Perceptions of Students with Visual Impairments towards their Inclusion in the Faculty of Education at the University of Zambia: A Phenomenological study

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Abstract

The University of Zambia, Faculty of Education admits students with disabilities including students with visual impairments. The students learn together with others without disabilities under the inclusive education policy and practice. This study established the perceptions of students with visual impairments towards their inclusion in the Faculty of Education at the University of Zambia. Eight (8) students with visual impairments were asked three main questions on how they perceived their inclusion and whether lecturers employed any inclusive strategies in their teaching to accommodate them. The study further established the challenges students faced learning in an inclusive classroom. Findings revealed that generally students with visual impairments were satisfied with their inclusion in the Faculty of Education. Most participants acknowledged that there was no discrimination from fellow students during academic discourse although they reported challenges resulting from lecturers' lack of skills to consider their learning needs in inclusive classroom. Further, the findings revealed that students with visual impairments appeared to feel more included academically but felt isolated in out of class activities which some described as a form of discrimination. From the findings, it is recommended that the Faculty of Education should train all lecturers of content and methodology courses in inclusive methodologies and design activities that promote interactive learning beyond the classroom to realise the inclusion of students with visual impairments.

Key words: perceptions, Students, Visual Impairments, Inclusive Education, Higher Education.

1. Background of Inclusive Education in Zambia

From 1905 when special education was introduced to students with visual impairments at Magwero in Chipata- Eastern Province until about 1992, the education of students with disabilities has been known to be provided through special education model. Policy documents such as the 1977 reforms and recommendations provided for education of learners with disabilities through special education institutions. In higher education, the Zambia Institute of Special Education (ZAMISE), formerly called Lusaka College of the Handicapped was the only institution that trained teachers for learners with disabilities. Trainee teachers did not need to have disabilities to take the course. The concept of inclusive education began to be recognised in the 1992 *focus of learning* document through to the 1996 Educating our Future Policy as integration.

The current policy on education *Educating our Future*, 1996 emphasized equality in the provision of education to children with special needs, quality education provision and supervision of special education provision and that to whatever extent possible children with disabilities should be integrated into mainstream classrooms (Ministry of Education- MoE, 1996). Guided by this policy, Zambia has made tremendous progress in providing education to learners with disabilities through different modes. Inclusive education was first piloted in Kalulushi in 1997 and later in North Western and Western Provinces in 2001 (Ndonyo, 2007). After that, we see teacher training in colleges begin embracing special education content in their training curriculum (Muzata, 2018).

In 1996, a degree programme to train teachers in special education was introduced at the University of Zambia (Muzata, 2018). The aim of the programme was to train teachers to teach learners with disabilities in schools. However, the inclusion of students with disabilities in teacher education has not been very

pronounced and documented**.** For instance, the University of Zambia policy of admission provides for 45% open admission, 30% female affirmative action, 15% rural affirmative action, 5% other and another 5% foreign students. There is no affirmative action allocated for admitting students with disabilities. This means they have to compete within the allocated percentages. However, despite not having an affirmative admission policy for students with disabilities, the University of Zambia over the years has admitted a number of students with disabilities. For instance, through the Department of Educational Psychology, Sociology and Special Education (EPSSE) in the Faculty of Education, the university has graduated 13 students with disabilities between 2015 and 2019. Eight (8) students had visual impairments (blind), four (4) with hearing impairments (deaf) and one (1) with a physical disability, all graduated with good grades with one getting a pass while 6 got credits and another got 6 merits) *(University of Zambia Graduation booklets 2015-2019).* The numbers given do not suggest that those were the only students with disabilities in the University. From the figures, there is enough evidence that the University admits students with disabilities.

The admission of students with disabilities into the university is not only good gesture for training teachers for learners with disabilities but a positive practice towards broadening employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

1.1. Conceptual Framework

The study is anchored on the 8 principles of inclusion as construed from article 3 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The 8 principles have been summarised in figure 1 as follows:

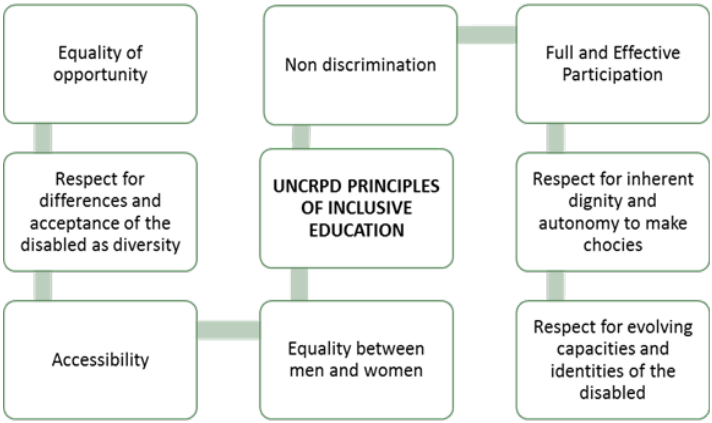

Figure 1: The 8 principles of inclusion

If the 8 principles became a litmus test for the implementation of inclusive education for students with visual impairments in the Faculty of Education at the University of Zambia, the institution would be said to be practicing full inclusion. From the students' experiences of studying in the university, lessons for reflection should be learned as to whether they experience the eight (8) principles (bench marks) for institutions practicing inclusive education.

1.2. Trends, practices and challenges in the Provision of Higher Education to students with Visual Impairments

Inclusive education, the rights based philosophy that advocates for equal access to educational opportunities and participation in education for all has for some time been a subject of discussion especially for learners in primary and secondary schools. According to Čerešňová, Peňáz, & Di Bucchianico, (2018), inclusive education is the education that is equally available and accessible to every person, while respecting individual differences in physical and cognitive abilities, various social, cultural and religious backgrounds. Not much has been written about in terms of access to higher education. However, the increasing demand for primary

and secondary education for learners with disabilities through special and inclusive education has opened up further demand for higher education. Like their peers, students with disabilities who successfully complete secondary school education want to get into tertiary education.

