

Academic Support Services in the Learning Environment for Students with Hearing Impairment in Selected Public Universities-Kenya

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Abstract

The struggle to integrate students with HI socially and academically is very challenging in the lecture halls where specialized academic support and access services are not commonly offered to students with HI in the universities. The purpose of this research study was to establish support services in the learning environment for students with hearing impairment. The research adopted a descriptive survey design whereby both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used. A pilot study was conducted to establish the validity and reliability of the research instruments. Data was then collected from lecturers, Dean of students' affairs, chairpersons of Departments that offer university common units and students with hearing impairments. The universities were selected due to the fact that they admit students with Special Needs; hence, they have rich information on the theme of the study. Target population was composed of three Deans of Students' Affairs, 15 chairpersons, 462 lecturers and 70 students with hearing impairments. On data analysis, the statistics were generated by means of statistical package of social sciences (SPSS) version 22.0, while qualitative data was analyzed through narrative analysis and thematic approach. The findings revealed that. selected public universities have inadequate resource materials for students with Hearing Impairments. Following these findings, the study recommended University Councils to avail bursaries for students with HI, and Higher Education Loans Board (HELB) to allocate more funds to students with hearing impairments pursuing higher education in public.

Keywords: University, Special needs, Hearing Impairment, Persons with Disabilities

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1. Introduction

According to the United Universal Declaration on Human Rights, all Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) have a right to education regardless of their handicap, ethnic backgrounds or social status. This implies removal of barriers that may hinder education progress to these students in an inclusive setting. This was also echoed by the World Conference Education for All (1990) held in Jomtien, Thailand; which emphasized diversification of Education to include all students with disabilities; further the Salamanca statement (UNESCO, 1994) reported great concern for students with disabilities being enabled to learn in a conducive environment. This includes adjustment of anything in the education sector that hindered imparting knowledge and skills to the students with disabilities. The call for inclusive educating has attracted enrolment of governments and interested groups to seek access to education for people with disabilities who are still unreached (UNESCO, 1994).

The Constitution of Kenya (2010) Chapter 4, Part 3, Section 54 (1) states that persons with disabilities should: be treated with dignity and respect and be addressed and referred to in a manner that is not demeaning; access educational institutions and facilities for persons with disabilities that are integrated to the extent compatible with the interest of the person with disability, to have reasonable access to all places, public transport and information; to use sign language, Braille or other appropriate means of communication and to access materials as well as devices to overcome constraints arising from the person's disability. Section 54(2) of the Constitution, 2010 provides that the state shall ensure the progressive implementation of the principle and that at least five percent of the members of the public in elective and appointive bodies are persons with disabilities.

Most international conventions made the world community to ensure highest policy and budgetary priority for adequate and appropriate, support provision to ensure effective participation of students with disabilities in the mainstream education setting (UNESCO, 1994). This includes the requirement by all institutions of learning to provide assistive devices and services, adaptation of the learning curricula and school infrastructure to enhance their effective participation and communication of these students with disabilities.

Research shows that hearing loss affects nearly twenty-eight (28) million people in the world. One (1) in every twenty-two (22) infants born in the United States has some degree of hearing impairment and one (1) in every one thousand (1000) infants has severe or profound hearing impairments (Hirer et al., 2007). The preference of hearing loss increases as people age. Persons above 65 years of age are approximately about eight (8) times more likely to have a hearing impairment than young adults aged 18-34 years. According to the USA Department of Education (2007), seventy-two thousand, three hundred and eighty-seven (72, 387) students

between the age of 6 and 21 were defined as having a hearing impairment and were receiving special education services. In 2019, there were about 2.3 million people between the ages of 18 and 34 living with disability. In addition, 25,000 of these people were enrolled in higher education institutions in the United States (Demographic Aspects of Hearing Impairment) (National Centre for Education Statistics, 1999). Worldwide, almost 650 million people live with disability. About a quarter of these persons are below 18 years (World Health Organization, 2011). Hearing impairment is experienced in all parts of the world although with varying degree of severity (World Health Organization, 2010).

Persons with disabilities can also be productive members of the society. In both developed and developing countries, promoting more inclusive societies for persons with disability requires improved access to both basic and tertiary education levels which is relevant and appropriate for employment suited to their skills, interest and inabilities (United Nations Economic and Socio Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2002). For this to happen adaptations are needed and thus physical environments especially at the universities should be accessible. There should be strong regional advocacy and the spread of barrier free design among policymakers and technical personnel responsible for construction of public facilities. They should aim towards reducing barriers in the built environment especially in the developing countries (United Nations Economic and Socio Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2002).

