



# Effects of Policies on Access and Equity in Education in Public Secondary Schools in Arusha City, Tanzania

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**Abstract:** *This study assessed the effects of policies on access and equity to education in public secondary schools. Specifically, the study examined the effects of education policies on access and equity to education and measures for addressing the effects of policies on access and equity to education in public secondary schools. Stakeholder theory guided the study. Convergent mixed methods design was adopted. Data were collected using the questionnaires and interview guide. Sample size comprised 394 respondents (135 teachers, 249 students, 5 WEOs and 5 schools heads) from a population of 3,497. Validity was established by experts whereas reliability test found  $r > 0.75$  by Cronbach Alpha methods. The findings showed that education policies have significantly increased student enrollment. However, the policies have not improved school infrastructure, reduced geographical barriers, and enhanced access to learning and teaching facilities, and guidance and counselling services. Most teachers pointed out that policies are not effectively enhancing inclusion of students with special needs. The study findings have shown that addressing the effect of education policies on access and equity requires several measures, including fair resource allocation and distribution and capacity building for teachers, using technology in teaching and learning. In conclusion, while education policies have improved enrollment rates, the quality of secondary education remains stagnant with insufficient teaching and learning resources. The study recommends collaboration between various stakeholders in the mobilization of resources and support for strengthening the implementation of education policies.*

**Keywords:** *Policies, Access, Equity, Education, Schools, Tanzania*

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## 1. Introduction

Education has a crucial role in forming the foundations of a civilised and sustainable society. In this era of globalisation, access and equity in basic education are the main focus for achieving inclusive human development (Chankseliani and McCowan, 2021). The importance of

access to education lies in giving every child the right to receive education and in providing equal opportunities to all individuals, regardless of socioeconomic background or any other factors that may become an obstacle (Madani, 2019). Equity in the realms of education refers to fairness, impartiality, justice, and equal opportunity for all students to fully participate in all academic opportunities (Mintz, 2021). Abdurahman et al. (2023) compared education

policies at the primary level, with a particular focus on accessibility and equity. Through this approach, the researcher identified significant differences between the approaches adopted by certain countries in achieving inclusive education goals. By analyzing this comparison, findings that can become the basis for improving and developing better education policies in the future will emerge (Abdurahman et al., 2023)

Peterson et al. (2020) described the efforts of one rural school district in the United States of America to plan for equitable distance learning. The strategies included assessing students' and staff's access to the Internet and reviewing past learning and the relationship between teachers and learners to ensure equal participation during emergency distance learning. Furthermore, Li et al. (2020), while investigating the guidance on reopening schools in the USA addressed the issue of access and equity. The document analysis done in the USA found that most of the policies regarding the reopening of schools considered equity and welfare of students with disabilities and special needs, as well as those at greater risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

Also, Moshtari and Safarpour (2023) posted that students with mobility challenges cannot access the benefits of international education. This is because most internationalization practices in East Africa's higher education focus only on those students who can travel from one country to another for study purposes. Common mobility challenges include financial constraints, family responsibilities, and workplace restrictions. However, there has been improved access to education for disadvantaged groups at primary and secondary levels; evidence of comparable strides in higher education is not documented. Economically, disadvantaged students from secondary school are challenged to access higher education partly because of unfavourable selection procedures (Schnepf et al., 2022).

In Tanzania, the education policies focus on promoting free and compulsory primary education, emphasising vocational training, and implementing strategies to enhance quality and access across all levels of education. The government aims to address educational challenges by improving infrastructure, teacher training, and curriculum relevance. For this scenario, a policy of access and equity for all students to acquire secondary school education has been impacted. Conversely, some challenges persist in ensuring equitable access (Mkumbo, 2018). For example, Mushi et al. (2019) posted that implementing the Free Education Policy aims to enhance access by removing financial barriers. Yet, there are challenges in resource allocation which may affect its effectiveness. In addition, disparities persist in both rural and urban areas due to infrastructure gaps and teachers not fully committed that

policy-makers should address to ensure access and equity to inclusive education. With such disparities, the students cannot access the international level of education and higher-level education institutions. Despite the efforts from the government of Tanzania aimed at enhancing infrastructure and policies addressing disparities, access and equity in secondary schools is yet to be achieved (Kimaro, 2019). This study therefore assessed the effects of policies on access and equity in education in public secondary schools in Arusha City.

