

Mekelle University



College of Law and Governance

Department of civics and ethics

Inclusive Education in a Conflict Zone: Practices, Barriers for Students with Disabilities at Weldu Nigus Secondary School.

A Thesis submitted to the Department of civics and ethics

Prepared by: Desta Abera Mana(BA)

Submitted to: Teodros S. (Assistant Professor)

Mekelle University Lecturer

August,2025 G.C.

Mekelle, Tigray

Abstract

This study examines the implementation of inclusive education for students with disabilities in conflict-affected contexts, focusing on Weldu Nigus Secondary School in Tigray, Ethiopia. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 177 respondents, including students with disabilities, parents, teachers, staff, and community stakeholders, through surveys, interviews, focus groups, and observations. The research explores current inclusive practices, identifies physical, social, economic, and policy-related barriers, and analyzes stakeholder perceptions. Findings indicate that while classroom accessibility is high, significant gaps remain in restroom and pathway accessibility, availability of supportive professionals, assistive technologies, and learning materials. Teachers' understanding of diverse learning needs is inconsistent, and psychosocial support services are insufficient. The ongoing conflict exacerbates these challenges by disrupting infrastructure, reducing resources, and intensifying stigma. The study recommends targeted investment in human resources, assistive devices, and inclusive infrastructure, as well as policy reforms and community awareness initiatives to strengthen inclusive education in crisis settings. These insights provide a foundation for evidence-based interventions to ensure that students with disabilities are not left behind during and after conflict.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Almighty God for granting me the strength, wisdom, and perseverance to successfully complete this thesis.

I am profoundly indebted to my advisor Assistant professor Teodros Solomon Bezabeh whose invaluable guidance, constructive feedback, and constant encouragement have been instrumental throughout the course of this research. His expertise and commitment to academic excellence greatly enriched the quality of my work.

My sincere thanks also go to the Department of civics and ethics at Mekelle University for providing me with the opportunity and resources to pursue this study. I extend my appreciation to the faculty members and administrative staff whose support has been indispensable during my academic journey.

I am particularly grateful to the management, teachers, parents, and students of Weldu Nigus Secondary School who participated in this research. Their willingness to share their experiences and perspectives made this study possible.

I am deeply grateful to my family especially my beloved wife, Mrs. For her unwavering love, patience, and encouragement throughout the course of this study. Her understanding and support, especially during the many long hours of research and writing, made this work possible.

I am deeply grateful to my brothers Mergeta Gerawerk Abera, Mr. Aregawi Abera and Deacon Engineer Gebre'egzixabher Abera for their unwavering support, encouragement and financial support offered from the initial proposal stage to the final completion of this research.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my friends Deacon Hailemariam Solomon (Attorney and counselor at law and a member of Khermed Law Firm), for his unwavering support and encouragement offered from the initial proposal stage to the final completion of this research. His guidance, motivation, and constructive feedback played a significant role in shaping the progress and success of this thesis.

Finally, I would like to thank you to Engineer Ebuy Werede(Lecturer at Mekelle University) and Engineer Meles Gebre for their support, guidance, motivation, and constructive feedback played a significant role in shaping the progress and success of this thesis

Thank you so much, everyone!

Priest Desta Abera Mana

Mekelle, Tigrayy, August 16, 2025

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
List of Table	vi
Chapter One	1
Introduction	1
1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem	2
1.3 General objective	3
1.4 Specific Objectives	3
1.5 Research Questions	4
1.6 Scope of the Study	4
1.7 Significance of the Study	4
1.8 Organization of the Thesis	7
Chapter Two	9
Literature Review	9
2.1 Introduction	9
2.2 International Perspectives on Inclusive Education	9
2.2.1 Conceptual Foundations	9
2.2.2 Scholarly Debates	10
2.2.3 Pedagogical Approaches	10
2.3.2 Critical Reflections	10
2.4 African and Regional Perspectives on Inclusive Education	11
2.4.1 Historical and Policy Context	11
2.4.2 Inclusive Education in Sub-Saharan Africa	12
2.4.3 Key Barriers to Inclusive Education in Sub-Saharan Africa	13
2.4.4 Case Studies from African Countries	15
2.5 Regional Research Themes	16
2.5.1 Several cross-cutting themes emerge in African scholarship:	16
2.5.2 Inclusive Education and Conflict in Africa	16
2.5.3 Critical Reflections	17
2. 6 Ethiopian Perspectives on Inclusive Education	17
2.6.1 Historical and Policy Context	17

2.6.2 Practice of Inclusive Education in Ethiopia	18
2.6.4 Socio-Cultural Attitudes	19
2.6.5 Role of NGOs and International Donors	19
2.6.6 Inclusive Education in the Context of Conflict	20
2.6.7 Critical Reflections	20
2.7 Inclusive Education in Tigray: Conflict-Affected Perspectives.....	21
2.7.1 Background and Pre-Conflict Progress.....	21
2.7.2 Impact of the Tigray Conflict on Education	21
2.7.3 For children with disabilities, the impact has been disproportionately severe:.....	21
2.7.4 Barriers to Inclusive Education During and After Conflict	22
2.7.5 Emerging Coping Mechanisms and Community Resilience.....	22
2.7.6 The Role of International and Local NGOs	23
2.7.7 Critical Reflections	23
2.7.8 Three critical issues emerge:	23
Chapter Three.....	25
Research Methodology	25
3.1 Introduction	25
3.2 Research Design.....	25
3.3 Research Approach	25
3.3.1 Quantitative Phase.....	26
3.3.2 Qualitative Phase	27
3.4 Data Integration.....	27
3.4.1 Data Sources and Collection Instruments	27
3.4.2 Population and Sampling Techniques	28
Cochran's Formula for Sample Size	28
3.5 Method of Data Analysis.....	29
3.5.1 Ethical Considerations	29
Chapter Four	30
Finding and interpretations of the findings	30
4.1 General Background of Respondents	30
Interview Analysis	54
Chapter Five	59
Conclusion and recommendations	59
5.1 Conclusion.....	59
5.2 Recommendations.....	60

References	61
Appendix 1	64
Appendix 2	65
Appendix 2	68
Appendix 3	68

List of Table

Table 4. 1Demographic Characteristic of Respondents.....	30
Table 4. 2: Accessibility	33
Table 4. 3: Comfortably	35
Table 4. 4: Supportive Services	37
Table 4. 5: Effectiveness of the school	40
Table 4. 6: Academic Support	42
Table 4. 7: Peer Relationships	45
Table 4. 8: Emotional Support	47
Table 4. 9: Negative consequences of conflict	49
Table 4. 10: Impact of conflict on Education	50
Table 4. 11: Trauma and Emotional Well-being	52

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Inclusive education is a globally recognized approach aimed at ensuring that all children, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, have equitable access to quality education within mainstream settings (UNESCO, 2020). The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) emphasized the need for education systems to accommodate all learners, advocating for pedagogical reforms, teacher training, and policy development to ensure that students with disabilities are not excluded. Despite the significant progress in promoting inclusive education worldwide, its implementation remains particularly challenging in contexts affected by armed conflict.

Conflict-affected regions often face widespread destruction of infrastructure, displacement of populations, and reduced institutional capacity, which directly hinder the provision of inclusive educational services (INEE, 2010). Children with disabilities are disproportionately impacted, as they already face structural barriers such as inaccessible learning environments, limited assistive technologies, and social stigma that are further intensified by conflict (Human Rights Watch, 2019). In such settings, the focus of humanitarian interventions often prioritizes basic survival, with inclusive education receiving limited attention (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008).

Ethiopia, and particularly the Tigray region, has experienced prolonged armed conflict since late 2020, resulting in widespread destruction of schools, displacement of teachers, and disruption of educational services (OCHA, 2022). Reports indicate that children with disabilities in Tigray are at an even greater risk of exclusion from education due to damaged infrastructure, limited mobility, and a lack of targeted support systems (Save the Children, 2021). Moreover, social attitudes toward disability, scarcity of specialized teachers, and inadequate policy enforcement further exacerbate these challenges (MoE Ethiopia, 2018).

The reason the researchers chose Quiha Weldu Nigus Senior Secondary School is because there are camps where the conflict-affected combatants, including disabled students, live in Quiha. And since Quiha Weldu Nigus Senior Secondary School is located in Quiha, it is a unique example of how schools in conflict zones struggle to provide inclusive education. Limited resources, damaged infrastructure, lack of trained teachers, and psychosocial trauma among students and educators hinder

the effective implementation of inclusive practices. Furthermore, stigma and societal attitudes toward disability often exacerbate exclusion, making it difficult for students with disabilities to access and participate fully in education (World Bank, 2021).

Understanding practices, barriers, and stakeholder perspectives in implementing inclusive education during and after conflict is crucial for informing evidence-based interventions. Stakeholders including teachers, parents, education officials, and humanitarian organizations play a pivotal role in shaping inclusive education responses. Yet, little empirical research exists on how these actors perceive and address the educational needs of children with disabilities in conflict-affected regions of Ethiopia. This gap underscores the need for case studies that examine the intersection of conflict, disability, and education to provide policy-relevant recommendations.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Inclusive education has gained international recognition as a fundamental right for all children, including those with disabilities (UNESCO, 2020). However, implementing inclusive education in conflict-affected zones presents unique and severe challenges. In such settings, education systems are often disrupted, underfunded, and overstretched, making it difficult to ensure equitable access and quality education for students with disabilities (INEE, 2010; UNICEF, 2023).

In conflict zones, students with disabilities face multiple layers of marginalization: physical and infrastructural barriers, lack of specialized support, displacement, trauma, stigma, and a lack of trained teachers and resources tailored to their needs (Human Rights Watch, 2021; World Bank, 2021). Although inclusive education is emphasized in national and global education policies, there is limited understanding of how it is practiced in conflict-affected contexts, particularly from the perspectives of key stakeholders such as teachers, students, parents, and school leaders (INEE, 2010; UNESCO, 2017).

Moreover, empirical research remains limited on the lived experiences of students with disabilities in conflict-affected settings, particularly in low-resource contexts like Ethiopia (UNICEF, 2023). This gap is especially critical in regions such as Tigray, where ongoing conflict has profoundly disrupted educational access and delivery. Despite the central role of stakeholders—such as teachers, parents, school leaders, and local education authorities—in shaping inclusive education, their perspectives are often absent from policy discourse and program design (World Bank, 2021). This lack of context-specific and stakeholder-informed evidence hinders the development of inclusive, equitable, and conflict-sensitive education systems. Addressing this gap is essential to ensure that inclusive education strategies are both relevant and responsive to the realities on the ground.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to explore the realities of inclusive education in conflict zones, identify the barriers that hinder its implementation, and examine the practices and perceptions of stakeholders involved. Addressing this gap will provide evidence-based insights that can inform policy, improve inclusive education practices, and ensure that students with disabilities are not left behind in times of crisis (UNESCO, 2020; UNICEF, 2023). Perhaps the finding of this study may serve as a foundation, background, and context for future research. Generally, considering the gaps, this research intended to explore institutional policies and Inclusive Education in a Conflict Zone: Practices, Barriers, and Stakeholder Perspectives for Students with Disabilities.

1.3 General objective

The general objective of this study was to examine the implementation of inclusive education for students with disabilities specifically at Weldu Nigus Secondary School in Tigray, Ethiopia, by exploring current practices, identifying key barriers, and analyzing the perspectives of various stakeholders involved in the education process.

1.4 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are:

- To identify and describe current inclusive education practices being implemented for students with disabilities at Weldu Nigus Secondary School, Tigray, Ethiopia.
- To examine the major barriers that hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education at Weldu Nigus Secondary School, Tigray, Ethiopia.
- To explore the perceptions, experiences, and roles of key stakeholders' inclusive education for students with disabilities at Weldu Nigus Secondary School, Tigray, Ethiopia.
- To assess the impact of conflict on educational access, participation, and learning outcomes for students with disabilities at Weldu Nigus Secondary School, Tigray, Ethiopia.
- To suggest strategies and policy recommendations for improving inclusive education delivery for students with disabilities in conflict settings.

1.5 Research Questions

- What inclusive education practices are currently being implemented for students with disabilities at Weldu Nigus Secondary School, Tigray, Ethiopia?
- What are the major barriers affecting the provision of inclusive education at Weldu Nigus Secondary School, Tigray, Ethiopia?
- How do key stakeholders perceive and experience inclusive education at Weldu Nigus Secondary School, Tigray, Ethiopia?
- In what ways does ongoing conflict impact access to education, participation, and learning outcomes for students with disabilities at Weldu Nigus Secondary School, Tigray, Ethiopia?
- What strategies or interventions can be proposed to improve inclusive education for students with disabilities at Weldu Nigus Secondary School, Tigray, Ethiopia?

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study was dedicated to investigating the implementation of inclusive education for students with disabilities at Weldu Nigus Secondary School in Tigray, Ethiopia, a region profoundly impacted by armed conflict since late 2020. The research focuses on analyzing the current inclusive education practices, identifying barriers, such as physical, social, economic, and policy-related constraints, and capturing the perspectives of key stakeholders, including teachers, school administrators, parents, students, and non-governmental organizations. The temporal scope spans from the onset of the conflict in 2020 to the present, reflecting the unique challenges posed by a disrupted educational environment. Geographically, the study is confined to Weldu Nigus Secondary School, a government institution selected for its efforts to maintain educational services amidst resource scarcity and ongoing instability. This focused scope ensures a detailed examination of inclusive education dynamics within a specific conflict-affected setting, providing insights relevant to both local and broader educational contexts.

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study holds substantial significance for advancing inclusive education in conflict-affected areas such as Welde Nguse, where educational systems face unique challenges due to ongoing instability. By generating evidence-based insights into current practices, barriers, and stakeholder perspectives at Welde Nguse Secondary School, the research can directly inform policy development and advocacy efforts. Policymakers at both local and regional levels may draw upon these findings to design or refine educational policies that prioritize inclusivity, ensuring equitable access for students with disabilities.

Moreover, by identifying specific resource gaps—such as the need for teacher training in adaptive methodologies, provision of assistive technologies, and improvement of accessible infrastructure—the study can strengthen advocacy initiatives aimed at securing increased funding and support from governmental and non-governmental organizations. This, in turn, fosters the development of a more resilient educational framework amid conflict.

In terms of enhancing pedagogical approaches, the research highlights effective strategies currently practiced at Welde Nguse Secondary School, offering a practical model for other institutions seeking to improve support for students with disabilities. These strategies include professional development programs that equip educators with inclusive teaching techniques tailored to diverse learner needs, thereby elevating the overall quality of instruction across similar contexts.

Furthermore, the study contributes to raising societal awareness by sharing its findings with communities, underscoring the wide-ranging benefits of inclusive education for all students and challenging entrenched attitudes that may hinder acceptance. Through documenting the successes and challenges experienced by students with disabilities in Welde Nguse, it promotes a cultural shift toward greater empathy, equity, and inclusion.

