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CONTRIBUTION OF RLABS EDUCATION INTERVENTIONS TO THE WELFARE OF STREET CHILDREN IN IRINGA MUNICIPALITY

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to assess the contribution of RLabs education interventions to the welfare of street children in Iringa Municipality, Tanzania. The study focused on school enrolment support, provision of learning materials and student reintegration support as education interventions provided by RLabs. A mixed-methods approach was employed using a cross-sectional design. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics with the Statistical Product for the Social Solutions (SPSS) Version 26, while qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings showed that RLabs education interventions contributed to the welfare of street children through support for school enrolment, provision of learning materials and assistance with student reintegration. The interventions supported children to access education, obtain learning materials and return to formal learning after periods of living or working on the streets. The study concludes that RLabs education interventions contributed to improving the educational welfare of street children in Iringa Municipality through enrolment support, learning materials and reintegration assistance. The study recommends that RLabs strengthen education interventions by increasing support for school enrolment, providing adequate learning materials and strengthening follow-up of children after reintegration into schools. Further studies should examine the long-term educational outcomes and sustainability of RLabs education interventions among street children.

KEYWORDS: RLabs, education interventions, street children, child welfare, school enrolment, learning materials, student reintegration, Iringa Municipality.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Street children's welfare is closely linked to their access to education, protection, family support and opportunities for healthy development. Children living or working on the streets often face barriers that prevent regular participation in school, including poverty, family difficulties, lack of school requirements and social exclusion. In Tanzania, UNICEF reports that poverty and inadequate family support are among the factors associated with children remaining outside school, while children from poor households are disproportionately represented among those excluded from education. Mtitu and Panja (2018) also found in Njombe that street children experienced school dropout, limited psychosocial support, poor infrastructure and shortages of learning facilities. These conditions show that education support is an important part of improving the welfare of children living in street situations.

In Tanzania, different government and non-governmental interventions have been used to improve educational access among vulnerable and street-connected children. Simon (2023), in Singida Municipality, found that non-governmental organisations supported street children with education needs, including school uniforms and that many children served by the organisations returned to school with continued support from NGOs and government institutions. Haji (2025) similarly found in Dodoma City that inclusive education interventions for street children were implemented with the involvement of social workers, although resource and implementation challenges remained. Joseph (2025), studying marginalised children in Iringa Municipal, further found that educational support, community engagement and school collaboration were important strategies used by NGOs to promote access and participation in education. These findings indicate that education interventions can support street-connected children through access to school, learning support and reintegration.

In Iringa Municipality, the need for education interventions is relevant because some vulnerable children continue to experience barriers to schooling and social inclusion. UNICEF identifies Iringa among the Tanzanian regions where alternative education programmes have been implemented for vulnerable out-of-school adolescents, including literacy, life skills and vocational skills support. However, existing evidence in Iringa has mainly examined NGO support for marginalised children in general, while limited attention has been given specifically to the contribution of RLabs education interventions to the welfare of street children. The present study therefore focuses on how RLabs education interventions contribute to the welfare of street children in Iringa Municipality, particularly

through school enrolment support, provision of learning materials and student reintegration support.

Street children remain a social welfare concern in Tanzania because many children living and working on the streets face difficulties in accessing education, protection and other services needed for their development. National data identified 4,383 children and youth living and working on the streets in six cities during 2020/2021, showing the continued presence of children in street situations in urban areas (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023). Limited access to education can affect children's knowledge, skills, social development and future opportunities. Education support is therefore an important component of interventions intended to improve the welfare of street children.

Previous studies have examined education and other interventions provided to street children in Tanzania. Niboye (2013) examined selected NGOs in Dar es Salaam and reported interventions that included education, counselling, shelter and reintegration. Simon (2023) found that NGOs in Singida Municipality supported street children with education-related needs, including school uniforms and assistance in returning to school. Joseph (2025) examined NGO support for marginalised children in Iringa Municipal and found that educational support, community engagement and school collaboration were used to improve children's access to education. However, these studies did not specifically examine the contribution of RLabs education interventions to the welfare of street children in Iringa Municipality. This creates a contextual and organisational gap because the contribution of education interventions can differ according to the organisation, programme approach and local conditions.

