Disablers to Academic Success of Learners with Special Education in Selected Higher Education Institutions in Zambia

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Abstract

The international community is agreed that the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goal particularly number four on education is dependent on how effective inclusive education is implemented by various countries. Whereas the implementation of inclusive education is well articulated at primary and secondary school levels, the same cannot be said at Higher Education level. Thus, in this article, we explore the status of inclusive education with reference to learners with special education needs at higher education level in Zambia. The article uses a Phenomenological approach to illustrate the lived experiences of learners with special education at the University of Zambia and Mulungushi University in Zambia. Key among the study objectives include exploration of the disablers experienced by learners with special education. The study findings point to a mismatch between policy and practice, negative attitudes, inaccessible learning environment and learning content among others cited as the major disablers to the success of learners with special education needs. This state of affairs could be attributed to system failure to domesticate inclusive education and develop responsive policies in Higher Education institutions. As such, inclusive education has remained a theoretical concept, well understood by the elites but poorly implemented on the ground. This then calls for Higher Education institutional system-wide transformation in favour of inclusive education.

Key words: *Inclusive Education, Learners with Special Education Needs; University of Zambia*

Background

This study focused on Learners with Special Education (LSEN), situated at Mulungushi University and University of Zambia in Zambia within the Southern part of the sub-Saharan Africa. In principle, inclusive education is a well-accepted concept in the two Universities since they are situated in the country where the 2006 United Nations Conventions for Persons with Disabilities was ratified and domesticated, (Simui, 2018). Given the favourable inclusive education supportive policy environment in existence, the study interrogates the practice in the two purposively selected universities to establish the reality on the ground. With this in mind, the study rides on Hermeneutic Phenomenology approach since the researchers accepted the difficulty of bracketing, as advanced through the Transcendental Phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Instead, the study leans on the works of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) dubbed, Hermeneutic Phenomenological (Simui, 2018). This departure was primarily because of the rejection of the idea of suspending personal opinions and the turn for the interpretive narration to the description, as advanced by numerous philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, Emmanuel Lévinas, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Jean-Luc Marion (Healy, 2012). Therefore, this study attempts

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to unveil the world as experienced by the learners with special education needs through their life world stories.

Worldwide, about one billion people, including children (approximately 15.6%) of the population live with some form of disability (WHO, 2011). In addition, disability appears to have disproportional effects on people and children in particular, from lower income countries and those living in the poorest of the world's population.

According to UNICEF (2013), while access to education for other children is improving the same cannot be said for children with disabilities. They remain most negatively marginalised and excluded from education. They continue to experience dismissive attitudes, discrimination, and are largely invisible in official statistics used for education planning and programme implementation (Banda, & Islam , 2012**)**. Such discrimination and exclusion has a negative effect on their livelihoods (UNICEF, 2013). UNESCO (2014) further notes that more than half of the 57 million children out of school are in Sub-Saharan Africa, (UNESCO, 2014).

Whereas Zambia has ratified and domesticated the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with disability through the Education Act on Persons with disabilities of 2012, little is known regarding the disablers within the higher education sub-sector. In gaining information on this, the current study was guided by the following specific objectives:

(i) Explore the presence of disablers to the educational experiences of learners with special education needs; and
(ii) Suggest measures for addressing disablers at higher education level.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The theoretical framework that guided this study anchored on the social model to understand the disability phenomenon. While the medical model emphasises on biology and locates disability related challenges in the affected person's body, the social model de-emphasises biology and situates disability within societal structures (Rieser, 2006). The social model is the term used by proponents opposed to the Medical model way of viewing disability (Roulstone, Thomas and Watson 2012). Under the social model, it is argued that the medical model severely and unnecessarily restricts the roles that disabled people can play in life (Watermeyer, 2013). Treating disabled people according to the medical models makes them dependent on certain (non-disabled) people and separates them from the rest of society.

Overall, the social model contributed enormously to disability dialogue and exposed oppressive ideology of the past. However, in the recent past, the social model has come under scrutiny from challengers. For instance, Bury (2000) alludes to the fact that, despite the most successful efforts to remove societal obstacles from

the environment, some traces, limitations and certain realities of a biologically informed disability would still remain (Bury, 2000; Banda, & Islam 2012).

