



Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Equity-Oriented Approaches in Education in Public Secondary Schools in Kibaha District, Tanzania

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Abstract : This study evaluated the effectiveness of equity-oriented approaches in education in public secondary schools in Kibaha District, Tanzania. Specifically, the study examined the relationship between inclusive teaching practices and student engagement, assessed the influence of fair distribution of resources on access and retention rates, and analyzed the effect of support programs on the reduction of achievement gaps moderated by policy implementation. Guided by an integrated theoretical framework combining Human Capital Theory and Nancy Fraser's Social Justice Theory, the research employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. The target population comprised 148 respondents, including 120 students, 20 teachers, and 8 administrators from four public secondary schools. A sample of 138 respondents was achieved, consisting of 112 students, 18 teachers, and 8 administrators, selected through purposive and simple random sampling. Data were collected using four instruments: the Student Questionnaire, the Teacher Questionnaire, semi-structured Interview Guides for administrators, and a Document Review Guide. Validity was established through expert review, pilot testing, and triangulation of data sources. Reliability was ensured through internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha ≥ 0.70 for questionnaire scales), inter-coder reliability (Cohen's Kappa ≥ 0.80 for qualitative coding), and test-retest reliability (Pearson's $r \geq 0.70$). A total of 138 questionnaires were deemed valid and used for data analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Findings revealed that inclusive teaching practices showed a significant positive relationship with student engagement, with students in schools implementing inclusive practices reporting 28% higher engagement scores than those in schools with limited inclusive practices ($t=4.21$, $p<0.01$, $d=0.76$). Fair resource distribution demonstrated a substantial influence on access and retention, with well-resourced schools achieving 87% retention rates compared to 61% in under-resourced schools ($\chi^2=8.34$, $p<0.01$). Support programs were found to reduce achievement gaps by 18-25% in schools with strong policy implementation, compared to only 5-8% in schools with weak implementation. Major challenges included limited teacher training in inclusive pedagogies (75% of teachers reported inadequate preparation), insufficient teaching and learning materials (80% of schools lacked adequate resources), and inconsistent policy implementation across schools. The study concluded that equity-oriented approaches significantly enhance educational outcomes but their effectiveness is contingent on systematic implementation, adequate resources, and sustained teacher professional development. The study recommends that the government and other stakeholders provide comprehensive teacher training in inclusive pedagogies, equitable resource allocation based on school needs, clear policy guidelines for implementing equity-oriented approaches, and strengthened monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure fidelity of implementation.

Keyword : equity-oriented education; inclusive teaching; student engagement; resource distribution; support programmes; achievement gaps; policy implementation; Tanzania

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INTRODUCTION

Educational equity refers to the provision of fair educational opportunities, resources and support in ways that respond to differences in learners' circumstances, abilities and needs. Equity is therefore distinct from equality because providing exactly the same inputs to every learner or school may not be sufficient where learners begin from unequal conditions. In secondary education, an equity-oriented approach may involve inclusive teaching practices, needs-responsive allocation of learning resources, targeted support, and institutional arrangements that enable learners from different backgrounds to participate meaningfully in schooling. Such approaches are important because educational participation and achievement are shaped not only by learners' individual effort, but also by the conditions under which teaching and learning take place.

At the international level, equity and inclusion have become central principles of quality education. Sustainable Development Goal 4 calls for inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all, while international education literature emphasizes the need to identify and address barriers that prevent particular groups of learners from benefiting equally from schooling (UNESCO, 2021, 2022; United Nations, 2020). Equity-oriented education consequently requires schools to

recognize differences among learners and to organize teaching, resources and support in ways that reduce avoidable disparities. This perspective is particularly relevant in public secondary schools, where learners may differ considerably in socioeconomic circumstances, learning needs, geographical location and access to educational resources.

Evidence reviewed in the source study indicates that the effectiveness of equity-oriented education depends on how educational resources and practices are translated into everyday school experiences. Inclusive classroom practices, for example, can increase opportunities for participation when teachers use differentiated instruction, relevant examples, formative assessment, collaborative activities and support appropriate to different learning levels. However, the implementation of such practices can be constrained by large classes, limited teaching materials, inadequate teacher preparation and insufficient time for individualized attention. Thus, the existence of an inclusive education policy does not automatically mean that learners experience inclusive and equitable teaching in the classroom.