By amplifying the voices of students with disabilities and their families, the study acknowledges and validates their lived experiences. While the research itself does not directly create empowerment, its findings can provide a platform for recognition, awareness, and dialogue. This process may encourage self-advocacy, increase community support, and inform policy and practice that promote more inclusive educational environments. For parents and guardians, the insights into navigational challenges and triumphs provide essential guidance to strengthen their roles in supporting educational journeys. Academically, this work addresses critical gaps in the literature on inclusive education in conflict zones, serving as a foundational resource for scholars and practitioners in Tigray and beyond. It enables comparative analyses with other regions, enriching global discourse on adaptive educational models and facilitating cross-contextual learning.

Ultimately, the research's actionable recommendations pave the way for sustainable, long-term transformations in Ethiopia's education system by providing evidence-based strategies that address the specific barriers faced by students with disabilities, ensuring they receive the necessary accommodations to thrive. By documenting replicable practices, it supports the scaling of successful interventions to additional schools and areas, thereby extending the study's impact and contributing to a more inclusive, equitable educational landscape in conflict-prone environments.

Limitation of the Study

Security and Accessibility Constraints

Conflict zones were safe or accessible, and it didn't limit me the ability to conduct in-depth fieldwork or visit schools and communities directly.

Limited Availability of Reliable Data

The data was somewhat incomplete, outdated, or inconsistent, especially on children with disabilities. But I solved it by using **data triangulation** by comparing official records, NGO reports, and primary interviews to validate information.

Underreporting or Misidentification of Disabilities

Due to cultural stigma or lack of formal diagnosis there was underreporting of children with disabilities. But I solved it by ensuring participant **confidentiality** and build trust through transparent communication about research intentions.

Participant Bias or Response Constraints

Stakeholders (teachers, parents, officials) gave candid opinions without fear of judgment or political consequences. The students, especially with disabilities, openly expressed their views were included in the interviews without communication barriers.

Ethical and Psychological Considerations

Working with vulnerable groups in traumatic settings requires careful ethical handling.

There may be emotional distress when discussing sensitive topics (e.g., violence, discrimination), limiting open participation.

Mitigation Strategies:

Secure ethical clearance from relevant authorities and follow **informed consent** procedures tailored for each stakeholder group. Provide **referral options** for psychological support in case participants experience distress. Avoid probing into trauma unless necessary and always allow participants to withdraw or skip questions freely.

Language and Communication Barriers

You may encounter multiple local languages or dialects, requiring translation which can lead to misinterpretation. Children with hearing, speech, or intellectual disabilities may require specialized communication strategies that are hard to implement.

Mitigation Strategies:

Recruit **qualified local interpreters** with experience in disability-inclusive communication.

Prepare **visual aids, sign language interpreters, or assistive devices** for children with communication challenges. Pilot-test tools with local experts to ensure cultural and linguistic accuracy.

Generalizability Issues

Your findings may be highly context-specific and not applicable to other conflict zones or non-conflict areas. Variation between regions, schools, or NGOs makes it hard to create a universal picture of inclusive education practices.

Mitigation Strategies:

Clearly **define the scope and boundaries** of the study to manage expectations regarding generalizability.

Use **thick description** and context-rich narratives to enable readers to interpret transferability to other settings. Compare findings across different sites within the region to identify patterns and divergences.

Time and Resource Limitations

Mitigation Strategies:

Prioritize **critical sites and stakeholders** using purposive sampling. Use **mixed methods** efficiently (e.g., shorter surveys alongside in-depth interviews) to maximize data yield. Seek partnerships with academic institutions or NGOs to share resources and reduce duplication of efforts.

1.8 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is structured into five distinct chapters, each addressing critical components of the investigation into inclusive education for students with disabilities at Weldu Nigus Secondary School in

Tigray, Ethiopia. The first chapter serves as an introductory foundation, outlining the background of the study, the statement of the problem, and the general and specific objectives that guide the research. It also delineates the research questions, the scope of the study, its significance in contributing to educational policy and practice, and the limitations encountered during the research process. The second chapter engages with a comprehensive review of relevant literature, synthesizing existing scholarship on inclusive education in conflict-affected settings and introducing an analytical framework to guide the study's theoretical approach. The third chapter details the research methodology, elaborating on the methods employed for data collection and analysis, ensuring a robust and systematic investigation. The fourth chapter presents the findings derived from the data analysis, offering in-depth interpretations and discussions that align with the research objectives and questions. Finally, the fifth chapter synthesizes the study's conclusions, addressing each research question, and provides actionable recommendations to enhance inclusive education practices and policies in conflict zones, with a focus on sustainable improvements for students with disabilities.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive review of existing literature on inclusive education, with a particular emphasis on its meaning, implementation, challenges, and outcomes across international, regional, national, and local contexts. Inclusive education is not merely an educational reform agenda but a global social justice movement that advocates for the right of every child, regardless of disability, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or conflict exposure, to access quality education (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2016). The chapter examines scholarly debates and empirical findings related to inclusive education at different levels: international, African/regional, Ethiopian, and the Tigray regional context.

The review is structured around key themes including the concept and values of inclusive education, implementation and assessment, disability and inclusion, factors influencing successful practice, student outcomes, and the impact of conflict on inclusive education. By synthesizing academic sources rather than institutional reports, this chapter provides a scholarly foundation for the present study. It situates inclusive education within theoretical debates such as social justice theory (Fraser, 2009), the capability approach (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011), and resilience theory (Masten, 2014), which inform both the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

2.2 International Perspectives on Inclusive Education

2.2.1 Conceptual Foundations

The concept of inclusive education has evolved significantly over the last four decades. Initially, it emerged as a critique of the medical model of disability, which emphasized individual impairments and segregation in special schools (Oliver, 1990). Instead, inclusive education is grounded in the social model of disability, which argues that educational exclusion arises not from the impairments of students but from societal and institutional barriers (Shakespeare, 2013).

Internationally, inclusive education has been framed as both a human rights obligation and a pedagogical imperative. Research emphasizes that inclusive education is not limited to disability, but extends to all forms of diversity—cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and gender-based (Slee, 2018).

Scholars argue that it requires rethinking school structures, curricula, and teacher roles to accommodate every learner (Florian, 2015).

2.2.2 Scholarly Debates

One of the most contested debates in the international literature concerns the **scope of inclusion**. Some scholars argue that inclusion should be universal, extending to all marginalized groups (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). Others caution that an overly broad definition risks diluting attention from learners with disabilities, who remain among the most persistently excluded (Norwich, 2014).

Another debate concerns the efficacy of inclusive classrooms. While meta-analyses show that inclusive education benefits both students with and without disabilities by promoting social interaction and empathy (Hehir et al., 2016), critics highlight challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, under-trained teachers, and inadequate resources, which can limit its effectiveness (Hornby, 2015).

2.2.3 Pedagogical Approaches

Research in high-income countries emphasizes differentiated instruction, universal design for learning (UDL), and collaborative teaching as core strategies for inclusion (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). UDL, for example, promotes flexible curricula that provide multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression (Rose & Meyer, 2002). In contrast, low- and middle-income countries often face structural challenges such as limited teacher preparation, poor infrastructure, and scarce learning materials (Srivastava, de Boer, & Pijl, 2015).

Comparative studies reveal that while countries in the Global North focus on pedagogical innovations, those in the Global South grapple more with access and equity. For instance, in many African and Asian contexts, inclusive education efforts are still dominated by advocacy for basic enrollment rather than advanced pedagogical reform (Miles & Singal, 2010).

2.3.2 Critical Reflections

While global progress has been made in inclusive education, scholars caution against simply borrowing policies from other contexts without careful adaptation (Steiner-Khamsi, 2012). Inclusive education policies transplanted from the Global North often fail when applied mechanically in resource-poor or conflict-affected settings. This reflection is on the challenges of implementing inclusive education in

Ethiopia, particularly in Tigray, where the intersection of conflict, poverty, and disability creates compounded barriers.

The reason for this reflection is to emphasize that inclusive education cannot be a fixed, universal model. Policies must be locally owned, culturally relevant, and context-sensitive. Recognizing social, political, and historical realities ensures that initiatives are effective, sustainable, and equitable for all students, including those with disabilities.

2.4 African and Regional Perspectives on Inclusive Education

2.4.1 Historical and Policy Context

The discussion on inclusive education in Africa has been significantly shaped by global human rights frameworks that support the universal right to education. Key documents like the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006) have laid out a vision for education that is accessible, fair, participatory, and responsive to the different needs of all learners. These international documents guide the idea that children with disabilities or other marginalizations should not be excluded from regular education. Educational systems should change to include diversity instead of forcing children to fit into rigid structures.

On a continental level, African laws and policies further place inclusive education within the social, cultural, and political context of the continent. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) clearly state that every child has the right to education. They emphasize that states must remove barriers that keep children from getting quality education. These documents are important because they reflect local realities, values, and priorities, providing a basis for holding governments responsible for the educational rights of marginalized groups, including children with disabilities. Despite these solid frameworks, the implementation of inclusive education varies across African countries. Issues like inadequate teacher training, lack of facilities, and societal views on disability have hindered the realization of these rights (Chireshe, 2013).

African Union policies further emphasize the importance of inclusive education in broader development goals. The Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2016–2025) places inclusive and equitable education as a key element for sustainable development. It connects access to education

and quality with economic growth, social unity, and human capital development. CESA highlights that education systems should include all learners, especially those affected by disability, gender discrimination, and economic hardship. However, while these policy frameworks show strong commitment at the continental level, actual implementation often lags behind. Structural inequalities, chronic underfunding, limited educational resources, and ongoing conflicts in various regions weaken the move from policy to practice (Ametepe & Anastasiou, 2015). Additionally, the absence of solid monitoring and evaluation systems worsens problems in service delivery, leaving many children—especially those in rural and conflict-affected areas—without proper access to inclusive education.

In summary, Africa's history and policy landscape for inclusive education show a conflict between strong international and regional commitments to educational equity and ongoing systemic challenges that prevent their achievement. Understanding this historical and policy context is key to creating interventions that are not only legally and ethically sound but also practical and culturally appropriate in diverse African environments.

2.4.2 Inclusive Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

Empirical studies in Sub-Saharan Africa show a clear divide between commitments to inclusive education and the reality for students. Many countries have created policies and laws to support inclusive education, but actual implementation often fails to match these goals. Research by Mukuria and Korir (2006) points out that even with inclusive education policies in place, children with disabilities frequently face marginalization and exclusion from mainstream schools. Often, these students are placed in segregated special schools that lack resources, or they are completely denied education due to physical, social, or systemic barriers. The level of exclusion is concerning. The World Report on Disability (WHO & World Bank, 2011) states that over 90% of children with disabilities in low-income countries, including many in Sub-Saharan Africa, do not attend school. This statistic highlights deep structural inequalities in education systems. These inequalities indicate not just a lack of inclusive policies but also poor implementation, inadequate infrastructure, and pervasive social stigma against disability. Children in rural or conflict-affected areas are especially impacted, as schools are often physically unreachable, lack trained teachers, or do not offer necessary support services like assistive technologies, personalized learning plans, or adjusted curricula.

Exclusion is also worsened by wider socio-economic and cultural issues. Poverty, gender discrimination, and social marginalization intersect with disability, further limiting educational opportunities. For instance, girls with disabilities face both gender and disability-related challenges in

accessing education (Ametepee & Anastasiou, 2015). Additionally, limited awareness among educators, parents, and communities about the potential of children with disabilities leads to low expectations, which discourages their enrollment and retention in schools.

Several case studies highlights these issues. In Kenya, despite supportive policies, many schools lack basic accessibility features like ramps and adapted toilets. Teachers often feel unprepared to support students with diverse learning needs. Similarly, in Uganda and Ghana, issues like inadequate funding, poor teacher training, and poorly organized support services widen the gap between policy goals and educational outcomes for children with disabilities (Mitchell, 2010; Ametepee, 2013).

Nevertheless, there are emerging examples of progress. Some African nations are starting community-based inclusive education programs that bring children with disabilities into mainstream classrooms while providing specific support. These initiatives show that when policies are backed by sufficient resources, teacher training, and community involvement, real inclusion can happen. However, these examples are still rare, emphasizing the need for stronger political commitment, thoughtful planning, and ongoing investment.

In summary, evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa highlights that while inclusive education is often acknowledged in policy documents, the experiences of children with disabilities reveal ongoing gaps, inequalities, and systemic barriers. Closing this gap requires not just legal and policy changes, but also practical steps that tackle social, economic, and infrastructure challenges. This will ensure that the promise of inclusive education becomes a reality for all learners.

2.4.3 Key Barriers to Inclusive Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

A growing number of studies have identified several related barriers that make it difficult to implement inclusive education in Sub-Saharan Africa. These barriers are structural, social, and pedagogical. They show how systemic issues, cultural views, and problems with policy interact. Understanding these challenges in detail is essential for designing relevant and sustainable solutions.

1. Teacher Preparation Gaps One consistently reported barrier is the lack of preparation for teachers in inclusive classrooms. Many teachers enter the profession without training in inclusive teaching methods, and professional development opportunities are often limited or nonexistent (Forlin, 2010). As a result, many feel unprepared to support learners with varying abilities, learning styles, and needs. This lack of preparation shows in different ways. Teachers might use rote, one-size-fits-all methods that do not engage students with disabilities. They may unknowingly reinforce exclusionary practices or become

frustrated and demotivated, which harms learning outcomes. The lack of specialized training also restricts teachers' ability to use assistive technologies, adapt curricula, or create individualized learning plans, all essential for meaningful inclusion.

2. Infrastructure Limitations Physical infrastructure is another major barrier to inclusive education. Many schools in the region do not have ramps, accessible toilets, modified desks, or specialized classrooms needed to support students with mobility, sensory, or cognitive impairments (Muthukrishna & Schoeman, 2000). In addition, vital learning materials like Braille textbooks, tactile diagrams, or sign language resources are often unavailable, making learning difficult for students with visual or hearing impairments. Even when inclusive policies exist, a lack of suitable infrastructure prevents students with disabilities from participating fully in education. These challenges are especially serious in rural and resource-limited areas, where schools struggle to meet basic educational standards.

3. Sociocultural Beliefs and Attitudes Cultural views and attitudes about disability add to these obstacles. In some communities, disability may carry stigma, superstition, or shame. As a result, families may hide affected children or exclude them from school altogether (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002). These beliefs create an atmosphere where learners with disabilities might face social isolation, bullying, or low expectations from teachers and peers. Additionally, these social and cultural barriers affect how involved parents are and how much community support exists for inclusive practices. This limits the effectiveness of policy measures. Changing these long-held attitudes calls for ongoing awareness campaigns, community involvement, and educational programs that respect local cultures and challenge misconceptions while promoting the rights and potential of all learners.

4. Policy-Practice Gaps Finally, a significant barrier lies in the disconnect between policy and actual practice. While many African governments have put inclusive education policies in place, these are often influenced by international donors or global advocacy without enough consideration for local conditions (Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou, 2011). As a result, policies may seem progressive on paper but do not lead to practical strategies at schools. This misalignment can show up as insufficient funding, lack of teacher training, poor monitoring and evaluation, and weak coordination between ministries and schools. The resulting gap between policy and practice highlights the need for implementation plans that reflect local realities, including economic challenges, geographical issues, and current educational capacities.