In one of their recent studies, Simui, Kasonde-Ngandu, Cheyeka, Simwinga and Ndhlovu (2018) focused on enablers and disablers to academic success of students with visual impairment: A 10-year literature disclosure, 2007–2017. Findings from this study reviewed a host of disablers namely: (i) negative attitudes, (ii) absence of inclusive education policy, (iii) inaccessible learning environment and learning materials, (iv) exclusive pedagogy, and (v) limited orientation and mobility. Amidst the disabling environment, a positive attitude, self-advocacy, and innovativeness stood out as key enablers to academic success by Students with Visual Impairment (SwVI). One major knowledge gap in Simui *et al.* (2018), study was concentration on learners with Visual Impairments at the exclusion of other Learners with Special Education Needs (LSEN) groupings. In addition, their study relied on secondary data at the exclusion of primary data. With the highlighted gaps, it becomes vital to conduct the current study to contribute to knowledge generation.

At present, a number of studies on the education of learners with disabilities in higher education have been conducted including that of Riddell, Tinklin and Wilson (2004) and that of Muzata, Simalalo, Kasonde-Ng'andu, Mahlo, Banja and Mtonga (2019) in Zambia. The study, whose purpose was to investigate the impact of multiple policy innovations on the participation and experiences of disabled students in higher education in Scotland and England between 2001 and 2003. Emerging from Riddell *et al.* (2004) research study were the following findings:

(i) most institutions had staffing and structures in places to develop policy and provision for disabled students.

(ii) Educational provisions for persons with disabilities have supportive policies in a number of areas including admissions, infrastructure and into some strategic plans. However, there was an apparent gap between policy and practice, with students encountering barriers to choice of institution and subject, access to the physical environment and to the curriculum (Riddell *et al.* (2004).

Riddell*, et al*. (2004) observe that depending on their particular impairment, most of the students experienced barriers to accessing education as it relates to the physical environment or teaching and learning at some point during their studies. Some students found that adjustments to teaching practices were difficult to obtain. Even where students had received formal agreements to provide 'reasonable adjustments' as demanded by law, such as handouts in advance of lectures, they often found themselves in the difficult position of repeatedly having to ask for these, unsuccessfully.

Lourens (2015), in his thesis, focused on the lived experiences of higher education for students with a visual impairment in South Africa. The study findings described the challenges related to the transition from school. In addition, participants discussed complex social interactions with non-disabled peers, in which

the latter reportedly offered help, and avoided or stared at participants, leaving them feeling "not seen". Third, within the learning environment, the participants were sometimes confronted with unwilling lecturers, a lack of communication amongst important role-players, late course material and/or headaches and muscle tension from the effort of reading with limited sight (Lourens, 2015).

Related to Lourens (2015) study above is Maguvhe (2015) pitched within South African context, who focused on factors that limited the participation of the visually impaired learners in mathematics and science education. The study revealed that teacher motivation and mentorship in mathematics and science methodologies and the use of tools for learner empowerment were lacking. It further revealed that teachers lacked the requisite skills in special education to harness learner potential in mathematics and science. This situation necessitates government action in teacher training and development. In Zambia the teaching of mathematics and science, especially physics, is not good enough even for students who are not visually impaired as observed by Changwe and Mulenga (2018) and by Zulu and Mulenga (2019: 283) who actually mentioned that 'learners' difficulties with physics can be attributed mostly to the lack of effective teacher pedagogical content knowledge and not to curriculum designing'. One then wonders what the situation could be for learners with visual impairment.

Similar to Lourens (2015), Ntombela and Soobrayen (2013), contextualised their study within South Africa particularly at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. In their study, Ntombela and Soobrayen (2013) explored the nature of access challenges faced by students with visual disabilities at the Edgewood campus. The findings showed that although access had improved for students with disabilities in this institution, there are still systemic barriers that limit the participation of students with visual disabilities in the academic programmes (Ginsbur, M, Banda, Jeongin, Tambulukani and Wei, 2014).

In general, Gronlund, Lim and Larsson (2010), observed that in developing countries there existed many obstacles in the process of implementing inclusive education. In conducting this study, an in-depth case study of two developing countries, Bangladesh and Tanzania were reviewed. The findings showed that obstacles to effective use of Assistive Technologies for IE came from three different levels school, national and network. In a related study, Majinge and Stilwell (2014) focused on SwVI in a different context. Majinge and Stilwell (2014) studied library services provision for people with visual impairments and in wheelchairs in academic libraries in Tanzania. The findings show that academic libraries provide services to people with visual impairments and in wheelchairs but these services are not inclusive or universal.

