Learner Diversity in Inclusive Classrooms: The Interplay of Language of Instruction, Gender and Disability

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ABSTRACT

The research was conducted to look into learner diversity in inclusive classrooms focusing on language of instruction, gender and disability issues, and their implications for education practices. A qualitative research approach was used to obtain data addressing the research problem from two inclusive secondary schools in Dar es Salaam region, Tanzania. A purposive sampling was used to obtain the schools, and research participants who were teachers and students. Open ended interviews, classroom observations, and focus group discussions were used in data collection. The findings have indicated challenges facing teachers in teaching mixed classes as well as students in such classes; especially those with disability. However, interactions between girls and boys were generally positive although the latter dominated in some classroom conversations. It is recommended that all teachers should be trained on how to handle students with special needs in particular and acquainted with general knowledge of learner diversity during initial-teacher training, and further enhanced through continued in-service trainings. Lastly, it is recommended that another study, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, be conducted using a bigger sample involving other types of participants with special needs; and that parents of children in special needs should participate in the proposed study.

Keywords: *disability, gender dominance, inclusive education, language of instruction, learner diversity*

INTRODUCTION

Learner diversity is an issue worth addressing in education practices across countries if inclusive societies are to be developed, promoted and sustained. Towards realizing inclusive societies, employing inclusive best practices in education systems would be an important foremost step. Inclusive education is a process that involves the transformation of schools and other centres of learning to cater for all children: boys and girls, students from various ethnic groups and linguistic minorities, rural populations, those affected by HIV and AIDS, and those who have exceptional learning needs. In the context of Tanzania, inclusive education is viewed as a system of education in which all children, youths and adults are enrolled, actively participate and achieve in regular schools and other educational programmes regardless of their diverse backgrounds and abilities, without discrimination, through minimization of barriers and maximisation of resources (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training [MoEVT], 2009; 2013). Inclusive education facilitates learning opportunities for all youths and adults as well. It is aimed at eliminating exclusion resulting from negative attitudes and lack of response to diversity in race, economic status, social class, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation and ability.

Education takes place in many contexts, both formal and non-formal, and within families and the wider community. Consequently, inclusive education is not a marginal issue. It is central to the achievement of high quality education for all learners and the development of more inclusive societies, and an essential element to achieving social equity (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2009).

Worthwhile noting is that, Tanzania has adopted the inclusive education system. The country has also declared Kiswahili to be the language of instruction (LoI) at all education levels (United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 2014). Despite the move, the LoI could be one of the barriers to learners with disabilities' knowledge acquisition, if not properly handled in the teaching and learning processes. Principally, if the students in special needs are not involved or interacting well with their colleagues and teachers alike in the teaching and learning processes, their participation and success in school is likely to be constrained. This is because language, a system of using arbitrary meaningful symbols, is a means of communication; a process that allows individuals to express their ideas, feelings, perceptions, and opinions to others who understand the communicated information. Through this process, individuals can get acquaintance, form friendship as well as interactions.

In this regard, language is of paramount importance in education, especially in the teaching and learning processes since it allows educational messages to be transferred from teachers to learners and vice versa, hence reciprocal communication in both written and spoken language forms. Based on this understanding, intriguingly, what happens if the language used in the communication process is not adequately known or understood by either of the parties involved? In order for learning to be realized, the language of instruction should be well understood by teachers and learners (Qorro, 1999). Indeed, many learners fail in examinations set in English because of poor background in the language and that they probably understand very poorly what they are taught in the classrooms (Qorro, 1999).

The aims of the research

Debates on whether or not Tanzania should use Kiswahili as a medium of instruction in all learning institutions, as well as research findings that girls perform better in languages than boys and that girls talk more than boys in non-formal conversation (Chase, 2011), it was important to conduct a research on gender conversational dominance in the classrooms with students in special needs. The aim of the current study was to analyse learner diversity in the classrooms focusing on language of instruction, gender and disability issues. This research was a timely endeavour in discerning the extent of gender conversional dominance among learners with hearing impairment and albinism in Dar es Salaam region inclusive secondary schools. Further, it was the interest of the researchers to find out whether or not learners in inclusive secondary schools interacted more in Kiswahili than in English classes or vice versa. To achieve these general aims, the following questions were addressed.

i. How are the classroom seating arrangements during the teaching and learning of English and Kiswahili languages?
ii. What is the frequency of teachers' asking questions to male and female learners with or without hearing disability or albinism in English and Kiswahili language classes?
iii. To what extent do male and female learners with or without hearing disability or albinism respond to teachers' questions posed in English and Kiswahili languages?
iv. Who, between male and female learners with or without hearing disability or albinism, dominate the classroom in asking questions using English language?
v. What are the challenges facing teachers in handling students with hearing impairments and those with albinism in inclusive classrooms?