Resource distribution represents another important dimension of educational equity. Schools serving learners with greater needs may require additional or differently targeted resources to provide comparable opportunities for learning. The source study highlights differences

in funding, student-teacher ratios, textbooks, computer access, library materials and laboratory equipment between schools. Research reviewed in the study similarly suggests that disparities in learning resources can affect enrollment, attendance, retention and educational participation, especially where students face economic, geographical or institutional barriers (Lupton & Thomson, 2022; World Bank, 2023, 2024). From an equity perspective, therefore, resource allocation should be considered in relation to learner and school needs rather than only the number of students enrolled.

Support programmes constitute a further mechanism through which schools can address unequal educational outcomes. Remedial instruction, mentoring, targeted academic assistance and other forms of learner support can help students who experience persistent barriers to participation or achievement. The source study shows, however, that the presence of a support programme is not by itself sufficient to guarantee reductions in achievement gaps. The continuity of support, availability of trained personnel, dedicated instructional time, monitoring and institutional commitment all influence whether such programmes are implemented consistently. This makes policy implementation an important condition in understanding the

effectiveness of equity-oriented interventions.

In Tanzania, national education commitments have increasingly emphasized access, quality, inclusion and equity in basic education. The expansion of fee-free basic education and investment in school infrastructure and teachers have contributed to wider educational access, but evidence reviewed in the source study indicates that differences in educational conditions continue to exist across schools and learner groups (URT, 2021; Uwezo, 2023). Differences may occur in the availability of qualified teachers, teaching and learning materials, infrastructure, class sizes and the capacity of schools to provide targeted support. These differences create a need to examine not only whether equity-oriented policies and practices exist, but also whether they are implemented effectively at school level.

Kibaha District provides a relevant context for examining this issue because the public secondary schools included in the source study represent differing school circumstances, including variation in resource availability and the conditions under which teaching and learning occur. The district therefore provides an opportunity to examine whether equity-oriented approaches are associated with differences in student engagement, access, retention and achievement. Examining these dimensions together is important because educational equity is

multidimensional: improvements in one area may not necessarily translate into improved outcomes if other barriers remain unresolved.

Against this background, the present study evaluated the effectiveness of equity-oriented approaches in public secondary schools in Kibaha District. It specifically considered the relationship between inclusive teaching practices and student engagement, the influence of fair distribution of resources on access and retention, and the effect of support programmes on achievement gaps while considering policy implementation as a moderating condition. By bringing these dimensions together, the study sought to generate district-level evidence on how equity-oriented approaches operate in practice and the conditions that shape their effectiveness.

Statement of The Problem

Despite national and international commitments to inclusive and equitable education, the existence of equity-oriented policies does not necessarily ensure that students in public secondary schools experience comparable opportunities to participate, remain in school and achieve academically. The source study indicates that differences in learners' circumstances and school conditions can continue to influence educational experiences even where broad policies promote equal access. This creates a practical problem for education

managers: a policy may be formally available to all schools while the resources, teaching practices and support mechanisms required for effective implementation remain uneven.

A key problem concerns the extent to which classroom practices respond to differences among learners. Inclusive teaching requires teachers to recognize varied learning needs, backgrounds and levels of participation and to adapt instructional practices accordingly. However, the source study identifies constraints such as large classes, limited instructional resources, inadequate teacher preparation and insufficient time for individualized support. Where these constraints persist, some learners may have fewer opportunities to participate actively or receive assistance appropriate to their needs. Consequently, there is a need for empirical evidence on whether inclusive teaching practices are actually associated with student engagement in the public secondary school context of Kibaha District.

Policy implementation represents an additional concern because it can shape whether equity-oriented approaches move from policy intentions to actual school practice. The source study found concerns about the clarity of policy guidelines, consistency of implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and teacher training. These conditions suggest that the effectiveness of support programmes

and other equity-oriented practices may vary according to the extent to which policies are understood, implemented and monitored at school level. Yet there is limited empirical evidence in the study context concerning the role of policy implementation in the relationship between support programmes and achievement gaps.

