

Awareness Levels of Key Stakeholders in Ensuring the Right to Education for Children With Disabilities in Primary Schools of Arsi Zone, Oromia Region, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Education is broadly recognized as a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of individual and social development, as clearly stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reinforced by subsequent international conventions. Accordingly, states have an obligation to ensure free, compulsory, and non-discriminatory primary education for all children, including children with disabilities. This study investigated the awareness levels of key stakeholders school leaders, teachers, and local education authorities regarding the educational rights of children with disabilities in Arsi Zone. A mixed-methods research design was employed. Quantitative data were analyzed using independent-samples t-tests, partial correlation test, cross-tabulations, and Chi-square tests, while qualitative data were generated through interviews and focus group discussions to tap stakeholders' lived experiences. The quantitative findings revealed generally low awareness levels among respondents, with significant differences between school leaders and teachers across four variables ($p < .001$). However, no significant difference was observed for Item 5 ($p = .947$). Generally mean scores ranged from 1.32 to 4.58, indicating inadequate understanding of disability related educational rights. Partial correlation test and Chi-square results further confirmed significant relationships and association respectively between awareness creation, leadership commitment, and parental attitudes, suggesting that improved awareness facilitates the identification and enrollment of children with disabilities, while weak advocacy and limited outreach contribute to their continued exclusion. Qualitative findings reinforced the statistical results, indicating to the absence of sustained awareness initiatives, inadequate institutional capacity, and weak community engagement as key barriers. The study concludes that strengthening continuous

professional development, promoting community-based advocacy, and enhancing accountability mechanisms are critical to translating awareness into effective enforcement of the right to education for children with disabilities in line with Education for All and Sustainable Development Goal 4. Key terms: Awareness, Children with Disabilities, Educational Rights, Leadership, Teachers

1 Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right that is essential for the development of individuals and societies. It enables people to realize their full physical, intellectual, social, and moral potential while promoting human dignity, equality, and social participation. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) recognizes education as a universal right and affirms that every person should have access to education without discrimination. It further emphasizes the responsibility of states, with support from the international community and parents, to ensure the realization of this right.

Building upon the UDHR, several international legal and policy instruments have reaffirmed and strengthened the right to education. These include the UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education (1960), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006). These frameworks require governments to provide free and compulsory primary education and ensure equitable access to quality learning opportunities for all children, including those with disabilities.

Since the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien in 1990, global educational agendas have increasingly emphasized inclusive and equitable quality education. Subsequent international commitments, including the Dakar Framework for Action (2000), the Incheon Declaration (2015), and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), have called upon governments to eliminate barriers that prevent marginalized groups from accessing and benefiting from education. These frameworks recognize that children with disabilities are among the most excluded groups and require targeted interventions to ensure their full participation in education.

Despite these international commitments, children with disabilities continue to face significant barriers to education in many developing countries. Stigma, discrimination, inadequate

implementation of educational policies, limited resources, inaccessible learning environments, and negative societal attitudes remain major obstacles to their educational participation and success (Mebratu et al., 2024; Yorke et al., 2023). Addressing these barriers requires more than legislative and policy commitments; it demands informed and committed stakeholders who understand and actively promote the educational rights of children with disabilities.

Research indicates that increasing awareness and understanding of disability rights among key stakeholders is essential for fostering inclusive educational environments and advancing the right to education for children with disabilities (Lindsay et al., 2012). In particular, effective educational leadership plays a crucial role in promoting inclusion through setting directions, building relationships, developing people, redesigning organizational structures to support desired practices, and improving instructional programs (Leithwood et al., 2020). Similarly, enhancing stakeholders' knowledge of inclusive education legislation and policies, while strengthening teachers' confidence and competence to teach diverse learners, is fundamental to the successful realization of inclusive education and the right to education for children with disabilities (Forlin & Chambers, 2011).

