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Accessibility of Support Services towards Education of Pupils with Special Needs in Public Primary Schools in Longido District Council

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Abstract: *This study examined the accessibility of support services towards the education of pupils with special needs in public primary schools in Longido District Council. Objectively, the study assessed the availability and utilization of vital support services and suggested strategies to improve accessibility of support services to address physical barriers faced by children with special needs. Social Model of Disability and convergent mixed-methods design was adopted. The study targeted 1,135 participants, including education officers, head teachers, teachers, and pupils. A sample of 113 participants was selected through random, purposive, and proportionate sampling procedures according to participant category and information needed. Data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interview guides. Validity was strengthened through experts' review and pilot testing. Reliability (0.872 and 0.889) was ensured using Cronbach's alpha method. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in the SPSS version 25. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically alongside research questions and presented through narratives and direct responses. The findings revealed that teacher support, assistive materials, encouragement, inclusive learning materials and infrastructure are support services available in schools although they are inadequate. Parent and community involvement should also be strengthened through awareness meetings. The study concluded that support services existed in some schools, but their adequacy and accessibility were not yet sufficient for meaningful inclusive education. The study recommended improved teacher training, provision of assistive devices, construction of accessible infrastructure, stronger counselling services, community sensitization, and district-level budgeting for inclusive education.*

Keywords: *Support services, special needs, Learning Barriers, Pupils, Inclusive Education, Tanzania*

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1. Introduction

Inclusive education has become central to global efforts for equitable schooling among pupils with special needs. It emphasizes participation, not merely admission into ordinary classrooms. Despite the global efforts for inclusive education, children with disabilities still face environmental and institutional barriers within many education systems (UNESCO, 2022). These barriers reduce access to teaching and school participation. Support services therefore are important for helping pupils to learn with dignity and confidence. Assistive technologies improve participation when devices match pupils' learning needs (John and Stackus, 2025). Such services make inclusion practical within ordinary school environments. Their accessibility remains important for pupils with special needs.

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Support services connect inclusive education goals with classroom practice. They include trained teachers and adapted learning materials. Unmet assistive technology needs reduce engagement and well-being among learners with disabilities (UNICEF, 2022). This shows that assistive devices support meaningful learning for pupils with special needs. Pupils also require counselling and flexible assessment arrangements. For the pupils to access all these services depend on school readiness and supportive learning environments (Mmbaga and Malekela, 2024). When these services are absent, school attendance becomes less meaningful. Accessibility therefore determines the quality of inclusion. In Asia, inclusive education has expanded through national reforms in school systems. However, many countries still struggle to provide practical support in classrooms. Asia-Pacific jurisdictions face challenges in supporting students with special educational needs in mainstream schools (UNESCO, 2023). These challenges show that inclusion requires more than placement. Pupils also need assistive devices and prepared teachers. In the Philippines, assistive technology use depended on teacher perceptions and available support mechanisms (CAST, 2022). This shows that Asian schools still face service accessibility challenges. The Asian context therefore supports the need for local school-based assessment.

Physical accessibility also affects education for pupils with special needs. Pupils need safe access to classrooms and toilets. School conditions in South Africa restrict participation among children with disabilities (Ngubane and Muthukrishna, 2023). Such restrictions may affect attendance and confidence. Poor pathways and unsuitable buildings increase dependence on others. Environmental barriers continue limiting full participation among disabled learners (UNESCO, 2022). Physical facilities should therefore form part of support services. Inclusive education requires accessible spaces for daily learning. In Tanzania, inclusive education is supported through public primary schools. The main concern is practical support at classroom level. Special education teachers report limited resources and difficult classroom conditions in Tanzania (Mohammed and Almasi, 2024). These challenges reduce effective support for diverse learners. Teacher commitment cannot replace adequate materials and infrastructure. Facilities and learning materials influence inclusive education in Tanzanian public primary schools (Mlolele et al., 2023). This shows that access varies across school contexts. District-level understanding is therefore important for planning. Assistive technology remains important for pupils with special needs in Tanzania. Pupils require early identification and adapted resources. Tanzania had 1,137 specialized special needs education teachers in 2023 (URT, 2024). This number shows progress in teacher preparation. Many schools still lack such teachers locally. Visual impaired learners need available devices and classroom-based assistive technology use (John and Stackus, 2025). Accessibility therefore depends on both availability and actual use. Rural districts experience stronger shortages than urban areas.

