Networking Role of Head Teachers in Addressing Educational Needs of Vulnerable Pupils in Iringa and Mufindi Districts, Tanzania

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Abstract
This study examined the networking role of public primary school head teachers in addressing educational needs of vulnerable pupils in Iringa and Mufindi Districts, Tanzania. It was guided by Epstein's theory developed by Joyce Epstein in the late 1980s. The target population included 321 schools, 321 head teachers, 642 welfare teachers and 26,815 vulnerable pupils, with a sample size of 490 selected through probability and non-probability sampling. Data was collected via questionnaires, interviews and observations, quantitative data analysed with the aid of SPSS version 27 descriptive and inferential statistics were obtained and qualitative data were analysed through thematic analysis using Turbo Scribe and QDA Miner software. Findings revealed that some schools partnered with organizations like DREAMS, World Vision Tanzania, UNICEF, TASAF and Village Community Banks (VICOBA), but assistance was inconsistent, leaving vulnerable pupils educational needs unmet. Other schools lacked any organizational connections, resulting in insufficient support for vulnerable pupils. The study concluded that networking diversity among head teachers was crucial for accessing educational support for vulnerable pupils from NGOs, charities and local groups. Head teachers without such connections were urged to establish them to secure resources. The study recommended that, head teachers should strengthen networking efforts to engage more educational supporters and collaboration between head teachers and the Ministry of Education Science and Technology to identify vulnerable pupils and develop support mechanisms. Additionally, awareness campaigns to educational stakeholders and training for head teachers on networking strategies were advised to improve access to educational assistance for vulnerable pupils.

Keywords: Networking, role of public primary school head teachers, educational needs, vulnerable pupils.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ADEM	Agency for Development of Educational Management
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CAMFED	Campaign for Female Education
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
HIV	Human Immune Deficiency Virus
HTs	Head teachers
MVC	Most Vulnerable Children
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
QDA	Qualitative Data Analysis
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences

TAPSHA	Tanzania primary schools Head teachers Association
TASAF	Tanzania Social Action Fund
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
URT	United Republic of Tanzania
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VPs	Vulnerable Pupils
WFTs	Welfare Teachers

1. Introduction

Networking is a vital tool for head teachers to secure resources for vulnerable pupils. A key factor to making networking successful is finding an appropriate partner school or organisation to work with (Azorín, 2022). Networks bring together those with like-minded interests, they are more than just opportunities to share 'good practice' (Hopkins. 2023). Head teachers, as key school leaders, play a crucial role in mobilizing resources to support vulnerable pupils. However, individual efforts are often insufficient. Networking among head teachers has emerged as a strategic approach to pooling resources, sharing best practices and mobilizing resources to support vulnerable learners. However, their effectiveness often depends on their ability to collaborate with stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, community leaders and other educators. (Muijs, 2021; Komba & Nkumbi, 2022).

Since the late 1980s, there has been evidence of schools where head teachers have worked collaboratively and developed high levels of personal and professional trust, including various different forms of networking (Hargreaves, 2018). Networking has come to the forefront in recent years and has become a beacon of good practice for innovation and improved learning (Prenger et al., 2021; Robinson et al., 2020; Schnellert & Butler, 2020). The use of networks in school settings therefore offers many opportunities and promising prospects for leaners (Azorín, 2020a). Thus, it can be argued that the inescapable advancement of networking environments is closely linked to the growing number of collaborative alliances and the increasing connections between education stakeholders who participate to support education resources (Azorín, 2020b). Networking role was spreading roots in the field of school effectiveness and school improvement (Azorín, 2022). Network is a set of actors' individual or organisations such as schools connected by a set of ties, whereby, networks promote the dissemination of good practice, enhance the professional development of teachers, support capacity building in schools, mediate between centralized and decentralised structures and assist in the process of re-structuring and re-culturing educational organisations and systems in securing required educational materials for leaners especially vulnerable pupils.

The networking role of head teachers are of paramount important in enforcing connections with different educational stakeholders. Head teachers have many role to perform at schools as outlined in the 1978 National Education Act of Tanzania, 2016/17 – 2020/21 Education Sector Development Plan, Guidelines for Teachers Deployment in Pre-Primary and Primary Schools of Mainland Tanzania 2020 and ADEM 2023. Some of these roles are to preparing the school development plan, supervising curriculum implementation, conducting administrative and pedagogical supervision. Furthermore, reviewing teaching and learning in the classroom, ensuring a conducive teaching and learning environment, collaborating with communities, networking, enforce teamwork, sensitizing and mobilizing teaching and learning resources; involving teachers, non-teaching staff, pupils, school committees, parents and other stakeholders in carrying out school development activities. Head teachers are additionally responsible for communicating with parents regularly about their children's progress truthful and transparent while discharging duties adhering to confidentiality (URT, 2018, 2020; ADEM, 2023 & UNESCO, 2024). Despite many roles played by head teacher networking role among others was of very important in enabling connections among educational stakeholders for ensuring educational needs of vulnerable pupils.