Recognizing the critical role of awareness and capacity building in advancing disability inclusion, Article 8(d) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) obliges States Parties to promote awareness-raising and training programs on the rights, dignity, and capabilities of persons with disabilities. Such initiatives are intended to challenge stereotypes, eliminate discrimination, and foster positive attitudes toward disability, thereby strengthening respect for the rights of persons with disabilities and creating more inclusive, equitable, and accessible educational environments (UNCRPD, 2006). In Ethiopia, the right to education for children with disabilities is recognized through various legal and policy frameworks, including the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (1995), the Education and Training Policy (1994), the National Plan of Action on Disability (2012), and the Inclusive Education Strategy (2016–2025). Furthermore, Inclusive Education Resource Centers (IERCs) have been established to support the implementation of inclusive education through teacher training, early identification of disabilities, and provision of assistive services (Tefera, et al., 2015; Sisak et.al., 2020). These initiatives demonstrate the country's commitment to ensuring equitable educational opportunities for children with disabilities.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although Ethiopia has ratified international conventions and established national legal and policy frameworks guaranteeing the right to education for children with disabilities, significant gaps remain in both enrollment and implementation. Despite these commitments, access to schooling for children with disabilities is still severely limited, indicating a persistent execution gap.

Inclusive education requires strong collaboration among school leaders, teachers, and communities. While school leaders are responsible for setting the vision and direction for inclusion, teachers play a central role in shaping learners' day-to-day educational experiences (Zegeye et al., 2025). However, technical training alone is not sufficient without effective leadership, coordinated implementation, and sustained awareness at all levels (UNESCO, 2020; WHO, 2011).

National statistics further illustrate the magnitude of the problem. In Ethiopia, only 310,014 (10.4%) of an estimated 2,967,526 children with disabilities are enrolled in formal education. In Oromia Regional State, the situation is even more concerning, where only 79,609 (6.7%) of approximately 1,191,767 children with disabilities are attending school (ESAA, 2022).

The situation is even more alarming in Arsi Zone, which has a total population of 3,894,248 (Arsi Zone Social Affairs Office, 2024). Based on the World Health Organization's estimated disability prevalence rate of 15% and a projected school-age population of 1,285,102 children, approximately 192,765 school-age children in the zone are expected to have disabilities. However, official records show that only 2,313 children with disabilities were enrolled in school during the 2024/25 academic year, representing a mere 1.2% of the estimated population of school-age children with disabilities (Arsi Zone Education Desk & Social Affairs Data, 2024/25). This striking disparity indicates that the overwhelming majority of children with disabilities remain excluded from educational opportunities despite the existence of legal, policy, and institutional frameworks intended to guarantee their right to education.

Existing studies in Ethiopia and elsewhere have largely focused on barriers to inclusive education, attitudes toward disability, availability of resources, and implementation challenges. While these studies provide valuable insights, limited attention has been given to the awareness levels of key stakeholders regarding the educational rights of children with disabilities. Awareness is a critical prerequisite for effective implementation of inclusive education policies because stakeholders who lack adequate knowledge of disability rights, legal obligations, and inclusive educational practices may unintentionally contribute to the exclusion of children with disabilities.

School leaders and teachers are among the principal actors responsible for translating educational policies into practice. Their awareness and understanding of the rights of children with disabilities influence decision-making processes, school culture, resource allocation, and classroom practices. However, empirical evidence concerning the awareness levels of these stakeholders in Arsi Zone remains scarce.

Therefore, there is a need to investigate the awareness levels of key stakeholders in ensuring the right to education for children with disabilities in primary schools of Arsi Zone. Understanding the extent of stakeholders' awareness will provide evidence for policymakers, educational authorities, and development partners to design appropriate interventions aimed at strengthening inclusive education and improving the enrollment and participation of children with disabilities.

General Objective

To assess the awareness levels of key stakeholders regarding the realization of the right to education for children with disabilities in primary schools of Arsi Zone, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia.

Specific Objectives

1. To determine the level of awareness of school leaders regarding the right to education of children with disabilities in primary schools of Arsi Zone.
2. To assess teachers' awareness of the legal, policy, and practical provisions related to the right to education of children with disabilities.
3. To examine stakeholders' awareness level of the right to education of children with disability.

Research Questions (optional but strongly recommended)

1. What is the level of awareness of school leaders regarding the right to education of children with disabilities?
2. What is the level of awareness of teachers regarding disability rights and inclusive education?
3. To what extent are stakeholders aware of national and international legal frameworks that guarantee the educational rights of children with disabilities?

1.3 Rationale for the Study

The right to education for children with disabilities (CWDs) is universally protected by global instruments like the UNCRPD and domestic policies including the Ethiopian Constitution and the Inclusive Education Strategy. However, a severe implementation gap exists in Ethiopia's Oromia Region. National statistics show a massive discrepancy between the population of CWDs and actual school attendance; in the Arsi Zone specifically, the situation is critical, with only 1.2% (2,313 out of 182,765) of children with disabilities enrolled in formal education.