Significance of the study

The present study provides insights into the actual teaching and learning processes in inclusive classrooms. The findings of this study offer important information about teachers' awareness of learner diversity in their classrooms. This information is expected to help improve in-service teacher practices with regard to meeting individual needs of learners, and significantly establish the need to revisit pre-service teacher preparation in Tanzania. Furthermore, since Kiswahili has been recently declared the medium of instruction at all levels of education in the country by the Government of Tanzania, the findings are

expected to assist in improving the teaching and learning through English and Kiswahili languages, taking into account gender and disability issues in inclusive secondary school classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language of instruction and learner diversity nexus in the classrooms

Language of instruction has long been an issue in the delivery of education in Tanzania whereby more than 130 ethnic tribes exist in the country, each of which has their own mother tongue. The long-standing debate has been on whether Kiswahili or English languages be the medium of instruction at all levels of education. The issue of the language of instruction in Tanzania dates back to colonial period. Revisiting on the language of instruction in the country during this period, Swilla (2009) states that;

'from 1919 to 1961, the British colonial administration maintained Swahili as the LoI in the first four years of primary school education for Africans. A gradual transition to English-medium of instruction took place in the fifth year, and English became the sole LoI from the sixth year through secondary and postsecondary levels. Swahili remained a compulsory subject in primary education and in the first four years of secondary education' (p. 2).

At independence, Tanzania was left with different colonial legacies within the education sector that required urgent change in national ideology, which in turn informed about the kind and focus of education in the country (Swilla, 2009). In attempts to make education more relevant to independent Tanzanians, making reforms in the education sector was inevitable. Among the Tanzania's major education reforms after independence was the enactment of the 1962 Education Act that made Kiswahili to be the language of instruction and assessment in primary education (Bikongoro, 2015).

Not only that but also it is worth noting that, right after Tanganyika's independence in 1961, Kiswahili language was declared the national language. It was, and still is, the language spoken and appreciated by majority of the people in the country. However, since independence, it has never been officially used as a medium of instruction in secondary education and above.

All in all, Kiswahili has long been the medium of instruction in almost all primary schools, with the exception of a few of them such as those owned by private entities as well as international organizations, *the English medium institutions*. The latter use English as the language of instruction. The language is taught as a subject in primary and junior secondary schools. Furthermore, it is used as a medium of instruction in all secondary schools. Not only that but also, the language is taught as a subject in Teacher Training Colleges for Grade "A" student teachers prepared to teach in primary schools. At Diploma level, the language is taught as a subject and used as a medium of instruction for all subjects with the exception of other foreign languages and Kiswahili (Mwakasendo, 2011).

From the aforementioned, one learns that using English as a medium of instruction at secondary school level is *a big jump* from the use of Kiswahili which is a local and second language to most Tanzanians, and a medium of instruction in many primary schools. It is indeed, a sudden switch from Kiswahili to English as a medium of instruction without prior orientation. In fact this shift has been reported to be one of the contributing factors to students' poor academic performance at secondary school level. To many stakeholders, using English as a medium of instruction from primary through tertiary levels of education in Tanzania would solve the mismatch (Godfrey, 2014). Certainly, it is of no wonder that code switching in secondary school teaching is a reality and common in almost all classes. Teachers give various reasons for the situation, the major one being that English is an international language and that Kiswahili lacks technical terms in science and other subjects (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1995). Teachers have to know that code switching in the classroom affects teaching and learning and hinders learners' eloquence in both Kiswahili and English languages.

Focusing on the use of Kiswahili as the medium of instruction in our educational institutions, as well as the actual practice of teachers in their day to day teaching, the following questions are worth posing: If

there is still some hesitation of using Kiswahili as a medium of instruction at secondary school level because of the fear that students will have deficits in English language, which is an international language, and if there are teachers who are practising code switching in their classrooms, where are we heading to? Why shouldn't the authorities and stakeholders make a firm decision on the language of instruction? To save the boat from sinking, should Form One students be given a comprehensive English course after primary school education for them to grasp the English language well at secondary school level? On the other hand, countries such as China, Russia, North Korea to mention some, are using their national languages as media of instruction and have developed well. Could these countries serve as role models for Tanzania?

Arguments for using English in teaching and learning are in line with what is contained in the report by the Ministry of Education and Culture (1995). The report indicates that English is an international language which makes it easy for people to communicate internationally. In the document it is contended that Kiswahili lacks technical terms which can make it difficult for people to understand and grasp well the science terminologies. The report also shows that since translation is expensive, the use of Kiswahili is uncalled for. In that report, a question was raised as to why code switching should not be legalized, if Kiswahili was to be used as a medium of instruction. It was also learned that teaching through a bilingual system could be another approach that facilitates teaching and learning. Another argument against the use of Kiswahili in teaching and learning was that it might not be possible to use the language in teaching and learning since teachers have not been well prepared. It is also argued that there are insufficient teaching and learning materials (Mwakasendo, 2011). These arguments need to either be challenged or supported through scientific research.

