Effectiveness of Community-Based Strategies in Supporting Marginalized Students in Secondary Schools Education in Meru District, Tanzania

Lidya Joseph Mushi, Evans Ogoti & Evarist Musa
Mwenge Catholic University
Email: mushilidya@gmail.com

Abstract: *The study examined the effectiveness of community-based strategies in supporting marginalized students in secondary schools within Meru District. Guided by a case study research design within a qualitative approach, the study was informed by the Social Capital Theory and addressed a single research question. The target population comprised secondary schools with disadvantaged students, teachers, school heads, local government leaders and parents. An expert purposive sampling technique was employed to select one secondary school, one student, one teacher, one head of the school, one local government leader and one parent. Data collection was conducted through an interview guide. The data were analyzed by identifying themes and patterns through systematic coding and interpretation to uncover underlying meanings and insights. The findings revealed that local government leaders are not involved in efforts to assist marginalized students. However, teachers and head of schools demonstrate support through counseling, a few mentorship programs, and communication with parents. Parents, on the other hand, are unable to provide financial support for tutorial programs. The students indicated that there are no tutorial or very limited mentorship programs available to them. The study concluded that support strategies for disadvantaged students are inadequately implemented by local government leaders and are only minimally utilized by teachers, head of the school and parents. Therefore, it is recommended that stakeholders should increase the engagement and foster collaboration to strengthen support mechanisms for marginalized students in Meru District, Arusha Region.*

1. Introduction

Education is an essential component for every member of society and has become one of the fundamental needs for all children today. In Tanzania, education is compulsory requiring parents to enroll their children in school by the age of five. Parents who fail to comply with this policy are held accountable by the government. Therefore, education can be defined as the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary for personal development and societal progress through learning and experience (Verma et al., 2023). Education is most valuable when obtained through formal educational institutions that have government approval.

Marginalized students are individuals who face significant obstacles to educational success due to various factors, including disabilities that necessitate additional support to

enable their participation in the learning process (Iwasaki, 2016). Furthermore, students from low-income families often face difficulties in affording essential resources such as school supplies and meals, and are therefore considered marginalized. Those from families experiencing crises, such as domestic violence or mental health issues may find it challenging to maintain focus and stability in their academic pursuits. These intersecting challenges collectively impede their ability to access equitable educational opportunities. Addressing these diverse needs is crucial for fostering an inclusive and fair educational environment to all children regardless of their challenges. In this study, the researcher evaluated the community support provided to students with cognitive and physical disabilities who come from impoverished backgrounds and have been unable to pass the national examination at the end of primary school level.

Education is widely acknowledged as a fundamental human right and a crucial catalyst for social and economic development worldwide. In Tanzania, the government has made notable progress in expanding access to education, particularly through policies designed to encourage enrollment in primary and secondary schools. Nonetheless, marginalized students, especially those from low-income families or affected by social stigma continue to encounter significant barriers that impede their educational achievement. The difficulty of children with special needs who are marginalized within Tanzanian society remains a pressing issue, leading to disparities in access to quality education among different groups (Katikiro and Mhagama, 2022).

Marginalized students frequently face a variety of challenges, including poverty, which hampers their ability to afford basic school supplies, transportation, and other essential resources. Cultural factors may also discourage girls from pursuing education, leading to early marriages or domestic responsibilities that take precedence over schooling. Students from low-income backgrounds often encounter difficulties in attending school and participating in lessons, completing homework or exams and feeling included and safe within the school environment (Braima, 2025). In Tanzania, the enrollment rate for learners with disabilities in secondary schools is only 0.48%, despite the high prevalence of disability in the population. Furthermore, the number of children with disabilities officially reported in schools is significantly lower than the actual number (United Republic of Tanzania, 2019; UNESCO, 2020).