## 1.1 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the effects of education policies on access and equity to education in public secondary schools in Arusha city.
2. What measures should be taken to address the effects of policies on the access and equity to education in public secondary schools in Arusha city.

## 2. Literature Review

The theoretical and empirical literature were reviewed with reference to themes from research questions. The study was directed by the stakeholder theory developed by Freeman R. Ein 1984

### 2.1 Stakeholder Theory

The theory assumes that organizations comprise stakeholders, who include individuals and entities that can influence the achievement of organizational objectives (Freeman, 1984). The theory further assumes that stakeholders' interests are interconnected. Balancing their interests is important for long-term success. There are two types of stakeholders: primary and secondary stakeholders. The primary stakeholders comprise individuals and entities directly affected by the organization's activities and policies. They may include shareholders, customers, suppliers, managers and employees. Secondary stakeholders are those that are not directly affected by the organization's activities, policies and performance. They include government regulators, competitors, media and Non-Governmental Organizations (Freeman, et al., 2018).

#### 2.1.1 Strengths of Coping Theory

The theory's strength is that it acknowledges the wider interests of various stakeholders in achieving the organisation's goals and objectives. The theory can further enable organisations to maintain their reputations by maintaining relationships with stakeholders. Therefore,

this theory is relevant to this study because it serves as a theoretical framework for assessing the effect of policies on access and equity in education in public secondary schools in Arusha City. Through stakeholder theory, the study considered the perspectives of teachers, students, and heads of schools and WEOs, who are the primary stakeholders of education policies implemented at schools.

### **2.1.2 Application of the Theory to the Current Study**

In the context of examining the effects of policies on access and equity in public secondary schools, this theory was applied as follows: it enhances engagement by involving a diverse range of stakeholders in the study, a researcher gained valuable insights into how policies affect different groups. This engagement helped to identify gaps and areas for improvement, leading to more effective and inclusive policy recommendations. Sustainable Policy Development, Stakeholder theory supports the idea that policies should align with the broader interests of society, not just short-term goals. Applying this perspective can lead to the development of policies that promote long-term equity and access in education, ultimately benefiting the entire educational system.

## **2.2 Empirical Review**

The researcher reviewed empirical studies under the following study themes: to determine the effects of education policies on access and equity to education in public secondary schools and suggest possible measures for addressing the effects of policies on the access and equity to education in public secondary schools in Arusha city.

### **2.2.1 Effects of Policies on Access and Equity to Education**

Chen and Lee (2021) examined the influence of educational policies on equitable access to schooling in rural China. Their study utilized a longitudinal design, tracking policy changes and their effects over a ten-year period. The sample included 200 schools and their administrative records, complemented by interviews with 100 school principals and 300 parents. Data were collected through archival research and semi-structured interviews. The research found that while policies aimed at increasing financial support for rural schools improved infrastructure, they did not adequately address disparities in teacher quality and student outcomes. This focus on infrastructure over educational quality suggests that while access improved, equity in educational quality remained uneven.

Loganathan et al. (2023) conducted a study in Malaysia to investigate the barriers and facilitators to educational access among marginalised non-citizen children, including refugees, asylum-seekers, migrants, stateless, and undocumented children. This study aimed to understand the impact of policies on access and equity in education for these groups, focusing on their exclusion from formal education at public schools despite education being acknowledged as a fundamental human right. The research employed a qualitative approach, collecting data through 32 in-depth interviews with various stakeholders, such as children, parents, educators, and policymakers. Key findings included that at the legislative and policy level, the requirement for citizenship documents significantly restricts access to public schools for many stateless children, and the lack of state endorsement for informal learning centres further limits educational opportunities. At the individual and family level, financial constraints and expectations for boys to work contribute to high dropout rates, while cultural norms and proximity issues affect enrolment, particularly for girls.

Olang'o et al. (2021) conducted a study in Kilifi County, Kenya, to investigate the influence of the Free Day Secondary Education (FDSE) policy on the academic performance of Rural Public Day Secondary Schools (RPDSS). This research aimed to explore the effects of the FDSE policy on education access and equity, focusing specifically on changes in school performance over time. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, utilizing a sample of 375 participants that included principals, teachers, and education directors. Data collection methods involved structured questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis of performance and enrollment records, with a test-retest reliability method yielding a high correlation coefficient of 0.83, ensuring the reliability of the instruments. The study's findings indicated a significant decline in school mean scores between 2003-2007 and 2013-2017, along with a strong positive correlation ( $r=0.93$ ) between increased enrollment and poor academic performance, underscoring the challenges of overcrowded classrooms and inadequate learning resources and student finances.