Children with disabilities in sub-Saharan Africa still experience unequal educational opportunities (World Bank, 2022). Longido District Council presents a rural pastoral context where support services are affected by distance, poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and limited specialist personnel. Pupils with special needs may attend schools where buildings were constructed before inclusive education became a planning priority. Teachers may also work with limited training while trying to support learners with visual, hearing, physical, intellectual, or learning difficulties. Mohammed and Almasi (2024) show that Tanzanian special education teachers face limited resources and demanding classroom realities. These realities make school-level support dependent on teacher commitment rather than systematic provision. Mlolele et al. (2023) also connect the implementation of inclusive education with the availability of facilities and learning materials. The situation in Tanzania therefore requires equal educational opportunities. Longido District Council provided a relevant rural context for examining these conditions.

1.1 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What vital support services for children with special needs are available and utilized in public primary schools in Longido District Council?
2. What strategies can be proposed to improve accessibility of support services to address physical barriers faced by children with special needs?

2. Literature Review

The researcher reviewed the Social Model of Disability formally developed and popularised by Mike Oliver in1983.

2.1 Social Model of Disability

This study was based on the Social Model of Disability, which sees disability as a result of environmental, social, and institutional barriers rather than just personal impairment. The theory states that exclusion results from societies' inability to create inclusive systems that address a variety of needs (Oliver, 2013). This suggests that pupils with special needs suffer when schools lack flexible teaching resources, qualified teachers, and inclusive facilities (Shakespeare, 2022). Disability should be seen through the lens of the learner-environment interaction, where participation is limited by institutions that are inaccessible, according to modern scholars (Goodley, 2023; Shakespeare, 2022). Making support services available is therefore one of the most crucial steps in achieving inclusive education.

2.1.1 Strengths of Social Model of Disability

One of the key benefits of the Social Model of Disability is its emphasis on social justice and institutional accountability. The theory shifts the focus from blaming particular individuals to altering the structures that cause exclusion. It forces lawmakers and educators to restructure schools to promote fair participation and remove systemic obstacles (Goodley, 2023). This point of view is particularly powerful in educational research because it promotes equity and stresses the necessity of systemic change rather than short-term accommodations. In favour of this view, Samwel et al. (2025) argues that institutions must change if inclusive education is to effectively serve all students. Consequently, the theory provides a strong foundation for examining accessibility of support services as a matter of rights and equity.

2.1.2 Application of Social Model of Disability

The Social Model of Disability is highly relevant to this study because it provides a framework for analyzing the connection between educational engagement and institutional accessibility. The concept supports the assertion that structural and environmental limitations rather than a lack of learning capacity - are the main causes of special needs students' exclusion (UNESCO, 2023). Among other support services, the study uses this methodology to enhance teacher training, assistive learning materials, and infrastructure. The theory is valued because it advances the goal of the study, which is to improve inclusive and equitable education in the public primary schools of the Longido District. It emphasizes that increasing accessibility is necessary to reduce educational marginalization.

2.2 Empirical Review

Under this section, this study reviews empirical studies related to accessibility of support services towards the education of pupils with special needs in public primary schools in Longido District Council based on themes generated from research questions.

2.2.1 Availability and utilization of Support Service

Tesfaye and Desta (2023) examined implementation of inclusive education in Ethiopian primary schools using a qualitative case-study approach. Their findings showed that uneven compounds, missing ramps, and unsuitable furniture restricted participation among pupils with disabilities. William et al. (2024) assessed the effectiveness of an in-service Teacher Professional Development Programme in promoting equity and inclusion for children with disabilities in Dodoma, Tanzania. The study examined teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs concerning the education of children with disabilities and explored challenges affecting inclusive education. The findings indicated that the professional development programme improved teachers' knowledge and attitudes towards inclusion. However, poor infrastructure, large numbers of pupils, inadequate sanitation arrangements, long distances, and lack of transportation continued to affect inclusive education.

In addition, Juma (2025) investigated teachers' perceptions and experiences in supporting the use of assistive technologies among pupils with hearing and visual impairments in selected primary schools in Zanzibar. The qualitative study involved 26 participants and used focus group discussions and observations. The study recognized assistive technology as an important means of improving information access and supporting pupils with hearing and visual impairments. Chamshama (2025) examined the integration of information and communication technology to enhance teaching and learning for children with autism spectrum disorder in Tanzanian primary schools. The study employed a convergent mixed-methods design involving head teachers, special needs education teachers, and parents. The findings indicated strong stakeholder recognition of ICT as an important component of contemporary inclusive pedagogy, but pupils' direct access to ICT was limited by inadequate facilities, funding constraints, insufficient technical support, and variations in teacher preparation. However, its concentration on autism spectrum disorder and ICT limits its coverage of other support services and disability categories. The present study builds on this work by examining a broader range of services, including learning materials, trained teachers, counselling, academic support, assistive devices, and specialist services across public primary schools in Longido District Council.