Several studies conducted in Tanzania have highlighted the challenges faced by marginalized students in accessing quality education compared to their peers. These studies identified shortcomings in the implementation of inclusive education. For instance, Possi and Millinga (2017) reported a shortage of learning materials and unfriendly classroom environments resulting from the diverse disabilities among children. A study by Losioki and Ngowoko (2024) revealed that there is limited information available regarding inclusive education in Tanzania and that teachers often lack sufficient understanding of inclusion and the pedagogical techniques necessary for effective inclusive education. Similarly, Losioki and Ngowoko (2024) found comparable findings, indicating that in most inclusive schools examined in Uvinza-Kigoma, the learning environment was not conducive to children with disabilities. The reviewed literature, both globally and within Tanzania, suggests that many nations have made efforts to implement inclusive education for marginalized students however, children in these settings still face numerous challenges in their learning processes.

In response to these urgent issues, various community-based strategies have been implemented to support marginalized students in secondary schools, as outlined in the National Strategy for Inclusive Education 2021/22-2025/26. Objective Strategy 3.2 aims to mobilize communities to support the education of vulnerable and marginalized students across various dimensions (URT 2017). These strategies involve the active participation of local stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and community leaders, working collaboratively to create supportive educational environments both at home and in schools. Initiatives such as after-school tutoring programs, scholarship schemes, mentorship opportunities, and the provision of learning resources emphasize the importance of education for marginalized groups. The goal is to address the specific needs of marginalized students and to foster a more inclusive educational landscape.

Despite the implementation of these initiatives, a significant gap remains in understanding their effectiveness in improving educational outcomes for marginalized students in Tanzania. Preliminary observations indicate that, while some community-based strategies have yielded positive impacts, many marginalized students continue to face academic and social challenges (National Strategy for Inclusive Education, 2017; Katikiro and Mhagama, 2022; Losioki and Ngowoko, 2024). The absence of comprehensive evaluation and research on these interventions creates a critical knowledge gap, hampering the ability of policymakers and educators to make informed decisions regarding community involvement in the education of marginalized students in secondary schools. Although Tanzania offers free education, students from marginalized backgrounds who do not pass the Standard Seven national exams are not offered support to pursue secondary education, particularly in private institutions. This gap

deprives these students of equal opportunities to realize their aspirations and underscores the lack of inclusive support systems for learners with disabilities within the current educational framework.

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of community-based strategies designed to support marginalized students in private secondary schools within Meru District. By examining various initiatives and their impact on educational access, retention, and academic achievement, the research seeks to identify successful practices and areas in need of improvement. Additionally, the researcher will assess community support in terms of resource provision, the assessment process, and cultural perceptions held by students, parents, school administrators, and local government leaders regarding the effectiveness of these community-driven strategies. Understanding the impact of community-based approaches is crucial, as it offers valuable insights that can inform future policy decisions and program development, ensuring that resources are directed toward initiatives that produce the best outcomes for marginalized students in Meru District, Arusha.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Despite the implementation of community-based strategies designed to support marginalized groups such as tutoring programs, financial assistance, and community awareness initiatives their effectiveness in enhancing educational outcomes has largely remained unexamined. Challenges include socio-economic disadvantages, cultural biases, and limited access to educational resources which disproportionately impact students from vulnerable backgrounds and often render schools as significant obstacles to their success (Muya et al., 2024). According to the World Bank (2025), approximately 244 million children with disabilities aged 6 to 18 are out of school. However, among the few marginalized students who do attend school, they face significant barriers to accessing quality education, including inaccessible teaching and learning materials, ineffective classroom pedagogies, and experiences of stigma or discrimination. Studies by Kalamba et al. (2024), Katikiro and Mhagama (2022), and Braima (2025) have examined the challenges faced by inclusive education in Tanzania. Nevertheless, there has been no research conducted to assess the effectiveness of community-based strategies in enhancing the educational experiences of marginalized students. To address this gap, the present study was conducted to examine the effectiveness of community-based strategies in supporting marginalized students in secondary schools within Meru District, Tanzania.