Methodology and Design

A qualitative research methodology with a hermeneutic phenomenology approach guided the study. The focus was to illuminate particulars and seemingly trivial aspects within experiences of LSEN with a goal of constructing meaning and

achieving a sense of understanding (Simui, 2018). In addition, Langdridge (2007) argues that our experiences can be best understood through stories we tell of that experience. To understand the life world we need to explore the stories people tell of their experiences, often with the help of some specific hermeneutic (Langdridge, 2007). Hermeneutics Phenomenology research design was applied to study the lived experiences of LSEN as postulated by Martin Heidegger. Heidegger's thesis is on '*Being* and *Time,'* further expanded by van Manen's four reflective thematic areas on lived experiences as follows: (i) lived space – Spatiality; (ii) lived body – Corporeality; (iii) lived time – Temporality; and (iv) lived human relation – Relationality, (van Manen, 2007; Simui, 2018 and Simui, Kasonde-Ngandu, Cheyeka and Kakana, 2018).

Seven participants were purposively sampled based on van Manen's (2007) inclusion and exclusion criteria as follows:

(i) Lived with an impairment (Corporeality),
(ii) Lived with an impairment for more than a year at the university (Temporality),
(iii) Lived with the an impairment in the target universities (Spatiality)
(iv) Lived with an impairment while studying with others in a university (Relationality).

Table 1 summarises profiles of the seven participants whose real names are replaced with pseudonyms for ethical reasons. Equally, participants' descriptors such as programme, year of study, age, sex, marital and employment status were purposively included for the purpose of better understanding of the phenomenon at hand as well as possible replication of the study by other researchers.

Table 1: Participants' Profiles

NAME	PROGRAMME	SEN TYPE	YEAR OF STUDY	AGE	SEX	MARITAL STATUS	EMPLOYMENT
[1] AAMU	BA Education	Low Vision	Year 2	22	F	Single	Unemployed
[2] BBMU	BSc Agriculture	Low Vision	Year 4	42	M	Married	Teacher
[3] CCMU	BA Economics	Physical Dis	Year 3	24	M	Unmarried	Unemployed
[4] DDMU	BA Commerce	Physical Dis	Year 4	44	F	Married	Teacher
[5] AUNZ	BEd Special	Low Vision	Year 1	22	M	Unmarried	Unemployed
[6] BUNZ	BEd Special	Low Vision	Year 3	26	M	Unmarried	Unemployed
[7] CUNZ	BEd Special	H/Impaired	Year 3	28	M	Unmarried	Unemployed

In this study, the researcher used the following research tools namely: un Structured Interviews schedule and observation guide. Use of multiple tools strengthened the validity and reliability of the study findings as evidence was collaborated and triangulated from different viewpoints.

Data generation procedure assumed the following approach as adapted from Simui (2018) as follows:

(i) Recruited participants using the inclusion/exclusion criteria;
(ii) Identified the lead participant with richest experience on the phenomenon;
(iii) Interviewed participants using a voice recorder and still camera to capture evidence;
(iv) Listened to the recorded voices of participants over time until researcher was fully immersed into the text;
(v) Transcribed the whole interviews for holistic representation of findings;
(vi) Generated a Crossword framework with rows ordered alphabetically and columns bearing participants' pseudonyms;
(vii) Extracted and documented essences using key words that represent lived experiences of participants; and
(viii) Analysed and interpreted themes using the framework while reflecting on the research objectives until themes were clear.

The analysis of data in this study was concurrently done throughout the data gathering process using inductive data analysis. Field notes and interview transcriptions were reviewed from time to time to identify the emerging themes or patterns. The data were coded accordingly from the sources reviewed and across each site case. The data was analysed thematically and the identified themes were cross-checked by the participants for validation purposes (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

In this study Guba's (1981) four criteria of Trustworthiness were applied. The four elements are: (i) credibility, (ii) transferability, (iii) dependability, and (iv) confirmability. For instance, to enhance rigour and enrich the analysis, a variety of strategies were employed including critical reflexivity, attention to negative (exceptional) cases, communicative validation and peer review (Charmaz, 2006). In carrying out this study, ethical issues as guided by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000), such as written consents from all participants were followed. Pseudonyms were assigned in place of actual names, to assure confidentiality and privacy. The pseudonym given were as follows: *AAMU, BBMU, CCMU, DDMU, AUNZ, BUNZ* and *CUNZ*.

