RESEARCH ARTICLE

Lived Disablers to Academic Success of the Visually Impaired at the University of Zambia, Sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract

The World Health Organization's (WHO) benchmark of persons with disability in every population is 15.6 per cent. However, the University of Zambia is way below that benchmark as it is home to less than 0.1 per cent of students classified as 'disabled'. Within the 0.1 per cent, students with visual impairment are the majority, estimated at 70 per cent. The purpose of this study was to explore disablers (also known as barriers) to academic success faced by students with visual impairment at the University of Zambia. A Hermeneutic Phenomenological approach directed the research process. Seven purposively sampled participants volunteered to voice their lived experiences and a cluster of themes emerged thereafter. Emerging from their lived experiences are thirteen disablers that impede the learning experiences at University and key amongst them are: (i) negative attitudes; (ii) policy-practice disjuncture; (iii) staff unreadiness and unpreparedness; (iv) inaccessible buildings; and (v) rigid curricula.

Introduction

This article is an extract from the principal researcher's doctoral thesis on lived experiences of Students with Visual Impairments (SwVI) while pursuing their studies at the University of Zambia in Sub-Saharan Africa (Simui, Kasonde-Ngandu & Nyaruwata, 2017) and (Simui, Kasonde-Ngandu, Cheyeka & Kakana, 2018). The University of Zambia is a public university with a history of more than 50 years (Mundende, Simui, Chishiba, Mwewa & Namangala, 2016). In principle, inclusive education was a well-accepted concept within the University since it existed within a country where the 2006 United Nations Conventions for Persons with Disabilities was ratified and domesticated (Simui, 2018). Hence, the

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presence of students with visual impairments within the University (Simui, 2018). In using the Hermeneutic approach, 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 Phenomenology (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 to unveil the world as experienced by the SwVI through their life world stories.

Background

The World Report on Disability observes that about a billion people, including children, (approximately 15.6 per cent) of the world's population live with some form of disability (WHO, 2011). The report notes the disproportional effects which disability has on people, and children in particular, from lower-income countries and those living in the poorest wealth quintile 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. Such discrimination and exclusion has a negative effect on their livelihoods (UNICEF, 2013). UNESCO (2014) further confirms this prevailing situation. UNESCO argues that, worldwide, there are still about 57 million children of primary school age, who are not in school due to financial, social or physical challenges. More than half of the 57 million children out of school are in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is anchored on the social model in order to understand the disability phenomenon. While the medical model emphasises 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 & 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 the 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.

Literature Review

Prevalence of students with disability in developed countries

In developed countries such as the United States of America and Canada, persons with reported disabilities represented a small segment of the general population at postsecondary education level, averaging between 1.5% and 11% across North America (Harrison & Wolforth, 2012; Fichten, Ferraro, Asuncion, Chwojka, Barile, Nguyen, Klomp & Wolforth, 2009). Prevalence rates varied greatly depending upon the size and type of the institution, with higher rates of enrolment reported in colleges and distance education institutions (Fichten et al., 2009).

Disablers to inclusive education in higher education

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). The purpose of their study 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.'s (2004) research study were the following findings: (i) most institutions had staffing and structures in places to develop policy and provision for disabled students; and. (ii) educational provisions for persons with disabilities have supportive policies in a number of areas including admissions, infrastructure and 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, usually 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's 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.

Related to Lourens' (2015) study above is Maguvhe (2015), pitched within a 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.

Similar to Lourens (2015), Ntombela and Soobrayen (2013) contextualised their study within South Africa particularly at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. In their study, they 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 were still systemic barriers that limited the participation of students with visual disabilities in the academic programmes.

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 inclusive education (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. They 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

A qualitative research methodology with a Hermeneutic Phenomenological approach guided the study. The focus was to illuminate particulars and seemingly trivial aspects within experiences of SwVI 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.

Research design

Hermeneutic Phenomenology research design was applied to study the lived experiences of SwVI as postulated in Martin Heidegger's thesis 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).