1.2 Research question

The study was guided by a single research question aimed at collecting data on the community-based strategies employed to support marginalized students.

How effective are community-based strategies in supporting marginalized students in secondary schools in Meru District?

1.3 Significant of the study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to offer valuable insights to a diverse range of stakeholders, including parents, local government leaders, teachers, and policymakers. For parents, gaining an understanding of effective community-based strategies can empower them to actively participate in their children's education and foster a supportive home environment. Local government leaders can leverage the findings to design and implement supportive programs aimed at assisting marginalized students, thereby enhancing educational access and promoting equity for all learners. Teachers stand to benefit from evidence-based practices that can be integrated into their teaching methodologies to improve outcomes for marginalized students. For the government, the study provides actionable recommendations for policy reforms that foster inclusive education. From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the existing body of knowledge on community engagement in education, underscoring the vital role of local government involvement in cultivating equitable educational opportunities.

1.4 Theoretical framework

This study was guided by Social Capital Theory, which emphasizes the importance of social networks, relationships, and community engagement in influencing educational outcomes. Social capital encompasses the resources and benefits individuals can access through their connections within a community, including support from family, peers, and local organizations. In the context of marginalized students in Meru District social capital can play a critical role in facilitating educational success to all students regardless of their status. For instance, community-based strategies that foster collaboration among parents, teachers, and local leaders can create a supportive network that enhances students' educational experiences. By utilizing social capital, community strategies can provide marginalized students with access to resources, mentorship, and encouragement, thereby improving their chances of academic success.

Additionally, the Social Capital Theory underscores the significance of trust and reciprocity within communities. When community members collaborate to support marginalized students, they not only enhance individual educational outcomes but also bolster the community's overall resilience and capacity for collective action. This theoretical framework informed the analysis of community-based strategies in the Meru District, providing deeper insights into how social networks and community engagement shape the educational experiences of marginalized students.

2. Literature Review

The study by Zubaidi and Nadifah (2023) on the Implementation of Community-Based Education to Enhance Learning Interest Among Marginalized Children in Indonesian Schools was conducted in Kalipenggung, Randuagung, Lumajang. This research aims to explore how the implementation of Community-Based Education can boost students' enthusiasm for learning, enabling schools situated in mountainous regions and remote areas away from urban areas. The goal is to allow students to maximize the use of their existing skills and resources. This study employed a qualitative case study approach utilizing an explanatory analysis model. The findings demonstrate that implementing Community-Based Education effectively increases the learning interest of marginalized children. This is evidenced by several achievements attained at both district and provincial levels.

However, the study provided valuable insights for the current research; nonetheless, Indonesia's specific geographical and cultural characteristics could limit the generalization of its findings to the Tanzanian context. In Tanzania, rural and marginalized communities may face different challenges, such as limited infrastructure, diverse cultural attitudes toward education, and varying levels of resource availability compared to Indonesia. This creates a gap in understanding how community-based education strategies can be effectively adapted and implemented across different geographical and cultural settings. While the Indonesian study highlights increased enthusiasm and achievements, there is a need to explore how community-based education impacts other areas such as life skills, socio-economic development, and access to higher education for marginalized children in Tanzania. Considering different community priorities and resource constraints, these aspects may require different approaches. These gaps underscore the importance of tailoring and investigating the effectiveness of community-based strategies within Tanzania's unique social, cultural, and infrastructural context to better understand how they can influence the educational experiences of marginalized secondary school students in the country.

Gonzaga et al. (2024) conducted a study on Community Engagement and Student Performance in Secondary Schools in Uganda. The purpose of the study was to explore ways of community involvement in the management of secondary schools in Town Council. The research was carried out in Kassanda Town Council, utilizing a descriptive survey research design that incorporated both qualitative and quantitative methods. Data were collected from 50 respondents, including parents and local leaders of Kassanda Town Council. The findings reveal that, although the community is involved in schools, the forms of participation are quite limited. The community makes only a few contributions to the performance of secondary schools, and this is hindered by poverty within the communities and the absence of policies to facilitate community participation in school affairs.