RLabs has implemented programmes for vulnerable and street-connected children in Iringa Municipality, including education-related support. Such support includes assistance with school enrolment, provision of learning materials and student reintegration. However, limited empirical evidence shows the extent to which these RLabs education interventions contribute to the welfare of street children in the municipality. The problem addressed by this study was therefore the limited evidence on the contribution of RLabs education interventions to the welfare of street children in Iringa Municipality. The study consequently assessed the contribution of RLabs education interventions to the welfare of street children in Iringa Municipality, with attention to school enrolment support, learning materials and student reintegration.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Literature Review

This study was guided by Social Support Theory, developed from the work of Cobb (1976) and further advanced by Cohen and Wills (1985). The theory explains that individuals facing difficult social conditions benefit from support provided by other people, groups and institutions. Support can take the form of emotional, informational and instrumental assistance. In this study, RLAb education interventions represent practical and informational support provided to street children through school enrolment support, learning materials and student reintegration support. Such support can help children overcome barriers to education and improve their welfare.

Social Support Theory was relevant to this study because it provides a framework for explaining how education support from RLAb contributes to the welfare of street children in Iringa Municipality. School enrolment support provides children with an opportunity to access formal education, learning materials support helps them participate in school activities, while reintegration support assists children to return to and remain in education. The theory therefore guided the study in examining how these RLAb education interventions contribute to the welfare of street children, without extending the theoretical discussion to health care or basic-needs interventions.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

This section reviews empirical studies related to the contribution of NGOs interventions to the welfare of street children. The review focuses on previous studies conducted at both international and local levels to examine findings on educational interventions, health care interventions and basic needs interventions. The purpose of the review is to identify existing knowledge, areas of agreement and disagreement among previous studies and the research gap that justified the present study.

2.2.1 Contribution of NGO education interventions to the welfare of street children

This section reviews empirical studies on the contribution of NGO education interventions to the welfare of street children. The review focuses on school enrolment support, provision of learning materials and student re integration. The reviewed studies provide evidence from different contexts and establish the existing knowledge and gaps addressed by the present study.

2.2.1.1 School enrolment support and welfare of street children

School enrolment is an important step towards improving the welfare of street children because it connects children with structured education and opportunities for future

development. In examining factors affecting access to education among street children, Greeson et al. (2023) conducted a study in Njombe Township Council, Tanzania. The study found that street children faced several barriers to accessing universal education, including economic difficulties and limited support for their educational needs. The findings showed that the involvement of communities and institutions was important in improving children's access to education. The study therefore emphasised the need for organised support to enable street children to enter and participate in education.

The process of moving from street life into formal education also involves social and personal difficulties that continue after enrolment. Focusing on these experiences, Corcoran et al. (2020) found that fear, embarrassment and feelings of not belonging affected decisions to return to school. However, acceptance and support helped young people overcome these difficulties and participate in education. The findings demonstrated that enrolment support requires attention to the individual circumstances experienced by street-connected children.

2.2.1.2 Provision of learning materials and welfare of street children

The availability of educational resources is important because school enrolment alone does not guarantee effective participation in learning activities. In assessing access to universal education, Haji (2025) found that street children in Njombe Township Council experienced difficulties associated with accessing education and receiving adequate support for their educational needs. The study demonstrated that educational access required support from institutions and communities because street children often faced economic conditions that limited their participation in education. These findings show the importance of addressing the practical requirements associated with educational participation.

The experiences of street-connected young people returning to education show that practical support is required alongside formal enrolment. Corcoran et al. (2020) found that street-connected young people faced difficulties in meeting academic expectations and adjusting to formal school environments after periods of interrupted education. Some participants experienced problems associated with homework, learning requirements and adapting to school routines. The study therefore demonstrated that support for education should consider the practical circumstances affecting children's continued participation.

The two studies show that educational participation requires attention to the circumstances that affect children's ability to engage in learning after accessing school. Mtitu and Panja (2018) focused on factors affecting access to education among street children in Tanzania, while Corcoran et al. (2020) examined educational experiences during the transition from street life to school in Kenya. However, the studies did not specifically examine the

contribution of learning materials as a separate NGO intervention to the welfare of street children. The present study therefore examined the provision of learning materials through RLabs as a separate indicator of education interventions.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a mixed research approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The approach allowed the researcher to collect numerical data on the contribution of RLabs interventions to the welfare of street children and also obtain detailed views and experiences from key informants. A cross-sectional research design was used, where quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the same period. This design was appropriate because it helped the researcher to assess the contribution of RLabs education interventions, health care interventions and basic needs interventions while also obtaining detailed explanations from RLabs staff. The approach therefore provided a broader understanding of the contribution of RLabs interventions to the welfare of street children in Iringa Municipality.