Komba (2020) explored the influence of education policies on equity in secondary schools within the Iringa region of Tanzania. The study focused on understanding how these policies affected students' access to quality education, particularly those from low-income families. The research utilized a qualitative methodology, with data collected from 25 secondary school teachers and 50 students through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. This approach provided in-depth insights into the participants' experiences and perceptions of educational equity. The study found that policies designed to improve access had not sufficiently addressed equity issues. While

more students were enrolling in secondary schools, there was a significant disparity in the quality of education received by students from different socio-economic backgrounds. The study highlighted that students from wealthier families had better access to resources, leading to better educational outcomes compared to their less affluent peers.

### **2.2.2 Possible Measures for Addressing the Effects of Policies on the Access and Equity to Education**

Balán (2020) conducted a comprehensive study across Latin America to examine the shift from elite to mass higher education and the associated challenges of access and equity in the 21st century. The study reviewed the implementation and impact of various equity policies designed to expand access to post-secondary education, with a particular focus on how these policies influenced economic and social inequality. Using a literature review methodology, the study analyzed policy documents, reports, and scholarly articles from selected countries in the region that had implemented diverse equity-promoting measures. These measures included policies aimed at institutional differentiation, expanding publicly funded institutions to serve marginalized communities, providing public assistance to offset private education costs, and implementing affirmative action for racial, ethnic, or social class groups. The study found mixed results regarding the effectiveness of these policies in reducing inequality; while some measures increased access for marginalized groups, the overall impact on economic and social disparity varied widely across the region.

Li et al. (2022) conducted a study on the challenges and strategies of implementing the Excellent Teacher Plan in China, focusing on teacher education sustainability at a key national normal university. Their research involved 36 semi-structured interviews with deans, administrators, and teachers across two campuses to gather in-depth perspectives on the policy's execution. The study found that accurately selecting students who are both genuinely interested in teaching and suited for the profession is problematic, and there is a need for improved synergy in the education system as well as clearer post-employment security policies. Fadhil and Rayess (2021) conducted a study in Indonesia to assess the impact and effectiveness of the Equity and Access Policy, which was designed to increase higher education access for students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds. Implemented over the past decade, this policy mandated that at least 20% of newly admitted students in higher education institutions should come from low-SES backgrounds. To evaluate the policy's implementation and its outcomes, the researchers used a qualitative methodology, relying on document

analysis and interviews with government officials, education leaders, and university administrators across Indonesia. Their findings indicated that while the policy aimed to improve access and equity, its implementation was hindered by several challenges, including inadequate budgeting, insufficient implementation mechanisms, and limited financial aid allocations.

Adebayo (2021) conducted a study in Nigeria to assess the effectiveness of policies aimed at improving gender equity in primary education. The study focused on regions with high gender disparities in enrollment. A case study methodology was employed, collecting data through interviews and observations in three regions. The sample included 40 school administrators, 100 teachers, and 200 students. The findings indicated that policies had led to increased female enrollment; however, the lack of teacher training and gender-sensitive materials limited the effectiveness of these policies in promoting true gender equity.

Ndlovu and Moyo (2021) investigated the role of policy reforms in promoting access to quality education in Zimbabwe. Their study was conducted across several urban and peri-urban schools and focused on how recent policy changes affected students' ability to access quality education. The study utilized a quantitative research design, administering questionnaires to a sample of 500 students and 100 teachers. The study found that while policy reforms had improved physical access to schools, there were still significant gaps in the quality of education provided, particularly in under-resourced schools.

Lazaro and Matiku (2022) conducted a study on the effectiveness of the free education policy in fee-free secondary schools in Morogoro municipality, Tanzania. The research aimed to investigate the implementation of the free education policy, examine the challenges faced in its implementation, and recommend strategies for effective execution. The study targeted stakeholders involved in the education sector within the Morogoro municipality. The study combined qualitative and quantitative data and found that stakeholders played a crucial role in implementing the free education policy by engaging in activities such as educating the community, encouraging school attendance, ensuring fees were not charged, and improving academic performance. It also noted several positive changes resulting from the policy's implementation, including increased student enrolment and attendance, improved supply of teaching materials, and enhanced school infrastructure.

