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Students Perspectives on Inclusion, A case Study of Kenyatta University- Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to establish the academic and social inclusion of students with disabilities in Institutions of higher learning at Kenyatta University in Kenya. The paper focused on the academic and social support as experienced by the students in the course of their studies at the institution. The study adopted a descriptive survey method using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, including questionnaires and Interview to collect data. 29 students with various disabilities participated in the study and 1 administrator in working in the disability service directorate. Findings indicate that students perceived a lack of inclusion in the issuance of academic materials and participation in excursions while in social activities the least inclusive activities were hobbies and major University activities like the culture week and the major conclusions were that the University should be enhanced to include a Disability Support section. And develop strategies for disability inclusion in every aspect of the students' academic and nob-academic life and that the section should provide advice to respective units within the University accordingly.

Keywords: Inclusion, Disabilities, Academic, Social, Participation, Higher Education, Students.

1.1 Introduction

Universities around the world are gradually embracing principles of inclusion (Slee, 2011), as the diverse student presence of students with disabilities has increasingly begun to challenge the previously assumed styles of meeting their service provisions and support. The adoption of the UNESCO, Salamanca Framework (UNESCO, 1994) and the *Dakar Framework for Action* (UNESCO: 2000) at the two *World Conferences,* in 1994 and 2000 respectively, affirmed the notion of Inclusive Education as

one fundamental key strategy to address issues of support, provisions, marginalization and exclusion of persons with disability in education. The frameworks provide that higher education institutions ensure compliance, as well as restructures provisions to better meet the needs of students with disabilities. Post-secondary education in general provides people gainful employment and opens opportunities for career development, hence for quality of life (Duta, Scguri-Geist, & Kundu, 2009). For people with physical and sensory disabilities, education is even more significant because their range of employment is limited to jobs that require fewer physical abilities and skills (Kendall & Terry, 1996). Accessibility to education is therefore especially important for people with disabilities (Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer & Acosta, 2005; Rimmerman & Araten-Bergman, 2005).

Whilst the needs and rights of disabled students as learners in higher education are officially recognized, majority of higher education institutions including those in Kenya, have been slow in including student's voices in policy-making, a process that potentially could improve outcomes for both parties students and universities. Scholars and practitioners must also participate in these efforts, by conducting studies of students' experiences in higher education they contribute new knowledge and function as facilitators providing incentives for both students and universities to engage in the dialogue, (Martinsson, 2009).

1.2 Materials and Methods

This study adopted descriptive survey design. Survey research was chosen because it enabled the researcher to collect data from a wide population using questionnaires. Survey research was also appropriate since it allowed the researcher to use a sample from the population and derive generalizations from the respondents with respect to the problem under study. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative measures by having questionnaires which had open section in them. The study locale was Kenyatta University, which is also the first public University in Kenya to enroll students with disabilities at University level and also has the highest number of students with disabilities. The target population was 30 students who were in session at the time, 29 participated in the study and they had different types of disabilities including hearing impairment, visually handicapped and physically challenged. They were in different academic levels from first year to fourth year. The sampled students who were on session at the time of the study. Data collection instruments that were used included, questionnaires and interview for the administrator in the disability directorate of the university and document review of student information. These research instruments were used together in order to triangulate the information derived from them. The results were depicted in form of frequencies and percentages. The open-ended questions yielded themes. Data was organized into tables and reported in descriptive form.

The responses were analyzed with respect to the study variables. The dependent variable in this study was Inclusion of students with disabilities. The dependent variables were social and academic factors. The Documentary review was used to gain an overall understanding of the number of Students with Disability (SDDs) across the university. The review revealed that the most frequently identified category of disability was having a Visual Impairment (VI) 20 (69%, followed by those with Physical Disability (PD) 8 (27%) and Hearing Impairment (HI) with 01(3%) . Questionnaires were administered to the

students with disabilities in the four levels of study, from first years to fourth years. The questionnaire was composed of 12 questions which addressed a range of academic and social activities that all students in the University are free to participate in. The questions focused more specifically on the students' perception on whether they felt included in these activities. A likert scale was used to elicit their views and they were required to indicate the response the best matched their experiences regarding inclusion. The scale included choices like very go, fair, quite good and extremely good. The student participation was invited and was voluntary taking cognizance of internationally accepted ethical research guidelines. Their participation was dependent upon their availability and the pressures of the academic year. Pressures of the academic year program seemingly influenced participation and in some cases research fatigue could have played a role as students have seemingly been participating in a number of research initiatives already. This study is not in any way meant to be a representative sample of all students studying at Kenyatta University because it only involved the students who were is session during the time. Ethical approval for the research was granted by the University's Research Ethics Committee. Participants were aware that they could withdraw from the process at any time. All participants were anonymized and direct quotes have been selected to ensure that sources were not identifiable. The study included 29 students with various disabilities and cutting across first year to fourth years and was limited to the following questions. The administrator in the disability directorate was also interviewed for services related focus of the study.

