# Equity-Based Strategies in Tanzania Public Secondary Schools: An Assessment of Awareness Level Among Stakeholders

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**Abstract**
Globally, the desire to achieve equity in education from a global perspective is clearly spelt out in the Sustainable Development Goals. In fact, equity in the context of education is a goal that everyone in the education sector would wish to achieve for every child. This paper is based on a research project that sought to assesses the level of awareness among education stakeholders on various equity-based strategies implemented by the Tanzania Government. The study employed the pragmatic research paradigm and a mixed-methods research approach.  Multiple case study design, which allowed the selection of two case study areas (Dodoma City representing the urban setting, and Kondoa district representing the rural setting), was employed. 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 three equity-based strategies that include free fees, eradication of contributions and introduction of ward secondary schools were to a large extent known among interviewed education stakeholders unlike the strategy on inclusive education. The strategy on inclusive education appeared not to be well articulated among interviewed education stakeholders and this was attributed to the focus of the strategy not being a common problem in the studied schools. Principally, this strategy was put in place to assist students with special needs and therefore much more common in schools with students of such needs. On account of the study findings, it was noted that there is still a degree of unawareness of the strategies among the teachers as key implementers of these strategies. Hence, the study recommends that further sensitization about these strategies is of necessity so as to enhance effectiveness in the implementation of the strategies.
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## 1.0 Introduction
Equity, in the context of education, is a goal that everyone in the education sector would like to see achieved for every child OECD (2012). 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 an ability to read, write and do some simple arithmetic.

In the context of this paper, Tanzania 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. This movement can be traced back when Tanzania signed the world declaration on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien, Thailand in the 1990s, and later reaffirmed it in Daka in the 2000s (Kambona, 2020). The declaration explicitly puts emphasis on the need to focus on equity, fundamental human values and strengthening of different cultures as well as adopting the expanded vision on basic education.

To date, Tanzania is in full gear to implement various strategies streamlined towards ensuring that equity in

its education system is attained. Such efforts include the implementation of Secondary Education Development Program (SEDP), which has helped the construction of secondary schools in each ward in the country. With SEDP, the number of secondary schools has increased in the country (URT, 2018). Such effort increased access to secondary education among the secondary school-aged children, who (mostly) previously would not have such a chance.  Other efforts include the introduction of ward secondary schools, Big Results Now (BRN), and introduction of fee-free education (Kambona, 2020; Mfwimi, 2014).

Despite the invested effort by the Tanzanian Government, equity in secondary schools is still found to be far from being realized. 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). These challenges raise questions on the prospects of implementing equity-based strategies in secondary schools in Tanzania and hence propel the need to examine the awareness level among stakeholders on the existing equity based strategies being implemented by the government.

## 2.0 Literature Review

Globally, 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 emphasizes the need to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (OECD, 2018).

In USA, a study conducted by Huberman (1993) revealed that implementing equity-based strategies in schools requires the development of a common language with which teachers can use to communicate to students equally. Without such a language, teachers find it very difficult to experiment with new possibilities of enabling all students to learn equally.

In addition, from the global perspective, OECD (2012) revealed that dealing with equity issues in education may require countries take targeted measures/practices. For instance, the report recommends eliminating system level practices that hinder equity; and targeting low performing disadvantaged schools.

In South Africa, Glewwe et al. (2014) reviewed a set of 79 empirical studies on promotion of equity in education. The author revealed that the prospect for implementation of equity in education requires among other needs as of having able teachers, basic infrastructure and instructional materials accessed by all students.  Hence, in this study, the issues raised by Glewwe et al. (2014) are going to be investigated considering their profound impact of ensuring equity in education.

In Kenya, a study on equity in access to secondary education by Nyatuka and Bota (2014) revealed that addressing the issue of equity remains a key priority of the Government of Kenya. In fact, according to the authors, although the Net Enrolment Rate (NER) at secondary school level had increased from 28.9% (29.8% for boys and 27.9% for girls) in 2008 to 32 % (34.5% for boys and 29.6% for girls) in 2010, counties in the north eastern region of Kenya had the lowest Net Enrolment rates.

