

Original Research

Assessing the Influence of Parental Support on the Implementation of Inclusive Education Practices in Zanzibar Primary Schools: A Case of Wete District

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Abstract

This qualitative multiple-case study examines how parental support influences the implementation of inclusive education practices in two contrasting primary schools in Wete District, Zanzibar. Each school was treated as a bounded case: one with an established inclusive education unit and one without. The design enabled within-case analysis and systematic cross-case comparison to explore how institutional structures shape parental engagement and inclusive practices. The sample consisted of 26 participants, including parents, regular and special education teachers, students, head teachers, and school committee leaders. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and direct observations in natural school settings. The findings indicate that parental support manifests in multidimensional forms, such as academic reinforcement at home, resource contributions to schools, participation in governance, and emotional encouragement, which collectively enhance students' academic achievement, behavioral development, and social integration within inclusive environments. Active parental involvement fosters improved attendance, reduced truancy, and a supportive school climate. Conversely, the limited engagement of parents correlates with heightened student isolation, diminished academic performance, and challenges in social-emotional adaptation, particularly for learners with special educational needs. These findings underscore the necessity of strong school-family partnerships to overcome barriers like socioeconomic constraints and cultural stigmas. The study highlights the critical role of parental support in advancing equitable, inclusive education aligned with Zanzibar's Education Policy of 2006 and the Persons with Disabilities Act No. 8 of 2022. Recommendations include strengthening school-family partnerships, expanding inclusive education units in primary schools, and developing community awareness programs to enhance parental engagement in inclusive education. By addressing context-specific dynamics in Zanzibar, this research emphasizes sustainable strategies for holistic student success.

Keywords: Parental support; inclusive education; school-family partnerships; inclusive practices; Zanzibar primary schools

Introduction

Inclusive education, as a basis of equitable schooling, seeks to accommodate diverse learners within mainstream environments, fostering participation, social integration, and academic growth for all students regardless of abilities or backgrounds (UNESCO, 2020). This approach emphasizes holistic collaboration among stakeholders, including families, to create supportive learning ecosystems that address not only cognitive needs but also social-emotional and cultural dimensions (Thomas, 2016). In Zanzibar, the push for inclusive education has been propelled by international frameworks such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006), alongside national policies like the Zanzibar Education Policy of 2006 and the Persons with Disabilities Act No. 8 of 2022 (Government of Zanzibar, 2022). These instruments mandate accessible, non-discriminatory education, with a focus on integrating children with special educational needs into regular classrooms through adaptations in curriculum, infrastructure, and community involvement (Juma, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2017).



Despite these advancements, the implementation of inclusive practices in Zanzibar's primary schools remains uneven, particularly in parental involvement and resource-constrained districts like Wete. Studies indicate persistent challenges, including limited teacher training, inadequate infrastructure, and cultural attitudes toward disability that hinder full inclusion (Juma & Lehtomäki, 2016). Parental support emerges as a pivotal yet underexplored factor in this context, influencing the efficacy of inclusive education by bridging home and school environments (Epstein et al., 2018; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Drawing from Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which posits that learning is socially mediated through interactions with more knowledgeable others including parents, parental engagement facilitates the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) for diverse learners. Similarly, Epstein et al.'s (2018) framework delineates six types of involvement (e.g., parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and community collaboration), highlighting how such support can enhance student outcomes in inclusive settings.

In Zanzibar, where approximately one-third of school-aged children face barriers to education due to socioeconomic and cultural factors, the role of families in supporting inclusive schooling becomes particularly significant (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, 2020). Parental roles are amplified. Research in comparable African contexts, such as Tanzania mainland demonstrates that active parental involvement correlates with improved academic performance and reduced exclusion for students with special needs (Mushi, 2024). However, gaps persist in understanding the specific influences of parental support or its absence on inclusive practices in Zanzibar, where cultural stigmas and economic constraints often limit family engagement (Juma & Lehtomäki, 2016).