Currently networking initiatives that were made in Tanzania were the formulation of TAPSHA which is an association of primary school head teachers in Tanzania, aimed at serving as a platform for professional development of head teachers and teachers, networking and advocacy for primary education. However the

Dr. Msuya scholarship program designed to finance educational costs for vulnerable children, focusing on linking disadvantaged communities with potential sponsors. Head teachers to have networks with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that play an active role in implementing and monitoring grant activities, contributing resources and advocating for policy changes. The National Costed Plan of Action (NCPAII) for Most Vulnerable Children (MVC) (2013-2017) was developed to guide actions and policies aimed at enhancing the wellbeing of MVC, including preventing and reducing health and social risks and protecting their rights. National strategy on Inclusive Education in Tanzania 2009-2017 was aimed to ensure all children, youths and adults are enrolled, actively participate and achieve in regular schools and other educational programmes regardless of their diverse backgrounds and abilities. CAMFED aims to empower young women in sub-Saharan Africa by ensuring they have access to education, leadership opportunities and economic empowerment to become independent and influential leaders in their communities. (CAMFED, 2023).

The international research into educational networks has led to education policies and practices aimed at fostering networking and collaboration in schools. In Ireland a study done by Bourke (2023) examined how head teacher networking enhancing availability of educational needs of vulnerable pupils. The study findings showed how networking support the development of individual members' bonding social capital through peer interaction and development of their professional capital to enhance capacity to respond to complexity. Additionally, it outlines how network bridging and linking social capital to support schools in disadvantaged contexts to collectively respond to intractable social issues by connecting network members' priorities to those of key stakeholders and building lateral capacity. The study suggested that, schools' idea of networks working together in a collaborative effort would be more effective in enhancing school capacity and improving pupils learning than individual schools working on their own.

In USA Nevard et al. (2020) on conceptualizing the social networks of vulnerable children and young people. Results shows that, the most frequently investigated vulnerabilities were minority ethnic status, homelessness and the presence of special educational needs. However, key findings highlighted that, vulnerable children and young people have impoverished networks. Also, the study found that, access to networks was a protective factor against negative outcomes and social ties, primarily immediate family, provide access to personal resources and network ties are to a degree substitutable to vulnerable pupils.

In Uganda Kakungulu (2024), the study explored the pivotal role of community partnerships in enhancing educational outcomes, particularly within underperforming schools. The study established that, by engaging local stakeholders, including families, businesses and non-profit organizations, schools can leverage these partnerships to provide additional resources, foster a supportive learning environment and address socio-economic barriers. The study found that, community partnerships and networking play a crucial role in enhancing educational outcomes, particularly in schools facing socio-economic challenges. By fostering collaboration and networking between educational institutions, families and community organizations, schools can create a more supportive and resource-rich environment that promotes vulnerable pupils success to education basic needs. In Tanzania a study done by Msuya (2022) explored on education financing through volunteering resource networking in supporting the disadvantaged students. The study found that, the scholarship raised community awareness on undertaking collective responsibility in financing education. It promoted the spirit of unity and charity.

Scholars have underlined vulnerable children as those under the age of 18 years falling under extreme conditions characterized by severe deprivation as to endanger their health, well-being and long-term development. Such conditions include living in extreme poverty, children with disabilities, orphans, abused, abandoned, neglected, infected/affected by HIV/AIDS, street children, children from marginalized communities, children facing socioeconomic and socio-cultural factors among conditions that hinder their academic progress and overall well-being (USAID, 2008; URT, 2017; Nyakaleji, 2020; Dutta and Rajkonwar, 2024). A report on Child "Vulnerability" in Tanzania reported that, poverty is widespread and is overall a major vulnerability factor in preventing many children from accessing education, though free primary education has greatly increased school participation. Precisely, children in these extreme conditions are most likely to be in public primary schools (URT, 2012 & 2024). Hence, head teachers are uniquely positioned to spearhead network connections initiatives with different educational stakeholders to support these vulnerable pupils' educational needs (URT, 2018 & 2021).

Educational needs is the major concern for all vulnerable pupils at all schools. Nyakaleji (2020) addressed that, educational needs refers to what is done by the school to ensure that all children including orphans and other vulnerable children (OVC) have access to and benefit from high quality learning opportunities. Losioki, (2020); Lauterbach and Dembek, (2023); Dutta and Rajkonwar (2024) and Ackim, (2024), highlighted that basic educational needs are basic needs and school requirements including food, learning materials, school uniform and monetary fees for school contributions. UNICEF (2024) pointed out that, the major reason for persistence of the problem of children from poor family is the lack of access to schooling, even when school fees are abolished, money must still be found to pay for things like uniforms and books. This leads to some children to either fail to attend to school or drop from school before completing standard seven as compulsory basic education. Policy and guidelines in Tanzania explained basic educational needs for most vulnerable children as access to school feeding programs, monitor pupils' progress at school, break barriers for girls in accessing education (e.g., provision of sanitary towels) and access to basic educational needs (URT, 2014, 2017, 2018 & 2021). Despite the emphases on inclusive education in Tanzania, there are many children from poor family in primary schools their parents who fail to meet the various costs of their education.

In Tanzania Educational policy of 2014 as revised in 2023, the National Guidelines for Identification of Most Vulnerable Children and Linkage to Care, Support and Protection (2017), Policy Guidelines on School Health Services in Tanzania (2018), National Guidelines for Supportive Supervision of Most Vulnerable Children Programs (2021) recognise the basic educational needs for most vulnerable children. Then, the government issued circular No. 6 (URT, 2015b) to clarify the role of parents with regard to fee-free public basic education. The circular, among other things, states that parents should meet the costs for the following items: school uniforms and uniforms for sports activities; learning materials such as exercise books, pens and pencils. The provision of food for children attending day schools (in cooperation with the school leadership) and medical expenses for the child and travel expenses for both day and boarding school pupils. In that case, it is the role of head teacher to make sure that networking with different educational stakeholders was effectively made to keep all in touch to ensure the basic educational needs of vulnerable pupils are met.

