

Research Article

Examining Stakeholders' Prospects on the Implementation of Equity-Based Strategies in Public Secondary Schools in Tanzania

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Abstract

The desire to address equity issues in the education sector is a shared philosophy by a number of countries, including Tanzania. As a result, Tanzania as a country is striving to address the issue of equity in its education system through the implementation of various equity strategies. This paper therefore sought to examine stakeholders' prospects on the implementation of equity-based strategies in public secondary schools in Tanzania. Precisely, the interest of the researchers was to explore what was being done in the selected public secondary schools to implement equity-based strategies. A mixed-methods research approach combining both qualitative and quantitative analysis approaches was employed. The study also used a multiple case study design, which allowed the selection of two case study areas i.e. Dodoma City representing the urban setting, and Kondoa district representing the rural setting. A total of One Hundred Forty-Four (144) participants from seven (7) public secondary schools were involved in the study. Data were collected through interviews and questionnaires. Quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive analysis and presented in numerical and graphical form while qualitative data were analyzed through inductive content analysis and presented in thematic form and narratives. Study findings revealed that the selected study schools were indeed implementing a number of activities towards the realization of equity and thus the prospects for implementing equity based strategies in these schools was found to be positive. For instance, activities such as the use of common and understandable language i.e., English and Kiswahili; ensuring that schools have qualified teaching staff, ensuring a supportive learning environment as well as strengthening and supporting school leadership were being implemented. Nevertheless, the study also noted that the implementation of some key factors critical for realization of equity in the schools such as incentive provision to teachers, use of appropriate technology and use of different learning styles was still weak and thus needed improvement.

Keywords

Equity-Based, Strategies, Public Secondary Schools, Stakeholders & Prospects

1. Introduction

The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) looks at the concept of equity in education to entail two aspects. First, fairness, which means ensuring that

personal and social circumstances do not prevent students from achieving their academic potential. Second, inclusion, which means setting basic minimum standards for education

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that are shared by all students regardless of background, personal characteristics, or location [1]. Similarly, [2], points out that equity in education has two major dimensions: The first dimension has to do with whether overall levels of education provision are sufficient and of the right kind.

The specific nature of these concerns varies with the level of education and with the life stage of the learners. For instance, in early childhood a dominant concern relates to ensuring access to high quality care to all who want or need it. In addition, access to childcare is itself an equity issue for parents, especially women, in terms of their ability to participate fully in the labour force. In schooling, universal access is a given but concerns exist about equality in relation to some structures, such as the provision of special education or the distinction between general and vocational education.

The second dimension of equity is concerned with participation and success of learners from particular groups that have experienced lower levels of participation and success in all areas of education. The key groups that have been identified as targets include various ethnic minorities (especially those whose first language is not that of the majority population and including, as appropriate, indigenous people and immigrants), and persons with disabilities.

On account of the explanations provided by scholars such as [1] as well as [2] on what equity in education may entail, there is no doubt that indeed equity in education is important. It is indeed global concern that is well stipulated in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Over the years, Tanzania has been in full gear implementing various equity based strategies streamlined towards ensuring that equity in its education system is attained and thus an issue of interest in this paper to examine prospects of implementing these strategies as perceived by the various education stakeholders in the country.

2. Literature Review

Worldwide, the role of education cannot be underestimated as it has proved to be the bedrock of prosperity. Hence, both public and private schools have the mandate of providing equitable access to education and ensuring that all learners have appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to succeed as contributing members of a rapidly changing, global society, irrespective of factors such as race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, language proficiency, immigration status, socioeconomic status, or disability [3]. Overall, it has been noted that in an equitable school environment, learners of all backgrounds, for instance, race, nationality, gender and many others, have the same opportunities to learn and develop their knowledge and skills. In creating an equitable learning atmosphere in schools, it is important for educators to be culturally proficient and possess the ability to communicate and work effectually across cultural lines [4]. Hence, equity in education is normally linked to equal access to formal education opportunities and resources.

Empirically, a number of studies have been carried out from a global perspective on the prospects of implementing equity in the education sector. For instance, in the USA, a study conducted by [5] revealed that the prospect of implementing equity-based strategies in schools requires the development of a common language with which teachers can use to communicate to students equally. Without such a language, teachers find it very difficult to experiment with new possibilities of enabling all students to learn equally.