Sample size and selection criteria

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

(i) Lived with a visual impairment (Corporeality)

(ii) Lived with a visual impairment for more than a year in the university (Temporality)
(iii) Lived with the visual impairment in the target university (Spatiality)
(iv) Lived with a visual impairment while studying with others in a university (Relationality)

Below is a table summarising 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 (names of participants are pseudonyms)

Name	Programme	Year of study	Age	Sex	Martial status	Employment status
Brid	B Ed Special	Year 2	25	F	Unmarried	Unemployed
Charm	B Ed Special	Year 3	38	M	Married	Employed
Frey	B Ed Special	Year 2	28	M	Unmarried	Unemployed
Joe	B Ed Special	Year 4	27	M	Unmarried	Unemployed
Steel	B Ed Special	Year 2	36	M	Unmarried	Employed
Tau	B Ed Special	Year 2	28	M	Unmarried	Unemployed
Tom	PhD candidate	Year 1	48	M	Married	Employed

Research tools

In this study, the researcher used the following research tools, namely: Unstructured Interviews schedule, Focus Group Discussions guide 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

Data-generation procedure assumed a four-step approach as follows:
(i) Shadowing and unstructured interview techniques applied to a PhD student with visual impairment (SwVI)
(ii) Two undergraduate SwVs purposively engaged and interviewed separately While one of the two participants happened to be the only SwVI under the distance-learning mode, the other one was in his fourth and final year at regular study mode
(iii) Three second-year SwVIs volunteered to be interviewed on their lived experiences within the university
(iv) A focus group discussion of three SwVIs composed of a female with albinism, a male student with low vision (SwLV) and a blind student

Analysis and interpretation

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 were then analysed thematically and the identified themes were cross-checked by the participants for validation purposes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Trustworthiness

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).

Ethical considerations

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 pseudonyms given were as follows: Tom, Joe, Steel, Charm, Brid, Tau and Frey. In addition, the ethics committee cleared the research proposal as provided for in the university regulations. The ethical clearance reference for this study was REF. HSSREC: 2018-May-014.

Findings and Discussion

Disablers to learning experienced by SwVI

Emerging from the SwVI lived experiences were thirteen (13) disablers identified as detrimental to their success at university level. These were: (i) negative attitudes; (ii) absence of IE policy; (iii) inaccessible learning environment; (iv) inaccessible learning materials; (v) exclusive assessment system; (vi) exclusive pedagogy; (vii) absence of mobility; (viii) absence of financial support; (ix) exclusive sanitary facilities; and (x) absence of landmarks. Others were: (xi) limited institutional support staff; (xii) inadequate assistive learning devices; and (xiii) limited partners.

Negative attitudes (Corporeality)

In the area of negative attitudes, which are linked to Corporeality according to Van Manen (2007), there were many incidences where these were manifested. For example, Brid reported a number of sighted students having bullied her based on her albinism condition. She painfully recounted how in the past she had been given demeaning and offensive labels:

> They call me all sorts of names. Aaaaah!!!!! At *ka chitangwa nalesa* [God's creation]. *Ka mwabi* [albino] … not in my class but *kuma* ruins [old residencies for the male students] when I am visiting the shopping complex. This time, I have learnt to ignore and move on. It is their nature. They do not know what they are doing.   (Brid, 26-01-2017)

Brid, cited incidents where sighted students bullied her based on her albinism condition [corporeality]. She painfully recounted how in the past she had been called demeaning and offensive language. This state of affairs described above point to lack of human rights enforcement by the duty bearers. Equally, Tau had his moments when a sighted peer could not provide support to him due to suspected negative attitudes:

> There was a day I was going to another hostel and I asked for directions. The persons just pointed but then I quickly told him that I had a visual impairment and so could not see properly. He did not care. He just pointed and left me stranded. I felt it was an attitude problem.   (Tau, 26-01-2017)

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 U.K., 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 of working with learners with disabilities in regular classes – hence their display of frustration, anger and negative attitudes towards 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, which 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, and limited peer, family and staff support as well. This then entails that for SwVI 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 amongst other barriers to inclusion. For instance, McDougall, DeWit, King, Mille 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.

