Research in Comparative and International Education
Volume 6 Number 4 2011
www.wwwords.uk/RCIE

RESEARCH IN
Comparative & International
Education

Equity and Equality in Access to Higher Education: the experiences of students with disabilities in Tanzania

ROSEMARIE NYIGULILA MWAIPOPO
Department of Sociology and Anthropology,
University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
AMANDINA LIHAMBA
University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
DELPHINE COSMAS NJEWELE
Department of Fine and Performing Arts,
College of Arts and Social Sciences,
University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

ABSTRACT Social development policies in Tanzania are exemplary in terms of their recognition of the rights of access to higher education institutions by specific demographic groups. Policy documents such as the 2005 *National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty* (known as the MKUKUTA) and the 2004 *National Policy on Disability* emphasise this necessity and outline the government's commitment to ensure that people who are socially disadvantaged, including those with disabilities, can equally access higher education. The process through which this is achieved is, however, less explicit and is therefore difficult to measure in relation to what students with disabilities actually experience as they not only pursue, but also experience higher education. Using both qualitative and quantitative data, this article analyses the process of access into higher education institutions and outcomes in terms of representation in higher education institutions by students with disabilities. In doing so, it seeks to explore the meaning and outcomes of policies related to higher education institutions in Tanzania in terms of their stated equality ideals and achievements in practice.

Introduction

Debates on equity and participation in higher education cannot avoid addressing the subtle discriminatory structures and practices that exist in society, and the degree to which such structures and practices have influenced the nature of the participation of certain population groups in higher education. Situating these debates within the practice of widening participation in higher education, it becomes easier to illustrate how students with disabilities experience higher education.[1] Generally, the status and condition of people with disabilities is one of the three basic aspects that have been identified by the World Bank as necessary to measure a country's achievement: health, knowledge and a decent standard of living (Guernsey et al, 2007). In a country such as Tanzania, where the National Disability Survey of 2008 estimated that the disability prevalence for the population aged seven years and above is 7.8%, such consideration is, indeed, imperative (United Republic of Tanzania, 2008; Legal and Human Rights Centre, 2009), yet this is often taken as simply a structural consideration, detached from the lived experiences and needs of the person.

Disability in the Tanzanian context has been generally described as the 'loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to

 http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/rcie.2011.6.4.415

Downloaded from rci.sagepub.com at University of Dar es Salaam on May 23, 2016

physical, mental or social factors' (United Republic of Tanzania, 2004a, p. 1). The policy also defines a person with disability as an individual whose prospects of obtaining and retaining employment are greatly reduced due to known physical, mental or social factors. This definition is in line with that of the United Nations (2006) and the World Health Organization's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (Chuwa, 2010, p. 8). The National Disability Survey of 2008 notes that within the current projected population of 43.2 million, it is estimated that about 3.4 million people in Tanzania experience some type of activity limitation (Chuwa, 2010, p. 16) or some type of disability such as blindness or visual impairment, deafness or hearing impairment, physical impairment, intellectual impairment or albinism (United Republic of Tanzania, 2008). The policy also explains that these experiences of loss or limitation could, however, be aggravated by the community's perception of disabled people (United Republic of Tanzania, 2004a, p. 1).

Such consideration indicates the country's recognition of social and cultural factors that influence how we sometimes perceive people with certain impairments, and is in line with current international thinking on the concept of disability. Since a paradigm shift has moved our understanding of disability from a medical to a social model (Guernsey et al, 2006, p. 3), the term has increasingly become relative and expressed degrees of exclusion or inclusion. The discussions around the medical and social models of disability give pointers to how the experience of students with disabilities in higher education institutions (HEIs) can be understood. The medical model emphasises disability as a problem, a pathology that needs to be fixed, and defines people with disabilities as persons with conditions which make them dependent and needing to be cared for (Shakespeare, 2006; Guernsey et al, 2007). This is an approach that has served to exclude people with disabilities systematically from participating equally in societal development. This model largely advocates for medical solutions since it believes in curing or managing disability from a clinical perspective. According to this model, investment in curative services is emphasised in order to enable people with disabilities to function as 'normal' people (Brisenden, 1998). Following this model, the participation of students with disabilities in HEIs is thus conceived as a situation that demands taking care of external structures, such as support systems, to 'help' them. Yet, while their discrimination in access to HEIs may not necessarily be obvious, it is often the insensitive or uninformed structural tendencies towards forms of disability that serve to stymie their access, retention and quality achievement in higher education.

The social model includes consideration of attitudes, prejudices and able-bodied norms and assumptions. According to this model, able-bodied norms and assumptions are generally taken to refer to ideas about physical wellness as the desired norm, which certain people are seen as not possessing. According to the social model, these ideas are socially and culturally constructed, and become the basis for discrimination against those seen as not possessing the physical criteria. The social model of disability originally evolved in the 1970s as a movement to challenge society's conception of disability and to denounce the way society discriminated against 'disabled' people by its attitudes and isolating them from participating fully in society. The model thus identifies systemic barriers, negative attitudes and exclusion by society (purposely or inadvertently) as the factors that perpetuate the idea of disability (Brisenden, 1998; Shakespeare, 2006). The argument is that although certain categories of physiological impairments may, indeed, cause certain functional inabilities or limitations of a person compared to other people, they do not directly amount to being totally dysfunctional in society. With reference to participation in HEIs, this model advocates for social awareness and the removal of barriers in order to allow people with disabilities to participate and engage fully as equal participants in society. In this case, their participation in higher education has to be seen as a rights issue and not as a favour.

In this article, we examine the outcomes of higher education policy in Tanzania (United Republic of Tanzania, 2007) on the rights of access to higher education by people with disabilities using the social model, by looking at the factors that generate disadvantage and opportunities throughout the life course of these people. Using the variables of access, retention and achievement, we discuss how wider structures of inequality such as socio-economic status intersect with systemic limitations to generate disadvantage, and therefore a different experience in participation in higher education for students with disabilities (Killean & Hubka, 1999).

The data used for this article was obtained from the study 'Widening Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania: developing an equity scorecard' (WPHEGT; Morley et al, 2010).