Despite efforts made by Tanzanian government and the foundation laid down for head teachers to execute their networking roles with regards to the needs of vulnerable pupils, the needs are not that very much addressed (Losioki, 2020) & Ndalichako, 2021). This situation leaves a lacuna in addressing the needs of vulnerable pupils in public primary schools a thing which raises concern on the roles of head teachers to effectively addressing this problem. Despite the fact that head teachers perform their networking roles, information on specific roles played is still limited specifically networking roles in addressing educational needs of vulnerable pupils. Few studies have been done in Tanzania on networking roles of primary school head teachers in addressing educational needs of vulnerable pupils in Mufindi and Iringa Districts, Tanzania. This study was undertaken to fill this gap.

1.1. Objective of the Study
The following objective guided the study
To assess networking role of public primary schools' head teachers in addressing educational needs of vulnerable pupils in Iringa and Mufindi districts.

1.2. Significance of the Study
The findings serve as resource of information for education planners and policymakers, inform professional development programs, capacity-building initiatives and government policies/programs, empowering head teachers and enabling evidence-based decision-making to better plan and support for vulnerable pupils. The findings also benefit vulnerable pupils by accessing educational needs after being addressed by head teachers. Again, this study aims to increase awareness among educational stakeholders such as teachers, parents, government and NGOs to strengthen mechanisms to enhance vulnerable pupils' access to education. Additionally, the study adds to the existing body of literature on networking role of head teachers in supporting vulnerable pupils and it provides empirical justification for the application of Epstein's theory.

2. Empirical Review
Some empirical studies had been carried out to examine networking indicators role performed by head teachers in addressing educational needs of vulnerable pupils. In USA, Nevard et al. (2020) conducted a study on conceptualizing the social networks of vulnerable children and young people. The study used a

mixed methods systematic review synthesize research in investigating whole, egocentric social networks of 32 vulnerable child groups with a mean age below 18. Results show that, the majority of pertinent researchers most frequently investigated vulnerabilities were minority ethnic status, homelessness and the presence of special educational needs. Furthermore, the study found that, vulnerable children and young people have impoverished networks, Also the study found that, access to networks was a protective factor against negative outcomes, social ties, primarily immediate family, provide access to personal resources and network ties are to a degree substitutable to vulnerable pupils.

The reviewed study informed this study on the importance of conceptualizing the social networks of vulnerable children and young people to enable vulnerable pupils access educational resources through social networks bearing the contextual and methodological differences of USA and Tanzania. Even though the reviewed study used a mixed method approach the selection of participants was not well explained. Therefore, this study used mixed method approach showing clearly how participants were selected using probability and non- probability sampling procedures whereby, 32 public primary schools selected, 32 head teachers, 64 welfare teachers and 394 vulnerable pupils.

In Indonesia Zulaiha et al. (2020) conducted a study on the effect of head teachers' competence and community participation on the quality of educational services. This research was conducted at Public Primary School 68 Palembang with 34 teachers as respondents. In this study there are three research variables consisting of two independent variables head teacher Competence (X1) and Community Participation (X2) and one dependent variable Quality of Educational Services (Y). In collecting data, the study used questionnaires. The results obtained in this study illustrate that the quality of educational services in Public Primary School 68 Palembang is very good and can meet pupils needs. This study sheds light on head teaches competence, community participation in improving quality of educational services in Indonesia. In this regard having different context compared to Tanzania the current study was conducted to examine contribution of networking role of head teacher in addressing educational needs of vulnerable pupils.

Moreover, the study used only questionnaires as instrument of data collection and one category of participant (teachers). Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasized the importance of using multiple data collection methods and respondents to ensure the validity and reliability of research findings. It emphasizes triangulation as a key strategy for enhancing the credibility of qualitative and mixed-methods research. The current study employing different instruments for data collection such as questionnaires, interview guides and observation guides. In addition, the study used more than one category of participants including welfare teachers, vulnerable pupils and head teachers to collect data.

In Saudi Arabia, Qaralleh (2021) investigated the role of head teachers in promoting community partnership. The study used a descriptive research method recruiting 5,320 teachers of both genders as the study population. The study sample was selected from the statistical population through the simple random sampling technique and the sample size reached 1,064 male and female teachers constituting 20.0% of the population. Results show that the existence of a role for head teacher in improving community participation in these schools through a set of practices undertaken by these individuals which were represented in their roles in terms of activating parent-teacher councils, providing effective channels of communication between the school personnel and the local community. Furthermore, head teachers form committees for further cooperation with local community establishing the organizational culture in the school to support community participation and implementing other extracurricular activities in favour of the concept of community participation.

This study sheds light on roles of head teachers through formulating different strategies to influence community participation in school activities. The current study aimed at examining the networking role done by head teachers in partnership with different educational stakeholders to make sure that educational needs of vulnerable pupils are in place. Moreover, the study used only questionnaire as instrument of data collection and one category of participant (teachers) which limits the findings. Creswell and Creswell (2018)

stressed on the importance of using multiple data collection methods and respondents to ensure the validity and reliability of research findings. They emphasized triangulation as a key strategy for enhancing the credibility of qualitative and mixed-methods research. The current study employed different instruments for data collection such as questionnaires, interview guides and observation guides. In addition, the study used more than one category of participants including welfare teachers, vulnerable pupils and head teachers to collect data.