1.3 Overview of Inclusion in Higher Education in Africa

People with disabilities in Africa often face poverty as a consequence of their exclusion from basic services such as school, health care and work (Rust & Metts, 2007). In many sub-Saharan African countries, Kenya included, having any disability minimizes their chance of going to school (UNESCO, 2010). Those who do start school are often at increased risk of 'dropping out' before completing basic education (Filmer, 2005; Hunt, 2008). Exclusion from basic education means that less students with disability who qualify to join Higher Education. Additionally, access for students with disability to HE or particular programmes can be formally blocked (Karangwa, 2008; Sights avers, 2009) or informally advised against (Howell, 2006). There is little information available on the representation of disabled students in HE especially in developing countries. Although states ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD; United Nations, 2006) and undertook to collect statistics that help identify and address the barriers faced by persons with disabilities in exercising their rights, including the right to access education on a par with their non-disabled peers, this has unfortunately not been realized. Some countries in Africa are beginning to collect data on the participation of disabled students in HE. Mumba (2009), for instance, quotes Zambian government figures suggesting that 3% of HE students are disabled. Their continued exclusion of persons with disabilities from basic education often leads to a very insignificant number qualifying to enter HE. The few who make it to higher education are faced with numerous challenges because there are no structures that facilitate their inclusion and effective participation in the programs they enroll in, subsequently, they are formally hindered form achieving their potential Karangwa, 2008; Sightsavers, 2009).

1.4 Inclusion for Students with Disabilities in Higher Education

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN-CRPD, 2006) ensures that more students with disabilities are enrolled in higher education institutions. This requires that countries and institutions ensure the existence of inclusive education systems at all levels of education as well as lifelong learning. Universities are therefore directed to make available appropriate infrastructures, reasonable accommodations, and supports to maximize academic and social development of students with disabilities, enabling their full and equal participation in education and in the labor market.

Following the convention, universities have to consider that persons with disabilities have equal rights to higher education, and it is the responsibility of higher education institutions to ensure these rights are realized. All adjustments and services for persons with disabilities are meant to enable their successful inclusion and should not affect the level of academic requirements for entry nor the academic standards to be met. According to the UN –CRDP, the recommendations for universities on minimum standards for disabled persons highlight nine standards namely; including the needs of disabled students in strategic plans; having official documentation on equal rights, developing policies and procedures concerning persons with disabilities; establishing disability specialist service; developing a criteria of eligibility for services and accommodations; having standards in the assessment of all students; ensuring same choice of study programmes; ensuring protection of information concerning the disability or health of an individual; promoting disability awareness among students and staff and disability training for staff (teaching and administrative). Unfortunately most institutions in developing countries are not privy to this or have not institutionalized these requirements in their operational procedures.

In HE access to education requires that every aspect of schooling, from policy to curriculum to pedagogical elements, to leadership, to ethos and culture change in order to educate learners within a common framework (Terzi 2014). When it comes to including students with disabilities in HE, there should be adaptations in terms of instructional approaches as well as the modification of the physical arrangement of the classroom, if required (Habulezi & Phasha 2012). In addition, inclusion should involve using a medium of communication that is appropriate and accessible for all learners to facilitate their independent interaction with the content.

In most Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Africa, Kenya Included, educational support for students is often described as inadequate, particularly in countries like Kenya where there are few resources to provide for such support. This problem is even more evidenced among students with disabilities (Muthukrishna, 2000).The situation is compounded by the fact that, for many years, little attention has been given to access to education by students with disabilities. Educational support for students with disabilities is even more critical at HEIs, (Graham-Smith, 2004). Educational support may refer to a variety of teaching methods, educational services such as Information, Communication and Technology (ICT), or other university resources that students with disabilities may need to facilitate their learning. Such support aims at equalizing their learning opportunities with their peers, meet their learning standards, or, generally, succeeding in academic work (Pingry, 2007; Michail, 2010). Such

support in a learning environment may be provided to individual students or specific student populations.