Another study conducted by Charles and Bali (2026) investigated learning engagement among pupils with hearing impairment and examined the implications of educational support services in inclusive primary schools in Tanzania. Using a phenomenological design, the researchers explored the lived experiences of 42 teachers and pupils through interviews and classroom observations. The findings showed that very few educational support services were available in the inclusive settings studied, although the services that were available appeared to improve pupils' attentiveness and engagement during teaching and learning. Ng'ande (2026) examined teachers' experiences in teaching pupils with hearing impairment in inclusive primary schools in Tanzania. The study considered how classroom environments, educational resources, and wider systemic factors influenced the inclusion of pupils with hearing impairment. The study is important because it demonstrates that support for pupils with special needs is influenced not only by the presence of teachers but also by the broader learning environment and educational system. However, its emphasis on hearing impairment and teachers' experiences means that it does not provide a comprehensive assessment of support-service availability across different categories of special needs. The current study addresses this limitation by examining support

services from several stakeholder perspectives and across multiple dimensions of inclusive education in Longido District Council.

2.2.2 Strategies to Improve Accessibility of Support Services to Address Physical Barriers Faced by Children with Special Needs

CAST (2022) presented Universal Design for Learning as a framework for making learning environments flexible for diverse learners. The guidelines emphasize multiple ways of presenting content, engaging learners, and allowing pupils to express understanding. This approach is useful because it shifts attention from learner limitation to flexible teaching and assessment design. However, Universal Design for Learning requires teacher preparation, materials, and supportive school leadership to become practical in rural schools. It may remain difficult where classrooms lack resources and teachers have limited special-needs training. Ngubane and Muthukrishna (2023) examined barriers to inclusive education for learners with disabilities in South African schools. Their findings showed that school culture, teacher preparedness, infrastructure, and community attitudes interacted to influence participation. Ametepee and Anastasiou (2022) examined special and inclusive education in Ghana and emphasized accessible school environments. Their findings showed that ramps, accessible toilets, and improved classroom layouts enhance participation among pupils with disabilities. The study was important because it placed infrastructure improvement within an African inclusive education context. The current study extended this discussion by examining strategies as a coordinated package. This package included infrastructure, professional preparation, psychosocial support, assistive devices, and parent-school collaboration.

Additionally, William et al. (2024) examined the effectiveness of an in-service teacher professional development programme in promoting equity and inclusion for children with disabilities in Dodoma, Tanzania. Elihuruma and Amos (2025) investigated the availability of teaching and learning facilities that support inclusive education in public primary schools in Morogoro Municipality, Tanzania. The study employed a mixed-methods approach involving questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions with teachers, head teachers, and pupils. The findings revealed shortages of ramps, special desks, assistive devices, teaching aids, and adequately trained personnel in many schools. However, it also focused mainly on physical and instructional facilities and paid less attention to counselling, parental involvement, and community-based resource mobilization. The current study addresses this gap by examining improvement strategies from pupils, teachers, head teachers, and education officers in Longido District Council.

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3. Methodology

This study adopted convergent design under the mixed methods approach. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), a convergent design involves collecting quantitative and qualitative data during the same phase. The advantage of this design is that the weaknesses of one form of data are supplemented by the strength of the other form. The target population of this study consisted of 1,135 participants in Longido District Council. This population included 10 ward education officers, 60 head teachers, 120 teachers, and 945 pupils (MoEST, 2026). Ward education officers were included because they supervise implementation of inclusive education at ward levels. Head teachers were included because they manage school resources, facilities, staffing, and daily support arrangements. Teachers were included because they interact with pupils and provide classroom-level learning assistance. Pupils were included because they directly experience the availability and accessibility of support services. The study selected 113 participants, which represented 10% of the target population. This was calculated by dividing 113 by 1,135 and multiplying the result by 100. The calculation produced 9.96 percent, which was rounded to 10% for presentation. The sample comprised two education officers and four head teachers purposively selected. Twelve teachers and ninety-five pupils with special needs were randomly and proportionately included. The interview guide was used to obtain in-depth information from education officers and four head teachers on accessibility of support services towards the education of pupils with special needs in public primary schools (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This study used questionnaires to obtain quantitative information from teachers and pupils. Content validity was established through research experts who assessed the relevance, clarity, and adequacy of the items (Taherdoost, 2021).

