



East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences

eajass.eanso.org

Volume 8, Issue 2, 2025

Print ISSN: 2707-4277 | Online ISSN: 2707-4285

Title DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37284/2707-4285>



EAST AFRICAN
NATURE &
SCIENCE
ORGANIZATION

Original Article

Towards Effective Implementation of Equity-Based Strategies in Tanzania Public Secondary Schools. A Case Study of Dodoma Region

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Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.2.3252>

Date Published: **ABSTRACT**

02 July 2025

Keywords:

*Equity,
Strategies,
Public,
Secondary,
Schools,
Equity-Based.*

Access to education is a fundamental right for every child. As such, promoting equity in the education system so as to facilitate access by every child is key to realising this goal. This study, therefore, sought to explore mechanisms for promoting effective implementation of equity-based strategies in Tanzania's public secondary schools. The study was carried out in the Dodoma region and employed a multiple case study design, which allowed the selection of two case study areas that included Dodoma City, representing the urban setting, and Kondoa district, representing the rural setting. One hundred Forty-Four (144) participants from seven (7) public secondary schools were involved in the study. Data were collected through interviews and questionnaires. Quantitative data were analysed through descriptive analysis and presented in numerical and graphical form, while qualitative data were analysed through inductive content analysis and presented in thematic form and narratives. Study findings suggest that the successful implementation of equity-based strategies in public secondary schools in Tanzania will require employing strategic actions that have the ability to make it possible for equity to be achieved in these schools. Hence, a set of possible strategies were identified and some of them include increasing support to schools so as to strengthen implementation of more activities for enhancing prospects for implementing equity-based strategies, promoting teacher professional training and instituting measures to mitigate socioeconomic status stigma for students while at school, among others. Implications of the above findings show that, if such actions are not taken seriously by education stakeholders, effective implementation of equity-based strategies to respond to equity issues in public secondary schools may not easily be achieved, and as a result, this may hold back government efforts towards promoting equity in public secondary schools in Tanzania.

APA CITATION

Matowo, F. W. & Kiwonde, F. M. (2025). Towards Effective Implementation of Equity-Based Strategies in Tanzania Public Secondary Schools. A Case Study of Dodoma Region. *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 8(2), 500-511. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.2.3252>

CHICAGO CITATION

Matowo, Faith William and Flora Mercury Kiwonde. 2025. "Towards Effective Implementation of Equity-Based Strategies in Tanzania Public Secondary Schools. A Case Study of Dodoma Region". *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences* 8 (2), 500-511. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.2.3252>

HARVARD CITATION

Matowo, F. W. & Kiwonde, F. M. (2025) "Towards Effective Implementation of Equity-Based Strategies in Tanzania Public Secondary Schools. A Case Study of Dodoma Region". *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 8(2), pp. 500-511. doi: 10.37284/eajass.8.2.3252

IEEE CITATION

F. W., Matowo & F. M., Kiwonde "Towards Effective Implementation of Equity-Based Strategies in Tanzania Public Secondary Schools. A Case Study of Dodoma Region". *EJASS*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 500-511, Jul. 2025.

MLA CITATION

Matowo, Faith William & Flora Mercury Kiwonde "Towards Effective Implementation of Equity-Based Strategies in Tanzania Public Secondary Schools. A Case Study of Dodoma Region". *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, Vol. 8, no. 2, Jul. 2025, pp. 500-511, doi:10.37284/eajass.8.1.3252

INTRODUCTION

Equity, in the context of education, is a goal that everyone in the education sector would like to see achieved for every child. Drawing from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2018) perspective, equity in education has two dimensions. First, the fairness dimension, which basically means making sure that personal and social circumstances such as gender, socio-economic status or ethnic origin are not obstacles to achieving educational potential. The second dimension is inclusion, which is concerned with ensuring a basic minimum standard of education for all. For instance, to enable everyone to have the ability to read, write and do some simple arithmetic.

The desire to achieve equity in education from a global perspective is clearly spelt out in the Sustainable Development Goals. Specifically, target 4.5 of SDG 4 emphasises the need to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (OECD, 2018). For instance, in developed countries such as the US, implementation of equity in education, as pointed out in the equity action plan of 2023, is of high priority and fully supported under the Executive Order 14091. In the UK, educational equity is a core focus in UK school policy as revealed by Ainscow (2020). According to Ainscow (2020), in the United Kingdom, significant efforts

have been undertaken to bridge the gap in educational achievements that vary widely across different socioeconomic groups. In Germany, international comparisons of educational equity, as revealed by Gorard (2020), show that Germany still needs to make improvements in this area.

