

Institutional Readiness
For Access To Higher
Education By Students
With Disabilities In
Public Universities
in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Access to education by students with disabilities (SWD) is critical in the education policy of any country. Kenya promotes education for all, but SWD are less than 1% of the enrolment in higher education. This research attempted to establish measures public universities have put in place to ensure readiness for access to higher education by SWD. A case study basic qualitative research method of a descriptive nature is used because disability is about experiences of PWD in relation to the environments they constantly interact with and the meaning they ascribe to the same. Accordingly disability also affects a small percentage of the student's population. The target population was students with disabilities, university administrators (Academic registrars and deans of students) and lecturers who taught SWD. The sample participation comprised of 202 SWD, 46 lecturers and 11 administrators, from 6 public universities. Research instruments were questionnaire for each of the target group, focus group discussion (FGD) for SWD and an observation checklist. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics through IBM SPSS 23 computer package. Presentation used tables and graphs and it revealed that readiness for access to H.E by SWD is lacking. Recommendation was that universities should adopt a Universal Design model in their infrastructure, curriculum and teaching/ learning to ensure readiness for access by SWD.

Key words: Institutional readiness, Access, Higher Education, Students with disabilities

1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Access to education comprises of an individual's presence, participation, acceptance and achievement in a learning institution (Paseka, 2017). Access to higher education is critical for persons with disabilities (PWD) because it facilitates attainment of meaningful skills, knowledge and attitudes. These are a necessity for gainful employment and eventual participation in national development. Expanded opportunities to higher education for persons with disabilities considerably add to their quality of life and that of their significant others (Wayne, 2004). Higher Education contributes to social justice in terms of political power and vertical mobility for PWD (Azad 2008). In Israel, a public committee examined the implementation of the Equal Rights for Persons with Disabilities Act (2005), the findings were that higher education still does not meet the requirements on inclusion of persons with disabilities (Admon, 2007; Laron report, 2005).

In South Africa, a study found out that PWD are likely to drop out of school, have lower transition rates, completion rates, and worse still low achievement rates in relation to their normal peers (Matshedisho (2007). This compares with a survey in Kenya where 67% of pupils with disability attained a Primary school level of education, 19% students with disabilities (SWD) attained secondary school educational level and only 2% of university enrolment comprised of students with disabilities (Republic of Kenya, 2007). In other sources the enrollment in the university in Kenya was 461820; and out of this only 0.11691% (440) were SWD

(Mukhwana et al, 2016). These figures suggest that the higher the level of education, the lower the number of the SWD. There is a need for explanation of this presentation hence the importance of this study.

Many interventions in the world in general and Kenya in particular have addressed disability issues including access to education through legislation, yet as seen above, persons with disabilities seem not to be adequately accessing higher education. The UN Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities section (v) recognizes the importance of accessibility to the physical, social, economic and cultural environment, to health and education and to information and communication, in enabling them to fully enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Article 24(1) gives an outline of the rights of PWD to education and what the countries of the world were required to do as pertains to implementation of the contents of the convention (UN CRPWD, 2006). In Kenya the Disability Act (2003) article 18(1), (2), (3) and articles 19 have given provisions for access to education for persons with disabilities. The same has been enshrined in the constitution of Kenya 2010 article 54(1) (b) which states that the persons with disability must be able to access educational institutions and facilities for persons with disabilities that are integrated into society to the extent compatible with the interests of the person. Although these provisions are important, they can be improved further by identifying some key aspects that educational institutions, especially universities, ought to address to improve access to higher education for persons with disabilities. Further the Act takes a charity and functional rather than a rights approach for access to education. It also lacks a clear implementation framework for the universities to be accountable. This factor renders it nebulous hence it gives universities a leeway to discriminate students with disabilities. The University Act 2012 section 29 (i) states that a University, in performing its functions shall have regard to the promotion and preservation of equality of opportunity and access. The Act is quite general and illusive on the place of students with disabilities in the university.

