

Factors Influencing Parents' Readiness to Enrol Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) into School in Tanzania

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the factors that influence parents' readiness to enrol their children with Special Educational Needs in school. It is based on a qualitative study that was conducted in two districts in Tanzania and used a purposively selected sample of 26 parents as key informants. The methods used to collect the required data included in depth interviews and observation and the data collected from these methods were thematically analysed. The findings indicate that parents' readiness to send their children with SEN to school is hindered by multiple factors including parents' lack of motivation, inadequate support and encouragement from the immediate social environment, unwelcoming school environment as well as shortages of transport to manage the distance from home to school. Recommendations included among others the need for continued effort to sensitise parents and the public on the essence of sending children with SEN to school as well as for the government to provide an enabling environment for children with SEN to start and remain in school.

Key words: *special educational needs, disability, inclusive education*

Introduction

There has been a growing concern that despite of the Governments' effort and commitment to provide equal access to education for all children in Tanzania, discrepancy remains between rhetoric and reality. The enrolment of children with Special Education Needs (SEN) as it is for other countries in the world remain underrepresented (UNESCO, 2018). While it is

¹A child or young person has SEN if he/she has a learning difficulty or disability, which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her. In this paper Special Educational Needs will be used interchangeably with the term Disability although they are not necessarily the same. Not every child with disability calls for special education provision to be made for him or her.

estimated that 7.9 percent of Tanzanians are living with a disability (Mnyanyi, 2014; National Bureau of Statistics, (NBS, 2008), UNICEF (2017) in its education fact sheet observed that less than 1 percent of children in pre-primary, primary and secondary school have a disability. The available official statistics from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) on the percentage of children with disabilities enrolled in primary schools was reported to be very low; at the range of only 0.43 percent by 2018 (MoEST, 2018). The situation has not changed much to-date (MoEST, 2022). Presently, there is still a large number of children with disabilities who are left out of the education system. According to the Five Years Education Sector Development Plan (2016/17 –2020/21) an estimated 400,000 school-aged children with disabilities live in Tanzania (MoEST, 2018). Only a total of 49,625 children with disabilities were registered in primary schools by 2018 (MoEST, 2019), which is equivalent to only 12.4 percent of all school-age children with disabilities who should be registered in primary schools. There are some concerns that this may even be an underestimate as children with disabilities are still hidden and not declared (Rohwerder, 2020).

Within this context that study was conceived as necessary to explore from the parents themselves why to date children with disabilities/SEN are not enrolled in school despite the available educational opportunities. A research of this nature was thought as important because in Tanzania all children regardless of their status have a legal right to access basic education. However, as it was indicated before, enrolment of children with special educational needs in Tanzania is still very low compared to the total number of children with disability. A situation where this segment of the population remains under represented within the education system cannot be left to continue. The purpose of this study therefore, was to examine the factors that influence parents' readiness to enrol their children with Special Educational Needs into school.

Literature Review

It is an undeniable fact that parents have a big role to play in the decision making process to enroll their children in school. Parents are the ones who make the final decision to allow their children to participate in the education system. As children grow and develop, parents make adjustments related to the changes in their children's development. One of the major adjustments parents make as observed by Dockett, Perry and Kearney (2012) is in response to children starting

school. They contend that, when a child leaves the home environment for the first time it can be an anxious and emotional time for the whole family. Ferrel (2012) also suggests that the way in which the first transitions are handled could have a significant impact on the child's capacity to cope with change in the short and long term. Parents are the first educators of their children and they continue to influence their children's learning and development during the school years and long afterwards (Jennings & Bosch, 2011).

In Tanzania, parental engagement in the transition process to start schooling for their children with SEN has not received much attention in terms of research (Thompson, 2017). There are however few studies that have implicitly been reported around this subject mainly focusing on access to and factors that influence provision of education to school age children with disabilities and SEN in Tanzania (Cosmas, 2018; Mapunda et.al 2017; Kesho Trust 2013; Stone-MacDonald, 2012; Mbwilo, Smide & Aarts 2010). All these studies have established that Tanzania has made great progress towards achieving its primary education targets and supporting students with disabilities. However, challenges remain which continue to keep these children outside the education mainstream. One of these challenges is lack of common understanding and collaboration between parents and teachers on who does what, how and why.