While existing studies in Zanzibar and comparable African contexts acknowledge the importance of parental involvement in inclusive education, limited research has examined how such involvement operates within different school structures. In particular, there is insufficient understanding of how institutional arrangements, such as the presence or absence of inclusive education units, shape the nature and impact of parental support. A multiple-case approach provides analytical depth by allowing systematic comparison between contrasting school contexts, thereby strengthening contextual interpretation.

This study therefore adopts a qualitative multiple-case design to examine how parental support shapes the implementation of inclusive education practices in two contrasting primary schools in Wete District. By analyzing each school as a bounded case and conducting cross-case comparison, the study seeks to illuminate how parental engagement interacts with institutional structures to influence academic achievement, behavioral development, social integration, and inclusive responsiveness. Through this approach, the research contributes context-specific insights to the broader discourse on inclusive education in resource-constrained settings.

To provide clear direction for the study, the research objectives and guiding questions are presented below.

Research Objectives and Questions

This study aims to assess the influence of parental support on the implementation of inclusive education practices in Zanzibar primary schools, with a particular focus on Wete District.

The specific objectives of the study are:

- (i) To explore how parental support influences the implementation of inclusive education practices;
- (ii) To identify challenges affecting effective parental involvement in inclusive education;
- (iii) To assess strategies that can strengthen school–family partnerships in promoting inclusive education.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways does parental support influence the implementation of inclusive education practices in Wete district?
2. What challenges hinder effective parental involvement in inclusive education?
3. What strategies can enhance collaboration between schools and families in inclusive settings?

The literature on parental support in inclusive education underscores its multifaceted role in enhancing student outcomes, particularly in resource-constrained settings like Zanzibar. This review synthesizes theoretical foundations, empirical evidence from global and African contexts, and identifies gaps, aligning with the study's objective to assess the

influence of parental support on inclusive education practices.

This study, which assesses the influence of parental support on the implementation of inclusive education practices in Zanzibar primary schools, is designed in alignment with whole schooling principles. It emphasizes inclusive learning, the development of collaborative school communities, and strong school–family partnerships as central to guiding the study’s objectives and research questions. These elements collectively support shared responsibility, active participation, and a sense of belonging for all learners within an inclusive school community.

Theoretical Foundations

Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory posits that learning is a socially mediated process, where interactions with more knowledgeable others, such as parents, facilitate the ZPD. In inclusive education, parents extend classroom scaffolding into home environments, supporting diverse learners’ cognitive and social growth (Thomas, 2016). Complementing this, Epstein et al.’s (2018) Framework of Six Types of Parental Involvement outlines parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community as key mechanisms. These types foster school-family partnerships, essential for addressing barriers in inclusive settings (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Together, these theories frame parental support as a dynamic mediator of inclusion, bridging home-school divides to promote equitable outcomes.

Forms of Parental Support in Inclusive Education

Parental support manifests in various forms, including academic reinforcement at home, resource provision, and emotional encouragement. In African contexts, parents often contribute through homework assistance and advocacy for adaptations, enhancing academic achievement for students with special needs (Mligo, 2018). In Zanzibar, Juma & Lehtomäki (2016) noted parents’ resource contributions, such as fundraising for infrastructure, as critical in overcoming socioeconomic constraints, this aligning with Epstein’s “parenting” and “learning at home” types.

Challenges to Parental Collaboration in Inclusive Education

Barriers to effective parental involvement include socioeconomic factors, cultural stigmas, and limited awareness. In low-resource African settings, poverty and time constraints hinder engagement, exacerbating truancy and academic decline (Mligo, 2018). At the same time, cultural stigma surrounding disability often leads to the rejection of affected children, particularly in contexts such as Zanzibar (Mushi, 2024). Communication gaps, such as inadequate school outreach, further impede collaboration (Haule, 2021). Internationally, Hornby & Lafaele (2011) identified similar barriers in explanatory models, emphasizing the need for context-specific interventions to build trust and capacity.

Influence of Parental Support on Inclusive Practices

Active parental involvement positively influences student outcomes, while its absence perpetuates exclusion. Empirical studies show correlations between engagement and improved attendance, reduced behavioral issues, and enhanced social-emotional adaptation (Epstein et al., 2018). In Tanzania, Haule (2021) linked parental monitoring to higher academic performance, particularly for students with disabilities. Conversely, limited support leads to isolation and poor adaptation, as evidenced in Zanzibar’s rural districts.

