



Actualizing School Leadership Practices in Implementing Inclusive Education Policy in Public Secondary Schools in Nyamagana District, Mwanza Region

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Abstract : This research examined the school leadership practices in implementing inclusive education policy in public secondary schools in Nyamagana District, Mwanza Region, Tanzania. The study was based on Behaviourism Theory, which illustrates how school leaders foster appropriate behaviours for teachers and students through the use of reinforcement, support, and clear communication to promote inclusion. The study employed a mixed methods approach using explanatory sequential design, which collected quantitative data through a questionnaire and qualitative data through an interview. The sample consisted of 176 participants, including the District Education Officer, District Special Needs Education Officer, five school heads, forty-two teachers and one hundred twenty-seven students, who were selected using simple random, stratified and purposeful sampling techniques. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS Version 26 for descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed with thematic analysis. The findings indicated that effective school leadership practices, through clear direction to teachers and students, consistent monitoring and positive reinforcement, and a supportive approach to communication, enhances the implementation of inclusive education. Leaders who model inclusion, make appropriate provisions in accordance with the learning needs of students, and invest in the engagement of stakeholders foster positive attitudes in teachers to promote inclusion and support student learning. The study concludes that developing the leadership capacity to promote pro-inclusive school culture and institutionalising inclusive leadership practices be supported for systems of equitable and quality education for all learners.

Keyword : School leadership, Inclusive education, Inclusive education policy and Educational policy

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is an approach that makes sure all students, no matter their abilities, backgrounds, or disabilities, have equal access to quality learning in regular schools. It aims to remove barriers to participation by adjusting curricula, teaching methods, and school environments to meet different needs. Research shows that inclusive education encourages social integration, fairness, and personalized support, helping students feel like they belong. Jardinez and Natividad (2024) state that inclusive education represents a worldwide commitment to equal educational opportunities and highlights the importance of embracing diversity.

Inclusion is not a new idea. Its roots go back to ancient times (Amartya Sen, 2020). However, the concept began to develop more clearly in the 18th century, particularly during the French Revolution, and gained further momentum after the 1990s. Kefallinou et al. (2020) argued that as it evolved, different views like social exclusion, segregation, integration, diversity, disability, disadvantage, special education, and inclusive education have emerged and been clearly highlighted. These perspectives, shaped by past thinkers in response to social events and other influences, have collectively contributed to forming a broader concept. As a result, significant changes have occurred in social, economic, and educational systems worldwide. Despite this progress,

inclusion is still a complex challenge. Inclusive practices are not always truly inclusive; they often look more like integration or partial inclusion (Arora & Sharma, 2017). Although much has been written about inclusion, we continue learning more about its many dimensions. These include how it appears, how it is applied, its effects, and the practices and consequences surrounding it.

Globally, inclusive education policy aims to ensure that every child has the right to quality education, no matter their differences or circumstances. This policy promotes fair access, especially for children with disabilities and marginalized groups. It creates frameworks that address varied learning needs and foster inclusive environments (Dudu et al., 2024). Success in this area relies on effective teacher training and adequate resources (Mulyadi, 2017). Although inclusive education is an important global goal, challenges still exist in turning policy into practice, particularly in emerging economies where educational inequalities continue.

In Tanzania, the Education and Training Policy of 2014 addresses the needs of the most vulnerable children. The government developed the National Strategy for Inclusive Education, which ran from 2009 to 2017. This strategy aimed to ensure equal access to quality education for all children, youth, and adults. The following strategy, covering 2018 to

2021, built on these accomplishments by using the materials, infrastructure, and skilled workforce established earlier (MoEST, 2017). Inclusive education, grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1949), embraces diversity as a positive force for building inclusive societies. Research emphasizes that effective school management strongly influences inclusive practices by enhancing student performance, fostering collaboration, and implementing customized programs (Dar et al., 2022; Apriliani et al., 2024). School management also plays a role in preparing teachers and special educators for inclusive settings (Gladush, 2020). However, challenges such as inadequate professional development, poor infrastructure, and limited resources remain (Cho & Park, 2024). In promoting inclusive education in Iringa, leadership commitment, availability of resources, and stakeholder collaborations are considered crucial, with proactive school management enabling several activities, including teacher training, curriculum adaptations, and infrastructure development (Kanyemka et al., 2024). Major barriers that hinder the construction of equity-oriented learning environments include a lack of sufficient funding and societal attitudes; however, strong leadership, community engagement, and government support are the key factors toward such constructions.