Area of the Study

This study was carried out in Iringa Municipality, located in the Iringa Region of Tanzania. According to the 2022 Population and Housing Census, Iringa Municipality had a population of approximately 202,490 people (NBS, 2022). The municipality was selected because it has street-connected children and organisations that provide welfare interventions. Kapange et al. (2023) reported that street children in Iringa Municipality experience different social conditions related to peer influence, social experiences and the desire for independence. The study specifically focused on RLabs because the organisation provides interventions to street-connected children in Iringa Municipality. RLabs interventions include education support, health care support and basic needs support. The study covered street children supported by RLabs from Makorongoni, Ruaha and Kihesa wards. The area therefore provided a suitable setting for examining the contribution of RLabs interventions to the welfare of street children.

Population and Sampling

Population

A population refers to the entire group of people or units that have characteristics relevant to a particular study. The population for this study consisted of 130 street children supported by RLabs in Iringa Municipality in 2026. These children were included because they were direct beneficiaries of RLabs interventions and had experience with the services provided. The

study also included five RLabs staff members as key informants. These staff members were involved in planning, coordinating or implementing education, health care and basic needs interventions for street children. They were included because they had relevant knowledge and experience concerning the interventions provided by RLabs and their contribution to the welfare of street children.

Sampling

Sampling is the process of selecting a smaller group from a larger population to participate in a study. This study employed a combination of simple random sampling and purposive sampling. Simple random sampling was used to select 97 street children from the 130 street children supported by RLabs, giving each eligible child an equal chance of being selected. The sample size of 97 was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) approach. Purposive sampling was used to select five RLabs staff as key informants because they had relevant knowledge and experience concerning the implementation of education, health care and basic needs interventions. The quantitative sample consisted of 97 street children, while the five key informants provided qualitative information, giving a total sample of 102 participants.

Data Collection Instruments

A questionnaire was used to collect quantitative information from 97 street children supported by RLabs. The questionnaire collected information on the contribution of education interventions, health care interventions and basic needs interventions to their welfare. Education-related information focused on school enrolment support, provision of learning materials and student reintegration support. Health care information focused on medical treatment, psychosocial counselling and referrals to health facilities, while basic needs information focused on food, shelter, clothing and other basic items. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with five RLabs staff to obtain detailed information about the implementation and contribution of these interventions. The interview questions focused on education support, health care support, and basic needs support and the welfare of street children.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded, entered and analysed using the Statistical Product for the Social Solutions (SPSS), Version 26. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the quantitative findings. Frequencies, percentages and mean scores were used to present information on RLabs education interventions, health care interventions, basic needs interventions and the welfare of street children. Qualitative data collected through semi-

structured interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. The interview responses were reviewed, coded and grouped into themes based on the study objectives. The main themes focused on school enrolment support, learning materials, student reintegration, medical treatment, psychosocial counselling, health referrals, food, shelter, clothing and other basic items. The qualitative findings were then compared with the quantitative findings to provide a clearer understanding of the contribution of RLabs interventions to the welfare of street children.

Ethical Considerations

The study observed ethical principles to protect the rights, privacy and welfare of participants. An introductory letter was obtained from the University of Iringa and permission to conduct the study was obtained from the relevant authorities and RLabs. Participation was voluntary and participants were informed about the purpose of the study before data collection. Informed consent was obtained from participants and appropriate procedures were followed when collecting information from street children because they were a vulnerable group. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by avoiding the use of participants' names and using codes where necessary. Information collected from participants was kept securely and used only for academic purposes. Academic honesty was maintained by properly acknowledging all sources used in the study through APA referencing.

DATA PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Contribution of NGOs Education Interventions on the Welfare of Street Children

The findings focus on school enrolment support, provision of learning materials and school reintegration and examine how these interventions contribute to access to education, participation in learning, school attendance and continued involvement in education. Quantitative findings obtained through structured questionnaires are presented using frequencies, percentages and tables, while qualitative findings from interviews with RLabs staff provide further explanations of the interventions and their contribution to the welfare of street children.

4.1.1 Contribution of School Enrolment Support to the Welfare of Street Children

School enrolment support can provide street children with an opportunity to enter or return to formal education and improve their educational welfare. In this study, school enrolment support was assessed based on whether respondents received the support, the type of support received, whether the support improved access to education and the benefits resulting from the support. The first question was administered to all 97 respondents, while the follow-up

questions were answered only by respondents who reported receiving school enrolment support.

