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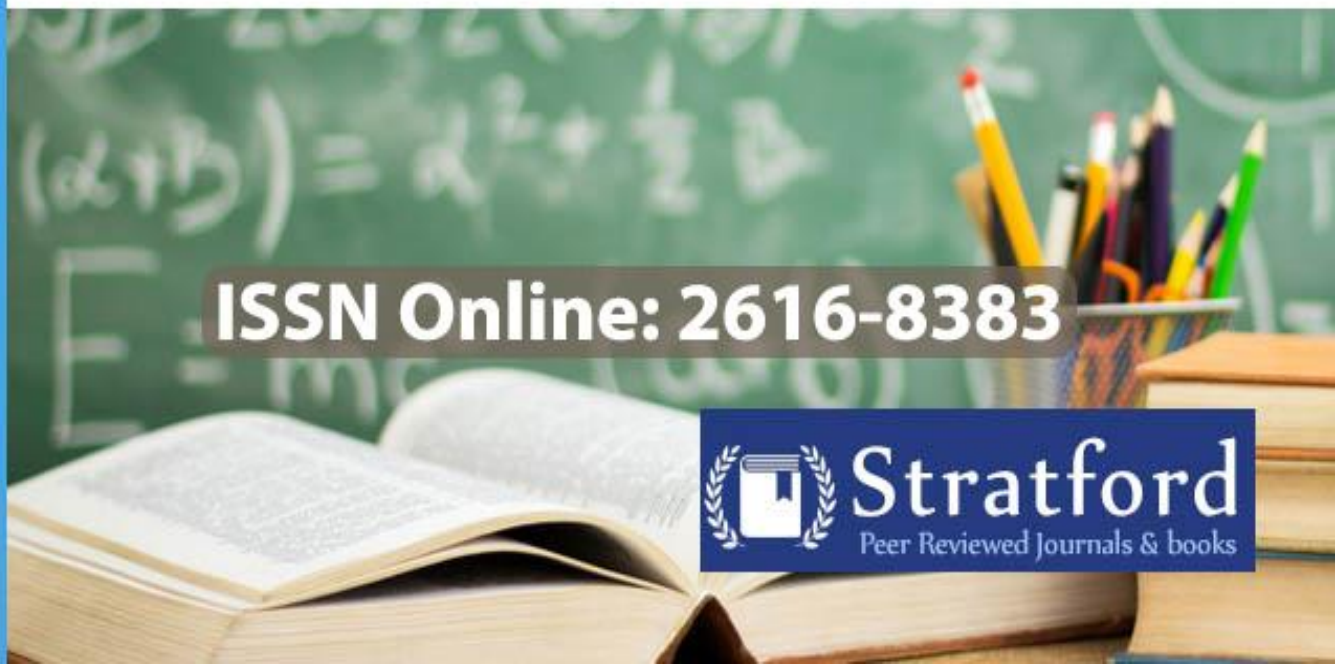

Investigating the Impact of Inclusive Education Policies on Access to Education for Students with Special Needs Education: A Case of Bsvi and Rish Schools of Special Needs in Musanze District, Rwanda (2024-2025)

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of inclusive education policies on the access to education for students with special needs, focusing on BSVI and RISH schools in Musanze District, Rwanda. The research aims to explore how the implementation of inclusive education policies affects the educational opportunities for students with special needs. Using a mixed methods approach, the study gathers both qualitative and quantitative data from surveys, interviews and focus groups with teachers, school administrators, students and parents. The study hypothesized that effective implementation of inclusive education policies enhances educational access for students with special needs and further investigates the role of teacher training in improving teaching practices and student outcomes. Stratified random sampling was applied to ensure a balanced representation of teachers, administrators, students and parents, providing a comprehensive perspective on the challenges and successes in implementing inclusive education policies. While inclusive education policies are impactful, their effectiveness is closely tied to their implementation and continuous support. Teacher training, although beneficial, has a relatively smaller impact compared to infrastructure and policy support in enhancing educational access. This study fills a research gap by examining how these elements work together to improve educational access in Rwanda, where limited studies have addressed their combined effect. In conclusion, the research underscores the necessity of a holistic approach that integrates well trained teachers, adequate infrastructure and strong policy support to ensure equitable access to education for students with special needs.