Literature Review

1. Theoretical Review

The study utilized behaviourism theory. As one of the earliest learning theories, behaviourism theory describes learning as a process of forming stimulus response connections; with a focus on observable behaviours rather than internal mental processes. Behaviourism theory was influenced by researchers such as B.F. Skinner, John Watson, and Pavlov, and explains that human behaviours are learned and shaped by external stimuli, such as rewards, punishments, and the surrounding environment. Behaviourism theory stresses that learning leads to a change in behaviour; thus, if teaching promotes learning, it must involve demonstrated change in someone's behaviour. In addition, it is understood that behaviours are a function of their consequences. The study positions behaviourism theory as the basis for understanding how school leadership can affect teachers' behaviours, relating to inclusive education policy in secondary schools in the Nyamagana District. School leaders can use behaviourist principles of positive reinforcement, expectations of clear behavioural outputs, and clear feedback, through their school leadership capacity, to change teachers' commitment towards four areas of inclusive practices. Specifically, when school leaders provide recognition of those teachers applying inclusive practices or engaging in professional development, the act of rewarding the

teachers for their behaviour can increase those teachers' commitment to inclusive practices. Furthermore, when a school leadership establishes limits of behaviours and school rules, and is even observant, they can establish some sort of accountability, which can produce behavioural changes within the teachers. Training teachers on processes of observation and offering teachers feedback, can give teachers opportunities to modify teaching behaviours and ensure that inclusive education becomes a sustained behaviour across schools.

2. Empirical Literature Review

a. School Leadership in Implementing Inclusive Education Policy in Secondary Schools

In Denmark, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2020) contributed a practical guide to support inclusive school leadership, through a specific policy framework. This article applied a policy analysis framework to make sense of different leadership models and identify policy levers for advancing inclusion education. The guide suggests that inclusive school leadership is a strong leverage point for improving learner outcomes and school development, and does so primarily by unpacking collaborative leadership teams to lead inclusive education. The authors clearly state that inclusive leaders must work under regulatory frameworks that define inclusive education, and to clarify

accountability for inclusive education. A framework is needed to clarify what makes an inclusive leader effective, for example, setting direction or developing human and organizational capacity. The authors describe an ecosystem model to align leadership roles in relation to schools and the overarching purpose of the education systems, which could help to affect equity, participation, and achievement for all learners.

Devecchi and Nevin (2020) examined inclusive school leadership from a comparative standpoint in the USA and UK. They used a theoretical and conceptual methodology to evaluate inclusive education and leadership, assess the current norms for leadership modelling, and propose new perspectives based on inclusive pedagogy and psychology. Devecchi and Nevin emphasised the tension between accountability-oriented leadership and inclusive values. They promoted "leadership for learning" as a broader vision that encompasses equity and achievement gaps for certain students or those with disabilities, underscoring the possibilities for inclusion leadership to reshape an inclusive school culture.

Lambrecht and colleagues (2022) researched how management practices impact individualised education planning (IEP) within inclusive education in Germany. Employing a quantitative methodology consisting of path modelling from 135 schools, the researchers examined whether

transformational leadership (TL) and instructional leadership (IL), influenced collaboration and the implementation of an IEP. The result showed that TL indirectly influenced IEP implementation. In contrast, IL had a more direct impact, indicate the contribution of the study to inclusive education is to suggest that effective school management, particularly engaging in IL, is crucial for effectively structuring collaboration to influence and lead to teaching practices that are more individualised and inclusive.