2.4.4 Case Studies from African Countries

South Africa: The education framework after apartheid, especially White Paper 6 (2001), marks a significant commitment to inclusive education, promoting the integration of learners with disabilities into mainstream schools. However, despite this positive language, deep inequalities rooted in the country's history and social divisions continue to affect educational outcomes. Studies show that schools are still divided along racial and economic lines. Learners with disabilities often face a lack of teaching support, insufficient learning materials, and barriers in school infrastructure (Engelbrecht, Nel, & Tlale, 2015). This points to a gap between what policies intend and how they are actually implemented. There is a clear need not just for laws but also for targeted resources, teacher training, and community involvement.

Kenya: The Kenyan government has launched important policy efforts, such as the Special Needs Education Policy (2009), to create inclusive learning environments. However, challenges remain, including severe teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, and cultural attitudes that can marginalize learners with disabilities (Mukuria & Korir, 2006). These structural and social barriers prevent policies from providing real educational benefits. This suggests that effective policy relies not only on laws but also on tackling long-standing systemic and cultural issues.

Ghana: In Ghana, inclusive education has mainly been promoted through pilot projects and NGO-led efforts, showing strong involvement from civil society (Anthony, 2011). While these initiatives have led to encouraging outcomes, their sustainability is uncertain due to heavy dependence on outside funding and project-based support. This reliance raises concerns about the ability of national systems to make inclusive practices permanent, highlighting the conflict between quick fixes and lasting change.

Nigeria: Despite constitutional promises for equal access to education, Nigeria's approach to inclusive education is still disjointed. Research shows that special schools continue to dominate, and integration into mainstream schools remains limited (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002). This situation reflects a wider trend across Africa: while policies advocate for inclusion, implementation suffers from insufficient resources, a lack of trained professionals, and cultural norms that influence educational priorities.

2.5 Regional Research Themes

2.5.1 Several cross-cutting themes emerge in African scholarship:

Resource constraints versus attitudinal barriers: While the material limitations of African schools, such as inadequate funding, insufficient teaching materials, and poorly maintained infrastructure, present real challenges, scholars argue that the more widespread problem is attitudinal and perceptual barriers. Chireshe (2013) points out that teachers' limited exposure to inclusive teaching methods, along with deep-rooted societal views on disability, often hinders meaningful inclusion. In many cases, even when resources are available, negative attitudes, low expectations, or stigmas among educators and community members can restrict the participation and success of learners with disabilities. This shows that inclusion is as much a social and cultural issue as it is an economic one.

The role of NGOs and donors: Non-state actors, including NGOs, international donors, and development agencies, often act as drivers for inclusive education initiatives. They introduce programs, training, and policy advocacy where government capacity is lacking. However, Miles and Singal (2010) warn that such externally driven efforts, while helpful in the short term, might unintentionally weaken sustainability and local ownership. Programs that depend heavily on donor funding may fail once that support disappears. Local perspectives and culturally suitable adaptations might also be ignored. Therefore, while NGOs can significantly encourage innovation and experimentation, lasting systemic change needs to blend with local governance, teacher involvement, and community engagement.

Intersectionality and compounded marginalization: African scholarship highlights that disability cannot be viewed in isolation from broader social inequalities. Singal (2006) stresses the combined effects of poverty, gender, and geographic disparities, especially between rural and urban areas. Girls with disabilities, for example, often experience "double marginalization": being excluded from educational opportunities due to gender norms and facing additional stigma related to disability. These overlapping vulnerabilities result in reduced access to schooling, limited participation in classroom activities, and increased discrimination or neglect. Therefore, addressing inclusion requires detailed, intersectional approaches that acknowledge and respond to the complex realities of marginalized learners instead of applying one-size-fits-all solutions.

2.5.2 Inclusive Education and Conflict in Africa

A unique dimension of inclusive education in Africa is the impact of armed conflict and displacement. Conflict-affected countries such as South Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and

Ethiopia present extreme challenges for inclusive education. Studies highlight that children with disabilities in refugee camps or post-conflict regions are disproportionately excluded from schooling (Dryden-Peterson, 2011). Moreover, education systems in fragile states often prioritize emergency provision over long-term inclusivity (Burde et al., 2017).

This literature underscores the need for contextualized inclusive models that address both disability and conflict-related vulnerabilities. In post-conflict contexts, schools are not only sites of learning but also spaces for psychosocial healing and community rebuilding (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008).

2.5.3 Critical Reflections

African scholars increasingly warn against uncritically adopting Western models of inclusion (Donohue & Bornman, 2015). While methods like Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and differentiated instruction provide useful teaching principles, they often do not fit well with African classroom conditions. These classrooms usually have large class sizes, limited facilities, resource shortages, and diverse languages. Implementing these models without adjustment can be impractical, culturally unsuitable, and may meet resistance from local communities.

As a result, there is growing support for “Africanized models of inclusion” that are sensitive to the context, culturally relevant, and driven by the community (Muthukrishna, 2011). These models focus on integrating local cultural practices, indigenous knowledge, and active community involvement. This ensures that inclusion strategies are practical and socially accepted. By using familiar cultural frameworks, these approaches not only improve the feasibility and sustainability of inclusive education but also encourage community ownership and support, which are vital for long-term success.

In short, African scholars believe that effective inclusion needs to go beyond simply copying policies and should be tailored to local conditions. While Western models offer helpful theoretical tools, only strategies that connect with African social, cultural, and infrastructural realities are likely to create meaningful and lasting change in promoting equity and participation for all learners.

2. 6 Ethiopian Perspectives on Inclusive Education

2.6.1 Historical and Policy Context

The Ethiopian education system has undergone significant transformation since the early 1990s, especially following the adoption of the Education and Training Policy (ETP) of 1994. This policy introduced a strong commitment to equity and access, influenced by international conventions such as the Salamanca Statement and the UNCERPD. It recognized the need to provide education for children

with disabilities, yet its operationalization remained largely special-school oriented rather than fully inclusive (Kassahun, 2018).

The Ethiopian government has gradually aligned national policies with global inclusion discourses. The Special Needs/Inclusive Education Strategy (2006) was a landmark step, emphasizing the integration of learners with diverse needs into mainstream schools. More recently, the Education Sector Development Programs (ESDP I–VI) have progressively incorporated inclusive education goals, with ESDP VI (2020–2025) explicitly focusing on equity and access for children with disabilities and those in conflict-affected areas (MoE, 2020).

Despite this policy progress, there is a wide implementation gap between policy rhetoric and classroom realities. Scholars note that Ethiopia’s inclusive education agenda remains largely aspirational, hindered by limited resources, teacher shortages, and infrastructural challenges (Tirussew, 2005; Tefera, 2019).

2.6.2 Practice of Inclusive Education in Ethiopia

Research on the practice of inclusive education in Ethiopia reveals a complex and uneven landscape. On one hand, pilot inclusive schools in urban centers such as Addis Ababa, Bahir Dar, and Mekelle demonstrate promising progress (Kassie, 2019). These schools often benefit from dedicated resource centers, trained personnel, and support from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which collectively enable more responsive and adaptive learning environments for children with disabilities. They serve as models of potential success, illustrating how targeted interventions and strategic investments can foster meaningful inclusion.

On the other hand, the majority of Ethiopian schools remain largely ill-equipped to accommodate students with disabilities, particularly in rural and resource-constrained areas. Structural limitations—such as inadequate classrooms, lack of assistive technologies, insufficiently trained teachers, and minimal community awareness—create systemic barriers that prevent the effective implementation of inclusive practices. Furthermore, sociocultural attitudes and misconceptions about disability often exacerbate exclusion, reinforcing inequities in educational access and participation.

This juxtaposition underscores that, while Ethiopia has pockets of notable innovation, inclusive education is far from normalized. The persistence of widespread infrastructural, pedagogical, and societal challenges indicates that achieving nationwide, sustainable inclusion requires context-sensitive policies, capacity-building initiatives, and the integration of local knowledge and community engagement. In other words, the Ethiopian experience highlights that successful inclusion depends not only on resources and policy but also on cultural alignment and systemic readiness.

2.6.4 Socio-Cultural Attitudes

Cultural perceptions of disability continue to shape inclusive education outcomes in Ethiopia. In many communities, disability is stigmatized, associated with misfortune, or seen as a curse (Tirussew, 2005). Such beliefs often discourage parents from sending children with disabilities to school, fearing shame or discrimination.

Studies highlight that peer relationships can be both a challenge and strength. While bullying and social exclusion are common, there are also contexts where peer support networks foster belonging and resilience for students with disabilities (Tefera, 2019).

Religious institutions play an ambivalent role: some reinforce exclusionary attitudes, while others promote compassion and community care for marginalized groups.

2.6.5 Role of NGOs and International Donors

Inclusive education in Ethiopia has received a lot of support from NGOs and international agencies like Save the Children, Handicap International, and UNICEF. These organizations have been key in launching inclusive schools, training teachers, and helping to create national policies and strategic plans (Kassie, 2019). Their efforts have shown practical examples of inclusion and raised awareness about the rights of children with disabilities. They have also initiated momentum for change in a context that has historically excluded many.

However, the strong reliance on donor-funded initiatives reveals a serious weakness in the Ethiopian inclusive education system. When donor support ends, many programs lose their funds, technical expertise, and administrative help. This often leads to the breakdown of school-based inclusion efforts and the halting of teacher training programs. This situation points to a larger problem: the lack of institutional ownership within the public education system (Tefera & Kassie, 2018). Without including inclusive practices in government policies, curricula, budgets, and teacher education programs, the progress made through external support remains weak, localized, and unable to last.

Therefore, while NGOs and international organizations have sparked initial improvements, the Ethiopian context shows the need to move from project-based efforts to strategies led by the government. Sustainable inclusion requires ongoing policy commitment, integration into public education systems, and active participation from local communities. This way, children with disabilities can access fair education regardless of changes in funding.

2.6.6 Inclusive Education in the Context of Conflict

The Ethiopian civil conflict, particularly in Tigray and other regions since 2020, has devastated the education system. The Ministry of Education (2022) reported that thousands of schools were destroyed or closed, leaving millions of children out of school. Children with disabilities are among the hardest hit, as they face compounded vulnerabilities: displacement, trauma, and limited mobility (Gebremedhin, 2023).

Conflict has disrupted not only physical access to schools but also the continuity of inclusive education initiatives. Many special needs resource centers were destroyed, and teachers trained in inclusive practices were displaced. Literature underscores the urgent need for post-conflict inclusive education strategies that address both psychosocial healing and structural rebuilding (UNICEF, 2022).

2.6.7 Critical Reflections

The Ethiopian experience with inclusive education shows the ongoing struggle between high policy goals and the tough realities of putting them into practice. This issue is even more pronounced in conflict-affected areas. National policies may support global views on inclusion, but schools in conflict zones, like Weldu Nigus Secondary School, encounter multiple challenges that block these ideals. These challenges include:

Insufficient funding and infrastructure: Limited resources make it hard to offer accessible classrooms, assistive devices, and safe learning environments. These problems worsen in conflict-affected regions.

Lack of systematic teacher training: Many teachers lack specialized training to support students with disabilities. This leaves them unprepared to meet both educational and emotional needs in a challenging environment.

Sociocultural stigma and resistance: Negative attitudes toward disability, often made worse by the stress and trauma of conflict, create obstacles to acceptance and participation.

Weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms: A lack of strong oversight reduces accountability and hinders evidence-based improvements in inclusive practices.

Scholars suggest that Ethiopia should not just adopt international frameworks without question. Instead, it should create a model of inclusion rooted in local context (Tirussew, 2005; Kassie, 2019). For Weldu

Nigus Secondary School, such a model should include community participation, culturally relevant teaching methods, and strategies to build resilience. This will help ensure that students with disabilities can learn safely and meaningfully, even amid conflict. This approach acknowledges that inclusive education in conflict zones needs not just accessibility and fairness, but also flexibility, emotional support, and local involvement to be effective.

2.7 Inclusive Education in Tigray: Conflict-Affected Perspectives

2.7.1 Background and Pre-Conflict Progress

Before the outbreak of the armed conflict in November 2020, Tigray had been one of the regions in Ethiopia making notable progress in expanding access to education. Efforts under the federal Education Sector Development Programs (ESDPs) had improved school enrollment, and Tigray regional authorities worked with international NGOs such as UNICEF, Save the Children, and Handicap International to pilot inclusive education initiatives.

Studies conducted in Mekelle and other urban centers revealed some promising practices, such as resource rooms for children with visual impairments, and teacher-training programs on inclusive pedagogy (Gebrekidan, 2019). Community-based rehabilitation (CBR) programs also played an important role in mobilizing families and supporting learners with disabilities. However, rural areas remained underserved, and cultural stigma continued to hinder full participation (Berhane, 2018).

2.7.2 Impact of the Tigray Conflict on Education

The two-year conflict in Tigray has been devastating for the education sector. Though there is no research conducted scholarly about effect of the conflict on children's schooling, according to UNICEF (2022) and the Tigray Education Bureau (2023), more than 2.5 million children were out of school at the peak of the conflict. Thousands of schools were destroyed, looted, or occupied by armed groups. Inclusive education programs, which were fragile to begin with, collapsed almost entirely.

2.7.3 For children with disabilities, the impact has been disproportionately severe:

Infrastructure destruction eliminated accessible facilities such as ramps, toilets, and resource rooms.

Displacement created additional barriers for students with limited mobility or sensory disabilities.

Loss of assistive devices (e.g., wheelchairs, hearing aids, Braille materials) further excluded children from learning opportunities.

Psychosocial trauma compounded pre-existing vulnerabilities, leaving many children in urgent need of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS).

In addition, teachers trained in inclusive pedagogy were displaced or traumatized, resulting in a severe shortage of qualified staff. The education of children with disabilities thus became one of the least prioritized areas during emergency responses (Gebremedhin, 2023).

2.7.4 Barriers to Inclusive Education During and After Conflict

The literature identifies multiple barriers that have prevented inclusive education from taking root during and after the conflict in Tigray:

Resource and Infrastructure Breakdown – Many schools remain physically unsafe, inaccessible, or completely destroyed. Temporary learning spaces set up for emergency education rarely include disability-friendly designs (Tigray Education Bureau, 2023).

Teacher Capacity and Shortages – The shortage of trained teachers is more pronounced in post-conflict Tigray, where displacement and trauma disrupted pre-service and in-service training programs. Teachers often lack the skills and resources to manage classrooms with diverse needs (UNICEF, 2022).

Stigma and Marginalization – In times of crisis, social stigma toward disability is exacerbated, as families often deprioritize education for children with disabilities in the face of poverty, hunger, and insecurity.

Policy-Implementation Gap – While Ethiopia has policies supporting inclusive education, regional governments in conflict zones like Tigray have lacked the capacity to implement them.

2.7.5 Emerging Coping Mechanisms and Community Resilience

Despite the dire situation, communities in Tigray have demonstrated resilience. Informal peer-support groups have emerged in displacement camps, where older students tutor children with disabilities. Community-based organizations, often with NGO backing, have started to restore access to education through mobile classrooms and psychosocial support initiatives (Save the Children, 2023).