In Zambia, like many other countries, students with disabilities compete for the same places in higher education institutions. There are no special education institutions perse where students with disabilities can receive education as it is with special schools. As such, inclusive education is the only option. Similarly, other higher education institutions around the world are not specialised to educate students with disabilities only. For instance, at Sevilla University, students with disabilities are admitted but with adjustments to accommodate them. Students with disabilities at Sevilla University appreciated scholarships provided to them but complained of bureaucracy over student assistance services and geographical location of their service centre that created a physical barrier to service and the dependence on good will of university staff to access information.

Similarly, in Indonesia, at the Atma Jaya Catholic University, there is no specific policy regarding eligibility of prospective students with disabilities (Ajisuksmo, 2017). Students have to pass entrance tests and be admitted on merit regardless of whether they have a disability or not. This may be construed as a positive none discriminatory process of admitting students but the demand for students' entry into university education may deter prospective students with disabilities from being admitted. Thus, for instance, at the University of Zambia, a candidate must obtain good points in five best subjects including English to determine one's selection. Some schools demand points as low as 5-6 points (in 5 subjects) to admit students yet most students with disabilities may not get such points and cannot be admitted even though they have points for

admission. Without an affirmative policy for disability, students with disabilities may be shelved into career programmes considered low where their points easily compete. Thus, the selection system may be a technical way of discriminating students with disabilities from undertaking studies in certain fields such as the sciences and some humanities.

In Pakistan, Uzair-Ul-Hassan, Hussain, Parveen, & De-Souza (2015), report teachers' positive attitudes towards including children with disabilities in inclusive schools. However, teachers still felt the need to have assistant teachers to help with managing inclusive challenges posed by learners with disabilities. Chataika, Mckenzie, Swart, & Lyner-Cleophas (2012), in a disability and society symposium paper report that while education is basic right for children in Africa, many people with disabilities struggle to have access to education and teacher education does not prepare teachers for meaningful implementation of inclusive education.

1.3. Practices in teaching students with Visual Impairments in higher learning institutions.

Kreider, Bendixen and Lutz (2015), state that most academic experts agree that Universal Design of Learning (UDL) is key for integrating blind and visually impaired students into the college classroom dynamic. UDL addresses and modifies course curricular that exclude any student, particularly those with a disability that affects their ability to learn and/or receive instruction in a class setting.

Lecturers should allow students with special needs to complete course work, give presentations and take exams using alternative formats. Working with students with specific needs to gain access to adaptive software and technology helps them learn effectively (Vogt, 1999). According to Ajisuksmo (2017), teachers at the Atma Jaya Catholic University use strategies such as placing students with

low vision in front seats to provide extra attention. Teachers in the study felt that educational assessment for students with disabilities should be flexible enough and that students with disabilities should be assessed separately.

In the United States of American, the university administration at times appoints individuals who can assist the visually impaired students as note-takers, readers, scribes or other essential roles, offer students with special needs additional time for assignments and tests, as well as getting to class, ensure all classrooms, dormitories, dining halls and other facilities are completely accessible to every student, regardless of disability (Reed and Curtis, 2011).

In higher learning institutions, members of academic staff make use of Assistive Technology to teach students with visual impairments. This requires specialized software, devices and other forms of technology which allows students with disabilities to receive a proper education. As mentioned above, postsecondary institutions are required by federal law to offer accommodation to all students with disabilities; most campuses maintain assistive technology centres where these learners can acquire the necessary equipment and materials (Myers and Bastian, 2010). An example of an assistive technology for the VI students is a Screen Reader. This device enables blind or visually impaired students to read on screen text using a speech synthesizer. The user operates the screen reader by inputting different letter combinations on a keyboard or Braille display, and this causes the speech synthesizer to read what is printed; the display will also 'speak' when changes occur on the screen. Other capabilities include a 'find' function, spell-check, and cell reading for spreadsheets (McDonnall, 2010).

A study by Simui, Kasonde-Ng'andu and Nyaruwata (2017), at Sim University in Zambia found that while appreciating the significance of ICTs one of the enablers of the academic success of learners with visual impairments, students faced a host of challenges

in their journey to academic success because they did not have access to ICTs.

1.4. Experiences of visually impaired students in inclusive learning classrooms

There appears to be various but common experiences in the provision of higher education to students with visual impairments in many countries. Morina, (2017) purports that although for some time now, inclusive principles and practices have been gaining inroads in universities, there is still a long way before claiming full inclusion because education for students with disabilities is faced with a lot of challenges related to failure by institutions to align educational practices with the principles of inclusive education. Students with visual impairments have different experiences in their higher learning institutions. A study conducted by Hong, (2015) reports that there is low staff to student ratio, frequent turnover in staff, and having to teach the staff how to get materials in accessible format. Students were reported to express frustration with the lack of experience and problem-solving on the part of the university office staff. Participants voiced that social skills were very important because they had to take initiative and learn to be assertive rather than aggressive to get their need for accommodations met.

Ajisuksmo (2017), reports that some faculties at the Atma Jaya Catholic University do not admit students with visual impairments because of lack of screen readers and lecturers with skills to teach such students. Buildings at the university were also said to be unfriendly to students with disabilities and some negative attitudes towards students with disabilities were reported

In a study by Hong (2015) participants reported that braille was almost non-existent in higher education unless they advocated hard for it in a socially acceptable manner. Timely production of the

braille materials they did get was an issue because once the materials finally arrived, students were behind in classes.

Studies by Simalalo (2017), Corbin and Strauss (2008), showed that Orientation and Mobility service offices at colleges did not typically provide orientation and mobility (O & M) for students with visual impairment. Further, a study which focused on technology provision to students in higher learning institutions indicated that participants reported that university staff were efficient in procuring educational equipment, including technology.