Bipath et al. (2021) looked into how leadership affects the implementation of the Inclusive Education Policy in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. The study used a qualitative approach. The results showed that participants had a limited understanding of the policy. There was also limited leadership support and direction from policymakers. This lack of guidance made it hard to effectively implement the Inclusive Education Policy, especially in rural areas. The study also suggested that enhancing inclusive practice requires a concerted effort to support and equip leadership with training, resources, and ongoing support.

Gunnþórsdóttir et al. (2024) conducted a case study in Iceland, using a qualitative approach to explore the roles of school managers in establishing inclusive practices in compulsory schools. Through thematic analysis, the study identified three important roles or functions of

inclusive school managers: leading the direction, promoting organizational development, and facilitating human development. The research revealed a gap between policy and practice in inclusive schooling in Iceland, despite strong policies on inclusion. Thus, the findings illustrate the role of school leaders in realizing policy into real, inclusive practices, where all students, irrespective of their background or learning needs, are invited to participate.

Makhubela (2023) examined the challenges school leaders face when putting inclusive education policy into practice in primary schools in Johannesburg. A qualitative case study within an interpretive framework was used to identify the obstacles to effectively implementing the policy. Some challenges included limited learning resources, limited funding, teachers' and parents' negative attitudes, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient training, and inadequate support mechanisms. More broadly, systemic challenges such as inadequate support from the department and few skilled people in the schools diminished the effectiveness of inclusive education leadership. More training, funding, and restructuring of school systems would better promote inclusive practice.

In India, Dar et al. (2022) conducted a study that focused on the role and responsibilities of effective educational leadership in transforming inclusive education. Using a qualitative

framework, the study revealed the importance of school leaders, principals, and administrators in inspiring collaboration among stakeholders and driving systemic change. Effective leaders build committed teams and develop inclusive educational programs tailored to diverse student needs. These leaders act as agents of change by promoting equal values and ensuring fair, high-quality education for all learners.

Mbua (2023) explores how principal leadership can support inclusive education in Fako Division, Cameroon secondary schools. The study uses a qualitative case study approach and identifies important leadership practices. These include promoting diversity, creating a shared inclusive vision, and building strong community relationships. However, the research also points out challenges such as negative attitudes, lack of funding, insufficient facilities, and untrained teachers. The study highlights how important instructional leadership is for setting high expectations for all students and encouraging parental involvement. It suggests that school leaders, staff, and the community should work together to improve the implementation of inclusive education.

Kanyemka et al. (2023) conducted a qualitative case study in Tanzania to examine the difficulties school management encounters while implementing inclusive education at

the secondary level. The study found that school leadership is key in promoting an inclusive school culture. This happens by encouraging stakeholder collaboration, supporting teachers, and advocating for necessary resources and professional development. The findings highlight the important role of school management in overcoming obstacles to inclusive education and ensuring that all students have fair access to learning opportunities.

METHODOLOGY

The research utilized a mixed methods research approach using a sequential exploratory design that brought together qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate the role of school management in implementing inclusive education for disabled students in the Nyamagana District of the Mwanza Region in Tanzania. Quantitative data were first collected, in the form of structured questionnaires, from the teachers and students, followed by semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data from school heads, the District Education Officer (DEO) and the District Special Needs Education Officer (DSNEO) to clarify quantitative findings and build on the results. Data were collected from 176 respondents using simple random, stratified and purposive sampling techniques from a total population of 9,387. A range of data collection instruments were used, including questionnaires and

interviews. Validity was confirmed by a review from experts, and reliability was tested using the test-retest method; Cronbach's Alpha values of .803 for the students' sample and .948 for the teachers' sample were obtained. Data were analyzed quantitatively using SPSS Version 26 for descriptive and inferential statistics, and qualitatively data were analyzed thematically. Ethical principles were adhered to in every part of the study, such as informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