While extensive existing literature heavily documents general systemic challenges, resource constraints, and societal attitudes, it frequently overlooks the foundational role that stakeholder awareness plays in driving the enrollment and exclusion of these children. A major gap remains in empirical research detailing how the specific understanding of local education authorities, school leaders, and teachers influences inclusive practices within the Arsi Zone.

Because policy implementation, disability identification, and community advocacy rely inherently on informed and committed leadership, assessing this awareness is vital. This study directly addresses this empirical neglect by investigating stakeholders' awareness levels regarding international and national legal frameworks. Its purpose is to reveal the exact perceptual barriers and institutional commitments required to bridge the gap between statutory policy and real-world school enrollment for marginalized children.

2. Method and methodology

Pragmatic research paradigm was used which provides methodological flexibility for examining complex educational issues (Creswell, & Creswell, 2017). Mixed method design was employed with concurrent strategy to collect and interpret quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously. The quantitative data was collected with generated structured questionnaires. The qualitative component employed semi-structured interviews to explore participants' experiences (Allwood, 2012). The two approaches enabled methodological triangulation and a comprehensive understanding of the problem.

2.1. Sample and Sampling Techniques

The study was conducted in Arsi Zone, Oromia Regional State, which comprises 26 districts, 1,077 primary schools, and an estimated population of 3.89 million. To ensure adequate representation of the target population, a combination of probability and non-probability sampling techniques, along with a census approach, was employed (Kothari, 2004).

Using Yamane's (1967) sample size determination formula at a 95% confidence level, a sample of 368 teachers was selected from a total population of 4,042 teachers. In addition, following the recommendation of Gay et al. (2009), 20% of the 303 primary schools located within the selected study areas were included in the study. Accordingly, 61 schools were selected, and all corresponding principals and vice principals were included through a census approach, resulting in 61 principals and 61 vice principals participating in the study.

Furthermore, seven districts (approximately 30%) were randomly selected from the 26 *Woredas* in Arsi Zone, together with one town administration, in accordance with the sampling guidance provided by Neuman (2003). The selected 7 District (*Woredas*) and one town administration constituted the study sites from which schools and participants were drawn.

Of the 490 questionnaires distributed, 468 were successfully completed and returned, yielding an overall response rate of 95.51%. The valid responses comprised 358 teachers (97.28% response rate) and 110 school leaders, including principals and vice principals (91.80% response rate).

2.2 Methods of Data Collection

Questionnaires serve as a foundational instrument in quantitative research, offering an efficient mechanism for data collection across large samples while preserving respondent anonymity to foster authentic participation (Gay et al., 2009). Aligned with a positivist paradigm, this study utilized structured questionnaires to gather primary data (Ali, 2024), which were subsequently supplemented by structured and semi-structured interviews to capture deeper contextual insights (Allwood, 2012).

Accordingly, five questionnaire items were developed by researcher to assess the awareness levels of teachers and school leaders regarding the right to education of children with disabilities. Relationships and associations within the data were evaluated using partial correlation and Chi-square tests. To ensure psychometric rigor, a pilot study was conducted across two schools with 24 participants (20 teachers and 4 school administrators). Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, applying a standard reliability threshold of Cronbach's alpha coefficient > 0.70 (DeVon et al., 2007). The pilot results demonstrated strong reliability and validity, yielding Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.899 for school leaders and 0.789 for teachers, thereby validating the instrument for full-scale administration.

2.3 Methods of Data Analysis

Data analysis integrated descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS version 25.0. Descriptive analysis employed frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation to summarize results. Inferential statistics included Independent Samples t-tests to compare awareness scores mean difference between teachers and principals, partial correlation test to insight the depth of relation and Chi-square tests to examine associations between categorical variables (McHugh, 2013). Interval widths of the 5 Likert scale were determined by dividing the range (5–1=4) by five, yielding 0.80, with awareness categories defined as: (1)=1.00–1.80 (very low), to (5)=4.21–5.00 (very high) (Boone, et.al., 2012).

2.4 Ethical Consideration

This study strictly obeyed ethical research principles, including obtaining participants' consent, ensuring confidentiality, protecting participants' rights, and preserving honesty in data collection, analysis, and reporting. And all necessary permissions were secured from the relevant institutions.