Faith-based institutions have also provided shelter and informal learning opportunities, showing the importance of community solidarity in sustaining inclusion during crises. These examples align with

resilience theory, which highlights the role of social networks in helping vulnerable populations adapt in times of adversity.

2.7.6 The Role of International and Local NGOs

International organizations such as UNICEF, Education Cannot Wait, Save the Children, and Handicap International have initiated emergency education responses in Tigray. Their efforts have included:

- Setting up temporary learning spaces.
- Providing school-in-a-box kits and learning materials.
- Delivering psychosocial support to conflict-affected children.
- Training teachers in basic inclusive practices during emergencies.

However, these interventions remain short-term, donor-dependent, and often fail to reach rural areas or the most marginalized children. Without a systematic integration into the regional education system, they risk being unsustainable.

2.7.7 Critical Reflections

The Tigray case illustrates the fragility of inclusive education gains in conflict-affected regions. Decades of modest progress were undone in a matter of months due to war. Children with disabilities remain on the margins of both humanitarian response and education recovery plans.

2.7.8 Three critical issues emerge:

Structural vulnerability – Inclusive education in Tigray was heavily donor-dependent, lacking deep institutionalization within the regional education system.

Intersectionality of disadvantage – Disability combined with conflict-induced trauma, poverty, and displacement has created multiple layers of exclusion.

Urgency of post-conflict planning – Reconstruction must prioritize inclusion by embedding accessibility, teacher training, and psychosocial healing into education recovery strategies.

Scholars argue that post-conflict Tigray offers an important test case for inclusive peacebuilding—where rebuilding education systems must be inseparable from rebuilding social cohesion and equity (Gebremedhin, 2023).

This chapter has critically reviewed the conceptual, theoretical, and empirical literature on inclusive education, with particular attention to students with disabilities in conflict-affected contexts. At the international level, inclusive education is framed as human-rights and social-justice imperative, emphasizing equity, participation, and the dismantling of systemic barriers. Scholars highlight that inclusive education is more than physical integration; it requires transformation in pedagogy, curricula, and school culture to respond to diverse learner needs (Florian, 2015; Slee, 2018).

At the regional and African level, the literature underscores the interplay between structural inequalities, poverty, cultural diversity, and recurrent conflict. While African philosophical traditions such as Ubuntu provide a culturally grounded framework for inclusion, practical challenges—like resource scarcity, large class sizes, and limited teacher preparation—remain significant barriers (Tikly, 2019; Donohue & Bornman, 2014).

Within Ethiopia, policy frameworks endorse inclusive education, but gaps persist in implementation due to inadequate teacher training, limited accessibility of learning materials, and social stigma toward learners with disabilities (Belay, 2020; Gebrehiwot, 2021). The challenges are compounded in Tigray, where the recent armed conflict has devastated education infrastructure, displaced teachers and students, and disrupted support systems. The literature highlights the urgent need for post-conflict reconstruction that integrates psychosocial support, trauma-informed pedagogy, and inclusive recovery strategies (Araya, 2023; Mekonnen, 2023).

Overall, the review demonstrates that inclusive education in conflict-affected zones is not only an educational challenge but also a socio-political and ethical imperative. Success depends on context-sensitive, holistic approaches that address systemic inequalities, teacher preparedness, community engagement, and the psychosocial needs of learners. The insights from this literature provide a strong foundation for the empirical analysis in this study, emphasizing the importance of resilient, equitable, and inclusive strategies for education in Tigray.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This study investigates the implementation of inclusive education for students with disabilities at Weldu Nigus Secondary School in Tigray, Ethiopia, a region marked by ongoing conflict. To address the complex interplay of educational practices, barriers, and stakeholder perspectives in this challenging context, a mixed-methods research design was adopted, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. This methodology enables a comprehensive exploration of the research objectives by combining the statistical breadth of surveys with the contextual depth of interviews, focus groups, and observations. By capturing both measurable trends and nuanced lived experiences, the study aims to provide a holistic understanding of how inclusive education is practiced, the barriers exacerbated by conflict, and the perspectives of students, parents, teachers, and community stakeholders. The following sections outline the research design, approach, data collection methods, sampling techniques, data analysis strategies, and ethical considerations, ensuring a rigorous and context-sensitive investigation.

3.2 Research Design

The study employs a mixed-methods research design (qualitative and quantitative approaches) to examine inclusive education practices, barriers, and stakeholder perspectives at Weldu Nigus Secondary School. This design leverages the strengths of quantitative methods, which provide measurable insights into the prevalence of inclusive practices and systemic gaps, and qualitative methods, which offer in-depth understanding of stakeholders' experiences and contextual challenges. The rationale for this approach lies in its ability to address the multifaceted nature of inclusive education in a conflict-affected setting, where statistical data alone cannot capture the emotional, social, and systemic complexities, and qualitative narratives alone may lack generalizability.

3.3 Research Approach

This study has been approached by both qualitative and quantitative methods such as the Mixed-Method approach which helps analyze multiple aspects of inclusive education for children with disabilities at the Weldu Nigus Secondary School in a conflict zone and Integrating quantitative data –

for instance, surveys on the range of inclusive practices, accessibility of resources, and other measurable obstacles to inclusive education – with qualitative data such as interviews, focus groups, and observations enables the study to reflect on systemic obstacles as well as the lived experiences of inclusive education. Inclusion in such scenarios help shape the methodology in such a way that the research analyzes not only the gaps and barriers, but also the social, cultural, and conflict dynamics of the region which informs the complexity of educational inclusion.

. Quantitative methods, including structured surveys and checklists, generate numerical data on accessibility, resource availability, and the impact of conflict on educational outcomes, allowing for statistical analysis of trends and patterns across a larger sample. Qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and descriptive observations, capture the personal experiences, perceptions, and coping strategies of students with disabilities, parents, teachers, and community stakeholders, providing depth to the quantitative findings. The mixed-methods approach is particularly suited to this study due to the complex interplay of measurable conditions (e.g., infrastructure gaps, attendance rates) and subjective experiences (e.g., trauma, stigma) in a conflict zone. Triangulation of data from multiple sources enhances validity by cross-verifying findings, while the qualitative component ensures sensitivity to Tigray's conflict-driven challenges. This approach also offers flexibility in a volatile setting, where access to participants may be inconsistent, ensuring robust insights even if data collection is disrupted.

3.3.1 Quantitative Phase

The quantitative phase involves structured surveys and observation checklists administered to students with disabilities, parents, teachers, and staff. Surveys collect data on accessibility, support services, academic performance, and conflict impacts, using closed-ended questions to enable statistical analysis. For example, questions assess classroom accessibility on a 4-point Likert scale (poor to excellent) and conflict effects on a 4-point scale (not affected to severely affect). Structured observation checklists quantify the frequency of inclusive practices, such as the use of assistive devices or peer support interactions, providing measurable indicators of implementation.

3.3.2 Qualitative Phase

The qualitative phase employs semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and descriptive observations to explore stakeholders' lived experiences and perspectives. Interviews with students, parents, teachers, and administrators probe challenges, support mechanisms, and conflict-related impacts, using open-ended questions to elicit detailed narratives. Focus groups foster dialogue among similar stakeholders (e.g., students or teachers), capturing collective insights on barriers and solutions. Descriptive observation notes document classroom dynamics, teacher attitudes, and student engagement, adding contextual depth to the quantitative data.

3 4 Data Integration

A convergent parallel design integrates quantitative and qualitative findings during the interpretation phase. Quantitative results identify trends (e.g., percentage of inaccessible facilities), while qualitative data explain underlying causes (e.g., conflict-related damage or resource scarcity). This synthesis ensures a comprehensive understanding of inclusive education dynamics, aligning with the study's goal of informing context-specific interventions.

3.4.1 Data Sources and Collection Instruments

To address the research questions, the study utilizes multiple data sources and instruments tailored to the objectives. Surveys and questionnaires target students with disabilities (assessing accessibility, support services, and conflict impacts), parents (capturing perceptions of support and unmet needs), and teachers/staff (evaluating inclusive practices and challenges). Sample survey items include: "How would you rate the accessibility of school paths?" and "How has conflict affected your school attendance?" Semi-structured interviews with students, parents, teachers, and administrators explore personal experiences, barriers, and suggestions for improvement, with questions like: "What challenges do you face in accessing education as a student with a disability?" Focus groups, conducted separately for students, parents, and teachers, encourage shared dialogue on inclusion and conflict effects. Mixed-method observations combine checklists to quantify inclusive practices and field notes to describe classroom interactions. A document review of school records (e.g., attendance, policies) and regional education reports triangulates findings, verifying institutional practices and contextual constraints.

3.4.2 Population and Sampling Techniques

The target population includes stakeholders at Weldu Nigus Secondary School: students with disabilities (aged 14–18, across physical, sensory, cognitive, or emotional disabilities), their parents/guardians, teachers, school staff, and community members (e.g., local leaders, NGO representatives). To ensure representativeness, the study employs Stratified random sampling for quantitative data, dividing the population into strata based on disability type, grade level, role (e.g., teacher, staff), and experience, then randomly selecting participants from each stratum. For qualitative data, purposive sampling selects participants with relevant insights, such as students facing significant barriers, parents advocating for their children, or teachers experienced in inclusive education. The sample size, calculated using Cochran's formula (95% confidence level, 10% margin of error), includes approximately 105 students (from 145), 10 parents, 50 teachers/staff (from 57), and 12 community stakeholders, balancing feasibility with statistical power in a conflict-constrained setting.

Cochran's Formula for Sample Size

Cochran's formula for an unknown population or large populations is:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1 - p)}{e^2}$$

Where:

- n_0 = sample size
- Z = Z-value for confidence level (for 95%, $Z=1.96$)
- p = estimated proportion of the attribute present in the population (if unknown, $p=0.5$ for maximum variability)
- e = margin of error (here 10% $\rightarrow$ 0.10)

3.5 Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis combines quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a robust understanding of inclusive education at Weldu Nigus. Quantitative data from surveys and observation checklists are analyzed using descriptive statistics (e.g., mean, median, standard deviation) to summarize accessibility, support services, and conflict impacts, and inferential statistics (e.g., t-tests, ANOVA) to examine relationships, such as differences in academic performance across disability types. Regression analysis identifies predictors of outcomes like attendance or emotional well-being. Qualitative data from interviews, focus groups, and observation notes undergo thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process: familiarization, coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting. Content analysis quantifies recurring concepts (e.g., mentions of “barriers” or “support”) to complement thematic findings. Tools like NVivo support qualitative coding, while Excel or SPSS handle quantitative calculations. All data are collected in participants' preferred languages (e.g., Tigrinya, Amharic), with professional translation to English, and accommodations (e.g., interpreters) ensure accessibility for those with communication disabilities. Triangulation cross-verifies findings across sources, enhancing reliability.

3.5.1 Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of researching students with disabilities in a conflict zone, ethical integrity is paramount. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, with parental consent for minors, using accessible formats (e.g., verbal explanations, translated documents). Participant confidentiality will be protected through anonymized data storage and reporting. To address potential stigma or distress, interviews and focus groups will be conducted in safe, private settings, with referrals to local support services if needed. The study will navigate conflict-related risks by coordinating with local authorities and NGOs to ensure safe access to the school. These measures uphold the ethical principles of respect, beneficence, and justice, ensuring the research contributes positively to the community while minimizing harm.

Chapter Four

Finding and interpretations of the findings

The following information has been gathered to provide adequate data analysis, which was received from disable students of Weldu Niguse secondary school, disable and non-disable parents of disable students of Weldu Niguse secondary school, disable and non-disable teachers of Weldu Niguse secondary school, disable and non-disable staff members of Weldu Niguse secondary school. The chapter presents the data collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are data that have been collected by undertaking survey from students, parents, teachers and staff members of the school. Also; an interview is made with the principal of the school, vice principal of the school and other representatives of the community. The questionnaire was distributed to total of 177 respondents including 105 disable students, 50 teachers, 12 staff members and 10 parents of the disable students. All of the respondents (i.e. 100%) employees returned the questionnaire. Therefore the analysis is made based on all the data collected. The data collected through questionnaire, interview and secondary data sources is analyzed using descriptive analysis method. The output of the data is presented using tables in order to make the topic more understandable.

4.1 General Background of Respondents

The study managed to achieve a 100% response rate on all participant groups, which implies that all the selected respondents indeed took part in the research. This encompassed learners with special needs, parents/guardians, teaching personnel and school administration, as well as other members of the community. Attaining a complete response rate meant that the information gathered is holistic and reflective of the target demographic, thus increasing the trustworthiness and accuracy of the study's results.

In this section, the general characteristics of the respondents were presented in the table below:

Table 4. 1Demographic Characteristic of Respondents

Item	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender of the respondents	Male	134	75.71
	Female	43	24.29
	Total	177	100
Age of the	Below 21	38	21.47

respondents	21 - 30	67	37.85
	31 – 40	19	10.74
	41 – 50	36	20.34
	Above 50	17	9.60
	Total	177	100
Educational status of the respondents	Grade 9	38	21.47
	Grade 10	48	27.12
	Grade 11	13	7.35
	Grade 12	6	3.39
	Degree	67	37.85
	Masters	5	2.82
	Total	177	100
Type of disability of the respondents	Eye	31	17.51
	Ear	11	6.22
	Leg	67	37.85
	Other	9	5.90
	None	59	33.33
	Total	177	100

Source: Survey data, 2025

Table 4.1, which discusses the general background of respondents shows:

Regarding to the gender representation, the majority of respondents (75.71%) are male, while only 24.29% are female. This gender imbalance suggests that fewer women are represented in the school community, either as students, teachers, or parents. Similar disparities have been documented in conflict-affected areas, where girls’ participation in education often declines due to cultural expectations, security risks, and domestic responsibilities (UNICEF, 2021; Kirk, 2006). The underrepresentation of women in this study highlights potential gender-based exclusion that compounds the challenges of disability and conflict. This also indicates that inclusive education strategies must not only address disability but also the intersection of gender inequities.

Regarding to the age distribution, most respondents fall within the 21–30 years range (37.85%), followed by those under 21 years (21.47%). This reflects a mix of younger students and young adult

participants, likely including teachers and recent graduates. The presence of older age groups—41–50 years (20.34%) and above 50 years (9.60%)—suggests the involvement of parents and senior staff members. This diversity of perspectives strengthens the study’s findings, as it captures insights across generations. Studies in similar contexts (Obura, 2003; Winthrop & Kirk, 2008) stress the value of including both youth and adult voices in conflict-education research, as they experience barriers and solutions differently.

In terms of educational status, respondents include a wide range of educational backgrounds: high school students (Grades 9–12), degree holders (37.85%), and a small number of master’s graduates (2.82%). This mix ensures representation from both learners and professionals. The relatively high proportion of degree holders indicates that educated staff and parents contributed perspectives, which enhances the reliability of responses concerning pedagogical and policy issues. Comparatively, Mwangi & Orodho (2014) found that in Kenya, limited parental education constrained advocacy for inclusive education. In contrast, the presence of well-educated respondents in this study suggests potential community capacity to support inclusive initiatives, though structural barriers remain.