Similarly, [6] also suggest that, prospects for effective implementation of equity strategies in education may require three types of interventions, i.e., pedagogical interventions that match teaching to individual student learning levels; individualized repeated teacher training associated with a specific method or task; and accountability-boosting interventions. In the context of this study, these aspects are equally important because they can influence equity in education within Tanzania if not addressed. For instance, for individualized repeated teacher training associated with a specific method or task, [6] suggest that this should include training teachers and providing them with regular mentoring to implement reading instruction in local language where necessary.

In addition, this intervention should include combining student reading groups with in-school supervision to provide ongoing guidance to groups. For the accountability-boosting intervention, [6], argue that this should include providing teachers with incentives to be present in school so that they purposely assist the students. Generally, issues raised by [6], are found to be crucial in ensuring equity in education.

From the global perspective, a study by the [7] revealed that the prospects of dealing with equity issues in education may require countries to take targeted measures/practices. For instance, the report recommends eliminating system level practices that hinder equity; and targeting low performing disadvantaged schools. This could be achieved by measures such as strengthening and supporting school leadership, attract, support and retain high quality teachers as well as ensuring effective classroom learning strategies.

In the context of Tanzania, various empirical studies have been undertaken on the prospects towards the implementation of equity-based strategies in the Tanzania education system. For instance, a study by [8] revealed that in order to achieve equity and quality in the Tanzania education system, teaching must focus on an individual learner instead of focusing squarely on learning outcomes.

Consequently, [9] points out that the MOEVT and PMORALG should allocate enough resources for School's inspection and monitoring & evaluation as a yardstick for ensuring equity and quality education. This finding is equally relevant in the context of this study. Precisely, the finding implies that when teachers are motivated then they will pay more attention to their work and to all students, be accountable and employ interactive methods of teaching that will involve all students. This will assist in ensuring that all stu-

dents are on board and thus promote equity.

Overall, the literature in this paper reveals that various efforts are being undertaken to implement equity based strategies and thus making it of interest to stakeholders' perspectives on the implementation of these strategies in public secondary schools.

3. Materials and Methods

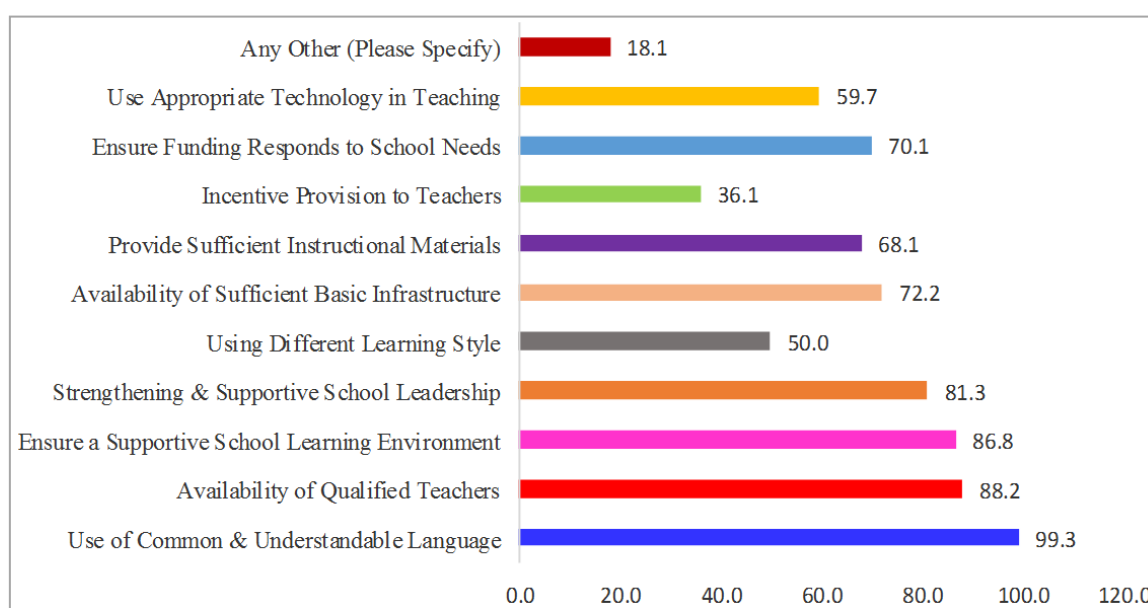
A mixed-methods research approach combining both qualitative and quantitative analysis approaches was employed. The study also used a multiple case study design, which allowed the selection of two case study areas i.e. Dodoma City representing the urban setting, and Kondoa district representing the rural setting. A total of One Hundred Forty-Four (144) participants from seven (7) public secondary schools were involved in the study. Data were collected through interviews and questionnaires. Quantitative data were analysed through descriptive analysis and presented in numerical and graphical form while qualitative data were