Downloaded from rci.sagepub.com at University of Dar es Salaam on May 23, 2016

The main objective of this study was to investigate who participates in higher education in the two countries. In so doing, an examination of the major structures of inequality, poverty, gender and age was used to establish the nature and scale of who participates in higher education and the effectiveness of policies and strategies adopted to facilitate widening participation. Information relating to four questions was subsequently pursued: (1) which social groups are under-represented and the relationship to national/international patterns of social exclusion; (2) the relationship of students' prior experiences and socio-economic backgrounds to achievement in education; (3) mechanisms of support to assist non- traditional students; and (4) perceptions of barriers to participation for under-represented groups. Two case-study universities were purposively selected in each country. One was a public university in Tanzania – the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) – and another was a private university to allow for comparisons on perceptions and experiences of access. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected and included 100 structured interviews with academics and policy makers at the national and institutional level, and 100 life histories of students on four programmes of study in each university. These included: Law, Science (Mathematics), Education, Engineering, Medicine, and Business and Commerce. Quantitative data was obtained from statistical records on student enrolment, retention and achievement, and presented in the form of equity scorecards. Among the 100 students in the two Tanzanian case studies, 11 students with disabilities from both institutions were interviewed. Because of their limited representation, the participation of students with disabilities included all those who willingly consented to their participation. Additional information was obtained through interviews and documented information from other institutions providing services or concerned with the rights of people with disabilities in Tanzania.

Tanzania: disability and the policy context

Access and equity to educational opportunities in Tanzania are commitments that have been evident since independence in 1961, and have been enshrined in major policy instruments and declarations reviewed over time. Articles 9 and 11 of the Tanzanian Constitution establish the right of every Tanzanian citizen to pursue 'education in a field of his [*sic*] choice up to the highest level according to his [*sic*] merits and ability' (United Republic of Tanzania, 1977, p. 19). Yet, contrary to the country's commitment to human rights and inclusion without discrimination in all development policy, access to higher education for people with disabilities is not yet well grounded in the Tanzanian higher education system. As early as 1974, Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania (1961-1985), proclaimed that disabled children had a right to education in both special and regular schools (Lema et al, 2004, p. 116). While acknowledging the fact that expansion of educational opportunities for disabled people needed to be given priority, he relegated that duty to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) since, he claimed, the government lacked the resources that disabled children needed for special programmes and materials (Lema et al, 2004, p. 11). A more recent way in which the situation of people with disabilities has been assessed is through the National Disability Survey (2008), one of several National Routine data systems that have been established to feed into the Tanzanian poverty monitoring system on the conditions of people with disabilities. While this data generates statistics on the social conditions of this group, it does not provide explanations of underlying mechanisms that have disadvantaged the disabled community from equal opportunities in social life, despite their recognition in all key development policies in the country.

Recognition of Rights to Higher Education for People with Disabilities in Policy

The *National Policy on Disability* (United Republic of Tanzania, 2004b) was established in 2004, more than 20 years after the proclamation of 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons. The *National Policy on Disability* was preceded by the *Cabinet Paper No. 19 of 1981* (United Republic of Tanzania, 1981), which focused on service provision for disabled persons. The Cabinet Paper was followed by *The Disabled Persons Employment Act No. 2 of 1982* (United Republic of Tanzania, 1982a), whose major provision was to ensure security of employment through a quota scheme. This quota

Downloaded from rci.sagepub.com at University of Dar es Salaam on May 23, 2016

system stipulates that 2% of the workforce in companies with over 50 employees must be persons with disabilities. The Act also established the National Advisory Council, which advises the minister responsible for the social welfare of disabled persons. The same year, *The Disabled Persons Care and Maintenance Act No. 3 of 1982* (United Republic of Tanzania, 1982b) was enacted to designate care responsibilities to families, relatives, local government, central government and NGOs.

The *National Policy on Disability* (United Republic of Tanzania, 2004b) comes as a firmer commitment to inclusiveness and part of the human rights agenda. Among other things, the policy wants to ensure that people with disabilities are enabled to receive education. The policy, however, addresses access to early learning and basic education only. Higher levels of education have not been included. Moreover, the policy limits accessibility to only issues of infrastructure conducive for people who have physical impairments. In addition to policy limitations, a study by Tungaraza & Mboya (2005) noted that some students and staff in higher education held negative attitudes towards the abilities of students with disabilities, indicating that the issue of disability is complicated on many levels.

Commitments to ensure that people with disabilities access higher education are strongly emphasised in the *National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty* (United Republic of Tanzania, 2005, 2010), popularly known as the MKUKUTA; *The Education and Training Act of 1998* (United Republic of Tanzania, 1998); the *Higher Education Students' Loans Board (HESLB) Act, 2004* (United Republic of Tanzania, 2004a); and *The National Higher Education Policy* (United Republic of Tanzania, 2007). *The National Higher Education Policy* stipulates the following commitment:

> *Policy statement*
>
> The Government and higher education institutions shall promote 'inclusive higher education' that takes into account the marginalized groups, regions and the urban–rural dichotomy.
>
> *Strategies*
>
> 1. HEIs to design and construct physical infrastructure that allows easy accessibility and mobility of disabled students;
> 2. HEIs to provide requisite facilities for disabled students and others who have special education needs in order to enhance their participation;
> 3. Supporting affirmative initiatives that redress imbalances by increasing to acceptable levels the proportion of students from the marginalized groups into higher education institutions;
> 4. Providing scholarships, bursaries/grants, full or partial loans to eligible students from the disabled and marginalized groups. (United Republic of Tanzania, 2007, p. 20)

Several measures have, indeed, been taken to put in place some of the policy-related strategies. For example, the Higher Education Students' Loans Board (HESLB) of Tanzania identifies applicants with disabilities as among those with special consideration for a loan. The Board defines the eligibility criteria of a needy student as one who 'is an orphan, is disabled or has disabled, poor parents, is from a poor single parent family, is from marginalised and disadvantaged groups, or, is from a low income threshold family earning national minimum wage or below' (United Republic of Tanzania, 2004a).