Exclusive policy

A number of cited lived disablers by SwVI pointed to the lack of institutional inclusive policy. The first case is that of Tom who was denied admission to the university on three occasions, despite having met the admission criteria. However, his sheer determination helped him get admitted on the fourth attempt. The second case is that of Bri who was bullied countless times within the university grounds without any recourse to intervention.

The third and final case is that of Steel, who was forced to repeat a year because of the institution's failure to provide assessment materials in Braille. Clearly, all three cases illustrated above point to the need for an inclusive policy to guide practice. In addition, Bri and Frey argued that their school Dean had come up with a rule that all front seats in classrooms were reserved for learners with special educational needs. However, "other people do not care even with such a policy".

In developed countries, a number of studies on the education of learners with disabilities in higher education have established the presence of inclusive policies. For example, Riddell et al.'s (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 & 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.

Inaccessible learning environment (Spatiality)

In terms of accessibility linked to the concept of 'Spatiality' according to Van Manen (2007), Steel described the university as not being accessible. In his words:

> The environment is not accessible. You need to climb a number of stairs to access services. Roads are not well planned. No landmarks! For me to walk alone is very challenging.
>
> (Steel, 20-01-2017)

Steel's lived experience regarding accessibility was collaborated by others' experiences as demonstrated by Charm who painfully remembered his experience as well:

> I remember one time; I bumped into a metal pole when I was surveying the university premises. I happened to be alone. Such an experience made me fear to move alone. I anticipated that there could be many other poles like that.   (Charm, 26-01-2017)

In addition, Joe's expressed sentiments were equally re-echoed by Steel who observed that:

> The place here has TOO MUCH STEPS! [Amplified voice]. Those steps become a hindrance to my mobility. On the other hand, the issue of the buildings being scattered all over is also another challenge. This is because, you find that I am required to attend a lecture in school of education and may be the following lecture is to be taken in the library basement. That becomes a challenge for me to move from one end to the other.
>
> (Steel, 20-01-2017)

The complications that resulted from Inaccessible Learning Environment included avoidable life-threatening accidents cited by SwVI. For instance, Joe recalled how one day he injured himself within the university premises:

> There was a day, I happen to be with a friend busy chatting and he forgot to alert me that we were approaching a staircase. I injured myself badly. Now, I was asking myself, imagine I had injured myself with someone! What if I was alone? I had my leg twisted. Again, the other time I was going to town. I was with a course mate. As I was about to board a bus, there was a deep drainage. He forgot to alert me of the presence of the drainage. I ended up in a drainage, and it was rain season and I injured myself again. This time it was my hand.
>
> (Joe, 26-01-2017)

Like the cited incidences 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 of people with disabilities. To this extent, 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.

Inaccessible learning materials

What was clear was that instructional materials given to SwVI were not accessible. "I was given modules in hardcopy format, obviously for use, when I am totally blind! What a puzzle!" (Steel, 20-01-2017). In addition, Steel observed that the library was not a friendly place:

> I remember it was just one single day when I visited the library when I got my student card. After the student card issuance, I wanted to read some of books found there. Unfortunately, I could not find any books or modules in Braille. All of them are hard copies. That stated to me clearly in my mind that the library here is not helpful to people with visual impairment especially the blind.
>
> (Steel, 20-01-2017)

All of the seven SwVI consulted had not 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, Steel recounted:

> ...when the results came out, I only managed to pass in two of the three courses that I had registered for. On the other one, they wrote None Examined (NE). But, that was unfortunate because I had sat for that examination too. Evidence was there but the results were not available. That forced me to re-enter the same course the following year. It is devastating because, once results get lost and I have a mobility challenge, I cannot manage to follow them up on my own.
>
> (Steel, 20-01-2017)

