and jogging.
- 48% of visually impaired children reported not to be involved in any sports in the school because of lack of supporting facilities.



### **3.5 Education officers' knowledge on inclusive education strategy**

During interviews with district education officers, researchers sought to examine their level of awareness about the inclusive education strategy as they essentially the key implementers at the district level.

- It was observed that although the strategy is well known to the majority of the education officers, a significant number of education officers are not aware of the strategy.

### **4.0. Major Challenges facing Visually Impaired Children in Inclusive Schools**

The major challenges facing visually impaired children in inclusive learning environment are include the following;-

- Shortage of teaching and learning materials
- Inadequate funding for inclusive schools
- Limited access to various places within the schools due to unfriendly infrastructure
- Poor quality teaching and learning materials particularly books
- Shortage of qualified and competent teachers
- Stigma from some teachers and sighted learners
- Lack of support staff for visually impaired children
- Late identification of visually impaired children.

The participants suggested that these challenges should be addressed to enhance effective learning of visually impaired children in inclusive classrooms.

## **5.0. General summary of key findings**

The findings of the study can be generally summarized as follows;-

- The learning environment in inclusive schools in Tanzania is relatively unfriendly for visually impaired children.
- Shortage in quality and quantity of teaching and learning materials such as braille materials, computers, embossers (braille printer), closed-circuit televisions (CCTV's), Braille papers, A4 frames and pens has direct impact on the academic success of learners.
- Investment in teachers training can enable effectiveness of teaching in inclusive learning environment.
- Visually impaired children learn better when placed in special schools other than in inclusive classrooms
- If difficulties encountered by visually impaired children such as poor learning environment, poor and inadequate teaching and learning facilities and lack of knowledge and skills among teachers are dealt with, inclusive schools will pave a way for better performance of the group.
- Teachers' lack of knowledge and skills renders interaction and participation with visually impaired children in classrooms difficult hence posing a learning barrier.

## **6.0. Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations are made to various key stakeholders.

### **6.1. Recommendations to the Government**

- Enhance in-service training programmes for primary and secondary teachers to equip them with knowledge and skills to teach in inclusive classrooms.
- Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should make special education training such as sign language and braille writing compulsory for all teacher trainees.
- There should be proper designing of teaching and learning materials for visually impaired children.
- The teacher-student ratio in inclusive classrooms should be minimized.
- The number of inclusive schools in the country should be increased.
- Training on inclusive education strategy to DEOs and REOs is essential
- Increase capitation grants to inclusive schools.
- Station technicians for maintaining machines used by visually impaired children.

### **6.2. Recommendations to schools**

- There should be regular inspection to school

environments to remove any barriers to smooth movement of visually impaired children.

- Ensure participation of visually impaired children in outdoor activities of their choice.
- Teachers should employ innovative approaches to enable visually impaired children to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.
- There should be special treatment for visually impaired children during examinations, i.e. giving them extra time during exams or tests.
- There should be proper storage of machines used by visually impaired children.
- Schools should keep proper records on enrollment of visually impaired children.

### **6.3. Recommendation to parents or guardians**

- **Parents and guardians** should pay regular visits to their impaired children as means of understanding problems which cannot be easily disclosed to teachers.