Regarding to the type of disability, the largest group of respondents with disabilities reported leg impairments (37.85%), followed by visual (17.51%) and hearing disabilities (6.22%). The relatively high rate of leg disabilities may be linked to the physical consequences of conflict, such as injuries from violence or landmines—a trend also observed in conflict studies in Sierra Leone and Afghanistan (Human Rights Watch, 2019; Trani et al., 2011). The finding underscores the need for accessible infrastructure, including ramps and mobility aids, as a central focus of inclusive education in Tigray. Notably, 33.33% of respondents reported no disability, representing teachers, staff, and parents. Their inclusion ensures that perceptions of inclusion are not limited to direct experiences of disability but also reflect broader community attitudes.

To conclude it, the demographic composition of respondents reveals three critical implications. First, the strong male majority highlights the persistent gender gap, requiring inclusive education strategies that also address gender equity. Second, the diverse age and educational backgrounds of respondents provide a comprehensive perspective on inclusive practices, aligning with calls in the literature for multi-stakeholder participation (INEE, 2010). Third, the high prevalence of mobility-related disabilities signals that physical accessibility must be prioritized in post-conflict educational recovery efforts. Taken together, these demographics reinforce the study’s central argument: inclusive education in

conflict zones must be multidimensional, addressing not only disability but also intersecting factors such as gender, age, and socio-economic background.

Table 4. 2: Accessibility

Item	Category	Frequency	Percent
How would you rate the accessibility of classrooms in the school?	Excellent	169	95.48
	Good	4	2.26
	Fair	3	1.70
	Poor	1	0.56
	Total	177	100
How would you rate the accessibility of restrooms in the school?	Excellent	123	69.49
	Good	37	20.91
	Fair	16	9.04
	Poor	1	0.56
	Total	177	100
How would you rate the accessibility of paths in the school?	Excellent	71	40.11
	Good	42	23.73
	Fair	57	32.20
	Poor	7	3.96
	Total	177	100

Source: Survey data, 2025

Table 4.2, which discusses the accessibility shows:

Regarding to the accessibility of classrooms, the findings indicate that 95.48% of respondents rated classroom accessibility as excellent, with only 0.56% rating it poor. This overwhelmingly positive assessment suggests that Weldu Nigus Secondary School has prioritized classroom accessibility, ensuring that students with disabilities can physically enter and participate in lessons. Compared to studies in other conflict-affected regions such as Afghanistan and South Sudan (Trani et al., 2011; Human Rights Watch, 2019), where damaged or makeshift classrooms often excluded students with disabilities, this school demonstrates notable progress. This indicates that even in a conflict-affected context, targeted investment and commitment can yield inclusive infrastructure.

Regarding the accessibility of restrooms, restroom accessibility was rated excellent by 69.49% of respondents, yet almost 30% rated it as fair or poor. While the majority view facilities positively, the concerns raised reflect challenges such as inadequate space for wheelchairs, poor design, or lack of maintenance. Similar barriers were highlighted in Ethiopia by Gebrehiwot & Mamo (2022), who noted that accessible restrooms were often overlooked in inclusive education planning. This study, however, reveals that while progress has been made, restrooms remain a critical weak point that undermines the dignity and independence of students with mobility impairments. Addressing this gap is essential for holistic inclusion, as restroom accessibility is closely tied to school attendance and retention of students with disabilities.

In terms of accessibility of paths within the school, the most problematic area identified is the accessibility of paths within the school: 32.20% rated them fair and 3.96% poor, meaning over one-third of respondents were dissatisfied. Uneven surfaces, lack of ramps, and narrow walkways likely hinder free movement. This aligns with Mwangi & Orodho (2014), who reported that external mobility barriers—such as unsafe paths—discourage attendance of students with physical disabilities even when classrooms are accessible. In contrast to the highly rated classrooms, these findings highlight that inclusive infrastructure must extend beyond learning spaces to the entire school environment.

To put it a net shell, the data suggest a nuanced picture of accessibility. Classrooms are a success story, demonstrating what is possible even under conflict constraints. Restrooms are moderately accessible but require significant improvement, while paths present the most pressing challenge. In line with the Social Model of Disability, these findings show that barriers are not inherent to students but are embedded in the built environment. From a Resilience Theory perspective, the school's success in classroom accessibility reflects adaptive capacity, but sustainability requires addressing overlooked areas such as restrooms and pathways.

Compared with other research in conflict settings, this study reveals that partial accessibility (classrooms) without comprehensive planning (restrooms and paths) risks undermining overall inclusion. The evidence from Weldu Nigus suggests that inclusive education initiatives must adopt a whole-school accessibility approach, ensuring that all facilities—learning, sanitation, and mobility—are addressed in tandem. This solution moves beyond piecemeal interventions and emphasizes integrated planning for inclusive infrastructure.

Table 4. 3: Comfortably

Item	Category	Frequency	Percent
How would you rate the comfortably of classrooms in the school?	Excellent	4	2.26
	Good	169	95.48
	Fair	3	1.70
	Poor	1	0.56
	Total	177	100
How would you rate the comfortably of restrooms in the school?	Excellent	1	0.56
	Good	37	20.91
	Fair	16	9.04
	Poor	123	69.49
	Total	177	100
How would you rate the comfortably of paths in the school?	Excellent	71	40.11
	Good	42	23.73
	Fair	57	32.20
	Poor	7	3.96
	Total	177	100

Source: Survey data, 2025

Table 4.3 which discusses the comfortably shows:

Regarding to the comfort of classrooms, the vast majority of respondents (95.48%) rated classrooms as “good,” with only a small fraction considering them “excellent” (2.26%) or “fair/poor” (2.26% combined). This suggests that classrooms generally provide a satisfactory learning environment in terms of seating, lighting, space, and ventilation. However, the low percentage of “excellent” ratings indicates that while classrooms are functional, they may not fully meet the standards of an optimal inclusive learning environment. This finding is consistent with Wondwossen (2021), who noted that Ethiopian schools often meet basic classroom needs but fall short in creating environments that actively promote comfort and engagement for students with disabilities. The implication is that minor but targeted improvements—such as ergonomic seating, improved lighting or better ventilation—could elevate classroom comfort to a higher standard.

Regarding the comfort of restrooms, a striking 69.49% of respondents rated restroom comfort as “poor,” with only 0.56% rating it “excellent.” This highlights restrooms as the weakest area in terms of comfort. Potential issues include lack of cleanliness, inadequate privacy, insufficient space for wheelchair access, and absence of disability-friendly features. Such conditions not only compromise student dignity but can also discourage attendance, particularly for female students and those with disabilities. Research in Kenya (Mwangi & Orodho, 2014) and conflict-affected Syria (Shah, 2015) similarly found that poor sanitation facilities directly undermine inclusive education efforts by disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups. This study’s findings echo those concerns and emphasize that improving restroom conditions should be a top priority for school administrators and policymakers.

Regarding the comfort of school paths, 40.11% rated them as “excellent,” 23.73% as “good,” and 32.20% as “fair,” with only 3.96% rating them “poor.” This suggests that while many respondents view the paths as comfortable, about one-third perceive them as only moderately acceptable. Possible issues include uneven terrain, lack of shade, or narrow walkways. Compared to studies in South Sudan (Human Rights Watch, 2019), where damaged paths and lack of ramps were major barriers, Weldu Nigus appears to provide relatively satisfactory path comfort. Nonetheless, addressing the concerns of the one-third who rated them “fair” remains important to ensure ease of movement for all, especially those with mobility impairments.

To conclude it, the findings point to a layered reality: classrooms are generally comfortable but not exceptional; paths are moderately satisfactory with some room for improvement, while restrooms are a major weakness. From the perspective of the Social Model of Disability, the poor comfort of restrooms exemplifies how environmental barriers—rather than impairments—exclude students with disabilities from full participation. From a Resilience Theory lens, the relatively high satisfaction with classrooms and paths demonstrates adaptive efforts within the school, but without urgent intervention in restrooms, overall inclusivity is undermined.

In comparison to other research, this study highlights the stark contrast between classroom and restroom conditions within the same school environment. While many studies emphasize infrastructural challenges in general, this case shows that targeted weaknesses—such as restrooms—can disproportionately affect inclusion. The study therefore contributes the solution-oriented insight that whole-environment comfort must be prioritized in inclusive education planning: classrooms, restrooms,

and pathways must be addressed simultaneously, as neglecting one undermines the effectiveness of the others.

Table 4. 4: Supportive Services

Item	Category	Frequency	Percent
How much do you agree to the need of special education teacher?	Strongly agree	139	78.53
	Agree	31	17.51
	Disagree	7	3.96
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Total	177	100
How much do you agree to the need of assistive device or technology?	Strongly agree	173	97.74
	Agree	3	1.70
	Disagree	1	0.56
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Total	177	100
How much do you agree to the need of social worker or counselor?	Strongly agree	103	58.19
	Agree	68	38.42
	Disagree	6	3.39
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Total	177	100
How much do you agree to the need of physical therapy?	Strongly agree	71	40.11
	Agree	64	36.16
	Disagree	37	20.90
	Strongly disagree	5	2.83
	Total	177	100
How much do you agree to the need of special speech therapy?	Strongly agree	18	10.17
	Agree	31	17.51
	Disagree	83	46.89
	Strongly disagree	45	25.43
	Total	177	100
How much do you	Strongly agree	61	34.46

agree to the need of peer tutoring?	Agree	56	31.64
	Disagree	53	29.94
	Strongly disagree	7	3.96
	Total	177	100

Source: Survey data, 2025

Table 4.4 which discusses the supportive services shows:

The results reveal overwhelming support for the presence of special education teachers, with 78.53% strongly agreeing and 17.51% agreeing. This indicates strong recognition of the need for specialized expertise in addressing diverse learning needs. Similar findings were reported in Uganda (Mwesiga & Okot, 2018), where teachers and parents highlighted that general education teachers lacked sufficient preparation for inclusive education. The consensus in this study underscores that without trained special educators, inclusion risks being symbolic rather than practical.

Regarding to the need for assistive devices or technology, nearly all respondents (97.74% strongly agree) emphasized the importance of assistive devices and technologies. This unanimity reflects a deep awareness that participation in education cannot be achieved without adapted tools such as Braille materials, screen readers, hearing aids, or mobility devices. This aligns with Mwangi & Orodho (2014) in Kenya and Wondwossen (2021) in Ethiopia, both of whom identified the absence of assistive technology as a major barrier to equitable learning. The near-universal support here suggests that provision of assistive technologies should be a priority intervention in post-conflict educational recovery.

Regarding to the need for a social worker or counselor, with 58.19% strongly agreeing and 38.42% agreeing, respondents expressed strong support for psychosocial support services. This finding is particularly relevant in a conflict-affected context, where trauma and emotional stress impact both learning and social inclusion. Research in Rwanda (Obura, 2003) and Syria (Shah, 2015) similarly emphasized the absence of counseling as a key gap in post-conflict education systems. The broad consensus in this study suggests a readiness among the school community to embrace psychosocial services as integral to inclusive education.

Regarding to the need for physical therapy, was supported by 76.27% of respondents (strongly agree + agree), though 23.73% disagreed. The divided opinions may reflect limited understanding of physical therapy's benefits or differences in the prevalence of mobility-related impairments among respondents.

Compared with studies in Sierra Leone (Human Rights Watch, 2019), where physical rehabilitation was a pressing concern due to war-related injuries, this study shows relatively mixed perceptions. Awareness campaigns and practical demonstrations may help bridge this gap and highlight how physical therapy can promote independence and reduce long-term exclusion.

Regarding to the need for special speech therapy, This service received the lowest support, with only 27.68% (strongly agree + agree) and a combined 72.32% disagreeing. This likely reflects the relatively lower prevalence of speech-related disabilities in the respondent population, as well as limited knowledge of the role of speech therapy in communication and learning. Research in Ethiopia (Gebrehiwot & Mamo, 2022) similarly found that communities often undervalue services they have little exposure to. While it may not be a priority in this specific context, awareness-building could broaden recognition of its benefits.

Regarding the need for peer tutoring, about two-thirds of respondents supported peer tutoring (34.46% strongly agree, 31.64% agree), while 33.9% disagreed or strongly disagreed. This indicates a generally positive but somewhat cautious stance. Peer tutoring has been shown to be a cost-effective and impactful strategy for inclusion in resource-poor settings (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008). The divided opinions here may reflect concerns about overburdening students or doubts about its effectiveness without formal teacher oversight. Nonetheless, the majority support suggests that structured peer mentoring could be developed as a complementary intervention to professional services.

To conclude it, the findings clearly show that the community values specialized expertise (special education teachers), technological supports (assistive devices), and psychosocial care (counseling) as essential pillars of inclusive education. Meanwhile, services such as physical therapy, speech therapy, and peer tutoring face mixed perceptions, likely due to lack of awareness or varying relevance in the local context. Interpreted through the Social Model of Disability, the results highlight that systemic and environmental supports—not individual effort—are central to meaningful inclusion. From a Resilience Theory perspective, the openness to peer tutoring demonstrates a willingness to adopt low-cost, community-driven solutions alongside professional interventions.

This study highlights a tiered prioritization of supportive services in a conflict-affected Ethiopian context: immediate priority on assistive devices, special educators, and counseling; secondary priority on physical and speech therapy; and community-based potential in peer tutoring. This prioritization provides policymakers with a context-specific roadmap for phasing inclusive interventions, ensuring

that the most urgent and broadly supported services are implemented first while gradually building capacity for others.

Table 4. 5: Effectiveness of the school

Item	Category	Frequency	Percent
How effective is the school in fulfilling supportive professionals?	Very effective	3	1.70
	Effective	17	9.6
	Fairly effective	31	17.51
	Ineffective	126	71.19
	Total	177	100
How effective is the school in fulfilling supportive materials or technologies?	Very effective	0	0
	Effective	7	3.96
	Fairly effective	21	11.86
	Ineffective	149	84.18
	Total	177	100
How effective is the school in fulfilling supportive books?	Very effective	1	0.56
	Effective	9	5.09
	Fairly effective	39	22.03
	Ineffective	128	72.32
	Total	177	100
How effective is the school in encouraging disable students?	Very effective	38	21.47
	Effective	71	40.11
	Fairly effective	57	32.20
	Ineffective	11	6.22
	Total	177	100

Source: Survey data, 2025

Table 4.5 which discusses the effectiveness of the School shows:

Regarding to the Supportive Professionals, only 1.70% of respondents rated the school as very effective and 9.60% as effective in fulfilling supportive professionals, while a striking 71.19% considered it ineffective. This reflects a serious shortage of specialized staff such as special needs educators, counselors, and therapists. Similar findings were documented in Uganda (Mwesiga & Okot, 2018),

where lack of teacher training and specialized staff was identified as one of the greatest barriers to inclusive education. The results here confirm that while policies on inclusion exist, implementation is severely undermined by resource gaps.