3. FINDING

These findings address a research question examined within the study titled *“The Role of School Leaders in Ensuring the Right to Education for Children with Disabilities in Primary Schools of Arsi Zone, Oromia Regional State of Ethiopia.”* Specifically, the research question *To what extent are key stakeholders (school leaders, teachers, parents, and the community) at all levels aware of the right to education for children with disabilities as outlined in international, regional, and national legal frameworks?*

The demographic profiles of respondents were collected and analyzed to assess their competence in responding to the questionnaire and interview items used to evaluate their level of awareness of the right to education for children with disabilities (CWDs). The analysis of respondents' demographic characteristics is presented in Table 1.

In addition, questionnaires were used to assess respondents' levels of awareness. An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to determine mean differences between school leaders and teachers (Table 2). Furthermore, partial correlation analysis, cross-tabulation, and Chi-square tests (Tables 3, 4, and 5) were employed to examine the contribution of stakeholders' awareness-creation initiatives to promoting societal responsibility in ensuring the educational rights of children with disabilities.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

No	Characteristics		Teacher		School leaders		Total	
			No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	Sex	Male	216	60.33	73	66.36	289	61.76
		Female	142	39.67	37	33.64	179	38.24
		Total	358	100	110	100	468	100
2	Educational level	Diploma	232	64.80	61	55.5	293	62.61
		BA/BSc	113	31.57	43	39.1	156	33.33
		MA/MSc	11	3.07	5	4.5	16	3.42
		other	2	0.56	1	0.9	3	0.64
		Total	358	100	110	100	468	100
3	Specialization	N. Science	43	12.01	28	25.46	71	15.17
		S. Science	89	24.86	30	27.27	119	25.43
		Math	62	17.32	-	-	62	13.25
		Language	142	39.66	34	30.91	176	37.60
		Other (school leadership in BA &1 T.T.I.)	22	6.15	18	16.36	40	8.55
		Total	358	100	110	100	468	100

*Source: A survey Data collected at the field (May, 2025); **No.** = Number

*Nineteen school leaders hold a BA degree in Educational Leadership, while two possess an MA in the same specialization. In addition, one school leader has qualifications at the Teacher Training Institution level.

Demographic Profile of respondents

The demographic profile of respondents in **table 1** above reveals a significant male representation of 289 (61.76%) compared to a female representation of 179 (38.24%). The majority of participants in the sampled schools are well qualified, according to the results. The majority of participants 293 (62.61 %) possess Diploma while 156 (33.33%) possess BA/BSc. Among these respondents 176 (37.6%) are language graduates, the majority of whom serve as school principals, indicating a potential gap in formal training related to school leadership skills.

Table 2: Mean Differences in Awareness Levels of School Leaders and Teachers across Selected five Variables.

S.N	Item	Responsibility	No.	Mean	SD	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
1	Awareness of the constitutional and legal rights of children with disabilities (CWDs) to education.	Leaders	110	2.39	.490	20.939	466	0.000
		Teachers	358	1.29	.455			
		Total	468	1.55	0.66			
2	The school regularly conducts awareness-raising activities to inform parents and communities	Leaders	110	2.34	.667	15.375	466	0.000
		Teachers	358	1.29	.455			
		Total	468	1.54	0.68			

	about the right of children with disabilities to access education.							
3	Parents of children with disabilities are sufficiently informed about their children's right to inclusive education.	Leaders	110	2.35	.656	21.519	466	0.000
		Teachers	358	1.00	.000			
		Total	468	1.32	0.65			
4	Local education authorities (e.g., <i>woreda</i> /zonal education offices) actively engage in advocacy to ensure CWDs are enrolled in schools.	Leaders	110	2.52	.502	31.722	466	0.000
		Teachers	358	1.00	.000			
		Total	468	1.36	0.69			
5	The absence of sustained advocacy programs is a key factor contributing to the low school intake of CWDs.	Leaders	110	4.58	.496	.067	466	0.947
		Teachers	358	4.58	.495			
		Total	468	4.58	0.50			

Note: p-value at $\alpha < 0.05$, $df = 466$

An independent samples t-test

Under Table 2 above, an independent-samples t-test was used to examine the mean differences in awareness levels between school leaders and teachers across key variables, and the findings are presented item by item and interpreted in light of relevant empirical and theoretical literature.