In Tanzania, Msuya (2022) conducted a study on education financing through volunteering resource networking in supporting the disadvantaged students. A mixed research approach was to collect data. A total sample of 91 participants was used including 64 beneficiaries, 11 heads of secondary schools, 15 parents and 1 scholarship coordinator from Dr. Msuya Foundation. The findings indicated that the scholarship successfully supported 111 students who were able to complete their advanced secondary education. Out of those, 93 passed and joined various higher learning institutions for further learning. The scholarship raised community awareness on undertaking collective responsibility in financing education. It promoted the spirit of unity and charity. This study focused on community networking in supporting financial and resources to disadvantaged students at advanced secondary school. The current study looked at head teachers networking role in supporting educational needs of vulnerable pupils at primary level specifically in Iringa and Mufindi Districts in Tanzania.

A study by Mtahabwa (2020) focused on strategies for building effective networks between head teachers and stakeholders to support vulnerable pupils in public primary schools in Kilimanjaro region, Tanzania. The study employed a qualitative research approach, specifically semi-structured interviews with a total of 20 participants. It highlighted several key strategies that head teachers employed to build effective networks with stakeholders including involving them in decision-making processes, fostering mutual trust and respect. Also, creating opportunities for continuous engagement, feedback, regular communication and fostering a sense of shared responsibility for supporting vulnerable pupils.

The reviewed study sheds light on strategies that can be employed by head teachers through network to support vulnerable pupils. Since the reviewed study focused on child abuse and harassment focusing on strategies for building effective networks between head teachers and stakeholders to support VPs. The current study focused on the contributions of head teachers network role in addressed educational needs of vulnerable pupils in Iringa and Mufindi Districts in Tanzania. In addition, it adopted a qualitative research approach that allows gathering of only exploratory information that could not be generalized outside the study area contrary to this study which adopted mixed-method research.

Reviewed studies confirm that there are various gaps such as methodological gaps, where most of the reviewed studies relied on a single research method for data collection, limiting triangulation. The review indicates that most studies relied on either qualitative or quantitative methods, often neglecting the benefits of mixed approach to provide a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of the subject matter. Also, the knowledge gap those reviewed existing research did not adequately address the networking role of head teacher in addressing educational needs of vulnerable pupils. Furthermore, contextual gap is also, many reviewed studies conducted out-side of Tanzania. Despite these findings, from the reviewed studies, there is a significant lack of studies in Tanzania specifically focusing on networking role of head teacher in addressing educational needs of vulnerable pupils in public primary schools. This study specifically focused on networking role of head teachers in addressing educational needs of vulnerable pupils in Iringa and Mufindi Districts in Iringa region, Tanzania.

3. Research Methodology
The study employed a convergent design in a single-phase mixed research approach, involving the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data sets simultaneously to complement each other (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2014; Okendo et al., 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Then, the integration of information was done in the interpretation of the findings. The adoption of a convergent research design helped the researchers to cross-validate qualitative and quantitative information and hence confirmed the

research findings. Besides, the convergent design allowed the researchers to collect data from a large sample that could be generalized to a wider population and from a natural setting. In addition, convergent design eased the researcher's time management as both forms of data were collected in a single phase. Therefore, the target population for this study was 321 public primary schools found in Iringa and Mufindi districts, 321 head teachers, 26,815 vulnerable pupils and 642 welfare teachers (URT 2024). Hence total target population was 27,778. The study applied both probability and non-probability sampling techniques to select a sample for the study. The sample size ranged between 10% and 30% as recommended by Asenahabi and Ikoha (2023). The sample size for this study was 490 in the following distribution: Thirty two (32) public primary schools and 32 head teachers selected to participate in this study using total purposive sampling technique. A total of 64 welfare teachers participated in the study whereby 2 teachers per school were selected using Olonite Proportional Allocation sampling based on gender (Olonite.2022). Moreover, the sample included 394 vulnerable pupils of the VPs targeted population. The selection of the VPs sample was done using proportionate Stratified Sampling based on genders.

Both quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments included questionnaires for welfare teachers and vulnerable pupils as well as interview guide for head teachers and observation guide for vulnerable pupils. The validity of quantitative instruments was ensured by four research experts whereas the validity of qualitative instruments was ensured through triangulation. Reliability in quantitative instruments was ensured through the pilot test, whereby, Likert scale items in a questionnaire were subjected to SPSS software Version 27 and Cronbach alpha coefficient for welfare teachers was 0. 758 and the coefficient for vulnerable pupils' instruments was 0 .761. The reliability of qualitative data was ensured through triangulation of information and peer review. Quantitative data was analysed through descriptive statistics frequency, mean and percentage.

Qualitative data were analysed using turbo-scribe and QDA Miner software by following all stages that are transcribing, familiarizing, coding, categorizing and develop themes, interpretation, validation and trustworthiness. The analysis of data began from the initial stages of data collection. While the interviews were going on, the researchers were transcribing the information collected, analysed interviews conducted earlier and wrote notes, which were eventually included as verbatim in the final report and organised the structure of the study. Then, re-read the transcriptions to get a comprehensive understanding of arising issues. However, notes from lesson observation was analyzed manually. Thematic analysis was employed to identify common themes coded from the transcribed data, aiding in the interpretation and discussion of the study findings and presented through narrations and supported by direct quotations. The researcher ensured ethical considerations including permissions, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity and acknowledging all cited works to avoid plagiarism.

4. Findings of the Study

This research questions aimed at presenting findings and discussions on how networking role of head teachers address educational needs of vulnerable pupils in Iringa and Mufindi Districts, Tanzania. The main respondents were welfare teachers and vulnerable pupils who provided quantitative data through questionnaire and head teachers who provided qualitative data through interview guide. The observation guide was administered to vulnerable pupils. Quantitative data was presented in tables. Moreover, qualitative data were presented in form of quotations and narration. Variables mean scores for welfare teachers and vulnerable pupils were discussed as presented in Table1 and Table 2.