The problem is therefore not simply the absence of equity-oriented approaches, but uncertainty about their effectiveness under actual school conditions. Existing literature provides evidence that inclusive teaching, appropriate resource allocation and targeted support can contribute to better educational outcomes, but the source study identifies a contextual gap concerning how these dimensions operate together in public secondary schools in Kibaha District. In particular, there is a need to connect classroom inclusion with student engagement, resource distribution with access and retention, and support programmes with achievement gaps while considering the implementation conditions that may strengthen or weaken these relationships.

Failure to address this evidence gap may limit the ability of school leaders, district education authorities and other education stakeholders to identify which equity-oriented approaches are producing meaningful educational benefits and what implementation conditions are required for them to work effectively.

The study therefore addressed the problem by evaluating equity-oriented approaches in public secondary schools in Kibaha District, Tanzania. The investigation focused on inclusive teaching practices, fair distribution of educational resources and support programmes, with particular attention to student engagement, access, retention, achievement gaps and policy implementation.

Objectives

To evaluate the effectiveness of equity-oriented approaches in education in public secondary schools in Kibaha District.

Specific objectives

1. To assess the relationship between inclusive teaching practices and student engagement in public secondary schools in Kibaha District.
2. The influence of fair distribution of resources on access and retention rates in public secondary schools in Kibaha District.
3. The effect of support programmes on reduction of achievement gaps, moderated by policy implementation in public secondary schools in Kibaha District.

Theoretical Framework

Human Capital Theory, associated with Schultz (1961) and Becker (1964), views education and training as investments that develop productive knowledge and skills. In

this study, the theory provided the rationale for assessing academic performance, participation and retention as outcomes of educational investment. It also supported the proposition that investing in learners who face disadvantage can generate wider social and economic returns.

Nancy Fraser's Social Justice Theory complements the economic focus of Human Capital Theory by emphasizing redistribution and recognition. Redistribution addresses unequal access to material resources such as funding, infrastructure, qualified teachers and learning materials. Recognition addresses cultural and status inequalities, including whether diverse backgrounds, abilities and identities are valued within educational institutions. The theory's principle of parity of participation is relevant to student engagement, inclusion and equal opportunity.

The integration of the two theories provided a broader framework for judging effectiveness. Human Capital Theory emphasized measurable outcomes from educational investment, while Fraser's theory emphasized whether those outcomes were achieved through fair distribution and recognition of diverse student needs. The combined framework therefore guided the study's attention to inclusive teaching, resources, support programmes and policy implementation.

Literature Review

Research reviewed in the source study shows that inclusive teaching can strengthen engagement when teachers use differentiated instruction, culturally responsive examples, formative assessment and flexible grouping. Evidence from the United States, Canada, Asia and Africa generally indicates positive associations between inclusive pedagogy and student engagement, although large classes and inadequate teacher preparation can restrict implementation. Tanzanian studies similarly report that inclusive education policies are stronger at policy level than in classroom practice.

Resource distribution is another important dimension of equity. Studies reviewed in the report indicate that needs-based funding and adequate learning materials can improve enrollment, attendance and retention. Conversely, urban-rural disparities in funding, qualified teachers, textbooks and infrastructure can reproduce inequalities. The literature also suggests that the manners in which resources are allocated matters: distributing resources according to need is more consistent with equity than simply allocating according to enrollment.

Support programmes such as remedial tutoring, mentoring and gifted education can reduce achievement gaps when they are systematic and adequately supported. However, studies consistently identify

implementation fidelity, teacher training, monitoring and dedicated instructional time as key conditions for success. The source study identifies a gap in Tanzanian research concerning the moderating role of policy implementation in the relationship between support programmes and achievement gaps, particularly within Kibaha District.

METHODOLOGY

Design and Study Context

The study used a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed separately and integrated during interpretation. The design was appropriate because the study required measurable evidence of engagement, access, retention and achievement gaps together with contextual explanations from teachers, administrators and students.

The study was conducted in public secondary schools in Kibaha District, Pwani Region. Four schools were purposively selected to provide variation between two equity-oriented schools and two ordinary schools, including urban or peri-urban and rural contexts.