analysed through inductive content analysis and presented in thematic form and narratives.

4. Results and Discussion

Exploring stakeholders' prospects on implementation of equity-based strategies in public secondary schools was at the heart of this study in the context of this objective. Precisely, under this objective, the study sought to explore what was being done in the selected schools to implement equity-based strategies. On account of the findings on this objective, the study drew conclusions on whether prospects for implementation of equity-based strategies were positive or negative.

In order to explore this objective, the study examined a set of prospect factors to establish current situation of each prospect situation in the selected study schools. Findings on this objective were as shown in Figure 1 while specific details as per each prospect are presented in the preceding sub sections.



Sources: Field data, 2022

Figure 1. Stakeholders' Prospects on Equity Strategy Implementation.

4.1. Use of Common and Understandable Language

Through the administered questionnaire on teachers, findings in this study revealed that 99.3% (143 teachers out of 144 teachers) indicated that they were using a common and understandable language in their teaching of students in the selected study public secondary schools. The factor scored the highest percentage rate when compared to all the other

examined factors.

Teachers who participated in the study stressed that they use bilingual teaching approach whereby both Kiswahili and English are used to complement each other and this enables all students to understand what is being taught by the teacher. In addition, they also revealed that this increases students' confidence and allows them to express themselves easily which enhances their learning. Quotes from some of the teachers as presented through the questionnaire were as stated below.

Teacher with Code Number 33: 'Using Kiswahili and

English languages makes all students to understand'

Teacher with Code Number 75: *'I use both English and Swahili which makes it easy for my students to understand. In some instances, I also try to use local dialects to make sure that students understand what I am teaching'.*

The interviews with key informants that included head teachers and education officers also revealed that using a common and understandable language was important in ensuring that all children understand what is being taught. For instance, Kondoa district education officer narration on this matter during the interview was as stated below.

'Teachers are encouraged to use both English and Kiswahili to ensure that their students understand what they are teaching. In some of our schools, our teachers even go to the extent of using local languages to help their students. To us this is very good and we strongly encourage it'.

The above findings therefore show that the use of common and understandable language was something that was seriously being considered and taken into consideration by teachers in the selected public secondary schools from the study areas.

As a result, these findings tend to conquer with [5] who revealed that the prospect of implementing equity-based strategies in schools requires the development of a common language with which teachers can use to communicate to students equally. Without such a language, teachers find it very difficult to experiment with new possibilities of enabling all students to learn equally. The results also conquer with the findings of [8] who also stressed that in order to achieve equity and quality in the Tanzania education system, use of a common and understandable language should be seen as one of the catalysts to this goal.

4.2. Availability of Qualified Teachers

Findings on the availability of qualified teachers from the administered questionnaires on teachers revealed that 88.2% (127 teachers out of 144 teachers) indicated the availability of qualified teachers in these schools. The prospect factor was rated second in terms of being implemented in the selected study schools.