In Africa, according to UNESCO (2023), the Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025 (CESA) was adopted by African Union heads of state and government, during its 26th Ordinary Session held in Addis Ababa on 31 January 2016, as the framework for transforming the continent's education and training systems. CESA concretised the vision set out in the continent's Agenda 2063 for enabling citizens to be effective agents of change to achieve the 'Africa We Want'. It also localised the global Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goal on education (SDG 4) within the context of Africa-specific priorities and challenges.

In addition, UNDP (2017) points out that although there may be no 'silver bullet' solution to inequality in broader society, equitable access to quality education in Africa has been identified as a particularly effective way to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Hence, efforts to expand access to and improve the quality of education need to prioritise equity in learning so that the most vulnerable children are placed at the centre of policy decisions and investments. UNDP (2017) further stresses that most education systems in

Africa experience segregation between the more able children and those who need extra support. In addition to working around the more visible dimensions of equity (gender, location, poverty), it is important to delve into the invisible barriers that prevent many children from benefiting from the educational experience (Banerji, 2014). The negative effect that crises, conflicts, natural disasters, and unexpected events have on the most vulnerable children cannot be ignored. Equity-related issues that prevent children from being enrolled in school, not attending regularly, attending but not following the average learning pathway, or not even appearing in official databases also need not to be ignored.

The UNESCO (2023) Report further points out that African countries are at different stages of their journeys to universal access at primary and secondary levels. In countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, and South Africa, universal primary education appears within reach by 2030, and efforts for lower secondary education have had notable success. However, in other countries, including Chad and Guinea-Bissau, more than two-thirds of children do not complete primary education, suggesting that access even at the primary level calls for urgent and intense policy attention. The situation is even worse in these countries when it comes to the secondary education level.

Children from the poorest quintiles, as reported by UNESCO (2023), are far less likely to complete primary, lower, and upper secondary schooling than children from the wealthiest quintiles, and the size of this gap increases at higher levels of education. Gender disparities in completion rates vary across nations and regions, highlighting the diversity of factors that keep boys and girls from attending school, and their variability across countries and age groups.

In East African countries such as Uganda, as revealed by Ogawa and Wokadala (2011), there were still serious issues relating to equity in lower secondary education. For instance, issues related to

both school and family factors, such as student age, household spending on education and education level of household head, among others, were found to be seriously influencing equity in secondary education.

In Rwanda as pointed out in the Global Partnership for Education report (2021), the government is actively promoting equity in education by focusing on inclusive policies and strategies to ensure access for all, including girls and children with special needs, through initiatives like the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2018/19 – 2023/24 (ESSP). In fact, according to the report, Rwanda has made education a priority sector to support its ambitious development objectives and grow a knowledge economy based on an educated workforce.

In South Sudan, as revealed in the Global Partnership for Education report (2019), achieving equity in education faces several challenges. According to the report, despite the fact that South Sudan's constitution states that education is a basic right for every citizen, South Sudan, a nation that gained independence just eight years ago, currently has over two million children and young people who are out of school.

Tanzania, on the other hand, as part of the signatories to the UN SDGs, has for more than two decades been working on ensuring that there is equity and equality in its education system. However, as noted by Kuluchumila et al (2016), the country's movement for equity achievement in the education practice is a recent phenomenon which needs proactive actions to realise equity in the country. This study, therefore, sought to explore mechanisms that could be employed to enhance the implementation of equity-based strategies in Public secondary schools within Tanzania.

Problem Statement

For more than two decades, Tanzania has been implementing various strategies to respond to equity issues in secondary school education in the country. Specifically, the intention has been to

enable all students at the secondary education level, regardless of their backgrounds, to complete secondary school education. Some of these efforts have included the introduction of SEDP, ward secondary schools, Big Results Now (BRN), and the introduction of fee-free education (Kambona, 2020).

Unfortunately, despite the invested effort, equity in secondary schools is still found to be far from being realised in the country. Studies show that there is continued presence of challenges such as negative attitudes towards the girl child, early marriage and poor cultural beliefs among others (Bryant, 2014; Kahise, 2013). Failure to address the issue of equity in secondary schools is leading to a serious gender imbalance, a huge societal gap in terms of development and an increase in vulnerability of children, as noted by Hakielimu (2017).