In this study, reliability was ensured using Cronbach's alpha in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 whereby the obtained values were 0.872 and 0.889 for the two objectives respectively. Therefore, the instrument was considered appropriate for the current study (Zakariya, 2022; Doval et al., 2023). For qualitative information, dependability was strengthened by using the same interview guide with comparable participants. These procedures helped maintain consistency across the data-collection process. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed thematically through transcription, coding, and generation of themes, and results were presented in narrative form (Braun and Clarke, 2021). After obtaining permission from the DED of Longido District Council, the researcher contacted head teachers to arrange suitable dates for visiting the sampled schools. Questionnaires were administered to teachers and pupils within the selected public primary schools. Interviews were conducted with head teachers and education officers at agreed times. Citations from various sources, including books, journals, articles, newspaper articles, reports, documents, and interviews, were acknowledged to avoid plagiarism (Pritha, 2021). Anonymity of respondents, confidentiality of data collected and audio recording was done with consent from the respondents.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents responses from quantitative and qualitative instruments followed by the discussion on the accessibility of support services towards the education of pupils with special needs in public primary in Longido District Council.

4.1 Support Service Availability

The first objective of this study aimed to examine the availability and utilization of vital support services for pupils with special needs in public primary schools in Longido District Council. The teacher responses were important because teachers observe service adequacy, resource use, and implementation challenges during daily classroom work. The data from Teachers were quantified to generate frequencies and percentages on the perceived availability and utilization of support services. The responses cover teacher assistance, academic help, learning materials, building access, fairness, participation, safety, attendance encouragement, and overall learning support. Responses from teachers are summarized in table 1.

Table 1: Teachers' Responses on Availability and utilization of Support Service (n = 12)

No.	Statement	SA f (%)	A f (%)	N f (%)	D f (%)	SD f (%)
1	Schools have trained special needs teachers.	2 (16.7)	2 (16.7)	0 (0.0)	8 (66.7)	0 (0.0)
2	Assistive learning materials are available.	8 (66.7)	3 (25.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (8.3)	0 (0.0)
3	Guidance and counseling services are provided.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	9 (75.0)	3 (25.0)
4	Schools provide individualized academic support.	3 (25.0)	4 (33.3)	1 (8.3)	4 (33.3)	0 (0.0)
5	Health or therapeutic services are accessible.	1 (8.3	2 (16.7)	2 (16.7)	5 (41.7)	2 (16.7)
6	Teachers receive support from specialists.	2 (16.7)	3 (25.0)	1 (8.3)	5 (41.7)	1 (8.3)
7	Learning resources meet diverse pupil needs.	0 (0.0)	2 (16.7)	1 (8.3)	7 (58.3)	2 (16.7)
8	Schools have inclusive teaching strategies.	8 (66.7)	2 (16.7)	1 (8.3)	1 (8.3)	0 (0.0)
9	Administrative support exists for inclusive education.	4 (33.3)	4 (33.3)	1 (8.3)	3 (25.0)	0 (0.0)
10	Support services positively affect learning.	7 (58.3)	3 (25.0)	1 (8.3)	1 (8.3)	0 (0.0)

Source: Field data (2026)

Regarding trained special needs teachers, Table 1 shows that 16.7% of teachers strongly agreed, 16.7% agreed, and 66.7% disagreed. The data suggest that most teachers did not consider trained special needs teachers to be sufficiently available. This indicates that professional specialization remained weak in the sampled schools. Although pupils reported teacher help, the teacher data show that such help often came from ordinary teachers rather than trained specialists. Relating to this finding, Mohammed and Almasi (2024) similarly found that Tanzanian teachers face challenges related to limited preparation for special needs education. The absence of strong agreement among most teachers implies that pupils may not always receive specialized assessment and intervention. Therefore, teacher availability should be strengthened through special needs training and school-based professional support.

Concerning assistive learning materials, 66.7% of teachers strongly agreed, 25.0% agreed, and 8.3% disagreed that such materials were available. This finding suggests that teachers recognized some level of assistive material availability in the schools. The high agreement indicates that materials such as braille tools, large print resources, or other learning aids existed in some classrooms. Such materials can improve access to curriculum content and make participation more practical for pupils with special needs. These findings relate to John and Stackus (2025), who highlighted the role of assistive devices in supporting visually impaired learners. The presence of one teacher who disagreed shows that distribution across schools or classes was not uniform. This means availability must be complemented by adequacy and equitable allocation.

On guidance and counselling services, 75.0% of teachers disagreed and 25.0% strongly disagreed that such services were provided. This was the clearest negative response in the table. The finding indicates that counselling services were largely absent or unstructured in the sampled public primary schools. This absence can affect pupils with special needs because emotional support, confidence building, stigma reduction, and peer adjustment are important for learning. Samwel et al. (2025) also found that institutional support is important for learners with disabilities in inclusive schools. The complete absence of agreement suggests that counselling should be treated as a priority area. Without psychosocial support, pupils may attend school but continue struggling socially and emotionally.

