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RESEARCH ARTICLE

ROLE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PRACTICES IN RWANDA, A CASE OF GASABO DISTRICT

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Abstract

This study explored the role of community engagement in implementation of Inclusive Education practices in Gasabo District, Rwanda. The research investigated four key dimensions: community awareness, socio-economic factors, community participation, and social-cultural influences on Inclusive Education implementation. Through qualitative methodology, the study engaged 64 stakeholders, including headteachers, local leaders, and parents of children with and without disabilities, using purposive and convenience sampling methods. Data were analyzed using thematic, narrative, and interpretive approaches. Key findings revealed limited understanding of Inclusive Education concepts and practices among community members, with significant knowledge gaps in supporting children with disabilities. Socio-economic barriers, including resource constraints and high costs of specialized learning materials, created educational exclusion. Community participation was found to be insufficient, lacking structured engagement frameworks. Social-cultural factors showed persistent stigma and misconceptions, though community solidarity and religious values provided some support. The study recommends implementing long-term community awareness campaigns, engaging local and religious leaders to address cultural beliefs about disability, and developing strategies to overcome financial barriers in accessing Inclusive Education. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of active parent-community engagement through regular communication and workshops. These findings contribute to the development of monitoring and evaluation frameworks for Inclusive Education programs and promote partnerships and help correct misconceptions about disability and highlight the benefits of inclusive education for all children by fostering campaigns among government agencies, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and community stakeholders in implementation of Inclusive Education practices in Rwanda.

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Introduction:-

Inclusive Education is a vital aspect of educational reform aimed at ensuring that all learners, regardless of their background or abilities, have access to quality education (Obah& Amerie, 2024). Inclusive Education is the most effective way to give all children a fair chance to go to school, learn and develop the skills they need to thrive. This means that all children sit in the same classrooms, in the same schools (UNICEF, 2023). This is because Inclusive Education is a multifaceted concept that encompasses various dimensions aimed at promoting equitable access, participation, and success in education for all learners, including those with diverse backgrounds, abilities, and needs (Mitchell, 2015)

In the United States, community engagement in education has been highlighted as an effective means to enhance inclusive practices. The partnerships between schools and community organizations facilitated the provision of resources and support for students with disabilities, leading to improved academic outcomes and social integration (Bailey & Glover, 2019). This underscores the importance of collective efforts in creating Inclusive Educational environments. Additionally, the successful Inclusive Education requires ongoing dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders, further reinforcing the need for community engagement as a vital component of educational policy (Peters, 2020).

In Nigeria, the role of community engagement in Inclusive Education practices has been underscored through various initiatives. According to Eke et al. (2019), community-based organizations in Nigeria have been instrumental in advocating for the rights of children with disabilities and facilitating their integration into mainstream schools. These organizations have conducted sensitization programs to educate communities about the importance of Inclusive Education, resulting in greater acceptance and support for children with disabilities (Eke et al., 2019). This example illustrates the critical role of community engagement in overcoming barriers to Inclusive Education.

In Uganda, community engagement plays a crucial role in advancing Inclusive Education objectives. Capacity building and training programs are also essential components of community engagement in Uganda's Inclusive Education policy. The government, in collaboration with NGOs and development partners, provides training for teachers, parents, and community leaders on inclusive teaching methods, disability awareness, and positive behavior. (Kiyingi &Chigambo, 2020). UNESCO (2018) posit that these committees consist of community members, parents, teachers, and school administrators who work together to address issues related to school governance, resource allocation, and student welfare. Through these committees, communities actively participate in decision-making processes and contribute to the development of Inclusive Education practices. The government, in collaboration with NGOs and development partners, provides training for teachers, parents, and community leaders on inclusive teaching methods, disability awareness, and positive behavior support strategies (Kiyingi &Chigambo, 2020).Ministry of Education and Sports of Uganda, conducts regular reviews and assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of community participation in Inclusive Education and identify areas for improvement (Almazan et al., 2017). According to Akinyi and Mutua (2018), the challenge of community engagement in implementing Inclusive Education is the lack of awareness among community members about the importance of inclusive practices. Ochieng and Wambua (2019) observe that the limited resources and infrastructure available in rural areas, hindering effective community participation in Inclusive Education initiatives. Additionally, the issue of cultural beliefs and stigma surrounding disabilities, which can impede community support for Inclusive Education programs (Musyoka and Kariuki, 2020).

In Rwanda, Inclusive Education is a key priority within the education sector, as outlined in the country's Vision 2020 and Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP 2018). The government of Rwanda has taken steps to promote Inclusive Education through policies, programs, and partnerships aimed at ensuring that every learner, including those with disabilities, receives quality education. Community engagement is recognized as essential for the successful implementation of Inclusive Education initiatives in Rwanda (Kwizera 2021). Community engagement involves the active participation of various stakeholders, including families, local leaders, and the civil society, in the education process (African Change Stories, 2024). Local communities, including parents, teachers, local leaders, and civil society organizations, play vital roles in supporting the needs of diverse learners and creating inclusive school environments. Community engagement in Inclusive Education is guided by the principles of participation, transparency, and accountability (REB, 2020).Rwanda, like many other countries, the pursuit of Inclusive Education is integral to fostering equitable access to quality education for all learners, regardless of their background, abilities, or circumstances (MINEDUC, 2015). Despite concerted efforts by the government and

various stakeholders to promote inclusive practices within the education system, challenges persist, particularly in the realm of community engagement. Gasabo district, located in the central region of Rwanda (Kigali City), represents a microcosm of these challenges, where the effective involvement of communities in the implementation of Inclusive Education remains a significant concern. Despite these efforts, community engagement in the implementation of Inclusive Education remains constrained by various factors that pose a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the role of community engagement in facilitating the successful implementation of inclusive practices. Addressing these challenges is crucial for advancing Inclusive Education goals and ensuring the holistic development and well-being of all learners. Limited awareness and understanding of Inclusive Education concepts among community members, including parents, caregivers, and local leaders, hinder their active participation and support for inclusive initiatives (Nyiramugisha & Mutsinzi, 2019). Additionally, socio-cultural norms and perceptions about disability and difference may contribute to stigma, discrimination, and social exclusion, to learners with disabilities and their families (Nkubito&Tuyisenge, 2018). The study aimed to explore these issues in-depth, identify best practices, and develop actionable recommendations to strengthen community engagement and promote Inclusive Education in the Gasabo district and beyond.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the role of community engagement on Implementation of Inclusive Education practices in Gasabo District-Rwanda.