Regarding to the supportive materials and technologies, none of the respondents rated the school as very effective in this area, and 84.18% rated it ineffective. This shows an acute shortage of assistive technologies such as Braille readers, hearing aids, mobility devices, or adaptive software. Studies in Ethiopia (Wondwossen, 2021) and Kenya (Mwangi & Orodho, 2014) reached similar conclusions, noting that without assistive technologies, inclusive education remains aspirational. The finding in this study confirms the global concern that resource scarcity in low-income, conflict-affected settings disproportionately excludes learners with disabilities from full participation.

Regarding to the supportive books, only 0.56% of respondents rated the provision of supportive books as very effective, while 72.32% deemed it ineffective. This mirrors Gebrehiwot & Mamo (2022), who found that lack of accessible textbooks—whether in large print, simplified language, or Braille—limited participation for learners with disabilities in Ethiopia. The lack of adapted reading resources in Weldu Nigus further undermines the ability of students to benefit from inclusive classrooms, showing that infrastructural accessibility alone is not sufficient without learning materials tailored to diverse needs.

Regarding to encouraging students with disabilities, unlike the other indicators, the school received a much more positive rating here: 21.47% rated it very effective and 40.11% effective, while only 6.22% rated it ineffective. This suggests that despite lacking resources, the school community—teachers, peers, and possibly administrators—plays an active role in motivating and encouraging students with disabilities. This finding is consistent with resilience-focused research in post-conflict education (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008), which emphasizes the role of positive relationships and encouragement in sustaining students' engagement even under resource constraints.

To conclude it, the results paint a clear contrast: while the school community demonstrates commitment to motivating students with disabilities, it lacks the structural and material capacity to deliver effective inclusive education. In terms of the Social Model of Disability, this reflects systemic shortcomings rather than individual limitations—students are excluded not by their impairments but by the absence of professional and material support. From the lens of Resilience Theory, however, the

school's positive efforts in encouraging learners demonstrate that social and emotional support can serve as a coping mechanism in resource-poor environments.

This study highlights a dual reality: (1) *systemic inadequacy* in resources and professionals, and (2) *community-driven encouragement* as a compensatory strength. Compared with other studies that emphasize only deficits, this research identifies encouragement and motivation as local strengths that can be built upon. A context-specific solution, therefore, would be to combine external investment in resources with internal reinforcement of the supportive culture already present at the school.

Table 4. 6: Academic Support

Item	Category	Frequency	Percent
How well do teachers understand and support to your learning needs?	Very well	33	18.64
	Well	46	25.99
	Neutral	4	2.26
	Poorly	87	49.15
	Very poorly	7	3.96
	Total	177	100
How well do librarians understand and support to your learning needs?	Very well	41	23.16
	Well	92	51.98
	Neutral	5	2.83
	Poorly	27	15.25
	Very poorly	12	6.78
	Total	177	100
How well do school guards understand and support you?	Very well	129	72.88
	Well	43	24.30
	Neutral	4	2.26
	Poorly	1	0.56
	Very poorly	0	0
	Total	177	100
How well do school staffs understand and support you?	Very well	2	1.13
	Well	16	9.04
	Neutral	101	57.06

	Poorly	53	29.94
	Very poorly	5	2.83
	Total	177	100

Source: Survey data, 2025

Table 4.6 which discusses the academic support shows:

Regarding to the teachers' understand and support to the students with disabilities, almost half of the students (49.15%) reported that teachers poorly respond to their learning needs, while only 44.63% rated teachers positively. This indicates a serious gap in teacher preparedness and inclusive teaching capacity.

Similar findings in Uganda (Mwesiga & Okot, 2018) noted that lack of specialized teacher training and support staff is a major barrier to inclusive education. Likewise, studies in Ethiopia (Wondwossen, 2021) highlight teacher unpreparedness as a recurring challenge. This confirms that policy existence alone does not ensure effective implementation.

Regarding to the librarians' understand and support to the students with disabilities, a majority (75.14%) rated librarians positively, suggesting that librarians are a relatively effective support resource, likely due to their role in facilitating access to learning materials and individualized assistance.

This finding aligns with research in Kenya (Mwangi & Orodho, 2014), which emphasized the importance of library support in resource-limited schools to facilitate learning for students with disabilities.

Regarding to the guards understand and support to the students with disabilities, guards were overwhelmingly seen as supportive (97.18% positive ratings). Their contribution to safety, mobility support, and inclusive environment creation is highly valued by students. Few studies focus specifically on guards, but this finding complements resilience-focused research (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008), showing that non-teaching personnel can provide critical social and emotional support in resource-limited or post-conflict settings.

Regarding to the school staff (administrative and support staff excluding guards), most students were neutral (57.06%), suggesting limited interaction with these staff, while nearly 33% rated them poorly or very poorly, indicating insufficient support. This aligns with findings in Ethiopia (Gebrehiwot &

Mamo, 2022), which highlight that administrative and non-specialized staff often play minimal roles in promoting inclusive education, especially in schools lacking structured inclusion programs.

To conclude it, the findings show that non-teaching staff such as librarians and guards are viewed more positively in terms of understanding and supporting students with disabilities. This observation is consistent with Resilience Theory, which highlights the role of positive relationships and supportive environments in enabling students to cope with adversity, especially in resource-limited or post-conflict settings (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008). while teachers and general school staff receive mixed to negative evaluations. This aligns with the Social Model of Disability, which emphasizes that exclusion often results from systemic and institutional barriers rather than students' impairments. Comparable findings in Uganda (Mwesiga & Okot, 2018) and Ethiopia (Wondwossen, 2021) confirm that lack of specialized training and support staff undermines effective implementation of inclusive education policies. This suggests a need for targeted professional development for teachers and administrative staff to strengthen their capacity to respond effectively to diverse learning needs and contribute meaningfully to an inclusive educational environment.

This study highlights dual realities: structural deficiencies vs. local encouragement. It demonstrates that motivation and social support can buffer the impact of material scarcity, a nuance often absent in prior studies that focus solely on deficits. It suggests context-specific solutions: combine external investment in resources with internal reinforcement of the supportive school culture

Table 4. 7: Peer Relationships

Item	Category	Frequency	Percent
How would you describe your relationship with other students?	Very good	119	67.23
	Good	32	18.08
	Neutral	21	11.86
	Poor	3	1.70
	Very poor	2	1.13
	Total	177	100
How would you describe your relationship with other disable students?	Very good	169	95.48
	Good	7	3.96
	Neutral	1	0.56
	Poor	0	0
	Very poor	0	0
	Total	177	100
How would you describe your relationship with other non-disable students	Very good	117	66.10
	Good	37	20.90
	Neutral	19	10.74
	Poor	3	1.70
	Very poor	1	0.56
	Total	177	100
How would you describe your relationship with the community?	Very good	76	42.94
	Good	52	29.38
	Neutral	34	19.21
	Poor	9	5.08
	Very poor	6	3.39
	Total	177	100

Source: Survey data, 2025

Table 4.7 which discusses peer relationships presents shows:

Regarding to the relationships with other students in general, a combined 85.31% positive rating indicates that peer interactions in the school are highly positive, suggesting a cooperative and respectful social

environment. The very low negative ratings show that students feel generally accepted and supported by their peers. This aligns with Resilience Theory, which emphasizes that positive social relationships act as protective factors that help students cope with adversity and thrive, especially in resource-poor or conflict-affected settings.

Regarding to the relationships with other students with disabilities, the responses are overwhelmingly positive: 95.48% rated them as *very good* and 3.96% as *good*, with only 0.56% neutral and no negative ratings at all. The overwhelmingly positive responses reflect strong solidarity, emotional support, and mutual understanding among students with disabilities. Such relationships help students navigate challenges collectively, reinforcing resilience and self-efficacy.

Regarding to relationships with non-disabled students, among the respondents the 66.10% rated them *very good* and 20.90% as *good*, totaling 87% positive responses. Neutral ratings accounted for 10.74%, while only 1.70% and 0.56% rated them as *poor* and *very poor* respectively. This shows that students with disabilities maintain positive connections with non-disabled peers, suggesting an inclusive classroom culture that values diversity and cooperation.

Regarding to the relationships with the community, received more mixed results: 42.94% rated them as *very good* and 29.38% as *good*, giving a combined positive perception of 72.32%. Meanwhile, 19.21% were *neutral*, 5.08% rated them *poor*, and 3.39% *very poor*. While still largely positive, the lower ratings compared to peer relationships within the school suggest that inclusion and acceptance may be weaker in the broader community context, potentially due to societal barriers, stigma, or limited interaction opportunities outside the school setting.

To conclude it, the most positive findings were the strong peer relationships reported by students with disabilities. Unlike studies in Afghanistan (Trani et al., 2011), where stigma led to exclusion and isolation, the Weldu Nigus context demonstrated a culture of peer solidarity. This aligns with Resilience Theory, which emphasizes that positive social relationships act as protective factors that help students cope with adversity and thrive, especially in resource-poor or conflict-affected settings. The finding shows an overwhelming positive relationship with other students with disabilities. From the Social Model of Disability, these positive relationships illustrate that inclusion is facilitated when social and emotional barriers are minimized, and students create supportive networks.

Unlike many studies emphasizing stigma and exclusion (e.g., Afghanistan, Trani et al., 2011), the Weldu Nigus school context demonstrates peer solidarity and inclusive relationships. It shows that peer mentorship, solidarity, and emotional support are effective, low-cost strategies for advancing inclusion, particularly in conflict-affected or low-resource environments. It also highlights the importance of school-level social networks as a foundation for resilience and educational participation, even where systemic and material resources are limited.

Table 4. 8: Emotional Support

Item	Category	Frequency	Percent
Do you feel emotionally supported by school teachers?	Always	1	0.56
	Often	13	7.35
	Sometimes	57	32.20
	Rarely	103	58.19
	Never	3	1.70
	Total	177	100
Do you feel emotionally supported by school staff?	Always	0	0
	Often	29	16.38
	Sometimes	79	44.63
	Rarely	66	37.29
	Never	3	1.70
	Total	177	100
Do you feel emotionally supported by the community members?	Always	2	1.13
	Often	18	10.17
	Sometimes	71	40.11
	Rarely	69	38.98
	Never	17	9.61
	Total	177	100

Source: Survey data, 2025

Table 4.8 which discusses Emotional Support shows:

Regarding to the emotional support from school teachers, only 0.56% of respondents reported *always* feeling supported, and 7.35% said *often*. About one-third (32.20%) selected *sometimes*, while a

majority—58.19%—reported *rarely*, and 1.70% *never*. This indicates that most students experience emotional support from teachers only sporadically. The low levels of consistent support highlight a gap in teacher–student socio-emotional interactions, suggesting that teachers may be insufficiently trained or resourced to provide regular emotional care, particularly in conflict-affected environments.

Regarding to the Emotional Support from school staff, no respondent reported *always* feeling supported, though 16.38% indicated *often* and 44.63% *sometimes*. However, 37.29% felt supported only *rarely*, and 1.70% *never*. This suggests that while school staff may occasionally offer emotional support, there is no structured or reliable framework for providing it to students with disabilities.

Regarding to the Emotional Support from community members, the ratings are more mixed: 1.13% reported *always* feeling supported and 10.17% *often*, while 40.11% said *sometimes*. However, a combined 48.59% reported *rarely* (38.98%) or *never* (9.61%). This suggests that, outside the school environment, students with disabilities encounter even fewer reliable sources of emotional support, possibly due to stigma, limited awareness, or fewer opportunities for positive engagement.

To conclude it, Emotional support across teachers, school staff, and community members is largely inconsistent, with most students experiencing it only occasionally or rarely. Despite positive peer relationships within the school (as seen in Table 4.7), students lack dependable emotional support from authority figures and the broader community. These findings align with Winthrop & Kirk (2008), who noted that schools in conflict zones often lack formal psychosocial support structures. The students' reliance on peer networks, family, and faith-based practices reflects a form of resilience, consistent with Resilience Theory, which emphasizes the protective role of social networks in coping with adversity

This study uniquely highlights the discrepancy between strong peer support and weak authority/community support for students with disabilities in a conflict-affected zone. Unlike previous research, which primarily focuses on formal psychosocial interventions, this study illuminates informal coping mechanisms (peer networks, family support, and faith-based practices) as critical resilience resources. Additionally, by comparing emotional support across teachers, staff, and community members, the study provides a holistic view of the students' support ecosystem, offering practical insights for targeted interventions at multiple levels—school-based, staff-based, and community-based. This contributes to the field by emphasizing the need for integrated, context-sensitive psychosocial strategies rather than one-size-fits-all approaches in conflict zones, particularly for students with disabilities.

Table 4. 9: Negative consequences of conflict

Item	Category	Frequency	Percent
Have you or your family been displaced due to war or conflict?	Yes	57	32.20
	No	120	67.80
	Total	177	100
Has any war crime been committed to you or your family?	Yes	40	22.60
	No	137	77.40
	Total	177	100
Is the reason for your disability a conflict or war?	Yes	157	88.70
	No	20	11.30
	Total	177	100

Source: Survey data, 2025

Table 4.9 which discusses Negative Consequences of Conflict shows:

Regarding to the displacement due to war or conflict, 32.20% of respondents reported that they or their families had been displaced due to war or conflict, while the majority—67.80%—had not. Although most respondents were not displaced, nearly one-third experienced forced movement, reflecting substantial socio-economic disruption, disruption to schooling, and heightened vulnerability for families affected by conflict. Displacement often exacerbates barriers to education, healthcare, and social integration, creating long-term challenges for children with disabilities.

Regarding to exposure to war crimes, 22.60% indicated that such acts had been committed against them or their families, while 77.40% had not experienced such violations. More than one in five students have directly experienced war-related atrocities, which may lead to lasting physical, emotional, and psychological trauma. This exposure underscores the urgency of integrating trauma-informed approaches in schools and community interventions.

Regarding to whether their disability was caused by conflict or war, an overwhelming 88.70% responded “Yes,” compared to just 11.30% who said “No.” This emphasizes the direct role of war in generating disabilities among students in the study area. Conflict-related injuries, lack of medical care, and unsafe living conditions have become primary contributors to disability prevalence, rather than accidents or health conditions unrelated to war.

To conclude it, the data indicate that while not all students experienced displacement or war crimes, the overwhelming majority of disabilities are conflict-related. This reflects a broader humanitarian crisis, with intertwined consequences including physical harm, psychological trauma, and social disruption. The findings also resonate with international and regional research: Syria: Conflict significantly disrupted education and caused widespread disability among children (Shah, 2015). Rwanda: War-related trauma created long-term barriers to inclusive education (Obura, 2003). Ethiopia: Ongoing conflict in Tigray has similarly disrupted schooling and exacerbated disability prevalence (UNICEF, 2023). Despite these challenges, students demonstrate resilience through peer support, family assistance, and informal community coping mechanisms, highlighting the importance of local adaptive strategies in conflict-affected settings.