According to the teachers who completed the study questionnaire, all teachers in the selected schools were qualified teachers with most of them having degree qualifications. In addition, the teachers stressed that the government had played a great role of ensuring that these schools have qualified teachers in almost every subject. Similarly, teachers further pointed out that despite of ensuring that schools have qualified teachers, there is still a challenge of finding that the teachers are very few to adequately cater for the many students usually enrolled in these public schools. An example of the statement on the matter from the teachers in a completed questionnaire is as quoted below;

Teacher with Code Number 73: *'Most of us teaching in this school have degrees and so it is not possible to find one of us*

with no qualification. Personally, I think the issue is not in having quality teachers because all recruited teachers have qualifications. The problem is in the number of students that one teacher has to struggle with. The students are usually very many when compared to the teachers. This is what affects the quality of teaching in these schools'

The interview on the same matter with head teachers as key informants also revealed that the issue of having quality teachers was highly emphasized right from the recruitment stage. However, they too expressed the concern of having many students to be served by a few teachers as a core challenge. For instance, the head teacher from school Y in Dodoma City narrated this matter during the interview as follows;

'In these public schools, having qualified teachers is not a problem. We get all our teachers recruited through the government system which requires them to have certain qualifications. However, this is not the problem. Our problem is that we normally have few teachers in comparison to the students' numbers. In this case, you may find a single subject teacher having to deal with over 300 students alone'.

A follow up discussion with education officers as part of the key informants revealed that they also emphasized the need to have qualified teachers in secondary schools as a pre-requisite to providing quality education to students in these schools. In addition, they also acknowledged the fact that in some schools the number of students is always higher than the teacher number which makes teaching a bit difficult. This situation was narrated by one of the education officers during the interview as presented below;

'The government is dedicated to improving learning for every student and because of that, it has put emphasis on recruiting teachers with qualifications. Of course, we find some schools having many students and few teachers but this is a logistic matter being addressed by the government'

Generally, the findings on the aspect of availability of qualified teachers show that in the examined public secondary schools is not an issue. On the contrary, the issue lies in having sufficient number of qualified teachers that match the increasing number of students in these schools. These results conquer finding by [8] who also revealed that having well qualified teachers is equally important to successful attainment of equity and quality education. In addition, [10] from South Africa also reviewed a set of 79 empirical studies on promotion of equity in education and found that the prospect for implementation of equity in education requires among other needs as having able and qualified teachers.

4.3. Ensuring a Supportive School Learning Environment

Findings from the administered questionnaire on teachers in this study revealed that 86.8% (125 teachers out of 144 teachers) indicated that a supportive learning environment

was provided to every student in the selected study public secondary schools. In this context, the teachers argued that students were being provided with sufficient classroom space, laboratories and sports grounds among others.

However, teachers in the study also raised the concern that the provision of such supportive learning environment is normally threatened by the huge enrolment of students such that things like classroom, laboratories fail to accommodate all students. For instance, one of the teachers with code number 69 from school D in Kondoa district quoted as follows;

'We try as much as possible to ensure that the school environment is supportive to the learning needs of our students. The government has been at the forefront of helping in expanding our facilities such as classrooms, providing desks and constructing toilets. Our only concern is that every year the enrolment keeps increasing and so the demand for more supportive learning environment also keeps growing. Otherwise, our students at present are very ok with our current learning environment'.

The interview with head teachers also revealed that providing a supportive learning environment was a priority concern among head teachers. In fact, according to one of the interviewed head teachers from Konda district, making sure that there is a supportive learning environment to every student is part of the performance assessments for head teachers. As a results, head teachers are required to make the best use of what is available to them and ensure that a certain degree of supportive learning environment is realized in their schools. This situation was narrated by the head teacher during the interview as follows;

'As head teachers, it is not for discussion as to whether we should provide a supportive learning environment or not. In fact, this is a must because it is even part of our performance assessment criteria. We normally fall short of things like funds to provide such environment in its fullest but you are expected to be seen doing something, including seeking an available support from the government for your school'.

In addition, the interview with the education officer from Dodoma City also emphasized on the matter by stressing that the government has a keen eye on the learning environment in its schools. As a result, both teachers and head teachers must play their roles in ensuring that their schools provide such supportive learning environment to the students. The education officer narrated this situation during the interview as cited below....,

'The government is sacrificing a lot of resources in the education sector and especially in ensuring that the schools are well equipped and facilitated so as to offer good learning environment to every student. We therefore work with the head teachers and teachers to see to it that such government efforts are not wasted'.

The findings as per this aspect indicate that the process of implementing equity-based strategies through the provision of supportive learning environment is being taken on board as revealed from the interviewed study participants. These

results conquer with the view that creating a supportive school learning environment for children that is engaging and interactive is considered key to achieving equity in any education system as stressed by [11].