Various researches have been conducted on the use of Kiswahili and English in teaching and learning as well as on students' performance. In her research, Vuzo (2010) found that through classroom interactions, teachers and students work together to create intellectual and practical activities that shape both form and content of the target subject. Further, the author has indicated that students' participation is low where English is used as a medium of instruction in comparison to classes where Kiswahili is used as a medium of instruction. It was therefore important to find out if the findings apply to students in special needs that is, those with albinism and hearing impairments.

However, not much has been done on gender dominance in Kiswahili classes. In terms of language differences and students' performance, a research conducted in Kenya by Moochi et al. (2013) showed that girls outperformed boys in overall performance in Kiswahili creative writing, style and spelling conventions. In the same research however, the two sexes were at par in content presentation, vocabulary use and use of grammatical elements in Kiswahili creative writing. Further, a study by Pajares and Valiante (1999) cited in Chase (2011), established no significant differences between boys and girls in writing performance yet girls were rated as "better writers" than boys. There is indeed paucity of research in Tanzania on the use of Kiswahili in teaching children in special needs. It is even worse to state that not a single research was found on albinism and hearing impairment focusing on gender conversational dominance in inclusive secondary school classrooms for children in special needs in Tanzania. The aforementioned observations, questions, and arguments have led to the current study, focusing on gender dominance in Kiswahili and English classes in two secondary schools in the country. From what has been raised in the previous paragraphs, one would have wished to find out which gender dominates the other in the classroom in terms of language classes.

Gender and learner diversity nexus in the classrooms

Generally, research indicates that males dominate in most conversations. Data from the United States of America (Wood, 1996) have shown that men try to control conversations and are concerned with using conversations to establish status and authority, compete for attention and power, and achieve instrumental status and goals. Other research findings show that women tend to use communication to build connections with others, to be inclusive, supportive, cooperative, and responsive to others (Woods cited in Lips, 2005). The author also argues that gender plays a role in verbal and nonverbal communication which includes facial expression, tone of voice, gesture, posture, touch, and eye contact. On the other hand, men tend to talk more than women and hold the floor, even when they are not saying anything.

Further, men interrupt women when talking. Another aspect is that women keep conversations going by asking questions, responding to what others say and probing for more information.

In the classroom contexts, there are a number of gender issues which may create barriers to students' learning if they are not well considered. These issues or aspects can be related to teachers, students or specific to the physical environments within the classrooms. Literature on classroom interaction shows that teacher-student interaction is characterised by the teacher's attempt to influence learning mainly by controlling the learners' exposure to learning and providing them opportunities to practise language (Verplaetse, 1998). Further, teachers control the learning content and direction of the discourse by asking questions and reformulating the answers given by leaners. Also, research findings indicate gender and sex differences in conversations. For instance, it is said that men do not give verbal recognition of contributions made by women, women are more communicative, women talk more with one another than men, and that women speak more comfortably than men in public (Lakoff, 1975; Spender, 1980). With respect to the classroom arrangement, traditional models of classroom setting has in most cases been affecting students' participation in the classroom discourses, especially girls (Mlama et al., 2005) making them being excluded from the teaching and learning processes. After reviewing the international research literature on the gender socialization process in schools across countries, Stromquist (2007) found that 'boys continue to dominate classroom time and space, a practice that seems to create subdued girls and naturalizes differences between men and women' (p. 30). Teachers need to be aware of such practices and use teaching methods which can make girls more engaged than what is considered normal in many societies (Mlama et al., 2005).

Classroom conversational dominance, which refers to control over conversation in terms of speaking time in the classroom, is among critical issues while teaching in inclusive classrooms that teachers need to be aware of and respond accordingly. Learners should be encouraged towards producing meaningful interactions which can facilitate the learning and understanding of subjects taught (Lewis-Moreno, cited in Mwakasendo, 2011). Classroom conversations are important in learning for both male and female learners. Equitable conversational practices in the classrooms between the two genders are important as a means of appreciation individual differences in the teaching and learning processes. Coupled with disability issues in the classrooms, teachers become more loaded with responsibilities.

Classroom conversations, discussions and the medium of instruction used in teaching and learning do not exclude learners in special needs receiving their education in special or inclusive schools. Sometimes it may be difficult for teachers and nondisabled learners to interact with learners in special needs due to the fact that the latter might feel uncomfortable or be neglected by their teachers and fellow learners. At times they may not be able to participate in classroom conversations due to their being handicapped through language.

Learners' classroom conversations can be hindered by a number of factors, one of them being the teacher-student and student-student interactions. The interactions can be worsened by the stigma attached to learners with disabilities. Research findings from Tanzania show that learners with visual impairment or health conditions, such albinism are segregated in classrooms and other arenas due to sustained stigma (Moshy, 2013). It is a lament filled with grief which also shows that learners with albinism are isolated, feared by their classmates and have a sense of being disliked. Definitely, such children may not be given time to speak or participate well in the classrooms. Further, findings indicate that in co-education classes for nondisabled learners, teachers ask more questions to boys than they do to girls (NESSE, 2009). All in all, no study on gender dominance in Tanzania was found in the literature reviewed, hence the current study.