This study was guided by the following specific objectives:

1. To investigate influence of community awareness on Implementation of Inclusive Education practices in Gasabo District.
2. To evaluate the influence of socio-economic factors on Implementation of Inclusive Education practices in Gasabo District.
3. To assess the influence of community participation on implementation of Inclusive Education practices in Gasabo District.
4. To examine the influence of social culture on Implementation of Inclusive Education practices in Gasabo District.

Literature Review:-

Theoretical Literature

A review of community engagement in the implementation of Inclusive Education in Rwanda indicates a multi-faceted strategies that encompasses social, cultural, and institutional dimensions (REB,2023). The involvement of community stakeholders, including parents, local leaders, and civil society organizations, is crucial in fostering an Inclusive Educational environment. Community engagement is recognized as essential for the successful implementation of Inclusive Education initiatives in Rwanda(Harper, 2018).

Community engagements and Implementation of Inclusive Education practices

Community awareness plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of Inclusive Education. Literature indicates that when communities are informed about the principles and benefits of Inclusive Education, they become active supporters and advocates (Johnson & Kagabo, 2022). This heightened awareness leads to better cooperation among parents, educators, and policymakers, creating an environment conducive to meeting the diverse needs of all students. Additionally, it helps in reducing stigmas associated with disabilities, fostering acceptance and understanding within the community (Smith, 2017).Community awareness plays a critical role in achieving successful Inclusive Education in Rwanda, offering numerous potential benefits that enhance educational outcomes for all students, particularly those with disabilities. One of the primary benefits of community awareness is the mobilization of resources. When communities are actively involved, they can pool resourcesboth financial and non-financialto support Inclusive Education initiatives. Community engagement leads to increased awareness and advocacy for the rights of children with disabilities. By involving community members in educational processes, there is a greater dissemination of knowledge regarding the importance of Inclusive Education. This can shift societal attitudes and reduce stigma towards children with disabilities. Community engagement fosters social integration by promoting interactions among diverse groups. Inclusive Education is not just about physical access to schools but also about integrating children with disabilities into the social fabric of the school community. When the broader community is involved, it encourages students to interact with peers from different backgrounds, fostering a culture of inclusion and mutual respect. This social integration is crucial for the personal development of all students and for building cohesive communities. Sustained commitment is another significant benefit of community engagement. When communities are interested in the educational system, there is a long-term commitment to

maintaining and improving inclusive practices. Through social networks, stakeholders can collaborate more efficiently to mobilize resources needed for Inclusive Education. This includes financial resources, expertise, and material support. Mugisha and Mutesa (2020) argue that social networks enable communities to leverage collective resources and expertise, thereby overcoming challenges that individual stakeholders might face. This collective effort is particularly important in resource-constrained environments where the implementation of Inclusive Education might otherwise be hindered (Mugisha &Mutesa, 2020).

Social networks provide platforms for advocacy and support, which are critical for the promotion and implementation of Inclusive Education policies. Byabagambi (2019) highlights that these networks can amplify the voices of parents and community members who advocate for the rights of children with disabilities. Through collective advocacy, social networks can influence policy changes and the allocation of resources towards Inclusive Education initiatives (Byabagambi, 2019). Social networks encourage the exchange of ideas and best practices, leading to innovative solutions for challenges related to Inclusive Education. When educators, parents, and community members share their experiences and strategies, they can collectively develop more effective and contextually appropriate solutions. Mugisha and Mutesa (2020) emphasize that this collaborative problem-solving approach is crucial for adapting Inclusive Education practices to local contexts and for continuously improving them based on feedback and shared experiences (Mugisha &Mutesa, 2020).

Socio-economic Factors and Inclusive Education

Socio-economic Factors significantly influence the implementation and success of Inclusive Education. These factors include the availability of resources, financial stability, and socio-economic status of families and communities. According to Smith (2017), families with higher socio-economic status are more likely to have access to educational resources, which enhances learning opportunities for children with special needs. Conversely, communities with limited resources may struggle to provide adequate support for Inclusive Education, leading to disparities in educational outcomes (Johnson &Kagabo, 2022). Additionally, socio-economic disparities can affect teacher training and the provision of necessary accommodations for students with disabilities (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Community participation and Inclusive Education

Community engagement helps in mobilizing resources, both financial and human, essential for creating and maintaining Inclusive Education settings. Community members can contribute through fundraising, volunteering, and providing expertise, thereby addressing resource gaps (Smith, 2017). The community helps in raising awareness about the importance of Inclusive Education and reducing stigma associated with disabilities. Communities play a vital role in advocating for policies that support Inclusive Education. They can influence local and national governments to implement and fund Inclusive Education initiatives, ensuring that schools have the necessary support structures in place (Johnson &Kagabo, 2022).

A well-informed and engaged community creates a supportive environment for Inclusive Education. Parents, teachers, and community members collaborate to ensure that inclusive practices are effectively implemented, leading to better educational outcomes for all students (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Community involvement allows for ongoing feedback, helping schools to continuously improve their inclusive practices. This participatory approach ensures that the needs of all students are met and that Inclusive Education initiatives are responsive to the community's unique context (Nshuti, 2018).

Social culture and Inclusive Education

Culture significantly influences the implementation of Inclusive Education by shaping attitudes, beliefs, and practices within educational systems and communities. Cultural norms and values can either facilitate or hinder the acceptance and integration of Inclusive Education practices. Conventional customs and beliefs can either facilitate or obstruct Inclusive Education. According to Lee, 2018; Brown, 2022) in certain cultures, communal living and support are highly valued, which can be advantageous for Inclusive Education. On the other hand, in cultures that place a high value on uniformity and conformity, inclusive practices may encounter opposition. A cultural aspect that affects inclusion is the level of community involvement in schooling. Inclusive Education programs typically have greater success in communities when residents actively participate in school activities and support inclusive practices. A study conducted by Davis (2021) discovered that Inclusive Education programs were carried out more successfully in places where there was a high level of parental advocacy and involvement.