Recent studies continue to emphasize the importance of school–family collaboration in inclusive education. For example, (Azorín & Ainscow, 2020) highlight that sustained parental engagement strengthens inclusive classroom participation and reduces marginalization among learners with disabilities. Similarly, Zakirova-Engstrand & Wilder (2024) found that active parental partnerships significantly enhance inclusive pedagogical practices and student social integration across diverse educational contexts. These contemporary findings reinforce the importance of parental involvement as a critical component of sustainable inclusive education systems.

Research Gaps

While global literature emphasizes parental involvement’s benefits, context-specific studies in Zanzibar remain limited, often overlooking the nuanced influences on primary school inclusion (Juma, 2018). This study addresses this gap by qualitatively assessing parental support’s multidimensional impacts in Wete District, contributing to unabridged education principles for sustainable equity.

Methods

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative multiple-case study design (Yin, 2018), in which each participating school constituted a bounded case. School A (with an established inclusive education unit) and School B (without a formal inclusive unit) were purposefully selected to enable systematic comparison of parental support structures and inclusive education practices within different institutional contexts. The multiple-case approach allowed for in-depth within-case analysis followed by cross-case synthesis to identify similarities, contextual variations, and explanatory patterns across the two schools. This design was appropriate because inclusive education implementation is embedded within school-specific organizational, cultural, and community dynamics.

While themes were allowed to emerge from the data, the coding process was also informed by the study's theoretical frameworks, particularly Epstein's six types of parental involvement and Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory. These frameworks provided analytical lenses for interpreting how parental engagement supports learning through social interaction and how different forms of involvement are reflected in inclusive education practices. This approach enabled the study to link empirical findings with established theoretical perspectives.

Beyond its comparative structure, the qualitative orientation of this study aligns with interpretive traditions that prioritize meaning-making and contextual depth. As argued by Stake (1995) and Merriam (1998), qualitative case study research seeks to understand how participants construct experiences within bounded systems rather than to generate statistical generalizations. This approach is particularly relevant for examining inclusive education practices, where parental engagement is shaped by lived realities, institutional cultures, and socio-cultural norms. By privileging participants' perspectives and contextual interpretation, the design enabled a nuanced understanding of how parental support operates within distinct school environments.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Wete District, Pemba, Zanzibar, a region characterized by both urban and semi-rural primary school contexts and ongoing efforts to strengthen inclusive education implementation under the Zanzibar Education Policy of 2006 and the Persons with Disabilities Act No. 8 of 2022 (Government of Zanzibar, 2022). Wete District was selected because it reflects the practical realities of inclusive education implementation in resource-constrained settings, including variations in school infrastructure, parental engagement patterns, and institutional support structures. The district therefore provided a suitable context for comparative case analysis.

Within the district, two schools were purposefully selected to represent contrasting institutional arrangements. School A operates an established inclusive education unit, while School B does not have a formal inclusive structure. Each school was treated as a distinct analytical unit, with data analyzed separately before conducting cross-case comparison to strengthen analytic depth and case integrity.

Sampling Procedures and Participants

A total of 26 participants were recruited through purposive sampling, consistent with qualitative multiple-case study methodology (Yin, 2018). Sampling was guided by the principle of information richness, ensuring inclusion of stakeholders directly involved in inclusive education practices within each school.

Participants were distributed across the two cases to preserve case integrity. Each school contributed 13 participants, including four parents, four teachers (two regular and two special education teachers), three students, one head teacher, and one school committee leader. This balanced distribution enabled within-case analysis and cross-case comparison.

Inclusion criteria required participants to have sustained engagement with the school context. Parents were required to have a child enrolled in the school for at least one academic year. Teachers were required to have a minimum of two years' teaching experience, including involvement with learners with diverse needs. Students aged 10–13 were selected to ensure developmental capacity to articulate their schooling experiences.