Another study on personal management skills of the visually impaired students, found out that the education received while in high school prepared them well in the area of personal management skills. This included daily living skills and academic skills, including organization and note taking, among others. Skills for living independently in the dormitories (cooking, cleaning, laundry) were also addressed well in high school Simalalo (2017). Social skills' instruction was an area of reported need, as were skills in planning and use of unstructured free time for recreation and leisure. Students with disabilities in fourth year at college did not have opportunities for socialisation (Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

At one of the Kwazulu Natal tertiary institution, Kasiram and Subrayen (2013) reported social exclusion of students with visual impairments. Social exclusion involved students with visual impairments being excluded from group works, hurtful comments against students with visual impairments, residences of students with disabilities labelled as nursing homes. Other challenges included absence of reasonable accommodation such as lack of recorders and lifts to high buildings. Students without disabilities were reported to be selfish, abusive and disrespectful to those with visual impairments.

In Zambia, when evaluating the Kalulushi inclusive education implementation, Mwamba (2016), reports inclusive education for learners with disabilities being implemented, as evidenced by the presence of learners with disabilities in schools. However, the implementation of inclusive education was characterised with difficulties of teaching and learning materials as well as teacher inadequacy and lack of preparedness for teachers teaching in inclusive schools. The findings by Mwamba were not quite different from Ndonyo's (2007), study of Solwezi schools. Ndonyo, (2007) in a study of teacher perceptions of inclusive education in basic schools of Solwezi found many challenges including lack of materials for teaching and learning, unfriendly infrastructure as well as learners teasing attitudes of their peers with disabilities among other challenges. The same challenges of inclusive education in Zambia and generally the education of learners with disabilities have continued to manifest in current researches (Central Statistical Office & Ministry of Community Development and Social Services, 2018). According to the CSO & Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (2018), most teachers in schools are generalists who need skills for inclusive teaching. At higher education level, a study by Simui (2018), of experiences of students at Sim university in Zambia indicated that students with visual impairments experienced challenges related to learning environments, unwilling lecturers, lack of communication amongst important role-players, late course material and headaches and muscle tension from the effort of reading with limited sight. Simui (2018), observes that negative attitudes, absence of an inclusive policy, inaccessible environments and learning materials, exclusive assessment system, exclusive pedagogy and limited orientation and mobility as barriers to inclusion at Sim University.

Morina (2017), advises that universities should provide sensitive transition for students with disabilities during their first

year of attendance to avoid early leaving and foster academic success. Strategies for transitioning include orientation, tutorials and counselling. In line with this thought, Mwamba, (2016) guides colleges of education and universities in Zambia to include special education and inclusive education issues in teacher preparation in order to have effective inclusive education. Mwamba, (2016) alludes to the importance of staff development in teacher preparation for inclusive education. Ajisuksmo (2017), recommends the impartation of skills to teach in inclusive classroom among teachers.

From literature, while schools and institutions of higher learning are making efforts to provide access to students with disabilities including those with visual impairments, they are finding challenges adhering to the principles of inclusive education UNCRPD has provided for nations to follow.

1.5. Statement of the Problem

The University of Zambia admits students with disabilities to learn together with others without disabilities. The admission and inclusion of students with disabilities is appreciated and should be encouraged. However, what has not been known are the perceptions of students with visual impairments towards their inclusion in the Faculty of Education at the University of Zambia, hence this study.
The following three research questions were answered in this study;

- How do students with visual impairment perceive their inclusion in the Faculty of Education at the University of Zambia?
- What inclusive practices does the faculty employ in their teaching to provide accessibility to the curriculum for students with disabilities?
- What challenges do students with visual impairments face studying in the Faculty of Education at the University of Zambia?

2. Methods and Materials

This study adopted the descriptive phenomenological qualitative design to study, describe and interpret the lived academic experiences of students with vision difficulties at the University of Zambia. Adopting this design provides the researchers with an avenue to not only obtain the lived experiences but also the subjective knowledge and perceptions of the participants involved with some degree of accuracy (Koopman, 2017). In adopting this design, the researcher becomes a qualitative researcher, setting aside any forms of preconceptions, judgments or prejudices towards a particular topic in order to make an objective analysis of the information participants bring to an investigation (Padilla-Díaz, 2015). It is the participants' lived experiences and so the interpretation is subjectively owned by the participant and thus, the researcher should be wary of misrepresenting facts. Creswell (2014) posits that, in phenomenological research design, a design with origins in philosophy and psychology, the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals as described by the participants. As a qualitative study, the sampling was purposive. Only students with visual impairments were targeted. Padilla-Díaz, (2015) advises that samples in phenomenological studies can range between 5-15 participants who should be able to articulate their live experiences. Eight (8) participants were involved in this study. In-depth interviews into the experiences of individual students with visual impairment were conducted for about 15-20 minutes each. All interviews were recorded on an MP3 recorder for further reflection and analysis prior to consent by the participants. Data was analysed by use of textual and structural analysis. Under textual analysis, the researcher identified the critical and common descriptions by participants while structural analysis involved the researchers' interpretation of what participants described about their lived experiences. For ethical reasons, all participants were recorded as Research participants 1-7 (RP1-8).

Table 1: ***Characteristics of participants***

S/N	Disability type	Sex	Age	Year of study	Program of study	Minor subject
RP1	Low vision (*Albinism*)	F	23	3	Special Education	Religious studies
RP2	Low vision (*Albinism*)	F	23	3	Special Education	Religious studies
RP3	Low vision (*Albinism*)	M	23	2	Special Education	History
RP4	Low vision	M	26	3	Special education	History
RP5	Blindness	M	30	4	Special Education	Civic Education
RP6	Blindness	M	22	1	Special education	History
RP7	Low vision (*Albinism*)	F	22	2	Special Education	History
RP8	Low vision (*Albinism*)	F	23	4	Special Education	Civic Education

RP= *Research participant*

2.1. *Limitations of the Study*

This was a qualitative study with a limited sample of students with visual impairments. Their views are not adequate to represent the views of all other students with disabilities admitted in the university and specifically the Faculty of Education. Further, the views of other stakeholders such as lecturers and administrators have not been captured in this study. The concept of inclusive education is multifaceted. The study did not assess the inclusive nature of infrastructure in the university although participants made a few highlights during the interviews. Further research is therefore needed to put into full picture the nature of inclusive education practiced.

3. Findings and discussion

The findings of this study have been presented according to the research questions that guided the study.