In Uganda, Ogawa and Wokadala (2011) revealed that 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 serious influencing equity in secondary education.

In Tanzania, various studies have been undertaken on implementation of equity-based strategies in the Tanzania education system. For instance, a study by Hakielimu (2007) revealed that in order to achieve equity and quality in the Tanzania education system, teaching must focus on an individual learner instead of focusing squarely on learning outcomes.  The observation made by Hakielimu is indeed very important in the context of this study. It is argued here that if much focus is put on learning outcomes as opposed to an individual learner, then it is very possible that some students may be left out and hence equity in education will not be achieved.

Similarly, Jidanva (2012) assessed the understanding and improvement in equity and quality of education in secondary schools in Tanzania. The study established that secondary schools in Tanzania were facing a lot of problems that affected equity and quality of education. For instance, the lack of enough space in the classrooms, lack of teacher professional development and schools going for many years uninspected. These observations by Jidanva (2012) also add to the list of key issues that make it difficult to achieve equity in education. Hence, these findings are important in the context of this study to be examined in relation to the study area.

Generally, this paper finds that the implementation of equity-based strategies involves adopting a combination of different measures/practices. In some instance, such measures/practices are country specific or context based.

## 3.0 Methodology

The study employed the pragmatic research paradigm and a mixed-methods research approach.  Multiple case study design, which allowed the selection of two case study areas (Dodoma City representing the urban setting, and Kondoa district representing the rural setting), was employed. 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.

## 4.0 Findings and Discussion

Assessing the level of awareness on available equity-based strategies was a critical factor in understanding prospects and challenges towards the implementation of equity-based strategies in public secondary schools in Tanzania. This study notes that over the years as revealed in literature (Kambona, 2020; Mfwimi, 2014), Tanzania has been striving to address the issue of equity in its education system. Unfortunately, despite of the invested effort, equity in secondary schools is still found to be far from being realized. (Bryant, 2014; Kahise, 2013). The government of Tanzania introduced several strategies to address the challenge of equity. Such strategies include fee-free scheme, eradication of parents' contributions, introduction of ward secondary schools and inclusive education (Kambona, 2020; Mbawala, 2017; Opini & Onditi, 2016; Odhoro, 2014).

This study presumes that the implementation of equity-based strategies in public secondary schools depends on the level of awareness about these strategies among education stakeholders. Thus, the study found it necessary to assess the level of awareness about these strategies among education stakeholders. Overall, study findings show that 85.9% of the teachers who completed the questionnaire revealed that they were aware of the equity based strategies being implemented by the government in public secondary schools. However, 14.1% indicated that they were not aware of the strategies. Specific findings as per each examined strategy are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Level of Awareness on the available Equity-Based Strategies**

| STRATEGY | MULTIPLE RESPONSES | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | YES | PERCENT | NO | PERCENT |
| Fee- Free Scheme | 139 | 96.5 | 5 | 3.5 |
| Eradication of Parents Contributions | 136 | 94.4 | 8 | 5.6 |
| Introduction of Ward Secondary Schools | 139 | 96.5 | 5 | 3.5 |
| Inclusive Education | 81 | 56.2 | 63 | 43.8 |
| **OVERALL AVERAGE % AWARENESS** | | **85.9** | | **14.1** |

Source: Field Data, 2022.

## 4.1 Awareness about the Fee- Free Scheme

The fee-free scheme is one of the equity-based strategies that were initiated by the Tanzania government. Precisely, this strategy sought to ensure that pupils or students do not pay any fees (Kambona, 2020). Awareness findings based on the questionnaire that was responded to by the teachers, revealed that 96.5% (139 teachers out of 144 teachers) indicated that they were aware of the strategy. However, a few teachers i.e. 3.5% of the teachers (5 teachers) stressed that they knew little about the methods since they had just joined the teaching profession.