Although, Tanzania has already set a national inclusive education strategy to enable children with disabilities and SEN to enjoy their right to education (MoEST, 2018), realization of this strategy is still very far. A study conducted by a team of researchers (Mapunda et al 2017) to assess if there is a functioning school-based system of assessment for identification and intervention programmes for children with special educational needs revealed that there were no special educational needs policy implementation frameworks necessary to enforce the provision of special educational needs in regular schools. Communication between schools and families of children with special educational needs was also very poor.

The gap between the intended policy outcome and what is actually implemented has also been cited by Mbunda (2017) and Said (2017) in their studies to assess the implementation of inclusive education in Tanzania's primary schools in Ruvuma Region and Morogoro Municipality respectively. Mbunda (2017), raised concern about insufficient teaching and learning materials to facilitate education

provision for children with SEN while Said (2017), indicated that enrolment rate for children with disabilities was still very low because of several institutional factors. These included lack of preparedness for teaching children with SEN as well as inadequate materials and good infrastructure to make inclusive education realistic.

It is important to note that the findings reported herein are not unique to Tanzania. Odongo (2018) in Kenya reported on the same issues. In particular parental participation remains low especially in the rural areas due to stigma, poverty and lack of useful knowledge. Children with disabilities are often stigmatized and viewed as unable to learn and so are rarely encouraged to go to school. This study was guided by ecological systems theory developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979).

The ecological systems theory provides a theoretical model about direct and indirect influences on children's learning through five concurrent surrounding sub-systems. It recognises the role played by the environment in which a child operates. That, children whether with or without disability are affected not only by structures closest to the child (microsystems) but also on how these structures interact and relate (meso-systems) and by the surrounding world (macro-systems). In the context of this study it implied that children's transition to school is not only dependent or influenced by the nature of disability of the child but also on parents, schools, peers and their relationships as well as on the socio-economic and cultural context within which the child lives. The theory was considered practical for this study because it gives emphasis on the interrelationships of the sub-systems and that if one system fails to work together, it will have negative effects on the other subsystems.

Further, this study was also informed by the Child Friendly School-(CFS) Model UNICEF (2012). According to this model enrolment to school for children with SEN is defined by three interlinked dimensions: a) ready children; b) ready schools; and c) ready families/parents. The model assumes that when parents are prepared and willing to send their children with SEN to school and the schools are prepared for them, children with SEN are more likely to enrol in school on time and stay until they complete primary school.

Therefore this study is anchored in a combination of ideas from the ecological theory and CFS Model and modified to form the following model.

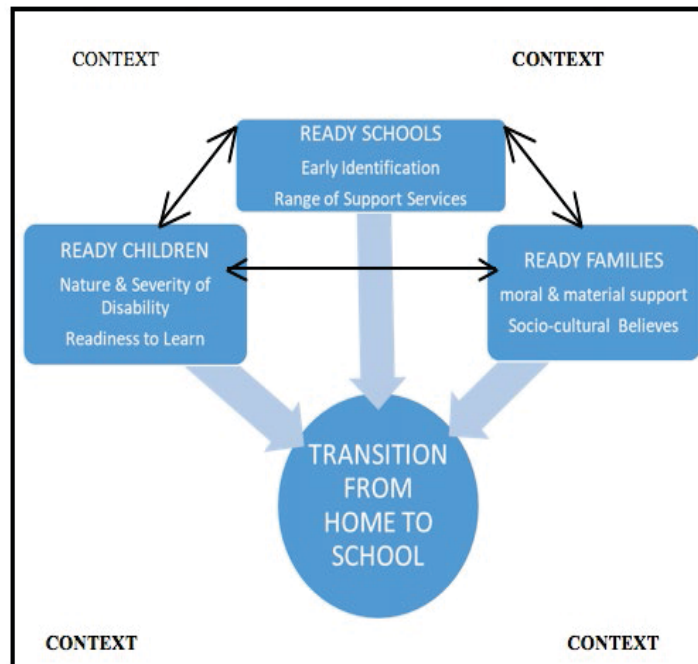


Figure 1: Diagram representing the Theoretical and Conceptual Framework modified from Child Friendly School-(CFS) Model developed by UNICEF (2012).