3.1. Research question 1: Students' perceptions of studying in the university

A question was asked to establish student perceptions of inclusive education at the Faculty of Education of the University of Zambia. Generally, students described their experience of studying at the university as both enjoyable and challenging.

> *I have been around for 1/3 months. The experience has been somehow challenging and somehow okay. That's how I can put it. In terms of social life, I am enjoying. There is nothing like stigmatisation, isolation. Maybe it can come from within the heart of a person but physically I don't experience that. Educationally, I would say partly I am also adapting but partly I am also disadvantaged.* (RP 3, Female, 7.05.2019).

From the above participant, social life in the university was enjoyable because there was no discrimination, stigmatisation or isolation. For another student with visual impairment and albinism, there has been a change in phenomenology from the time she was in the first year to the time she was in 3rd year.

> *In first year many people used to avoid us. I don't know what they were thinking or what was going through their minds. They were very few that interacted with us. Now this time I am seeing the change. Since, I don't know whether it's because of education or something like that. There is change because even the research group is just nice. We contribute points and discuss, the group is just nice. ((*RP 1, Female, 8.05.2019)

From the participant, it appears there is appreciation for change in experience and acceptance that fellow students who used to avoid her were no longer doing so. The student appeared to acknowledge the role of education in changing people's perceptions towards persons with disabilities. When persons with disabilities and those without mix and interact, they see more of the similarities among them than the differences. This change in experience is crucial for inclusion, just like one student mentioned;

> *The experience is really different from that of the school where I was. Magwero was once a special school. They turned it into an inclusive school when I was in grade 8 but they were not allowed to enrol more than 10 students in the class. So like here, the experience is different because there I interacted with people of the same status, while here, I am interacting with different people, not only those who have disabilities.* (RP 7, Female, 7.05.2019)

Inclusion should expose all persons to their wider community so that they are able to interact. According to the participant, the University of Zambia is a wider community she has been exposed to where she is able to interact with people from different backgrounds, the disabled and non-disabled.

Qualitative text search query analysis revealed that students had positive perceptions towards their inclusion in the Faculty of Education. They described their experience from fair to good. There was no absolute negative perception (see figure 1). Further text analysis also showed that students with visual impairments did not suffer discrimination on a wide scale although two of the participants reported this type of treatment. The students integrated very well with all other students in academic work although this was not reported on out of academic work activities.

Table 2: *Participants perceptions*

	RP1	**RP2**	**RP3**	**RP4**	**RP5**	**RP6**	**RP7**	**RP8**
Perception	*Fair*	*Good*	Good	*Fair*	*Fair*	Fair	*Fair*	*Fair*
Discrimination	*Sometimes*	*No*	No	*No*	*No*	No	***Yes***	***Yes***
Non-Academic socialisation	*No*	*No*	No	*No*	*No*	*No*	*No*	*No*
Academic socialisation	*Good*	*Good*	Good	*Good*	*Good*	Good	*Good*	*Good*

Table 2: Qualitative text query summary analysis of student perceptions about inclusion at UNZA.

From the text query analysis, there is need to improve on none academic socialisation and interaction with students with disabilities. This finding is in agreement with what Muzata (2018) found among students with disabilities in higher learning institutions in Zambia. According to Muzata (2018), students with disabilities in higher learning institutions lacked opportunities for leisure. It means the Faculty of Education must find better ways to encourage none academic socialisation through creation of outdoor activities.

Although discrimination is not openly reported by participants in this study, some behaviours towards students with visual impairments suggest some amount of discrimination. Two participants who lamented that there were some forms of discrimination had this to say;

> *When it comes to socialising with a person, for example a person is greeting me or I want to greet that person, I always don't give him or her my hand for a greeting, instead I first wait for the person to start to give me his hand. (*RP7, Female, 7.05.2019).
>
> *I am able to interact with my friends though there maybe sometimes where it can seem that I am a little bit isolated in some courses. Sometimes when it seems like that, like for*

> *example when I was given a question to present, my tutorial partner in EDU, at the end of that tutorial session, other pairs were meeting to prepare how they could be meeting to prepare their tutorial, but my tutorial partner left the arena before we could meet and agree on how we can prepare for the presentation. (*RP 6, Male, 21.05.2019).

Another student said;

> *There are some who have accepted and others have not. Some are not comfortable with us because I remember in first year I was staying with two; one was in 3rd year doing mathematics and the other one special education. They were kind of discriminating because when you cook food they don't want to eat. But what was surprising is that the student who was influencing the friend to be negative was the one who was doing special education.* (RP 1, Female, 8.05.2019)*.)*

Further, another student with albinism echoed some discriminatory remarks on her when moving around the university premises.

> *People will call you all sorts of names, maybe you are passing on your own then someone behind you or in front starts calling you some names, "mwabi, moneni uyo mwabi, have you seen that one is an albino." But even if you know that this person is an albino, you don't have to start calling them that because for me if I see a black person I cannot start calling him ati, muoneni uyo wofipa, no. (RP8, Female, 8.05.2019)*

The student in this verbatim expresses some form of stigma against her where instead of being called by the given names, some people call her by stereotypical terms such as 'Mwabi' literally meaning albino. The student explains that being called as such is stereotypical, an argument that Muzata (2019), made that traditional terms used to described persons with disabilities in Luvale are often

stereotypical and against inclusion. The findings are equally similar to Kasiram and Subrayen's (2013), findings at a Kwazulu tertiary institution where students without disabilities were reported to be disrespectful, and abusive to students with visual impairments. AIthough this finding does not suggest rampant abuse of students with visual impairment in this study, all students should be sensitised against negative attitudes towards those with disabilities. Zambia, in her endeavour to domesticate the UNRCPD has a provision in law which stops any person from using derogatory terms based on disability (GRZ, 2012). Chitiyo and Muwana (2018) have observed positive development in legislation in Zambia and Zimbabwe's way of managing education for the disabled. The University of Zambia equally have rules and regulations that govern student discipline and regard for one another in a learning institution. Although the aim of this article is to educate against and not to punish, the law is very clear that any person who deliberately uses derogatory terms with an intention to verbally and psychologically abuse the person with a disability should prosecuted.