Focusing on individualized academic support, 25.0% of teachers strongly agreed, 33.3% agreed, 8.3% were neutral, and 33.3% disagreed. The data show a mixed pattern, although agreement was higher than disagreement. This suggests that individualized support existed in some classrooms but was not consistently practiced across the sampled schools. Individualized support is important because pupils with special needs may require adapted explanations, additional time, or alternative learning tasks.

These findings are consistent with Mmbaga and Malekela (2024), who connected inclusive education readiness with school-level support arrangements. The disagreement by one third of teachers shows that workload or limited training may prevent consistent individualized attention. Therefore, schools need structured plans for identifying and assisting pupils according to their learning needs.

Regarding health or therapeutic services, 8.3% of teachers strongly agreed, 16.7% agreed, 16.7% were neutral, 41.7% disagreed, and 16.7% strongly disagreed. The data suggest that most teachers considered such services inaccessible. This indicates a gap in support for pupils needing health screening, therapy, referral, or specialized follow-up. Health and therapeutic services are important because some disabilities require support beyond classroom teaching. The finding agrees with Goodley (2023), who emphasizes that social inclusion should recognize individual support requirements. The teachers who agreed may have referred to occasional support rather than regular school-based services. This means stronger coordination between schools, health facilities, and district authorities is necessary.

Concerning specialist support to teachers, 16.7% strongly agreed, 25.0% agreed, 8.3% remained neutral, 41.7% disagreed, and 8.3% strongly disagreed. The pattern suggests that specialist support was available to some teachers but not sufficiently accessible. Specialist support can guide teachers on assessment, communication methods, learning adaptations, and assistive device use. Limited specialist support may leave teachers to depend on personal experience when supporting pupils with complex needs. These findings agree with Abosi and Koay (2023), who reported weaknesses in teacher preparation and support within inclusive education settings. The negative responses show that professional backup was not dependable across schools. This may reduce the quality and consistency of support provided to pupils.

In relation to learning resources meeting diverse pupil needs, 16.7% agreed, 8.3% were neutral, 58.3% disagreed, and 16.7% strongly disagreed. The findings suggest that learning resources existed but did not adequately meet diverse needs. This means available materials may not cover different disabilities, classes, subjects, and learning levels. Diverse needs require braille materials, visual aids, adapted furniture, hearing support, and simplified instructional materials. Mlolele et al. (2023) also showed that facilities and learning materials influence inclusive education implementation. The strong disagreement indicates that adequacy remained a more serious issue than mere availability. Therefore, resource planning should consider both quantity and suitability for different learners.

On inclusive teaching strategies, 66.7% of teachers strongly agreed, 16.7% agreed, 8.3% were neutral, and 8.3% disagreed. The data indicate that most teachers believed inclusive teaching strategies were practiced. This suggests that teachers attempted to use peer support, repeated instruction, seating arrangements, and flexible classroom approaches. Inclusive strategies can improve participation when formal resources are limited. These findings correspond with CAST (2022), which emphasizes flexible ways of presenting content and supporting learner engagement. The small disagreement shows that some classrooms still need better instructional adaptation. Teacher training can improve the quality of strategies already being attempted.

Regarding administrative support for inclusive education, 33.3% strongly agreed, 33.3% agreed, 8.3% were neutral, and 25.0% disagreed. This pattern suggests that administrative support existed in some schools, although it was not experienced by all teachers. Administrative support may include timetable adjustments, resource requests, monitoring, enrolment records, and communication with education officers. Such support can make inclusion more systematic and reduce the burden on individual teachers. UNESCO (2023) similarly emphasizes that inclusive education requires system-wide responsibility. The teachers who disagreed show that leadership support was uneven across sampled schools. Strengthening school management can therefore improve coordination of support services.

Focusing on whether support services positively affected learning, 58.3% strongly agreed, 25.0% agreed, 8.3% were neutral, and 8.3% disagreed. The data show that most teachers believed support services improved learning for pupils with special needs. This indicates that available services had educational value despite weaknesses in training, counselling, specialist support, and resource adequacy. The finding implies that expanding support services would likely improve classroom participation and learning outcomes. John and Stackus (2025) similarly found that assistive support improves access to learning among pupils with disabilities. The small disagreement suggests that services may be too limited in some schools to produce clear learning benefits. Therefore, existing support should be strengthened rather than treated as sufficient.