In addition, the continued existence of equity-related challenges as reported by Bryant (2014) and Kahise (2013) raises questions as to why achieving equity continues to be a challenge in Tanzania. On account of such questions, this study sought to explore proactive actions that need to be taken on board so as to enhance the implementation of equity-based strategies for the realisation of equity in Tanzania public secondary schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Castelli et al (2012) and Levin (2003), equity in education has two major dimensions: The first dimension has to do with whether overall levels of education provision are sufficient and of the right kind. The specific nature of these concerns varies with the level of education and with the life stage of the learners. For instance, in early childhood, a dominant concern relates to ensuring access to high-quality care to all who want or need it. In addition, access to childcare is itself an equity issue for parents, especially women, in terms of their ability to participate fully in the labour force. In schooling, universal access is a given, but concerns exist about equality in relation to some structures, such as the

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

According to literature, there are various factors that influence equity in education. For instance, UNESCO (2017) stresses that many of these factors can work either to facilitate or to inhibit inclusive and equitable practices within education systems. Some of these factors may include the below stressed factors.

Quality of Teachers

With regard to the quality of teachers, it is noted that teachers have more influence on learner learning than any other school factor. In addition, the effect of high-performing teachers has been shown to be similar, notwithstanding school characteristics, making teacher quality a major element in equity plans (Barth, 2016). There is no single way to define teacher quality, however, experience, credentials and academic background have all been shown to have an effect on teacher quality.

Similarly, new “growth “or “value-added” measures have been developed to relate learner gains to individual teachers. In truth, all of these indicators matter, as pointed out by Barth (2016). Providing adequate professional support to educators and school leaders is a critical basic requirement for increasing educational equity in schools. An equity focus for professional learning opportunities specifically refers to a paradigm shift from isolated and deficit-based professional development to an asset-based, job-embedded approach.

To create an equitable learning environment, educators must be culturally competent and possess the ability to communicate and work effectively across cultural lines. The most effective way to develop cultural competency among staff is to provide long-term, sustained professional development that enriches teachers' cultural understanding (Hanover Research, 2017). Excellent teaching should be developed, nurtured, and sustained through the creation of robust professional learning communities that support educators in their process of meeting and exceeding a clearly articulated vision for excellent teaching (Hanover Research, 2017)

Funding

The distribution of funds among schools is another distinct feature of equity in education. Barth (2016) asserts that money is the clearest indicator of educational equity between districts. The largest share of school revenue comes from governments and other stakeholders. However, these funds are not adequate to meet the needs of all schools. Hence, the manner in which these funds are distributed is very critical to promoting equity in education. UNESCO (2017) points out that it may be necessary to set up or strengthen monitoring systems to ensure that funding and other resources are used appropriately and effectively. Even though levels of funding differ from country to country, many of the challenges and strategies are similar. However, establishing sustainable partnerships between the government and other potential funders could be a worthwhile opportunity for exploration.

Discipline

Discipline is another key factor that impacts on achievement of equity in education. As revealed by Barth (2016), there is a need for schools to adopt positive discipline management strategies to ensure that there is equitable provision of education to all learners. In this regard, teachers need to establish and maintain behaviour standards for respectful treatment in the classroom. Consequences for

misbehaviour must be implemented consistently and equitably in order to avoid the cultural misunderstandings that sometimes lead to disciplinary interventions (Hanover Research, 2017). Hence, according to Hanover Research (2017), the following guidelines, such as implementing positive disciplinary programs that include restorative justice and collaborative problem solving, creating a positive school climate to facilitate equitable disciplinary practices and setting clear expectations for learner learning and behaviour, should be adopted.

STUDY THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the context of this study, two theories, i.e., the Social Justice Theory and the Theory of Social Inclusion, as detailed below, were used to guide the study. From the Social Justice Theory point of view, as pointed out by Nyatuka and Bota (2014), the social justice theory was advanced by John Rawls in 1971. It is upon this theory that the concept of equity was founded and focuses on the idea of justice as well as fairness in the distribution of goods and services, including education. This study applied the theory within this context by exploring how justice and fairness were being actualised in the studied schools. In the case of the social inclusion theory, according to Booth and Ainscow (2011), social inclusion by definition is a contestable term. According to the Commission of the European Communities (2003), social inclusion has been coined to imply a process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living that is considered normal in the society in which they live. In the context of this study, the theory of social inclusion was found to be relevant in the sense that the study looks at inclusion, which is a key factor towards promoting equity in education.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Glewwe et al. (2014) employed a cross-sectional design and reviewed a set of 79 empirical studies on the promotion of equity in education. The author revealed that the prospect for implementation of equity in education requires, among other needs, having able teachers, basic infrastructure and instructional materials accessible to all students. Hence, in this study, the issues raised by Glewwe et al. (2014) are going to be investigated considering their profound impact on ensuring equity in education. As per this finding, the authors identified not having able teachers, basic infrastructure and instructional materials as possible gaps that would compromise the implementation of equity-based strategies in secondary schools.