School Leadership in Implementing Inclusive Education Policy in Secondary Schools

The specific objective looked at school leadership in implementing inclusive education policy in secondary schools. The researcher explored if school leaders effectively managed the implementation of inclusive education by giving clear directions, providing the necessary resources, and creating a supportive environment for both teachers and students. This was assessed by asking teachers and students closed-ended questions regarding the leadership strategies and actions taken to promote inclusive practices in their schools. Teachers' and students' responses were recorded using a five-point scale, where 1 represented Strongly Disagree, 2 represented Disagree, 3 represented neutral, 4 represented Agree, and 5 represented Strongly Agree. In

addition, the questionnaire findings were supplemented by interviews with heads of schools and the District Education Officer (DEO) to gain deeper insights into leadership roles in implementing inclusive education policy.

Table 1.
Teachers' Responses on the Influence of School Leadership in Implementing Inclusive Education Policy

Statement	SD F %	D F %	N F %	A F %	SA F %
1. The school administration supports teachers in implementing inclusive practices.	1(2.4)	3(7.1)	2(4.8)	23(54.8)	13(31.0)
2. There is clear communication from school leaders about inclusive education goals.	3(7.1)	3(7.1)	6(14.3)	20(47.6)	10(23.8)
3. Inclusive education policy is effectively monitored by school management.	3(7.1)	3(7.1)	4(9.5)	19(45.2)	13(31)
4. Leadership decisions reflect a commitment to all learners, including those with special needs.	5(11.9)	2(4.8)	2(4.8)	16(38.1)	17(40.5)

Source: Field Data July (2025)

Table 1 presents teachers' perspectives on the impact of school leadership on implementing inclusive education. Most teachers agree that leadership plays a crucial role in promoting inclusive education, with 23 teachers (54.8%) agreeing and 10 (23.8%) strongly agreeing. Similarly, 23 teachers (54.8%) agree and 13 (31%) strongly agree that the administration

supports inclusive practices. Clear communication from leaders is also recognized, with 20 teachers (47.6%) agreeing and 10 (23.8%) strongly agreeing. Regarding monitoring, 19 teachers (45.2%) agree and 13 (31%) strongly agree that school management effectively oversees inclusive policy. Lastly, leadership commitment to all learners, including those with special needs, is affirmed by 16 teachers (38.1%) who agree and 17 (40.5%) who strongly agree. Overall, the responses demonstrate strong support for the role of school leadership in promoting inclusive education.

Support Teachers in Implementing the Inclusive Education Policy

Many respondents argued that school leadership support teachers in implementing inclusive education policy. In response to this statement, 1 (2.4%) of the teachers strongly disagreed, 3 (7.1%) disagreed, and 2 (4.8%) were neutral. Conversely, 23 (54.8%) agreed and 13 (31%) strongly agreed. This shows that 85.8% of teachers feel supported by their administration regarding inclusive education. Such a high level of agreement indicates that administrative backing is a key enabler for teachers in applying inclusive teaching strategies. During the interview respondents argued that support makes teachers more confident and willing to experiment with new inclusive strategies, knowing that mistakes will be met with guidance

rather than criticism. One respondent argued that:

“Teachers cannot work in isolation; school leaders must give them the tools and encouragement. Many teachers are supported by their school heads, which makes them confidently apply inclusive methods in their teaching processes. Support can mean training, providing teaching aids, adjusting timetables, or simply listening to teachers’ challenges. When administration stands with teachers, inclusion becomes achievable” (Respondent A, July 2025).