Keywords: *Inclusion Education Policies, Special Education Needs*

1.0 Introduction

Globally, inclusive education has been identified as a pathway to reducing educational inequalities, promoting social cohesion, and fostering an environment where diversity is respected (Ainscow & Sandill, 2021). Countries around the world, particularly those in the Global South, have made significant strides toward adopting inclusive education policies. However, challenges such as insufficient infrastructure, lack of teacher training, and limited awareness of special educational needs often hinder effective implementation (Norwich, 2020).

Inclusive education has become a cornerstone of educational reform across the globe, driven by the belief that all children, irrespective of their abilities or disabilities, should have equal access to quality education (Armstrong, 2009). Historically, students with disabilities were segregated into special education settings, often isolated from their peers in mainstream schools. This approach was based on the assumption that students with special needs could not thrive in regular educational environments (Ainscow, 2013). However, over the past few decades, a model shift has occurred, favoring inclusive education as a fundamental human right, underpinned by principles of equality and justice.

In Africa, the implementation of inclusive education faces numerous challenges, including large class sizes, lack of resources, poorly trained teachers, and negative societal attitudes toward people with disabilities (Chataika et al., 2021). However, some countries, such as South Africa, Uganda, and Kenya, have made notable progress by developing specific policies and strategies to support the integration of students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms (Mukhopadhyay, 2021). Despite these efforts, the pace of change has been slow, particularly in rural areas where awareness about the needs of children with disabilities is limited. Access to inclusive education for students with special needs remains a significant issue in many African countries, particularly in remote and underserved regions (O'Reilly et al., 2021).

Rwanda, a small landlocked country in East Africa, has made impressive strides in rebuilding and expanding its education system since the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, which left much of the country's infrastructure in ruins. The Rwandan government has prioritized education as a means of national development, with a strong emphasis on improving access to education for all children, including those with disabilities (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Rwanda's Inclusive Education Policy, implemented in 2014, aims to ensure that children with special needs are integrated into the national education system and receive quality education that meets their individual needs. The policy emphasizes the need for physical infrastructure adaptations, teacher training, the provision of specialized learning materials, and an overall commitment to reducing discrimination and stigma (Ministry of Education, 2014). In Rwanda, students with special needs are often segregated into specialized institutions, which may offer some tailored support but are not fully aligned with the inclusive education vision that the government advocates. Specialized schools like BSVI (Blind and Social Vision Impaired) and RISH (Rwanda Institute for Special Needs) in Musanze District provide education specifically for students with disabilities, but there is a growing call for greater integration and inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream schools (Munyaneza & Nduwayo, 2020).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

While the government of Rwanda has adopted inclusive education policies, the actual impact of these policies on access to education for students with special needs remains underexplored (Adero

et al., 2020). There is a need to investigate the extent to which these policies have been implemented in schools like BSVI and RISH in Musanze District, and whether these schools provide students with the necessary resources and support to succeed in an inclusive educational environment (Munyaneza & Nduwayo, 2020).

Additionally, societal attitudes toward disability are a key factor in the effectiveness of inclusive education in Rwanda. Negative views and social stigma surrounding disabilities often lead to the marginalization of students with special needs, both within the classroom and across the wider school community (Shifrer D. (., 2013). This stigma affects not only how peers accept students with disabilities but also how willing teachers are to modify their teaching approaches to accommodate the diverse needs of their students (Heiman, 2004). The absence of support and inclusion fosters an environment where students with disabilities may feel isolated, diminishing the overall impact of inclusive education (Moore, 2013).

This study seeks to explore how inclusive education policies affect students with special needs at the selected schools, identifying both the successes and the challenges faced in ensuring that these students have equal access to educational opportunities (Chataika et al., 2021). It will also examine whether the policies are effectively implemented and if there are gaps between the intentions of the policy and its actual impact in practice (Evans, 2020). To address these issues, a multifaceted approach is necessary, focusing on implementation of inclusive policies resource allocation, teacher training and shifting societal attitudes to create an educational environment where all students, regardless of ability, can thrive together.

1.2 Research Objectives

To assess the effectiveness of implementation of inclusive education policies in promoting physical, academic and social access to education for students with special needs in BSVI and RISH schools in Musanze District, Rwanda.