Haruna (2020) points out that addressing equity in education within Nigeria requires taking actions on fundamental challenges such as poverty, financial barriers, as well as social and cultural barriers. The author further stresses that strategies such as periodic curriculum review, teacher retention and improving the teaching and learning environment need to be taken on board.

Kakembo (2024) points out that Governments hold an important role in ensuring educational equity, which is essential for societal progress and economic development. According to the author, strategies that include equitable resource allocation and grassroots involvement. Collaboration between federal, state, and local authorities, supported by partnerships with private and community stakeholders, is essential for implementing sustainable solutions. The author further stresses that through concerted efforts and sustained commitment, Kenya can transform its education landscape, ensuring that every child has access to quality education, regardless of background or circumstance.

Mwangi (2024), Kenya's pursuit of educational equity and excellence is indispensable for national development and social progress. Hence, by

addressing systemic disparities, investing in targeted interventions, and fostering collaboration across sectors, Kenya can build a more inclusive and resilient education system that empowers all individuals to realise their full potential.

Bizimana (2024) revealed that resolving issues such as the teacher-student ratio, ensuring adequate teaching facilities and resources, implementing appropriate teacher training programs, among others, were necessary strategies towards promoting equity in Rwanda's education system. Hakielimu (2007) revealed that in order to achieve equity and quality in the Tanzanian education system, teaching must focus on an individual learner instead of focusing squarely on learning outcomes.

Mbwala (2017) points out that the MOEVT and PMORALG should allocate enough resources for schools' inspection, monitoring and evaluation as a yardstick for ensuring equity and quality education. This finding is equally relevant in the context of this study. Precisely, the finding implies that when teachers are motivated then they will pay more attention to their work and to all students, be accountable and employ interactive methods of teaching that will involve all students. This will assist in ensuring that all students are on board and thus promote equity.

Kitila (2011) also carried out a study which established that the low salary given to teachers limited their ability to meet their basic needs and thus shifted their attention to other businesses. This reduces time for teaching and impairs efforts towards realising equity and quality in secondary schools. In addition, Weber and Andreas (2003) also stressed that while teachers are generally well-compensated, salary difference is a huge factor in education equity, with potential issues arising from disparities in pay scales and the attractiveness of the profession, especially between East and West Germany.

Overall, based on the above empirical literature on the implementation of equity-based strategies in the

Tanzanian education system, it is evident that proactive actions need to be taken on board to ensure that equity-based strategies are effectively implemented so as to achieve equity in Tanzania's public secondary schools.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a multiple case study design, which allowed the selection of two case study areas in Dodoma region, and they included, Dodoma Urban District, representing the urban setting and Kondoa Rural District, representing the rural setting. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews, surveys and observation methods, while secondary data was collected through document review, particularly policies and strategies relevant to this study were carried out. Data analysis involved the use of content. The total number of participants in the study was 144 participants from seven (7) public secondary schools. Data were collected through interviews and questionnaires.

Both internal and external validity were addressed in the study. For internal validity, this was addressed by ensuring that data obtained through various sources is consistent with existing evidence and general trends, while external validity was taken into consideration by ensuring that the research design was thoroughly prepared to avoid any loopholes that could have been against this test. Reliability, on the other hand, was ensured by putting emphasis on developing an appropriate research design, employing appropriate data collection methods, adhering to the research process and using appropriate data collection instruments.

Ethical considerations were also observed in the course of undertaking this study. The research made sure that consent was obtained from all study participants, followed the required research procedures and no minors were involved in the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This part of the study presents findings on enhancing equity in public secondary schools within Dodoma as revealed by the study participants. With the help of the questionnaire and key informant interviews, study participants pointed out several possible ways that could be adopted to enhance equity in public secondary schools within Dodoma. However, in the interest of this study, the five noted major ways as suggested by the participants were as presented below.