Materials and methods

This study employed qualitative research approach. Within the qualitative approach the study adopted embedded case study design. According to Yin (2003) an embedded case study is a case study containing more than one sub-unit of analysis. It is appropriate for descriptive studies, where the goal is to describe the features, context, and process of a phenomenon. In Tanzania, same as in other countries children with SEN who are integrated in regular schools are classified in several categories mainly autism, physical, visual, hearing, and intellectual (development delay) impairment). The inclusive schools where these children are integrated formed the subunits of the single context. This means also that the parents of these respective categories of children formed the subunits

of the single group of parents. The study was conducted in Kinondoni district in Dar es Salaam Region and Kibondo district in Kigoma Region. The selection of Dar es Salaam was based on the fact that Dar es Salaam was the first region in the country to practice inclusive education and is urban based. It was also reported to have registered more children with disability than any other region in the country (President's Office Regional Administration and Local Government, 2018). Kigoma Region was also considered appropriate for this study since it was located at the peripheral and is rural based. According to the Tanzania Disability Monograph (URT, 2019) more children with disabilities who never attend school, come from the rural areas like Kibondo largely because of lack of awareness among parents. Besides, the Education Sector Performance Report for Tanzania Mainland by MoEST (2019) shows that at primary school level, Kigoma Region had the least Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in the country (89.6%) which suggests that there are still large numbers of out-of-school children.

Twenty six parents were selected through snowballing and convenient sampling and these were subjected to semi structured interviews. The parents were divided into two categories: parents with children with SEN in inclusive schools and other category of parents who have decided to keep their children with SEN at home (not sent to school). Parents with children in school had adequate information relevant to the topic under study. The other set of parents with children but still at home gave insights into why they decided to keep their children at home and what they thought ought to be done to enable such children to start schooling. With the assistance of village authorities and teachers the researcher managed to visit the respective parents and conducted face to face interviews with the parents until when the saturation point was reached.

Information collected through interviews were recorded and later on transcribed. The transcripts were read over carefully to get a sense of the data's totality and to establish categories as per research questions. The categories were examined to form main themes which guided the analysis and discussion of findings.

Results

The profile of parents with children with disabilities/SEN.

An examination of parents who had children with disabilities and SEN shows that they were not homogeneous. Rather, they were heterogeneous in terms of

age, sex, educational level and economic status. In the first place all parents who participated in this study were biological parents and were all adults by legal and social definition. This means that they were all above 18 years which is the legal definition in Tanzania. Socially they were all married, had children and had social responsibilities related to these children and community at large. In terms of occupation, some parents were government employees (teachers and nurses), while others were self-employed (petty business) and others were small-scale farmers especially in Kibondo district. Although disability is sometimes associated with poverty, it was not evident that only parents from poor families had children with disabilities. Some children were just born with disability regardless of the socio-economic status of the parents. Information obtained from parents revealed that some children were born well and it wasn't very easy to know that the new born child would finally be in the situation he/she was currently in. Others were involved in some accidents of one form or another. As for children with intellectual impairment and autism for example, parents narrated that they slowly noticed that the growth and development of their children was not normal. The exact causes especially for autism remains unknown. Since this was not the focus of the study the researcher did not push this aspect far. What is true is that all parents regardless of their socio-economic status or educational level did not choose to have children with disabilities .