Table 1: Welfare Teachers Responses on the Networking Role Done by Public Primary School Head Teachers to Address Educational Needs of Vulnerable Pupils in Iringa and Mufindi Districts (WFTs n= 62)

S/N	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	MEAN
		f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	
1	HT builds a network that addresses educational needs of VPs	1 (1.6)	5 (8.1)	0 (0.0)	25(40.3)	31 (50.0)	4.29
2	HT network connectivity enhances motivational and provision of support to VPs	2 (3.2)	6 (9.7)	0 (0.0)	21(33.9)	33 (53.2)	4.24
3	HT established network contributes to improve	2 (3.2)	6 (9.7)	0 (0.0)	25(40.3)	29 (46.8)	4.18

	the educational conditions of VPs						
4	HT knowledge sharing, openness and trust increases access to educational needs of VPs	1 (1.6)	7 (11.3)	0 (0.0)	27 (43.5)	27 (43.5)	4.16
5	HT network diversity reduce burdens and increases access to educational needs of VPs	2 (3.2)	7 (11.3)	0 (0.0)	27 (43.5)	26 (41.9)	4.10
6	HT engages with external organizations to support VPs	2 (3.2)	9 (14.5)	0 (0.0)	22 (35.5)	29 (46.8)	4.08
7	HT provides information and introductions to network partners who support educational needs for VPs	3 (4.8)	4(6.5)	2 (3.2)	30(48.4)	23(37.1)	4.06
8	HT maintains relationships with stakeholders to ensure ongoing support for VPs	2 (3.2)	2 (3.2)	0 (0.0)	26 (41.9)	26 (41.9)	4.06
9	HT reaches out to explore potential partnerships for funding sources to support VPs needs	3 (4.8)	7 (11.3)	0 (0.0)	36 (58.1)	16 (25,8)	3.89
10	HT provides regular updates on resources availability from network partners	4 (6.5)	8(12.9)	2 (3.2)	27 (43.5)	21(33.9)	3.85
	WFTs & VPs Overall mean						**4.09**

Source: Field Data, 2025 **Key:** F= Frequency, %= percentage SD= Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

Data on Table 1 presented a mean score of 4.29 for welfare teachers agree with the statement on head teachers build a network that contribute to addresses educational needs vulnerable pupils. This implies that head teachers' networks facilitate access to funding, training and community partnership. A strong head teachers network contributes to more responsive, equitable and sustainable support systems for vulnerable pupils. This was supported by a study done by Harris and Jones (2020) who said that, head teachers in strong networks adopt evidence-based strategies like visionary planning, instructional innovation, community engagement and mentoring programs to support disadvantaged pupils. A report by OECD (2021) and Muijs (2021) indicated that, schools in leadership networks faster adoption of inclusive and head teachers network link schools with social service providers and NGOs.

The data on Table1 on head teachers network connectivity enhances motivation and provision of support to vulnerable pupils' educational needs, presented a mean score of 4.24 for welfare to agree with this statement that this network connectivity contribute to address needs of VPs. This implies that head teachers network connectivity contributes to enhance availability of VPs educational needs. In Ghana, Kyeremeh (2020) agrees with this by asserting networking among professional communities is key to building capacity, these networks enhance motivation, develop cultural expectations and provide underlying support structure to develop and sustain capacity building for educational improvement and enhancement.

Washington and O'Connor (2020) in their study conclude that collaborative networking has a positive impact on vulnerable children. This was also suggested by Bourke (2023) who said that social capital networking increases your knowledge and it gives you access to other people's human capital. Collaborating network with educational stakeholders expands networks of influence and opportunity and it develops resilience when you know there are people to go to who to give you advice and be your advocates in supporting VPs educational needs.

The Data on Table 1 also show that welfare teachers' mean score was 4.18 agreeing with the statement that head teachers established network contributes to improving the educational conditions of VPs. This implies that head teachers' partnerships with different educational stakeholders is important in enhancing support systems that are used to address educational needs of vulnerable pupils. This is supported by OECD (2022) report on Equity in Education showing that schools with strong external collaborations report higher satisfaction among disadvantaged pupils whereby their educational needs are assured. Building on collaborative networks is essential and has a positive contribution in addressing educational needs of vulnerable pupils.

Data on Table 1 on head teachers' knowledge sharing, openness and trust increases access to educational needs of vulnerable pupils agrees with this statement by showing a mean score of 4.16 of welfare teachers. The data show that head teachers' knowledge sharing, openness and trust contribute to increasing access to educational needs of vulnerable pupils. This implies that head teachers sharing needs of vulnerable pupils openly to different educational stakeholders enables some stakeholders to have a feeling of vulnerability

hence they become ready to provide support to educational needs of vulnerable pupils. Head teachers have a wider room of addressing educational needs of vulnerable pupils at all times and their close touch with stakeholders can help them contribute for educational needs of vulnerable pupils.

These findings are justified by HT7 during the interview who had said that:

> The strategy we have here includes discussing educational needs of VPs frequently during our parent meetings here at school and even in the village. You could say that today someone might not understand, but as you continue to talk about the matter, another person starts to reflect on why this issue is being mentioned repeatedly and they begin to see its importance, which may lead them to help (Head Teacher 7, *Interview,* 15th October, 2024).