However, generally, from the findings discrimination was not reported by most students. The findings therefore demonstrate a positive attitude of the University of Zambia students towards students with disabilities. This is in agreement with Muwana (2012) who found that University of Zambia students had positive attitudes towards inclusion of children with disabilities in the mainstream classroom.

3.2. Research question 2: Students' perceptions of Inclusive practices employed by lecturers in teaching during lectures.

Research question 2 explored students' views on the inclusive practices by lecturers when teaching them. There were varied responses from participants, although generally, they recognised the role played by lecturers in employing strategies that were inclusive to students with disabilities. Participants reported that some lecturers

were able to use inclusive practices in their teaching while others did not. Some of the strategies reported were placing students with low vision in front seats while they were teaching, giving activities that enhanced group interaction.

> *Lecturers don't tell us to sit in front. We sit in front on our own but the lecturers don't seem to know why we sit in front. They don't realise that we have learning needs. They just think that we just like sitting in front.* (RP 1, Female, 8.05.2019)

Another student said;

> For *special education, it was announced in first year that students leave the first sits for us but for history, that doesn't happen.* (RP 7, Female, 7.05.2019).

There appears to be a latent policy in the Faculty of Education that students with disabilities be given chance to sit in front during lectures. This was acknowledged by all the students with vision difficulties. However, some obstacles were observed especially in courses that had many students. Front seats were never left for students with disabilities in such cases. One participant said;

> *I face challenges sometimes the seats reserved for students with disabilities in front, you find them occupied and it is difficult to tell someone to stand. It would be better if the policy for students with disabilities sitting in front is very well implemented because sometimes we find people sitting on the front seats where they are supposed to sit.* (RP 3 Male, 7.05.2019).

In the verbatim, the concern about reserved seats maybe constrained by the large numbers of students per class. Ahidjo, Mbugua, & Locoro (2017), report that students with visual impairments are constrained from learning in inclusive classrooms in higher education because of noise caused by large number of classmates and that some lecturers

just write on the board without reading what they write. This concern was also raised by one of the participants in the following verbatim;

> *For me my learning needs I can say for example when I am in class, the lecturer, is supposed to identify that in this class there is someone who needs my special attention. Like when he or she is writing on the board, at the same time he or she should be able to read so that those who cannot see on the board will be able to get something.* (RP 1, Female, 8.05.2019).

Another student says;

> *I am short sighted and if a lecturer comes in class and starts writing on the board without reading or talking about what he is writing, I am affected because I cannot see very far.* (RP 3, Female, 7.05.2019).

The concerns are genuine although it depends on the types of disability one may have. Students with short-sightedness would deserve to sit in front and closer to the board or projector so that they can easily see text projected or written on the black board. For students with farsightedness, a position applicable further from the projected material is needed. In this case, for effective inclusion of such students, it is important to know the different types of students with special education needs. Such knowledge would help to label 'reserved seats' for some students with disabilities. But the large numbers of students in classrooms may be a real cause of worry for inclusion. It is such large numbers that may inhibit lecturers' well intended initiatives to meet the learning needs of students with visual impairments in classrooms.

Another inclusive strategy acknowledged by participants as being used by lecturers is the giving of notes.

> *Everything has been okay. The lecturers are helpful. When we cry for notes, they give us, when we want modifications anywhere, we explain and they understand because they know the challenges that we go through.* (RP 1, Female, 8.05.2019).

An analysis of the excerpt above shows that students with visual impairments have to beg to be given notes. This should not be the case, especially if lecturers understand their obligations with regard to the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classrooms. Inclusion demands that the needs of every student are met.

However, some lecturers were not helpful to students as reported by two of the students below;

> *I write my own notes but one day I asked the madam for learning disabilities to help me with notes because I was slow. From that time, I have never seen any action. I manage by getting notes from my fellow albino and other people in the class.* (RP 2, Female, 8.05.2019).

One student described some lecturers as Judas Iscariots, or as professionals who don't practice what they teach. She said:

> *Sometimes, for me I don't see them practicing what they teach, especially for special education lecturers, they don't do what they teach. Like I will say it this way. It's like having a pastor who preaches gospel and instead of him or her putting those things he or she teaches into action, he or she just pretends.* (RP 7, Female, 7.05.2019).

Another student explained;

> *For special education lecturers, they get to interact with us but the problem is from the minor subject, they don't understand what we talk about, they think that we are normal, it's just the skin. So they take us as the same.*

> *But some of them just don't know and they are difficult to convince like one lecturer just told us, 'so what do want me to do?' So like that you even get an **A** or **B+.*** (RP 1, Female, 8.05.2019).

The lamentations by the participants requires attention to sensitise lecturers on the need to provide support to deserving students with special education needs. Simui (2018) noted this challenge among other challenges that some lecturers were just unwilling to help students with visual impairments. If inclusion is to be real, extra support that enable student participation in learning is required. Further, there is need for a continued sensitisation against negative attitudes. In any case, for lecturers, negative attitudes should not even be something to talk about. They need to be exemplary and be able to provide support to students in need.

The other inclusive strategy used by some lecturers is group discussions. All students mentioned the significance of group discussions in making them closer to their peers. They reported that discussion in particular allowed them to mix with peers, some of whom could have developed negative stereotypical behaviour against them. One participant reported as follows:

> *One lecturer in EPS 1010 in the first year, divided us into groups and gave each group a question to go and answer and so through that it helped me a lot to discover new friends. That's how I found my good friend without albinism and then he made me to be a leader of that group and I was able to coordinate the members in those groups.* (RP 3 Male, 7.05.2019).

From the above participant, such practices can help broaden the horizons of interactions among students with different abilities. The student confessed that such a strategy helped students with disabilities to build confidence of themselves as well and be accepted as persons

with 'normal intelligence as well. The participant further explained;

> *The other strategy is for lecturers to make the lessons as much interactive as possible. By using such strategies, sometimes I tend to contribute and fellow students even say I am intelligent. The other strategy is for lecturers to identify peers that they pair us with so that if the peer is fast, I can copy from him or her.* (RP 3 Male, 7.05.2019).