Cultural attitudes and beliefs about disability and diversity play a crucial role in shaping Inclusive Education practices. Societies that value diversity and inclusivity are more likely to support Inclusive Education policies and practices (Smith, 2017). Social culture influences the level of community engagement and support for Inclusive Education. In communities where there is a strong tradition of collective responsibility and mutual aid, there is often more active participation in creating inclusive environments. This includes advocacy for necessary resources and support for inclusive practices (Johnson & Kagabo, 2022). The level of community engagement in education, which is often culturally driven, affects the implementation of Inclusive Education. In cultures where community involvement in education is high, there tends to be more support for Inclusive Education initiatives. This community support is crucial for mobilizing resources and fostering a supportive environment for all students.

Cultural norms and values shape educational practices and pedagogies. For example, cultures that emphasize collaborative learning and community involvement are likely to adopt inclusive teaching methods that cater to diverse learning needs (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Conversely, cultures that prioritize competition and individual achievement may face challenges in implementing Inclusive Education. Social culture also influences the development and implementation of policies and legislation related to Inclusive Education. Cultural values around equity, justice, and human rights can drive the creation of policies that promote Inclusive Education. In societies where these values are deeply embedded, there is often stronger legislative support for Inclusive Education initiatives (Nshuti, 2018). Cultural factors also impact how policies related to Inclusive Education are developed and implemented. Policymakers must consider cultural contexts when designing and implementing Inclusive Education policies to ensure they are culturally appropriate and effective. Inclusive Education is also impacted by cultural perspectives on professional development and teacher roles. It is imperative to implement training programs that prioritize cultural competence and inclusive teaching methodologies. Research indicates that educators with training in Inclusive Education and cultural contexts are more capable of managing diverse classrooms (Garcia, 2020; Patel, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

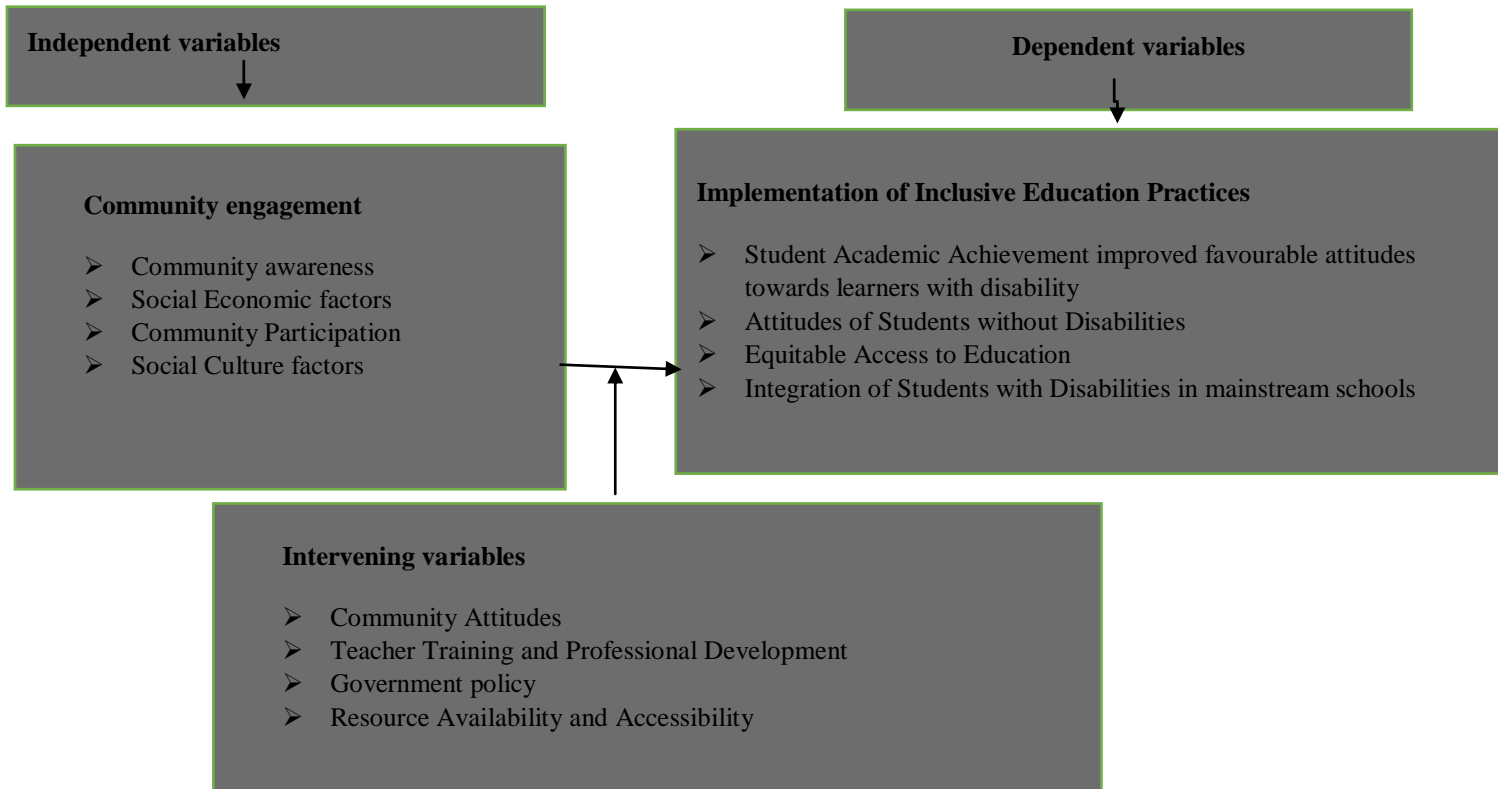
The theoretical framework for this study on role of community engagement on implementation of inclusive education as established in Social Capital Theory as articulated by Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988), emphasizes the value of social networks and relationships in fostering community engagement and collective action. Social capital is the network of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively. Ensure that resources, such as training, funding, and materials, are distributed effectively across the network to support inclusive education initiatives. Establish feedback mechanisms within the network to monitor progress and address challenges. Use network analysis tools to collect and analyze data on the network's structure, interactions, and outcomes. Study conducted by McPherson et al. (2021) examined how social capital affects students' scholastic attainment in underprivileged communities. According to the study, adolescents who had strong social networks including ties to their families, communities, and schools had a higher chance of succeeding academically. The study emphasized the role that social capital plays in offering resources and assistance that improve educational achievements. Villalonga et al. (2020) conducted a study in which they assessed the connection between social capital and public health outcomes. The study showed that societies with greater social capital were better equipped to handle the difficulties brought on by the pandemic. According to Smith and Christakis' (2019) concentrated on role of social capital in urban community development initiatives. The study revealed that communities with social capital had greater success putting development plans into action, like enhancing the quality of the local services and infrastructure. Collaboration and group effort were made easier by social capital, which was essential to the success projects. This information helped in refining strategies and enhancing the network of effectiveness. Encourage collective efficacy, where community members believe in their collective ability to achieve inclusive education goals.