Head teachers have a wider room of addressing educational needs of vulnerable pupils at all times and their close touch with stakeholders can help them contribute for educational needs of vulnerable pupils. It is very important for head teachers to make sure that frequently that talk about educational needs of VPs openly in order to make sure that all educational stakeholders are aware and possibly it is easier to take action and provide support.

These findings were supported by Social Capital Theory founded by Bourdieu (1983) that emphasizing network as to a structure and quality of social relationships that constitutes a positive product of social interactions that can be a source of benefits for individuals, social groups and the society as a whole. Nevard et al. (2020), Tsounis and Xanthopoulou (2024) also have a similar idea that social capital concerns the amount of trust and civic participation which is available in a community, a city, or a state and may facilitate interpersonal cooperation from which all community members may benefit irrespective of their unique investment in social networks especially in supporting needs of VPs.

In order for head teachers' knowledge sharing, openness and trust to increase access to educational needs of vulnerable pupils to work well the human capital is very necessary for supporting in mobilization of these resources. Furthermore, understanding the diverse cultural and family circumstances that one's pupils come from, being familiar with and able to sift and sort the science of successful and innovative practice contribute to addressing the needs of VPs. Although, having the emotional capabilities to sympathise with diverse groups of children in and around a school. It is about possessing the passion and the moral commitment to serve all children and to want to keep getting better in how you provide that service to them and social ties, primarily immediate family, provide access to personal resources.

Data on Table 1 on head teachers network diversity reduce burdens and increase access to educational needs of vulnerable pupils A mean score of 4.10 of welfare teachers agreed with this statement. This implies that head teachers struggle to make partnership with different educational stakeholders so as to ensure access to educational needs of vulnerable pupils. This was evidenced during interview with head teachers, whereby HT7 narrated that:

> If the government could order us to gather information and send it to them and then conduct an analysis and approve it, this could potentially help these vulnerable pupils so that they too can reach a point where they fulfil their dreams by accessing their educational needs. Head Teacher 7, Interview, 15th October, 2024).

The Ministry of Education Science and Technology in collaboration with head teachers they have to set good strategies of identifying VPs and set plan how to meet their educational needs such as uniforms, food access to monetary fund for school contributions. Head teachers' networks with different educational stakeholders increases assurance in addressing educational needs of VPs. To do this well, head teachers need considerable human and social capital of their own. Head teachers' network diversity in carrying out their duties has a great impact in improving the on-going activity of addressing the educational needs of vulnerable pupils.

This was supported by Zulaiha et al. (2020) who reported that, harmonious relationships and cooperation in synergy between the school and the community will not just happen without effort. In addition, Zulaiha et al. (2020) asserts that such links can occur if the head teacher is active and can build mutually beneficial relationships. Bryk et al. (2022) also adds that, networked schools use real-time data tracking to identify at-risk vulnerable pupils early so as to support them. People have begun to tap into the ideas of social capital among pupils and their families arguing that it is pupils from disadvantaged homes especially who are often lacking the networks of trust, information, support and advocacy that can help them succeed (Bourke (2023). Bourke (2023) added that, it's not enough for head teachers of the disadvantaged and the poor to have a

heart of gold. They need to have a treasure chest of knowledge and expertise too. They need to know how to make brilliant connections between the capital children need to get upward access and the existing cultures of these children's families and their communities.

Data on Table 1 presented welfare teachers' response to be 82,3% for agree and 17.7% for disagree about head teachers engage with external organizations to support educational needs of vulnerable pupils. This implies that head teachers' networks with community organizational, non- governmental organizational (NGOs) and faith-based organizations contribute to supporting educational needs of vulnerable pupils. Also, partnerships between schools and external organizations are crucial in addressing educational disparities. However, the disagreement view of some welfare teachers should not be ignored by head teachers. Head teachers should put in consideration their views and make sure that they increase more engagement with external organization in order to secure enough educational needs of VPs.

During interview with head teachers, it was evidenced that:

> DREAMS (Afya Women) project provides menstrual pads, exercise books and school bags to needy pupils. Also, World Vision provide support to poor families by giving them capital like goats, cows, chicken, pigs so as to increase their incomes and sometimes they provide school materials for vulnerable pupils (Head Teacher 5, Interview, 10th October, 2024).

This response indicates the efforts made by head teacher to get connected with different network partners enable them to address educational needs of VPs. Networks bring together those with like-minded interests. Also, networks are more than just opportunities to share good practice in supporting vulnerable pupils' educational needs. In this regard, it is easier for head teachers to secure resources for VPs and reduce burden unto them. These findings concur with a report by UNESCO (2023) on Global Education Monitoring Report that highlights the role of external collaborations in supporting the marginalized pupils. The finding also concurs with OECD (2022) report on equity in education which notes that schools engage with NGOs and local organizations to improve outcomes for vulnerable pupils by supporting them educational resources. The same is also shared by Hopkins (2020), Smith and Brown (2024) who posit that head teachers facilitate external support networks to support vulnerable pupils. Networks bring together those with like-minded interests. Networks are more than just opportunities to share good practice in supporting vulnerable pupils' educational needs.

Data on Table 1 presented results about head teachers provide information and introductions to network partners who support educational needs of vulnerable pupils. Welfare teachers' responses have a mean score of 4.06. This implies that welfare teachers agree to the statement that head teachers contribute to ensure connections are built and support is being provided by introducing network partners who support educational needs of vulnerable pupils. During interview with head teachers on ensuring connections with education stakeholders, it was said that:

> Regarding network partners, there was one that helped us last year, but this year they have not showed up. However, we are grateful for this group that sometimes came and assist us with soap, bed-sheets and exercise books. Also, these brothers and sisters from (Dream) Health women are really a great help; we can say they are the main saviours of these vulnerable pupils coming from difficult environment. When they come here, they bring school bags and a lot of items for these vulnerable pupils, overall, they help a lot (Head Teacher 9, Interview, 5th December, 2024).