Participants and Sampling

Table 1. Participants and Response Distribution

Participant category	Target/sample	Usable responses
Students (Forms I-IV)	120	112
Teachers	20	18
Administrators	8	8
Total	148	138

Source: Field Data, 2026

Students were included as the main beneficiaries of educational practices, while teachers and administrators provided information on instructional practices, resources, support programmes and policy implementation. The quantitative student component included 120 students, while qualitative sampling involved student focus groups and interviews with teachers and administrators. Data cleaning resulted in 138 usable responses, representing an effective response rate of 93.24%.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using student and teacher questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, document review and academic performance records. Documents included budgets and procurement records, enrollment and attendance registers, examination results, support-programme records, school plans and monitoring reports. Quantitative analysis used SPSS, including frequencies, percentages,

means, standard deviations, t-tests, Pearson correlation, chi-square tests and regression procedures. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically using the six-phase approach to thematic analysis. Integration occurred through side-by-side comparison of quantitative and qualitative evidence.

Validity and reliability procedures included expert review, pilot testing, factor analysis, criterion-related validity, Cronbach's alpha, test-retest reliability and inter-coder reliability. Qualitative trustworthiness was strengthened through credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability procedures. Ethical safeguards included informed consent, parental consent and student assent, confidentiality, secure data storage and institutional authorization.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

1. Inclusive Teaching Practices and Student Engagement

Students' perceptions indicated moderate implementation of inclusive teaching practices, with an overall mean of 2.61 out of 4.00 and 53.45% agreeing or strongly agreeing that teachers implemented inclusive practices. Teachers were rated most positively for respecting students from different backgrounds ($M=2.91$; 64.29% agreement) and explaining lessons clearly ($M=2.87$; 62.50%). Lower ratings were recorded for using examples from different cultures ($M=2.38$; 43.75%) and challenging students who learned

quickly with harder work ($M=2.42$; 46.43%).

Table 2. Students' perceptions of Inclusive Teaching Practices

Inclusive teaching indicator	Mean	SD	Agree/Strongly agree (%)
Explain lessons clearly	2.87	0.92	62.50
Use different teaching methods	2.65	0.98	55.36
Give extra help to struggling students	2.58	1.02	52.68
Challenge fast learners	2.42	1.08	46.43
Respect different backgrounds	2.91	0.87	64.29
Use different cultural examples	2.38	1.04	43.75
Adapt lessons to different needs	2.48	0.96	49.11
Overall score	2.61	0.84	53.45

Source: Field Data, 2026

Student engagement was also moderate, with an overall mean of 2.75 and 61.31% demonstrating high engagement. Behavioral engagement was highest ($M=2.93$; 67.86%), followed by emotional engagement ($M=2.78$; 62.50%), while cognitive engagement was lowest ($M=2.54$; 53.57%).

Table 3. Student Engagement Scores

Engagement dimension	Mean	SD	High engagement (%)
Behavioral engagement	2.93	0.85	67.86
Emotional engagement	2.78	0.92	62.50
Cognitive engagement	2.54	0.98	53.57
Overall engagement	2.75	0.85	61.31

Source: Field Data, 2026

A statistically significant relationship was found between inclusive teaching and student engagement. Students in schools with high inclusive teaching implementation reported an engagement mean of 3.15 compared with 2.35 in schools with low implementation. The difference was significant, $t(110)=4.21$, $p<0.01$, with a large effect size ($d=0.76$). Pearson correlation also showed a strong positive relationship between inclusive teaching and engagement ($r=0.68$, $p<0.01$).

Qualitative evidence supported these findings. Teachers reported that group work, culturally relevant examples, use of Kiswahili to support discussion and differentiated assistance encouraged previously quiet or disengaged students to participate. At the same time, teachers in schools with limited inclusive practice identified classes of more than 60 students as a major barrier to individual attention

and differentiation. Students similarly reported greater interest when teachers connected lessons to familiar community experiences and allowed initial discussion in Kiswahili.

Fair Resource Distribution and Access/Retention

Document analysis revealed substantial differences in resources between equity-oriented and ordinary schools. Equity-oriented schools received nearly twice the per-student funding and had substantially better student-teacher ratios, textbook availability, computer access, library resources and laboratory equipment.