Item 1: Awareness of Constitutional and Legal Rights

The independent-samples t-test results indicate a statistically significant difference in awareness levels between school leaders and teachers regarding the constitutional and legal rights of CWDs to education. The 110 school leaders reported comparatively higher mean though still low awareness score ($M = 2.39$, $SD = 0.49$) whereas teachers ($N = 358$), showed significantly lower awareness mean score ($M = 1.29$, $SD = 0.46$). The t-value ($t = 20.939$), with 466 degrees of freedom and $p < 0.01$, confirms that the difference is statistically significant and did not occur by chance. Similarly, the total mean score ($M = 1.55$) and standard deviation ($SD = 0.66$) clearly indicate an inadequate level of awareness among respondents. The findings indicate that the low level of awareness among school leaders, who are primarily responsible for leading awareness-creation initiatives within the education system, significantly contributes to the failure to realize the right to education for children with disabilities.

Item 2: The presence of regularly conducted Awareness-Raising Activities for Parents and Communities at school level

The computed result of SPSS 25.00 indicate that the mean and standard deviation value ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 0.67$) for school leaders; showing the practice of conducting awareness raising activities at school level was low and for teachers ($M = 1.29$, $SD = 0.45$) very low. The t-value ($t = 15.375$) with 466 degree of freedom and $p < 0.01$ confirms the mean difference between the two groups was statistically significant. The total mean score ($M = 1.54$) and $SD = 0.68$ similarly indicate the very low practice of conducting awareness raising activities at school.

Item 3: Parents' awareness of the educational rights of their children with disabilities

Both school leaders ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 0.66$) and teachers ($M = 1.00$, $SD = 0.00$) rated parental awareness as low to very low, with an overall mean score of $M = 1.32$ ($SD = 0.65$). The difference between the two groups was statistically significant ($t(466) = 21.52$, $p < .001$), indicating that parents of children with disabilities are largely uninformed about their children's right to education.

Item 4: Engagement of Local Education Authorities

School leaders ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 0.50$) rated the engagement of local authorities as low, while teachers ($M = 1.00$, $SD = 0.00$) rated it as very low. The total mean ($M = 1.36$, $SD = 0.69$) indicates very low engagement, with a significant mean difference ($t(466) = 31.72$, $p < .001$).

The t-test results indicated that the minimal advocacy engagement by local education authorities, in creating awareness on the educational rights for CWDs remains very low.

Item 5: Absence of Sustained Advocacy Programs

School leaders (M = 4.58, SD = 0.50) and teachers (M = 4.58, SD = 0.50) both rated *very high*, with no mean significant difference ($t(466) = 0.07, p = 0.95$). This shared perspective indicates that the lack of sustained advocacy is a key factor contributing to the low school intake of CWDs.

Table 3: Partial Correlation test of dependent and independent Variables

Control Variable			School leaders and teachers are adequately aware of the constitutional and legal rights of children with disabilities to education	School leaders and teachers are adequately aware of the constitutional and legal rights of children with disabilities to education
There is conventions and agreements, Ethiopia is ratified concerning rights to education at the school level and easily	School leaders and teachers are adequately aware of the constitutional and legal rights of children with disabilities to education.	Correlation	1.000	.960
		Significance (2-tailed)		.000
	Teachers receive adequate orientation on how to advocate	df	0	465
		Correlation	.960	1.000

community awareness initiatives has contributed to the failure of children with disabilities and their parents or guardians to assert their right to access inclusive education.	Undecided		-	-	-	-		
	Agree	-	-	-	89	121	210	
	strongly agree	-	-	-	74	184	258	
	Total	-	-	-	163	305	468	
Chi-square Tests								
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)			Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square	9.571 ^a	1	.002					
Continuity Correction ^b	8.977	1	.003					
Likelihood Ratio	9.558	1	.002					
Fisher's Exact Test						.002	.001	
Linear-by-Linear Association	9.551	1	.002					
N of Valid Cases	468							

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 73.14.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Cross- tabulation and Chi-square test result

The cross-tabulation result shows that almost all respondents rate under **agreed or strongly agreed** indicating that lack of effective community awareness initiatives has contributed to the failure of children with disabilities and their parents or guardians to affirm their right to access inclusive education. Out of 468 valid responses, **305 respondents strongly agreed** and **163 agreed**, while no respondents rated under the disagreement or undecided categories. This indicates a strong consensus among participants that inadequate awareness is a major reason for the low enrollment of children with disabilities.