Educational achievement has great value to human beings and the society in which they belong. Many of the international conventions have prioritized support for mainstreaming Students with Hearing Impairment (UNESCO, 1994). Therefore, institutions should provide support mechanisms and assistive devices of learning to students with HI (Johnson, 2006). The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD, 2007) stipulates that the main goal of educating the students with HI is to give them same possibilities of participating in the society to adult life as other people without HI. Indeed, this is also in line with the mandate of the Kenya National Association for the Deaf (KNAD, 2009).

In Kenya, there are about 31 public universities. The students' admission criteria are highly competitive and students must attain high grades (aggregate C+ and above) to be admitted to the university irrespective of gender, disability, colour and religion (MOE, 2014). In many African countries, no research has been done on the challenges that students with hearing impairments encounter while undertaking their studies in universities and the influence of the challenges on the students' academic achievement.

The three public universities in Kenya namely; Maseno University, University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University, have created departments or directorates which are committed to ensuring that PWDs within their jurisdiction are taken care of. The three universities have strategic and vision plans of enhancing access for persons with disabilities to information and any other utilities accessible to persons without disabilities. These universities admit the largest number of students with disabilities in Kenya.

Despite admitting high numbers of students with special needs, most public universities in Kenya do not provide conducive or supportive environment required for effective participation of students with hearing impairments in academic activities; hence, posing adverse effects. Thus, students with hearing impairments take more time to complete their degree programs unlike their peers without disabilities (Wolanin, 2005).

2.0 Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design, utilizing different methodologies in data collection and analysis. The study was conducted at three selected public universities which comprised of Kenyatta University, University of Nairobi and Maseno University. The target population for this study was drawn from the three public universities which admit students with hearing impairments. Common University units are compulsory to all students including students with HI who are not exempted. The researcher intended to generate data from all the students with HI taking the University common units and who are in any year of academic study.

3.0 Results

3.1 Academic Support Services for Students with Hearing Impairment

The main objective of our research was to establish academic support services in the learning environment for students with HI. To investigate this, the study looked at facilities and equipment put in place for students with HI in the selected public universities.

3.1.1 Accommodation of Students with HI on Campus Hostels

We focused on the accommodation on campus hostels as a support service put in place by universities to enhance learning and achievement of students with HI. On campus hostels accommodation was of interest to the study as students were spared the challenges of off campus hostel accommodation. A questionnaire enquiring on the support services was administered to 70 students from the selected Public Universities. Their responses were as shown in the table 3.1

Table 3.1 Students Accommodation on Campus Hostels

University hostel	Frequency	%
Yes	55	78.6
No	15	21.4
TOTAL	70	100

The findings revealed that 55 (78.6%) were accommodated on campus hostels, however 15 (21.4%) were not accommodated on campus hostels. Thus, the universities have ensured that they offer accommodation to their students with HI. Universities ensure that they accommodate all the students with HI in campus hostels. The findings concur with a study carried out by Powel (2007) who carried out a comparison study on students with HI satisfaction with distance learning and on campus the findings revealed that students with HI on campus did better than those off campus or who commute due to inadequate accommodation at the university. When students are accommodated on campus hostels, it gives them ample time to study and ease the trouble on transport, time wasting and security. These results were triangulated with findings from interview guide administered on the three Deans of Students Affairs who indicated that most of the students with HI were accommodated in the university hostels. This is an indicator that Universities are mindful to offer accommodation to students with HI on university hostels.

3.1.2 Financial Support for Students with HI

The study also sought to find out whether students with HI received any financial support. The findings are indicated in the figure 3.1.