The growing sensitivity to the needs of students with disabilities also led to the establishment in 2007 of the Sebastian Kolowa University College (SEKUCo) as a constituent college of Tumaini University, one of the universities run by faith-based organisations in the country. SEKUCo, in its vision, is committed to be a leading African institution of higher learning that fully recognises and actively professes the human value and dignity of all society members, including people with disabilities, and whereby everyone is able to learn and live in harmony with God, fellow human beings and all creation.[2] SEKUCo's approach upholds and goes beyond the social model of disability approach by focusing and inculcating an ethical and human rights approach to inclusion in higher education, and plans to mainstream in all its teaching programmes issues about needs, rights and the abilities of people with disabilities. This objective is elaborated by the college provost's intention to 'create a conducive study environment for applicants with disabilities who qualify to join university studies'.[3] In the year 2010–2011, SEKUCo enrolled several students with disabilities, including three with hearing impairments, six with visual impairments, one with speech

Downloaded from rci.sagepub.com at University of Dar es Salaam on May 23, 2016

and language disabilities, and one who is physically (mobility) impaired. These are out of a total of 1331 students, making their representation 0.8% of the total student enrolment. The SEKUCo initiative, as commendable as it is, nevertheless illustrates that, in spite of the policy recognition of people with disabilities, the participation rate of disabled persons in higher education in Tanzania continues to be quite low.

Several reasons have been claimed to have led to the above situation. One is the fact that the general enrolment rate at the country level is low, despite the rapid growth and expansion of higher education in the country, and this is also reflected in the participation of people with disabilities. What is evident is the fact that Tanzania has among the lowest gross enrolment rates at 1.4% (i.e. access for higher education age cohorts), which is one of the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa, where the average is 3% (United Republic of Tanzania, 2007), and possibly the lowest enrolment rate of students with disabilities across the region.[4]

Most recently, the Tanzania Commission for Universities approved lower minimum entry requirements for enrolment in order to widen access to higher education in the country (Tanzania Commission for Universities, 2010, p. 6). This decision does not constitute positive discrimination for any category of applicant and, in this case, categorically makes it compulsory for each applicant to pursue higher education under the same criteria leverage as other candidates. Students with disabilities are thus obliged also to satisfy other criteria for eligibility, including the demand for a student loan under the HESLB. Since there is also a requirement that academically outstanding applicants deserve priority for consideration for a loan, it implies that in most cases those students with very good Advanced (A) level examination results, and definitely those who also had a good secondary level schooling, stand a better chance. The extent to which students with disabilities have satisfied these criteria for merit is another aspect to consider.

The challenges experienced in the general national context are, however, only one part of these students' experiences. At another level are the students' individual experiences and challenges they encounter through the course of their lives, and as they experience university life. In the following sections, we present and discuss the lived experiences of students who have entered higher education in order to illustrate how students with disabilities charter themselves through several challenges and opportunities and manage their higher education experience.

Access to University by Students with Disabilities in Tanzania

In 2010, there were 49 HEIs in Tanzania, of which 32 are universities and university colleges and 17 non-university HEIs (United Republic of Tanzania, 2007). Of these, 45 participate in the national Central Admission System for students (Tanzania Commission for Universities, 2010, pp. 3-5). In the academic year 2005-2006, the total number of students enrolled in HEIs in the country was 55,314 (17,803 females and 37,331 males). Of these, only 54 were students with disabilities, with the UDSM having the most with 40 students (Ministry of Higher Education, 2006, pp. 5-19). The total number of enrolled students in universities and university colleges in the country increased by 190.2% from the 2005-2006 period to reach 118,951 students in the 2009-2010 academic year (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010, p. 96). The increase in the number of students is attributed to the increased access to HESLB funds and the increase in the number of established HEIs in the country (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010).

As discussed above, there are several basic criteria for access to higher education. Of priority are the criteria based on the required merits – i.e. a certain pass grade for a particular specialisation. Second is funding and having the right resources to support these students' learning needs. These aspects are both crucial for enabling access of students with disabilities to higher education. In critical consideration, however, these criteria, which are basically formal, structural conditions, are among the leading impediments to the access of students with disabilities to higher education. Thus, although policy emphasises the need for the eradication of discrimination in the enrolment of students with disabilities at any level of education, it is basically understood that students with disabilities, particularly those with specific forms of impairments – for example, those with mental, sight or hearing impairments, and who require and deserve special schooling – are still disadvantaged. A report by Nilson & Nilson states that:

Downloaded from rci.sagepub.com at University of Dar es Salaam on May 23, 2016

> there are 16 special schools in Tanzania, and 159 special units integrated into regular schools. 2% of children with disabilities are said to attend these schools. Currently there are two Special Teacher Training Colleges in Arusha and Tanga, which train teachers for children with disabilities. (Nilson & Nilson, 2011, p. 3)

An earlier report, however, established that enrolment in primary school for students with disabilities was not promising. A report by the Tanzania Legal and Human Rights Centre (2009, p. 70) on the status of human rights in Tanzania in 2008 mentions that 'only 0.3 percent of children enrolled in primary schools are children with disabilities, a lower than expected rate … and despite their low enrolment, they are also reported to drop out of school at a higher rate than others'. These factors are compounded by the limitations in the schooling environment that these students encounter in both primary and secondary education, and that serve as the foundation for gaining the qualifications they would have needed for entry into higher education. Their inclusion in this regard, discussed not strictly as an outcome of denial of enrolment at these lower levels of education, is the experience of poor facilities, inadequately trained teachers and the lack of funding to attend proper schooling.

A report on the level of illiteracy in Tanzania gives another view on the schooling of people with disabilities. Using data from the National Disability Survey of 2008, Chuwa (2010) explains that although about 27% of Tanzania's population aged 15 years are illiterate, illiteracy among persons with disabilities is, however, higher. According to the National Disability Survey, about 48% were estimated to be illiterate compared to 25% of persons without disabilities; 42% and 3% of people with disabilities had no education at all or had secondary education, respectively, compared to 24% and 7% of those without disabilities. Enrolment rates were also low among children with disabilities (52%) when compared with those without (75%) (Chuwa, 2010). The number of students with disabilities in Tanzanian secondary schools as shown in Table I reflects the situation of their participation in education institutions.

Form (grade)	Females	Males	Total
Form 1	462	717	1179
Form 2	465	731	1196
Form 3	375	598	973
Form 4	361	519	880
Form 5	5	17	22
Form 6	9	27	36
	1677	2609	4286

Table I. Total number of students with disabilities in secondary schools in Tanzania in 2010 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010, p. 65).