The Pearson Chi-square test result ($\chi^2(1) = 9.571, p = .002$) indicates a **statistically significant association** between perceptions of lack of awareness and low enrollment of children with disabilities. This finding is supported by the continuity correction, likelihood ratio, Fisher's exact test, and linear-by-linear association, all of which are significant at $p < .01$.

Overall, the results provide strong empirical evidence that **insufficient awareness among parents, community members, and school staff is significantly associated with low enrollment and weak assertion of the educational rights of children with disabilities**. These results indicate the need for systematic and sustained community awareness initiatives to promote inclusive education and empower families to claim these rights.

Table 5:- Association between the awareness levels of school leaders and teachers and the school's annual intake plan for children with disabilities (CWDs).

Count		The school's annual plan includes strategies designed to identify children with disabilities in the surrounding community.						
		Strongly disagree	disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Remark
School leaders and teachers are adequately	Strongly disagree	121	130	3	-	-	254	
	disagree	55	97	19	-	-	171	

aware of the constitution al and legal rights of children with disabilities to education.	Undecided	0	6	37	-	-	43
	Agree	-	-	-	-	-	-
	strongly agree	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Total	176	233	59	-	-	468
Chi-square Tests							
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)		Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square	247.723 ^a	4	.000				
Continuity Correction ^b	-	-	-				
Likelihood Ratio	180.375	4	.000				
Fisher's Exact Test	-		-				
Linear-by-Linear Association	117.553	1	.000				
N of Valid Cases	468						

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.42.

In addition, the here below result in **table 5** of Chi-square test revealed a strong association between school leaders' and teachers' awareness of the legal rights of children with disabilities and the presence of strategies in schools' annual plans to identify CWDs, ($\chi^2(4, N = 468) = 247.723, p < .001$). Most respondents 254 (54.3%) strongly disagreed, 171 (36.5%) disagreed, and 43 (9.2%) were undecided indicating limited awareness and weak planning for identifying children with disabilities.

The Linear-by-Linear Association ($\chi^2 = 117.553, p < .001$) confirmed a significant and consistent positive relationship between awareness and inclusive planning at the 99.9%

confidence level. As awareness increases, schools are more likely to integrate disability identification strategies.

4) Discussion

4.1. Quantitative analysis

The independent-samples t-test revealed statistically significant differences ($p < .01$) between school leaders and teachers across all awareness-related variables. Although school leaders demonstrated relatively higher awareness than teachers, the overall mean scores were low, indicating limited understanding of the constitutional and legal rights of children with disabilities (CWDs). This finding supports Article 8 of the UNCPRD (2006), which recognizes awareness-raising as a prerequisite for realizing disability rights, and concurs with Lojamo et al. (2025) and Aldersey et al. (2025), who stress that informed educational leadership is fundamental to advancing inclusive education.

This low level of awareness was also reflected in the limited awareness-raising activities conducted for parents and communities. Despite significant differences among respondents ($p < .01$), participants consistently reported that schools rarely organize sustained awareness programs, resulting in poor parental understanding of their children's educational rights. Interview findings further revealed that many parents seldom seek information about their children's progress due to inadequate knowledge of their rights and fear of jeopardizing school placement. These findings align with Yorke et al. (2023), Albrecht (2021), Walelign (2025), and Pavan (2024), who emphasize that continuous community engagement is essential for reducing stigma, strengthening advocacy, and promoting the educational inclusion of CWDs. The weak awareness culture was further evidenced by the limited involvement of local education authorities. Although significant differences were observed ($p < .01$), respondents agreed that advocacy, supervision, and professional support from Woreda education offices remain inadequate. Focus group discussions confirmed that special needs units receive little monitoring and technical assistance, reflecting weak institutional commitment to inclusive education. Similar concerns were reported by Mebratu et al. (2024), who identified inadequate awareness, weak institutional capacity, and poor policy implementation as major barriers to educational inclusion.

Consistent with these findings, the partial correlation analysis showed a very strong positive relationship between teachers' awareness of legal instruments and their advocacy for the educational rights of CWDs ($r = .960, p < .001$). The result suggests that access to international instruments such as the CRPD, CRC, UDHR, and ICESCR enhances awareness and

strengthens advocacy engagement. This supports UNESCO (2020), Loreman (2017), and Lojamo et al. (2025), who argue that localizing international conventions improves stakeholders' understanding of their legal responsibilities, while Ainscow and Miles (2008) emphasize the importance of professional training in sustaining advocacy capacity.