In line with the concept of building self-confidence for students with visual impairments who may feel ignored, mentioning their names and providing them with opportunities to contribute while the lecturer is teaching is also important. One of the participants said:

> *Some of the lecturers, mention your name, then you know that they are noticing you and also mentioning what he is writing like in the morning today, one lecturer who was teaching us was mentioning everything he was writing on the board so I was able to follow*. (RP5, Male, 10.05.2019.)

In the verbatim, the student acknowledges that some lecturers mention their names while they are teaching. This is very important classroom management strategy generally for all teachers. However, when used in teaching in an inclusive classroom, it allows students with disabilities to feel recognised and be alert to participate in the lesson. The participant further notes the significance of reading aloud what is written on the board. Students with impairments and particularly those who are blind depend entirely on the sense of hearing to learn. The use of total communication strategies such as this can help students with vision difficulties to benefit maximally from lectures.

From the findings, lecturers used minimal inclusive strategies when teaching. This was also observed by one of the participants who said;

> *Lecturers use of inclusive strategies was very minimal. But one strategy I use myself is when a lecturer is using a projector, I just use my phone to capture what the lecturer projects.* (RP 3, Male, 07.05.2019).

Although the reasons for such failure to use inclusive strategies need more exploration, the need to orient lecturers in inclusive education methodologies is critical to have successful implementation of inclusive education. Thus for instance, while students need notes, they do not just need ordinary notes but notes adapted to each type of visual impairments. Students who are blind need ordinary notes that they can read using JAWS software while the ones with low vision need magnified notes commonly known as large print. However, a lot of education in the use of ICTs is crucial so that students with low vision impairments can learn to use even ordinary computers, phones and iPad to enlarge text when reading or studying.

3.3. Research Question 3: Challenges faced by students with visual impairments face studying in the Faculty of Education.

Challenges were reported about learning in inclusive classrooms. The challenges related to pedagogy, adaptation, materials, assessment and accessibility.

3.3.1. Pedagogical challenges

Pedagogical challenges faced by students included challenges related to the practices by lecturers when teaching students with visual impairments. One of the prominent challenges students faced was when lecturers used projectors to teach. When lecturers used projectors to teach, they were either too fast for the students when explaining concepts or the students could not see what was being projected because of their loss of vision. One of the students said;

> *Sir, when lecturers come to teach, they come with projectors. And for me I am not able to see on the projector. I just need them to come with hard copies.* (RP 2, Female, 8.05.2019).

A situation where a student is not helped to follow a lecture because of a disability may cause a lot of frustration and discouragement. It is important at this point then to mention that the core function of any university programme is to help students acquire appropriate skills, knowledge, values and attitudes. Banja and Mulenga (2019: 187) noted that 'if the institutional curriculum does not allow for this to happen, students can experience learned helplessness, the end result of which could be that expected quality outcomes will not materialise'.

Lecturing pace was also reported as a challenge as reported by one of the students;

> *When the lecturer is dictating, it's difficult because they are very fast and we are not used to writing using the pen because we were accustomed to using braille when we were at secondary school. It's hard to use braille because the lecturers are very fast and we can't use braille because braille involves moving from one cell to another and you find you have remained behind.* (RP 1, Female, 8.05.2019).

From the verbatim, students' report what they found it very difficult to cope with the speed of lecturing and found it difficult to take notes. One point coming out from the verbatim is the challenge of using braille by students with visual impairments to take notes. Mtonga, (2011) notes that the use of braille by students with visual impairments presents challenges in terms of finger sensitivity especially during the cold season. Simalalo (2017), Mtonga (2013), propose that the use of computers and JAWs software to read and

write quickly. For the students in this, using braille to take notes slows them down so much that they fail to catch up with the speed of lecturing. While lecturers should be sensitized to be at pace when teaching, students need to be sensitised to use recorders and computers to take notes. However, JAWS may prove difficult to use when a lecturer is lecturing in a large class because a student using JAWS installed on computers depends on the voice from JAWS, which may be very disturbing to several other students and also may pose a challenge to the user because he or she would need to be listening to two voices at the same time during a lecture.

3.3.2. Challenges related to curriculum adaptation

Students reported challenges that related to a rigid curriculum that lecturers were unable to adapt to meet their learning needs. For instance, one of the challenges reported was the nature of content taught such as statistics or mathematics related content. Students with visual impairments felt they are usually disadvantaged learning statistical or mathematical content because they do not have such background from secondary schools where they were exempted from taking maths as a subject because of the disability they have. One of the students said;

> *The difficulties we face is when it comes to learning statistics. Because of that we cannot whenever the lecturer is writing on the board, we can't see. This is the same that was happening even when we were at secondary school because they were discouraging us from learning mathematics and this disadvantaged us and so now it has become a learning disability because I cannot calculate.* (RP 1, Female, 8.05.2019).

Another student said,

> *We have encountered difficulties on drawings. When they*

> *give pictures, it becomes difficult for us. It is better when it comes to such questions, they should just be asking us questions*. (RP1, Female, 8.05.2019)

Another participant said;

> *On writing tests we find it hard more especially when we write the test which involves maths concepts. Because when we are learning, some of the lecturers don't consider that there is somebody who is disabled in the class. So when it comes to learning, they don't perfect to the level in which a student who is disabled can get something. But otherwise for me I can't complain much because I do pass.* (RP4, Male, 16.05.2019)

The challenges that relate to curriculum adaptation affect the way students with visual impairments are assessed as well. For instance, participant number 7 reported:

> *The issue of the tests, you know we write the tests in 50 minutes which is not enough for a person like me. I am slow in writing. I also have a short sight and also sometimes we differ in thinking. So I would like you to sensitize the lecturers and even for History, tell them the importance of adding time for us. And even the issue of preparing the tests and the exam in large print. Like last time we faced the problem of forgetting like when we wrote the exam for EDU 1010, we told them to prepare the exam in large print and they pretended to hear us but when the actual day came, we were stranded. And they said they forgot. (*RP7, Female, 7.05.2019).