There is a wide disparity between the sexes in the figures shown in Table I, indicating that females are less likely to be qualified to enter higher education than males. According to Possi (1996, p. 165), several factors could be behind this picture. These may include not only possible overprotection by parents, but also the general negative attitude towards the education of girls, as well as the differential treatment, expectations and reinforcement given to girls. These attitudes, when coupled with the general societal discrimination of the education of people with disabilities, have taken their toll on the further advancement of females with disabilities. Another aspect that is evident from these statistics is that the number of students with disabilities drops drastically from Form 4, that is, the ordinary level, to Form 5, the advanced secondary (high) school level. Hence, fewer students with disabilities attain the basic qualifications to be eligible for higher education.

The learning environment in lower levels of education thus becomes one of the key enablers or barriers to participation in higher education. Another factor is the nature of support at the family level. Some of the student respondents in the WPHEGT study (Morley et al, 2010) indicated that, contrary to generalised beliefs, their biggest push towards higher education was by their parents. The social and economic disposition of their families notwithstanding, students expressed how either their mother or older siblings and other relatives gave them courage to pursue education. On family encouragement, one of our participants recalled what her parents thought about her capabilities:

Downloaded from rci.sagepub.com at University of Dar es Salaam on May 23, 2016

> They [the family members] said, this one … she can do something, and they took me to my aunty [in Dar es Salaam], who took me to school. (Student with physical impairment, UDSM)

This statement gives an indication that the student's family did not embrace cultural or socially related stigma or ideas about disability as being synonymous with inability, and this is, indeed, reflected in most of the interviewed students' statements about their own families. We are, however, careful not to generalise from these experiences since, as has been discussed above, the actual representation of students with disabilities in different levels of education is still low. Data from the 2008 National Disability Survey shows that only 40% of children with disabilities are attending primary school, an attendance rate which is less than half the rate for Tanzanian children overall (United Republic of Tanzania, 2008), indicating that much needs to be done to deal with these challenges in the country. Infrastructural and structural challenges have denied the availability and accessibility of education facilities for children needing special attention. Sometimes, willing parents are challenged by the lack of information or resources to facilitate their children's entry into further education, as the following respondent explained:

> In my family, first of all, I got the problem of getting a school because I was taken to this school and they found out that I have a problem of visual impairment and there was no means, so they took me back home. I stayed there until there was one sister [nun] who was from Sweden who came there to my village and she said, 'This person can be taken to special schools'. This is when she arranged for me to be taken to special school there at Mgeza [in the Bukoba region]. (Student with visual impairment, UDSM)

For those who had the advantage of enrolling in special schools, their educational background is usually good and they insist that this is one of the crucial enablers to higher levels of education. In 2010, Tanzania had several schools providing special, inclusive and integrated primary education throughout the country, and 12 secondary schools.[5] One of the LLB students at the UDSM who is visually impaired explained that, after loosing his eyesight, he was sent to a special school called Uhuru Mchanganyiko (Ilala, Dar es Salaam) and was taught Braille. According to the student, learning Braille was an enabler in the sense that it opened up to him the possibility to be able to learn like other students. From that point, he started actively pursuing further education opportunities with the assistance of his mother. He said:

> When I completed my studies [at Uhuru Mchanganyiko], I went to the Ministry [of Education] to seek further opportunities, and I was given a chance to join Mpwapwa Secondary School. This is a special school because it has a special unit for dealing with students with disabilities, although it also admits other students. (Student with visual impairment, UDSM)

Participation in higher education therefore has been largely dependant on access to the resources available at lower education levels by the students in this study, as mentioned above. However, as was also observed, such special facilities at secondary education level have not often been available or conducive, reflecting more on the unpreparedness of education facilities to cater for students with different disabilities. A student with visual impairment explained his experience as follows:

> The first school I went to for Form 5 had a very inconducive environment. First of all, the timetable was as you find it at the university. You keep on shifting from one classroom to another. If you miss the room, then you have missed the period, because you could go round and round until the time is over. And the chairs were also scarce. It was our fellow students who took time to guide us. For Form 6, we went to another school, but the situation was even worse there. The school did not have a section for blind students, hence we had to wait for three months for the facilities to be sent from the former school to this school. Neither were there teachers for certain subjects. (Student with visual impairment, UDSM)

The lack of much needed learning facilities for students with visual impairments has also made them change from their preferred specialisations to other courses – for example, switching from science specialisations to arts specialisations – as will be discussed below.

Downloaded from rci.sagepub.com at University of Dar es Salaam on May 23, 2016

The Application Process to University

The experience of higher education begins with the process of application for admission for students with disabilities. Traditionally, not many institutions had systems to provide them with prior information on applicants with disabilities so that they were better equipped to prepare for their arrival. Meeting the conditions for admission was, in the past, through matriculation examinations, which all students were obliged to sit, but which caused particular tribulation for applicants with visual impairment. One student with visual impairment explained his experience as follows:

> Now, the transition from advanced secondary to university, plus the year I had before I joined the university, the process of joining the university was so cumbersome to me because there was no direct entry for people with eye impairment. I took the joining instruction form, I mean I wrote the application letter to the university for me to be selected and … was allocated a place where we go for the matriculation examination … once I reached there, I found there were no facilities for me to do the exam, something which has put me at risk. But I decided not to be discouraged, so I consulted the person who was supervising that exam … and I told her the real situation that I was facing. She was so cooperative and she gave me the telephone number of the officers concerned … Then I was told to write a letter to explain the situation. I kept on making a follow-up [from my home town] until I was told to come [to the university]. (Student with visual impairment, UDSM)

Enrolment in the UDSM of Students with Disabilities

The UDSM has a long experience of working with students with disabilities. The first students who were enrolled in the 1978-1979 academic year were visually impaired. In the 1980s, the UDSM started enrolling students with other categories of disability, including those with physical impairment, hearing impairment and albinism. Their numbers have risen to the 40 students enrolled in the UDSM in the 2010-2011 academic year. Their types of impairment are shown in Table II.