According to the teachers that had indicated knowing the strategy, this strategy was helping students who could not afford school because of fees to acquire education. For instance, teacher with code number 104 narrated about the strategy in the completed questionnaire as follows...,

*I know the fee-free scheme because out of it is helping parents and students to use the opportunity to learn because other parents had failed to bring their children to school because of fees'*

Similarly, from the interviews, the key informants who included the head teachers and education officers from Dodoma City and Kondoa District shared the same view on the strategy. They expressed their awareness about the strategy by stressing that the strategy is a key pillar the government's education reforms since it was providing every child an opportunity to access education. Specifically, the interviewed education officer from Kondoa District stressed as follows;

'*Many of our children come from peasant families where the parents cannot afford to pay education fees. To me this was a very important step in enabling all children to get education. In some families the boys were the only considered children to go school since the parent could not afford to pay for both the girls and boys. As a result, the girl child was always sacrificed and married off'*

Overall, this study found that the fee-free scheme as an equity-based strategy was a well-known strategy among teachers and other education stakeholders (School head teachers, education officers) within Dodoma City and Kondoa district who participated in the study. The findings also noted that there are some few teachers whose level of awareness about the strategy is low and thus needs to be improved.

## 4.2 Awareness about the Eradication of Contributions

Eradicating school contributions by parents is one of the strategies adopted by the Tanzanian government to promote equity in its education sector. As pointed out by Uvambe, 2021, this strategy was part of circular 5 that

was released by the government. Findings based on the completed questionnaire on the awareness of this strategy by teachers revealed that 94.4% (136 teachers out of 144 teachers) were aware of the strategy and its contribution to improving access to education for pupils.

According to the teachers, eradication of contributions such as money for food, stationary etc has played a vital role in seeing that parents have no burden of these contributions.  One of the teachers with code number 91 in the completed questionnaire stressed that...;

*'Both strategies (Fees free scheme and Eradication of contributions) are applied in our school, as no any student for example pays school fees since the government is providing free education to all students and also no money contribution at our school'*

The interview discussion on the same strategy with key informants (head teachers and education offers) revealed that this strategy is known and implemented in schools. For instance, one of the head teachers from school B in Kondoa district narrated her awareness of the strategy as follows…;

*'I have been a head teacher in this school for the past 10 years and since the government eradicated any form of school contributions from parents, it has been my duty to ensure that such practice is not implemented. In fact, we now have many students attending school without any hindrances like in the past. It is a good effort from the government to help parents'*

This finding was further supported by the two interviewed education officers from the two study areas. For instance, the Dodoma education officer who participated as a key informant in this study echoed the findings as follows...;

*'On our part as major education stakeholders, this strategy was very important to support the fees free scheme. There was no way we could have eliminated fees and left contributions in place because in some instances, even the contributions were much more than the fees themselves. So, it was important to deal with both issues'*

Based on the above findings, it is therefore evident that education stakeholders within Dodoma City and Kondoa district are similarly aware of this strategy and its contribution to dealing with equity issues in their schools and in the education sector.

### 4.3 Awareness about the Introduction of Ward Secondary Schools

This strategy was introduced to accommodate equity in secondary schools through building of public secondary schools in each ward all over the country by the government. Hence, through the Secondary Education Development Programme (SEDP), a number of secondary schools were constructed as revealed by Mbawala, (2017).