It was interesting to note that majority of parents who came forward for interviews were women-mothers (18 women and 8 men). Even through observation, it was noted that its mothers who were taking trouble to escort their children with disabilities to school. Only in few occasions like in Kinondoni District, children were taken to school using public transport or hired motorcycles and bicycles driven by men. There wasn't any specific reason for this but it appears the mothers have accepted this as their role. This is not surprising because traditionally, the actual day-to-day tasks related to the child's care are not men's priority. Although, it was very tiresome and time consuming the mothers did not complain. They felt that men (father and husband) were not capable of providing adequate care for the child with a disability or that they (mothers) are simply more qualified for this important task. The following interview extract explains this:

I am a teacher by profession. I have a child with intellectual impairment. She was born normal like any other child and I did not know that she had any defect. But slowly at the

age of 6 months she stopped growing up as other children. She stopped increasing in weight as similar to other children of her age. Almost everything became stagnant. She was delayed to sit down and walk. She started walking at the age of three. She was frequently being attacked with high fever and convulsions. It wasn't easy at all. Sometimes she would cry the whole night. We went to seek for medical advice in several places. Finally we were informed that our daughter had some problems within her brain and won't grow normal. Of course this wasn't good news at all for a parent especially for a mother. You think of so many things and ask yourself so many questions without straight forward answers. My husband is self-employed. His work is equally demanding. It involves travelling. We had to sit down, discuss and agree. After a long discussion, debate and consultation I decided as a mother to sacrifice my job. I wanted to spend more time with my child.

Factors influencing parents' readiness to enrol children with SEN into school

The study revealed several factors which affect parents' readiness to enrol children with SEN into school. These factors are presented and analysed in the following section.

The main factor deduced from the analysis of findings was Parents' Lack of motivation and inspiration which was largely psychological and personal to the parents themselves. Some of these parents were staying very close to inclusive schools but were not motivated to send their children with SEN to school. The only thing they were mainly concerned with was insecurity and the future of their children in the event that they die. When one of the parents who was staying very close to an inclusive school was asked as to why they have not sent her child to school, she had this to say:

Sending this child to school is not something one can be excited and proud of. After all what will she learn? And what will be next? The doors for a bright future are already closed. My daughter will be stigmatized and traumatized

by other children in school. She will not be associated with anyone in class. That is why I have just accepted this situation and kept my daughter in doors.

Such parents had low self-esteem and lost hope over their children. They didn't believe that they were able to learn in a normal classroom setting and in the same way as other children. They looked sad and desperate.

Within the same context, one parent did not even want to talk about her child because of what happened. The child was born healthy but at the age of five years they got involved in a bad bus accident which led the into the child's loss of the right arm and brain injury. According to this parent the original dream and hope to go to school was cut short by that accident.

Subsequent analysis of the findings also revealed that lack of inspiration and motivation to send children with SEN to school was fuelled by lack of moral support and encouragement from the immediate social environment, close relatives and even community members as a whole. While parents accepted having children with disabilities as a will of God some family and community members viewed it differently. According to the parents very few people and even close family members had the understanding that children with disabilities were human beings like others and did not choose to be the way they were. In an interview session, parents voiced their concern about the ridicule and mockery they were getting from close relatives who felt that sending a child with disability was a waste of time and resources. Some didn't believe that a child with intellectual impairment for example could learn anything useful to lead an independent life in future. They erroneously associated disability with evil. This feeling of bad luck was strongly felt by mothers who were blamed to give birth to such children as can be seen from this interview extract which was emotionally shared:

My in-laws despise me to say I have brought bad luck hence a source of sorrow and agony disappointment in the family. I remember one day my sister in law came to visit us and found me busy with putting things together for my child with SEN to start school like other children without disability. She mocked me and say I was wasting my time and the little money we had in the family to send such child to school. My child has cerebral palsy and her development has been slow and problematic. She was born normal and with love and

affection we brought our baby girl home. However, at about three or four months, we realized that her development was very different from that of the other children. Her muscular development was very tight on one side, and quite loose on the other side. She started walking very late the age of four and presently she cannot walk firmly by herself. During early years, she frequently experienced convulsions. The Doctors informed us that this was a lifelong situation and we just have to accept and stay with it positively. My sister in law asked me very provoking and upsetting questions. As a mother I was very much hurt and traumatized.