Despite the legislation and interventions, persons with disabilities continue to be left out in accessing education in general and higher education in particular and many barriers suffice ((Matshedisho, 2007, Githinji, 2015). A combination of factors seems to affect access to higher education by persons with disabilities. The general observation seems to be this; that persons with disabilities are not fully included in education; particularly higher education. This situation can only be reversed if they can fully access education through making universities ready for access. The purpose of this research is to establish why students with disabilities seem not to access higher education adequately, existing readiness within universities, challenges if any and to make recommendations for action.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study evaluated institutional readiness for access to higher education by disabled students in Kenya. Despite the definite efforts to put in place legislation that address the readiness of institutions for access to education by persons with disability; data (access indicator) on enrolment of students with disabilities in higher education shows that very few are enrolled (Mukhwana, 2016). Sixty seven percent(67%) have attained a

primary school level of education, while 19% and 2% secondary and university level respectfully (Republic of Kenya,2007)).This suggests that students with disability are likely to drop out of the system early.It is a pointer towards, marginalization of persons with disability in accessing higher education. The question that needs to be answered is why? How ready are the universities for access to education by students with disabilities? Are there some challenges that counter their readiness for access by SWD.If it is so what and where are they? Could lack of readiness for SWD by public universities be the course of this low figure? To what extend could Curriculum inclusiveness, pedagogical skills as well as existing infrastructure, staff competencies and the physical environment be affecting SWD's access to higher education in public universities in Kenya? This study evaluated, examined and determined institutional readiness (university) for access to higher education by students with disabilities in public universities in Kenya and made recommendations for action to universities and relevant actors.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the state of readiness for access (inclusion) to higher education by students with disabilities in Public Universities in Kenya with a view to making recommendations to universities and relevant actors.

1.3 OBJECTIVE

To investigate institutional readiness for access to higher education by disabled students in public universities in Kenya

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to establish the status of readiness for access to education by dd students with disabilities in higher education in Kenya in terms of infrastructure, faculty competencies curriculum inclusiveness as well as challenges that universities experience. Reviewed literature showed that indeed infrastructure, competencies of lecturers, curriculum inclusiveness and institutional challenges are crucial variables for access to higher education by students with disabilities.

2.1 READINESS OF INFRASTRUCTURE

Various studies on the state of infrastructure have emphasized the helplessness of persons with disability in an inaccessible built environment (Carr, Frincis, Rixlin, & Stone, 1992; Borland & James 1999;).Research findings have shown that inaccessible infrastructure limits activities of PWD (Wasim, 2018) and adversely affects their independence (Mwirigi 2017;). These studies have not however highlighted the need for readiness of this infrastructure as a major variable that influences access to education by SWD.

2.2 LECTURER'S COMPETENCIES

Researchers have shown that competencies of lecturers are of exceptional importance for the creation and application of new knowledge, skills and values (Blaskova &Kucharpikova, 2014;) which greatly impacts on

the student's learning and achievement (Holand & Horby, 1992; Ng Chiaw Gee ,2018; Tawanda ,2019;).The(competence) ability to apply knowledge, skills and attitudes to a learning situation for a learner with disability in a meaningful and professional manner by lecturers cannot be underestimated (Gathumbi et al, 2015). This is because SWD have special learning needs that require specific competencies (Kigen, 2017). However the variable of readiness of competencies as an enabler of access to higher education has not been addressed by any of the studies this researcher has come across.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study has applied a case study basic qualitative research method of a descriptive nature(Gay et al 2012). It is based on the social model of disability as its theoretical framework and constructivist (interpretive) paradigm(Mertens, 2010). The research applied Information Power model (Malterud et al, 2015) and purposive sampling(Patton, 2002) technique because of the characteristics of the target population.

3.1 STUDY POPULATION AND SAMPLE SIZE

The study was undertaken in (6) public universities in Kenya.Two hundreds and two (202) students with disabilities undertaking studies at various levels, 6 Registrars of academic,6 deans of students and 46 lecturers participated in the study. They were selected using purposive sampling method (Patton, 2002).

3.2 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The research instruments comprised of three questionnaire an observation checklist and a focus group discussion. There was a questionnaire for students with disabilities, a questionnaire for lecturers, a questionnaire for deans of students and one for the registrar's academic. One observation checklist was used. The FGD was conducted at the end of data collection for only SWD.

4. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

4.1 THE INFLUENCE OF INFRASTRUCTURE ON ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION BY SWD

The source of problems of persons with disability begins with a biased and excluding environment within which they must operate from rather than an individual's disability (;UPIAS, 1976). This study agrees with this view especially when most administrators(66%) reported that most buildings do not comply with universal design for buildings and infrastructure and needed minor or major modifications to be accessible. They also reported that disability audits are not done (63%) . Table 4.19 shows the details of the response of administrators on the accessibility status of existing infrastructure in public universities.