### 3. Methodology

The study adopted convergent mixed methods design whereby the researcher collected both quantitative and qualitative set of data at the same time, analyzed them separately, and then the quantitative and qualitative results were later integrated (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The target population comprised of 28 public secondary schools in Arusha city, 28 heads of schools, 25 Ward educational officers (WEOs), 954 teaching staff, and 2,490 students from one intact stream of form three class in public secondary schools, which brings a total of 3,497 (MoEST, 2024). The sample size comprised 394 respondents, including 135 teachers, 249 students, 5 WEOs, and 5 heads of schools. The study employed both probability and non-probability sampling technique. Purposive sampling was employed to select 5 Head of schools and 5 WEOs while simple random sampling and stratified random techniques was used to select 27 teachers (14 female and 13 male teachers) from each school. For students, one intact stream comprising of 49, 49, 50, 50 and 51 students from form three class in each school were conveniently selected.

Data were collected using questionnaires and interviews. Research and education experts established content validity of data collection tools. Reliability test conducted by Cronbach Alpha methods found  $r > 0.75$  (0.757 and 0.908) for all items in the two objectives implying that the

instruments were reliable (George & Malley, 2023). Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics in the SPSS version 25 while thematic analysis was employed for qualitative data. The quantitative and qualitative results were later integrated (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

### 4. Results and Discussion

The findings were discussed according to the themes derived from research questions.

#### 4.1 Effects of Policies on Access and Equity to Education

Objective one of the current study was set to determine the effects of education policies on access and equity to education in public secondary schools in Arusha city. Students were asked to indicate their perceptions about the effects of education policies on access and equity to education in public secondary schools in Arusha City. Questionnaires were administered to the sampled secondary school students using five Point Likert Scale, where; 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3= Undecided 2= Disagree and 1= Strongly Disagree, they were required to indicate their level of agreements with the 7 items which were in the questionnaires. Table 1 shows the summary of quantitative data.

**Table 1: Students' Responses on Effects of Policies on Access and Equity to Education (n=183)**

	Effects of Policies	Students' Responses in Frequencies (f) and Percentage (%)									
		SD		D		N		A		SA	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Policies have helped to improve infrastructures at schools	23	12.6	85	46.4	27	14.8	29	15.8	19	10.4
2	Policies have helped to reduce geographical barriers, making it easy for students from remote areas to access education	71	38.8	73	39.9	0	0	31	16.9	8	4.4
3	Policies have helped to ensure students have equal access to education	53	29.0	75	41.0	0	0	44	24.0	11	6.0
4	Policies have helped to enhance access to learning facilities	56	30.6	78	42.6	0	0	39	21.3	10	5.5
5	Policies have enhanced access to guidance and counselling services	57	31.1	80	43.7	12	6.6	25	13.7	9	4.9
6	Policies have helped to ensure access to education for students with special needs	84	45.9	74	40.4	0	0	21	11.5	4	2.2
7	Policies have helped to ensure equal treatment of all students	69	37.7	49	26.8	0	0	48	26.2	17	9.3

**Source: Field Data (2024)**

The data in table 1 shows that in the first statement, students were asked about the effect of education policies on improving infrastructures at schools. The findings presented in table 1 show that 23(12.6%) strongly disagreed while 85(46.4%) disagreed. The findings indicate that most (59%) students believe that education policies are not effectively improving school infrastructure. Potential reasons for this perception include a lack of financial resources for infrastructure development. Data in table 1 also indicate that 27(14.8%) of the students were neutral. The neutral responses indicate mixed experiences. On the other hand, 29(15.8%) agreed and 19(10.4%) of the students strongly agreed. These findings suggest that few students in schools have experienced positive results in infrastructural improvement following the implementation of education policies. This finding aligns with the study conducted in China by Chen and Lee (2021) who found that while policies aimed at increasing financial support for rural schools improved infrastructure, they did not adequately address disparities in teacher quality and student outcomes.

During the interviews, Ward Education Officers (WEOs) and school heads were asked about the effects of policies on enhancing access to education. One of the WEOs, who was anonymously identified as WEO2 pointed out that;

*“The free education policy has helped to reduce the burden on parents and increased access to education. Students from low-income households can also attend school, and the government covers school fees. The challenge encountered in implementing this policy is that some parents use it to avoid their responsibilities, such as buying textbooks and paying for school meals”* (Personal interview, May 22, 2024).