Head teachers' contribution to ensuring connections are built and support is being provided from network partners who support educational needs of vulnerable pupils is pertinent. These findings were supported by Hopkins (2020) who suggested that, networks bring together those with like-minded interests, they are more than just opportunities to share 'good practice' especially in supporting VPs educational needs.

Furthermore, the Data on Table 1 presented a mean score of 4.06 for welfare teachers on a statement about head teachers maintain relationships with stakeholders to ensure ongoing support for vulnerable educational needs. This implies that head teachers are successful in fostering networks to different educational stakeholders, which contributes to addressing the educational needs of vulnerable pupils. This was also supported during an interview with one of the head teachers who mentioned that: *"There is a Roman Catholic Church that assists children living in difficult situations by providing supplies through a charity*

fund, including school uniforms, exercise books and sometimes they cover food" (Head Teacher 4, Interview, 9th October, 2024).

Head teachers have the spirit of unity and charity to that enhance ongoing support to educational resources. This indicates a strong commitment of head teachers to search network partners for ensuring ongoing support and resources for these pupils, which is essential for their academic and social development. These findings were justified by Epstein Theory which stressed that, school-community partnerships can thus bring about numerous benefits, including building a caring community, improving school curricula, supporting families, providing for vulnerable pupils' development, boosting behaviors, increasing attendance and education, as well as helping vulnerable pupils succeed at schools and in later life (Epstein, 2010a, 2010b).

These findings were also in line with those of Msuya (2022) from Tanzania who stresses that the scholarship in supporting vulnerable students raised community awareness on undertaking collective responsibility in financing education. This was also supported by a study conducted in Saudi Arabia by Qaralleh (2021) who highlighted that, authentic relationships and connections should be fostered between schools and the surrounding communities in order to build effective partnerships, meeting the goals of all partners involved in supporting educational needs of vulnerable leaners.

Data on Table 1 presents welfare teachers' response that 16.1% disagree and 83.9% agree that head teachers reach out to explore potential partnerships for funding sources to support vulnerable educational needs imply that schools have connections with community supporters like VICOBA and others. This was also supported during an interview with one of the head teachers who stated that:

> For example, in our village, we have various groups to whom we send letters, they have their Village Community Bank (VICOBA). They meet to raise funds. So, once we send them a letter, they usually set aside a portion. For instance, there was a time they brought us books, exercise books, shoes, uniforms and pens. There are stakeholders here who provide us with milk and we collaborate with them even though the assistance is not consistent (Head Teacher 7, Interview, 15th October, 2024).

In contrast, some head teachers claimed not having access to any service provided by supporters whereby HT6 had this to say: *"In our school we don't have any supports, if they were there, they wouldn't have failed to provide two or three bags of maize, because we have many children in difficult environments whom their parents can't support them"* (Head Teacher 6, Interview, 11th October, 2024).

The responses from welfare teachers and head teachers interview showed how head teachers put more efforts in establishing networks that could help to get access to educational needs of vulnerable pupils. The study found that, there are so many schools who luck supports due to insufficient network partners within the area of study. This was evidenced by HT 6 who said:

> Private organizations have not been very numerous for us and it is possible that their scarcity is due to the geography of where they are located. I won't go into much detail here because I have not met these private organizations to explain the challenges we face to see if they would help us or refuse to help (Head Teacher 6, Interview, 11th October, 2024).

In-sufficient network partners in the study area have seen as an obstacle to some schools to access educational needs of VPs. Head teachers and teachers have been helping in supporting VPs educational needs though it is not frequently due to other responsibilities facing them.

Data on Table 1 presented results on head teachers provide regular updates on resources availability from network partners who support educational needs of vulnerable pupils. Data show welfare teachers' response was 19.4% disagree and 80.6% agree on head teachers provide regular information and updates on available resources from network partners to support educational needs of VPs. Even though that head teachers provide regular information and updates on available resources from network partners. There is a need to take into consideration the ideas of those who disagree with this statement. The interview conducted to 10 head teachers, HT9 had this to say:

> We have these friendly schools, like private schools that often bring us pens and sometimes exercise books. So, when these supplies arrive at our school, I have to inform the responsible teachers and we usually prioritize vulnerable pupils living in difficult environment. However, sometimes if a child is lacking a pen or exercise books, they come and ask for one, and we provide

it. If a teacher notices a child doesn't have these supplies, we also give them out when available (Head Teacher 9, Interview, 5th December, 2024).

Head teachers continuously have to provide feedback and updates on the available resources from network partners in order to increase trust from service providers hence to ensure continuously support for VPs. This is in line with the findings by Kakungulu (2024) from Uganda who stipulated that, head teachers should maintain and promote a proactive, operational and predisposed orientation that seeks to promote vulnerable pupils' success and global growth in all key learning domains. The study maintained that, all school-community members should interact in a responsive and responsible manner to ensure that resources needed to enhance pupils' academic achievement were made available. Despite the good number of networks by head teachers applied to solicit support for vulnerable pupils from educational stakeholders, accessing educational support for vulnerable pupils is needed to be put into continuous consideration.