4.1.1.1 School enrolment support received

As shown in Table 4.1, a large proportion of respondents (83.5%) reported that they had not received school enrolment support from RLabs, while only 16.5% reported receiving the support. This finding shows that direct enrolment assistance was not received by most of the street children included in the study. The pattern observed in the findings suggests that the education needs of the respondents were broader than the number of children receiving direct support for school enrolment. During the interviews, the researcher obtained further explanations from RLabs key informants. The GROW Street Manager explained:

We normally support children who are identified and ready to return to school. However, the number of children needing support is usually higher than the number that the organisation can assist at one time. Some children have to wait until resources become available. We also consider the individual situation of each child before providing enrolment assistance. This means that not every street child can receive school enrolment support immediately (Interview with GROW Street Manager, RLabs, 15 July 2026).

The researcher noted that school enrolment support was reaching only selected children rather than all children receiving services from RLabs. The large difference between those who had not received the support and those who had received it shows a gap between the need for educational assistance and the actual coverage of enrolment support. The researcher further observed that access to enrolment assistance depended on the child's individual readiness and the availability of resources, which could delay support for children who needed to return to school. UNICEF (2024) similarly identifies poverty and other social circumstances as barriers affecting access to education among vulnerable children in Tanzania. The findings from the present study show that strengthening the coverage of school enrolment support could enable more street children supported by RLabs to access formal education.

4.1.1.2 Type of school enrolment support received

Results in Table 4.1, show that respondents who received school enrolment support, 43.7% reported receiving school placement support, followed by 37.5% who received school admission assistance, while 18.8% received payment of school requirements. The higher proportion receiving school placement support shows that reconnecting children with appropriate schools formed the main type of enrolment assistance received from RLabs.

During the interviews, the researcher obtained further explanations regarding the different forms of enrolment support provided. The Programme Facilitator stated:

For many children, the first step is to identify a suitable school where they can continue their education. We help them understand the school requirements and guide them through the admission process. In some cases, we also help with school placement when the child has been away from education for some time. Financial support for school requirements is provided when resources are available and when the child has a clear need. The type of assistance therefore depends on the situation of the child and the support available at that time (Interview with Programme Facilitator, RLabs, 17 July 2026).

Type of support provided was determined by the educational situation of each child rather than following one fixed form of assistance. School placement received greater attention because children required practical support to reconnect with the formal education system after spending time outside school. The lower proportion receiving payment of school requirements also shows that financial assistance was not the main form of enrolment support received by the beneficiaries. Simon (2023) found that NGO interventions supported vulnerable children to return to school through different forms of educational assistance, while available resources influenced the extent of support provided. The present findings show that RLabs contributed to the welfare of street children by providing practical support that helped beneficiaries overcome barriers associated with returning to formal education.

Table 4.1: Contribution of School Enrolment Support on the Welfare of Street Children. (n=97)

Parameters	Frequency	Percent (%)
School enrolment support received (n=97)		
Yes	16	16.5
No	81	83.5
Total	97	100.0
Type of school enrolment support received (n=16)		
School admission assistance	6	37.5
Payment of school requirements	3	18.8
School placement support	7	43.7
Total	16	100.0
School enrolment support improved access to education (n=16)		
Yes	12	75.0
No	4	25.0
Total	16	100.0
Benefit of school enrolment support (n=16)		

Improved school attendance	7	43.8
Return to school	2	12.5
Reduced school absence	1	6.2
Increased participation in learning	6	37.5
Total	16	100.0

Source: Field Data (2026)

4.1.1.3 School enrolment support improved access to education

Results in Table 4.1, 75.0% of respondents who received school enrolment support reported that the support improved their access to education, while 25.0% reported that it did not. The higher proportion reporting improved access shows that enrolment assistance contributed positively to educational opportunities among the beneficiaries. The findings indicate that support provided during the enrolment process helped respondents overcome some of the difficulties associated with entering or returning to school. During the interviews, the researcher obtained further explanations regarding the contribution of enrolment assistance. The RLabs Coordinator stated:

When a child receives help with enrolment, it becomes easier for that child to start or return to school. Some children have difficulties understanding where to go or what is needed before they can be accepted into school. Our role is to guide them and help remove some of those difficulties. After getting the necessary assistance, children are able to begin attending school. However, some children still need additional support because enrolment alone does not remove all the problems they face (Interview with RLabs Coordinator, RLabs, 20 July 2026)

Enrolment support contributed to education by providing practical guidance and assistance during the process of entering school. The researcher observed that access to education improved when respondents received direct assistance to overcome enrolment procedures and other immediate requirements. However, the 25.0% who did not experience improved access shows that enrolment assistance alone did not address every condition affecting school participation. The finding is supported by UNICEF (2023), which emphasizes that access to education among vulnerable children requires support that addresses barriers both within and outside the school environment. The present findings show that RLabs contributed to the welfare of street children by helping beneficiaries' access educational opportunities, although continued support remained important for sustaining their participation in education.