No.	Category of impairment	Number of students
1	Visually impaired	14
2	Albino/visually impaired	6
3	Physically impaired	15
4	Hearing impaired	4
5	Physically impaired/visually impaired	1
	Total	40

Table II. Students with disabilities enrolled at the UDSM in 2010-2011 (University of Dar es Salaam, 2011).

The UDSM maintains the categorisation of disabilities as shown in Table II, which are also noted in the National Disability Survey of 2008 (United Republic of Tanzania, 2008). People with learning disabilities or intellectual disabilities do not appear in the data, although the survey of 2008 identifies them as a category under people with disabilities. The UDSM staff at the Special Education Unit (SEU) who are responsible for maintaining this data explained that they do not have evidence to support the admission of students in the category of intellectual disabilities.

The UDSM Special Education Unit

On admission to the UDSM, students with disabilities are supported by the UDSM's Special Education Unit, which provides them with academic-related support. This unit was established in the 1978-1979 academic year to cater for the needs of the visually impaired students who were enrolled at the UDSM that year. This unit is housed in the UDSM main library building and its functions are coordinated by the School of Education through one of its departments (the

Downloaded from rci.sagepub.com at University of Dar es Salaam on May 23, 2016

Department of Education Psychology and Curriculum Studies). The coordinator of this unit comes from the School of Education. The unit has three trained transcribers and two sign language interpreters. Non-trained staff include part-time readers and note-takers. For the academic year 2010-2011, the unit received special facilities – many of them to cater for visually impaired students. These include low-vision devices, electronic note-takers, special scanners and miniguide obstacle detectors. Many of these modern facilities have been supplied by the Tanzania Education Authority.

The demand for support by such a unit is important owing to the increasing enrolment of students with disabilities. Between the 1978-1979 academic year and the 2010-2011 academic year, a total of 238 students with various categories of disability have been enrolled at the UDSM and supported by the unit (University of Dar es Salaam, 2011). The unit also reports that 21 students have been able to undertake postgraduate studies at the UDSM, two of them pursuing doctoral degrees. Of these, seven students were females (Special Education Unit, 2011). Students with disabilities are informed of the existence of this unit during the enrolment week. As the figures in Table II indicate, the demand to cater for students with visual impairment is significant for the SEU, hence its concentration on special facilities for these students.

Maintaining Studies

For students with disabilities, their capacity to maintain their place at the UDSM was seen to be enabled by the availability of supporting infrastructure – both physical and other basic assistive devices to enhance the performance of the student. In an interview for the WPHEGT study [6], one of the policy makers in the UDSM administration commented that although the government is opening up university intake in the country, not much priority has been placed on developing a conducive learning and living environment for students with special needs. For the physically challenged, it was mentioned that moving from one place to another in the conventionally established facilities was a major problem. This aspect was obvious because most of the UDSM facilities, including the layout of the landscape, do not take into consideration the special needs of people with disabilities. This is one thing that was disregarded at the time when much of the UDSM's physical structures were being put in place in the 1970s, particularly because the physical layout was not sensitive to disability during the time of their establishment.

The limitations of the physical infrastructure are also felt when these students have to navigate themselves through the day, either during classes or in the halls of residence. One of the students explained her experience as follows:

> It is difficult … sometimes I am in lectures and … when you have a problem [implying needing to go to the toilet] and it is upstairs … when you go to someone to assist you, then you have to go out, and when you come back you [and the friend who assisted you] have missed much of the lesson. (Student with physical impairment, UDSM)

The students also experience challenges when they need to access the several resource centres or reading places in the various buildings. The UDSM's main library, for example, has its borrowing and reading facilities located upstairs. For some of the students with physical impairments or visual impairments, this is quite a challenge. Although some of them explained that they have devised systems of asking colleagues to borrow books for them, this is not always possible. The first challenge is in having the opportunity to select the correct material that one wants to borrow. This is not always possible, since those who borrow on behalf of other students rely on limited information. The other challenge is borrowing a book from the special reserve, where you have to leave your identification card for the period of use until you return the book or reading material. Even students with less challenging physical disabilities found this to be too difficult an obligation to help their more challenged colleagues. On this experience, one of the students with physical impairment and who was undertaking a Bachelor of Science in Education said:

> For me … I can say I can go to the library, but there are some of my friends who cannot, because they have to use the Bajaj [6], and in borrowing books you have to sign for it and put your ID [identification], but you cannot put your ID for a book that is not yours, so they sometimes use notes … but everybody has a different understanding [implying that the quality of the notes

Downloaded from rci.sagepub.com at University of Dar es Salaam on May 23, 2016

> would depend on how well one has been able to capture the lecture points], so it becomes difficult for them. (Student with physical impairment, UDSM)

Access limitations in this case also bear negatively on a student's performance, since, as this student was trying to express, some students with disabilities have to rely on sources of academic information that may not be entirely reliable.

The challenges posed by the physical environment have not gone unnoticed by UDSM administrators. In response to the needs of these students, the UDSM has allocated Hall of Residence No. 1 for students with visual impairment, which is closest to the lecture rooms, and Hall of Residence No. 7 for those with physical impairments. Despite these arrangements, the UDSM's elaborate physical layout means that students have to make their way up a series of staircases to the classrooms or across the main road in the case of connecting with Hall of Residence No. 7. On this experience, one of them commented as follows:

> In the dormitories, there is no problem except in the passages. I get help from the students in my class. As long as there are these people … there are students who just volunteer to assist you. Sometimes when the class is over, they come to you and ask you, 'Where do you want to go?' Then he or she takes you there. They do this on a voluntary basis, and it is not a rule. They do this out of their own conscience. (Student with visual impairment, UDSM)

During one of the interviews with the case-study private university, a policy maker explained how some of these shortcomings were being overcome. This university has allocated a specific room and a toilet facility to cater for disabled members of the university. The following illustrates this initiative as explained by this university's Dean of Students:

> The policy that we have here in our Prospectus … if I quote from … the 2008/2009 Academic prospectus, page number 4 … 'The University's education programmes are structured to recognise that each student is an individual, and to enable the individual to benefit fully from the opportunities it affords. The University is open to all persons regardless of race, creed, colour, gender or political opinion.'
>
> Now during the enrolment, each faculty is advised to be careful or sensitive that you enrol students without any barriers … I will give you an example of which … 3 years ago we did … when we were enrolling, this student who is from the Maasai, a rural area, but also she is a disabled student … so we had to have another criteria for her to join the University. One was to see that we give her special favour so that she cannot compete with others who have performed well. Secondly, we had to accommodate her on-campus although she was late. So we had to ask other students to go out of campus and then we accommodate this student who is 'disabled' and it was successful and she is now in the 3rd year.
>
> We have some two rooms which … even the toilets are special for students with disabilities, and we are planning to add more for the male students … dormitories. At the same time our infrastructure here – I will show you that even a student with disability has great access, even lecturers who have disabilities … but also you have … how you treat them, that they are equally treated at the University level, so they feel at home. And we always ask them, 'How do you feel, what can be added, what are the challenges you are facing?' etc. (Student Affairs Officer, private university)

The above narrative illustrates an example of special attention to forms of disability purposively afforded by policy makers in this institution that has created an environment where students with disabilities can cope with their academic life relatively smoothly. What is also important is that having prior information of the disposition of students joining an institution allows policy makers to plan ahead for the most appropriate way to accommodate special needs. This planning, however, especially in terms of the physical infrastructure, is becoming practically more evident in the new constructions in both universities, although it was more elaborate in one of the campuses of the private university, where even special washing facilities to serve students with physical impairments were put in place.

As indicated briefly above, meeting the demands of teaching and assignments was another challenge for students with disabilities. In some cases, group discussions with fellow students have been used as alternative sources of information, where knowledge sharing is important, particularly in the case of students who cannot by themselves sieve through the material they are

Downloaded from rci.sagepub.com at University of Dar es Salaam on May 23, 2016

supposed to engage with or are not able to access the correct sources of academic material they are supposed to. Regarding this group discussion alternative, one of the students had this to say:

> I have my own group … almost six students whom I can call at the moment I need him or her depending whether we are sharing the course. But what I do in most cases is to take those students whom we can opt the same course … whom we are sharing the interest in courses. So I may pick one depending on what my timetable shows that I have to go through. I call him or her, then we go through the subject. Frankly speaking, they have been the backbone of my success. (Student with visual impairment, UDSM)

Discussions with fellow students are therefore quite useful enablers for students who are challenged on their own to access the right material, as was expressed in this case. Students with disabilities interviewed in the WPHEGT study also reported that the existence of the SEU had been helpful in giving them access to equipment, such as special typewriters. However, its capacity to meet their needs has fallen short because the facilities and staff are inadequate to meet the demand. One of the students with visual impairment at the UDSM explained as follows:

> The legal materials 'statutes' that you have to consult in the LLB programme are not in Braille print. And the problem is compounded because there is no special machine [for that purpose] to cater for all students in need. We thus have to depend on the staff to type these materials for us. (Student with visual impairment, UDSM)

However, even with such support for typing, the SEU was noted as not having enough typewriters to go round for the students when they were needed. Some of the machines used during the examinations were also claimed to be faulty:

> And there were some computers which are now out of order that need replacement for a long time. (Student with visual impairment, UDSM)

Appreciating these limitations, one of the staff at the SEU explained that the university provides readers (people) for students with visual impairments whose responsibility it is to read examinations or literature to them. But they are not on a one-to-one ratio with the students and therefore they offer their services on a rotation basis. This means that the arrangement of allocating these readers has to be quite efficient. This challenge is compounded during the examinations period, as the following explanation given by a student with visual impairment illustrates:

> Studying as a law student with visual impairment is tough. That is, during the examinations, the time becomes very short. Because when you are doing an examination of … Land Law … you are required to consult about five statutes. And because these statutes are in normal print, there has to be somebody to read for you. So when you get the questions, you have to ask him to read a particular section, and then you need to see if that section is appropriate for your question or not, so you keep on doing this for some time, therefore you spend quite some time. And even if you would want to write the statutes before, the statues are so voluminous … (for example, a land statute can go from here to here!) [He gestures with his hands to indicate the bulkiness of these statutes.] Therefore you need to spend time reading them, and we use our fingers in reading, then typing with the same fingers, so you end up taking a lot of time. We only have half an hour added to our exam time. (Student with visual impairment, UDSM)

This description shows that students with certain disabilities encounter specific challenges compared to other students when they embark on their normal academic obligations. Without targeted and specialised assistance, the learning process becomes tough, indeed. However, the fact that some students have been able to enrol in disciplines such as law illustrates their potential and capabilities.

Attitudes and Social Esteem

Negative or rather uninformed or insensitive attitudes towards people with disabilities, as has been established by the social model of disability, are the key factor leading to the neglect of the real needs of people with disabilities. Gestures that indicate difference and words said to show concern,

Downloaded from rci.sagepub.com at University of Dar es Salaam on May 23, 2016

even if in good faith, can also be sometimes depressing on the part of the recipient. On such an experience, one of the students commented as follows:

> I have forgotten something … in my A levels, I think I can remember something which made me sad is when the headmaster of that school was surprised. It was in the December exam. I reached there late, there was no preparation but I sat the exam and I came seventh out of 20. We were 20 in the class. Now, in announcing the 10 best, the headmaster was so surprised to see a blind man, and he announced in public. It was on a graduation that he said, 'How can you with eyes be defeated with a blind man?' – something which shocked me because I didn't expect it from him. (Student with visual impairment, UDSM)

This rather insensitive statement illustrates several issues. Firstly, it is the nature of the social and cultural context that informs about people with disabilities and which actually shows exclusiveness and discrimination. Secondly, there is the inadequacy of the training of teachers to enable them to embrace inclusiveness and sensitivity in addressing diversity in a community of students with different dispositions – for example, according to social, physiological, economic, gender and other differences. In response to this comment by his head teacher, the student showed his disappointment immediately, but he also became demoralised in attending social occasions until after he had completed his education.

Another student, also with visual impairment, explained that incidences where they encounter insensitive statements are quite common and that now he is used to them. His argument was that one needs to be tolerant, even if it is usually bad experiences. On this note, he explained that what is important is to concentrate on one's personal struggles, such as seeking and maintaining enrolment at the university. Such concentration, he believes, has served to change people's attitudes towards him. The following section discusses perceptions of achievement through accessing higher education that prevail among some students.