Applied to Inclusive Education, social capital theory suggests that strong, supportive networks among parents, teachers, community leaders, and policymakers can enhance the implementation of Inclusive Education. When communities possess high levels of social capital, they are more likely to support inclusive practices and provide the necessary resources and advocacy for students with disabilities. This refers to the networks and connections within a community. In the context of Rwanda, structural social capital includes the relationships between parents, teachers, local leaders, and educational institutions that facilitate the implementation of Inclusive Education.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework specifies the relationship between community engagement and implementation of inclusive education practices. The figure below presents how community engagement affects implantation of inclusive education practices.

Conceptual Framework



Source: Researcher (2024)

Research Methodology:-

Research design

A case study is a qualitative research design that involves a comprehensive examination of a single case or multiple cases within their real-life context (Yin, 2018). This study employed descriptive case study design to describe the role of the community engagement on the implementation of inclusive education practices. The study uses qualitative data collection and analysis techniques, offering a comprehensive perspective on the research (Creswell, 2014). Thematic approach was designed to capture data on key variables such as the frequency of community participation in school activities, awareness levels of Inclusive Education policies, and perceived effectiveness of these initiatives (Bryman, 2016). Qualitative method provided deeper insights into the experiences and perspectives of stakeholders. This approach helps to uncover the nuanced challenges and facilitators of community engagement in Inclusive Education (Patton, 2015). Researcher used this approach to deeply investigate and analyze the perspectives of respondents on community engagement and implementation of inclusive education practices in Gasabo District

Target population

The target population of this research comprises 64 stakeholders including headteachers, parents of children without and parents of children with disabilities, and local government officials from Gikomero sector of Gasabo.

Sample design

This section presents the sampling techniques which were used by the researcher to identify sample size from which data were collected.

Sample Size Determination

The research used the formula that Yamane Taro (1967), as cited by Agbionu (2016); to determine a sample.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Using Yamane's formula $n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$ where n represent sample size, N represent target population of the study, e is the expected degree of precisions where $e = 1 - P$ and P is **0.95** then $e = 1 - 0.95$, $e = 0.05$ presented at 95% confidence level to obtain:

$$n = \frac{70}{1 + 70(0.05)^2} = 64 \text{ participants}$$

Table 3.1:- Target Population and Sampled Size.

Respondents	Population	Sample
Headteachers	4	4
Parents to learners without disability	22	20
Parents to learners with disabilities	22	20
Local community leaders	22	20
Total	70	64

Source: Gasabo (2024)

Sampling Techniques

By using a case study approach, researcher enriched, contextualized insights into community members. To explore the interplay between independent variables and Dependent variables the researcher employed purposive and Convenience sampling techniques. This method ensures that key informants who can provide valuable insights into community engagement and inclusive education practices are included in the study.

Research Findings and Discussions:-

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This research gathered data age group, gender, professional qualifications, and teaching experience of respondents in lower primary public schools in Kicukiro District, Rwanda.

Age Group of Respondents

Age of respondents are parents, headteachers and local community leaders of Gasabo District, researcher treats it can impact their findings and the statistical methods that interact with other variables.

Table 4.1:- Age Group of Respondent.

Age group	Frequency	Percentage
21-25	3	4.5
26-30	12	18.6
31-35	15	23.3
36-40	15	23.3
41 and above	19	29.3
Total	64	100%

Source: Primary data (2024)

The findings show that 3(4.5 %) of respondents are between age of 21 and 25 years old, 12(18.6) of respondents are between 26 and 30 years old, 15(23.3%) are between 31 and 35 years old while 15(23.3%) are between 36 and 40

years old and 19(29.3%) represents age between 41 years old and above. This reveals that most of the respondents (70.6%) are aged 32 years old and above.

Gender of Respondents

The study sought to establish gender of respondents who participated in interview guide and focus group indicate their gender.

Table 4.2:- Gender of Respondents.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	37	57.8
Male	27	42.2
Total	64	100.0

Source: Primary Data (2024)

37(57.8%) of respondents represents female while 27(42.2%) of respondents represents male. This could be due to the subject of the research being more relevant or appealing to female participants, or it could reflect gender-based trends in engagement with the topic. The over-representation of female respondents means that conclusions drawn from this study might be more reflective of female perspectives or experiences.

Professional Qualification of Respondents

Through the interview guide and focus group discussion, the current researcher intended to understand the qualification level of participants.

Table 4.3:- Professional Qualification of Respondents.

Professional qualification	Frequency	Percentage
Advanced Certificate A2	17	26.6
Diplomat A1	12	18.7
Bachelor A0	30	46.9
Postgraduate	5	7.8
Total	64	100

Source: Primary Data (2024)

Table 4.3 presents that 64 participants including parents, headteachers and local community leaders, 17(26.6%) of respondents hold an Advanced Certificates, 12(18.7%) of respondents hold Diploma and 30(46.9%) of respondents hold Bachelor while 5(7.8) hold Postgraduate. This indicates that there is a higher representation of individuals with Bachelor's degrees, and indicating that education is valued across the board.