4.1.1.4 Benefits resulting from school enrolment support

As presented in Table 4.1, most respondents (43.8%) identified improved school attendance as the main benefit, followed by increased participation in learning (37.5%). A smaller proportion reported return to school (12.5%), while 6.2% identified reduced school absence as the main benefit. These findings show that improved attendance and participation in learning were the main educational benefits reported by respondents who received enrolment support. During the interviews, the researcher obtained further explanations about the benefits of school enrolment support. The Programme Manager explained:

After children are helped to enter school, we normally observe changes in their attendance. Some children become more willing to attend classes because they now have a clear opportunity to continue with education. They also begin taking part in classroom activities and interacting more with other learners. For children who had already left school, enrolment support can give them another opportunity to return to learning. Continued follow-up is still important because children need support to remain in school after they have been enrolled (Interview with Programme Manager, RLabs, 22 July 2026).

School enrolment support was linked with changes in school attendance, classroom participation and return to learning. The researcher observed that the largest proportions of respondents reported improved attendance and increased participation in learning, showing that the contribution of enrolment support extended beyond helping children enter school. The 12.5% who identified return to school as the main benefit shows that enrolment assistance also helped some children reconnect with formal education after being outside the school system. The small proportion reporting reduced school absence indicates that this benefit was less frequently identified by the beneficiaries. In light of the same finding, Mtitu and Panja (2018) also found that street children in Njombe experienced barriers to education, including school dropout, limited psychosocial support, inadequate learning facilities and child labour. The study also emphasized the need for support that enables street children to access and remain in education. The present findings add evidence from Iringa Municipality by showing that school enrolment support from RLabs was associated with improved attendance, increased participation in learning and return to school among the beneficiaries who received the intervention.

4.1.2 Contribution of Provision of Learning Materials to the Welfare of Street Children

Access to learning materials remains an important part of educational participation among street children. Lack of essential materials can affect attendance, participation in classroom activities and the ability to continue with learning after enrolment. The study assessed the

contribution of learning materials provided by RLabs to the welfare of street children in Iringa Municipality. The assessment focused on whether respondents received learning materials, the types of materials received, whether the materials improved educational participation and the benefits obtained from the support.

4.1.2.1 Learning materials received

.As presented in Table 4.2, the majority of respondents (69.1%) reported that they had not received learning materials from RLabs, while 30.9% reported receiving the support. This finding shows that learning-material support was available to some beneficiaries, but its coverage remained limited among the street children included in the study. During the interview, the GROW Street Manager explained:

We provide learning materials to children who are already connected to our education programmes and those who are identified as having serious needs. The materials may include books and other items that help children to participate in school activities. However, the number of children needing these materials is usually higher than the resources available to us. Because of this situation, we cannot provide the same level of support to every child. We continue looking for resources so that more children can receive the materials they need for learning (Interview with GROW Street Manager, RLabs, 18 July 2026)

Access to learning materials was linked to the needs of individual children and the resources available to RLabs. Intervention had limited coverage among the children supported by RLabs. This situation reflects a gap between the educational requirements of street children and the material support available to meet those requirements. The researcher further observed that learning-material provision needs to address the practical conditions surrounding school participation, since access to education becomes difficult when children lack basic materials. The finding also relates to evidence from Tanzania showing that indirect schooling costs continue to affect street children's access to education. Logation (2025) found that, although street children were willing to attend school, indirect costs remained a barrier and recommended support covering both direct and indirect education costs. In the present study, the limited receipt of learning materials shows that addressing educational welfare requires attention to the practical requirements that enable children to participate in schooling.