The study recommends that stakeholders need to be oriented and educated about their responsibilities in decision-making processes within schools, as well as ensuring transparency and accountability for the funds they help to raise. It also emphasizes the importance of deliberate community involvement in school matters. Furthermore, the study suggests that policy formulation regarding the management of secondary schools should be inclusive of societal needs. While the study highlights the positive impact of community engagement on student performance, it does not specifically focus on marginalized groups and their unique challenges, leaving a gap in understanding how community involvement strategies can specifically benefit disadvantaged students. To address this gap, the current researcher conducted a study on the Effectiveness of Community-Based Strategies in Supporting Marginalized Students in Secondary Education in Meru District, Tanzania, with the aim of investigating how effective these strategies are in promoting educational equity and improving outcomes for marginalized students in Meru District.

Lauwo and Mkulo (2021) conducted a study examining the challenges faced by community involvement in ensuring quality education in public secondary schools within Meru District, Arusha Region, Tanzania. The primary objective of their research was to identify and analyze the obstacles hindering effective community participation in the enhancement of educational quality. The study employed a mixed-methods approach with a convergent parallel design, utilizing a sample of 89 participants selected through both probability and non-probability sampling techniques. Quantitative data were collected via questionnaires, while qualitative insights were obtained through interviews. The findings indicated that key challenges impeding community engagement include ignorance, poor school leadership, poverty, political interference, traditional beliefs and customs, and

inadequate communication between schools and the community. Based on these results, the authors recommended the development of targeted strategies and increased government efforts to raise awareness about educational partnerships, aiming to enhance community participation in schools.

However, while this study provides valuable insights into the general challenges of community involvement in Meru District, it does not specifically address how these strategies impact marginalized groups, such as students with disabilities or those from impoverished backgrounds. To fill this gap, the current research focuses explicitly on the strategies employed by the community to support marginalized students within Meru District, Tanzania. This approach aims to offer a more significant understanding of how community interventions can effectively support vulnerable student populations and promote inclusive education.

The reviewed studies collectively highlight the importance of community involvement in enhancing educational outcomes; however, they reveal notable gaps concerning the specific support and effectiveness of community-based strategies tailored for marginalized students. The study by Lauwo and Mkulo (2021) focus on general community participation challenges in Meru District without addressing how these strategies directly support marginalized groups, such as students with disabilities or those from impoverished backgrounds. Similarly, Zubaidi and Nadifah (2023) demonstrate the success of community-based education in increasing learning enthusiasm in Indonesia, but their findings are context-specific, with limited insights into how such strategies translate to Tanzania's unique socio-cultural and infrastructural realities, and how they impact broader aspects like socio-economic development or life skills. Gonzaga et al. (2024) examine community engagement in Uganda's secondary schools, highlighting limited participation and policy gaps, but their study does not specifically explore how community involvement benefits marginalized or disadvantaged students. Overall, there is a significant gap in understanding how community-based strategies are adapted or how effective they are in supporting marginalized students within diverse cultural and infrastructural contexts, particularly in Tanzania, and in addressing their unique educational needs beyond general participation.

3. Methodology

This study employed a case study research design within the framework of qualitative research approaches. The qualitative component provided in-depth insights into the experiences and perceptions of marginalized students, their

parents or guardians, school heads, and local government leaders regarding the implementation of community-based strategies. The target population included marginalized students enrolled in secondary schools within Meru District, along with their parents or guardians, heads of the school, and local government leaders. This diverse population ensured a comprehensive understanding of the various stakeholders involved in community-based educational strategies. Non-probability sampling techniques were used to select participants, with criterion purposive sampling specifically employed to choose one secondary school serving marginalized students, along with one student, one parent, the head of the school, and one local government leader. Data were collected using an interview guide tailored for parents, head of the school, student, and local government leader to facilitate field data collection.