Table 1. The response of administrators on accessibility of infrastructure

Category	Response		total	%	%	Total%
	Yes	No		Yes	No	
Needs Minor modification for access to 3 types of disabilities i.e. physical, visual, hearing	6	5	11	54.5	45.5	100
Needs Major modification to comply with > 50% of ISO 21542:2011 Universal Design	7	4	11	63.6	36.4	100
Compliance with Universal Design 21542:2011 is part of the requirement for new buildings in this university	6	5	11	54.5	45.5	100
More than 80% of the buildings comply with Universal Design ISO 21542:2011	4	7	11	36.4	66.6	100
Disability Audit done on all buildings and certified by a third party e.g. NCPWD periodically	4	7	11	36.4	63.6	100
Internl Disability audit done annually	4	7	11	36.4	63.6	100

4.1.2 THE STATUS OF DISABILITY FRIENDLY INFRASTRUCTURE IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

Table 4.20 shows the responses on disability friendly infrastructure. Most respondents reported that libraries posed accessibility challenges for SWD. Nine (9) out of 11 (82%) of the administrators said that libraries were not accessible, 147 out of 202 (73%) SWD responded that they were not accessible and 38 out of 46 (61%) of the lecturers said that they were not accessible. The library's periodical area in one university (referred to by code name as PU1) could not be accessed by crutch and wheelchair users because it was located on 2nd floor and there was no lift.

Likewise (9) out of 11 (82%) of the administrators said that the disability toilets were accessible and 2 out of 11 (18%) said they were not accessible, 74 out of 202 (37%) of the students said that they were accessible while 127 out of 202 (63%) said they were not accessible, 9 out of 46 (20%) of the lecturers said they were accessible and 37 out of 46 (80%) said they were not inaccessible. The observation checklist revealed that the Universal Design (UD) signage was not appropriately placed on the buildings because recommended standards were not observed. This posed a big problem for the deaf students who mainly rely on visual signs in finding their way, especially the new comers. The disability toilets in PU2 (Code name) had circulation spaces of less than 1500mm-2000mm in the inside and doorways of less than 900 mm. In the same university most walkways were uneven and had widths of less than 1800mm.

On the accessibility of lecture rooms this is how the responses were: eight (8) out of 11 (73%), of the administrators said that they were accessible, 77 out of 202 (38%), of the students said they were accessible and 16 out of 46 (35%) of the lecturers said they were accessible. Most lecturers and students indicated that lecture rooms were not accessible to SWD. Although they were spacious enough.

On the existence of accessible play grounds for SWD most respondents answered in the negative with 73% of administrators answering that play grounds were not accessible to SWD, 70% of the students said they were not accessible and 65% of the lecturers said they were not accessible.

Fig. 1 Response on availability of recreational infrastructure

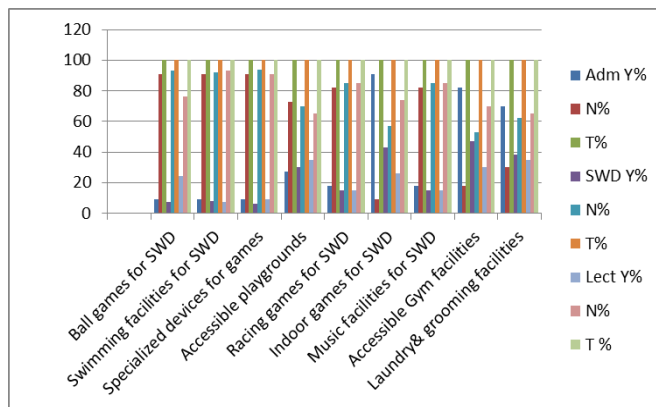


Table 2 Disability friendly infra- structure

Name of infrastructure /facility	Response from administrators			Response from SWD			admin Response %			SWD response %			Lecturer's Response			Lecturer's response %		
	Ye s	N o	Tot al	Yes	No	Tot al	Ye s	No	Tot	Y es	No	Tot	Ye s	No	To t	Ye s	N o	Tot
Accessible Disability toilets	9	2	11	74	127	202	82	18	100	37	63	100	9	37	46	20	80	100
Acc. Disability bathroom	6	5	11	45	157	202	55	45	100	22	78	100	14	32	46	30	70	100
Spacious lecture	10	1	11	104	98	202	90	10	100	51	49	100	31	15	46	67	33	100
Accessible lecture rooms	8	4	11	77	125	202	73	27	100	38	62	100	16	30	46	35	65	100
Accessible doorways	9	2	11	94	108	202	82	18	100	47	53	100	14	32	46	30	70	100
Tactile surfaces	9	2	11	46	156	202	82	18	100	23	77	100	13	33	46	28	72	100
Accessible libraries	2	9	11	55	147	202	18	82	100	27	73	100	18	38	46	39	61	100
Accessible Ramps	10	1	11	86	116	202	90	10	100	43	57	100	12	34	46	26	74	100
Accessible hostels	9	2	11	80	122	202	82	18	100	40	60	100	26	20	46	56	44	100
Accessible lifts	7	4	11	85	117	202	64	36	100	43	57	100	19	27	46	41	69	100
Acc. Music rooms	2	9	11	30	172	202	18	82	100	15	85	100	7	39	46	15	85	100