During interviews, teachers' concerns were reflected by head teachers and education officers. The major issue was that support services existed in pieces rather than as a complete school-based system. One education officer said:

> "The schools are trying to support pupils with special needs, but we still have gaps in trained teachers, counselling, specialist visits, and enough materials. We need a coordinated system instead of depending only on the goodwill of individual teachers." (Interview, 10 June 2026)

This was further evidenced by a head teacher who linked teacher data with daily school constraints. The head teacher emphasized that availability required both human and material support. The head teacher stated:

> "Teachers are willing to help, but willingness alone cannot replace proper training, counselling skills, and adequate resources. When materials are few and specialists do not visit regularly, pupils receive support, but the support remains incomplete." (Interview, 11 June 2026)

The responses indicate that support service availability in Longido District Council was partial rather than comprehensive. Teachers confirmed the presence of assistive materials, inclusive strategies, and some administrative support, but reported serious gaps in specialist teachers, counselling, health services, and adequate resources. The qualitative findings concur with the quantitative findings by teachers, whereby areas of availability and shortage were clearly separated. The agreement between qualitative and quantitative data indicates that support services existed but did not yet form a complete inclusive education system. This means that improving education for pupils with special needs requires strengthening the missing components while supporting the services already available.

4.2 Physical Accessibility Barriers

The study also aimed to assess the physical barriers that limit access to support services for pupils with special needs in Longido District Council. The data from pupils were quantified to generate frequencies and percentages on barriers related to classrooms, pathways, toilets, furniture, lighting, movement, and learning resources. These findings are presented in Table 2 as pupils' responses on physical accessibility barriers. Since most statements were framed negatively, agreement indicates the presence of a barrier requiring attention.

Table 2: Pupils' Responses on Physical Accessibility Barriers (n = 95)

No.	Statement	SA f (%)	A f (%)	N f (%)	D f (%)	SD f (%)
1	Some classrooms are difficult for pupils with special needs to enter.	43 (45.3)	38 (40.0)	5 (5.3)	9 (9.5)	0 (0.0)
2	There are not enough sloped access ways for pupils who have difficulty walking.	48 (50.5)	33 (34.7)	5 (5.3)	9 (9.5)	0 (0.0)
3	Doors and pathways are too narrow for pupils with mobility challenges.	19 (20.0)	19 (20.0)	43 (45.3)	9 (9.5)	5 (5.3)
4	Toilets are not designed for pupils with special needs.	52 (54.7)	29 (30.5)	5 (5.3)	9 (9.5)	0 (0.0)
5	The school compound is hard to move around for some pupils.	48 (50.5)	33 (34.7)	5 (5.3)	9 (9.5)	0 (0.0)
6	Furniture in classrooms is not suitable for pupils with special needs.	46 (48.4)	35 (36.8)	5 (5.3)	9 (9.5)	0 (0.0)
7	There is poor lighting for pupils with visual difficulties.	10 (10.5)	14 (14.7)	10 (10.5)	43 (45.3)	18 (18.9)
8	Lack of special equipment makes movement difficult in school.	43 (45.3)	38 (40.0)	5 (5.3)	9 (9.5)	0 (0.0)
9	Pupils with special needs struggle to reach learning resources.	48 (50.5)	33 (34.7)	5 (5.3)	9 (9.5)	0 (0.0)
10	Physical barriers make learning harder for pupils with special needs.	52 (54.7)	29 (30.5)	5 (5.3)	9 (9.5)	0 (0.0)

Source: Field data (2026)

Regarding classrooms being difficult to enter, Table 2 shows that 45.3% of pupils strongly agreed, 40.0% agreed, 5.3% were neutral, and 9.5% disagreed. The data suggest that most pupils considered classroom entry a physical challenge for pupils with special needs. This level of agreement indicates that classroom access was a present barrier in the sampled schools. Difficult entry can delay attendance, reduce independence, and make pupils depend on classmates or teachers. These findings agree with Kisanji and Saanane (2022), who found that school infrastructure in Tanzania often remains unfriendly to learners with disabilities. The pupils who disagreed may have been in classrooms with better entry points or did not personally experience mobility barriers. This variation indicates that physical access differed across schools and classroom locations.

Concerning inadequate sloped access ways, 50.5% strongly agreed, 34.7% agreed, 5.3% were neutral, and 9.5% disagreed. The finding shows that most pupils viewed the absence of ramps or friendly pathways as a serious barrier. This indicates that pupils with walking difficulties may face challenges when moving between classrooms, toilets, offices, and learning spaces. Sloped access ways are important because they support independent movement and reduce reliance on other pupils. Mugo and Wanjohi (2022) similarly found that lack of ramps restricts movement among learners with disabilities in primary schools. The small disagreement suggests that some schools had limited access ways or pupils did not use areas requiring ramps. Nevertheless, the dominant agreement shows that this barrier requires urgent attention.