1.3 Research Hypothesis

There is no significant impact of the implementation of inclusive education policies on the access to education for students with special needs in BSVI and RISH Schools in Musanze District, Rwanda.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 The Medical Model vs. the Social Model of Disability (Hogan, 2019)

Inclusive education policies are largely shaped by the social model of disability, which views disability as a result of societal barriers, rather than an inherent limitation of the individual (Vlachou, 2004). This framework emphasizes the need to adapt educational environments to accommodate the diverse needs of all learners, focusing on removing barriers to participation in mainstream schools. In contrast, the medical model views disability as a defect to be treated, often leading to separated education systems for students with disabilities (AREHEART, 2008).

The shift from the medical model to the social model, particularly influenced by international frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (Weller, 2011), has played a pivotal role in the global push for inclusive education. These policies advocate for the integration of students with disabilities into general classrooms and emphasize the role of societal attitudes and systemic changes in promoting inclusion.

In many African countries, including Rwanda, the social model has gained prominence in national education policies. However, societal stigma and historical perceptions of disability remain significant barriers to full inclusion (Barrett H. L., 2024).

2.2 Empirical Review

While international frameworks like the *Salamanca Statement* and *CRPD* advocate for inclusive education, their practical implementation varies widely across regions. In some developing countries, such as Rwanda, policies often fail to address the local contextual challenges faced by schools, such as limited resources and inadequate training for teachers (Talley L., 2016). The gap between policy development and practical implementation is a major barrier to achieving the objectives of inclusive education. Studies suggest that a bottom-up approach, involving the active participation of teachers, communities, and policymakers, is necessary to ensure that inclusive education policies are effectively implemented at the school level (Graham L. J.-S., 2023).

Mixed Academic and Social Outcomes: Empirical studies report mixed academic outcomes for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Some studies show positive effects on **social** integration and self-esteem, with students with disabilities benefiting from interacting with their peers in general education settings (Katz, 2002). However, academic achievements often depend on the level of support provided, including tailored interventions such as individualized learning strategies and extra resources.

Access to specialized teaching and resources, such as assistive technology, significantly improves the academic performance of students with special needs. When these supports are insufficient, students may struggle to achieve the expected academic outcomes, emphasizing the importance of a well-rounded support system that includes teacher training and infrastructure development (Aithal, 2023).

3.0 Research Methodology

The research employed Slovin's formula size calculation to select as sample of 32 individuals. Data was collected using a combination of questionnaires with both open and closed-ended questions, as well as face-to-face interviews, particularly for respondents who did not have time to complete the written questionnaires. The primary data was then edited, coded, and entered into MS Excel and SPSS for quantitative analysis and statistical generalization, while qualitative information was presented in a narrative form to complement the quantitative findings.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

Objective one: To assess the effectiveness of inclusive education policies in promoting physical, academic, and social access to education for students with special needs in BSVI and RISH schools in Musanze District, Rwanda.

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for implementation of inclusive education policies

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I'm familiar with the current inclusive education policies	32	3.00	5.00	4.0000	.71842
I believe the inclusive education policies at our school are effectively implemented	32	3.00	5.00	4.0625	.71561
Our school faces significant challenges in implementing inclusive education policies	32	3.00	5.00	4.1563	.72332
Resources for students with disabilities are adequately allocated at our school	32	2.00	4.00	2.4375	.56440
The school has clear policies regarding to the inclusion of students with special needs	32	3.00	5.00	3.9063	.58802
Inclusive education policies are regularly reviewed and updated at our school	32	3.00	5.00	3.7812	.65915
Teachers receive sufficient professional development to support inclusive education at our school	32	3.00	5.00	3.5938	.61484
The school administration actively supports the implementation of inclusive education policies	32	3.00	5.00	4.2188	.60824
The school has sufficient resources to implement inclusive education policies at our school	32	2.00	4.00	3.4688	.56707
The school has established specific strategies for monitoring and evaluating the progress of policies	32	3.00	5.00	4.0625	.71561
Valid N (list wise)	32				

Source: Research data

The table above presents responses regarding the effectiveness of inclusive education policies at BSVI and RISH schools, measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). Descriptive statistics show that respondents generally hold positive views about the policies. For instance, the mean score for familiarity with the policies was 4.00 (agree), indicating that most participants are familiar with the policies, with minimal variation (standard deviation = 0.72). Similarly, the belief that the policies are effectively implemented received a mean score of 4.06 (agree), signaling general consensus that the policies are well-executed, with slight variation in responses (standard deviation = 0.72). Respondents also agreed that there are significant challenges in policy implementation, with a mean of 4.16 (agree), again showing minimal variation (standard deviation = 0.72).