The sample size was deemed adequate for in-depth qualitative analysis, as the study prioritized analytic depth over statistical generalization. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved within and across cases, mean-

ing no substantially new themes emerged from subsequent interviews. Ethical approval was granted by the State University of Zanzibar (Ref. No. HA.248/299/03/97), with additional research clearance obtained from the Office of the Second Vice President of Zanzibar (Ref. No. CA.33/411/01-T/13) and the Zanzibar Research Committee (Permit ID: 200173962791748424497). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality and voluntary participation were strictly maintained throughout the study.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection utilized multiple qualitative methods to triangulate findings and enhance credibility. Semi-structured interviews, lasting 30–40 minutes each, were conducted individually in Swahili and then translated into English based on participant preference, using open-ended questions to explore perceptions of parental support's influences (e.g., “How does parental involvement affect students’ academic and social outcomes?”). The interview protocol was semi-structured and designed to explore key aspects of parental involvement in inclusive education. The questions were organized around major themes, including forms of parental support, experiences with inclusive education practices, communication between parents and schools, challenges affecting parental engagement, and strategies for improving collaboration. This structure allowed flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences while ensuring consistency across interviews. Interviews were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim. Complementary direct observations were performed over four weeks, totaling 20 hours per school, using structured checklists to document classroom interactions, parent-teacher meetings, and school ground activities. Observations focused on indicators of inclusion, such as student engagement, peer interactions, and evidence of parental contributions (e.g., resource provision or emotional support). Classroom and school observations were guided by specific indicators, including teacher-student interactions, participation of learners with diverse needs, use of inclusive teaching strategies, classroom behavior patterns, and visible forms of parental involvement such as attendance at meetings or communication with teachers. These observations helped to triangulate interview data and provided contextual understanding of inclusive practices. Field notes captured contextual nuances, including barriers like socioeconomic constraints.

To ensure transparency, interview data and observational data were treated as distinct sources during analysis. Interview transcripts provided participants’ perceptions and experiences, while observation notes documented naturally occurring behaviors, interactions, and school practices. During analysis and reporting, findings were explicitly attributed to their respective data sources to strengthen methodological clarity and analytic rigor.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis as outlined by [Braun & Clarke \(2006\)](#). The process began with repeated reading of interview transcripts and observation notes to achieve data familiarization. Initial codes were then generated inductively from the data. Interview transcripts and observation notes were first coded separately in order to preserve data-source integrity before integration. Examples of initial codes included “homework supervision,” “parent absence from meetings,” “behavioral reinforcement,” “teacher frustration,” and “student withdrawal.”

Following initial coding, related codes were grouped into broader categories and examined for patterns across participants and cases. Themes were refined through iterative comparison both within each case (School A and School B) and across cases, as well as across data sources (interviews and observations). This analytic process resulted in two overarching themes: (a) Positive Influences of Parental Support and (b) Negative Consequences of Limited Engagement. The final themes were organized according to the multiple-case structure, with within-case analysis presented prior to cross-case synthesis.

Coding was conducted manually using Microsoft Word (Version 2019; Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, WA, USA) through highlighting and margin annotations. Although specialized qualitative data analysis software was not employed, systematic color-coding and the maintenance of a code log were used to ensure analytic consistency and rigor. To enhance credibility, 20% of transcripts were independently reviewed by a qualitative research colleague familiar with Zanzibar’s education context. Coding interpretations were discussed until consensus was reached. Rather than calculating statistical inter-coder reliability, a consensus-based approach was adopted, consistent with qualitative case study methodology ([Creswell & Poth, 2018](#)).

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were employed based on established qualitative research criteria. Credibility was enhanced through data triangulation by using multiple sources, including interviews and observations. Member checking was conducted by verifying selected responses with participants to ensure accuracy of interpretation. Transferability was supported through detailed descriptions of the study context, enabling readers to assess the applicability of findings to similar settings. Dependability and confirmability were ensured by maintaining a clear audit trail of data collection and analysis procedures, allowing for transparency and consistency in the research process.

Ethical considerations were observed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation of all respondents. Also researcher considered approval from the State University of Zanzibar (SUZA) and the office of Second Vice President of Zanzibar before collecting the data.