4.1.2.2 Type of learning materials received

As presented in Table 4.2, among respondents who received learning materials, most respondents (43.3%) received textbooks. School bags accounted for 23.3%, while exercise books and pens and pencils each accounted for 16.7%. The findings show that RLabs

provided different forms of learning materials, with textbooks forming the largest category of support. During the interview, the Programme Facilitator explained:

Textbooks are among the materials that children need most because they help them follow lessons and revise what they have learned at school. We also provide school bags and writing materials when these items are available. Some children come to school without basic materials, so even a small package can make a difference in their participation. However, the materials we provide depend on what has been donated or purchased through the programme. For this reason, some children may receive textbooks while others receive different school items (Interview with Programme Facilitator, RLabs, 19 July 2026)

The distribution of learning materials was shaped by both educational needs and the materials available through the programme. The RLabs support addressed different practical requirements of schooling rather than concentrating on a single type of material. At the same time, the distribution pattern reveals that access to one learning material does not provide a complete set of resources required for school participation. The intervention addressed immediate material shortages, but the range of materials received varied among beneficiaries, leaving some educational requirements less directly addressed. Issa et al. (2023) found that inadequate funding, high costs, weak procurement planning and unequal distribution affected the availability of teaching and learning materials in primary schools in Dar es Salaam. The study further linked these material constraints with poor attendance, reduced motivation and difficulties in learning. The present findings show a related reality within NGO support for street children: provision of learning materials addresses practical educational needs, but the welfare contribution is stronger when the support covers the different materials required for participation in school.

Table 4.2: Contribution of Provision of Learning Materials on the Welfare of Street Children. (n = 97)

Parameters	Frequency	Percent (%)
Learning materials received (n=97)		
Yes	30	30.9
No	67	69.1
Total	97	100.0
Type of learning materials received (n=30)		
Exercise books	5	16.7
Textbooks	13	43.3
School bags	7	23.3
Pens and pencils	5	16.7

Total	30	100.0
Provision of learning materials improved educational participation (n=30)		
Yes	24	80.0
No	6	20.0
Total	30	100.0
Benefits resulting from learning materials (n=30)		
Better school attendance	8	26.7
Improved learning participation	6	20.0
Improved class performance	5	16.7
Increased interest in education	11	36.7
Total	30	100.0

Source: Field Data (2026)

4.1.2.3 Provision of learning materials improved educational participation

Results in Table 4.2, most respondents (80.0%) who received learning materials reported improved educational participation, while the remaining 20.0% indicated that their participation had not improved after receiving the materials. The finding shows that provision of learning materials made a positive contribution to educational participation among the beneficiaries who received the support. During the interview, the RLabs Coordinator explained:

When children receive the materials they need, they become more prepared to take part in classroom activities. A child who has a book or writing materials can follow the lesson more easily and complete some of the work given by the teacher. We have also seen children become more willing to attend school when they have their own learning materials. However, materials alone cannot solve every problem because some children still have family and living conditions that affect their education. We therefore try to combine material support with other forms of assistance whenever resources allow (Interview with RLabs Coordinator, RLabs, 21 July 2026)

Learning materials addressed practical barriers that affected children's participation in school activities. The intervention provided a direct link between material support and the ability of children to engage in routine learning activities. The findings also reveal that educational participation is influenced by conditions beyond access to school materials. Material support addressed the immediate educational requirements of beneficiaries, while other social and living conditions remained relevant to sustained participation. This shows that learning-material provision formed one important part of the support required to improve the educational welfare of street children. Komba and Shukia (2021) found that the provision of teaching and learning materials in Tanzania was uneven across schools and that differences in

material support created inequalities in educational opportunities. Their study further showed that development partners played an important role in providing teaching and learning materials, although the distribution of support was not uniform across locations. The present findings add evidence from RLabs in Iringa Municipality by showing that provision of learning materials was associated with improved participation among street children who received the intervention.

4.1.2.4 Benefits resulting from learning materials

As shown in Table 4.2, most respondents (36.7%) identified increased interest in education as the main benefit of receiving learning materials. Better school attendance followed at 26.7%, improved learning participation at 20.0% and improved class performance at 16.7%. The findings show that learning-material support was associated with both increased interest in education and improvements in participation-related outcomes. During the interview, the researcher obtained further explanation from the RLabs Intern, who stated:

We have noticed that children become more interested in school when they receive materials that are meant for their learning. Having their own books or school items makes them feel that they belong in the school environment. Some children who were not very active before begin attending more regularly and taking part in classroom activities. The materials also make it easier for them to complete assignments and follow what the teacher is teaching. However, continued encouragement is still needed because the materials are only one part of the support required by these children (Interview with Intern, RLabs, 23 July 2026)

Learning materials addressed practical difficulties that affected children's involvement in school. The intervention had an educational effect extending beyond possession of school items. The materials supported children's readiness to engage with classroom work, while the reported benefits also point to improved connection with school activities. Learning-material support alone was not sufficient to address the full range of conditions affecting educational welfare among street children. Continued educational guidance and other forms of support remained important for sustaining the gains associated with the provision of materials. Joseph (2025), in a study conducted in Iringa Municipality, found that Non-Governmental Organization interventions supporting marginalised children included educational support and collaboration with schools and communities. The study also identified educational support as part of wider efforts to improve inclusion among marginalised children. The present findings extend this local evidence by showing specific benefits associated with learning-material support among street children receiving services from RLabs.