During interviews with head teachers, the issue of classroom entry and ramps was strongly raised. The head teachers explained that some buildings were constructed before inclusive design became a priority. One head teacher said:

> "Some classrooms are not easily accessible for pupils with physical difficulties because the entrances have steps and rough ground. During rainy days, movement becomes worse, and pupils depend on friends or teachers to reach lessons safely." (Interview, 9 June 2026)

The same barrier was further pointed out by an education officer who linked ramps to dignity and independence. The officer explained that access should not depend on lifting pupils. The officer said:

> "Ramps and smooth pathways are still insufficient in several schools. A pupil should not be carried or pulled every time movement is needed, because independent access is part of dignity and meaningful participation in school." (Interview, 10 June 2026)

The responses indicate that classroom entry and ramps were important barriers in Longido District Council schools. They show that physical barriers can reduce accessibility of support services by making movement difficult before learning support is even reached. These findings agree with Tesfaye and Desta (2023), who also linked uneven compounds and missing ramps with restricted participation. The qualitative findings also concur with quantitative findings, whereby most pupils agreed that classroom entry and access ways created barriers. This agreement indicates that infrastructure improvement is necessary for inclusive education within the district.

4.3 Strategies to Improve Accessibility of Support Services to Address Physical Barriers Faced by Children with Special Needs

The second objective of this study aimed to suggest strategies for improving the accessibility and physical barriers of support services for children with special needs in Longido District Council. The data from pupils were quantified to generate frequencies and percentages on possible improvement strategies. These data are presented in Table 3 as pupils' responses on strategies for support accessibility. The strategies cover ramps, teacher training, special materials, classroom arrangement, academic support, accessible buildings, counselling, parent involvement, and general facility improvement. Responses from pupils are summarized in table 3.

Table 3: Pupils' Responses on Strategies to Improve Accessibility of Support Services to Address Physical Barriers Faced by Children with Special Needs (n = 95)

No.	Statement	SA f (%)	A f (%)	N f (%)	D f (%)	SD f (%)
1	Schools should build ramps and friendly pathways for pupils with special needs.	67 (70.5)	19 (20.0)	4 (4.2)	5 (5.3)	0 (0.0)
2	More teachers should be trained to support pupils with special needs.	72 (75.8)	14 (14.7)	4 (4.2)	5 (5.3)	0 (0.0)
3	Schools should provide special learning materials and equipment.	69 (72.6)	17 (17.9)	5 (5.3)	4 (4.2)	0 (0.0)
4	Classrooms should be arranged to help pupils move easily.	65 (68.4)	20 (21.1)	5 (5.3)	5 (5.3)	0 (0.0)
5	Pupils with special needs should receive extra academic support.	70 (73.7)	15 (15.8)	5 (5.3)	5 (5.3)	0 (0.0)
6	Schools should improve toilets and buildings for accessibility.	69 (72.6)	16 (16.8)	5 (5.3)	5 (5.3)	0 (0.0)
7	Teachers should be given time to support pupils individually.	67 (70.5)	19 (20.0)	4 (4.2)	5 (5.3)	0 (0.0)
8	Guidance and counseling services should be strengthened in schools.	72 (75.8)	13 (13.7)	5 (5.3)	5 (5.3)	0 (0.0)
9	Parents and communities should help support pupils with special needs.	68 (71.6)	18 (18.9)	5 (5.3)	4 (4.2)	0 (0.0)

10	Improving school facilities will help pupils with special needs learn better.	75 (78.9)	12 (12.6)	4 (4.2)	4 (4.2)	0 (0.0)

Source: Field data (2026)

Regarding construction of ramps and friendly pathways, Table 3 shows that 70.5% of pupils strongly agreed, 20.0% agreed, 4.2% were neutral, and 5.3% disagreed. The data suggest that most pupils supported the construction of ramps and accessible pathways. This indicates that pupils recognized mobility improvement as a key strategy for making support services reachable. Friendly pathways can help pupils move independently between classrooms, toilets, offices, and learning resource areas. These findings agree with Mugo and Wanjohi (2022), who identified ramps as essential for improving accessibility in inclusive schools. The small disagreement may reflect pupils who did not personally experience mobility difficulties. Nevertheless, the strong agreement shows that infrastructure improvement should be prioritized.

Concerning the need for more teacher training, 75.8% strongly agreed, 14.7% agreed, 4.2% were neutral, and 5.3% disagreed. The finding shows strong support for professional training in special needs education. This indicates that pupils perceived teacher training as necessary for improving the support they receive in classrooms. Trained teachers can identify learning barriers, adapt lessons, use assistive materials, and support participation more effectively. In this regard, Abosi and Koay (2023) also reported that teacher preparation is central to inclusive education in sub-Saharan Africa. The small disagreement suggests that some pupils were satisfied with current teacher support. However, the dominant agreement confirms that training should strengthen existing teacher commitment.