Results

Findings are presented according to the multiple-case study design. Within-case analysis is first provided for School A and School B, followed by cross-case comparison. Themes presented in this section were developed through thematic analysis following [Braun & Clarke \(2006\)](#) framework and interpreted using Joyce Epstein's framework of parental involvement and Lev [Vygotsky's \(1978\)](#) sociocultural theory. These theoretical perspectives guided the interpretation of how parental support operates within inclusive education settings, particularly in shaping students' academic engagement, behavior, and social participation. The analysis therefore integrates empirical findings with theoretical insights to provide a deeper understanding of parental involvement in inclusive education.

Case One: School A (With Inclusive Education Unit)

School A operates within an urban setting with relatively structured administrative processes, including an established inclusive education unit. This institutional arrangement appeared to shape parental engagement by formalizing communication channels and collaborative routines.

Academic Reinforcement and Student Engagement

Interview data from teachers in School A indicated that parental monitoring of homework and consistent communication contributed to improved student confidence and classroom participation. One teacher stated:

“When a parent follows up, even if the child has a learning difficulty, we see progress. They come to school prepared and are more confident to participate in class” (T1SA).

Classroom observations supported these reports, revealing higher task engagement and sustained attention among students whose parents were described as actively involved.

These findings reflect [Epstein et al.'s \(2018\)](#) “learning at home” and “communicating” types of involvement, where parental engagement extends instructional scaffolding beyond the classroom. From a sociocultural perspective, such parental mediation aligns with [Vygotsky's \(1978\)](#) concept of the ZPD, where learning is strengthened through guided support from more knowledgeable others. This demonstrates how parental involvement extends learning beyond the classroom and reinforces scaffolding processes that are central to inclusive education.

Behavioral Alignment Between Home and School

Teachers in School A emphasized that consistent behavioral expectations between home and school reduced classroom disruptions. One teacher explained:

“... parents help us shape behaviors; they reinforce positive behaviors and quickly address issues that arise” (T1SA).

Observational field notes confirmed fewer behavioral conflicts compared to School B. During one observed school committee meeting, parents collaboratively discussed strategies for improving punctuality and peer interaction. This behavioral consistency illustrates the social construction of norms across home and school environments, reinforcing Lev [Vygotsky's \(1978\)](#) assertion that learning and development occur through structured social interaction. It also reflects Joyce Epstein's concept of *parenting* and *communicating*, where shared expectations between parents and schools support

positive student behavior.

Proactive Inclusive Adaptation

Special education teachers reported that parental insights were essential for adapting instruction:

“... Parents are my best resource for understanding a child’s unique needs” (T3SA).

Such collaboration reflects Epstein et al.’s (2018) model of two-way communication and shared decision-making. Observational data documented adjustments in seating arrangements and differentiated instructional approaches following parental consultation.

School A’s inclusive unit appeared to institutionalize these communication practices, embedding parental support within structural mechanisms.

This highlights the importance of collaborative decision-making in inclusive education, where parents act as key partners in shaping instructional strategies, consistent with both sociocultural theory and Epstein’s involvement framework.

Attendance and Truancy Monitoring

Both interview and observational data indicated that active parental supervision reduced absenteeism. A student noted:

“... My parents ask me what I learned every day. If I miss class, I must explain why” (S1SA).

This reflects Epstein et al.’s (2018) parenting dimension, where monitoring reinforces responsibility and school commitment. This finding also reflects Joyce Epstein’s *parenting* dimension, where parental supervision supports student accountability and regular school attendance, which are essential for sustained engagement in inclusive learning environments.

Case Two: School B (Without Inclusive Education Unit)

School B, located in a semi-rural context, lacks a formal inclusive education unit. Parental engagement practices were largely dependent on individual teacher initiative rather than institutionalized mechanisms.

Limited Academic Follow-Up

Teachers in School B reported weaker parental follow-up regarding homework and school progress:

“... For parents who don’t ask about homework or come to check their child’s progress, the child stops caring too” (T1SB).