Table 4. Resource Distribution Across School Types

Resource indicator	Equity-oriented	Ordinary	Ratio/advantage
Per-student funding (TSh)	185,000	95,000	1.95×
Student-teacher ratio	35:1	55:1	0.64
Textbooks per student	1.8	0.7	2.57×
Computer-student ratio	1:15	1:80	5.33×
Library books per student	5.2	1.8	2.89×
Laboratory equipment adequacy	3.8	2.1	1.81×

Source: School Records and Document Review, 2026

These resource differences were accompanied by substantial differences

in access and retention. Equity-oriented schools recorded enrollment of 92.5%, attendance of 84.7% and Form I–IV retention of 87.2%, compared with 76.3%, 65.2% and 61.4% respectively in ordinary schools. The dropout rate was 8.1% in equity-oriented schools and 26.3% in ordinary schools.

Table 5. Access and Retention Rates

Indicator	Equity-oriented (%)	Ordinary (%)	Difference
Enrollment rate	92.5	76.3	+16.2
Attendance rate	84.7	65.2	+19.5
Retention rate	87.2	61.4	+25.8
Transition Form IV–V	52.8	28.6	+24.2
Dropout rate	8.1	26.3	-18.2

Source: Field Data, 2026

Interviews indicated that rural schools often received less funding because allocation mechanisms emphasized enrollment rather than need. Administrators and the Ward Education Officer described the resulting pattern as inequitable because schools serving students with greater socioeconomic disadvantage could receive fewer resources. This qualitative evidence reinforced the quantitative pattern that better-resourced schools had stronger access and retention outcomes.

Support Programmes, Achievement Gaps and Policy Implementation

Schools with systematic support programmes showed smaller achievement gaps across academic,

gender, geographic and socioeconomic indicators. The top-versus-bottom 25% achievement gap was 18.5% in schools with systematic programmes compared with 35.2% in schools without them. The rural-urban gap was 8.5% versus 22.4%, while the socioeconomic gap was 12.3% versus 28.6%. Over two years, schools with systematic programmes reduced achievement gaps by 18–25%, compared with only 5–8% in schools without systematic programmes.

Table 6. Achievement Gaps and Support Programmes

Indicator	Systematic support	No systematic support	Difference
Top 25% vs. bottom 25% achievement gap	18.5%	35.2%	-16.7 pp
Gender achievement gap	4.2%	12.8%	-8.6 pp
Rural-urban achievement gap	8.5%	22.4%	-13.9 pp
SES achievement gap	12.3%	28.6%	-16.3 pp
Reduction over two years	18–25%	5–8%	+13–17 pp

Source: Field Data, 2026

Teachers recognized policy implementation as a central determinant of programme success: 83.33% agreed or strongly agreed that policy implementation was the main factor determining success. However, only 44.44% agreed that their schools had clear policies on support programmes, and only 38.89% agreed that programmes were consistently implemented. Effective monitoring

was reported by only 22.22%, and only 22.22% agreed that teachers received adequate training.

Table 7. Teachers' Perceptions Of Policy Implementation

Policy implementation indicator	Agree/Strongly agree (%)
Clear policies on support programmes	55.55
Support programmes consistently implemented	44.45
Effective monitoring of support programmes	33.33
Adequate resources for support programmes	22.23
Teachers receive training	33.33
Policy implementation determines programme success	83.33

Source: Field Data, 2026

The main implementation challenges were limited resources (88.89%), large class sizes (77.78%), insufficient teacher training (72.22%), lack of clear policy guidelines (66.67%), inadequate monitoring and evaluation (66.67%), limited time for support activities (61.11%) and varied student backgrounds and needs (55.56%).

Table 8. Challenges in Implementing Support Programmes

Challenge	Teachers (n=18)	Percentage
Limited resources	16	88.89
Large class sizes	14	77.78

Insufficient teacher training	13	72.22
Lack of clear policy guidelines	12	66.67
Inadequate monitoring and evaluation	12	66.67
Limited time for support activities	11	61.11
Students' varied backgrounds and needs	10	55.56

Source: Field Data, 2026

Discussion

The study demonstrates that inclusive teaching is positively associated with student engagement. The strong correlation and large effect size indicate that students experienced more engagement where teachers used more inclusive approaches. The result is consistent with the literature reviewed in the source study, including evidence from Tanzania, Kenya, India and other contexts showing that differentiated and culturally responsive instruction can improve participation. However, the moderate overall implementation score indicates that positive practice was not yet widespread.