Working Experiences of Respondents

Through interview guides research sought to ask headteachers and local community leaders about the experience in leadership position

Table 4.4:- Teaching Experience.

Working Experience	Frequency	Percentage
0 to 2	2	8.3
3-5	3	12.5
6-8	8	33.3
9 and above	11	45.9
Total	24	100

Source: Primary Data (2024)

Table 4.4 presents that 24 respondents represent all local community leaders and headteachers who attended interview. 2(8.3) of respondents have experience between 0 and 2 years yet, 3(12.5%) of respondents have experience between 3- and 5 years and 8(33.3%) of respondents have experience between 6 and 8 years while 11(45.9%) of respondents have experience of 9 years and above. This variation indicates that few of the officers are relatively new, while others have extensive experience, offering a blend of fresh perspectives and

seasoned expertise. This shows that most of the respondents have substantial experience, which could mean that they have been involved in education systems and community engagement efforts for a considerable period.

Presentation of Findings

This section explores Role of community engagement on implementation of Inclusive Education practices in Gasabo. The purpose of the study is to investigate the role of community engagement on Implementation of Inclusive Education practices in Gasabo District-Rwanda.

Community Awareness on Implementation of Inclusive Education

This study intended to investigate the level of community awareness on implementation of Inclusive Education.

Understanding of Inclusive Education

The study established that there is a shared understanding that Inclusive Education aims to provide opportunities for all students, including those from vulnerable backgrounds and students with disabilities. The respondents emphasize the non-discriminatory nature of Inclusive Education, which aims to integrate all children regardless of their abilities, socio-economic status, or gender. One respondent highlighted that in Inclusive Education, “students from poor family’s study together with students from rich families... boys together with girls.” This understanding is aligned with global principles of inclusive education, which seek to integrate students in a single learning environment. However, 34 respondents still narrowly define Inclusive Education as being primarily for students with disabilities, suggesting that while there is general awareness, conceptual clarity about what Inclusive Education truly encompasses is lacking. Some community members think “it is education for disabled students, as they face problems to study with other children without disabilities and in Inclusive Education students with disabilities have their program designed only for them related to their difficulties ” which reflects an incomplete understanding on inclusive Education. When communities are informed about the principles and benefits of Inclusive Education, they become active supporters and advocates (Johnson &Kagabo, 2022).

Sources of Information about Inclusive Education

The study sought to establish source of information on Inclusive Education primary sources of information for most respondents include radio, television, meetings, and training sessions organized by stakeholders. These media channels are accessible, but may not be sufficient in reaching all community members. Two parents in focused group discussion indicated that using radio and community meetings as sources, but also admitted that the community at large is not fully informed. While these sources are useful, they seem to lack the depth necessary to ensure that people have a complete understanding of what inclusive education entails. These networks can amplify the voices of parents and community members who advocate for the rights of children with disabilities Byabagambi(2019). This indicates the need for more comprehensive, community-centered awareness programs, especially in remote areas or areas with limited access to formal media.

Community Awareness Level

The general perception across respondents is that community awareness of Inclusive Education is still low. The data show that many people in Gasabo District view inclusive education narrowly as a program for disabled children, and there is a prevalent misunderstanding about the broader goals of inclusion. One headteacher said, "Parents do not care for education of children with disabilities," indicating a lack of awareness about the value of inclusive education for all children. The study findings highlighted traditional beliefs and stigmatization as barriers to raising awareness. Traditional views on disability and education continue to affect how families engage with the concept of inclusive education.

Impact of Increased Community Awareness

Despite the challenges, there have been some positive outcomes when awareness has been raised. Headteacher; **“increased awareness has led to more parents sending their children to school, including those with disabilities.”** Sector Education Inspector also emphasized that the level of community initiative is still low. Slee (2017), indicated that addressing stigma and promoting understanding through community engagement are crucial for advancing Inclusive Education. According to sector social affair said; “Some parents have begun to provide basic materials to their children after awareness initiatives, but a significant gap remains in more active community support.” For instance, “parents often send only able-bodied children to school while leaving children with disabilities at home, as seen in the case where one child was left at home due to distance barriers.” said Social Economic Development officer. (Harper, 2018) Expressed that community engagement is recognized as essential

for the successful implementation of Inclusive Education initiatives in Rwanda. This indicates that community awareness needs to be improved by changing mindset within community.

Initiatives for Raising Community Awareness

“Efforts to raise community awareness, so far, have largely been limited to sensitization during community meetings to the other side the impact has been done, with some people resistant to changing their traditional mindsets about education and disability.” Saidi One person represents people with disabilities in Cell. According to one headteacher, Community engagement is crucial in changing perceptions, and there are examples where school committees and advocacy groups have begun to involve parents more actively in Inclusive Education initiatives. (Mugisha & Mutesa, 2020) stated that by leveraging these structures, the education system can better address the diverse needs of students. “In a village there was parent who used to carry her physically disabled child to school and she stopped doing so because of the long distance made as she had to care for the other children” This reflects how socio-economic challenges intertwined with cultural norms anticipate learners with disability in Inclusive Education while local leaders and school committees have made efforts, the full involvement of the community is still work in progress.

Cultural and Socio-Economic Barriers

Traditional beliefs and stigmatization continue to limit the understanding and implementation of Inclusive Education. Some people in the community still see disabilities as shameful or view the inclusion of children with disabilities as unnecessary or secondary to the education of able-bodied children. According Davis (2021) discovered that Inclusive Education programs were carried out more successfully in places where there was a high level of parental advocacy and involvement. One of village leaders said that “Traditional beliefs lead to lower community expectations for children with disabilities like where community members conclude that Inclusive Education is for people with disabilities.” At the same time, limited resources both financial and infrastructural are hindering the broader implementation of Inclusive Education. According to Mugisha and Mutesa (2020) social networks enable communities to leverage collective resources and expertise, thereby overcoming challenges that individual stakeholders might face. Schools lack the necessary materials, trained personnel, and physical accommodations (e.g., ramps, specialized classrooms and sanitary facilities) to support all learners inclusively.