Observations revealed incomplete assignments and lower classroom participation among some students. Unlike School A, parental involvement in School B appeared less structured and more dependent on individual teacher initiative. This reflects the absence of Epstein’s *learning at home* involvement, limiting opportunities for guided support. From a socio-cultural perspective, the lack of parental engagement reduces opportunities for scaffolding, which may hinder students’ cognitive and academic development.

Behavioral Challenges and Reactive Communication

Interview data suggested higher behavioral concerns linked to limited parental presence. A head teacher stated:

“... the children who misbehave or miss classes are the ones whose parents have never attended school meetings” (HTSB).

Observational data recorded more frequent minor disruptions and peer conflicts compared to School A. Communication in School B tended to occur after problems emerged, indicating reactive rather than proactive engagement. This pattern contrasts with Joyce Epstein’s framework, which emphasizes proactive communication and partnership. The absence of consistent parental engagement weakens the social structures necessary for behavioral development, as emphasized in Lev Vygotsky’s theory.

Emotional Withdrawal and Isolation

Teachers reported emotional withdrawal among students lacking parental support:

“... There are pupils who don’t talk much in class... nobody encourages them at home” (T3SB).

Observation notes confirmed patterns of isolation during group activities. This supports [Vygotsky’s \(1978\)](#) view that social and emotional contexts significantly influence learning processes. Emotional encouragement from parents creates a supportive environment that enhances learners’ confidence and participation in inclusive classrooms. This underscores the critical role of parental emotional support in fostering inclusive participation and preventing marginalization in classroom settings.

Cross-Case Analysis

Cross-case comparison revealed that parental involvement positively influenced academic engagement, behavioral consistency, and inclusive adaptation in both schools. However, structural mechanisms shaped the depth of collaboration.

School A’s inclusive education unit appeared to institutionalize [Epstein et al.’s \(2018\)](#) partnership dimensions, facilitating proactive communication and collaborative problem-solving. In contrast, School B relied more heavily on informal, teacher-driven outreach.

Both schools faced socioeconomic and cultural barriers, yet the presence of institutionalized communication structures in School A strengthened the operationalization of inclusive practices.

The comparative findings suggest that parental support does not operate independently of school-level organizational structures; rather, institutional arrangements mediate the extent to which parental involvement becomes systematically embedded in inclusive practice.

Discussion

This multiple-case study examined how parental support influences the implementation of inclusive education practices across two primary school contexts in Wete District. The within-case analyses revealed context-specific patterns of parental engagement in School A and School B, while the cross-case comparison highlighted the mediating role of institutional structures in shaping the consistency, sustainability, and impact of parental involvement on inclusive practices. By examining these influences through the lenses of [Vygotsky’s \(1978\)](#) sociocultural theory and [Epstein’s Framework of Six Types of Parental Involvement \(2018\)](#), the results underscore how active engagement fosters holistic student development while disengagement perpetuates barriers to equity. These findings align with inclusive education principles that emphasize collaborative partnerships among families, schools, and communities to address diverse learner needs ([Thomas, 2016](#)).

Active parental support emerged as a catalyst for positive outcomes, enhancing academic achievement through home-based reinforcement and resource advocacy. This resonates with prior research in African contexts, where parental assistance in learning activities has been linked to improved performance for students with special educational needs ([Mushi, 2024](#)). In Zanzibar, such involvement mitigates the challenges outlined in the Zanzibar Education Policy of 2006, which emphasizes adaptations for inclusion but often faces implementation gaps due to limited family-school linkages ([Juma & Lehtomäki, 2016](#)). [Vygotsky’s \(1978\)](#) concept of the ZPD is particularly relevant here, as parents act as mediators, extending scaffolding from classrooms to homes and enabling diverse learners to achieve beyond their independent capabilities. Similarly, [Epstein et al.’s \(2018\)](#) types of involvement such as communicating and volunteering manifest in the observed reductions in truancy and behavioral issues, creating a supportive climate that aligns with global inclusive education standards ([UNESCO, 2020](#)).