Achievements: positive future gained through university

Students with disabilities in this study mentioned that their achievements which were worth noting should be related to their performance in examinations at different levels. Passing successfully through their secondary school examinations and qualifying to enter university was seen as a big step in ensuring their participation in higher education. One of the students explained how he used to feel threatened by examinations, but largely due to the fear of not being selected because of his disability. Such fears thus became allayed by their good performance in secondary school examinations, making them eligible for selection to university. Entry into university was sometimes contrary to expectations, but still the fact of being enrolled is worth all the challenges encountered in the process, as was explained by one student at the UDSM who wanted to study engineering before suffering from an eye disease. When he lost his sight, he vowed just to study anything as long as he accessed higher education. He said that after being informed of his deteriorating eyesight, he made a vow, saying, *hapa, ni education tu* ('here, it is only education'), and was satisfied as he proceeded successfully from his secondary to university level.

Joining the university has meant a positive change in the lives of people not only through confidence-building, but also because it offers an opportunity to seek ways to assist others with similar challenges, as this student was able to explain:

> I can say [I am] positively affected by the University. First of all, I learnt I can stand on my own. And when I say the University, it means [it] includes all stakeholders … I can hire a room. Also, I can now present things in different disabled organisations. I have learnt on how to lead a student body like through DARUSO [Dar es Salaam University Students' Organization]. I … have learnt a lot on how to communicate with people of different status, which approach to use in order to succeed, whom to see, whom to talk with at what point in time, and how to express myself, tackle different problems, challenges. Of course, I have totally been changed being there at the University. (Student with physical impairment, UDSM)

For many students with disabilities, therefore, university education is, indeed, a special achievement not only academically, but also socially, and it serves to enhance their personal esteem to a higher 'class or status', as one of them put it. The prestige is also built by the students'

Downloaded from rci.sagepub.com at University of Dar es Salaam on May 23, 2016

appreciation of being enrolled in what are perceived as prestigious universities. A student with a sight impairment expressed his opinion as follows:

> I wanted to study law at UDSM … because the prestige that this university carries in the country is widely known … when I came here, I was very happy. (Student with visual impairment, UDSM)

This achievement is, however, also accomplished by a recognition of the social world, and how entering a university and having a degree is likely to change pejorative attitudes on the part of other members of society. Similar to Kisanji's (1995, p. 53) discussion on how attitudes towards disability have been a mixture of persecution as well as tolerance, one of our student respondents in the WPHEGT study explained how it irked him to experience people showing tolerance, but of a paternalistic nature. He said:

> Now, to be at the University can change people's attitudes towards you because many people desire to enter University but they fail. So I believe that I have done an important thing. I am different from the past. I mean, when I came here to the University, I can see people are now respecting me. You know, initially I could feel people as looking down on me … they saw I could not do anything … they saw me as somebody who could just be at home … as I said before … when visitors came home they would give me money. Now, I used to be surprised, thinking, 'Why does this person give me money?' I thought that that person must have been thinking that this person is now doomed. I could not understand. (Student with visual impairment, UDSM)

Participation in higher education was to this student a means through which he felt empowered and overcame what was otherwise seen as a lack of capabilities. At the same time, access into higher education was largely regarded as an achievement that opened up a better future for the students.

Conclusions

This article has sought to document and discuss the lived experiences of students with disabilities as they encountered the university as part of the widening participation in higher education endeavour. We have focused on students with disabilities as one of the special categories of students to examine, owing to their special circumstances, and how these students access and achieve benefits from higher education. What is evident is the fact that the desire to overcome perceptions of discrimination and the challenges caused by disability has been a major motivation for the students to pursue higher education. Higher education gives them a positive outlook on life and its achievement is seen as a step to a brighter and more positive future. However, while social policy in Tanzania is increasingly being sensitive to the situation of people with disabilities, several challenges – both social and physical – are being encountered. The infrastructural inadequacies, sometimes owing to old structures, still remain a challenge in the environments of HEIs. Yet, it is the lower education infrastructural and support structures to facilitate the academic development of these students that is also wanting.

Much more needs to be done to facilitate the wider participation of students with disabilities in their varied and dispersed contexts from which they enter higher education in Tanzania. This includes not only making specific efforts to sensitise communities on the rights of people with disabilities to education, and equitable resource allocation to the different education levels to support the learning environment, but also decentralising the admission process to higher education as a deliberate attempt to ease the burden on students with disabilities in relation to these tasks. Finally, more studies, such as tracer studies, need to be conducted to establish how university education has, indeed, benefited the lives of persons with disabilities, as desired in the policy documents.

Notes

[1] We adopt the terminology 'students with disabilities' not only to be consistent with the language used by the United Nations – 'people with disabilities' – but also to emphasise what Guernsey et al (2006, p. 7) have indicated: 'to emphasise the person first, and the disability, second'. The

Downloaded from rci.sagepub.com at University of Dar es Salaam on May 23, 2016

terminology 'students with disabilities' (in Kiswahili, *wanafunzi wenye ulemavu*) was also used by the student respondents to refer to themselves during this study.

[2] See Sebastian Kolowa University College (2009) Vision and Mission Statements, 16 August. http://www.sekuco.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=55%3Avision-and-mission-statements&catid=25%3Abackground&Itemid=28&showall=1 (accessed 23 November 2011).

[3] 'Message from the Provost', SEKUCo, 20 August 2008. http://www.sekuco.org/index.php?option

[4] Bloom et al (2005) calculate this rate of participation as 5% from UNESCO estimates. See http://www.uis.unesco.org

[5] See the brief by the Tanzania League of the Blind at: http://www.tanzanialeagueblind.org/news.php

[6] The *Bajaj* is a tricycle, also known as a tuk-tuk in other countries, which some students with disabilities are given to facilitate their movement.

[6] WPHEGT stands for Widening Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania (Morley et al, 2010).

References

Ministry of Higher Education (2006) *Basic Statistics on Higher Education, Science and Technology in Tanzania (BEST), 2001/2002-2005/2006*. Dar es Salaam: Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology.

Ministry of Higher Education (2010) *Basic Education Statistics in Tanzania (BEST), 2006-2010*. Dar es Salaam: Ministry of Education and Vocational Training.