The Influence of Socio-economic Factors on Implementation of Inclusive Education

The study sought to evaluate the influence of socio-economic factors on implementation of Inclusive Education. This section contains the findings from perspectives of focus group discussion, headteachers and local community leaders on socio-economic factors.

Financial Barriers to Accessing Inclusive Education

Data collected from focus group discussion reveal that family financial circumstances have a direct impact on the ability to support children with disabilities in accessing Inclusive Education. One parent of a child with disability said, “My family is unable to afford the transportation costs for my child who needs to travel long distances to reach school that offer inclusive services as specialized school or programs designed for students with significant disabilities is financially out of reach for us. So, we decided to send our child who has problem of autism in a nearby school where he does not get appropriate support needed and he is not motivated to attend class.” With limited resources families may struggle to provide adequate support for Inclusive Education, leading to disparities in educational outcomes (Johnson & Kagabo, 2022). Another parent stated “parents do not afford the special school for students with special disabilities due to the cost like my daughter has hearing impairment and it required me to send her to special school where they use sign languages and found school that charged me five hundred thousand per term which I was unable to pay now child is struggling to learn with others in day school where teachers do not communicate with her except in writing,” This shows how socio-economic conditions restrict access to tailored educational environments that could benefit children with unique needs. Parents face challenges in providing the necessary educational materials for children with disabilities. These materials are often expensive, and without external support, many children are left behind.

Lack of Specialized Resources

The availability of specialized assistive device and trained teachers is a crucial aspect of implementing Inclusive Education. However, the financial limitations of schools and families result in a lack of these necessary supports. One Headteacher reported,

“Schools struggle to afford assistive devices, such as hearing aids or visual aids, which are essential for students with sensory impairments and schools do not have trained teachers who are able to deal needs of students especially those who have visual and hearing impairments.” For instance, “students with visual and hearing impairments and deaf learners are not well supported due to the financial burden associated with acquiring such materials within school.”

Particularly, importance in resource-constrained environments where the implementation of Inclusive Education might otherwise be hindered (Mugisha & Mutesa, 2020). The limited availability of these resources results in students feeling stigmatized and excluded from their peer groups, contributing to a sense of alienation and reinforcing social inequalities. A parent of a child with visual impairment said, “My child needs most access to specialized resources like braille books, audio recordings, and possibly digital tools designed for visually impaired learners. Due to the lack of these resources, he repeated two times in primary two because he is lacking these materials and in his primary one, his teachers used to teach him using different materials that he could touch and feel and he succeeded. Teachers need training to better understand how to work with students like my child. If these resources were provided, he wouldn’t just be struggling to keep up; I know he could thrive. I believe that with the right tools, children with visual impairments can perform just as well as their peers.” According to Mugisha and Mutesa (2020) lack of specialized resources-constrained environments where the implementation of Inclusive Education might otherwise be hindered. This shows that lack of resources, insufficient teacher training, and an education system that does not fully support the needs of students with disabilities. These factors contribute to the academic delays and emotional frustration experienced by the children with disabilities.

Marginalization and Stigmatization within Families and Communities

Data collected from local leaders consistently point to the marginalization of children with disabilities within families and communities. Due to socio-economic pressures, parents often prioritize children without disabilities over those with disabilities, leading to the marginalization of the latter. The long journeys and lack of accommodations further exacerbate these inequalities. One of social Economic Development Officer observed that

“In the Cell found a child with physical disabilities aged at 12 years old rocked up at home without being sent to school and parent indicated that she was unable to afford the necessary support as her partner left them due to the conflict caused by disability in family.” Additionally, the stigma attached to disabilities creates psychological and emotional barriers that prevent children with disabilities from fully participating in the community. This social exclusion is compounded by family conflicts, as caring for children with disabilities can become a significant burden, particularly for low-income household. Some families experience strain or even abandonment, with one parent pushing the responsibility onto the other. Community members can contribute through fundraising, volunteering, and providing expertise, thereby addressing resource gaps (Smith, 2017).

Socio-Economic Disparities Among Schools

The data show clear disparities in resources between schools in low-income areas of Gasabo District. Some schools have better access to infrastructure, learning materials, and teacher training, which enables them to provide more comprehensive support for students with disabilities. In contrast, schools in rural areas struggle with these basics, making it difficult to fully implement Inclusive Education. One headteachers observed that, “Schools in low-income areas struggle with inadequate resources such as a lack of specialized equipment like braille. Additionally, schools lack trained personnel.” Socio-economic disparities can affect teacher training and the provision of necessary accommodations for students with disabilities (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). This disparity means that students in these schools do not have the same access to the accommodations that are available in better-funded schools. Socio-economic inequality also affects the training capacity of teachers in inclusive settings. Teachers in urban schools are more likely to receive specialized training, while those in low-income areas often do not have the skills to handle diverse classrooms effectively.

Parental Engagement and Socio-Economic Status

Parental involvement in the implementation of Inclusive Education is significantly influenced by socio-economic factors. Parents from higher-income households are generally more engaged in their children’s education, while parents from low-income households struggle to participate in their children’s education due to economic hardship. One parent highlighted, “many parents work long hours or multiple jobs, which leaves them little time to attend school meetings or actively engage in their children’s education.” The absence of parental involvement is a significant barrier to the effective implementation of Inclusive Education, as it limits the collaboration needed

between teachers, parents, and the broader community. “Some families are struggling to meet basic needs which affects their ability to prioritize the education of children with disabilities. some parents decide not to send their children to school at all due to financial and logistical constraints.” Given by Sector Education Inspector. According to Smith (2017), families with higher socio-economic status are more likely to have access to educational resources, which enhances learning opportunities for children with special needs.