The other participant faced difficulties with the requirement of typing assignments and date lines involved which did not consider students with visual impairments. He said;

> *I have seen that although this challenge may not apply to another visually impaired person, for me I am still adapting to typing, I am still learning, am not quite fast but in as far as assignments are concerned, I am required to type, so it's a little bit challenging, because like for instance I was finishing typing an assignment last week in which I was required to type four pages. So for me to type those four pages, I spent about four days just to type the same assignment.* (RP 6, Male, 21.05.2019).

In the above verbatim, RP 6, a first year student with blindness felt that there was need for him to adapt to the requirements for typing assignments. This reveals that learners with visual impairments, ICT background is poor, a finding similar to Muzata (2018) who found that students in higher learning institutions faced challenges with technologically related compensatory skills that could aid them in their learning.

The demands in writing assignments also proved to be challenging for one of the students with visual impairment. Thus apart from not been given more days to type, they found referencing as challenging as well. A participant studying History as minor said;

> *The referencing style in History is somehow proving to be a challenge because we are using the Chicago system where you have to be writing footnotes, where you are quoting so even in the way the lecturer is teaching on the references, in some way it is sounding to be more focused on those who can see because his teaching is based on what people can see and focus more on computers where he starts explaining like, " to insert a reference, you have to move the curse on top of the screen and click there and you see footnotes, and so for me, I can't see, I need to show on the keyboard. But so far I am in the dark*." (RP 6, Male, 21.05.2019).

In the verbatim, the participant is implying that the teaching by lecturers appears to be focussing on students without visual impairments because the lecturer shows them how to write references without him seeing. This goes in line with the other student who said lecturers need to recognise that there are students with visual impairments in the classroom. Failure to do so shows that inclusion is only a rhetoric concept. However, this also goes further to how students are prepared to ICT computers to type, research and generate references. Visually impaired students need to take a course in the use of computers as recommended by Muzata (2018), in order to make them more independent. ICTs have to a larger extent got the potential to provide a sense of independence for students with visual problems.

Assessment was also rarely inclusive because in many cases students with visual impairments were not given extra time and assessment tasks were not in braille and took very long to be marked or scripts simply got lost. This finding is similar to Simalalo (2017). In fact, this also resonates with what Mulenga and Kabombwe (2019:124) explained that 'the success of a curriculum is realized by the way teachers measure learner achievement through learning' and not using assessment to exclude learners but as a means of improving teaching and learning. The question of adding time is a consideration that lecturers in their individual capacities should realise is a very important consideration for students with visual impairments. Even without an institutional policy, it is only professional to consider students with disabilities and the challenges they face in their learning. This is not to say an institutional policy is not needed but an institutional policy can help compel lecturers to provide extra time for students with visual impairments during assessments.

Further, there should be flexibility in the nature of tasks given to students with visual impairments. Consideration of the nature of a test, exam or a written assignment should be made so that students with visual impairments benefit from inclusive. Otherwise, students

with visual impairments may feel a sense of unfair treatment during assessment. Flexibility can be exercised by extending due dates of assignments for students with visual impairments, changing the nature of tasks that pose challenges to students with visual impairments or providing alternative tasks. For instance, in an examination or test, instead of all students answering a question that requires calculations or that has diagrams, students with visual impairments can answer an alternative question that does not involve drawing or calculations. Students with visual impairments can also benefit from prepared in the use of computers and iphones for academic purposes. Typing assignments and the search for online data on assignments shouldn't be a problem if students have learnt to use of ICTs for education purposes. The Ministry of General Education current emphasis on ICTs and computer studies introduced as subject (MESVTEE, 2013), introduced in the revised curriculum of 2013 should be used as basis to provide ICT competences to learners with visual impairments. However, it appears accessibility to ICTs by persons with hearing and visual impairments in most higher education institutions is problematic (Ahidjo, Mbugua & Locoro, 2017). Many researchers have found ICTs as best equaliser in education of students with visual impairments. Simui et al (2017) recognises ICTs as enablers to academic success of students with visual impairments in schools but observes that the same students face challenges related to learning environments, unwilling lecturers, lack of communication amongst important role-players, late course material and headaches and muscle tension from the effort of reading with limited sight. These challenges of muscle tension were mentioned by the participants in this study as well although the most displeasing challenge according to participants was lecturer's unwillingness to help students with visual impairments, illustrated in the verbatim below;

> *There are also bad experiences especially with the minor course of study, the lecturers from religious studies*

> *don't understand that we have visual impairments and sometimes they argue that we are able to see and do not need notes but when we explain and explain, they finally understand"* (RP 1, Female, 8.05.2019).

These are students' real life experiences of learning in the university and need to be addressed in order to strengthen the inclusive education implementation the institution has embarked on.
Another participant said;

> *The way the questions are prepared, especially tests, usually have 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. So there was a little bit of a challenge there*. (RP 6, Male, 21.05.2019).

Similar to a study by Agesa (2014), in Kenya who found that most learners with visual impairments performed poorly in academics due to lack of implementation of the policy of differentiated curriculum as per the laid down policy on Special Needs Education, this study reveals that there is curriculum differentiation for learners with visual impairments when they included in the Faculty of Education. According to Agesa (2014) the difficulties encountered by teachers' failure to differentiate the curriculum was due to the heterogeneous nature of visual impairments. This eventually led students with visual impairments to withdraw from inclusive learning institutions. All students reported a challenge with transcription of their test and examination transcripts. The students reported that their tests and examinations transcribed were usually transcribed late thereby creating a gap in receiving feedback and sometimes loss of results. One student said;

> *The other challenge that I forgot sir is the issue of braille*

> *transcription because I have noticed that my papers take quite a long time to be marked. That is a challenge because I need to know my results quite early enough and I also need to go through where I was wrong and make corrections but with this issue of waiting for somebody to transcribe there is a high likelihood that maybe the paper may get lost*. (RP 6, Male, 21.05.2019).