- **Involving Education Stakeholders, Such as Teachers, in Discussing Education Matters.**

The need to involve teachers as key education stakeholders in discussing education matters was one of the aspects that was pointed out by the study participants. According to the participants, as revealed through the questionnaire, teachers have a better understanding of the educational needs of many students. Hence, there is a need to involve them in discussions pertaining to education matters. In one of the completed questionnaires, it was narrated that:

'If we want to address equity issues in our education system, we should not leave the teachers behind. As teachers, we are closer to students and therefore we understand their challenges and needs'.

This view was also shared by the head of schools as key informants in this study through the in-depth interview. According to the head of schools, the role of teachers in enforcing equity cannot be underestimated. This implies that the government needs to make sure that teachers, as key stakeholders in the education system, are fully involved in the decision-making process.

- **Improve Teachers' Working Environment.**

Improving teachers' working environment was another possible way that study participants pointed

out for enhancing equity in public secondary schools in Dodoma. According to the participants, as revealed through the questionnaire, the working environment in most schools is not supportive of the teachers. This includes poor infrastructure, small working offices with no furniture, and sometimes a lack of support to teachers from the school leadership itself. Hence, in such situations, teachers' teaching morale is reduced, and even the need to invest more time to implement activities that would enhance equity among students is eroded. To substantiate this view, a quote on this matter as reflected in the completed questionnaire is as follows:

'I think the government should begin by improving our working environment. If you look into the environment in which teachers teach, it is pathetic, and this has a direct impact on enhancing equity'.

This view was further supported by the Kondoa education officer, who also acknowledged the fact that there was a need to improve teachers' working conditions in the country. According to the Officer, most schools have no appropriate office facilities, and in some schools, offices are overcongested. These findings imply that there is a need to pay attention to teachers' working conditions in order to enhance the implementation of equity-based strategies in public secondary schools.

- **Parents Should Cooperate with Teachers to Ensure that Students are Supported from Both Sides.**

In this aspect, the study participants through the questionnaire acknowledged the need for parents to cooperate with teachers so as to enforce equity for the benefit of the students. According to the participants, parents have a role to play and thus need to cooperate with teachers in ensuring that students get support from both ends. To cement this view, a quote from one of the questionnaires is stated below:

'Enforcing equity should not be left to teachers alone. Rather, parents as well should endeavour to cooperate with us as teachers in this process. If we do this, then our children will benefit and achieve their educational goals'.

Discussion with the head of school as study key informants on this matter also revealed that indeed there was a need for parents to cooperate with teachers to enhance equity in these schools. According to the head of school, parents have a role to make close follow-up on education matters of their children, as well as raising a voice in situations where things do not appear to be going in the right direction. In this regard, the findings on this matter imply that cooperation with teachers and the school leadership is very important as it can foster the implementation of equity-based strategies in the schools.

- **Improve Students' Learning Infrastructure and Instructional Materials**

In the context of this study, participants also revealed that in order to enhance equity in public secondary schools within Dodoma, there is a need to improve students' learning infrastructure and instructional materials. The learning infrastructure includes classrooms, chairs and tables, while the instructional materials include textbooks. In the completed questionnaire, one of the participants is quoted to have stated as follows:

'We can only talk about equity if students' learning infrastructure is in good shape, sufficient and instructional materials are also sufficient. Otherwise, currently, students are largely affected by these two aspects'.

A further discussion with the heads of schools on this matter also revealed a similar sentiment. According to the heads of schools, the current infrastructure and instructional materials are insufficient to meet students' needs. This finding implies that there is a need to address the issue of

learning infrastructure in the schools in order to support equity efforts by the government.

▪ **Improve Teachers' Salary and Incentives**

Last but not least, study participants echoed the need to improve teachers' salaries and incentives as one of the possible ways through which the implementation of equity would be enhanced. According to the participants, teachers spend a lot of time trying to balance their living since the provided salary is low and incentives are very rare. By doing so, teachers end up not spending enough time to pay attention to students' needs, and thus, this impacts equity enhancement in these schools. However, study participants think that if this is addressed, it will enhance equity implementation in schools. Though a completed questionnaire, one of the participants is quoted to have stated as follows;

The government should look into the possibility of increasing our salaries and providing incentives. This will motivate us to focus on our teaching duties and help students more, which will then support equity efforts by the government'.