Mitigation Measures by Schools and Community Organizations

Despite the socio-economic challenges, some schools have taken proactive steps to mitigate the effects of poverty on Inclusive Education. Schools have initiated community-based partnerships to provide resources for students from low-income families. These partnerships with NGOs, churches, and community organizations help reduce the financial burden on parents by providing materials such as books, supporting devices and uniforms. One of headteachers said “We have built partnerships with NGOs...to provide supporting devices and school materials, presenting how collaboration with external organizations helps bridge the resource gap in underfunded schools. The government, with support from local communities, has introduced a school feeding program to address one of the most pressing socio-economic barriers. By ensuring that students receive at least one nutritious meal per day, this program has improved attendance and participation, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.” This initiative highlights how community engagement can play a key role in mitigating the socio-economic barriers that affect Inclusive Education. Study conducted by Osei et al. (2021) found that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a crucial role in bridging the gap caused by socio-economic disparities. The socio-economic factors in Gasabo District significantly hinder the full implementation of Inclusive Education. Financial constraints, lack of specialized resources, and socio-economic disparities between families and schools create barriers that prevent children with disabilities from accessing the same educational opportunities as their peers.

The Influence of Community Participation on Implementation of Inclusive Education

The study sought to determine community participation on implementation of Inclusive education.

Forms of Community Participation in Inclusive Education

Parents and the broader community play a vital role in supporting the implementation of Inclusive Education in several ways. Gelardine (2018) emphasized that community engagement is crucial for creating inclusive educational environments, particularly in settings where resources are limited. Headteachers said, “some parents participate in regular school meetings where they discuss issues related to Inclusive Education. They share ideas, experiences, and provide input on how to improve inclusion for children with disabilities. In one instance, parents organized fundraising events to purchase educational materials that support children with different learning abilities, fostering a more inclusive environment in classrooms.” Akinyi and Mutua (2018) explored the strategies used by communities to support inclusive education. This illustrates how community collaboration can address resource gaps. Parents said, “We actively buy learning materials for our children and ensure they attend school regularly, regardless of disabilities. we also encourage children to study and succeed, showing commitment to their children’s education.” And One of Social Economic Development officers expressed, “Some community members provide support for transportation and equipment for children with disabilities, such as arranging wheelchair support or pooling resources to facilitate school attendance for those with disabilities.” This presents other way in which community and participate in implementation of Inclusive Education by supporting schools in integration of Inclusive Education.

School Engagement with the Community

The study sought how school engage with community to promote Inclusive Education. According to Headteachers, Schools in Gasabo District have taken several steps to engage the community in Inclusive Education initiatives. One Headteacher asserted, “My school hosts parent meetings where issues related Inclusive Education are discussed and during these meetings foster mutual understanding and collective problem-solving and School General Assembly Committee was established to allow parents, especially those of children with disabilities, to share their challenges and experiences.” These meetings help foster a culture of collaboration between the school and the community. One of Parents stated, “Some schools host cultural events, such as sports days, where children with and without disabilities participate together to present their talents. With cultural event, my child with disability attended this event on talent show in school and she was awarded as best performer in news reporting and best poetess and she was excited for being awarded amongst others from that time she starting feeling comfortable and confident that she was able create poem and she went the broadcasting Agency to present her talent in show busy program and per now she creates poems for different ceremonies regardless her disabilities.” This is a showcase where integration of these

events reduce stigma by showing how inclusion benefits everyone and build individuals' confidences by showing the community that disability is not inability. Headteacher expressed that school organized a sports day where all students, regardless of ability, participated in sport and they played together and students with disabilities well happy to play with other students without disabilities. This event demonstrated how inclusive activities can foster community cohesion and normalize the presence of children with disabilities in everyday life as Harper (2018) discusses how community engagement can enhance the effectiveness of inclusive education initiatives by fostering collaboration between schools, families, and local organizations.

The Influence of Social Culture on Implementation of Inclusive Education

This study sought to examine the influence of Social Culture on implementation of Inclusive Education requesting by analysing data collected local leaders, headteachers and focus group discussion.

Cultural Barriers Hindering Inclusive Education

According to the parents' arguments, in some parts of the community, disabilities are seen as a curse or punishment from God, leading to significant social stigma. One parent conveyed, "some families hide children with disabilities from the public because they feel ashamed and fear of social ostracism and it creates conflicts in family to identify the its originality." This stigmatization results in parents being reluctant to send their children to school, limiting their access to education. Other parent reported, "Some parents believe that educating children with disabilities is a waste of time, keeping them at home and isolating them from their peers and children are often denied the right to play or interact with other children." According to the given examples it is clear that reinforcing the exclusion leads people with disabilities to trauma and a lack of self-esteem. One of representative of people with disabilities stated, "Certain local beliefs perpetuate the idea that disability is hereditary or caused by supernatural forces and this belief system creates discrimination within families and communities, where children with disabilities are marginalized, insulted, and even violated physically and emotionally. Added, some parents view these children as burdens, and in some cases, girls with disabilities face double discrimination due to cultural attitudes that undervalue the education of girls." And one of village leaders said, "the mindset of some families leads to children with disabilities being insulted or given stigmatizing names, which reinforces their exclusion and hinders their integration into mainstream schools." As Kiuppis(2021) focused on the impact of deep-rooted stigmas surrounding disabilities and their role in social exclusion and identified social exclusion as a significant barrier to the successful implementation of inclusive education. Due to cultural misconceptions, children with disabilities often experience emotional trauma. They are denied the opportunity to play, interact, or attend school with their peers, which damages their self-confidence and overall well-being. Sector social affair said, "There are some cases where children with disabilities are insulted by their own parents, and in extreme cases, are subjected to violence or forced into dangerous situations, such as sexual abuse, due to their vulnerability and lack of support from the community." This is simply understood that the community needs to understand the right of people with disability and to make sure that all children are considered the same and having a child with disability is not a curse because they are children like others.