Apart from lack of inspiration and the desire to send children with learning disabilities to school, some parents were also unwilling to enrol their children with disabilities because of lack of self-knowledge and awareness about the cause of disability in children as well as available opportunities. . They did not know that given support and proper intervention, such children would learn even if it would be at a slow pace. They also held false beliefs and myths about disability. In one family they had two children with albinism and the parents felt it was really bad luck to have such children. The parents felt that their identity and even respect they had within the society has changed. The father had this to say:

We feel embarrassed because of the existence of these children in the family. We have accepted this as a will of God but we ask ourselves what we have done to God to have such children within the family. Personally, I don't see any reason why we should spend time to prepare these children to go to school. Wherever I go people point fingers on me. We are psychologically alienated

Again, as it was narrated by the mother, the blame for giving birth to children with albinism was heavily placed over her shoulders. However, there is no scientific empirical support for the notion that mothers cause their children's albinism. It was learned from these parents especially mothers were even scared to have additional children thinking they might get another child with the similar problem.

The researcher asked the parents if they were aware of the existence resources and services for their children to access educational opportunities. Majority of parents (15 out of 26) said that they were aware of the existence of inclusive schools but not the resources and support services offered by those schools. Four parents who have kept their children at home said they were not aware of anything. Even those who were aware of the presence of inclusive schools they could not tell exactly how this was working out. They were pessimistic and did not believe for example that children with intellectual disability or extreme autism could learn anything tangible.

It was indeed a pity that parents did not know that autism for example, was just a condition and not something to hide. Research has shown that with early intervention and continued therapies, a child with autism can lead an independent, productive, and happy life. As affirmed by Olley (2005), some of them can be very successful in school and develop to their full potential. The teacher who is specialized in autism in one of the inclusive schools in Kinondoni district for example confirmed that early intervention yields big benefits. In that school they had five children with autism in different stages. Those who reported early had shown great improvement.

When Ally came here he was unable to talk, socialize and stay attentive. He was solely alone all the time at the corner of the class. He did not want to interact with other children even during break time. I decided to keep an eye and give him individualized personal support. Now he can talk a few words.

The nature and severity of the child's disability was pointed out by parents as another reason why they failed to comply with government call and directive to send children with disabilities to school. During field research for example the researcher met two parents with children who had profound multiple disabilities. The first parent had a son with half of the body (right hand side) paralyzed and was unable to move and talk well. The second one had a child who was dragging his bottoms to move around within the family compound and it was very difficult for such children to move out of the homestead to school.

Much as I am very thankful to the government to provide special schools for our children with disability, I am currently at crossroad given the nature of disability for my child.

While for example normal children can simply walk on their feet to school, children with physical disability like mine cannot do so. He needs a wheel chair and someone to assist to move the child around. The wheel cannot easily afford this.

Apart from these two parents, the researcher also met another parent who appeared for an interview with the child who was about 13 years old but he had tied him with ropes around his feet and arms to prohibit him from movement. This child had severe autism and was also intellectually impaired. The parent explained that her child had persistent challenges in social interaction, speech and even nonverbal communication. He was destructive and at times he used to hurt himself as if he had no feelings. Apart from all this, he was hyperactive and could not stay focused in one area. Sadly, the parent (father) explained that much as the family would have wished to send his child to school, the nature and complexity of the child's disability has made it impossible. At home the child has to be watched and stay closely with someone. Sometimes the child is locked inside for some hours to allow parents to go to the fields for cultivation especially during raining season.