Conversely, the adverse effects of limited engagement, such as heightened truancy, academic decline, and isolation, reveal systemic vulnerabilities in Zanzibar’s inclusive framework. The outcomes within the two school contexts examined are intensified by socioeconomic constraints and cultural stigmas surrounding disability, as identified in the findings, which mirror broader challenges in low-resource settings ([Hornby & Lafaele, 2011](#)). The absence of parental input disrupts the sociocultural interactions vital for inclusion, leading to exclusionary cycles that undermine the Persons with Disabilities Act No. 8 of 2022 ([Government of Zanzibar, 2022](#)) mandates for equitable access. This disengagement not only hampers individual student progress but also strains school resources, as teachers reported increased efforts to compensate for home-school disconnects. Comparative literature from mainland Tanzania suggests that such gaps can be addressed through targeted interventions, yet in Zanzibar, the dynamic interplay of poverty and awareness deficits amplifies these influences ([Haule, 2021](#); [Mligo, 2018](#)). The findings thus extend [Epstein et al.’s \(2018\)](#) framework by demonstrating how barriers to

involvement beyond mere absence intersect with contextual factors to impede broader educational discourse.

Furthermore, the study's findings suggest actionable pathways for aligning Zanzibar's inclusive education practices with both national policies and global frameworks like Sustainable Development Goal 4 ([United Nations, 2015](#)). Strengthening parental engagement can enhance policy implementation by fostering teacher-parent collaboration, which requires targeted training for educators to effectively involve families. Additionally, community sensitization programs could address cultural stigmas, encouraging parents to advocate for their children's inclusion. However, the manner in which such support was integrated into inclusive classroom practice differed between the two cases, with School A demonstrating more institutionalized collaboration mechanisms than School B. The cross-case analysis suggests that in contexts where structured communication channels are absent, parental engagement becomes inconsistent and less systematically embedded within inclusive pedagogical planning. While findings are context-bound to the two participating schools, they offer insight into broader patterns observed in similar resource-constrained settings.

Limitations of the Study

While the qualitative depth provides rich insights, the small sample size and focus on Wete District limit generalizability, suggesting a need for broader studies. Nonetheless, these findings imply that strengthening parental support through policy could enhance inclusive outcomes, offering a model for other African regions facing similar barriers.

This study contributes to the existing literature by providing context-specific insights into parental support in inclusive education within Zanzibar, a setting that remains underrepresented in research. It extends existing knowledge by demonstrating how parental involvement operates differently across schools with and without inclusive education units.

The study also contributes theoretically by integrating Joyce Epstein's framework of parental involvement with Lev Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory to explain how parental engagement influences inclusive education practices. Additionally, the findings highlight the importance of institutional structures in strengthening effective school-family partnerships.

Conclusions

This study examined the influence of parental support on the implementation of inclusive education practices in Zanzibar primary schools, focusing on Wete District. The findings demonstrate that parental involvement plays a critical role in enhancing students' academic engagement, behavior, and participation in inclusive classroom environments. Differences observed between schools with and without inclusive education units further highlight the importance of institutional support in strengthening effective school-family partnerships.

However, challenges such as limited parental awareness, socioeconomic constraints, and weak communication between schools and families continue to hinder meaningful engagement. These findings suggest the need for targeted interventions, including community awareness programs, policy support, and capacity-building initiatives to promote inclusive education.

Future research may explore similar dynamics in other contexts to provide comparative insights. Overall, inclusive education depends on strong collaboration between schools and families and cannot be sustainably achieved without institutionalized parental engagement mechanisms.

Author Contributions

The conceptualization of this research was primarily undertaken by ASF; who was also responsible for the initial drafting of the manuscript, data collection, SKJ provided expert supervision throughout the research process, guiding the methodology development, ensuring the academic rigor of the formal analysis, and overseeing the validation of the findings. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript. Both authors have participated sufficiently in the work and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Ethical approval was granted by the State University of Zanzibar (Ref. No. HA.248/299/03/97), with additional research clearance obtained from the Office of the Second Vice President of Zanzibar (Ref. No. CA.33/411/01-T/13)

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Availability of Data and Materials

Not Applicable.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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