Findings and Discussion of the Study

Emergent from the lived experiences of LSEN are clusters of essences that represent both associated disablers and their resultant copying mechanisms within the Simui's Hermeneutics Crossword Analysis (SHCA) Framework as illustrated in tables 2 and 3, (Simui, 2018).

Table 2: SHCA Framework A – I

	Simui's Hermeneutics Crossword Analysis (SHCA) Framework						
	AAMU	*BBMU*	*CCMU*	*DDMU*	*AUNZ*	*BUNZ*	*CUNZ*
A	Access Attitudes	Access Attitudes	Access Attitude	Access Attitudes	Attitudes	Attitude	Attitudes
B	Barriers	Barriers	Barriers	Barriers	Barriers	Barriers	Barriers
C	Computers Counsellor	Computers Counsellor	Computer Cost	Computer	Computer	Computer	Computer
D	Determination Dependence	Dependence Disability	Dependence	Dependence	Dependence	Dependence	Dependence
E	eLearning	eLearning	eLearning	eLearning	eLearning	eLearning	eLearning
F	Friends	Friends	Friends	Friends	Friends	Friends	Friends
G	Guide	Guide	Guide Group-work	Group-work	Guide	Guide	Guide
H	Humility Hardwork	Humility, Hardwork	Hard-copies	Hardwork	Hard-work	Hard-work	Hearing impaired
I	Inquisitive Involved	Intelligent	Innovation	Internet	Involved	Involved	Interpreter

Source: Adapted from Simui (2018)

Description: rows run from 'A to I' represents the emergent essences using prominent words from the seven participants respectively who each headed a column as documented in Table 2.

Table 3: SHCA Framework J - Z

	Simui's Hermeneutics Crossword Analysis (SHCA) Framework						
	AAMU	*BBMU*	*CCMU*	*DDMU*	*AUNZ*	*BUNZ*	*CUNZ*
J							
K	Knowledge	Knowledge	Knowledge	Knowledge	Knowledge	Knowledge	Knowledge
L	Lecture Landmarks Library	Landmarks Library	Landmarks Lecturers Library	Landmarks Library Lecturers	Low-vision, Library	Low-vision, Library	Low-vision, Lecturers
M	Mobility	Mobility	Mobility	Mobility	Mobility	Mobility	Mobility
N	Negotiation	Note-dictation	Networking	Note-dictation	Note-dictation	Note-dictation	Note-dictation
O	Orientation	Orientation	Orientation	Orientation	Orientation	Orientation	Orientation
P	Pedagogy	Pedagogy	Physical disability	Physical disability	Pedagogy	Pedagogy	Pedagogy
Q	Questions	Questions	Questions	Questions	Questions	Questions	Questions
R	Role-models,	Role-model	Relations	Relations	Relations	Relations	Resource-Room
S	Staircases	Staircases,	Staircases	Staircases	Staircases	Staircases	Staircases
T	Technology	Technology	Technology	Technology Tutor	Technology	Technology	Sign language
U	Unfriendly	Unfriendly	Unfriendly	Unfriendly	Unfriendly	Unfriendly	Unfriendly
V	Visually-Impaired	Visually-Impaired			Visually-Impaired	Visually-Impaired	
W	White cane	White cane	Wheel chair	Wheel chair			
Z	Zest	Zest	Zest	Zest	Zest	Zest	Zest

Source: Adapted from Simui (2018)

Description: Rows run from 'J to Z' represents the emergent essences using prominent words from the seven participants respectively who each headed a column as documented in Table 3.

Disablers to learning experienced by LSEN

Emerging from the clusters of essences in Tables 2 and 3 from LSEN's lived experiences were eleven disablers identified as detrimental to their success at university level. These were:

(i) Negative Attitudes;
(ii) absence of inclusive education Policy;
(iii) inaccessible learning environment;
(iv) inaccessible learning materials;
(v) exclusive Assessment system;
(vi) exclusive Pedagogy;
(vii) absence of Financial support;
(viii) limited Orientation and Mobility

(ix) Absence of landmarks;
(x) Limited institutional support staff; and
(xi) Inadequate Assistive Learning devises. The eleven disablers are consistent with the findings by Simui, Kasonde-Ngandu, Cheyeka and Makoe (2019), Simui (2018), (Simui, 2018 and Simui, Kasonde-Ngandu, Cheyeka, Simwinga and Ndhlovu, 2018). The disablers are discussed as follows:

Negative Attitudes (Corporeality)

In the area of negative attitudes, which were linked to 'Corporeality' according to van Manen (2007), there were many incidences where these were manifested. For example, *AAMU* reported having unfriendly sighted peers because of his disability. *AAMU* recounted 'I have challenges interacting with other students. Some students tend to be unfriendly to me, (*AAMU*, 20.05.19). *AAMU has*, cited experience was similar to *CCMU* who observed that, 'Some students have avoided sharing a room with me because of my condition,' (*AAMU*, 22.05.19).