The WEO2's response indicates that public secondary schools in Arusha City implement a free education policy in accordance with government guidelines. The free basic education policy has enabled students from economically disadvantaged families to also access education. Nonetheless, parents have an obligation of looking into the basic welfare of their sons and daughters such as school uniforms and medication.

Similarly, one of the heads of schools, who was identified as the head of school 1, noted that;

*The implementation of education policies is supported by non-governmental organisations, the private sector, and individuals. Students from low-income families cannot afford school uniforms. The stakeholders donate money to schools so low-income students can have uniforms and books* (Personal interview, May 22, 2024).

The key informants were also asked whether education policies have helped to reduce geographical barriers. One of the heads of schools, who was identified as the head of school 2, shared how the challenge of the shortage of schools undermines the effective implementation of education policies. Head of School said,

*“During the implementation of the Secondary Education Development Programme (SEDP) between 2004 and 2014, the government focused on improving access to education by ensuring that every ward in Tanzania has a secondary school. To a large extent, the goal has been achieved. However, one school in each ward is insufficient to meet the growing education needs. The number of students going to secondary school is increasing because of universal education. Primary and Secondary education is mandatory. Therefore, implementing free basic education policy may be challenging if not well explained to parents”*(personal interview May 23, 2024).

The interview findings from the head of School 2 indicate that increasing demand for education is putting pressure on schools to implement education policies. Therefore, some aspects of the free education policy may be realistic. For instance, schools may be unable to cover other education costs such as school uniforms, exercise books, and meals. In the second statement, students were asked whether implementing the education policies has helped reduce geographical barriers. The findings in Table 1 show that 71(38.8%) strongly disagreed, and 73(39.9%) of the students surveyed disagreed. The findings show that most surveyed students (78.7% combined) believed current education policies are not effectively reducing geographical barriers. Students from remote areas may face challenges due to the large distance from home to school. Furthermore, lack of reliable and affordable transportation options can pose significant barriers for students in geographically isolated regions. Additionally, findings in table 1 indicate that 31 (16.9%) agreed and 8 (4.4%) of the students surveyed strongly agreed. The implication is that education policies have reduced geographical barriers to a minimal extend. In support, Ndlovu and Moyo (2021)found that while policy reforms had improved physical access to schools, there were still significant gaps in the quality of education provided, particularly in under-resourced schools.

Findings in table 1 show that 56(30.6%) strongly disagreed, and 78(42.6%) disagreed. These findings indicate a prevalent perception that current education policies are not effectively enhancing access to learning facilities. Potential reasons for this perception include insufficient infrastructure and unequal distribution of resources. Many schools may still lack adequate learning facilities, such as libraries, laboratories, and technology. Inequitable distribution of resources may result in some schools having better facilities than others. Therefore, there may be gaps in implementing policies to improve access to learning facilities. The findings in table 1 further show that 39(21.3%) agreed, and 10(5.5%) strongly agreed. This minority might represent schools where policies have been more effectively implemented or where there have been specific initiatives to improve facilities. In line with this finding, Lazaro and Matiku (2022) noted several positive changes resulting from the policy's implementation, including increased student enrolment and attendance, improved supply of teaching materials, and enhanced school infrastructure.

One of the WEOs remarked that:

*“Despite the government’s efforts to ensure students with special needs have equal access to education opportunities, there are still challenges. For instance, primary schools in Arusha City practice inclusive education. However, when it comes to public secondary schools, inclusive education remains a challenge. Accommodating students with special needs in regular schools is a challenge due to shortage of teaching and learning resources”* (personal interview, 1, May 2024).

Another WEO also explained about the challenges of implementing inclusive education in public secondary schools in Arusha City by putting forth the following views;

*“In 2017, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology formulated the National Strategy for Inclusive Education, aiming to ensure equal access to education for excluded children, such as those with special needs and disabilities. However, the policy has not been realised because most secondary schools do not have teaching facilities and resources to cater for students with special needs”* (personal interview 3, May 22, 2024).

The interviews with Ward Education Officers (WEOs) highlight several key points regarding the implementation of the inclusive education policy in public secondary schools in Arusha City. While some primary schools in

Arusha City, practice inclusive education, public secondary schools face significant challenges. A major challenge is the shortage of teaching and learning resources needed to accommodate students with special needs in regular schools.