4. Results and Discussion

The study employed a purely qualitative approach, focusing on secondary school students with physical disabilities who exhibited low academic achievement and came from low-income families in the Meru District of Arusha, Tanzania. A student sharing these characteristics was selected to serve as a representative for others with similar backgrounds. To strengthen the validity and reliability of the findings, the study also incorporated interviews with head of the school, local government official, and a parent of a disabled student from the same district for data triangulation. Data collection was conducted using an interview guide, which was administered to all participants on separate days. Each interview lasted between 30 to 40 minutes, providing participants with sufficient opportunity to share their experiences in detail. Some portions of the interviews were recorded with the participants' consent. The collected data were then analyzed thematically, with the inclusion of direct quotations and narratives to enrich the findings. The following presents the key insights derived from the study.

During the interview the local government leader was asked on his involvement in supporting the marginalized students in secondary schools, and he has this to say: "*The education support for any student should come from families and local organizations rather than the local government leader's intervention because there is no funds allocated for such programs*" (face-to-face conversation with LGL Y, July 18, 2025). This response indicates that the local government leader believes that the primary responsibility for supporting marginalized students should be positioned with families and community organizations, rather than local government authorities. The leader perceives a lack of dedicated funding or resources for programs aimed at supporting these students. His attitude

reflects the perspective that community and family involvement are more sustainable and feasible sources of support. This viewpoint also highlights a potential gap in government commitment and resource allocation toward inclusive education initiatives, particularly for marginalized students in secondary schools including those in private institutions.

The head of the school was asked the same question for the evidence on what was revealed by the local government leader and he revealed that:

> There is a lack of support from the local government for marginalized students in my school. However, some students receive assistance from individuals in the community, such as family friends or kind-hearted individuals rather than local leaders or officials. For example, there is a student in my school who is physically disabled and comes from a very low-income family who has some cognitive challenges, as he failed the standard seven national exam and was not eligible to join government schools, which offer free education. Despite these difficulties, he is supported by various caring individuals, not by the area's leaders (face-to-face with the HoS Yon July 17, 2025).

This information indicates that support for marginalized students in the school primarily comes from individuals within the community, such as family friends or charitable organizations rather than from the local government or its leaders. It reveals a gap in official government involvement, and the responsibility for supporting these students heavily relies on individuals, which may not be sufficient or sustainable to address their diverse needs. This situation underscores the need for greater government engagement and structured support to ensure that marginalized students receive the assistance they require, whether within the school or through broader programs. Providing such support can increase opportunities for these students and foster their interest in learning. This finding is supported by Zubaidi and Nadifah (2023), who state that community involvement in the education of marginalized students enhances their enthusiasm for learning and has been proven to increase their interest and engagement in education.

The parent of the child with a disability was asked about the contribution of the local leaders in supporting her child's basic needs in school, such as textbooks and other resources. She had the following to say:

> There has been no contribution from the village leaders; however, they are aware of my child's situation and my economic challenges. I cannot blame them, as they are also struggling with their own families. One day, I approached the village chairperson to request support for my child's admission to a private secondary school, as he was not selected to join the government secondary school. I believe this was due to his disability, but I did not receive any assistance. There are no programs in the local area to support disabled students, despite efforts from the government. My son is currently in Form Two, and with the help of kind-hearted individuals I was able to pay his school fees and cover other necessary expenses. (Face-to-face conversation with the parent, 18/7/2025).

This information indicates that there is little or no formal support from village leaders or the government for disabled students who face challenges due to their disability, especially when they are not selected to join the government secondary schools where fees are waived. It acknowledges that village leaders are aware of the families' economic hardships but cannot be blamed for their lack of assistance, as they themselves are also experiencing difficulties. The situation highlights the absence of organized programs or government-led initiatives to support disabled students in pursuing secondary education in the area, leaving families to depend on the kindness and good intentions of individuals to help their children continue with their education.