However, responses regarding resource allocation for supporting the implementation of inclusive education policies were less favorable. The mean score for the adequacy of resources for students with disabilities was 2.44 (disagree), suggesting that participants do not believe resources are adequately allocated, with low variation in opinions (standard deviation = 0.56). Additionally, the

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sufficiency of resources for implementing the policies scored 3.47 (neutral to agree), reflecting some agreement but also neutral sentiment among respondents. In contrast, the school's active support for inclusive education policies received a high mean score of 4.22 (strongly agree), indicating strong agreement that the administration plays a crucial role in supporting these initiatives, with little variation (standard deviation = 0.61).

Lastly, the data shows that respondents generally agree that the school has clear inclusion policies (mean = 3.91) and strategies for monitoring and evaluating policy progress (mean = 4.06). These aspects were viewed positively, with minimal variation in responses, as reflected by the standard deviations (ranging from 0.59 to 0.72). Overall, while the schools exhibit strong administrative support and clear policies, there are concerns regarding the adequacy of resources and challenges in effectively implementing inclusive education policies. The consistency in responses across most categories suggests a shared understanding of the situation, with opportunities for improvement in resource allocation and addressing the implementation challenges. Table 2 Model Summary on the implementation of inclusive education policies on the access of education for students with disabilities.

Table 2: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.652[a]	.425	.353	.15498	.425	5.909	1	8	.041

Source: Research Data
a. Predictors: (Constant), implementation of inclusive education policies

The Model Summary in Table above reveals a moderate positive relationship between the implementation of inclusive education policies and the access to education for students with disabilities. The R value of 0.652 indicates a strong correlation, while the R Square value of 0.425 suggests that approximately 42.5% of the variance in access to education for students with disabilities can be explained by the implementation of inclusive education policies. The Adjusted R Square of 0.353, accounting for the number of predictors in the model, indicates that the model still explains a significant portion of the variance, though slightly less when considering adjustments for predictors.

The Change Statistics section reveals that the R Square Change is 0.425, meaning that the implementation of inclusive education policies accounts for 42.5% of the variance in educational access. The F Change of 5.909, with a significance value (Sig. F Change) of 0.041, indicates that the model is statistically significant, suggesting that the relationship between inclusive education policies and educational access is unlikely to be due to chance. These findings imply that the implementation of inclusive education policies has a positive effect on educational access for students with disabilities, with the results demonstrating statistical significance.

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Table 3: ANOVA on implementation of education policies on the access of education

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.142	1	.142	5.909	.041[b]
	Residual	.192	8	.024		
	Total	.334	9			

Source: Research Data
a. Dependent Variable: Access to education
b. Predictors: (Constant), implementation of inclusive education policies

The table above of ANOVA assesses the overall significance of the regression model by comparing the variance explained by the predictors (implementation of inclusive education policies) to the unexplained variance. The Regression sum of squares is 0.142 and the Residual sum of squares is 0.192. These values indicate that the model explains a portion of the variance in the dependent variable, which is access to education, while the residual represents unexplained variance. The total sum of squares is 0.334, reflecting the total variance in the data.

The F-value of 5.909 is used to determine the significance of the model, with the associated significance level (Sig.) of 0.041 indicating that the model is statistically significant at the 5% level. This suggests that the implementation of inclusive education policies has a significant effect on access to education. The low p-value (0.041) confirms that the model's findings are not due to random chance, reinforcing the idea that inclusive education policies are positively influencing the educational access for students with disabilities.

Table 4: Coefficient on Implementation of inclusive education policies on the access of education

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	2.841	.373		7.610	<.001	1.980	3.702
	Implementation of inclusive education policies	.239	.098	.652	2.431	.041	.012	.465

Source: Research Data
a. Dependent Variable: Access to education

The coefficient table above provides insight into the specific contribution of the predictor variable, the implementation of inclusive education policies, on the dependent variable, access to education. The unstandardized coefficient for the constant is 2.841, meaning that when the implementation of inclusive education policies is zero; the baseline access to education is 2.841. The unstandardized coefficient for the implementation of inclusive education policies is 0.239, indicating that for every one-unit increase in the implementation of inclusive education policies, access to education increases by 0.239 units.