The identified presence of negative attitudes in this study is common to many settings as noted by Mutanga and Walker (2017); Chhabra, Srivastava and Srivastava (2010) and Hess (2010). In the UK, students with a visual impairment have been reported to be at risk of social exclusion and of being stigmatised for their impairment (Hess, 2010). In addition, Chhabra *et al.* (2010) revealed that many regular teachers feel unprepared and fearful to work with learners with disabilities in regular classes hence their display of frustration, anger and negative attitudes toward inclusive education.

Thurston (2014) describes discomfort experienced by students with disabilities generated by peers outside their network of friends. Equally, Dart, Nkanotsang, Chizwe and Kowa (2010) reported that the students experienced low self-esteem, loneliness and a lack of acceptance from their fellow students, consequently contributed to poor academic performance. Negative attitudes appear to influence nearly all the other disabling factors reported above. Where the attitudes are negative, there is likely to be limited financial support, limited peer, family and staff support as well. This then entails that for LSEN to progress and realise their potential, the need for positive attitudes becomes paramount. It is for this reason that a number of researchers rank negative attitudes top among other barriers to inclusion. For instance, McDougall, DeWit, King, Miller, and Killip (2004) contend that negative peer attitudes are commonly considered to be a major barrier to full social inclusion of disabled students in schools (Simui, *et al.* 2019 and Simui, 2009).

Exclusive Policy

A number of cited lived disablers by LSEN pointed to the lack of institutional inclusive policy. The first case is that of *AAMU* whom his peers within the university stigmatised. However, his sheer determination helped him continue

with his education. The second case is that of *BUNZ* who had no accommodation despite being admitted in the university. The third and final case is that of *AUNZ*, who had challenges finding his way within the university. Later forced to rely on peer support to navigate his way within the university.

In developed countries, a number of studies on the education of learners with disabilities in higher education have established the presence of inclusive policies (Ginsbur, M, Banda, 2014). For example, Riddell, *et al*. (2004) study established that most institutions had staffing and structures in places to develop policy and provision for disabled students. Even where an inclusive policy is available, there are instances where a disjuncture between policy and practice prevails (Mosia and Phasha, 2017). In this regard, Read *et al.* (2003) argue that education that does not accommodate student diversity perpetuates inequality in society and violates human rights of persons with disabilities (Simui, 2009).

Inaccessible Learning Environment (Spatiality)

In terms of accessibility linked to the concept of 'Spatiality' according to van Manen (2007),

BUNZ, recalled how he had struggled to be accommodated at first year. In his words, he observed that:

> Lack of accommodation is a challenge in this university. Coupled with accommodation challenge, I do not have relatives in Lusaka. So, when I came in first year, I was not accommodated. Consequently, it affected my learning, as I could not concentrate in class since I had to worry about accommodation, (*BUNZ*, 26.05.19).

Like the cited incidence above, Gelbar, Madaus, Lombardi, Faggella-Luby and Dukes (2015) reported experiences where students with disabilities faced challenges such as inaccessible buildings, rigid curricula and negative attitudes of staff and lecturers. Similarly, Banda-Chalwe, Nitz and De Jonge, (2013) contended that accessibility to premises, facilities and services was a right by People with disabilities. To this extend, inaccessibility of the physical environment is a violation of that right. Further, Swain and French (2008) observed that exclusion was the denial of rights and responsibilities of an individual expressed in oppression, which shaped the personal and collective experiences and expectations of People with Disabilities (PWD).

Inaccessible Learning Materials

What was clear was that most instructional materials given to LSEN were not accessible. For instance, *BUNZ* observed:

> '…some of the notes given to us are in small fonts so I fail to read them. So, I prefer asking for help from fellow students who are not disabled, (*BUNZ, 26.05.19)*.

In addition, *BUNZ* remembered how he was forced to change his carrier from legal practitioner to teaching.