A survey entitled "Provision for students with disabilities in Higher Education" carried out by the UNESCO as a contribution to the World Conference on Higher Education (UNESCO, 1999) found that the educational needs of students with disabilities were often ignored. However, this differed from one country to the other. For example, developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa differed remarkably from developed countries in Europe in terms of provision of services to individuals with disabilities. The study also pointed out that there was a need to improve services on the educational needs of students with disabilities, particularly in those universities in the under developed regions, which lack sufficient resources.

Findings of study by Booth, Cooper, and Willett (2013) found that using student voices could help to to redefine support they required in their education. Their study found that students were able to offer considerable insight into what they found particularly supportive in their educational process and how institutions could enhance their progress and academic as well as social inclusion. The researchers provided a detailed description of student views on what they found to be supportive and their suggestions on how best the institutions could meet their needs. Mamiseishvili and Koch (2012) mention the importance of Self Advocacy Skills particularly at University level. In the HEIs environment, students are encouraged to advocate for themselves with faculty members on issues affecting their lives. Self-advocacy promotes the idea that individuals with disability should effectively communicate his/her own interests, needs, and rights, as well as to assume responsibility for making appropriate choices. The current study utilized the students responses and perspectives on the level of inclusion in social and academic activities at Kenyatta University, thereby laying ground for recommendations on what could be done in areas where such perception were not quite favorable.

1.5 Statement of the Problem

Over one billion people (approximately 15%) of the world's population live with some type of disability. This figure gradually raises in line with population increases, growing poverty, natural disasters and continuous conflicts. Many people with disabilities typically face a wide range of barriers to access education, public information, public services, health care, infrastructure, and employment. Available statistical data indicates that educational opportunities for many people with disabilities typically end at secondary education level due to unconducive infrastructure and limited education related facilities provided by HIEs. These limitations include among others, the lack of financial and trained human resources, inaccessible curriculum content, little or non existing support services as well as the high cost of assistive devices and information and communication technologies (ICTs). As a result, there are very few professionals with disabilities who can be found in key fields including science, government, law and medicine who are able to attain decision-making positions or develop initiatives at local, national and international levels. Obviously, there will be a significant lag in national economic progress due to the loss of the contributions of this valuable reservoir of technical talent that remains untapped. For this reason, unless deliberate inclusive strategies are developed by ensuring that

necessary academic training opportunities are made available, institutional facilities become more accessible, content, learning and teaching process become more inclusive it will be increasingly difficult to ensure that the contributions of all citizens, including those with disabilities are part of the overall effort to build inclusive Knowledge-Based Societies. Inclusiveness will only be made possible by implementing Universal Design and no-discrimination principles and information accessibility in the delivery of education.

1.6 Findings and Analysis

Table 1: Type of Disability

	Frequency	Percentage%
Physical Disability	08	27
Visual Impairment	20	69
Hearing Impairment	01	03
TOTAL	29	100

The study found that majority of the students who participated in the study had Visual Impairment no (80) followed by Physical Impairment no (42) while those with Hearing Impairment were 8. Most studies have found that students with visual impairment in institutions of higher learning are likely to have problems associated to access to materials and orientation and mobility while those with physical impairment have challenges associated with access to various environments within the campus. The implication is that strategies must be established to ensure that learning materials and the academic environment are made more accessible to these learners to ensure inclusivity.

Table 2: Students Overall Perceived Inclusion in Social Activities

	Frequency	Percentage
Very good	2	7 %
Fair	16	55 %
Quite good	10	34 %
Extremely good	1	3 %
Total	29	100%

When asked how they perceived their inclusion in social activities at the university majority of the students 16 (55%) indicated that it was fair, 10 students (34%) thought it was quite good while only 1 student (3%) said it was extremely good. Several studies have that some students with disabilities lack skills in initiating and sustaining positive social relationships (Gresham, 1997; Heiman & Margalit, 1998) and in appropriately interpreting social cues. They often exhibit more aggressive and negative verbal and nonverbal behaviors (McConaughly, Mattison, & Peterson, 1998; Sigafoos, 1999) and may be either disruptive or withdrawn. Often these behaviors result in students with disabilities having fewer friends than their peers without disabilities as well as their being actively rejected by peers. Such

pervasive deficits in social functioning manifested by many students with disabilities have been widely acknowledged by the special education community.

