

Spring 2024 Professional Fellow

Name: Eva Ephrem Chuwa
Country: Tanzania
Job Title: Special Needs Teacher, Al Muntazir Special Education Needs (AMSEN)
Project Title: Enhancing In-Service Teacher Training for Autism Inclusion at a Private School in Tanzania

Issue: Inclusive education began in 1998 as a pilot program in two schools, gradually expanding to cover nearly all regions in Tanzania (Possi & Milinga, 2017). In 2009, the Tanzania Ministry of Education and Vocational Training set a national strategy to achieve inclusive education for all children (MoEVT, 2009), emphasizing the importance of educating students with disabilities alongside their nondisabled peers in the same classrooms. However, despite the widespread availability of inclusive schools, few admit students with disabilities such as autism. There is a significant gap in implementing inclusive education, particularly for students with autism, mainly due to attitudinal, environmental, and knowledge barriers in schools (Laiser, 2023; Possi & Milinga, 2017).

Inclusion is crucial for children with autism. Research suggests that including them in nursery settings improves their cognitive outcomes in primary school (Nahmias et al., 2014). Inclusive environments also benefit children with autism by enhancing their social, communication, self-care, and cognitive skills as well as fostering an inclusivity among all children (Briskman et al., 2020). However, the absence of inclusion from the nursery level onwards prevents children with autism from fully exercising their rights.

Project Objective: Eva's project aims to enhance in-service teacher training at Al Muntazir Nursery School to promote autism inclusion, drawing on best practices from the US, and engage parents effectively in Tanzania's cultural and academic context. Eva recognizes that the lack of inclusive early intervention in Tanzania has hindered the civic engagement of individuals with autism.

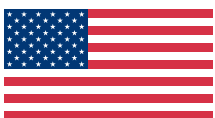
Activities: Al Muntazir operates as a four-school system with campuses for nursery, primary, secondary, and special education. The Special Education Needs school uses a curriculum designed to meet each student's individual needs, especially in communication and social skills. Students have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) created in collaboration with parents, setting goals to address challenges, nurture strengths, and develop new skills. Initially, students attend part-time with the goal of transitioning later to full-time (secondary school) mainstream classes when ready.

At Al Muntazir, Eva, a special education needs teacher, used to teach at the Nursery School and then transitioned to the Special Education Needs School to specifically work with children with autism. While she has expertise in inclusive education, many nursery teachers do not, emphasizing the need for training and support.

Leveraging her background and with support from both the Al Muntazir Nursery School and Special Education Needs school, Eva plans to enhance the existing in-service nursery teacher training by incorporating best practices for autism inclusion from the US. Additionally, she aims to involve parents of children with autism through formal and informal engagement, adapting US advocacy methods to fit the Tanzanian cultural and academic context.

References:

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