However, there is also indication that some schools may be struggling to either provide or maintain acceptable standards of learning environment due to the ever-growing student enrolment and funding challenges.

4.4. Strengthening and Supportive School Leadership

Findings from the administered questionnaire on teachers with regard to this matter in the context of this study revealed that 81.3% (113 teachers out of 144 teachers) indicated that strengthening and supporting of school leadership and teachers in the selected study schools was necessary. This is because it makes it easy to implement activities that support equity-based strategies. According to the teachers, such support is normally provided in the form of short course training to leaders and teachers, provision of basic facilities, allowing teachers to go for further studies and providing housing to some teachers that reside on school premises. As quoted from one of the teachers from School D in Kondoa district in a completed questionnaire;

'I have been teaching for the last 7 years in this school and during this time, I have been supported by my school which makes my work easy and am able to focus on my work' It is not easy to deal with students when you are also struggling with issues but if you are supported, then you find peace of mind to work'.

The interview with head teachers also proved that being strengthened and supported enables head teachers to effectively execute their duties including those that relate to promoting equity in schools. For instance, one of the head teachers cited the financial support they receive from the government and routine training as key to their effective functioning. This was narrated by the head teacher during the interview as cited below

'Normally when we receive support as school leaders this empowers us to do our work well. It becomes very easy for us to enforce activities that will promote equity in the learning process for all students. For example, my school receives a lot of support from the government and this has been of great help in the way we function'.

The follow up interview with education officers also revealed that school leadership need to be supported so that they can effectively execute their duties. According to the Dodoma City education officer, supporting school leadership by the government is necessary because without it, head teachers may find it difficult to operate.

Generally, the results on this aspect of strengthening and supporting school leadership show that selected schools considered support received as of paramount importance in their execution of duties including those that relate to promoting

equity. As a result, these findings conquer with [12, 13] who argued that lack of strengthening and supportive school leadership also makes it difficult to achieve equity in education if not addressed. According to the author, when schools lack good leadership, it becomes difficult to implement and monitor activities that lead to equity in such schools.

5. Implications

Results show that despite of the fact that prospects towards implementing equity-based strategies appear to be positively being promoted, interviewed stakeholders stressed that some key factors that are necessary for effective implementation of equity based strategies have not been given due attention in the implementation process. Such factors include incentive provision to teachers, encouraging the use of appropriate technology as well as using different learning styles. This implies that there is a need to improve on the implementation prospects of equity based strategies in the education sector by the government if Tanzania is to fully achieve its intended goal of ensuring inclusive education for all children in the country.

6. Conclusions

Overall, noted observation on the findings relating to the stakeholders' prospects on implementation of equity – based strategies in public secondary schools show that the selected study schools were found to be implementing a number of activities towards realizing this goal. For instance, from the examined prospect factors being implemented, this study found that the four most implemented factors included the use of common and understandable language i.e., English and Kiswahili; ensuring that schools have qualified teaching staff, ensuring a supportive learning environment as well as strengthening and supporting school leadership.

On account of the above findings, the drawn conclusion by this study was that prospects towards implementing equity-based strategies are positively being promoted but need further improvement in the aspects of incentive provision to teachers, use of appropriate technology and use of different learning styles. The implementation of these factors was found to be weak and thus needed attention from the concerned authorities.

7. Recommendation

On account of the study findings, this study recommends that there is a need for further improvement in implementing prospects/activities that will enhance inclusive education in the country. Precisely, this study emphasizes the need to improve teachers' incentives, introduction of appropriate and user friendly technology as well as encouraging the use of different learning styles that meet the different learning cir-

cumstances of the students.

8. Future Research Direction

Based on the study results, future research direction on this matter should seek to explore the extent to which improvement in the implementation of equity based strategies is being carried out in the country.

Abbreviations

MOEVT	Ministry of Education and Vocational Training
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PMO-RALG	Prime Minister's Office, Regional Administration and Local Government
URT	United Republic of Tanzania

Author Contributions

Faith William Matowo: Study Conceptualization, data collection and analysis as well as writing paper as a PhD Candidate

Mohamed Salum Mosorka: Provided constructive inputs into the study as the principle supervisor

Flora Kiwonde: Provided constructive inputs into the study as the second supervisor

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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