The standardized coefficient (Beta) for the implementation of inclusive education policies is 0.652, indicating a strong positive relationship between the two variables. The t-value of 2.431, with a significance value of 0.041, shows that this predictor is statistically significant at the 5% level. This suggests that the implementation of inclusive education policies has a substantial and positive effect on educational access for students with disabilities. Furthermore, the 95% confidence interval for the coefficient (0.012 to 0.465) supports the reliability of these results, as it does not include zero, reinforcing the significant impact of the policies on educational access.

Interview Questions about the implementation of inclusive education policies

What measures have you put in place to ensure the successful implementation of inclusive education policies at your school?

The respondents answered that they have implemented several key measures to ensure the successful rollout of inclusive education policies. These include organizing professional development workshops for teachers to enhance their understanding of inclusive teaching practices. They also mentioned the importance of creating accessible classroom environments, such as adjusting seating arrangements, ensuring physical accessibility, and using assistive technologies. Some schools have adopted individualized learning plans for students with disabilities to meet their specific needs. The respondents highlighted ongoing collaboration with parents and specialists to continuously adapt these measures. Additionally, a feedback system was established, allowing teachers and students to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies. These efforts correlate with the data, which shows a significant positive relationship between the implementation of inclusive education policies and access to education.

How do you monitor and evaluate the impact of inclusive education policies on students with disabilities?

The respondents emphasized a multi-faceted approach to monitoring and evaluating the impact of inclusive education policies. They conduct regular assessments through both formal and informal channels, such as periodic tests, one-on-one meetings with students, and teacher reflections. Feedback is gathered from parents and students through surveys to measure satisfaction and perceived benefits. Some respondents mentioned having a dedicated team to track the academic progress and social inclusion of students with disabilities. They also highlighted the importance of data analysis to identify trends and areas for improvement. Furthermore, some schools use student progress data to make real-time adjustments to teaching methods and resources. The statistical findings align with these practices, confirming a strong link between inclusive education policy implementation and enhanced access to education, as observed in the positive relationships in the data.

What challenges do you encounter in implementing these policies?

The respondents acknowledged several challenges they face when implementing inclusive education policies. First of all the main difficulties is the shortage of resources, such as specialized learning materials and assistive technologies, which can hinder the effective support of students with disabilities. Secondly, some respondents noted that teachers often struggle due to insufficient training on inclusive teaching methods, which can result in resistance to fully embrace these policies. Third challenge respondents they have mentioned were the need for more collaboration with external specialists, such as occupational therapists and speech-language pathologists, who can assist in meeting the diverse needs of students. Resistance from some parents and community members, who may not fully understand the benefits of inclusion, was also cited as a barrier.

However, the respondents responded that despite these challenges, there has been a clear improvement in student access to education. This resonates with the data, which demonstrates a statistically significant impact of inclusive policies on educational access, confirming that overcoming these barriers leads to positive outcomes for students with disabilities.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Access on Education for students with special needs

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
The school facilities (e.g., ramps, elevators, accessible toilets) are easy to navigate	32	3.00	5.00	3.7812	.55267
School has classrooms and common areas that are accessible to students with physical disabilities	32	3.00	5.00	3.7188	.52267
Children can access all areas of the school, including outdoor spaces, without difficulty	32	3.00	5.00	3.9375	.71561
Teachers provide enough individual support to help understand the lessons	32	3.00	5.00	3.8750	.75134
The curriculum has been adjusted to suit special learning needs	32	2.00	5.00	3.6250	.70711
Children access to the assistive technologies (e.g., screen readers, hearing aids) to participate in class	32	2.00	5.00	3.5938	.71208
The school facilities are accessible and safe for children with special needs	32	3.00	5.00	3.8750	.65991
I believe the school has made the necessary physical accommodations to support children's mobility and access to school spaces	32	3.00	5.00	3.9375	.61892
Children can move around the school and participate in physical activities without barriers.	32	3.00	5.00	3.7500	.56796
Children are provided the necessary learning materials (e.g., Braille, hearing aids, computers) to fully participate in class	32	3.00	4.00	3.3125	.47093
Valid N (list wise)	32				

Source: Research Data

The table of descriptive statistics for access to education for students with special needs provides an overview of how students perceive the availability and effectiveness of various school facilities and resources. Each item measures a different aspect of accessibility, ranging from physical infrastructure to educational support. The sample size (N) for each variable is 32, meaning that 32 responses were considered for each question. The minimum values across the items range from 2.00 to 3.00, indicating that some respondents rated the accessibility lower, while the maximum values consistently reach 5.00, suggesting that some respondents found the facilities or support fully adequate.