This emphasizes the importance of school leaders supporting their teachers. Teachers require assistance to implement inclusive teaching methods effectively and cannot do it alone. Support can be provided through training, resources, flexibility, or simply by being a listening ear. When leaders provide the necessary support, inclusion becomes achievable rather than a challenge in the classroom. Furthermore, Dar et al. (2022) argued that leaders who support teachers act as catalysts for change, helping to build a committed teaching force for inclusion. Kanyemka et al. (2023) stressed that administrative support enhances teacher morale and collaboration, making inclusive education more effective. In addition, from the Behaviourism perspective, this support acts as positive reinforcement; teachers who feel valued and aided are more likely to sustain inclusive practices,

thereby making them habitual behaviours within the school culture. Therefore, education policymakers should ensure school leaders are empowered through budgets, training, and staffing to provide continuous, practical support. Even well-trained teachers may find it difficult to uphold inclusive practices without sustained assistance.

Providing Clear Communication on Inclusive Education

Teachers had a positive perception of how school leadership communicates inclusive education goals. Specifically, 10 teachers (23.8%) strongly agreed, and 20 (47.6%) agreed with this statement. A smaller group of 6 teachers (14.3%) were neutral, indicating no clear opinion. On the less supportive side, 3 teachers (7.1%) disagreed, and another 3 (7.1%) strongly disagreed. These results show that 71.4% of respondents view communication from school leaders as clear and supportive, suggesting that leadership efforts in aligning staff with inclusive education objectives are largely effective. During the interview respondents argued that effective communication is crucial for ensuring that all staff understand the goals and how to achieve them. Respondents argued that:

“We share our inclusive education targets in every term meeting and ensure teachers have written guidelines. That way, everyone knows what we aim for

and their role in achieving it. Clear communication helps teachers to have information’s about the implementation of inclusive education policy, which enables them to implement policy effectively” (Respondent B, July 2025).

This shows how important clear communication is in making inclusive education work. By sharing goals regularly and giving teachers written guidelines, everyone stays on the same page and understands what’s expected. When teachers know exactly what the policy says and their role is, they feel more confident and prepared to implement it. In Behaviourism theory developed by B. F. Skinner, John Watson, and Pavlov on 20th Century states that communication acts as the initial stimulus that informs the desired behavioural response. The resulting behaviour (teacher practice) may be inconsistent if the stimulus is unclear. Clear, direct, and repeated communication helps shape and maintain inclusive teaching behaviours. In addition, Devecchi and Nevin (2020) argue that effective leadership in inclusive schools requires transparent communication that fosters shared understanding and buy-in from staff. Ainscow and Sandill (2020) also stress that consistent communication is foundational to building a collaborative and inclusive school culture. Generally, the implication is that school leaders should strengthen their communication strategies by using multiple channels, such as staff

meetings, written memos, WhatsApp groups, and workshops, to ensure that inclusive goals are understood and internalized by all teachers.

Monitoring Inclusive Education Policy

School leadership has a role in monitoring all-inclusive activities which take place in the school. A significant majority of teachers, 32 (76.2%), agreed that school leadership effectively communicates inclusive education goals. Among them, 13 (31%) strongly agreed, and 19 (45.2%) agreed. A smaller group of 4 teachers (9.5%) remained neutral, showing no clear stance. On the contrary, 3 teachers (7.1%) disagreed, and another 3 (7.1%) strongly disagreed. The data suggests that school management plays an active and effective role in monitoring how inclusive education policy is implemented. This reflects a strong institutional commitment to ensuring compliance and progress in inclusive practices. In addition, school leaders set inclusive goals and check progress and compliance, ensuring that policies are not just on paper but also in practice. During the interview, respondents argued that school leaders are very effective in monitoring the process of implementing inclusive education policy, as one respondent argued that:

"We tried to monitor what has been done by our teachers in implementing inclusive education by observing classes, reviewing lesson plans, and meeting with

teachers to discuss progress. This helps us identify areas where teachers need more support or resources to fully implement inclusive teaching" (Respondent A, July 2025)