4.2 LECTURERS' COMPETENCIES AS A DETERMINANT OF ACCESS

The physical or material environment merely provides a context for teaching and learning, but the most potent barriers are those which inhibit the teaching/learning process(UNESCO,1998). Competency is the ability to plan, control and facilitate interaction in the classroom that is appropriate to the activity and which takes into account the different needs and abilities of learners(Kusuma & Ramadevi,2013). agree that Lecturer's competencies influence student's performance.Lecturer's competencies were categorized in four as : Professional competence, Pedagogical competence, Technological competence, and communication competence.

4.2.1 PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE

The professional competence distinguishes lecturers as authorities in their areas of specialization as role models, trustees of students' academic future, good managers and ethical personalities. Table 4.23 shows how students responded to the six components of the professional competence. The components of knowledge expertise 170 out of 202 (84%) display of mature personality 150 out of 202 (72%), clear leadership 130 out of 202 (64%) and role models 139 out of 202 (68%) were rated high. This indicates that lectures are keen on their role as authorities and custodians of knowledge in higher education. Components of good managers and moral ethical code were rated lowest at 84 out of 202 (41%) and 62 out of 202 (31%) respectively.

Table 3. Students' response to the six components of professional competence

Professional Competence component	SWD response					
	Agree	Disagree	Total	%Agree	%Disagree	Total %
Lecturers have subject expertise knowledge	170	32	202	84	16	100
Lectures as role models	139	98	202	68	32	100
Lecturer as managers (time, resources. Planning, decision making)	84	118	202	41	59	100
Lectures have high moral & ethical code	62	140	202	31	69	100
Lecturers display mature Personality	150	52	202	72	28	100
Clear leadership	130	72	202	64	36	100

4.2.2 PEDAGOGICAL COMPETENCE

Pedagogy as the ability of an individual to use a coordinated, synergistic combination of tangible resources (instruction materials) and intangible resources (knowledge, skills, experience) to achieve efficiency and/ or effectiveness (Madhavaram, Laverie, 2010.). The pedagogical competence was rated poorly by the students with disability in this study. Out of the five components of this competence, students who agreed that lecturers provided lesson materials in advance were 109 out of 202 (54%) while those who disagreed were 93 out of 202 (46%). This was a fair rating together with that of instructional leadership where 164 out of 202 (81%) agreed and only 38 out of 202 (19%) disagreed. Other than these two components of this competence the rest of the components were rated poorly by the students(see table 4.24).

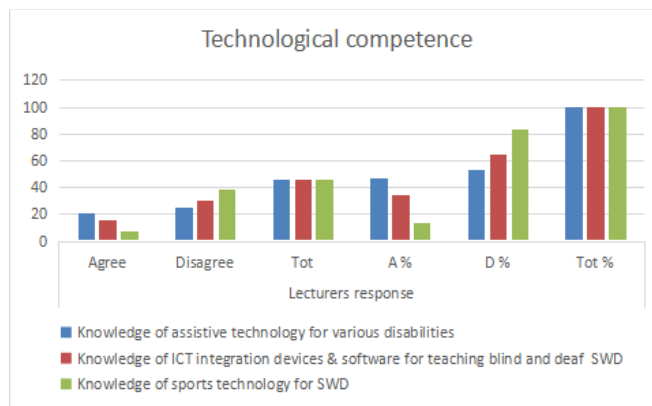
Table 4 Student responses to the pedagogical competence

Pedagogical competence	SWD response					
	Agree	Disagree	Tot	% Agree	% disagree	%Tot
Provision of lesson materials lecture notes /in advance	109	93	202	54	46	100
Utilization of teaching/learning materials in different versions(digital, audio ,print, tactile)Course materials online	81	121	202	40	60	100
Utilization of a variety of teaching methods(lecture, FGD, use of body, senses ,application, outdoor learning)	84	118	202	41	59	100
Classroom management, Attendance monitoring including to help identify any potential well being issues among students	65	137	202	32	68	100
Instructional leadership	164	38	202	81	19	100

4.2.3 TECHNOLOGICAL COMPETENCE

In Fig. 15 most lecturers indicated that they had limited knowledge of the assistive devices that SWD needed in general and for academic purposes. Likewise most of them (65%) indicated that they had no knowledge about ICT integration devices and software for use by blind and deaf students. Technological competence is important for the lecturers because they are advisers on what technology students need in order to access education. Technological competence is critical in today's special needs education because it opens doors for SWD to benefit more and fully exploit their potential.