The means of the responses show that, on average, students rated the accessibility positively but with some variation. The highest mean of 3.9375 was observed for items like "Children can access all areas of the school, including outdoor spaces, without difficulty," and "I believe the school has made the necessary physical accommodations to support my child's mobility and access to school spaces." These values suggest that, generally, students felt that outdoor and mobility-related accommodations were relatively good. On the other hand, the item with the lowest mean, 3.3125, was "Children are provided the necessary learning materials (e.g., Braille, hearing aids, computers) to fully participate in class," indicating that students felt slightly less satisfied with the availability of learning materials for special needs support.

The standard deviations, which reflect the variability of responses, show a range from 0.47093 to 0.75134. For example, the "learning materials" item had a standard deviation of 0.47093, indicating relatively low variability in the responses, meaning most respondents gave similar ratings. In contrast, the item "Children access all areas of the school, including outdoor spaces, without difficulty" had a higher standard deviation of 0.71561, suggesting a wider range of perceptions among students regarding accessibility to outdoor spaces. These variations in means and standard deviations indicate that while overall access to education is perceived positively, there are areas, especially regarding specialized learning materials and infrastructure, where improvements might be needed to ensure consistent access across all students with special needs.

5.0 Conclusion

This chapter aims to investigate the impacts of inclusive education policies on the access to education for students with special needs at BSV and RISH schools of special education needs in Musanze District; Rwanda. By confirming the following hypothesis: There is significant effect of implementation of inclusive education policies on the access of education for students with special needs at BSVI and RISH schools in Musanze District.

Regarding the research hypothesis, the study found that the implementation of inclusive education policies has a statistically significant positive relationship with access to education for students with special needs in BSVI and RISH schools in Musanze District ($\beta = 0.652$, p-value = 0.041). The data suggests that as inclusive education policies are more effectively implemented, access to education for students with special needs improves significantly. These policies provide the necessary framework to ensure that students with disabilities have equitable opportunities to participate in education, receive adequate support and engage with their peers in the learning environment.

Field data collected from respondents in both schools confirmed that the implementation of inclusive education policies has a positive impact on the accessibility of education for students with special needs. Teachers, school administrators, and students reported that these policies helped create a more supportive and inclusive environment, where students with disabilities could

access appropriate learning materials, receive specialized support, and participate in mainstream classes. The findings indicate that inclusive education policies have not only facilitated the integration of students with special needs but have also contributed to creating a more diverse and inclusive learning culture in both schools.

"These findings are consistent with previous studies that show how inclusive education policies can enhance educational access for students with special needs. For instance, Angelis and Horne (2019) found that when schools implement inclusive education policies, students with disabilities experience "better access to quality education, improved academic outcomes, and greater social integration." This aligns with the positive results found in this study, which show that the implementation of inclusive education policies in BSVI and RISH schools significantly improves the educational experience for students with special needs." These policies, when effectively implemented, are crucial in promoting equitable education and improving the overall educational environment for all students.

Based on the statistical results ($\beta = 0.652$, p-value = 0.041), the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, indicating that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between the implementation of inclusive education policies and access to education for students with special needs. The p-value of 0.041 is less than the 0.05 threshold, which means that the implementation of inclusive education policies does indeed have a meaningful and significant impact on improving access to education for students with special needs. The findings suggest that when inclusive education policies are effectively implemented, students with special needs experience better access to education, improved support, and greater integration into mainstream learning environments.

6.0 Recommendations

The government should continue to strengthen the implementation of inclusive education policies, ensuring that they are effectively communicated and supported at all levels of the educational system. This includes providing adequate resources and financial support to schools for the proper implementation of inclusive education strategies. Stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations and advocacy groups, should actively support the promotion and advocacy of inclusive education policies. This can be achieved by providing training, raising awareness, and collaborating with the government and educational institutions to push for stronger policy implementations.

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