It was therefore important to find out who dominates during the teaching and learning process in the classroom so as to control conversations and give chance to all learners in the teaching and learning process.

Conceptual and theoretical considerations of the study

In this study, both *Flander's Model of Classroom Interaction* and *Gender Role Theory* were used. The modified Flander's model of classroom interaction as indicated in Table 1 was used to discuss and find out the extent of gender dominance and interactions among male and female as well disabled and nondisabled learners in inclusive classrooms.

Table 1: Modified Flander's Interaction Analysis Technique

Teacher-student Interaction	Teacher's direct influence:	Categories
		Teacher calls on boys and girls equally
		Teacher calls mainly on girls
		Teacher calls mainly on boys
		Teacher provides praise to all children
		Teacher provides praise mainly to girls
		Teacher provides praise mainly to boys
		Teacher involves all children
	Teacher's indirect influence	Praises and encourages boys/girls
		Accepts boys'/girls' ideas
		Asks boys/girls questions
		Gives directions to boys/girls
		Criticizes boys/girls
Student Talk (Boys and Girls)		Students (boys/girls)' responses
		Students (boys/girls) talks' initiations
		Silence and confusion (boys/girls)

Source: Modified Flander's Interaction Model

To complement the Flander's model, *Gender Role Theory* guided the study in analyzing gender dominance in classroom teaching and learning environments. The theory emphasizes nurture and the contribution of the social environment to learning gender-related behaviours. It also indicates that reinforcement increases gender appropriate behaviours. Proponents of *Gender Role Theory* assert that observed gender differences in behaviour and personality characteristics are, at least in part, socially constructed, and therefore, the product of socialization experiences which may come about due to classroom teaching and learning (Loreman, Depeller & Harvey, 2010). . In this study, presenting information in multiple formats, that is, the use of direct teaching, and group discussions which were used in classroom observations.

3RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research approach and design

Qualitative approach as explained by Ary, Jacobs and Sorensen (2010) was employed to obtain data addressing the research problem. The approach assisted in exploring participants' issues and insights on the topic. A case study design was used to get the required data from two secondary schools enrolling students with hearing disabilities and albinism.

Research site, study population, and sampling procedures

The study was conducted in Dar es Salaam region in which two secondary schools enrolling learners with hearing impairments and albinism. The study population included teachers and students because the two spend time with disabled children in classrooms. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed to select the schools and participants. The study sample consisted of 109 participants as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Study Sample

School and Type of Participants	Disability	Number of Participants	
School A:	Albinism	Female	Male
Teachers		2 (1.83%)	2 (1.83%)
Students		22 (20.1%)	28 (25.69%)
Sub Total		54 (49.5%)	
School B:			
Teachers		-	5 (4.59%)
Students	Hearing Impairment	15 (13.76%)	
	Visual Impairment	10 (9.17%)	
	Multiple Handicapped	25 (22.93%)	
Sub Total		55 (50.46%)	
Grand Total		109 (100%)	

Data collection methods

Open ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and focus group discussions were   used in collecting the relevant data for the study. Following are their descriptions:

Semi-structured interviews: Semi-structured interviews with open ended questions were conducted with teachers as well as learners at School B to enable the researcher get a clear understanding of gender dominance in language teaching in the classroom.   Teachers and students at School A declined to participate in interviews without giving concrete reasons.

Focus group discussions (FGDs): Four Focus group discussions with eight participants each, were conducted with students in School B to get information on the methods used to teach male and female learners in the classrooms. They were also used to obtain data on whether or not there was gender dominance in the classrooms when asking and responding to questions.   Each group had two female participants. At School A, 16 student participants were purposely selected to participate in focus group discussions. There was a gender balance of four female and four male participants.   Only five male teachers participated in the study leading to 21 participants from the school.   Female students did not want to participate in focus group dissuasions. They declined outright for unknown reasons since they did not want to disclose the reasons for the decline.

Classroom observations: Four non participatory classroom observations were used to gather data on how teachers interact with learners as well as on the learner-learner interaction in each school (two for each language. Data were collected focusing on the level of questions according to Bloom's taxonomy levels of questions while referring to gender dominance and finding out whether or not there was gender bias and/or gender stereotyping. Two classroom observations were conducted at School A while four of them were conducted at School B.

Trustworthiness of the study.

Trustworthiness in research may entail building confidence of the research process to ensure reliability of its findings. In this study, this was arrived at through adhering to credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability criteria for evaluating qualitative research proposed by Guba as cited in Shenton (2004). The constructs were used as defined by Ryan, Coughlan and Cronin (2007, p. 743) in the following ways:

- *Credibility:* 'addresses the issue of whether there is consistency between the participants' views and the researcher's representation of them'. In this study it was achieved through triangulation technique whereby different methods were employed in data collection. Additionally, familiarity with the areas of study was made to allow for minimization of potential barriers to carrying out the study effectively.