The findings in table 1 indicate that 57(31.1%) strongly disagreed, and 80(43.7%) disagreed. A significant portion of the students (74.8% combined) strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement. This indicates a common perception that current education policies are not effectively enhancing access to guidance and counselling services. Potential reasons for this perception include insufficient services and inequitable distribution of resources. Many schools may lack adequate guidance and counselling services, including trained counsellors and appropriate facilities. There also might be an inequitable distribution of resources for these services, with some schools receiving less support than others. In this regard, table 1 also show that 12(6.6%) were unsure, indicating they neither agreed nor disagreed. On the other hand, 25 (13.7%) agreed, and 9 (4.9%) strongly agreed, suggesting a few students had access to guidance and counselling services. While focusing on Sustainable Policy

Development, Freeman et al.(2018) noted that Stakeholder theory supports the idea that policies should align with the broader interests of society such as guidance and counselling of students, not just short-term goals. Applying this perspective can lead to the development of policies that promote long-term equity and access in education, ultimately benefiting the entire educational system.

## **4.2 Teachers' Responses of Measures for Addressing the Effect of Policies**

Another specific objective on this study was to suggest possible measures for addressing the effects of policies on the access and equity to education in public secondary schools in Arusha city. Teachers were asked to indicate their perceptions about eight measures for addressing the effects of policies on access and equity to education in public secondary schools in Arusha City. The perceptions were measured using a five-point Likert scale of agreement levels ranging from Strongly Disagree (SD) =1, Disagree (D) = 2, Neutral (N) = 3, Agree (A) =4, and Strongly Agree (SA) = 5. Table 2 presents the data of quantitative findings through questionnaires.



**Table 2 Teachers' Responses of Measures for Addressing the Effect of Education Policies (n=106)**

	Measures for Addressing the Effect of Education Policies	Teachers' Responses in Frequencies (f) and Percentage (%)											
		SD	D	N	A	SA	f	%	f	%	f	%	
1	Equitable distribution of resources	0	0	0	0	47	44.3	59	55.7				
2	Capacity building for teachers	0	0	13	12.3	56	52.8	37	34.9				
3	Providing access to technology and learning resources	0	0	12	11.3	21	19.8	56	52.8	17	16.0		
4	Strengthening parent and community engagement	0	0	0	0	66	62.3	40	37.7				
5	Enhancing infrastructure and learning environment	0	0	0	0	48	45.3	58	54.7				
6	Policy monitoring and evaluation	0	0	0	0	68	64.2	38	35.8				
7	Promoting inclusive school culture	0	0	0	0	69	65.1	37	34.9				
8	Early interventions to identify special needs students	0	0	0	0	54	50.9	52	49.1				

**Source: Field Data (2024)**

Data in table 2 show that teachers were asked whether equitable resource distribution can be a measure for addressing the effect of education on access and equity to education. Table 2 shows that 47(44.3%) agreed, while 59(55.7%) of the teachers surveyed strongly agreed. Teachers widely agree on the importance of fair resource distribution to promote access and equity in education. Teachers' perspectives are informed by their direct experiences in the classroom. Their strong support for equitable resource distribution reflects their understanding of the practical challenges and needs faced by students. Teachers are likely to see firsthand the benefits of fair resource allocation in improving educational outcomes. This consensus suggests that teachers recognise how equitable allocation of resources can help address educational disparities. Equitable resource distribution ensures that all students have access to essential materials, facilities, and support needed to succeed in their education, such as textbooks, technology, qualified teachers, and funding for extracurricular activities. The study by Mbise

(2019) conducted in Dodoma aligns to this finding by revealing that while policies had improved access to secondary education, significant equity issues on equitable resource distribution persisted. Girls and students from rural areas faced continuing barriers to educational opportunities due to inadequate infrastructure and cultural norms that limited girls' education.

In addition, teachers were asked about the role of technology and learning resources as a possible measure for addressing the effect of education policies on access and equity. The findings in table 2 indicate that 12(11.3%) disagreed, 21(19.8%) were neutral, 56(52.8%) agreed, and 17(16.0%) strongly agreed. From these findings, a small percentage of teachers disagreed that technology and learning resources can mitigate the impact of education policies on access and equity. This suggests that some teachers may be sceptical about the effectiveness of these tools or may have faced challenges in implementing them. Nearly one-fifth of teachers remained neutral, indicating

neither agreement nor disagreement. This neutrality could be due to a lack of experience with technology and learning resources, uncertainty about their impact, or mixed experiences in their application. Therefore, while teachers significantly support the role of technology and learning resources in addressing the effects of education policies on access and equity, it is crucial to address the concerns and uncertainties of some teachers through training, support, and equitable access initiatives. The findings in the study conducted by Johnson and Lee (2021) concurs with the current study but further indicated that despite policy improvements, there remained disparities in access to educational resources such as ICT equipments and opportunities among different socio-economic groups.