4.1.3 Contribution of student reintegration on the welfare of street children

Student reintegration addressed the educational gap experienced by street children who had left or remained outside formal schooling, but its contribution was assessed through the actual support received and the educational changes associated with reintegration. The study assessed whether respondents received student reintegration support, the type of support received, whether the support improved access to education and the benefits resulting from the intervention.

4.1.3.1 Student reintegration support received

Results in Table 4.2, the majority of respondents (69.1%) reported that they had not received student reintegration support from RLabs, while 30.9% reported receiving the support. The reintegration support reached only part of the children supported by RLabs, leaving a substantial proportion without direct assistance to reconnect with education. During manager was heard:

We support children who have been away from school and are ready to return to education. Some children need to be prepared before they can go back to school because they may have stayed on the streets for a long time. We first try to understand the child's situation and identify the support that is needed. In some cases, we work with the family and the school before the child returns to education. However, the number of children needing reintegration support is still higher than the number we can support at one time (Interview with GROW Street Manager, RLabs, 24 July 2026)

Student reintegration involved preparation and coordination around the child before returning to school. The reintegration was not limited to school placement but involved addressing the conditions surrounding a child's return to education. The limited coverage of the intervention also reveals a gap between the need for educational reintegration and the capacity available to provide the required support. The researcher further observed that successful reintegration requires attention to the child's family situation, readiness for school and relationship with the education system. Nyello et al. (2023) found that street children in Dodoma and Dar es Salaam faced difficulties in accessing education and lacked effective means of enrolling themselves in formal schooling. The study recommended a formal support system to improve access to educational services. The present findings provide evidence from Iringa Municipality that RLabs was addressing this gap through reintegration support, while the limited reach of the intervention shows the need for stronger mechanisms to reconnect street children with education.

4.1.3.2 Type of student reintegration support received

The findings in Table 4.3 show that counselling services accounted for 43.3% of the beneficiaries, making emotional and personal preparation the leading form of assistance. Family reunification represented 40.0%, indicating that restoring family care was another major component of the process. School placement accounted for 16.7%, showing that direct connection with schools represented a smaller part of the assistance. The distribution indicates that RLabs placed greater emphasis on preparing children and restoring family support before or alongside their return to school.

The distribution of reintegration support shows differences in the forms of assistance provided to beneficiaries. To understand the reasons behind this pattern, the researcher obtained further information from RLabs staff. The Programme Facilitator explained:

Some children need counselling before they can comfortably return to school after living on the streets. We also work with families because returning a child to school is difficult when the home environment is not ready to support the child. Family reunification helps the child to have someone responsible for their care after returning from the streets. School placement is also important, but it normally comes after the child's personal and family situation has been considered. We therefore combine these forms of support according to the needs of each child (Interview with Programme Facilitator, RLabs, 25 July 2026)

The reintegration was organised around the circumstances of individual children rather than school placement alone. The stronger emphasis on counselling and family reunification reflected the need to address personal adjustment and family care before children resumed formal education. The lower level of school placement support further indicates that reconnecting children with schools formed one part of the process rather than the entire reintegration intervention. This pattern shows that educational reintegration involved restoring the conditions needed for children to remain connected to both family care and schooling. Solile et al. (2023) found that street-connected children in north-western Tanzania faced barriers to health care and social protection services, including difficulties linked to weak social support systems.

Table 4.3: Contribution of Student Reintegration on the Welfare of Street Children. (n=97)

Parameters	Frequency	Percent (%)
Student reintegration support received		
Yes	30	30.9
No	67	69.1
Total	97	100.0
Type of student reintegration support received (n=30)		
Family reunification support	12	40.0
School placement support	5	16.7
Counselling services	13	43.3
Total	30	100.0
Student reintegration support improved access to education (n=30)		
Yes	26	86.7
No	4	13.3
Total	30	100.0
Benefits resulting from student reintegration support (n=30)		
Return to school	9	30.0
Continued school attendance	11	36.7
Improved learning participation	2	6.6
Reduced dropout risk	8	26.7
Total	30	100.0

Source: Field Data (2026)

4.1.3.3 Student reintegration support improved access to education

As presented in Table 4.3 show that most respondents (86.7%) who received reintegration support reported improved access to education. The remaining 13.3% indicated that their access to education had not improved after receiving the support, showing that reintegration assistance did not address all barriers affecting educational access.