When further asked to rate to specific activities where they particularly felt most included in majority of them (72%) cited disability related activities, classroom discussions (70%) religious activities (63%) while activities like arts and music (41%) and culture week (Mayat and Amosun 41%) that are generally regarded as extracurricular activities were rated generally low. A study by (2011) on post secondary education, found that most institutions plan and structure various activities designed to promote social inclusion and friendship development. For many individuals with disabilities when transitioning to post-secondary institutions, the natural inclination is to fit in. Unfortunately for majority of them, even when they have a mildly visible disability, they are immediately seen as not "normal" compared to peers in the classroom or other campus settings, because of the assistive devices they may be using during or outside the classroom. This has largely been known to contribute to their exclusion in social activities as indicated in the findings.

Table 2: Students Overall Perceived Inclusion in Academic Activities

	Frequency	Percentage
Very good	0	0%
Fair	17	59%
Quite good	11	38%
Extremely good	01	3%
Total	29	100%

When interrogated about their perception on academic inclusion, majority of the students 17 (59%) responded that is was fair while only 1 student (3%) mentioned that is was extremely good. 11 students (38%) cited their academic inclusion as quite good. Research has found that most students with disabilities in HEIs do not feel quite included in academic activities, e.g, a study by Mayat and Amosun (2011) found that that students with disabilities I most African countries are still excluded from certain academic fields, even though the staff members expressed willingness to teach students with disabilities, they showed some reservations. The authors argue that staff members were concerned about the perceived limitations of students with disabilities. They expressed concern that students with disabilities would not be able to meet all the course requirements. Although these perceptions will likely vary depending on the type and severity of any students disability, the findings from this study makes a case for continued probing from the lecturers' side on how they perceive disability matters at universities and work on possible avenues towards full academic inclusion and participation of students with disabilities. The most cited inclusive activities by the students were the library activities (81%) and Disability related activities, (70%), while activities such and academic material support (35%) and academic excursions had the lowest ratings. A report on disability in higher education (2011) found that barriers in HIEs are exacerbated by inequalities inherent in the higher education system. This includes the ways in which HEIs are structured and function, dominant attitudes that inform and shape the practices of such HEI as well as the role that higher education plays within society as a whole. The report cites that students with

disabilities are often excluded from academic activities based on mere perceptions of their capabilities. This was especially found in relation to fieldwork or practical activities off-campus or use of graphic material or specific types of equipment.

These findings are in line with those by Orr and Bachman Hammig (2009) who found that most students with disabilities struggled with how to approach educators for material support or how to describe their learning style and how to effectively put forth their academic needs in a way that educators understood. More recently, Orr et al. (2009) found a connection between students' willingness to seek assistance and their perceptions of faculty support. In fact, they found that in most cases, educators were not aware of the presence of these students in their classes who may require accommodations. Where students choose not to disclose their disability, it was completely impossible for educators to implement recommended accommodations into their teaching methodology.

Findings of this study suggest that the students' experience limitations in certain social and academic activities that would wish to be included in like academic excursions, majority of them were also of the opinion that they were not as included in provision of materials support as their counterparts without disabilities. These findings agree with Read, (2003) who argue that education which does not accommodate student diversity perpetuates inequality in society. These restrictions or lack of accommodations experienced by students with disabilities are contrary the Capabilities Approach's virtue of choice which is known to inspire hard work in a person who has such choice available in his or her life (Terzi 2014). According to policy, Kenyatta university first year students with disabilities are expected to disclose their disabilities so that the university can respond to their needs, implementing the policy has met with certain challenges that have prevented certain critical services to be availed to these students. Inclusive services can be facilitated by capturing data during student admission process and using the same for planning stages on the necessary services required by individual students with disabilities. Providing the same treatment to students with disabilities as we do for non-disabled students does not promote inclusivity. Inclusive education is brought by efforts to compensate social and academic disadvantage of students with disabilities. In this study, participation of students with disabilities in certain academic and nonacademic activities was found to be inadequate because of, among other factors, the failure to make learning materials available for the specific needs of the learner as well as failure to make all activities accommodative.