Long process of getting a child with disability registered in the school system was mentioned as another stumbling block for parents to send their children with SEN to school. The parents informed the researcher that the process begins with medical assessment and diagnosis. Before a child is accepted at an inclusive school he/she has to be assessed by a medical practitioner to get a confirmation certificate of the child's type of disability and if there was any medical attention / treatment needed. Medical doctors also determine if a child is eligible for special education support and services. Technically, this is an important requirement and step not advisable to skip. Teachers need to be well informed and advised by medical practitioners accordingly. Some of the parents who participated in this study considered this requirement as cumbersome, unnecessarily bureaucratic as well as time-consuming especially if parents are not staying close to the district government hospital or any other government hospital where they can easily and freely access the doctors. In rural remote areas of Kibondo district for example, this step was not very practical because the district hospital is not accessible to distant communities. Therefore, parents just take their children with disabilities to school for the teachers themselves to carry out initial assessment and identification.

Some teachers were very understanding and accepted the children without the medical certificate especially where they felt the disability wasn't very complex. Otherwise parents were advised to go and seek for the medical confirmation. In an interview with parents it was clear that for the some parents the morale to enrol their children was low and they were doing this because they had been told by local leaders to do so. Being told to go back for medical diagnosis and certification was more or less like a permit to go back home forever. For educated parents who were aware of the importance of education and who wanted their children with disabilities to learn something the situation was different. They were willing to take their children for the medical diagnosis and certification before taking them to school for registration.

Apart from severity of the child's disability, parents also mentioned distance from home to school and lack of transport to enable all children make the journey each morning to school and the classroom as another challenge. Children with disabilities unlike those who are normal cannot be left to commute to school from home on their own. Unfortunately, not every primary school was an inclusive school. As pointed out Kibondo district had only 3 inclusive schools to cater for the whole district. Certainly not every child in need was staying in the neighbourhood. The only one school which has been converted into a boarding school had no capacity to absorb all children with SEN in the district because of lack of facilities and adequate specialized staff Even for Kinondoni not all primary schools were inclusive. At times parents had to board public or private transport to take their children with disabilities to school and bare the task of waiting for them within the school environment until when lessons were over. According to the parents, this was very time demanding and had financial implications. It also entailed having some money to pay for the fare of the child and the person who is assisting or escorting the child to school. Further to that, the parents also raised their concern that the time to be spent waiting for the children would have been have been used for other family commitments. For working parents the situation was even more complicated because they had to go to work hence hire someone to perform this task. The parents were worried that sometimes such logistics acted as barriers and discouragement for parents' to send their children with SEN to start schooling. This has also been observed in the current National Inclusive Strategy (URT 2022) that without customised support those with certain disabilities may find it extremely difficult to attend school even where ordinarily distance is considered

reasonable. An interview extract from a parent in Kinondoni who had a girl child with intellectual impairment confirms this:

There is no way my child can move alone from home to school. I have to assist her or someone else in the family. Worse still we will have to wait for her until they finish classes. Otherwise, going home and coming back would be very expensive. For how long will we be able to carry on this task? But I have other children as well who needs my attention. To be frank, this is not sustainable. So I have given up and decided to keep my child at home.

According to the findings from this study, sometimes parents were discouraged to send their children with disabilities to school because of unwelcome and friendly school environment. A school with welcome, safe and friendly environment for children with SEN is characterized by appropriate physical facilities which encompass **the school buildings and all its contents including physical structures, infrastructure, furniture**, well managed classrooms, **school-based health supports** and a comfortable and tailored indoor classroom environment. It should be noted that majority of regular schools which accommodate children with disabilities were not established for that purpose. Initially, they were all day schools except the one in Kibondo which had boarding facilities. The schools in Kinondoni district were located in urban centers and majority of them along major roads. There was a lot of heavy traffic moving by and making it difficult for some children with SEN to cross the road.

The nature of the classrooms was of two kinds those that were accommodating all kind of students (inclusive classrooms). The other kinds of classrooms were set aside only for those students with special educational needs. These classrooms were however in the same compound as other classroom within the schools and during break time all students engaged in the same social activities inclusively. The classrooms had the infrastructure adjusted to cater for the needs of the students with disabilities. These adjustments included creating gentle slopes instead of stairs for smooth mobility, covering corridors with shades. However these adjustments were limited to ease mobility. Inside the classrooms, boarding rooms, dining rooms and toilets there were no adjustments and the students had to manage like other students but difficulties.