This means that school leaders are actively monitoring how teachers implement inclusive education. By observing lessons, reviewing plans, and engaging in open conversations with teachers, they can assess what is effective and identify areas that require assistance. The focus is on understanding and providing support rather than passing judgment. When leaders take the time to listen and provide guidance, teachers feel more empowered, and the goal of inclusion becomes attainable in their classrooms. This is supported by Gunnþórsdóttir et al. (2024) and Lambrecht et al. (2022), who argued that ongoing evaluation and feedback from leaders are critical for sustaining inclusive practices over time. On the same vein, Behaviourism Theory was developed by B. F. Skinner, John Watson, and Pavlov in 20th Century, support the arguments by analyzing the importance of feedback monitoring that provides continuous reinforcement, which can strengthen positive behaviours (inclusive teaching) and correct deviations from the desired practice. School leaders should institutionalize regular, supportive monitoring systems and ensure feedback is used for teacher growth, not punitive action.

Monitoring must also link to resource allocation and training needs.

Provide a Decision Which Reflects a Commitment to All Learners

Decisions that are taken by school leaders are useful to all learners and teachers. Most teachers supported the statement, with 17 (40.5%) strongly agreeing and 16 (38.1%) agreeing. A small number of teachers, 2 (4.8%), were neutral, showing no clear opinion. On the less supportive side, 2 teachers (4.8%) disagreed, and 5 (11.9%) strongly disagreed. This indicates that 33(78.6%) of teachers believe that leadership decisions are made with consideration for all learners, including those with special needs. Despite a small percentage of disagreement, the overall sentiment reflects strong confidence in school leadership's inclusive vision. During the interview, respondents argued that school leaders are making decisions which favour all kinds of students in school, which has positive impact on their learning process, as one respondent argued:

"When we plan our budget or schedule activities, many educational stakeholders are involved to know what materials are most needed in schools to ensure that students with special needs are confident. In our planning, we always ask: How will this affect learners with special needs? We make sure our plans don't leave anyone out." (DS, July 2025).

This means the school's commitment to inclusion extends in significant decisions such as budgeting and event planning. Before finalizing any plans, they consider how it will affect students with special needs, ensuring that no one is overlooked or excluded. This thoughtful approach ensures that every learner is at the center of the plan, creating a school environment where everyone feels a sense of belonging. It is a simple yet impactful practice that fosters a sense of inclusivity for all students. In addition, Mbua (2023) in Cameroon and Dar et al. (2022) found that leaders who embed equity in decision-making processes significantly enhance the inclusiveness of school environments. Generally, school and district-level decision-making should be guided by a formal framework requiring consideration of all learner categories, ensuring equity is embedded in every policy, budget, and program choice.

Table 2.
Students' Responses on the Influence of School Leadership in Implementing Inclusive Education Policy

Statement	SD F %	D F %	N F %	A F %	SA F %
1. School leaders promote equal learning opportunities for all students.	13(11)	15(12.7)	17(14.4)	34(28.8)	39(33.1)
2. School rules support the inclusion	10(8.5)	12(10.2)	32(27.1)	32(27.1)	32(27.1)

	of students with diverse needs.					
3.	I feel school leaders listen to students' concerns about inclusion	13(11)	11(9.3)	25(21.2)	44(37.3)	25(21.2)
4.	Teachers are supported by the school leadership in addressing student diversity	4(3.4)	10(8.5)	20(16.9)	46(39)	38(32.2)

Source: Field Data July (2025)

Table 2 shows that most students believe school leadership plays a positive role in promoting inclusive education. For instance, 73 students (61.9%) agreed or strongly agreed that school leaders promote equal learning opportunities, while only 28 (23.7%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Regarding school rules supporting inclusion, 96 students (81.3%) agreed or strongly agreed, indicating strong support. Similarly, 69 students (58.5%) felt that school leaders listened to their concerns about inclusion, while 24 (20.3%) disagreed. The strongest support was observed in how leadership helps teachers address student diversity 84 students (71.2%) agreed or strongly agreed, with only 14 (11.9%) disagreeing. Lastly, 80 students (67.2%) felt that school governance encourages a friendly environment, with just 16 (13.6%) expressing

disagreement. The data suggest that most students perceive school leadership as effectively promoting inclusive education.