The cross-tabulation and Chi-square analyses further demonstrated that inadequate awareness is significantly associated with the low enrollment of children with disabilities ($\chi^2 = 9.571$, $p = .002$). Similarly, a strong association was found between stakeholders' awareness of legal rights and the inclusion of disability identification strategies in school annual plans ($\chi^2 = 247.723$, $p < .001$). Together, these findings indicate that awareness is not only critical for claiming educational rights but also for effective inclusive planning and child identification. This conclusion is consistent with UNESCO (1994, 2020), Opoku (2021), Yorke et al. (2023), Tefera et al. (2015), and Ainscow and Miles (2008), who contend that sustained awareness-raising and capacity-building initiatives are indispensable for translating inclusive education policies into practice and ensuring the right to education for children with disabilities.

4.2. Qualitative analysis

In addition to the inferential statistical results obtained from the quantitative data, interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with teachers. The findings from these interviews and FGDs revealed that no awareness-creation programs had ever been conducted at the school level or by the *Woreda* Education Office. Likewise, participants reported that there were no reference materials or nationally enacted legal frameworks available at the school level that address the right to education of children with disabilities, which could support reading, learning, and capacity building in the schools.

One FGD participant noted, *"I have taught in this school for more than five years; however, I have never received any advocacy or awareness training concerning the educational rights of children with disabilities. School leaders have never encouraged teachers to read international conventions related to disability rights, nor have I seen such documents made available in staff rooms or the school library for reference."* This testimony illustrates the limited dissemination of legal and policy frameworks within schools and supports the quantitative findings that stakeholders' awareness of the educational rights of children with disabilities remains low.

The interview findings from parents are consistent with the t-test results shows a very low level of awareness and a lack of orientation regarding their children's educational rights. One parent

explained, *“My child was unable to speak until the age of three, and a hospital later confirmed that he had an intellectual disability. When I tried to enroll him in school at the age of seven, the school refused admission, claiming that it lacked the facilities to support him. Because I was unaware of my child's legal and constitutional right to education, I did not know where to seek help or how to challenge the decision.”*

Regarding parents' awareness of the educational rights of children with disabilities, interview findings revealed that schools are often reluctant to enroll these children and frequently admit them only after persistent requests and negotiations by parents. Participants further reported that, even when they observe limited progress or educational challenges, they hesitate to question teachers or school leaders due to fear that their children may lose their school placement. This reflects low parental awareness of educational rights and limited confidence in advocating for their children's entitlement to quality education.

One parent stated, *“My daughter is now 14 years old and has autism. She has attended the rehabilitation class for many years, but she still cannot read or write. Although I am worried about her lack of progress, I am afraid to question the school because I fear that she may lose her place. Sometimes, it seems that the school is only keeping her there rather than helping her learn and develop academically.”* Observations further revealed that while such settings provide temporary care and social interaction, they lack structured instruction and developmental support. This reflects deep institutional misconceptions that treat educational services as charity rather than as a right.

Regarding the engagement of local education authorities, qualitative interview evidence indicates that units serving children with disabilities are often perceived as external responsibilities rather than integral institutional obligations equivalent to regular classes.

A special needs unit teacher explained, *“Our unit is treated as an isolated and exceptional part of the school. Teachers in regular classes are unwilling to support children with disabilities, often viewing them as disruptive. The school principal never visits the unit, does not review lesson plans, and provides no professional guidance throughout the academic year.”*

Another teacher reported, *“Officials from the Woreda education office have never come for supervision or monitoring visits to our unit. The learners' fate is left entirely to the teachers of the unit.”* This account reinforces the quantitative findings, highlighting weak local authority engagement and limited institutional commitment to inclusive education for children with disabilities.

5. CONCLUSION

Education for children with disabilities is constrained by multiple factors, including lack of committed leaders inaccessible infrastructure, negative societal and school attitudes, and unsuitable curricula. In line with these multiple challenges, prior studies have given limited attention to stakeholders' awareness in ensuring this right. Therefore, this study was designed to examine the awareness levels of key stakeholders using inferential statistics, interviews, and FGDs to capture perceptions and lived experiences of respondents and to address this gap.