Overall, the findings imply that community-level interventions are either lacking or ineffective in addressing the needs of marginalized students. They highlight the urgent need for increased awareness, accountability, and action from local authorities to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students. These findings are consistent with those of Kamitanji (2024), which identify community poverty as a primary cause and consequence of student marginalization in Tanzania. This underscores the strong relationship between economic hardship and access to education. The results demonstrate that students from low-income backgrounds often encounter systemic barriers that hinder their ability to access quality education, thereby perpetuating a cycle of disadvantages. This cycle not only impacts their academic performance but also sustains broader social inequalities. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for policymakers and educators, as it emphasizes the necessity for comprehensive community strategies that address economic challenges alongside educational reforms. Ultimately, such approaches are essential for breaking the cycle of marginalization and promoting equitable opportunities for all students.

Additionally, the researcher was interested in the community's cultural perceptions regarding support for marginalized students in secondary schools. The following information was provided by a local leader, a parent, and

the head of the school. During a conversation with the parent, she had the following to say:

> The culture of Tanzania often involves hiding or isolating children with disabilities which makes it difficult for families to seek support or assistance. This stigma and discrimination are rooted in traditional beliefs and social norms that view disability as a source of shame. As a result, it was challenging for me to openly ask for help or advocate for my children's needs within the community. Although I tried to speak with a local leader, I received no support. This cultural attitude created barriers for me in accessing the necessary services, especially education for my child (Face-to-face conversation with parent Y, 18/7/2025).

The information aligned with that of the local government, which stated: *The culture of Tanzania often involves hiding or isolating children with disabilities, making it difficult for families to seek support (face-to-face conversation with LGL Y, 18/7/2025).* As revealed by a local government official, societal stigma and traditional beliefs contribute to this practice, leading families to keep disabled children out of public view. This cultural attitude creates significant barriers to accessing necessary services, support, and inclusion. It also discourages open discussion and advocacy for the rights of disabled children. Addressing these deeply rooted beliefs is essential to promote awareness, acceptance, and improved support systems within the community.

These findings suggest that the practice of hiding disabled children in Tanzania reflects deep-rooted societal stigmas and misconceptions about disability. Such attitudes often create significant barriers to education and access to community services. This cultural mindset indicates a lack of awareness and understanding of the capabilities of disabled individuals, fostering exclusion and marginalization. Consequently, these children are deprived of the opportunity to participate fully in society which not only hampers their personal development but also denies the community the chance to benefit from their potential contributions. Addressing this issue requires a shift in cultural perceptions, increased advocacy for inclusion, and community support that promotes the rights and abilities of all children, regardless of their disabilities. When head of the school was asked about the cultural beliefs of society towards marginalized students, he revealed that:

> Cultural beliefs and practices within the community sometimes hinder our ability to actively support marginalized students in my school. I have made efforts to identify students with disabilities in the community by asking some students if they are aware of any such children in their area. Some parents feel ashamed to bring their children with disabilities to school and sometimes they do not see any value or contribution that such children can make to society. Additionally, the head of the school mentioned that, although the government has made efforts to promote inclusive education, educating children with disabilities remains a significant challenge in our society (Face-to-face conversation with the HoS Y, 17/7/2025).

The student had this to say in terms of the society culture on the disabled students towards their education:

> One parent prohibited her son, who was my peer, from helping me during the holiday because of my disability. I come from a low-income family, and my physical disability has led my neighbors to believe that education is not necessary for me. Similarly, I was delayed in registering for school because my mother was uncomfortable with my condition. I am currently 18 years old and in Form Two. (Face-to-face conversation with student Y, 17/7/2025).