Exclusive pedagogy

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

> My own experience has been that lecturers rush against time. In a space of one hour we cover a lot of content. They even tell our friends the sighted to write their notes in short forms … This becomes a challenge to us who are using Braille. Especially that I am not all that fast in terms of Braille compounded by the speedy-rush lecturing, makes the whole experience very challenging. (Joe, 20-01-2017)

Tom reflected on his experiences in other universities within Sub-Saharan Africa where teaching staff had adapted their methodologies to meet the needs of SwVI, contrary to the approach followed at the University of Zambia:

> We do not bother to ask the question 'how can I help you?' All we do is to teach using whatever means available to everyone even when some of those teaching strategies are not friendly to learners with disabilities. For instance, it is common to hear: *See* the diagram on the board. *Copy* the notes on the board. Can you *see here* what they are doing? (Tom, 04-01-2017)

In other words, the teaching approaches adopted by some of the teaching staff at the University of Zambia were exclusive and not inclusive to the needs of SwVI. Such an approach, if not checked, contributed to low numbers of SwVI being able to progress and realise their potential in the long run. 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 and Namangala's (2017) study, which noted the presence of unfriendly instructional materials at the University of Zambia as a threat to academic success of distance students in general and SwVI in particular.

Limited financial support (Relationality)

Limited financial support was reported to be a barrier to entry into university education. For instance, Tom, in his first year and first semester, could not register on time, owing to the lack of financial resources. His sighted course mates, on the other hand, were already six weeks into the syllabus after the registration window had closed. Only sheer determination enabled Tom to eventually register, progress and complete his studies. Tom's lived experience is similar to that of Steel. Like Tom, Steel was an in-service student when he first joined the University of Zambia. Steel observed:

I always spend more than my colleagues who are sighted. For instance, on food, I have a guide whom I accommodate and feed. Therefore, I have to spend more than a K1000 [$100] every residential [period of 2 weeks].   (Steel, 20-01-2017)

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

Exclusive sanitary facilities (Spatiality)

Tau had issues with the communal sanitary facilities within the hostels. He observed that the they were in a poor state. He argued: "I fail to see whether the communal toilet or bathroom is clean. I just go there without realising that the room is unclean." Unlike Tau, with low vision, the rest of the SwVI were much more affected by the poor hygiene levels in communal sanitary facilities around campus, a situation they described as "pathetic" and requiring urgent attention.

Absence of orientation and mobility (Spatiality)

Reflecting on unforgettable nasty experiences in the university, Tom remembered a day when he fell into a ditch:

I remember there was a time I needed to attend a lecture. I had just come in the university … there was no one to escort me … I decided to start off and take a risk. I started quite well … I found myself hammering flowers. Someone asked, where I was going, whom I told 'Maths lab'. He later volunteered to show me the direction. That man just left after some few steps and gave verbal directions to me to go 'straight' whatever 'straight' meant. Now, I crossed but I did not know that where I was going there was a ditch. Two women stood afar off and they were saying '*eyeeee, bala ponena muchilindi*' [Ooh! He is going to fall into a ditch]. At the time I heard them, I had already lifted my leg. I found myself in a ditch. The only good thing was that I fell sat. I did not fell portrait. Then, one of the two women said, '*wamona, efwo nachilalanda*' [you see, this is what I told you that he was going to fall into a ditch!] However, I wondered, they saw me coming toward a ditch, but decided not to warn me! That is how I went back to my room. I could not attend that lecture.

(Tom, 04-01-2017)

Why is it easy for a sighted student to watch disabled students (perhaps a course mate) fall in a ditch without offering support? Could it be a sign of a negative attitude or lack

of education? Tom's lived experience is a reminder of the need to embrace orientation and mobility (O&M) by all stakeholders, given the many barriers that exist in and around the university.