In an in-depth interview with both the heads of schools and education officers as study key informants, this matter was also raised and noted to be of concern in enforcing equity in public secondary schools. On the part of the heads of schools, they think that doing something about teachers' salaries and incentives will be a great motivation for the teachers to work more. Similarly, education officers shared a similar view with the heads of schools on this matter.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings on the possible ways to enhance equity in public secondary schools within Dodoma Region, as revealed by the study participants, show that five approaches could be employed as presented above. Discussion on each of these approaches is presented below.

▪ **Involving Education Stakeholders in Education Matters.**

As it was noted in the findings section, study participants expressed the issue of not involving education stakeholders, such as teachers, in decision-making on education matters. As a result, they felt that this was one of the threatening factors to the effective implementation of equity-based strategies in public secondary schools within the study districts. These findings concur with the findings of Kakembo (2024), who also found that achieving equity in the education sector requires collaboration among education stakeholders, especially with the teachers. This finding therefore implies that, inclusivity of education stakeholders, such as teachers in education matters, should be seen to be of essence to the effective implementation of equity-based strategies in public secondary schools.

▪ **Improve Teachers' Working Environment.**

Improving teachers' working conditions was one of the possible ways suggested by study participants towards enhancing the effective implementation of equity-based strategies. As presented in the findings section of this study, this aspect was one of the most felt challenges among teachers, and hence, they saw it as another threat to the implementation of equity-based strategies in their schools. The finding largely concurs with the findings of Haruna (2020), who also found in his study that due to poor working conditions for teachers in schools, it is difficult to have teachers working effectively. This impacts the quality of education delivered by them, as well as making it difficult to acquire positive results from any equity and equality measures.

▪ **Parent Cooperation with Teachers**

The study findings revealed that a lack of cooperation from parents sometimes downplays any effect of making sure that students fully attend school. As a result, efforts towards achieving equity are usually compromised, and hence, this situation

needs to be reversed as suggested by the study participants. These findings concur with the findings by Mwangi (2024) in Kenya and Bizimana (2024) from Rwanda, who in their studies also found that when parents do not cooperate in making sure that their children attend school, this jeopardises any education effort. Hence, they too recommended the need to ensure that there is cooperation between the school authority and parents to make sure that children fully attend school.

▪ **Improve Students' Learning Infrastructure and Instructional Materials**

Study participants also identified the issue of a shortage of students' learning infrastructure and instructional materials as part of the constraints to the implementation of equity-based strategies in public secondary schools. As a result, they suggested that this was one of the areas that needed improvement. These findings concur with the findings of Bizimana (2024), who also cited this aspect in the context of Rwanda. This finding implies that there is a need to address the situation of learning infrastructure and instructional materials in public secondary schools if equity is to be realised in these schools.

▪ **Improve Teacher Salary and Incentives**

The issue of teacher salary was also reported from the findings as one of the major concerns towards effective implementation of equity-based strategies in public secondary schools in the study districts. As a result, participants suggested the need to improve teacher salaries and incentives as one of the possible ways that could be adopted so as to motivate teachers and enable them to commit themselves to their duties, which would in turn contribute to improved implementation of equity-based strategies. These findings align with the findings of Nyatuka and Bota (2014) from Kenya, who also noticed from their study that poor teacher remuneration and especially on the issue of salary, makes it difficult to attract and even retain quality

teachers. This consequently impacts the quality of education delivery, making it difficult to achieve positive results from any government effort.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION(S)

Conclusion

This study sought to explore mechanisms for enhancing effective implementation of equity-based strategies in Tanzania's public secondary schools. In line with this objective, findings have shown that study participants agree to the fact that several measures can be employed to ensure effective implementation of equity-based strategies in Tanzania public secondary schools. However, five aspects were strongly pointed out as discussed above. In the context of this study, this implies that, for the sake of enhancing equity in public secondary schools within Dodoma Region, it will be of paramount importance for the above proposed measures to be taken on board.

In addition, the findings largely concur with the study theories, i.e. the theory of social justice and the social inclusion theory, which also implies that when the above aspects are implemented, it will be possible to promote social justice and social inclusion that happen to be fundamental principles to the concept of equity.

Recommendation(s)

Based on the study findings, this study therefore recommends that there is a need to adopt the above suggested proactive measures so as to promote effective implementation of equity-based strategies in Tanzania public secondary schools.

Future Research Direction(s)

Based on the study findings, future research direction on this matter should seek to explore modalities for implementing the suggested proactive actions. Identified modalities will assist in highlighting how the suggested actions/measures should be implemented.

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