It was noted through observation that, the classrooms set separately to cater for children with SEN were not categorized depending on the nature of the child's disability. Therefore all children with SEN were learning in that same classroom environment. The teachers voiced their concern that in such a universally inclusive classroom, it was challenging for them to provide individualised personal support for the children with SEN. For the case of children with autism, as observed by Woronko & Killoran (2011) no two children are alike. There is much variation with respect to sensory responsiveness. Some have mild and moderate autism while others are in extreme and severe condition. Interestingly, even those in severe condition some of them could be having above average intellectual capacity (World Health Organisation, 2010). Some are non-verbal while others are verbal and can speak selective words, others are sensitive to noise, certain type of food and others to visual stimuli and scent. Teachers in this regard, need to acquit themselves to the child's specific sensory needs. As we shall see in the next section this wasn't easy and practical given the scarcity of special education teachers in that area and the real situation in majority the classroom be it special or inclusive. It was also noted that some schools visited (almost all in Kibondo) were not fenced and there were no gate keepers to ensure that children are safely in doors. In one school for example, a child with autism was found missing from the school environment because he went back home. Fortunately, the home wasn't far from the school but anything could have happened on the way since the child could not communicate socially to express himself since the child could not communicate socially or express himself.

Inadequate number of specialised human resource was among the findings observed by the researcher. Majority of the inclusive schools which were visited each had two special education teachers expected to handle all children regardless of their specific educational need and regardless of the teacher's area of specialization within the broad range of learning difficulties among children. A visit to one school which was earmarked to handle children with autism, the researcher found that even other children with disabilities were brought there because of proximity to where they were staying. The situation was almost the same in majority of the schools visited especially in Kibondo district. The placement of teachers did not consider their specific areas of specialization. So long one has undergone training in special education, the assumption was that he/she could handle any type of disability. In another school in Kinondoni, there were only two

trained teachers to handle 40 children with SEN. Therefore, as observed by URT, 2004 in Kenya children with special needs are taken to school and left in the care of teachers who are overwhelmed by the large number of children in the classes. Consequently, they do not pay much attention (even if they wish) to the specific educational needs of each individual child.

Discussion

This study has established several issues worth discussing. These issues can be grouped into two main parts namely internal and external factors. The first part is composed of internal factors which are those personal to the parents themselves. These are mainly psychological in nature. They included parents' lack of motivation and inspiration as well as lack of self-knowledge and awareness about the cause of disability and opportunities ahead. As observed by Odongo (2018) in a study conducted in Kenya about barriers to parents/family participation in the education of a child with disabilities, parents actually go through a cycle of shock and grief for the unknown future of their children with disabilities. This in turn affected their morale to enrol their children especially those with severe and profound disability in school. The narrations from the parents are not unique and surprising. In India Limaye (2016) observed that one of the factors that influence the accessibility of education for children with disabilities includes parents' self- perception and declined motivation once the diagnosis of disability for their children is confirmed. Regardless of this, it was also evident from this that parents themselves as well as their children with SEN were not homogeneous. The differences in parents 'characteristics in terms of educational level, awareness and knowledge about disability as well as the type of disability of their children and the activities they were engaged in to earn their living also influenced their readiness to allow their children with SEN to start to start schooling. The findings also demonstrate that all parents regardless of their socio-economic status or educational level did not choose to have children with disabilities. What was true and common to all parents was that much as they were hurt to have a child with disability in the family, majority parents accepted and took this positively as a will of God.