From the verbatim, the student complains of receiving feedback late. Feedback is crucial for learning. Feedback, or knowledge of results is supposed to be timely in order to inform learning. Students get motivated when they receive feedback timely and work on their weaknesses based on the same. It does not help students with visual impairments to wait long for feedback when all their peers have received feedback on the same task. This does not reflect well for inclusion. The students may feel ignored, segregated or discriminated. They further face a sense of insecurity that their results could be lost. In any case, loss of results has been witnessed by some students with visual impairments. One of the students described her experience of missing results with tears in her eyes. She said;

> *I remember in my first year, there is this course which is called EDU 1010, I wrote the exam but the results came out 'not examined'. At that time, I was not staying in Lusaka, I was in Chipata but I came all the way to appeal. But there was no response despite going around asking all lecturers involved. After sometime, they told me that my exam papers were missing because one lecturer misplaced them. They said my paper was packed together with students who were writing in braille and so it got misplaced. What was painful was telling me that there was no way they could help me when it was not my fault. They told me to repeat the course. I was very frustrated and I just felt like I should just stop school. I repeated the course in the second year but my results were again showing 'not examined'. I was told I failed because of missing Continuous Assessment (CA). They again lost my*

> *marks for CA. I said that it was unfair to repeat the course three times but up to now there is nothing and I am now in my fourth year. So for me this experience makes me feel that even my young sister and my daughter should never come to UNZA.* (RP8, Female, 8.05.2019)

From the verbatim, the main problem is the lack of specialised staff to do transcription and the dependence on people who volunteer to transcribe instead of having full time personnel to do transcriptions for all students with visual challenges. The University of Zambia, Faculty of Education does not have full time personnel to do transcriptions of students' works. Some lecturers with the skill in transcription help to transcribe upon request and they only have to do this when they have time off their busy schedules. This is why it is important to have a disability unit in the university to take care of the needs of students with disabilities. As it is, no one can be held responsible for missing braille papers.

3.3.3. Challenges related to accessibility

The Faculty of Education is the only school in the university that has an elevator which helps students with disabilities avoid the use of stairs to access classrooms and lecturers in offices on the 3rd, 4th and 5th floors. This is positive move towards inclusion of students with disabilities in the school. However, the elevator ends at the 3rd floor where lecture rooms end. Effort should further be made to provide access to the 4th and 5th floors where students should access administrative and personal academic guidance in the deans and lecturers' offices respectively. In this study, all students were satisfied with the classroom environment but were not satisfied with the library. For instance, one of the students said;

> *The library is a very conducive place for studying and writing assignments but the problem comes in where you do not know where and how to consult about the needed*

> *books because for us when we came we did not receive that orientation unless I use friends.* (RP 3, Male, 07.05.2019).

The concern about lack of orientation was also raised by other participants. One said;

> *I just go with my notes in the library to study. I don't use the books in the library because it's difficult to locate the books. Sometimes the books are old and the books are not even there, especially for special education*. (RP1, Female, 8.05.2019).

All participants reported the challenge regarding reading materials which were either in small font, too small for students with low vision to read and the lack of braille books for those who were completely blind.

> *the challenges so far that I have seen are in as far as reading materials are concerned, there should just be soft copy materials, that's what I can easily have because I am told in the library, there are no braille books, though I have never entered the library myself so am not sure about that but if that is true then that can be a challenge to myself as a far as researches are concerned.* (RP 6, Male, 21.05.2019).

Another student had this to say;

> *I don't access the library. This is because the way the library is. The library is not accommodative, the way they have arranged the seats and not only that but also even the books in the library, they are in small fonts. So when we usually go there, we just go with our books, then we study but we don't use the library materials. We also do not use electronic books and internet in the library.* (RP4, Male, 16.05.2019).

Although this study did not focus much on other aspects of academic

life for studentship in the university, students revealed the challenges related to the library in their discourse about the challenges they faced. The library is a very important facility for students in any high learning institution. Basically, the library should stock study materials for students with visual impairments. Options include transcribing some critical course materials into braille and having more of electronic books since most books are in small fonts for students with low vision to see. The library needs specialised staff to help students that want to use the materials. Computers with internet connectivity and JAWS software would be helpful if provided in a specialised compartment for students with visual impairments to access. Students need to be oriented in the use of electronic gadgets to access the virtual library services provided by the university. More orientation is needed for students with visual impairments to be able to find books in the different sections of the library. That students with visual impairments were not oriented means that they cannot access the library material. Orientation of students into their new university life helps them to settle down and feel encouraged to stay on and advance in their studies. Morina (2017), advises that universities should provide sensitive transition for students with disabilities during their first year of attendance to avoid early leaving and foster academic success. Strategies for transitioning include orientation, tutorials and counselling.

4. Conclusion

The University of Zambia appears to be a leading example in the implementation of inclusive education even though the institution does not have a disability policy and unit. First, the admission of students with disabilities, including those with visual impairments is a demonstration of adherence to the national policy on inclusion and the domestication of the UNCRPD on inclusion. Despite the challenges in teaching students with visual impairments, the effort the institution is making should be supported. From the findings,

it appears, with an institutional disability policy and unit, the faculty can perform better in promoting inclusion of students with disabilities. Through a disability unit, an institutional policy can be derived to guide the provision of effective inclusive education for students with disabilities.

5. Recommendations

In the light of the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. The University of Zambia needs a disability unit to enhance service delivery to students with disabilities enrolled in the institution. The unit can address complaints of discrimination, service delivery, and source for assistive teaching and learning devices among other services.
2. The Faculty of Education should develop a disability policy to guide the implementation of inclusive education for students with disabilities and those with visual impairments. A disability policy can guide the implementation of Inclusive education in the faculty in that lecturers and students would know what is expected of them in their interaction with students with disabilities.
3. Lecturers need to be sensitized and capacity built in inclusive education methodologies and curriculum adaptation to be able to meet the learning needs of students with visual impairments and others with different disabilities enrolled in the school.
4. The university library needs to be made accessible to students with visual impairments. Access to the library should begin with orienting students with visual impairments to library area, how they can access online materials using computers and transcribing some of the vital books in braille. A separate computer room installed with internet and JAWs allocated to students with visual impairments within the library would greatly enhance access to learning materials for students with visual impairments.

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