Table 2: Vulnerable Pupils Responses on Networking Role Done by Public Primary School Head Teachers to Address Educational Needs of Vulnerable Pupils in Iringa and Mufindi Districts (VPs n =390)

S/N	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	
		f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	MEAN
1	HT established network connects you with pupils from neighboring schools	3 (0.8)	18 (4.6)	0 (0.0)	151 (37.3)	218 (55.9)	4.44
2	HT networks contribute to improving your educational conditions	4(1.0)	20(5.1)	4(1.0)	139 (35.6)	223 (57.2)	4.43
3	HT openness in networking increases your educational support	4(1.0)	16 (4.1)	1 (0.3)	162 (41.5)	207(53.1)	4.42
4	HT network gives you the motivation to love the school	4(1.0)	02 (5.1)	0 (0.0)	170 (43.6)	198 (50.3)	4.37
5	HT works very much to build a network that addresses your educational needs	5 (1.3)	28(7.2)	2(0.5)	138(35.4)	217(55.6)	4.37
6	HT invites visitors to the school to provide education on the needs of VPs	2(0.5)	15 (3.8)	3 (0.8)	195 (50,0)	175 (44.9)	4.35
7	HT regularly notifies you of new sponsors	5 (1.3)	23(5.9)	4(1.0)	173 (44.4)	185 (47.4)	4.31
8	HT organizes a study tour to impress pupils living in a difficult environment	4(1.0)	37 (9.5)	2(0.5)	159(40.8)	188 (48.2)	4.26
9	HT provides information and introductions to know my network partners	9 (2.3)	27(6.9)	7 (1.8)	174(44.6)	173 (44.4)	4.22
10	HT maintains good relationships with stakeholders to ensure ongoing support	8 (2.1)	31 (7.9)	0 (0.0)	191 (49.0)	160(41.0)	4.19
	Overall mean						4.27

Source: *Field Data, 2025   Key: F= Frequency, %= percentage SD= Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree*

Data on Table 2 shows that a statement on head teachers' capability to establish networks that connects vulnerable pupils with neighboring schools yielded the highest mean score of 4.44. This implies that head teachers have good capacity to establish networks that connect their schools with neighboring schools. During interview HT9 had the following to say: ''*We have friend schools, like private schools that often bring us pens and sometimes exercise books. So, when these supplies arrive at our school, we usually prioritize vulnerable pupils living in difficult environment*" (Head Teacher 9, Interview,5th December).

Head teachers' networks with neighboring schools especially private schools means a lot in ensuring educational supports to VPs. Head teachers' cultures of addressing educational needs of VPs to different educational stakeholders openly contribute to reduce burden and hence needs to be met.

Head teachers network created has ranked the second source to contribute to improving educational needs of VPs as shown in Table 2 with the mean score of 4.43. This implies that head teachers' networks created contribute to addressing educational needs of VPs. This was supported by a study done by Bourke (2023) who revealed that, establishment of networking initiatives has been shown to support schools in effecting improvement. However, head teachers' openness in networking has ranked the third in improving educational needs of VPs as shown in Table 2 with the mean score of 4.42. This implies that head teachers' openness creates trust among educational stakeholders; hence providing support to educational needs of VPs. This was supported by Kakunglu (2024) who addressed that, by engaging local stakeholders, including

families, businesses, and non-profit organizations, schools can leverage these partnerships to provide additional resources for VPs, foster a supportive learning environment and address socio-economic barriers for VPs.

The fourth and fifth statement were about head teachers network gives VPs the motivation to love schooling and works very much to build a network that addresses your educational needs. This aspect had a means score of 4.37 each. This implies that head teachers' networks generate motivations to VPs to like attending school and puts much efforts to ensure educational needs are addressed well to educational stakeholders. The sixth statement was 'head teachers invite visitors to the school to provide education on the needs of VPs. This had the mean score of 4.35. This implies that head teachers engage with different educational stakeholders to advocate for the needs of VPs. The seventh variable was head teachers regularly notifies VPs new sponsors when they are available with a mean score of 4.31. These seven statements which were above grand mean were discussed and those below the grand mean of 4.27 were left even though those are the main contributors and agree that head teachers networking strategies contribute to address educational needs of VPs. This implies that head teachers have to put more emphasis by incorporating all network strategies to address educational needs of VPs.

The summary of responses from welfare teachers and vulnerable pupils and interviews conducted with head teachers contribute to address networking role of head teachers in addressing educational needs of vulnerable pupils. This networking role underscores the grand mean of 4.09 and 4.27 for welfare teachers and vulnerable pupils respectively. This indicates that WFTs and VPs agree that, head teachers connect with different educational stakeholders contributed to address educational needs of vulnerable pupils. Furthermore, the study found that some schools were having access to different network partners like DREAMS (Afya Women), World Vision Tanzania, Roman Catholic Church, UNICEF, TASAF and Village Community Bank (VICOBA) a few to mention. However, some head teachers claimed not having any connections with any organization which results in a lack of educational materials for supporting vulnerable pupils. Awareness campaign and training to all educational stakeholder to how to get connected and provide support for vulnerable pupils have a great impact

5. Conclusions
The study concluded that networking diversity among head teachers was crucial for accessing educational support for vulnerable pupils from NGOs, charities and local groups.

6. Recommendations
The study recommended that, head teachers should strengthen networking efforts to engage more educational supporters and collaboration between head teachers and the Ministry of Education Science and Technology to identify vulnerable pupils and develop support mechanisms. Additionally, awareness campaigns to educational stakeholders and training for head teachers on networking strategies were advised to improve access to educational assistance for vulnerable pupils.

7. Conflict of Interest
No conflict of interest exists in this study

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