Across all analyses, a consistent pattern emerged showing extremely low awareness, weak advocacy and poor institutional engagement regarding the educational rights for CWDs at school, community, and local authority levels. Independent-samples t-tests ($p < .001$) revealed significant gaps between school leaders and teachers across legal awareness, parental sensitization, community awareness, access to international conventions, and advocacy campaigns. Qualitative evidence such as parental denial of admission, denial of CWDs enrollment, and isolation of special-unit learners further validates systemic neglect.

Unanimous agreement on items 1-5 seen in **table 2** (t-test), along with strong partial correlation ($r = .960$, $p < .001$) and multiple Chi-square results (all $p < .001$), confirms that awareness is the key driver of advocacy, inclusive planning, and enrollment. The combined inferential statistics and interview evidence clearly show extremely low awareness and weak advocacy regarding the educational rights of children with disabilities at school, community, and local authority levels. Strengthening awareness programs, professional development, community advocacy, and school-level localization of international conventions is essential to advance the right to education of CWDs at schools level.

In sum, the exclusion of children with disabilities cannot be attributed solely to resource constraints; rather, it is closely linked to limited awareness and insufficient commitment among school leaders to initiate school-level awareness-creation programs that promote advocacy and the implementation of legal obligations. In addition, weak coordination among Zonal, *Woreda*, and school-level actors remains a significant obstacle to inclusion. These findings indicate the need for strengthened leadership and enhanced teacher awareness, equipped with existing global, regional, and national legal frameworks and policies.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Zonal and District (*Woreda*) Education

6.1.1. For Zonal Education Desk

- Issue mandatory directives requiring schools to integrate disability identification, awareness-raising and advocacy activities into their annual plans.
- Localize and disseminate key international and national legal instruments, including the Convention on the Right of Person with Disability (CRPD), Convention on the Right of Children (CRC), United Nation Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and ICESCR, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), to schools and communities.
- Lead large-scale awareness and advocacy campaigns on the educational rights of children with disabilities.
- Establish clear accountability and monitoring indicators for the implementation of inclusive education policies and disability rights.

6.1.2. For District (*Woreda*) Education Offices

- Operationalize zonal directives through continuous professional development (CPD) and capacity-building programs for school leaders and teachers.
- Regularly supervise and monitor school-level awareness, advocacy, and inclusion activities.
- Mobilize Kebele leaders, Disabled People's Organizations (DPOs), None Government Organizations (NGOs), community groups, and parents to support inclusive education initiatives.
- Enforce binding directives on the admission, participation, and support of children with disabilities in schools.
- Provide assistance and follow-up support to families facing discrimination or barriers to educational access.

Joint Responsibility

- Strengthen awareness, advocacy, supervision, and enforcement mechanisms to ensure the effective implementation of disability rights and inclusive education policies.
- Bridge the gap between national policy commitments and local implementation to guarantee the right to education for all children with disabilities.

6.2 Recommendations for Schools and Other Stakeholders

6.2.1. For Schools

- Integrate disability identification and awareness-raising strategies into annual school improvement and action plans.
- Ensure that key international and national legal instruments related to the rights of children with disabilities (e.g., CRPD, CRC, UDHR, and ICESCR) are accessible and visibly displayed for staff, students, and parents.
- Establish school-based advocacy committees to promote and monitor the educational rights of children with disabilities.
- Provide continuous professional development and awareness training for teachers and school leaders on inclusive education and disability rights.
- Strengthen mechanisms for the early identification, enrollment, and educational support of children with disabilities.
- Promote collaboration between regular classroom teachers and special needs units to ensure shared responsibility for inclusive education.

6.2.2. For Community Partners and Other Stakeholders

- Disabled People's Organizations (DPOs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and parents' associations should conduct sustained community awareness campaigns on the educational rights of children with disabilities.
- Provide technical and material support to schools for awareness creation, teacher training, and inclusive education implementation.
- Support schools in developing effective systems for identifying and enrolling out-of-school children with disabilities.
- Advocate for the enforcement of disability rights and inclusive education policies at school, community, and government levels.
- Strengthen partnerships among schools, families, communities, and local authorities to promote educational inclusion.
- Empower parents to understand, claim, and protect their children's right to quality and inclusive education.

Joint Responsibility

- Schools and stakeholders should work collaboratively to strengthen awareness, advocacy, and accountability mechanisms that ensure the realization of the right to education for all children with disabilities.

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