The lack of proper planning and consultation between different university units and departments responsible for students' support can also contribute significantly to the problem. As exemplified through the interview with administrators at the disability services directorate,
"*it takes very long for students with hearing impairments to be allocated a sign language interpreter."*

Essentially, students should be consulted about their needs for meaningful access (Claiborne et al. 2011), however unprocessed disability data can result into their exclusion. In most institutions of higher learning, support for students in general is skewed towards students without disabilities thus limiting support provided to those with disabilities. In this study, the support provided for students with visual and hearing impairments was found to be insufficient, students with visual impairments for example,

reported that unlike their sighted peers who use library books, journals and other reference materials they depended on lecture notes they recorded and material they downloaded from the Internet. Most lectures in the institution are offered face-to-face, this study found the practice not suitable for all students with disabilities.

The administrator observed

"the university does not have sufficient resources including projectors with forces students with low vision to cope with lecturers' handwriting."

Results from the open section of the questions reveal that lecturers are fast-paced to the extent that some students could not manage to take any notes. Majority of these students are denied access to curriculum because of a lack of the necessary accommodations, hence overdependence on lectures while those who fail to copy notes such as students with visual impairments were not compensated with soft copy notes (Gewirtz 1998). In addition, the University has not implemented the disability policy which mandates lecturers to accommodate student diversity such that majority of the lecturers are indifferent or not sensitized to students' needs.

Although one might hope that lecturers would accommodate students of their own free will, and in lieu of such policy, this was not being the reality and some policy framework is always necessary. To this end, Salmi and Bassett (2014) state that access is denied when opportunities are insufficient to enable students with disabilities to succeed in their chosen programmes. In fact, teaching and learning practices at the institution do not meet the basic equality principle of fairness where all have access to the same learning material. Lecturers' lack of commitment to support students with disabilities may also be explained by their limited understanding of how to support students living with various disabilities.

The university could enhance access to curricula to these students with disabilities if additional time for tests and examinations were provided to them. Consultations between students and staff could address issues surrounding students' learning experiences. As Claiborne et al. (2011) observe, consultations with students living with disabilities give them an opportunity to define their needs. For example, one student, depending on their disability, may find that the extra time allocated to them provided for tests and exams is sufficient while another may not understand how additional time was determined by the University as it is too limited. Such individual accommodations by the university will enable them to respond to the specific needs of students with disabilities as they should.

The themes emerging from the open-ended questions on how the University could improve the inclusion of students with disabilities:

- Disability relates equipment to be available from Disability Center
- Communication to faculty about needs of students who signed up for classes
- The disability directorate needs to provide assessment and recommended accommodations and sends to advisors and seek
- Extra time should be given during examinations and sit in CATs for students with various disabilities
- More inclusion in non-academic activities for all staff about how to include students with disability during instruction

1.7 Recommendations

In view of the above findings, I conclude that students with disabilities are not adequately included in academic activities especially with regard to material support and academic excursions, based on these findings it is therefore recommended that Kenyatta University looks into the accommodations and adaptations for instructional materials and that would make them more conducive to the needs of these students with disabilities. Providing them materials specific to their individual needs will ensure that they are being effectively included in learning and that they are able to compete favorably with their peers without disabilities. The findings in this article, although they cannot be generalized, however, they are expected to contribute to the discourse on disability inclusion in higher education in Kenya.

The perspectives of students with disabilities presented herein have implications on informing institutional policies and practices at Kenyatta University but also other public Universities in the country. Despite the fact that Kenyatta University is already providing some support to students with disabilities, it can be argued that there is still lot that needs to be done with regard to catering for the individual instructional and social needs of these students. This situation may probably be due to the lack of established mechanisms for mainstreaming disability within every section in the University. The lack of established mechanisms can be attributed to the lack of guidelines or directives on disability inclusion within the institution. As such, there is need for policy directives requiring on what can be termed as reasonable accommodations and other equality of opportunities measures for students with disabilities to increase their participation on both academic and social activities. Institutions of higher learning, as a matter of facilitating inclusion of diverse student population are required to develop an Institutional Disability Policy and strategic plans to implement it. Any Government should include fund on disability inclusion. Disability awareness should be a strategy that is created across all units, including among students, staff and visitors to the institutions.

Conclusion

Disability inclusion in HIE including Kenyatta University, will require the institution to collect data on students with disability and other special educational needs, and document their experiences to facilitate planning. Collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the commission for University Education (CUE) on matters of data collection. As a sustainable strategy for disability inclusion at the University, the existing disability directorate should be enhanced to include a Disability Support section. The support section will be a disability think tank for the directorate and the University in general, in advising on strategies for disability inclusion in every aspect of the students academic and nob-academic life. The section can be a focal point for collaboration with stakeholders; a place for assessment of disability and providing advice to respective units within the University accordingly.

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