Promote Equal Learning Opportunities

Most students believe that school leaders promote equal learning opportunities for all. Specifically, 39 students (33.1%) strongly agreed, and 34 (28.8%) agreed with the statement. A smaller group of 17 students (14.4%) were neutral, indicating no strong opinion. On the contrary, 15 students (12.7%) disagreed, and 13 (11%) strongly disagreed. This means that 53(61.9%) of the students believe school leaders play a positive role in creating equal learning chances for everyone. Although the majority agreed, nearly 28(24%) disagreed indicates that not all students experience fairness equally. Moreover, respondents argued that school leaders promote equal opportunity of learning to all students within the main class, regardless of their disabilities, as one said that.

“As a school leader, I see it as my core responsibility to promote equal learning opportunities for all students. I ensure that every learner, regardless of their background, ability, or learning style, has access to quality education. This involves setting high expectations for inclusive teaching practices, allocating resources fairly, and reviewing how learning support is delivered. I also guide staff to recognize and remove

barriers preventing some students from fully participating in the classroom" (Respondent C, July 2025).

This statement implies the school leader's dedication to inclusion as a fundamental aspect of their role. They are determined to ensure that all students have equal access to quality education regardless of their background, abilities, or learning styles. This involves establishing rigorous teaching standards, equitably distributing resources, and continuously assessing the level of student support. The leader also assists teachers in identifying and eliminating any barriers that may hinder a student's full participation. The goal is cultivating a learning environment where everyone feels acknowledged, supported, and empowered to thrive. The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2020) emphasises that inclusive leadership involves setting strategic direction and promoting equity for all learners. Working within policy frameworks, collaborative leadership teams can ensure fairness becomes a visible and reinforced school norm. Generally, Schools should institutionalize clear and reinforced leadership practices that ensure equality is not dependent on individual leaders' discretion, but embedded in school culture.

Provide Rules to Support the Inclusion of Students with Diverse Needs.

Many students believe that school rules promote the inclusion of learners with diverse needs. Specifically, 32 students (27.1%) agreed, and another 32 (27.1%) strongly agreed. However, a significant number of students, 32 (27.1%), remained neutral, indicating uncertainty or mixed feelings. On the contrary, 12 students (10.2%) disagreed, and 10 (8.5%) strongly disagreed with the statement. This shows that 64(54.2%) of the students feel the school rules support inclusion, though the high neutral response suggests uncertainty or lack of awareness among a large portion of students. Also, one respondent stated that

"Our rules ensure that every student feels safe, valued, and supported, regardless of their physical, emotional, or learning differences. School heads guide teachers to use inclusive teaching strategies, accommodate individual needs, and foster a classroom culture where bullying and discrimination are not tolerated. By emphasizing collaboration, accessibility, and fairness, our school rules help create an environment where all students have equal opportunities to succeed and belong" (D July, 2025).

This statement highlights the school's commitment to ensuring the protection and support of all students, regardless of their abilities or

challenges. The rules are designed to facilitate inclusive teaching methods, accommodate individual student needs, and foster a classroom environment of kindness and respect. The school maintains a zero-tolerance policy towards bullying and discrimination, prioritizing fairness in all aspects. By emphasising teamwork, accessibility, and equitable treatment, the school cultivates a safe and inclusive space where every student is valued and has the opportunity to thrive from a behaviorism theory developed by B. F. Skinner, John Watson, and Pavlov in 20th Century, it is argued that rules act as antecedents that shape behaviour. Consistent enforcement with positive reinforcement for compliance helps condition inclusive behaviours among staff and students. Furthermore, Devecchi and Nevin (2020) stress that clear and supportive policy frameworks help leaders align rules with inclusive values, ensuring they guide everyday practice rather than remaining symbolic statements. Generally, Schools should make inclusion-focused rules explicit, visible, and reinforced through continuous reminders, assemblies, and consistent application.