- *Dependability:* 'involves the researcher giving the reader sufficient information to determine how dependable the study and the researcher are'. To achieve this, the researchers ensured that questions were flexible and also allowed clarification for consistency. The participants were allowed to listen to the information collected by the researcher through interpretation and tapes to ensure if information in the text was what was aired by the participants. The questions were repeated to various participants to get similarities and/or differences.

- *Confirmability:* 'requires the researcher to demonstrate how conclusions and interpretations have been reached'. The procedure for confirmability was twofold: First, the researchers acknowledged the weaknesses of the study and offered suggestions on how to improve the areas of weaknesses in similar future studies. Second, like credibility criterion, multiple data collection methods and sources were applied to ensure triangulation of the data.

- *Transferability:* 'whether or not findings can be applied outside the context of the study situation'. The context of the study has been sufficiently provided, and the findings have been clearly described to allow for comparisons between and among contexts.

Ethical considerations

The researcher obtained informed consent from the participants after they were clearly told that no force would be used to make them participate in the study. Further, the participants' rights were not violated during the research process. Participants' names and identities were kept confidential through the use of numbers. There were no harmful instruments or items used while interacting with the research participants. Further, the research was not intended or expected to involve risk of harm to subjects. The participants were not exposed to any physical or psychological harm such as stress, discomfort, or embarrassment, hence no adverse effects. Consent was sought from the Heads of the sampled schools, and the participants themselves. The researcher also asked for consent from subject teachers after taking steps to ensure that they had complete understanding of the procedures to be used, as well as demands placed on them.

Data analysis

The analysis of data was done thematically leading to the emerged themes as presented in the findings section. Since the study was qualitative in nature, data coding and categorisation were used to get meaningful units of analysis through the use of words, phrases and sentences. The aforementioned enabled the researchers obtain the exact picture of learner diversity in the inclusive classrooms.

FINDINGS

Gender conversational dominance was analysed in secondary schools with a special interest in Kiswahili and English languages, and students in special needs. The goal was to arrive at a detailed description and understanding of gender dominance in the use of the two languages in teaching and learning for the named students and what implication does it have for inclusive education best practices among teachers, other education stakeholders and the general community. In this section, the findings are presented according to the research objectives.

Seating arrangements

The study sought to find out the classroom seating arrangements in order to determine whether they meant to address and respond to learner diversity in the teaching and learning processes with respect to disability and gender. Through classroom observation, it was found that teachers took into consideration students' disabilities and arranged their seats according to their visual acuity. Those with albinism as well as

partial sightedness were required to sit in the front row for them to easily see what is written on the chalkboard. Further, students with hearing impairment had to seat where they could easily see their teachers to facilitate total communication which included both lip-reading and the use of sign language. It was also noted that there were classrooms with students who knew sign language, and thus assisted their fellow students with sign language translation. As for the gender aspect, the classrooms were not separated according to sex. However, there was some kind of positive segregation in seating arrangements. There were separate rows for boys and girls. There were no reasons given for this kind of seating arrangement. The arrangement, however, is considered too traditional such that subtler forms of gendered stereotypes and socialization are likely to be perpetuated in the classrooms, especially when teachers do not make deliberate efforts to positively engage girls in classroom interactions (Mlama et al., 2005). Teachers need to use instructional strategies and employ classroom arrangement styles which provide equal opportunity in classroom participation during the teaching and learning processes.

The frequency of teachers' asking questions to male and female learners with /without hearing impairment and/or albinism in English and Kiswahili language classes

Generally, there was no indication of gender preference in asking questions to students. Students were picked to ask or respond to questions according to their frequency in raising up their hands. However, when students in focus group discussions were asked to explain the extent to which teachers asked questions to male and female students, participants with hearing impairments from School B said that teachers who lacked sign language knowledge did not ask questions to students with hearing impairments because of communication breakdown. The explanations were qualified by some students who contended that they did not have qualified teachers to consult in the classroom. In terms of lip-reading, the students reported that it was difficult for them to lip-read their teachers in the classroom, especially when they were asked questions,   since the teachers speak very fast in classrooms and at times do not face students with hearing impairments. The following is a quotation from one of the student respondents in the research.

Teachers in Kiswahili do not know sign language. There is one teacher in English who is at least knowledgeable of sign language. However, he struggles hard while teaching. Further, some teachers do not attend classes while others sometimes forget about us.

Another statement to qualify the response was as follows:

Students do not understand the English language subject because they are not taught by qualified teachers. There is also shortage of specialized teachers in sign language. The shortage has led to lack of expertise assistance offered to students with disabilities in all classrooms during the teaching and learning process.

Definitely, the aforementioned problems affect the teaching and learning of students with hearing impairments as well as their participation in the classroom.