The second category of factors are external which point to the fact that lack of parents' readiness to send their children to school is influenced by multiple factors majority of which are beyond their own personal control. These are mainly circumstantial and institutional-based. They include factors as societal attitudes

and perception about disability, severity of the disability, long process of getting the child with SEN accepted in school, distance from home to school, and unwelcome school environment. Much as parents would wish to see their children starting school as other children of their age, this wish is sometimes cut short by lack of support from the immediate social environment. Mothers of children with disabilities in particular experience more psychological and physical issues on day-to day basis than other mothers of normal children. Caring for a child with disability has a deep impact on the mother's social relationships as well as on the overall economy of the family. While these mothers were desperate and exhausted with taking care of the children with disabilities, they remained committed with affection and love to their children. Although it may be argued that the findings are culturally limited, they seem to accord with research from other parts of the world. In a research carried out in To describe across three different cultures-Irish, Taiwanese and Jordanian of the Western world McConkey et.al (2008) for example, indicate that the misconception about bad lucky for having a child with disability in the family is also reinforced by actors deeply rooted in the normative values about women as mothers caring agents who consequently have to bear the work-load of caring for the child.

Again, this study has demonstrated that although, the parents have the final say to send their children with SEN to school, their power to decide is sometimes curtailed by the severity of the child's disability as well as the long process of getting their children with SEN accepted within the system. Even if getting medical confirmation is necessary to inform both parents and teachers on how well to handle the children especially those in need of medication, alternative ways could be sought out to cut down the process and make it user friendly. Finally, while no one denies the fact that children with SEN have the same rights as everyone else in society and all teachers were expected to teach children with special educational needs (SEN) in their normal classrooms, this was not a simple and trouble free operation. The Salamanca statement and Framework for example, states that all children regardless of their disability should learn together in ordinary schools. However, this entails availability of facilities and adequate and specialized human resource to make it possible. Indeed in a developing country context like Tanzania as also evidenced in Kenya the limited number of resources and facilities make the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action to remain a distant goal to achieve. This is confirmed by Woronko & Killoran (2011) who

affirmed that no two children with autism are alike. There is much variation with respect to sensory responsiveness. Some have mild and moderate autism while others are in extreme and severe condition. Interestingly, even those in severe condition some of them could be having above average intellectual capacity (World Health Organisation, (WHO, 2010). Some are non-verbal while others are verbal and can speak selective words, others are sensitive to noise, certain type of food and others to visual stimuli and scent. Teachers in this regard, need to acquit themselves to the child's specific sensory needs. In a situation where special education teachers are not readily available and parents do not have self-knowledge about this condition, more such children are therefore likely to remain at home without access to education. This has also been observed in the current National Inclusive Strategy (URT 2022) that without customised support those with certain disabilities may find it extremely difficult to attend school.

Overall, this study indicates that enrolling a child with SEN is not an easy and straight forward process. Time had to be devoted to fit in the educational and other logistical needs of the child. While parents may be blamed for not being ready and willing to enrol their children with disabilities and SEN in school, several challenges have also been observed some of which end up into parents to send their children to school. This means also that not every child with SEN had an opportunity to be sent to school even if parents wished to do so. Lack of support from the immediate social environment and even the long process of getting a child with SEN needs accepted and registered in school had its own implications let alone the severity of the child's disability as well as the location and distance from home to the inclusive school.

Based on the discussion of findings and conclusions it can be seen that, there is generally a need for special education officials, teachers and medical practitioners to sensitize and raise awareness among the parents and community at large about disability and the available educational opportunities for of children with SEN. Given the fact that disability is a natural part of human diversity that must be respected and supported in all its forms, there is need for a shared commitment between the government on one part and parents and communities on the other part in ensuring that children with SEN also access quality primary education near their families. Continued effort should also be made even by the communities and other educational stakeholders to assist children with SEN with

the necessary learning materials, devices and equipment. Although this study has shown that early diagnosis and identification was not a common practice in all schools in Tanzania, there is need for the government to institute within its health and education policies and practices the diagnosis and early identification of disability and learning abnormalities among pre-primary children. The sooner learning disabilities are diagnosed and treated; the more likely children will be able to reach their potentials.

Finally, this study is based on a small number of participants. Therefore, it does not permit generalization of the findings. However, the number was adequate to give a clear picture on why we still have children with SEN not enrolled into school.

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