Findings on the awareness level about this strategy among teachers who completed the study questionnaire revealed that 96.5% (139 teachers out of 144 teachers) were aware of the strategy and its contribution to addressing equity issues in the education sector within the study areas.  For instance, teacher with code number 77 in the completed questionnaire narrated on this matter as follows...;

*'I know about the ward secondary schools and they are helping to accommodate most of the children. This is giving chance to every child to attend school although there some things that need to be improved in these schools so that they provide children with quality education. For example, most ward schools have so many students but with few teachers'*

Through interviews, head teachers as key informants in this study also acknowledged their awareness about the introduction of ward secondary schools. However, they too expressed concern on the challenges that the schools face in providing quality education to the students.  For instance, the interviewed head teacher from school X stressed the following;

*'The schools are playing a big role in making sure that all children have access to education but they are faced with shortage of facilities and teachers. This puts pressure to the leadership of the schools and the teacher's themselves'*

A further discussion with education officers as key informants through interviews from the two study areas also revealed that the introduction of ward schools was necessary to ensure that all children qualifying for entry into secondary schools had the opportunity to do so.  The interviewed education officers also acknowledged the presence of challenges facing the running of ward secondary schools but emphasized that this was something that needs to be addressed by the society as a whole and not to leave it to the government.  For instance, the interviewed Kondoa education officer narrated on the matter as follows;

*...Introducing these schools by the government was a very good thing. The government wants the best for its citizens. We also understand that there are some minor challenges such as limited chairs in some schools but this is something that we can support as a community and not to leave it to the government alone'.*

The above findings on ward secondary schools also reveal that, this strategy is known among study participants. In addition, participants also know the contribution that the strategy is making towards addressing equity issues in the education sector within their settlements.

**4.4 Awareness about the Introduction of Inclusive Education**
This strategy was sought in order to assist students with special needs. As such, students with disabilities who appeared to be excluded for many years from the Tanzania secondary education system were now accommodated as revealed by Opini and Onditi, (2016).  Study findings on this strategy among teachers who completed the study questionnaire showed that 56.2% (81 teachers out of 144 teachers) were aware of the strategy while 43.8% (63 teachers) indicated that they were not aware of the strategy.

For the case of those teachers who indicated that they knew about the strategy pointed out that the strategy emphasizes the need to enable every child regardless of their socio-economic background to access secondary education.  For instance, teacher with code number 62 in the completed questionnaire stated on the matter as follows;
*'My understanding about inclusive education is that all children should have their right to access secondary education. So, as teachers we are expected to use teaching methods that serve all children even the disabled'.*

On the contrary, through interviews, the head teachers and education officers as key informants in this study indicated that the strategy was a well-known strategy to them through which the government aims at ensuring that no child is left behind due to any circumstance.  However, one of the head teachers from school W in Dodoma City revealed that there is need to deepen the emphasis on using learning methodologies that encourage inclusive education. According to the head teachers, most teachers only know strategies relating to free fees, elimination of contributions and the introduction of ward secondary schools.

**5.0 Implication, Conclusion, Recommendations and Future Research Direction**
**5.1 Implication**
Results show that the awareness level among interviewed study participants is not 100% for all examined equity based strategies. This implies that effective implementation of these strategies to respond to equity issues in the education sector at secondary education level in Tanzania is likely to be compromised. Consequentially, this might yield into poor results in terms of addressing equity in secondary education in the country.

**5.2 Conclusion**
Based on the study findings, it is evident that three equity-based strategies that include the free fees, eradication of contributions and the introduction of ward secondary schools are well known among education stakeholders. It is also evident that study participants understand the contribution/ relevance of each of the strategies towards responding to equity issues in the education sector within their settlements. In addition, the findings also show that the strategy on inclusive education is not well articulated among many of the interviewed study participants despite of being known among head teachers and education officers. This implies that this strategy needs to be widely exposed so that it can be of help to responding to equity-based issues in public secondary schools.

**5.3 Recommendation**
On account of the study findings, this study recommends that there is a need for further sensitization about these strategies among teachers who are the grass root implementers of the strategies. This will enhance effectiveness in the implementation of the strategies.

**5.4 Future Research Directions**
Based on the study results, future research direction on this matter should seek to explore the impact of the noted awareness level on effective implementation of equity based strategies.

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