Results from FGDs with Form Three learners indicated the presence of teacher-student interactions problems in teaching and learning, especially in asking questions. It was reported that the teachers did not have skills in sign language. It was also obvious that there was lack of cooperation between learners with hearing impairment and those without disability, possibly because of lack of knowledge in sign language. Knowledge of sign language among learners was said to be better for those who got their primary education in English Medium Primary Schools than those who got their education in public secondary schools. From classroom observations, it was observed that girls were more daring in asking questions. One of the participants in form Three D said the following in one of the FGDs:

The girls are daring in asking questions. Many girls ask questions. It may be due to the fact that all students except one of the boys are deaf. Further, a big percent of learners are girls. However, during English and Kiswahili language lessons, when the teacher asks a question and points to learners, some of

them do not respond because they do not understand the language. Likewise, their teachers do not know sign language. Consequently, teachers write on the chalk board for learners to copy. In fact, he /she can just leave the classroom after writing the notes on the board. All in all, girls try a lot.

Another issue raised was shortage of special teaching and learning materials. Information from teachers showed that shortage or lack of special equipment affects the learning of students with hearing impairments. The participants argued that the availability of hearing aids for example would make both boys and girls learn well. The following sentence was given during a focus group discussion: "Both boys and girls with hearing impairment struggle hard to ask questions and learn equally regardless of their gender, as long as they use hearing aids''

During focus group discussions at School B, responses from teachers glaringly showed that more male than female learners ask and respond to teachers' questions. One male teacher said, "Boys ask more questions than girls. It is not that they are cleverer than the latter. No, girls just fear asking questions.''

Another teacher said the following:

It is the boys who ask more questions. Girls are afraid of being laughed at, especially when they happen to use broken English. Also girls lack the confidence of standing up in front of the class to answer questions. They simply do not have confidence. Generally boys dominate in asking and responding to teachers' questions because they are brave and girls are fearful.

Gender dominance among learners with albinism and hearing impairment in responding to teachers' questions posed in English and Kiswahili language classes

Another objective of the research was to analyze gender dominance among learners with albinism in responding to teachers' questions posed in English and Kiswahili language classes whose findings are presented here. At School A, the results from FGDs showed that girls were leading in responding to questions asked in both Kiswahili and English languages as well as in literature. When asked to state why girls were good at languages, one male participant, while laughing, said, "It is because languages are simple. Boys are good at structure and understand it well. Boys in Form Three preferred science to arts subjects''. This teacher is gender biased because he thinks that the reason why girls do well in languages is due to the fact they are simple.

At School B, results showed that all students participated in responding and answering questions. However, despite the fact that they were given hearing aids, the latter were not working well. In terms of comprehension, summary, debates and structure, both boys and girls did well and got support from their subject teachers.

All in all, several issues were raised in FGDs with Form Three D students. The students said that those with hearing impairments were not well assisted by both teachers and students which made them fail in their examinations. At the same time, the participants said that teachers teach without writing on the chalk boards. Only those who studied in English medium schools perform well. Girls were reported to perform even better in English because most of them came from English medium schools. They also performed better in Kiswahili.

Further to that, the researchers wished to know the performance of students in special needs from the teacher in charge of academics at School A. The latter said the students were performing well. On the other hand, when asked about the reasons of low performance in the two languages by some students, especially those with hearing impairments, one student said:

There are very few sign language teachers. Those without knowledge in sign language fail to translate some words. Sign language teachers do a good job. They teach well. The rest who do not have sign language education ignore us. They neither teach nor care about us. They do not use sign language.

Conversational dominance in language comprehension

When teachers in School B were asked to state the position of conversational dominance in language comprehension, they stated that girls dominate more than boys in responding to comprehension questions because most girls know how to express themselves. The reason given was that girls like languages.

However, when the participants were asked to say who were more dominant in both Kiswahili and English Literature classes, the response was that there was no difference between boys and girls. They gave a reason that it may be due to the fact that languages are easy. This argument does not hold water since there could be a position whereby one gender would outperform the other that is, boys could also outshine girls in subjects considered to be easy and vice versa.

In terms of structure and composition, boys were said to be better than girls in structure while girls were said to be good in composition as well as in written tasks. Following is what one of the teachers said:

Both boys and girls are good in Kiswahili and English. People consider languages to be easy. Why boys are good in language structure and not in summary is unknown. On the whole, girls are very good in writing. Not only that but also boys are very careful and kin to learn. They are cooperative and are not fearful to one another.

The results are a bit different from the report on Boys' Reading Commission (2012) which indicated that girls engaged more in reading and outperformed boys in reading tests.

At School A, the results were different to a certain extent. Initially, discussions with participants in focus groups indicated no big difference in the extent of asking questions between boys and girls. However, as time went on in the discussions, it was clear that boys dominated in asking questions to teachers. When asked to state clearly who ask more questions in both Kiswahili and English classes, the participants said that boys asked more questions than girls. The following statements support the case:

Generally, boys dominate in asking questions in the classrooms. Girls are afraid of being laughed at if at all they happen to be using broken English. Girls do not have confidence to stand up and answer questions.