> I wanted to do law, my career was to do law, now they discouraged me that with my disability, 'you know there are a lot of books with a lot of pages so with the sight challenge, maybe it will hinder you,' (BUNZ, 26.05.19).

All of the seven LSEN consulted had challenges to used the library for learning purposes as it had study materials in inaccessible formats. Whereas academic libraries are expected to provide services to students with visual impairments, Majinge and Stilwell (2014) noted that their services were not inclusive or universal.

Exclusive Assessment system

Some students reported challenges at assessment stage. For instance, *AUNZ* recounted:

> Braille transcription is another challenge because I have noticed that my paper once it has submitted takes quite long to be marked. That is a challenge because I need to know my result quite early enough and I also need to go through where I was wrong and make corrections, (*AUNZ* 27.05.2019).

Exclusive Pedagogy

The teaching methodologies or pedagogy adopted by most lecturers were exclusive to LSEN. For example, *AUNZ* observed that most of the teaching staff took a hasty-teaching approach, without taking cognizance of the needs of LSEN into account. He argued:

> The way the questions are prepared especially tests maybe it requires a diagram that can be difficult for me, for example the table that came in the EPS 1030 test, it gave me a little bit of a challenge especially because it was dictation, I was not reading for myself. Hence there was a little a challenge there, (*AUNZ* 27.05.2019).

Further, *BUNZ* observed that:

> When you go in a lecture, the lecturer is too fast when it comes to explaining things and as a result you lag behind. In addition, I find it difficult because most of them instead of dictating, they just concentrate on writing on the board instead of explaining what they have written on the board so that is a challenge because I fail to follow what they are teaching (BUNZ, 26.05.19).

In other words, the teaching approaches adopted by some of the teaching staff in the two Universities were exclusive and not inclusive to the needs of LSEN. Such an approach if not checked contributed to low numbers of LSEN able to progress and realise their potential at University. This is consistent with Matlosa and Matobo's (2007) findings in Lesotho on the visually and hearing impaired students. Their study showed that access for students with visual impairments

to science-related programmes was constrained by Mathematics and Statistics requirements, insufficient resources and lecturers' lack of understanding about the students' disability and support needs. Matlosa and Matobo's (2007) findings are consistent with Simui, Thompson, Mundende, Mwewa, Kakana, Chishiba, Namangala's (2017) who noted the presence of unfriendly instructional materials at the University of Zambia as a threat to academic success of distance students in general and students with visual impairments in particular (Simui, *et al.,* 2017 and Mundende, Simui, Chishiba, Mwewa and Namangala, 2016).

Limited Financial support (Relationality)

Limited financial support was reported to be a barrier to entry into university education. For instance, BUNZ, together with his peer from Sefula Secondary school in his first year and first semester, could not register on time, owing to lack of financial resources. BUNZ observed that even when financial support was provided, it was not not adequate enough especially to support his peer to proceed with school.

> … at first he was never given a scholarship (bursary), that in the first year third term, then they gave him 75% so meaning the 25% was hard and also the issue of adaptation. (*BUNZ* 26.05.2019).

From the *BUNZ* extract above, it is clear that the cost of living is higher for LSEN compared to the non-SEN students. For instance, the challenging part of the indirect costs of the education of students with visual impairments, such as the cost for guide, purchase white cane and jaws software is that students with visual impairments and their families are forced to shoulder such costs, even when they are living in abject poverty. This becomes a barrier despitetheir tuition fees being fully taken care by government and other well-wishers. The finding on cost element is consistent with Emong and Eron's (2016) who argued that the monetary value of the basic requirements for blind students exceeded the financial support they received from the university, (Emong and Eron 2016). In addition, the financial demands on students with visual impairments is compounded by their chronic poverty status, (Trani and Loeb, 2012).

Absence of Orientation and Mobility (Spatiality)

Reflecting on orientation and Mobility related experiences in the university; *DDMU* remembered that he had challenges navigating his way around the university. 'I experience problems to move around the university. I cannot access some lecture rooms by wheelchair,' (*DDMU* 23.05.2019). Equally, *AUNZ* noted that, 'I am unable to get the classroom independently. I only get to class with the assistance of my sighted friends. Sadly, I did not get any form of orientation, (*AUNZ*, 27.05.2019). *DDMU* and *AUNZ's* lived experiences above are a reminder on the need to embrace Orientation and Mobility by institutions of higher learning, given the many barriers that exist in and around university premises.