The findings highlight how cultural beliefs and practices within the community can significantly hinder support for marginalized students, particularly those with disabilities. The example of a parent preventing their child from assisting a peer with a disability illustrates the pervasive stigma that often surrounds disability in Tanzanian culture. This tendency to hide or isolate children with disabilities not only limits their social interactions and support networks but also discourages families from seeking the necessary assistance. As a result, this environment fosters a cycle of exclusion, making it challenging for disabled students to integrate into the educational system and receive the support they need to succeed academically and socially. Addressing these cultural barriers within the community is essential for promoting inclusivity and ensuring that all students have equitable access to educational opportunities. These findings are similar to those of Yusuph and Hussein (2022), who revealed that the smaller number of students with disabilities in the schooling system was attributed to a lack of awareness among parents about the educational services available to children with disabilities, as well as traditional beliefs, poverty, stigma, and harassment.

The researcher was also interested in understanding how head of the school and local leaders support marginalized students in terms of learning resources, such as textbooks, during the teaching and learning process. A face-to-face conversation was held with the student, who appeared dissatisfied and stated

"I remember I didn't join Form One immediately after completing Standard Seven because my mother was unable to buy all the items listed in the joining instructions we received from school. I was expecting to join school, but the money she begged from friends was not enough to cover the school fees and the necessary items. I stayed at home for a year waiting for my mother to find other people willing to help me. We went to the nearby church, but they had nothing to contribute except making promises. My education is solely my mother's responsibility, and she is struggling because she is unemployed and has very low income which makes it difficult to support my education." With a sad face, the boy added, "I wish my community could see how hard my mother is struggling to support my education." (Face-to-face conversation with student Y, 17/7/2025)

Regarding the same question, the head of the school revealed that:

However, marginalized students need support but there are no funds available for that, and the school activities depend on students' fees. The school fees are not enough to cover both salaries and support the marginalized students. I feel uncomfortable writing letters to parents if a student from a low-income family cannot afford all the necessary resources for school attendance. I have the intention of seeking donors to support students from low-income families and those with disabilities, but it is very challenging for me (Face-to-face conversation with HoS Y, 17/7/2025).

This information suggests that the school lacks the necessary resources and strategic planning to effectively utilize potential funding for the benefit of marginalized students. It also highlights a reliance on external support rather than the development of internal mechanisms for inclusivity and assistance. There is a clear need for a comprehensive effort to seek donations from donors in order to build an inclusive school culture and operational framework that prioritizes the needs of marginalized students. During a face-to-face conversation with the parent regarding resources for her child, she expressed the following:

"It is a challenge for me because each year I am required to buy nine books, each costing ten thousand shillings. I wish teachers could provide the books in the school because nine thousand shillings is a lot for me. I am not employed, and my son needs special attention in his learning due to his condition of excessive salivation, which could hinder other students from sharing their books with him. I bought nine books in form one, and now in form two, I have done the same, but I have nothing to do with form one books."

This information highlights the financial burden and challenges faced by parents of children with special needs, particularly in accessing educational resources. The recurring requirement to purchase nine books each year, combined with the substantial cost, places immense strain on a parent who is not employed. Additionally, the mention of excessive salivation affecting the child's ability to share books underscores the unique difficulties that children with disabilities encounter in a mainstream educational setting. The lack of continuity in using the previous year's books further emphasizes financial waste and underscores the need for a more supportive system, such as the provision of school supplies by teachers or educational institutions.