The resource findings provide evidence for both Human Capital Theory and Fraser's Social Justice Theory. From the Human Capital perspective, investment in teachers, learning materials and infrastructure supports the development of learners'

capabilities. From Fraser's perspective, the large differences between schools illustrate maldistribution, while the greater needs of rural and disadvantaged learners indicate the importance of allocating resources according to need rather than simply enrollment.

The findings on support programmes indicate that interventions can reduce achievement gaps when they are systematic. The much larger reduction in schools with systematic programmes suggests that the presence of a programme alone is not enough. Policy implementation operates as an active condition: clear guidelines, trained teachers, dedicated resources, monitoring and leadership determine whether a support programme becomes effective in practice.

Overall, the findings support the integrated theoretical framework. Educational equity requires both improved outcomes and fair participation conditions. Inclusive teaching addresses recognition and participation; fair resource allocation addresses redistribution; support programmes provide targeted opportunities; and effective policy implementation connects these elements into sustained practice.

Implications

For the Ministry of Education and district authorities, the findings imply that equity policies should be translated into operational guidelines

specifying minimum expectations for inclusive teaching, resource allocation, support programmes and monitoring. Resource formulas should incorporate school need rather than rely primarily on enrollment.

For school leaders, equity should be incorporated into instructional leadership and school improvement planning. Heads of schools should monitor participation, attendance, retention, resource access and achievement gaps, while supporting teachers to use differentiated and culturally responsive methods.

For teachers, the findings emphasize continuous professional development in inclusive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, formative assessment and support for both struggling and high-ability learners. Teachers should also provide greater opportunities for cognitive engagement and self-regulated learning.

For curriculum developers, the findings indicate a need for learning materials and assessment approaches that recognize diverse backgrounds and learning needs, together with sufficient timetable space for support activities.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that equity-oriented approaches can significantly improve educational outcomes in public secondary schools in Kibaha

District. Inclusive teaching was strongly associated with student engagement, fairer resource conditions were associated with higher access and retention, and systematic support programmes were associated with smaller achievement gaps. Nevertheless, implementation remained uneven because of inadequate resources, large classes, insufficient teacher preparation, unclear policy guidance and weak monitoring.

The evidence suggests that equity should be understood as a system rather than a single intervention. Improvements in teaching practice, resource distribution and student support need to operate together and require strong policy implementation and institutional leadership.

1. Develop clear operational guidelines for implementing equity-oriented education at school level, including measurable standards for inclusive teaching, resource distribution and support programmes.
2. Revise resource allocation mechanisms so that funding and learning materials are distributed according to identified need, with additional support directed to disadvantaged rural schools.
3. Provide sustained in-service training on inclusive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, culturally responsive teaching, support

programmes and gender-sensitive strategies.

4. Establish systematic remedial and enrichment programmes with clear identification procedures, dedicated time, responsible staff, monitoring tools and progress reviews.
5. Strengthen school-level monitoring and district-level accountability by tracking access, attendance, retention, participation and achievement gaps across student subgroups.
6. Reduce the instructional effects of overcrowding through teacher deployment, class-size management and appropriate learning-resource provision.
7. Strengthen school leadership capacity to coordinate equity-oriented practices, mobilize resources and engage parents and communities.
8. Undertake longitudinal and comparative studies to determine the longer-term effects and cost-effectiveness of equity-oriented approaches across Tanzanian districts.

Limitations

The study was confined to public secondary schools in Kibaha District, limiting direct generalization to other Tanzanian districts. Its cross-sectional design captured conditions during the study period and could not establish long-term causal effects. Some measures relied on self-reported

perceptions, which may be affected by response bias. Academic performance records were not equally complete across all schools, and the study did not include parents or community members as primary respondents. These limitations were partly addressed through mixed-methods triangulation and document review.

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