Cultural Practices Supporting Inclusive Education

Despite these challenges, there are aspects of the local culture that support the implementation of Inclusive Education like Community Solidarity. One of village leaders argued that Rwandan culture places a high value on community solidarity and collective responsibility. Once the community understands the importance of Inclusive Education, it can rally to support children with disabilities. "In some cases, religious leaders and community members advocate for compassion and equality, which aligns with the values of inclusion. Faith-based teachings often encourage acceptance of people with disabilities, promoting inclusive values and practices. Religious institutions play an important role in promoting Inclusive Education. Faith leaders often speak about compassion, equality, and the importance of supporting people with disabilities, helping to shift cultural mindsets towards more inclusive practices." As the study of Walton (2020) argued that the success of inclusive education policies depends on their alignment with the social and cultural context of the region. Highlights the critical role of cultural alignment in policy success. Religious leaders and other opinion leaders are crucial proactive roles by discussing the rights of people with disabilities in their sermons, which can help to reshape the perceptions of disabilities in the community and facilitate the implementation of Inclusive Education in community.

Cultural Practices to Promote Inclusive Education

Kiuppis (2021), observed that in many communities, deep-rooted stigmas surrounding disabilities can lead to the social exclusion of students with special needs. District and Sector Education officers responded that Several strategies have been employed to address the cultural barriers to Inclusive Education in Gasabo District including

raising awareness about disabilities and the benefits of Inclusive Education is critical to changing cultural beliefs. One of headteacher stated, “Community-wide initiatives, including meetings and campaigns, help educate parents about the importance of sending children with disabilities to school and avoid misconceptions that segregate these children from others. Campaigns organized by the National Committee for People with Disabilities and other local leaders educate families about the benefits of Inclusive Education, including the positive social impact of inclusive practices.” These leaders can help shift negative perceptions by using their influence to promote inclusion, thereby reaching families of children with disabilities that are not connected to schools or resistant to the idea of integration. One of village leaders, expressed, “in some cases, community leaders have played an active role in organizing discussions and workshops aimed at educating parents on the importance of inclusive education for children with disabilities.” The partnership between schools and local communities, such as through school committees and inclusive events, helps promote Inclusive Education. “Schools collaborate with local leaders and organizations to create cultural events, such as sports days, where children with and without disabilities can interact, fostering inclusion. while cultural beliefs in Gasabo District present significant barriers to the implementation of Inclusive Education, there are also positive cultural values like community solidarity and religious teachings that can support inclusion.” Said Headteacher. Effective strategies to overcome cultural barriers include ongoing community education, sensitization campaigns, and collaboration with influential community leaders. By addressing the deeply rooted misconceptions around disabilities and fostering a more inclusive mindset, community perceptions make further progress toward a fully inclusive education system.

Conclusions and Recommendations:-

Conclusions:-

The study on Role Community Engagement on Implementation of Inclusive Education practices in Gasabo District, Rwanda, underscores its critical influence in both facilitating and impeding educational inclusion efforts. The findings reveal that although some community members and leaders have contributed positively, significant barriers remain, particularly related to limited awareness, cultural stigmas, and socio-economic challenges. The study indicates that community awareness of Inclusive Education is generally low. Many community members narrowly associate it with educating children with disabilities, which leads to limited community involvement and engagement. There is a need for broader community education to enhance understanding that Inclusive Education encompasses all children, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. Cultural stigma around disabilities remains one of the greatest hindrances to effective implementation. Traditional beliefs, particularly in rural areas, marginalize children with disabilities, preventing their full participation in educational systems. Socio-economic challenges also exacerbate these issues, as families with limited resources struggle to afford necessary educational support for children with special needs, leading to exclusion. Where engagement has been achieved, particularly through local leaders, schools, and religious institutions, there has been measurable progress. Increased awareness has led to higher school attendance for children with disabilities and improved attitudes toward inclusion. These efforts, however, are uneven across the district, with rural and low-income areas lagging behind. For Inclusive Education to be successful, collaboration between schools, families, and community leaders is essential. Community meetings, advocacy from religious leaders, and partnerships with NGOs have shown potential in fostering a supportive environment. Strengthening these collaborations and encouraging active parental involvement are key to overcoming the socio-economic and cultural barriers that still exist. The influence of social culture in Gasabo District on the implementation of Inclusive Education is a mix of both barriers and opportunities. While deep-rooted stigma and misconceptions hinder inclusion, cultural values like community solidarity and religious influence offer potential for positive change. Addressing these barriers through education, community sensitization, and partnerships with local leaders is key to fostering a more inclusive mindset and advancing Inclusive Education in the district.

Recommendations:-

Through collaboration with schools, NGOs, and local leaders will help correct misconceptions about disability and highlight the benefits of inclusive education for all children by fostering implementation of long-term community-focused awareness campaigns. These campaigns should clarify that Inclusive Education involves all children, not just those with disabilities, and should be communicated through accessible, culturally relevant channels like local media and community gatherings.

There should be engagement of local leaders and religious leaders for changing social cultural beliefs about disability, as their influence to promote more inclusive attitudes. By integrating messages about inclusion into

sermons, gatherings, and cultural events, these leaders can challenge stigmas and encourage open dialogue in the community.

Financial constraints prevent many families from affording the costs of sending children with disabilities to school, especially for expensive assistive devices and educational materials. To address this, there should be targeted support including scholarships, assistive devices, and the provision of necessary learning tools from schools, government, and NGOs.

Schools should actively engage parents and the community to share responsibility for inclusive practices, using regular communication like parent-teacher meetings and community workshops to foster collaboration. Organizing inclusive events where children with and without disabilities interact can help normalize inclusion, while school committees involving parents, leaders, and educators ensure community participation in decision-making to support inclusive education for all.

Suggestion for Further Study:-

To dive into understanding of the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Rwanda, several studies suggested for further studies related the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Rwanda.

The effect of teacher training programs in equipping educators with the skills needed to implement Inclusive Education.

The contributions of parents of children with disabilities, in promoting Inclusive Education would be beneficial.

The Influence of cultural beliefs on the acceptance of Inclusive Education in different regions of Rwanda.

The effect of technology integration in education to enhance Inclusive Education in Rwanda

The implementation of Rwanda's Inclusive Education policies, identifying challenges at the policy level at school level

The effects of collaboration between government entities, NGOs, and schools that support Inclusive Education.

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