School Leaders Listen to Students' Concerns About Inclusion

Most students felt that school leaders listened to their concerns about inclusion. In total, 44 students (37.3%) agreed, and 25 (21.2%) strongly agreed

with the statement. Meanwhile, 25 students (21.2%) were neutral, showing no strong opinion. On the less supportive side, 11 students (9.3%) disagreed, and 13 (11%) strongly disagreed. Overall, 58.5% of the students felt their concerns were being heard. Still, the combined 41.5% of neutral or disagreeing responses shows room for school leaders to improve communication and responsiveness to student voices. One emphasized that:

"When learners feel heard and their experiences are acknowledged, it fosters a sense of belonging and trust within the school community. Inclusive education goes beyond policy; it requires ongoing dialogue with students to understand the barriers they face and to identify practical solutions. School leaders who engage with students, especially those with diverse needs, are committed to creating an environment where every voice matters. This approach not only improves the well-being of learners but also strengthens the overall effectiveness of inclusive practices in our schools" (Respondent B, July 2025).

This means that schools need structured feedback channels (student councils, suggestion boxes, inclusion forums) so that listening becomes systematic rather than incidental. Behaviourism highlights the role of feedback loops. When students voice concerns and leaders respond positively, it reinforces the behaviour of speaking up and builds trust in the

system. In addition, Gunnþórsdóttir et al. (2024) found that setting direction and promoting human development are core leadership roles that involve listening to stakeholders, including students, to co-create inclusive solutions.

Support Teachers in Addressing Student Diversity

Most students felt that school leadership supports teachers in addressing student diversity. Specifically, 38 students (32.2%) strongly agreed, and 46 (39%) agreed with the statement. A smaller group of 20 students (16.9%) were neutral, indicating no strong opinion. On the less supportive side, 10 (8.5%) disagreed, and only 4 (3.4%) strongly disagreed. This means that 71.2% of students feel school leadership is actively helping teachers support diverse student needs. This is a strong indicator of leadership commitment to inclusive practices in teaching. One stated that:

"We prioritize open communication, mentorship, and practical support to help teachers adapt their strategies and build confidence in inclusive practices. When school leadership is actively involved and supportive, teachers are better equipped to create equitable, engaging, and responsive classrooms for all students. By providing ongoing professional development, fostering a collaborative school culture, and ensuring access to inclusive teaching resources, school leaders

empower teachers to meet the varied needs of their learners"
(Respondent E, July 2025)

Strong leadership and support systems make a real difference in inclusive education. When schools focus on open communication and mentorship, teachers feel more confident and capable of adjusting their teaching to meet diverse student needs. Support from school leaders through training, teamwork, and access to helpful resources gives teachers the tools to build fair, engaging, and responsive classrooms. Furthermore, Lambrecht et al. (2022) found that instructional leadership directly improves inclusive teaching by structuring collaboration and supporting Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Generally, Leadership should continue to provide practical, ongoing support, not just policy-level encouragement, so that inclusive practices become a daily teaching habit.

CONCLUSION

The research concludes that effective school leadership underpins successful implementation of inclusive education policy in secondary schools in the Nyamagana District. When school leaders provide thoughtful direction, ongoing monitoring, supportive feedback, and positive affirmation to staff, they enhance both teachers' engagement and students' involvement in the inclusive process. School leadership that is collaborative, fair, and accountable promotes school

cultures where diversity is respected and all learners are supported and are counted. Nonetheless, challenges to inclusion persist due to limited resources, inadequate training, and negative attitudes. Therefore, the article recommends education authorities to strengthen leadership capabilities through continual professional learning, allocate the necessary resources to implement inclusive programmes, and embed inclusive leadership practice within schools that values equity and collaboration. School leaders also need to support their engagement with teachers through increased feedback, communication, and community participation to ensure that inclusive education is an integral and supported part of school management and classroom practice.

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