Furthermore, teachers were asked whether strengthening parent and community engagement can be a possible measure for addressing the effect of education policies on access and equity. Findings in table 2 indicate that 66 (62.3%) agreed, and 40 (37.7%) strongly agreed. The findings indicate that all teachers surveyed in this study favored the role of parent and community engagement in enhancing access and equity in education. This consensus underscores the perceived importance of collaborative efforts in educational improvement. Engaging parents and the community in education can lead to numerous benefits. It fosters a supportive learning environment, enhances communication between schools and families, and encourages community involvement in addressing educational challenges. Such engagement can also help tailor educational policies better to meet the needs of students and their families. Strengthening parent and community engagement can play a critical role in promoting equity. When parents and community members are actively involved, they can advocate for resources and support for underrepresented or disadvantaged students, helping to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to succeed. In this regard, Loganathan et al. (2023) while focusing on community and educational institutions, found that at the legislative and policy level, the requirement for citizenship documents significantly restricts access to public schools for many stateless children, and the lack of state endorsement for informal learning centres further limits educational opportunities. At the individual and family level, financial constraints and expectations for boys to work contribute to high dropout rates, while cultural norms and proximity issues affect enrolment, particularly for girls.

The interview findings indicate that both WEOs and heads of schools were in favour of early interventions. One of the WEOs said:

*“Early identification and intervention can help ensure that students with special needs receive the support and resources they need to succeed.”*

*This can help level the playing field and promote equity by providing all students with the opportunity to achieve their full potential. Early interventions can include a range of supports, such as individualized education plans, specialised instruction, and access to resources and therapies. These supports can help address the diverse learning needs of students with special needs and ensure they have equal access to education”* (Personal interview, May 22, 2024).

Similarly, Head of school 2 said,

*“Parents should collaborate with teachers and school heads to identify students' special needs. Early interventions are essential for identifying and supporting students with special needs as soon as possible. Addressing learning and developmental issues early allows educators to provide tailored support, significantly improving educational outcomes for these students”* (Personal interview, May 23, 2024).

The findings from the WEOs and the head of the school emphasise the importance of collaboration among stakeholders. Involving parents, teachers, and school leaders in identifying and supporting special needs students helps create a supportive and inclusive educational environment. This collaborative approach improves the effectiveness of early interventions and strengthens the relationships between schools and families, promoting a shared commitment to students' success. These findings are supported by Ishemo (2020) who recommended that the government should improve the allocation of finances to ensure effective implementation of the free education policy, which might improve access and equity in education. Furthermore, free education policy should be supported with sufficient stakeholder participation from different corners.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the current study, the following conclusions were drawn:

It is concluded that while the free education policy is well-oriented and implemented, inclusive education appears to be poorly implemented in the selected public secondary schools in Arusha City. Both students and teachers surveyed stated that they were not clearly aware of the policy, and parents were not oriented about it. The notable communication gaps indicate that important stakeholders of educational policies, such as students, teachers and

parents, lack awareness of some of the education policies and hence pose challenges in policy implementation. This study also concludes that ensuring the positive effect of education policies on access and equity requires several measures and the inclusion of several stakeholders such as teachers, parents, and community members.

## 5.2 Recommendations

Based on the conclusions the following recommendations were made;

1. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should perform comprehensive evaluations to identify specific areas where the free education policy is not meeting expectations of the stakeholders. This could involve surveys, focused groups, and interviews with implementers, students, and parents. Understanding the precise challenges in order to take appropriate interventions and improvements.
2. In addition, there is need for community support that might provide additional resources and opportunities for teaching and learning. The findings of interviews with the ward education officers revealed that some parents are reluctant to accept free education in secondary schools. These findings highlight the need for school management to organise regular information sessions for parents, teachers, and students to clarify the scope and limitations of the free education policy.
3. The heads of schools and ward educational officer should collaborate with teachers to promote an inclusive school culture. This consensus underscores the perceived importance of inclusivity in creating fair and just educational environments.

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