Surprisingly, one teacher in the same school did not find any difference in terms of dominance in language use and said as follows:

I do not find a line of demarcation. There are female learners with HI who dominate in conversation and in other classes it is boys. So, I cannot say exactly who does it. In some classes it is the males while in others it is the females.

Another teacher said, "I do not get a line of demarcation. In some classes it is the males. In others it is the females. I have a class where a girl with hearing impairment performs well …."

Challenges in handling students with hearing impairment and those with albinism in inclusive classrooms

The research also looked into challenges facing students with hearing impairments and those with albinism. Responses from research participants in both schools showed lack of cooperation between disabled students and their nondisabled colleagues in classrooms for students with hearing impairments. Lack of cooperation was also evident between specialised and non-specialised teachers. The problems resulted from inability to use sign language among teachers and students.

Challenges in handling students with hearing impairment

When the Headmaster in the school for students with Hearing Impairments was asked to indicate how teachers handle or assist learners with hearing impairment in classroom interactions several responses

were given, especially on whether or not learners with disability were being asked questions by their teachers, or whether or not the learners were interactive and cooperative. He said that both male and female learners with and without disability did not fear each other. With respect to students' participation and involvement in the teaching and learning processes, the Headmaster was of the view that teachers on the whole use student-centred methods of teaching as he put it that, "We try to reflect constructivism and the student is at the centre of learning and expect to involve students in experiments and presentations".

In the process of the discussion, contrary to the Headmaster's views, one of the teachers said that it is difficult to tell which approach or teaching method works well in enabling learners to be actively responding in class. The teacher said,

It is difficult. We have mainstreamed classrooms. There are teachers who have not specialised in special needs education and cannot interact well with the learners. This is really an impediment. The students are not getting what they are required to get like other learners. We need to have in-service training.

Another teacher said,

There are many factors affecting the teaching of learners. Communication barrier is rampant because some language teachers are not well trained. In fact there are very few teachers with specialised training for teaching students in special needs. This school is for learners with hearing impairment. However, the teachers do not have training. The setting is not even appropriate for the learners. We do not have teaching and learning materials.

Further, in the same vein, the Headmaster had the following concerns:

Teachers relax a lot despite the fact that they lack the skills to enable them interact with students with hearing impairments. So they are not proactive in assisting students. They leave them alone. The students are not getting what they are supposed to get. This is because of communication barrier. There are very few trained teachers to handle the students. Not only that there is lack of teaching and learning materials. For example, we do not have Power Point presentations.

At School A, the participants complained that the Syllabi are very long making it difficult for the teachers to complete subject syllabi. One teacher from School A reiterated the following: "There are nine topics in the English syllabus, so time is too short. The exams are composed from the first to the last topic..."

From the findings, it is clear that teachers have challenges in teaching students with hearing impairments and that students with the disability are facing problems in their learning since the teachers are not proactive in teaching them. On the side of students from School B, communication barrier was said to be the main challenge. Those with hearing impairment do not interact well with their fellow students and teachers because the latter do not understand sign language. They also mentioned that lack of reaching and learning materials to be among the hindrances.

Challenges in handling students with hearing albinism

The following were concerns with regards to problems facing learners with albinism: "The learners have problems with lighting and that classroom windows do not have curtains so the light affects learners with albinism. For learners with albinism, lighting is a problem and they cannot learn well".

Another finding was stigma in the classroom. Unfortunately, all students with disability, majority being those with albinism, were at one time placed in one classroom and that teachers teaching the students in the classroom were stigmatizing and labelling them. Fortunately, the students were distributed to other classrooms.

One teacher complained about the challenges of inclusion and said as follows:

These students have to fit in the social system. I like inclusion but what preparations are there for inclusive education in terms of infrastructure, teaching and learning materials. We have to get prepared for that. The policy is there but not well implemented.

DISCUSSIONS

Data on student diversity in inclusive classrooms were analysed focusing on three learner diversity nexuses: language of instruction, gender and disability issues. The findings have clearly indicated the complexity of teaching in classrooms having students with varied educational needs and backgrounds which requires a great deal of teachers' attention in the teaching and learning processes. The findings have indicated that some teachers were speaking very fast while teaching in such classrooms as opposed to slowing down their pace of teaching in order to allow for lip-reading by the students with hearing impairment. The findings are similar to those by Safder, Akhtar, Ghulam and Misbah (2012) who found out that, teachers did not make sure that students understood what was being instructed in the classroom.

The study has also revealed that, the classroom interaction between students with hearing impairments and those without hearing disability and teachers was hindered by lack of knowledge in sign language. It has also been found that, more girls than boys in one of streams were dominating classroom conversations as reflected in asking more questions, because in this classroom girls outnumbered boys. These findings match with what was reported by Zhang (2010) who investigated on differences in the classroom participation for girls and boys, in terms of amount of talk and styles of talk. On the contrary, Shomoossi, Amouzadeh and Ketabi (2008) in their study found male dominance despite the fact that female students outnumbered their male counterparts. This was partly because of teachers' controlling the patterns of student behaviours during their teaching. The differences in the findings imply having a big number of students of a particular disability may not be necessarily the sole determining factor of gender conversation dominance in the classrooms. Instead, it signifies teachers' lack of gender responsive pedagogy practices, whereby teachers do not pay attention to the specific learning needs of girls and boys (Mlama et al., 2005). Training teachers in this area is therefore critical to achieving equal learning opportunity for girls and boys.