Absence of landmarks (Spatiality)

The other disablers were linked to absence of landmarks. For instance, all learners with visual impairments reported the absence of landmarks as a barrier to learning as can be seen below.

> The university has no landmarks. The area is too vast. For us to move around and get to know places where we are there must be some landmarks. Therefore, I think it is a very big challenge, (AUNZ 26.05.2019).

Going by the lived experiences of Students with Visual Impairments (SwVI), the need for Orientation and Mobility (O & M) cannot be over emphasised. In other words, as SwVI are oriented to their university surroundings, such an initiative would be meaningful when coupled with the presence of permanent landmarks. In both universities, there appear to be an absence of Orientation and permanent landmarks, leaving SwVI vulnerable and exposed to all sorts of avoidable accidents.

Limited Institutional support staff (Relationality)

Institutional support was cited as lacking to support LSEN. The staff support was affected by the attitudes and values staff had towards LSEN. Take the experience of *CUNZ* as an example below.

> … lack of resource room for us to use. Inadequate use of sign language during lectures as a medium of communication for us to be effectively in learning and acquisition of knowledge. Lecturers in this institution do not use sign language as a medium of communication for us deaf students in learning (*CUNZ* 27.05.2019).

The experience above brings to mind the challenge of staff competencies in sign language and braille education that Muzata (2018) brought to light in a study of Teaching Skills of Special Education Students during Teaching Practice. Thus, LSEN were left at the mercy of their sighted peers to progress in their academic endeavours. This finding is similar to Emong and Eron's (2016) findings, where students reported that their university had found it challenging to transcribe brailed works into print. Consequently, blind students did their examinations, as they were not brailed. I feel it is unethical. Affected students retorted that it was unethical on the part of the university. It made LSEN feel that their former secondary schools were better than that university in understanding their disability as it was brailing examinations for them (Emong and Eron 2016).

Limited Assistive Learning devices

When LSEN enter university, they have expectations to find assistive learning devices. For example, *CUNZ* expected to find Assistive Learning Devices (ALD) at University. To the contrary, his University was ill equipped with such tools as observed below.

> It is not easy for me to access the library because there are no interpreters to interpret for me when I need materials in the library, (CUNZ 27.05.2019).

Consistent with the findings of this study, Maguvhe (2015), revealed that blind and partially sighted learners find it difficult to pursue mathematics and science subjects because learning support devises are limited and teachers are not capacity built to create a conducive learning environment for SwVI. It is clear that the use of white cans, eyeglasses, computers, jaws software, voice recorders, magnifying lenses, scanners and embossers enhance the learning experiences of SwVI to realise their potential (Simui, *et al.* 2019 and Simui Kasonde-Ngandu and Nyaruwata, 2017).

Continuum of Lived Experiences by LSEN at university

Overall, LSEN's university lived experiences discussed above were all linked to a series of stages within the university life namely:

(i) Pre-Entry;

(ii) Admission;

(iii) Registration;

(iv) Teaching-Learning;

(v) Assessment; and

(vi) Graduate as depicted in figure 1 below.

Once a learners graduated, there was a prospect of enrolling for a higher degree. Learning experience stage appear to be influenced by a number of critical factors such as the social, physical, library and pedagogical environments as attested by LSEN in their accounts above.

Conclusion

In conclusion, LSEN are faced with a host of disablers on a daily basis to progress through their academic journey at higher education level. Whereas resources are limited in public universities, LSEN carry with them unexploited resources that administrators, managers and teaching staff can tap into and devise innovative ways to combat exclusion. To this effect, it is clear that solutions to the challenges encountered in the process of implementing inclusive education lie with the excluded persons, if only they can be engaged and consulted in decision-making process, institutions are bound make a break-through to a multitude of challenges encountered when implementing inclusive education in institutions of higher learning.

Based on the findings of the current study, the researchers' recommendations to the two Universities and others with similar settings are as follows:

(i) Develop and implement an inclusive policy to guide practice;
(ii) Involve LSEN in decision-making process affecting their academic progression;
(iii) Introduce an orientation and mobility programme for LSEN within the university curriculum for them to become independent;
(iv) Improve on the accessibility to the learning environment and content;
(v) Build capacity among staff to support LSEN;
(vi) Build capacity among non-impaired students to support LSEN; and
(vii) Provide access to suitable technology. Such tools could include white cans, talking watches, voice recorders, embossers and elevators among others.

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