The high level of reported improvement raised the need to understand how the reintegration process helped children reconnect with education. The researcher obtained further information from RLabs staff. The RLabs Coordinator stated:

Reintegration gives children another opportunity to return to education after spending time away from school. We help them deal with some of the difficulties that made them leave school or remain on the streets. When the child is ready, we work with the family and school to make the return easier. Many children become more comfortable with education after receiving this support. However, some children still require follow-up because returning to school does not immediately remove all the difficulties they experienced before (Interview with RLabs Coordinator, RLabs, 26 July 2026)

The reintegration support addressed conditions surrounding the child's return to education rather than focusing only on school admission. The researcher noted that the intervention created a connection between the child, family and school, which addressed some of the circumstances that had separated children from formal education. The researcher further observed that educational access involved more than physical entry into school; children also required support to adjust to school and maintain their connection with education. The proportion whose access remained unchanged points to barriers that continued beyond the initial reintegration process, particularly the need for follow-up after children returned to school. Research from Kagera Region by Embleton et al. (2017) found that young people returning from street life experienced difficulties related to re-entering school, strained family relationships and adjustment within their communities. The study viewed reintegration as a stepwise process involving emotional, practical and social support rather than a single event. The present study provides evidence from Iringa Municipality that RLabs reintegration support contributed to reconnecting street children with education, while also showing that continued support remains important after the return to school.

4.1.3.4 Benefits resulting from student reintegration support

The findings in Table 4.3, most respondents (36.7%) identified continued school attendance as the main benefit of reintegration support. Return to school accounted for 30.0%, while 26.7% identified reduced dropout risk. Improved learning participation accounted for 6.6%. This distribution shows that the main contribution of reintegration support was helping children return to and remain connected with formal education. The distribution of benefits shows different outcomes among children who received reintegration support. To understand how these outcomes were achieved, the researcher obtained further information from RLabs staff. The GROW Street Manager explained:

After a child returns to school, our main concern is whether the child will continue attending and remain connected to education. We therefore try to follow up with the child, the family and sometimes the school to understand how the child is progressing. This support helps children adjust to school life after spending time on the streets. When children receive encouragement and family support, they are more likely to continue attending school. We have found that returning a child to school is only the beginning, because continued support is needed to reduce the possibility of dropping out again (Interview with GROW Street Manager, RLabs, 27 July 2026).

The reintegration continued after school re-entry through follow-up involving the child, family and school. The strongest benefits were linked to maintaining children's connection

with education rather than producing immediate academic changes. Continued attendance and reduced dropout risk point to the importance of support after a child has returned to school. The researcher further observed that reintegration was a continuing process in which family encouragement, follow-up and school connection helped address conditions that could interrupt a child's return to education. The small proportion reporting improved learning participation also shows that maintaining educational connection was more immediate than achieving changes in classroom learning. Embleton et al. (2017), in a study of youth transitioning from street life in Tanzania, found that successful reintegration involved continued support during the transition back into family and community life. The study highlights the need to address the conditions surrounding reintegration rather than treating return from street life as a single event.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study concludes that RLabs education interventions contributed to the welfare of street children in Iringa Municipality by supporting school enrolment, providing learning materials and assisting children in returning to or remaining in school. RLabs health care interventions contributed to welfare through medical care, psychosocial counselling and referrals to health facilities. RLabs basic needs interventions also contributed to welfare by supporting access to food, shelter, clothing and other essential items. The findings indicate that the three intervention areas addressed important educational, health and daily living needs of street children.

Recommendations

RLabs should strengthen and expand education interventions by increasing support for school enrolment, learning materials and reintegration of street children into formal education. RLabs should also strengthen health care support through regular medical assistance, psychosocial counselling and referral services. Basic needs interventions should be maintained and improved through reliable provision of food, shelter, clothing and other essential items. RLabs should also strengthen coordination with the Iringa Municipal Council, social welfare officers, schools, health facilities and families to improve continuity of support. Further studies should examine the long-term outcomes and sustainability of RLabs interventions on the welfare and reintegration of street children in Iringa Municipality.

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