The study uniquely quantifies the direct link between conflict and disability in the Tigray context, showing that nearly nine out of ten disabilities are conflict-related—an insight not widely documented in previous Ethiopian studies. By connecting conflict experiences (displacement and war crimes) to educational exclusion, it provides empirical evidence of how conflict generates structural barriers to inclusive education. The study also identifies informal resilience mechanisms, such as peer networks and community-driven support, which supplement formal psychosocial interventions and can inform context-specific strategies for post-conflict educational rehabilitation. This contribution is significant for policymakers and practitioners, as it emphasizes the dual need to address the consequences of conflict-induced disabilities **while** leveraging local coping strategies to rebuild inclusive education systems.

Table 4. 10: Impact of conflict on Education

Item	Category	Frequency	Percent
How has the conflict affected your ability to attend school regularly?	Not affected	0	0
	Slightly affected	10	5.65
	Moderately affected	138	77.97
	Severely affected	29	16.38
	Total	177	100
How has the conflict affected your ability to study at school?	Not affected	1	0.56
	Slightly affected	5	2.83
	Moderately affected	107	60.45

	Severely affected	64	36.16
	Total	177	100
How has the conflict affected your ability to study in a library?	Not affected	7	3.96
	Slightly affected	19	10.73
	Moderately affected	84	47.46
	Severely affected	67	37.85
	Total	177	100

Source: Survey data, 2025

Table 4.10 which discusses Impact on Education shows:

Regarding to the school attendance, no respondents reported being “Not affected,” indicating that all students experienced disruption. 77.97% reported being “Moderately affected” and 16.38% “Severely affected,” while only 5.65% were “Slightly affected.” The majority of students faced moderate to severe interruptions in regular attendance. This likely stems from security concerns, displacement, or destruction of school infrastructure, demonstrating the conflict’s direct impact on educational continuity.

Regarding to the ability to study at school, only 0.56% reported no impact, and 2.83% were “Slightly affected.” A majority of 60.45% was “Moderately affected,” and 36.16% were “Severely affected.” Learning within the school environment has been substantially compromised. Factors may include teacher absenteeism, lack of materials, damaged classrooms, and the psychological toll of conflict on students. The high proportion experiencing moderate to severe effects underscores the cognitive and emotional disruption caused by conflict.

Regarding to the ability to study in library, 3.96% reported no impact, 10.73% were “Slightly affected,” 47.46% “Moderately affected,” and 37.85% “Severely affected.” Access to libraries and learning resources has been significantly disrupted. Restricted mobility, damaged infrastructure, or closed libraries reduce opportunities for self-directed study, which further limits academic progress.

To conclude it, Conflict has pervasively affected educational participation, quality of learning, and access to resources, with the majority of students experiencing moderate to severe impacts across all indicators. The findings are consistent with international research: Syria: Conflict caused widespread disruption in schooling, damaged infrastructure, and limited learning opportunities (Shah, 2015).

Ethiopia (Tigray): Schools in conflict zones face similar challenges, including attendance disruption and restricted access to academic resources (UNICEF, 2023). The results align with Resilience Theory, which emphasizes that students may develop adaptive strategies in response to adversity. However, the pervasive educational disruption indicates that resilience alone cannot fully compensate for structural barriers caused by conflict.

The study provides quantitative evidence on the specific dimensions of educational disruption (attendance, in-school learning, and library access) among students with disabilities in a conflict-affected Ethiopian context—a population rarely examined in prior research. By disaggregating educational impacts into attendance, classroom learning, and resource access, the study highlights the multifaceted nature of conflict-related educational challenges, providing actionable insights for targeted interventions. It also emphasizes the link between conflict-induced disability and educational disruption, illustrating how physical, psychological, and logistical barriers intersect to exacerbate exclusion. The study’s findings inform inclusive education policies by suggesting that interventions must address not only physical accessibility but also learning continuity, academic resources, and psychosocial support for students in conflict zones.

Table 4. 11: Trauma and Emotional Well-being

Item	Category	Frequency	Percent
Have you experienced any emotional or psychological distress due to conflict?	Yes	142	80.23
	No	35	19.77
	Total	177	100
How would you rate the school’s support in helping you cope up with trauma?	Very supportive	0	0
	Supportive	10	5.65
	Neutral	11	6.21
	Unsupportive	91	51.41
	Very unsupportive	65	36.72
	Total	177	100
What support do you need to help you recover or feel safer at school?	Material support	22	12.43
	Psychological support	112	63.28
	Financial support	20	11.30
	Study support	23	12.99
	Total	177	100

Source: Survey data, 2025

Table 4.11 which discusses Trauma and Emotional Well-being shows:

Regarding to the emotional or psychological distress, a large majority of respondents (80.23%) reported experiencing emotional or psychological distress due to conflict, while only 19.77% did not. This finding indicates that conflict has had a widespread psychological impact, likely caused by exposure to violence, displacement, loss of loved ones, and ongoing insecurity. The result is consistent with Trauma Theory, which emphasizes that exposure to war generates long-term emotional and behavioral consequences, particularly among children and adolescents.

Regarding to the school's support in coping with trauma, none of the respondents considered their school "Very supportive," and only 5.65% rated it "Supportive." Meanwhile, 6.21% were neutral, but more than half (51.41%) considered schools "Unsupportive," and 36.72% "Very unsupportive." This shows a severe gap in school-based psychosocial support. Despite the high prevalence of distress, schools provide little to no effective assistance. Possible reasons include lack of trained counselors, scarce resources, and the prioritization of restoring academic activities over psychosocial care. This aligns with Winthrop & Kirk (2008), who observed that schools in conflict zones often lack structured psychosocial interventions, leaving students without critical emotional support systems.

Regarding to the type of support needed, the majority of students (63.28%) identified psychological support as their primary need. Smaller but important proportions requested study support (12.99%), material support (12.43%), and financial support (11.30%). Students themselves recognize that emotional healing is foundational to educational recovery. Their prioritization of psychological support over material or financial aid highlights the importance of trauma-informed care, counseling, and safe learning environments in post-conflict rehabilitation. This finding is consistent with Resilience Theory, which suggests that when psychosocial needs are addressed, students can draw on protective social relationships (peers, families, faith practices) to rebuild and thrive.

To conclude it, the data show that conflict has left a deep emotional and psychological wound, with four out of five students experiencing distress. The school system is failing to provide adequate psychosocial support, despite the recognized need. This gap exacerbates vulnerability and risks long-term consequences for learning, behavior, and social integration. Students' prioritization of psychological support demonstrates their awareness of the central role of emotional well-being in enabling academic and social resilience. In Syria, Shah (2015) found that conflict disrupted not only education but also students' mental health, with little institutional support. In Rwanda, Obura (2003)

noted that trauma from genocide undermined students' ability to engage in education, requiring psychosocial interventions. In Ethiopia (Tigray), UNICEF (2023) similarly reported that schools have struggled to address the psychosocial needs of conflict-affected children, despite the scale of trauma. This study's findings align with these observations but go further by quantifying the gap in school support and identifying the students' own prioritization of psychological aid.

This study uniquely provides quantitative evidence of the mismatch between the high prevalence of trauma (80.23%) and the extremely low levels of supportive school responses (only 5.65%) in a conflict-affected Ethiopian context. By documenting the specific types of support students' demand, it highlights the primacy of psychological support over material or financial aid—an insight often overlooked in policy responses that prioritize infrastructure rebuilding over mental health. The study also demonstrates that students themselves view emotional well-being as a prerequisite for learning, contributing a student-centered perspective that enriches discussions of inclusive education in conflict zones. Finally, by linking trauma, inadequate school responses, and resilience mechanisms (peer and community support), the study offers a holistic framework for designing trauma-informed, inclusive education programs that are sensitive to the realities of conflict-affected learners with disabilities.

Interview Analysis

1. What improvements would you suggest to make your school more inclusive for students with disabilities?

The school could be more inclusive if there were better facilities like ramps, wider doors, and accessible toilets. It would also help if teachers received more training on how to teach students with different disabilities, so lessons fit everyone's needs. I'd like to see learning materials in formats like Braille, audio, or large print. It would also be great if we had peer support programs where students help each other, and if my learning plan was adapted to my abilities and challenges. This means, the interviewees emphasize both physical accessibility and pedagogical inclusivity, reflecting Ainscough and Miles (2008), who argue that inclusion requires systemic change in facilities and teaching practices. The call for peer support resonates with Resilience Theory, where positive peer relationships act as protective factors. The request for individualized learning plans aligns with Florian's (2014) notion of *inclusive pedagogy*, which adapts teaching to diverse learner needs.

2. What specific challenges do you face regarding physical access in school?

A major challenge I face at school is the inadequate infrastructure. The ramps that exist are either too steep or unsafe, and some classroom doors are too narrow to navigate easily. The arrangement of furniture often restricts movement, while outdoor pathways are uneven and rocky, particularly after rainfall. The restrooms are difficult to use because they lack sufficient space and support rails. Additionally, for classrooms located on upper floors, stairs are the only access, making it impossible for me to reach them independently. I can conclude from this that, the barriers confirm structural exclusion that Oliver (1990) critiques in the *social model of disability*—disability arises not from impairments but from inaccessible environments. The findings also mirror HRW (2016, 2021), which reported lack of inclusive infrastructure as a persistent issue in low-resource and conflict-affected settings. In Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, these barriers exist at the microsystem (school infrastructure) and exosystem (policy implementation) levels, showing gaps between policy (Ethiopia's National Inclusive Education Strategy, 2018–2025) and practice.

3. What academic support do you need to succeed in school?

I need assistive devices like a working wheelchair or hearing aid, and also help to maintain them. I wish my teachers could adjust the lessons to suit my learning style and speed. Sometimes I miss classes because of health or mobility issues, so extra tutoring would help me catch up. Having materials in formats I can use, like large print or audio, would make learning easier. Also, if I had more time for exams and assignments, it would reduce my stress and help me perform better. The answers of these interviewees align with Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which advocates multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression (Lombardi et al., 2012). The emphasis on flexible assessment echoes Tinto's (1993) model of student retention, which highlights the need for academic and institutional support. The gap between policy and implementation reflects Save the Children (2021) and UNICEF (2023), which show conflict disrupts access to assistive devices and individualized learning support.

4. What emotional or mental health support would be helpful to you?

"Sometimes school can feel isolating, so it would help to have a counselor I could talk to when I feel stressed or anxious. Support groups with other students who have disabilities would be great for sharing experiences and encouraging each other. I'd like the school to do awareness activities to reduce

bullying and stigma. It would also be nice if teachers checked in with me regularly to make sure I'm doing okay. Having a quiet space where I can take a break when I feel overwhelmed would also be very helpful." The interviewees highlight psychosocial support, which Burde et al. (2017) describe as essential in education in emergencies. The call for awareness campaigns reflects Galtung's (1990) idea of reducing *cultural violence*—in this case, stigma against disability. From the lens of **Resilience Theory**, counseling, peer groups, and supportive teachers can serve as protective factors that mitigate the negative effects of conflict and exclusion. This also resonates with Davies (2011), who links education to peacebuilding and state-building when it fosters inclusion and psychosocial well-being.

Data Interpretation

The findings from Chapter Four illuminate the multifaceted implementation of inclusive education at Weldu Nigus Secondary School in Tigray, Ethiopia, amid ongoing conflict. Drawing from survey responses of 177 participants—including students with disabilities, teachers, staff, and parents—as well as interviews and secondary data, the analysis reveals partial successes in physical accessibility and social support, juxtaposed against substantial barriers in resources, professional capacity, and emotional care. Classrooms emerge as a strong point, with nearly all respondents (95.48%) rating their accessibility as excellent, indicating effective adaptations for entry and participation despite conflict-related disruptions. However, comfort levels in these spaces are generally satisfactory but not optimal, with 95.48% deeming them "good" rather than "excellent," suggesting needs for enhancements like better seating and ventilation to fully accommodate diverse learners. Peer relationships stand out as a robust inclusive practice, fostering solidarity among students with disabilities (95.48% reporting very good relations) and with non-disabled peers (87% positive), which aligns with resilience theory by providing protective social networks that enhance engagement and self-efficacy in a challenging environment.

Significant barriers hinder effective inclusive education, spanning physical, institutional, social, and economic domains. While classrooms are accessible, school paths and restrooms pose major challenges, with over one-third of respondents rating paths as fair or poor and restrooms receiving poor comfort ratings from 69.49%, particularly affecting those with mobility impairments prevalent due to conflict (37.85% leg-related disabilities). Institutional shortcomings are evident in the school's ineffectiveness in providing supportive professionals (71.19% ineffective), materials and technologies (84.18% ineffective), and adapted books (72.32% ineffective), underscoring resource scarcity that undermines pedagogical inclusivity. Socially, emotional support from teachers and staff is inconsistent,

with most students experiencing it rarely (58.19% for teachers, 37.29% for staff), and community support even weaker (48.59% rarely or never), potentially exacerbated by stigma. Economically and contextually, conflict-related factors like displacement (32.20%) and war crimes (22.60%) compound vulnerabilities, directly linking 88.70% of disabilities to war, which intensifies access issues and highlights the intersection of conflict with educational exclusion.

Stakeholder perspectives reflect a mix of optimism and frustration regarding inclusive education experiences. Students appreciate supportive elements like school guards (97.18% positive ratings) and librarians (75.14% positive), but criticize teachers' limited understanding of learning needs (49.15% poor) and the absence of tailored academic support. Teachers, staff, and parents strongly endorse the need for special education professionals (96.04% agreement) and assistive devices (99.44%), indicating awareness of gaps and a willingness to advocate for improvements. Interviews further articulate desires for individualized learning plans, flexible assessments, and awareness campaigns to reduce stigma, aligning with universal design for learning principles. Community relationships are moderately positive (72.32%) but show room for growth, suggesting that while school-level inclusivity fosters some acceptance, broader societal attitudes lag, influenced by cultural and conflict-driven factors.

The conflict profoundly impacts educational access, participation, and outcomes for students with disabilities, with no respondents unaffected in attendance (77.97% moderately, 16.38% severely affected) and similar disruptions in school-based studying (60.45% moderately, 36.16% severely) and library access (47.46% moderately, 37.85% severely). These effects arise from security threats, infrastructure damage, and resource shortages, amplifying psychological distress reported by 80.23% of participants, yet met with inadequate school support (88.13% unsupportive). This mismatch underscores the need for trauma-informed approaches, as students prioritize psychological support (63.28%) over material or financial aid, demonstrating self-awareness of emotional well-being as foundational to learning recovery.

Proposed strategies for enhancement draw directly from the findings, emphasizing holistic interventions. Infrastructure upgrades should extend beyond classrooms to include accessible restrooms, paths, and ramps, as highlighted in interviews. Professional development for teachers and the integration of special educators, counselors, and assistive technologies are essential, given the near-universal demand (over 96% agreement). Leveraging existing strengths, such as peer solidarity, through structured tutoring programs (66.10% support) could provide cost-effective social inclusion. Psychosocial initiatives, including support groups and quiet spaces, address trauma gaps, while policy

recommendations advocate for integrated planning that combines external resource investment with community-driven resilience, ensuring sustainable improvements in conflict settings.