Bloom, D., Canning, D. & Chan, K. (2005) Higher Education and Economic Development in Africa. Harvard University, 20 September. http://www.dawodu.com/africaedu1.pdf

Brisenden, S. (1998) Independent Living and the Medical Model of Disability, in T. Shakespeare (Ed.) *The Disability Reader: social science perspectives*, pp. 20-27. London: Continuum.

Chuwa, A. (2010) Characteristics of the Handicapped Population in Tanzania. Paper presented at Sixth Africa Symposium on Statistical Development, 31 October–2 November, Cairo.

Guernsey, K., Nicoli, M. & Ninio, A. (2006) *Making Inclusion Operational: legal and institutional resources for World Bank staff on the inclusion of disability issues in investment projects*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Guernsey, K., Nicoli, M. & Ninio, A. (2007) *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: its implementation and relevance for the World Bank*. Social Protection Discussion Paper No. 0712. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Killean, E. & Hubka, D. (1999) *Working towards a Coordinated National Approach to Services, Accommodations and Policies for Post-secondary Students with Disabilities: ensuring access to higher education and career training*. Ottawa: National Educational Association of Disabled Students.

Kisanji, J. (1995) Attitudes and Beliefs about Disability in Tanzania, in B. O'Toole & R. McConkey (Eds) *Innovations in Developing Countries for People with Disabilities*, pp. 51-70. Bologna: Lisieux Hall in association with Associazione Italiana Amici di Raoul Follereau.

Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC) (2009) *Tanzania Human Rights Report 2008: incorporating specific part on Zanzibar*. Dar es Salaam: LHRC.

Lema, E., Mbilinyi, M. & Rajani, R. (2004) *Nyerere on Education*. Dar es Salaam: HakiElimu.

Ministry of Higher Education (2006) *Basic Statistics on Higher Education, Science and Technology in Tanzania (BEST), 2001/2002-2005/2006*. Dar es Salaam: Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology.

Ministry of Higher Education (2010) *Basic Education Statistics in Tanzania (BEST), 2006-2010*. Dar es Salaam: Ministry of Education and Vocational Training.

Morley, L., Leach, F., Lussier, K., Lihamba, A., Mwaipopo, R., Forde, L. & Egbenya, G. (2010) Widening Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania: developing an equity scorecard. Research Report, November. http://www.sussex.ac.uk/wphegt/impact-outputs/report-summary

Msechu, W (2009) The Right to Education in Tanzania. In Msechu.com. http://msechustephen.blogspot.com/2009/09/right-to-education-in-tanzania.html (accessed 12 April 2011).

Nilson, S. & Nilson, A. (2011) Disability Rights in Tanzania. http://www.msc.st/docs/HRBA-Disability-Tanzania-revised-2011-01-30.doc

Possi, M. (1996) Gender and Education of People with Disabilities in Tanzania, *UTAFITI*, *3*(2), 155-168.

Downloaded from rci.sagepub.com at University of Dar es Salaam on May 23, 2016

Shakespeare, T. (2006) *Disability Rights and Wrongs*. London: Routledge.

Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) (2010) *Students' Guidebook for the Central Admission System for Higher Education*. Dar es Salaam: TCU.

Tungaraza, F.D. & Mboya, M.W. (2005) Orientation and Mobility Training and Transition Issues for Students with Disability in Tanzania Institutions for Higher Learning: needs assessment report. Unpublished Research Paper, Faculty of Education Research, University of Dar es Salaam.

United Nations (2006) Conventions on the Rights of Peoples with Disabilities. Some Facts about Persons with Disabilities. United Nations, New York, 14-25 August. http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/pdfs/factsheet.pdf (accessed 21 November 2011).

United Republic of Tanzania (1977) *The Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania with 2008 Amendments*. Dar es Salaam: Government Printer.

United Republic of Tanzania (1981) *Cabinet Paper No. 19 of 1981*. Dar es Salaam: Cabinet Secretariat.

United Republic of Tanzania (1982a) *The Disabled Persons Employment Act No. 2 of 1982*. Dar es Salaam: Government Printer.

United Republic of Tanzania (1982b) *The Disabled Persons Care and Maintenance Act No. 3 of 1982*. Dar es Salaam: Government Printer.

United Republic of Tanzania (URT) (1998) *The Education and Training Act of 1998*. Dar es Salaam: URT.

United Republic of Tanzania (URT) (2004a) *Higher Education Students' Loans Board (HESLB) Act, 2004*. Dar es Salaam: URT.

United Republic of Tanzania (2004b) *National Policy on Disability*. Dar es Salaam: Ministry of Labour, Youth Development and Sports.

United Republic of Tanzania (2005) *National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty*. MKUKUTA I, Vice President's Office, June. http://www.povertymonitoring.go.tz/Mkukuta/MKUKUTA_MAIN_ENGLISH.pdf

United Republic of Tanzania (2007) *The National Higher Education Policy*. Dar es Salaam: Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology.

United Republic of Tanzania (2008) *Tanzania Disability Survey Report*. Dar es Salaam: National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs.

United Republic of Tanzania (2010) *National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty II*. Dar es Salaam: MKUKUTA Secretariat, Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs. http://www.tzdpg.or.tz/uploads/media/MKUKUTA_II_03.pdf

University of Dar es Salaam (2011) Special Education Unit Reports. School of Education, University of Dar es Salaam, March.

ROSEMARIE NYIGULILA MWAIPOPO is a Lecturer in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Her professional and research interests are in the areas of people and natural resources, and poverty, gender and equity issues. *Correspondence*: ny_lila@yahoo.com

AMANDINA LIHAMBA is the Director of Public Services at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Her professional and research interests are in the areas of performance studies, cultural communication, gender and equity issues in education. *Correspondence*: amandina@uccmail.co.tz

DELPHINE COSMAS NJEWELE is an Assistant Lecturer in the Department of Fine and Performing Arts in the College of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. She is currently undertaking a PhD study on the models and challenges of children's theatre in Africa. Her research interests are in the areas of drama and theatre in education. *Correspondence*: njewele@udsm.ac.tz

Downloaded from rci.sagepub.com at University of Dar es Salaam on May 23, 2016