In analysing gender dominance among learners with albinism and those with hearing impairments in responding to teachers' questions posed in English and Kiswahili languages classes, the findings have indicated that, girls took the lead in responding to teachers in both cases at one of the two schools. On the other hand, there were no differences in response between girls and boys in the other school.

In terms of academic performance of students in special needs, it has been indicated that, a good number of these students were doing well in their studies despite the challenges they encountered in their learning such as lack of teachers specialized in sign language for students with hearing impairments. This finding is similar to what Alahmadi (2001) discovered. The author recommended that it is necessary to consider the facilities and services available in schools and universities which need to be adapted to the needs of special needs students. The design of classrooms requires special considerations to adjust students with disabilities.

Language of instruction has been markedly observed to be an issue in the teaching and learning at secondary school levels; where students are seriously challenged in their learning. While students with good background in English language (those from English medium primary schools) were less affected by language barrier in the teaching and learning processes, those who did not get their primary education in English language faced difficulties interacting and participating in the classroom teaching and learning processes conducted in English language, the current language of instruction at this level of education in the country. The findings concur with what was revealed by Qorro (1999), Vuzo (2010) and Godfrey (2014) calling for the need to address the problem. Could Tibategeza's (2010) proposal for 50-50 bilingual education be a promising solution to the issue of the language of instruction in the country?

Indeed, in inclusive education best practice perspective, the findings inform about the increased learner diversity in the classrooms signified by different language backgrounds of learners with respect to

the language of instruction. It is therefore important for teachers to consider this variable as they teach at secondary school level so that justice is done to all students. In this way, the inclusion of students in regular schools is deemed to succeed.

In regard to the challenges facing teachers in handling students with hearing impairment and those with albinism, the findings have vividly indicated teachers' incompetence in dealing with the students of the said exceptionalities coupled with a lack of the necessary teaching and learning materials in order to facilitate learning for students in special needs. The findings support what was raised by Booth, Elliott-Johns and Bruce (n.d.), who are questioning the training of teachers as well as effective instructional frameworks, and teaching/learning strategies which might appropriate for teaching inclusive classrooms. Some teachers complained about some of the subject syllabi being too long to be covered adequately within the specified time. .

Existence of some forms of stigma has also been pronounced as a problem facing students in special needs particularly those with albinism in the results of the present research. This is evident when all the students with disabilities with the majority being those with albinism were placed in one classroom. It is clear from the findings that changes have to be made in terms of teacher training, availability and use of exchange and learning environments.

LIMITATIONS

Some teachers who participated in the study disallowed the researchers to sit behind their classes for data collection. This situation marred the data collection from classroom interactions. To circumvent the situation, the researchers used triangulation of three data collection techniques namely; open ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. Another hindrance was that in Tanzania there is no secondary school specifically designated for inclusive education serving learners with hearing impairment and visual impairment. The researcher used schools for students with hearing impairment and albinism. The study was limited to only two secondary schools; there is a need for another study comprising of a relatively bigger sample to be done on the topic.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper has presented findings on a research that was carried out to unpack learner diversity issues in two inclusive secondary schools from Dar es Salaam region. It looked into classroom interactions among learners with hearing impairment and albinism with the purpose of analyzing gender conversional dominance in Kiswahili and English language classes. The findings have shown that background differences in terms of the LoI perpetuate exclusionary practices to some learners through classroom instructions. Additionally, some shortcomings in the use of sign language by teachers and students, availability and use of special equipment for student with hearing impairment, stigmatisation and poor teacher-student interactions, as well as lack of training on how to handle students with hearing impairments and those with albinism have been evident. Consistent with the findings, the following recommendations are offered for action, policy issues and further research.

1. Teachers should consider background differences in language among learners as an issue that needs to be appreciated in order accommodate all learners in their classrooms especially when they start teaching new students who join secondary education.
2. The government should train and employ sign language teachers. All teachers already in inclusive schools with students with hearing impairments should learn sign language. This implies that all teacher trainees should be trained on how to handle students with special needs in their courses; it should be a requirement for all trainees aspiring to teach in inclusive schools making it possible for teachers to accommodate all learners.
3. Teachers should get in-service training so that they can be able to recognize and handle learners with disability in their classrooms.
4. Learners with and without disability should be encouraged to work together, taking into account that Tanzania cherishes inclusion.

5. The teaching and learning equipment for students with hearing impairment should be purchased and used by teachers and students.

6. This study should be replicated in other regions using a bigger sample schools with different types of disability.

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