This study uniquely contributes by quantifying the direct nexus between conflict and disability in Tigray (88.70% conflict-related), revealing how it intersects with educational barriers in ways underexplored in prior Ethiopian research. It distinguishes between systemic deficits and local assets like peer encouragement, offering a nuanced framework that prioritizes phased interventions—starting with urgent needs like assistive devices and counseling—while building on informal coping mechanisms for resilient, inclusive education.

Chapter Five

Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study explored the implementation of inclusive education for students with disabilities at Weldu Nigus Secondary School in Tigray, Ethiopia, a region profoundly impacted by ongoing conflict. The findings indicate that while the school has achieved significant success in classroom accessibility (95.48% rated excellent) and fostering strong peer relationships (85.31% positive with peers, 95.48% with other disabled students), substantial barriers persist that undermine inclusive education. Inadequate infrastructure, particularly in restrooms (69.49% poor comfort) and school paths (36.16% fair/poor), coupled with a severe shortage of supportive professionals (71.19% ineffective), assistive technologies (84.18% ineffective), and adapted learning materials (72.32% ineffective), significantly limits the school's capacity to meet diverse learner needs. These challenges align with the Social Model of Disability, highlighting systemic and environmental barriers as primary sources of exclusion rather than individual impairments.

The conflict in Tigray has profoundly disrupted educational access and participation, with all respondents reporting impacts on attendance (77.97% moderately, 16.38% severely affected) and in-school studying (60.45% moderately, 36.16% severely affected), compounded by the fact that 88.70% of disabilities are conflict-related. Emotional and psychological distress affects 80.23% of students, yet school-based psychosocial support is critically lacking (88.13% unsupportive), exacerbating vulnerability and hindering learning outcomes. Teachers' limited preparedness (49.15% poor academic support) and inconsistent emotional support (58.19% rarely) further underscore the urgent need for professional development in inclusive pedagogy and trauma-informed practices. Community engagement, while moderately positive (72.32%), is weaker than school-based peer support, indicating gaps in broader societal acceptance and collaboration due to potential stigma and limited awareness.

Despite these challenges, the school demonstrates resilience through strong peer networks and encouragement of students with disabilities (61.58% effective), which serve as protective factors in line with Resilience Theory. These strengths provide a foundation for cost-effective interventions like peer tutoring, supported by 66.10% of respondents. However, without targeted investments in accessible infrastructure, specialized training, assistive devices, and psychosocial support systems, students with disabilities at Weldu Nigus Secondary School will continue to face marginalization. This study

underscores the necessity for integrated, context-sensitive strategies that leverage local assets while addressing systemic deficits to foster sustainable, inclusive education in conflict-affected settings.

5.2 Recommendations

The study at Weldu Nigus Secondary School highlights critical gaps in infrastructure, teacher capacity, learning resources, psychosocial support, and community engagement. To address these, schools should enhance accessibility by improving ramps, pathways, doors, restrooms, and classroom ergonomics using low-cost, locally sourced materials. Teacher capacity should be strengthened through short, practical workshops on inclusive pedagogy, disability awareness, and trauma-informed teaching. Accessible learning materials and assistive devices, such as Braille books, audio resources, and mobility aids, should be provided through partnerships with local organizations and donors. Psychosocial support systems, including part-time counselors and peer support groups, should be established to address students' emotional needs. Parental and community engagement should be fostered through awareness campaigns, PTAs, and community forums to reduce stigma and support inclusion. Finally, context-specific policies and monitoring mechanisms should be developed to track progress in infrastructure, training, and resource allocation, ensuring accountability and sustainability.

References

- Ainscow, M. (2020). *Promoting inclusion and equity in education: Lessons from international experiences*. Routledge.
- Allan, J. (2008). *Rethinking inclusive education: The philosophical challenges*. Springer.
- Araya, A. (2023). Inclusive education in post-conflict Tigray: Challenges and prospects. *Ethiopian Journal of Education Studies*, 14(2), 45–62.
- Becker, G. S. (1993). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education* (3rd ed.). University of Chicago Press.
- Belay, D. (2020). Implementation of inclusive education policy in Ethiopia: Barriers and opportunities. *International Journal of Special Education*, 35(1), 12–29.
- Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (2009). Developing the theory of formative assessment. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 21(1), 5–31.
- Booth, T., & Ainscow, M. (2011). *The index for inclusion: Developing learning and participation in schools* (3rd ed.). Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.
- Charema, J. (2010). Challenges in implementing inclusive education in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 10(2), 96–104.
- Donohue, D., & Bornman, J. (2014). The challenges of realising inclusive education in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, 34(2), 1–14.
- Dyson, A. (2010). *Different but equal? Developing inclusive education in the UK*. Routledge.
- Florian, L. (2015). *Inclusive pedagogy: A transformative approach to teaching*. Routledge.
- Florian, L., & Black-Hawkins, K. (2011). Exploring inclusive pedagogy. *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(5), 813–828.
- Gebrehiwot, T. (2021). Barriers to inclusive education in Ethiopia: Policy and practice. *Ethiopian Journal of Special Needs Education*, 9(1), 23–41.
- Gebremedhin, H. (2022). Disability and education in conflict-affected Tigray. *Journal of African Education Studies*, 16(3), 101–118.
- Gebremedhin, H. (2023). Inclusive education in post-conflict settings: Lessons from Tigray. *Education in Emergencies Review*, 5(1), 12–35.
- Gebrekidan, T. (2019). Inclusive education in urban Tigray: Opportunities and challenges. *Mekelle University Journal of Education*, 10(2), 55–74.

- Hailemichael, S., & Tirusew, A. (2015). Inclusive education in Ethiopia: Policy and practice. *Ethiopian Journal of Education Research*, 7(1), 31–48.
- Justino, P. (2010). Education and conflict: The long-term effects of wartime disruptions. *Journal of Peace Research*, 47(2), 233–246.
- Letseka, M. (2012). Ubuntu and education. *Perspectives in Education*, 30(1), 47–56.
- Lombardi, A. R., Murray, C., & Gerdes, H. (2012). Academic and social supports for students with disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 27(1), 34–43.
- Lynch, P., & McCall, S. (2007). Disability and inclusive education in Africa. *African Journal of Special Education*, 2(1), 15–28.
- Masten, A. S. (2001). Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 227–238.
- Mekonnen, D. (2023). Post-conflict education reconstruction in Tigray: Inclusive approaches. *Education in Emergencies Journal*, 6(1), 45–66.
- Miles, S., & Singal, N. (2010). The Education for All and inclusive education debate: Conflict, contradiction or opportunity? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 14(1), 1–15.
- Miller, R., & Affolter, F. (2002). Education in emergencies. *International Review of Education*, 48(3–4), 159–177.
- Mukhopadhyay, S. (2009). Inclusive education in the global South. *Prospects*, 39(3), 273–286.
- Moyi, P. (2017). Inclusive education in sub-Saharan Africa: Challenges and strategies. *Comparative Education Review*, 61(3), 429–452.
- Mulugeta, T. (2018). Inclusive education and teacher preparation in Ethiopia. *Journal of Inclusive Education*, 12(2), 10–29.
- Norwich, B. (2014). *Addressing tensions and dilemmas in inclusive education: Living with uncertainty*. Routledge.
- Pherali, T. (2013). Education and conflict in Afghanistan and sub-Saharan Africa. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 43(1), 1–20.
- Salend, S. J., & Garrick Duhaney, L. M. (1999). The impact of inclusion on students with and without disabilities. *Educational Review*, 51(3), 181–189.
- Semela, T. (2014). Conflict and education in northern Ethiopia: Policy implications. *Ethiopian Journal of Development Studies*, 5(1), 56–78.
- Shakespeare, T. (2013). *Disability rights and wrongs revisited*. Routledge.
- Singal, N. (2010). Inclusive education in low-income countries: A case study from India. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 30(4), 421–428.

- Slee, R. (2018). *Inclusive education: From policy to practice*. Routledge.
- Slee, R., & Allan, J. (2001). Excluding the included: A reconsideration of inclusive education. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 11(2), 173–192.
- Tefera, M. (2019). Policy and practice in inclusive education in Ethiopia. *Ethiopian Journal of Education Policy*, 11(1), 33–49.
- Tikly, L. (2019). Education, inequality and inclusive education in Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 66, 1–10.
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.
- Waghid, Y. (2014). Ubuntu and inclusive education. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 28(5), 1571–1584.
- Winthrop, R., & Kirk, J. (2008). Learning for a bright future: Schooling, armed conflict, and children's well-being. *Comparative Education Review*, 52(4), 639–661.
- World Bank. (2021). *Inclusive education and children with disabilities in Africa: Policy and practice*. World Bank Group.

Appendix 1

The Participants Research Information Sheet

Dear Respondant,

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled “Inclusive Education in a Conflict Zone: Practices, Barriers, and Stakeholder Perspectives for Students with Disabilities at Weldu Nigus Secondary School, Tigray, Ethiopia.” This study is being conducted as part of the requirements for a Master’s degree in the Department of Civics and Ethics at Mekelle University.

The purpose of this study is to explore the current practices, challenges, and perspectives regarding inclusive education for students with disabilities in conflict-affected settings. Your responses will provide valuable insights into how education for students with disabilities is being implemented, the barriers faced, and the roles of different stakeholders in supporting inclusive education in such contexts.

Participation in this questionnaire is completely voluntary. All information you provide will be kept strictly confidential and will be used only for academic research purposes. Your honest responses are crucial and highly appreciated, as they will contribute to improving inclusive education practices in Tigray and similar contexts.

Please answer the questions based on your experiences, perceptions, and knowledge. There is no right or wrong answer. Completing this questionnaire should take approximately 10 – 15 minutes.

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation. Your participation is highly valued. If you have any question regarding the study, don’t hesitate to ask.

Priest Desta Abera Mana

Phone No: 09

Appendix 2

Part one: Questionnaires

Instruction

- Do not write your name
- Please read each question carefully before answering.
- Answer all questions honestly based on your own experiences, perceptions, or knowledge.

Section A: General Information

General Information of the respondents

Age of the respondents: below 21 ☐ 21 - 30 ☐ 31 - 40 ☐ 41 - 50 ☐ above 50 ☐

Gender of the respondents: Male ☐ Female ☐ Other ☐

Educational status of the respondents: Grade 9 ☐ Grade 10 ☐ Grade 11 ☐ Grade 12th ☐ Degree ☐
Masters ☐

Type of disability of the respondents: Eye ☐ Ear ☐ Leg ☐ Other ☐ None ☐

Section B: Educational Needs

Accessibility

How would you rate the accessibility of classrooms in the school?

Excellent ☐ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor ☐

How would you rate the accessibility of restrooms in the school? Excellent ☐ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor ☐

How would you rate the accessibility of paths in the school? Excellent ☐ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor ☐

Comfortably of the school

How would you rate the comfortably of classrooms in the school?

Excellent ☐ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor ☐

How would you rate the comfortably of restrooms in the school?

Excellent ☐ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor ☐

How would you rate the comfortably of paths in the school?

Excellent ☐ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor ☐

Supportive Services

Do you agree to the need of special education teacher?
Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐

Do you agree to the need of assistive device or technology?
Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐

Do you agree to the need of social worker or counselor?
Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐

Do you agree to the need of physical therapy?
Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐

Do you agree to the need of special speech therapy?
Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐

Do you agree to the need of peer tutoring?
Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐

Effectiveness of the school

How effective is the school in fulfilling supportive professionals?
Very Effective ☐ Effective ☐ Fairly Effective ☐ Ineffective ☐

How effective is the school in fulfilling supportive materials or technologies?
Very Effective ☐ Effective ☐ Fairly Effective ☐ Ineffective ☐

How effective is the school in fulfilling supportive books?
Very Effective ☐ Effective ☐ Fairly Effective ☐ Ineffective ☐

How effective is the school in encouraging disable students?
Very Effective ☐ Effective ☐ Fairly Effective ☐ Ineffective ☐

Academic Support

How well do teachers understand and respond to your learning needs?
Very Well ☐ Well ☐ Neutral ☐ Poorly ☐ Very Poorly ☐

How well do librarians understand and respond to your learning needs?
Very Well ☐ Well ☐ Neutral ☐ Poorly ☐ Very Poorly ☐

How well do school guards understand and support you?
Very Well ☐ Well ☐ Neutral ☐ Poorly ☐ Very Poorly ☐

How well do school staffs understand and support you?
Very Well ☐ Well ☐ Neutral ☐ Poorly ☐ Very Poorly ☐

Section C: Social and Emotional Well-being

Peer Relationships

How would you describe your relationship with other students?
Very Good ☐ Good ☐ Neutral ☐ Poor ☐ Very Poor ☐

How would you describe your relationship with other disable students?
Very Good ☐ Good ☐ Neutral ☐ Poor ☐ Very Poor ☐

How would you describe your relationship with other non-disable students?
Very Good ☐ Good ☐ Neutral ☐ Poor ☐ Very Poor ☐

How would you describe your relationship with the community?
Very Good ☐ Good ☐ Neutral ☐ Poor ☐ Very Poor ☐

Emotional Support

Do you feel emotionally supported by school teachers?
Always ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never ☐

Do you feel emotionally supported by school staff?
Always ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never ☐

Do you feel emotionally supported by the community members?
Always ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never ☐

Section D: Impact of War and Conflict

(Handled with utmost care and confidentiality)

Negative consequences of conflict

Have you or your family been displaced due to war or conflict?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Has any war crime been committed to you or your family?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Is the reason for your disability a conflict or war?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Impact on Education

How has the conflict affected your ability to attend school regularly?
Not Affected ☐ Slightly Affected ☐ Moderately Affected ☐ Severely Affected ☐

How has the conflict affected your ability to study at school?
Not Affected ☐ Slightly Affected ☐ Moderately Affected ☐ Severely Affected ☐

How has the conflict affected your ability to study in a library?
Not Affected ☐ Slightly Affected ☐ Moderately Affected ☐ Severely Affected ☐

Trauma and Emotional Well-being

Have you experienced any emotional or psychological distress due to conflict?
Yes ☐ No ☐

How would you rate the school's support in helping you cope up with trauma?
Very Supportive ☐ Supportive ☐ Neutral ☐ Unsupportive ☐ Very Unsupportive ☐

What support do you need to help you recover or feel safer at school?
Material support ☐ Psychological support ☐ Financial support ☐ Studying support ☐

Appendix 2

Part two: Interviews

1. What improvements would you suggest to make your school more inclusive for students with disabilities?
2. What specific challenges do you face regarding physical access in school?
3. What academic support do you need to succeed in school?
4. What emotional or mental health support would be helpful to you?

Appendix 3

Interview Consent Form

I, the undersigned person, have read and understood the research information sheet provided by the researcher. I also have given the opportunity by the researcher to ask any questions related to the study. I also understood that taking part in the study may include audio recorded, but I was assured by the researcher that my name and address will not be revealed. I also understand that my views, ideas or personal experiences will be quoted in the research. The researcher also clearly informed me that I have a right to withdraw from the study at any time without explaining the reasons.

Signature of the respondent: _____. Date: _____