Figure 2: Lecturers' response on the technological competence



4.2.4 COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

Three elements are commonly used to conceptualize communication competence: effectiveness, appropriateness and goal attainment. This study established several gaps in this competence. On the lecturer's competence to deal with communication barriers effectively, 63% of the students reported positively while 47% of the students reported on the negative. On the usage of a variety of mediums of communication such as visual, verbal, signage, tactile, print 50.5% of the students reported on the negative while 49.5% reported on the positive. It is imperative that this competence was slightly below the expectation of SWD and this was likely to affect their access to education. On effectively packaging and relaying information only 37% reported in the positive while 63% reported in the negative. On effectively handling feedback only 26% reported on the positive and 74% on the negative. Table 4.25 illustrates the response on this competence.

Table 5: Students' response as pertains to the lecturers' communication competence

Communication Competence	SWD Response					
	Yes	No	Tot	% Yes	% No	%Tot
Effectively deals with communication barriers	128	74	202	63	37	100
Uses a variety of mediums to communicate (visual, sign, print, verbal, tactile)	100	102	202	49.5	50.5	100
Effectively packages & relays information	78	124	202	37	63	100
Effectively handles intra/interpersonal, communication	112	90	202	55.5	44.5	100
Effectively handles feedback	52	150	202	26	74	100

5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study set out to evaluate the state of readiness for access (inclusion) to higher education by students with disabilities in Public Universities in Kenya with a view of making recommendations for action to universities and relevant agencies based on the findings.

5.1 CONCLUSION

5.1.1 THE INFLUENCE OF INFRASTRUCTURE ON ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION BY SWD

The study established that indeed infrastructure in most universities was not accessible to a great section of SWD hence the need for modification. This affected access to education by students with disabilities.

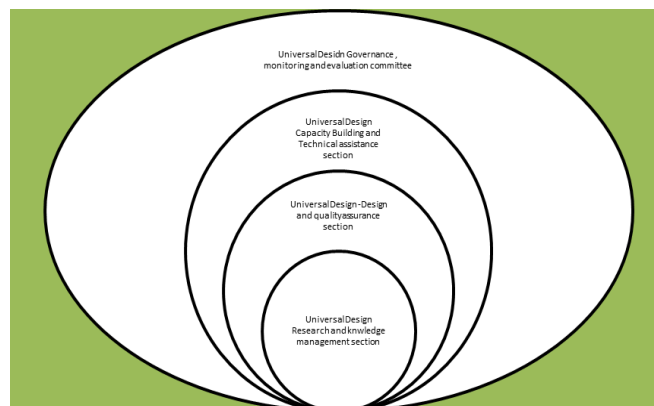
5.1.2 LECTURER'S COMPETENCIES

The findings of the study showed that lecturer's competencies influenced access to education. It was established that there was need to enhance competencies of lecturers for them to be able to deliver effective teaching and learning in terms of pedagogy, technology and communication.

5.2 RECOMMENDATION

The study recommends that universities need to adopt the Universal Design Model for their infrastructure, Teaching/learning and curricula designs. This will ensure that everyone's needs will be addressed irrespective of whether they have disabilities or not. It will consist of departments as illustrated in figure 16.

Figure 3 The Proposed UD Model Butalanyi, UD Model (2020)



5.2.1 UNIVERSAL DESIGN GOVERNANCE, MONITORING AND EVALUATION COMMITTEE (UDGM&E)

This is the oversight committee. It is the overall decision making level. This is also the planning and resource mobilization arm of the UD department.

5.2.2 UNIVERSAL DESIGN CAPACITY BUILDING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SECTION (UDCB&TA)

This section is charged with ensuring that there are capacities and systems for universal design principles sustainability in the university.

5.2.3 UNIVERSAL DESIGN -DESIGN AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SECTION (UDDQA)

This section works hand in hand with the research and knowledge management section to ensure that recommendations as per research findings are implemented.

5.2.4 UNIVERSAL DESIGN RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT SECTION (UDR&KM)

This is the section that is charged with carrying out research on the needs and recommending on the mode of addressing the gaps according to the principles of the universal design.

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