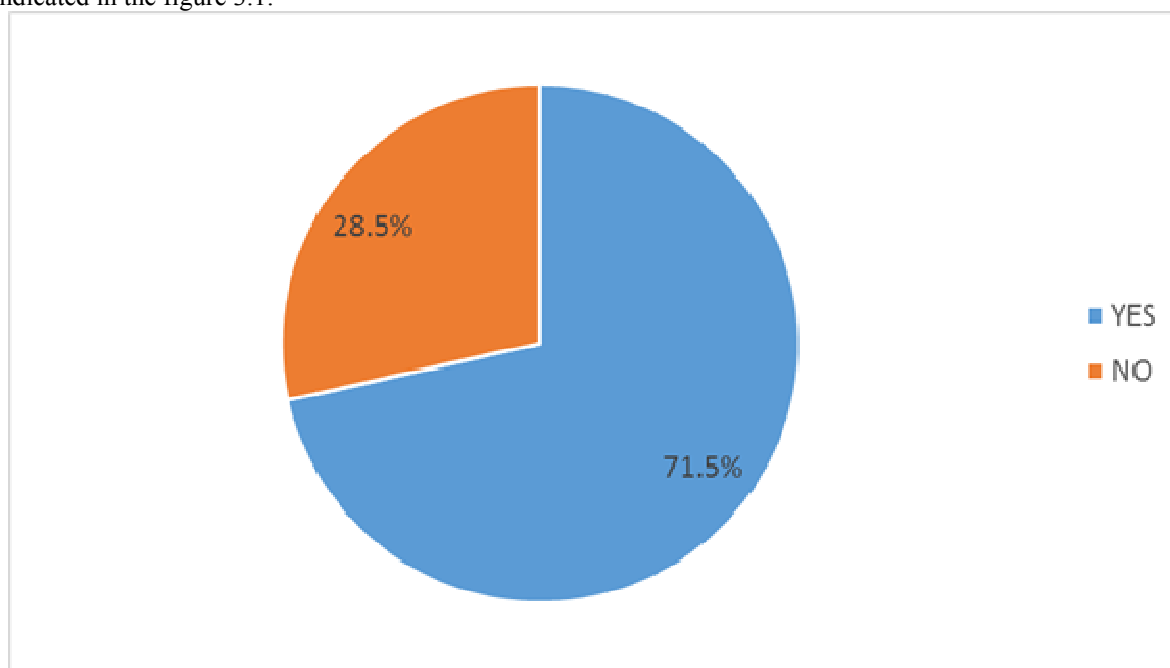


Figure 4.1: Financial Support for Students with HI

The findings revealed 50 (71.4%) of the student's response showed that they got support for their upkeep and tuition while 20(28.6%) did not. From the findings, there is a clear indication that universities ensure secure upkeep of these students with HI. Student with HI are entitled to equal treatment like other students in line with Basic Education Act (2003) and the Constitution of Kenya (2010), which outlines the need to increase access, enhance retention; improve quality and relevance of education in academic levels. Furthermore, the persons with disabilities Act (Rok, 2003) provides a comprehensive legal framework which outlaws all forms of discriminative treatment of persons with disabilities such as lack of access to education and training. It also provides for adaptation of infrastructure, socio-economic and environmental facilities to ensure a conducive environment for person with disabilities.

3.1.3 Other Support Services for Students with HI

Further, the study sought to establish whether the Deans of Students' Affairs offices had the service of the sign language interpreters since all Deans were not conversant with sign language. Some of the universities provided some sign language interpreters while others did it only on special occasions. This finding implies that some students with HI may lack means of access to instructions which disadvantages them in academic achievements.

The findings reveal that a large number of students received financial support and tuition at 37 (52.86%) while 33 (47.14%) did not receive. According to basic education Act of (2003) states that the maximum extent possible persons with disabilities should be provided with assistive devices, other equipment ,access to available

information, technical assistance to all institutions, associations and organizations concerned with the welfare, rehabilitation of persons with disabilities including those controlled and managed by the government, to make provision for assistance to students with disabilities in the form of scholarships, loan programmes, fee subsidies and the similar form of assistance in both public and private institutions according, to basic Education Act of (2003), provision for persons with disabilities.

Generally, we noted that there is lack of adequate accommodation in universities hostels for all students with HI, inadequate resource materials, inadequate support for tuition and upkeep; lack of hearing aids, regular students' poor attitude towards them, inadequate lecture hall participation, few/or no sign language interpreters. The study findings further revealed that majority of the lecturers felt and believed that inadequate instructional strategies, lack of policy guidelines, lack of familiarization with students with HI were some of the major factors influencing academic performance of students with HI at the selected public universities.

6.0 Recommendation

The study recommends that Public Universities Board of Management to ensure that they establish resource centers at universities which enroll students with HI. The study recommends that University Board Management have to be innovative enough to source for funds from NGOs and Business Organizations to procure adequate resource materials for resource centers required by students with HI. The study further recommends that student with HI have to be given university bursaries for needy students.

Findings for objective one of the study, established that universities have put some support services in place to increase learning and achievement for students with HI at selected public universities. The findings revealed that student's accommodation in campus hostels 55(78.6%) with only 15(21.4%) not offered accommodation in campus hostel. Similarly, financial support at 50(71.4%) of financial support further upkeep whereas 20(28.6%) did not get. This means that some other services are lacking. Dean of students' affairs responses, supported by findings of chairpersons of departments that offer university common units, lack of sign language interpretation services at their offices. Factors perceived by lecturers as the main problem are: lack of policy guidelines; inadequate instructional strategies.

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