Absence of landmarks (Spatiality)

The earlier reported challenge of uncovered ditches and dangerous obstacles displayed all over the university premises was compounded by the lack of landmarks, as observed by Charm, Tom and Steel. For instance, Steel concluded that:

> 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.   (Steel, 20-01-2017)

Going by the lived experiences of SwVI, the need for O&M appear to be linked to landmarks. 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. At the University of Zambia, both O&M and the presence of permanent landmarks were missing, leaving SwVI vulnerable and exposed to all sorts of avoidable accidents.

Limited institutional support staff (Relationality)

Institutional staff support covers both academic and non-academic support offered to SwVI in order to learn effectively. The staff support was affected by the attitudes and values staff had towards SwVI. Take the experience of Tom as an example:

> A problem came up … even after fighting those battles. I only knew Braille and there was no lecturer who knew Braille to support me. When assignments or tests were given, I would write in Braille and there was no one who could transcribe from Braille to text language for lecturers to read.   (Tom, 04-01-2017)

The experience above brings to mind the challenge of staff competencies as far as Braille education is concerned. In addition, the University did not have support staff engaged to act as guides and provide Mobility and Orientation services to SwVI. Thus, SwVI 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 Brailled works into print. Consequently, the examinations blind students took were not Brailled. I feel this is unethical. Affected students also reported that it was unethical on the part of the university. It made SwVI feel that their former secondary school was better than their university in understanding their disability as it had Brailled their examination papers for them (Emong & Eron, 2016).

Limited assistive learning devices

At the time SwVI entered university, they had expectations. For example, SwVI expected to find assistive learning devices (ALDs) within the university. To the contrary, the university was ill equipped with such tools as observed by Steel:

> When I came here [University of Zambia], I thought I would be provided with Orientation and Mobility support, by helping me with a white cane and then orient me on the infrastructure. Sadly, I was not oriented.   (Steel, 20-01-2017)

As was noted earlier, the bulk of the ALDs used by SwVI were owned by individual students. It was clear that the use of white canes, eyeglasses, computers, JAWS software, voice recorders, magnifying lenses, scanners and embossers enhance the learning experiences of SwVI to realise their potential. Therefore, there is need for the university to invest in this area as well.

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 devices are limited and teachers are not capacitated to create a conducive learning environment for SwVI. It is clear that the use of white canes, eyeglasses, computers, JAWS software, voice recorders, magnifying lenses, scanners and embossers enhance the learning experiences of SwVI to realise their potential (Simui, Kasonde-Ngandu & Nyaruwata, 2017).

Limited partnerships (Relationality)

Partners played a significant role in the provision of the much-needed resources in the education of SwVI at university level. At the university, very few partners dedicated to support SwVI existed, as alluded to by Tom:

> We need partners to come on board and join hands with the university, given the amount of resources needed to address the needs of students with visual impairments. Currently, very few Visual Impaired focused partners exist, if any.   (Tom, 04-01-2017)

The University of Zambia, being a state-owned university, was open to partners interested in investing in the higher education sector, specifically in the area of SwVI. Thus, more partners were welcome to partner with the university in the provision of quality education for SwVI.

Conclusion

In conclusion, SwVI are faced with a host of disablers on a daily basis which hinder their progress through their academic journey at higher education level. Whereas resources are limited in universities such as the University of Zambia, SwVI carry with them unexploited resources that administrators, managers and teaching staff can tap into and use to 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 the decision-making process, institutions are bound make a breakthrough to a multitude of challenges encountered when implementing inclusive education in institutions of higher learning.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the current study, the researchers' recommendations to the university and other similar higher learning institutions are as follows:

(i) Develop and implement an inclusive policy, given that the university has no tailor-made policy on inclusive education.

(ii) Involve SwVI in decision-making process affecting their academic progression.

(iii) Introduce an Orientation and Mobility programme for SwVI within the university curriculum for SwVI to become independent.

(iv) Improve on the accessibility to the learning environment and content.

(v) Build capacity amongst staff to support SwVI.

(vi) Build capacity amongst non-visually impaired students to support SwVI.

(vii) Provide access to suitable technology. Such tools could include white canes, talking watches, voice recorders, embossers and elevators, amongst others.

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