Furthermore, the researcher was interested in exploring the strategies employed by school administrators to support students with disability in terms of formative assessment. Face-to-face conversations were conducted with the head of the school, the student, and the parent to triangulate the sources of information and ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. The head of the school agreed to collaborate with teachers to allocate additional time during internal examinations for students who experience difficulties with writing and reading. The head of the school revealed that: *"I told my teachers to provide more time for students who face challenges or have disabilities that slow their reading or writing speeds (*face to face conversation with HoS Y, 17 Julu 202*5)."* This information demonstrates that the school leadership cares about the individual needs of each student, supporting inclusive education, which is the primary goal of education in Tanzania. The student was asked the same question regarding whether teachers provide extra time during internal exams, and the responses differed from those of the principal. The student stated:

Most of the time, I have failed to complete tests or examinations since form one because the majority of teachers do not provide me with extra time. I have difficulty with writing due to my disability, as you can see, but very few teachers take my ability into consideration when assessing my work. The boy also added that sometimes the low marks he receives are a result of his disability, which prevents him from writing as quickly as other students (face to face conversation with student Y, 17 July 202*5*).

The conversation with the parent reflected the student's concerns, as he reported that: *some teachers do not provide him with extra time during examinations, despite being*

*able to see his disability (*face to face conversation with the parent Y, 18 July 2025). Overall, the information from the three participants indicates that, although the head of the school has issued a directive to give extra time to students with disabilities, there is a significant inconsistency in its implementation by teachers. This results in unfair testing conditions for the affected students. This situation not only highlights a lack of awareness among some teachers but also raises concerns about the student's academic performance and well-being. Additionally, the observations reveal a lack of follow-up and monitoring by the school leadership to ensure the proper implementation of inclusive education within the school

Such an inequitable approach to timed evaluations can inadvertently cause these students to struggle further, not due to a lack of ability, but because of the overwhelming stress imposed by rigid time limits. Consequently, they may receive lower grades which do not accurately reflect their true capabilities. This situation underscores the urgent need for more equitable assessment practices that accommodate the unique challenges faced by students with learning difficulties. By allowing assessments to be more flexible and considerate of their circumstances teachers can enable these students to perform to their full potential without the undue burden of time-related stress.

During a face-to-face conversation, the head of the school was asked about how students with disabilities are encouraged in their learning. He stated:

> "I used to call the students who faced challenges to encourage them at least once a term." He also mentioned that there are teachers who are specifically responsible for counseling and guiding students on their academic and school-related issues (face-to-face conversation with HoS Y, 17/07/2025).

This information shows that the head of the school's approach to student support is proactive, emphasizing the importance of regular encouragement for students facing difficulties. By reaching out to these students at least once a term, the head highlights the value of personal connection and reassurance in fostering resilience and motivation. When asked if he received emotional support from the head of the school or teachers, a student responded, *"Sometimes the head of the school and some teachers tell me to study hard and to make sure I impress my mother."* (Face-to-face conversation with student Y, 17 July 2025). This statement indicates that there is an expectation from both head of the school and some teachers for students to perform well academically, often tied to family pride and support. The student's motivation appears to be influenced by external validation, particularly the desire to impress his parents

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings indicate that community-based strategies in Meru District are underutilized and inadequately implemented due to systemic neglect and resource constraints. Teachers and school leaders are doing their best within their capacities but are limited by the absence of formal programs. Meanwhile, parents face financial hardships and cultural stigma that hinder them from providing additional support. Students, in turn, are often left to navigate their educational journeys without adequate guidance or mentorship, leaving marginalized students without essential support. This lack of assistance can perpetuate cycles of underachievement and marginalization.

.5.2 Recommendations

There is an urgent need for a powerful policy that champions community involvement in the education of marginalized students. Such a collaborative approach can profoundly improve their learning experiences and academic outcomes. By actively engaging community members including parents, local leaders, and schools can cultivate a supportive environment tailored to address the unique challenges faced by these students. Community participation can facilitate the development of customized programs and resources that meet the specific needs of marginalized groups, fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment. Additionally, there is a need to raise awareness about the importance of inclusivity and equity, thereby promoting a collective sense of responsibility for the education of all children. Ultimately, a policy that advocates community engagement should bridge the gap between schools and families, ensuring that marginalized students receive the necessary support and encouragement to excel both academically and socially.

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