During interviews, head teachers also emphasized ramps and teacher training as practical improvement strategies. They explained that accessibility requires both physical changes and professional knowledge among teachers. One head teacher said:

> "The first improvement should be ramps and smooth pathways because pupils must reach classrooms safely. At the same time, teachers need training so that support is not based only on sympathy, but on professional inclusive education skills." (Interview, 13 June 2026)

This was further supported by an education officer who connected teacher training with district planning. The officer said inclusive education needed continuous professional development. The officer stated:

> "Teacher training should be continuous because new needs appear every year. If teachers understand disability, classroom adaptation, and communication methods, pupils with special needs will receive better support even before additional specialists arrive." (Interview, 15 June 2026)

The responses show that ramps and teacher training were considered essential strategies within Longido District Council. They indicate that accessibility requires removing movement barriers while improving classroom support. These findings are in agreement with Mutua and Dimitrov (2024), who emphasized teacher training, adapted materials, community involvement, and leadership. The qualitative findings concur with pupils' quantitative findings, whereby most pupils strongly supported ramps and teacher training. This agreement indicates that improvement strategies should combine infrastructure development with teacher professional preparation.

Focusing on special learning materials and equipment, 72.6% strongly agreed, 17.9% agreed, 5.3% were neutral, and 4.2% disagreed. The data show that most pupils supported provision of special learning materials and equipment. This indicates that pupils understood the importance of adapted resources in improving accessibility of learning. Such materials can include braille books, large print materials, hearing support, visual aids, mobility equipment, and simplified teaching resources. The finding aligns with John and Stackus (2025) who found that assistive technology supports classroom participation among visually impaired learners. The few pupils who disagreed may have had less direct need for specialized materials. Even so, the dominant agreement shows that materials and equipment are necessary for inclusive learning.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The following conclusions were made based on the findings:

The study concluded that public primary schools in Longido District Council had made efforts to support pupils with special needs. The presence of teacher assistance, peer support, some assistive materials, and school encouragement showed that inclusive education was being practiced. Nevertheless, the available support services were not enough to guarantee full accessibility for all pupils. Shortages of trained teachers, weak counselling, limited specialist support, and inadequate materials reduced the quality of inclusion. The first objective therefore concluded that support services existed but required strengthening in quantity, quality, and professional use.

The study also concluded that physical barriers remained a major obstacle to meaningful participation. Classrooms, toilets, pathways, furniture, and school compounds were not fully accessible to pupils with mobility and other special needs. These barriers created dependence, reduced comfort, and limited movement within schools. The second objective therefore concluded that infrastructure improvement is central to inclusive education. The third objective concluded that accessibility can be improved through a

coordinated package of teacher training, assistive devices, counselling, community involvement, and disability-friendly infrastructure. The study further concluded that inclusive education in Longido requires joint action from schools, families, communities, and education authorities.

Stakeholders consistently affirmed the need for low-cost accessibility upgrades (ramps, handrails, accessible WASH, friendlier classroom layouts), expanded teacher training and school-based inclusion teams, strengthened counseling, reliable referral links to health and rehabilitation services, and a managed pool of assistive devices—with community and parental engagement to reduce stigma and support attendance. The findings further showed that the study concluded that Longido's schools had made notable strides toward inclusive education through foundational supports and some assistive provisions, but persistent human-resource, psychosocial, infrastructural, and referral gaps continued to hinder full accessibility and consistent learning gains for pupils with special needs; addressing these through targeted infrastructure improvements, ring-fenced resources, continuous teacher development, formalized specialist outreach, and stronger family–school partnerships is essential to realize equitable, effective support across the district.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the conclusion, the study recommended that:

1. Teachers should provide modular, school-based continuous professional development focused on screening and referral, IEP development and review, differentiated instruction, classroom and assessment accommodations, behaviour support, and use/care of assistive devices. Establish or strengthen school inclusion teams (head teacher, SNE focal person, class teachers, guidance teacher) to coordinate IEPs, referrals, device management, and caregiver follow-up, with termly review meetings and simple data tools.
2. Community and caregiver engagement should run structured, termly caregiver meetings to set and review IEP goals, demonstrate home strategies, and agree on attendance and follow-up plans. Implement community sensitization with school committees, local leaders, and organizations of persons with disabilities to reduce stigma and support early identification and referrals.
3. The government should establish a dedicated, ring-fenced inclusive education budget at district and school levels to fund accessibility upgrades, assistive devices, itinerant specialist outreach, and school-based counselling. Integrate clear inclusive education indicators into routine inspections and school performance reports (presence of ramps/handrails, accessible latrines, IEP coverage, assistive device availability, counselling sessions delivered).

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