Support Services for Students with Disabilities in Higher Education Institutions: A Case of the University of Dar- es -Salaam in Tanzania

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Abstract: **This study inspected the support services provided to students with disabilities (SWD) in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Tanzania, where a total of 173 respondents were involved in a descriptive study that was cross-sectional design. The respondents were categorized as follows; 33 SWD, including ten visually impaired, seven hearing impaired, seven physically impaired, five low vision, three Albino, and one speech impaired. Other respondents included 47 non-disabled students, 40 Dar-es-Salam University students' organization (DARUSO) leaders, 35 trainers, and 18 management personnel. The study revealed the support services provided to SWD as caretakers, health and psychological support, accommodation facilities available around the University, sign language interpreters, readers, leaders, loans, and other special treatment. However, the study reports on shortages of special education staff and transport facilities. The study recommends the improvement of infrastructures accessible to SWD and the increase of more permanent committed special education educators and other specially trained supporting staff.**

Keywords: **Support Services, Students with Disabilities, Higher Education Institutions, an Exploration into the Support Services**

I. INTRODUCTION

Delivering assistive technology and other supporting services for SWD in HEIs has drawn attention both nationally and internationally to strengthen learning environments for physically and other challenged learners. Several nations have formulated policies and regulations to support the implementation in HEIs. In Thailand, for instance, the Thai Ministry of Education issued regulations for delivering assistive technology and related services for SWD. These regulations have encouraged equality and the opportunity for these learners to learn smoothly (Lersilp & Lersilp, 2017). Most learners with disabilities in tertiary institutions are conscious of their rights to obtain assistive technology and education services for teaching and learning. However, such consciousness is not the only positive factor that encourages them to receive full services (OHEC, 2004).

The National Higher Education Policy (The United Republic of Tanzania, 2007) has considered inclusive education and directed the HEIs to design and build the infrastructures that are accessible by SWD and provide the necessary facilities, loans, and support services to enhance their participation. However, the National Disability Act of 2010 has the purpose of making provisions for health care, social support, accessibility, rehabilitation, education, and vocational training, communication, employment or work protection and promotion of basic rights for people with disabilities, and providing for related matters (Tanzania, 2010, p. 5).

The University of Dar-es-Salaam (UDSM) established the department of special education during the academic year 1978-1979 whereby only visually impaired students were enrolled in that academic year. Furthermore, in the 1980s, the unit received students with other impairments such as albinism, physical impairment, and hearing impairment (Mwaipopo *et al*., 2011). Their number increased to 238 students in the academic year 2010-2011. The unit had two sign language interpreters, three trained transcribers, and non-trained part-time readers and note-takers. The Dar es Salaam College of Education (DUCE)-a constituent college of UDSM, established a special unit in 2005 as a response to the call to support SWD (DUCE, 2018). In the academic year 2019-2020, the University supported a total of 160 SWD, see Table 4**.**

Lack of information on support services for SWD in tertiary institutions has become a constant theme in several studies in developing countries. Madriaga (2007) revealed that it was not always clear to physicians and other challenged students as to who were the responsible people to analyze their needs. It was also not clear which facilities and entitlements (or rights) were available to them. This involved the legal notion of reasonable accommodation. In that way, students with disabilities not only experience stress and anxiety but also have difficulties adapting to life and study situations at large.

Although Tanzania's tertiary institutions have increased enrolments of SWD, many limitations hinder them from joining and persisting in their learning environment. "These barriers include poor infrastructure, transport, school fees, stigma, inadequately trained teachers and limited assistive devices needed in schools (CCBRT, 2017).

The main objective of this study was to explore the support services provided to SWD in HEIs in Tanzania. The study focused at:

1. Determining the SWD support services available at UDSM.

2. Inspecting the extent to which university infrastructures and facilities support the SWD at UDSM.
3. Identifying the challenges related to supporting services provided to SWD in HEIs in Tanzania

Research Questions

1. What are the support services provided to SWD at UDSM?
2. To what extent do University infrastructures and facilities support the SWD at UDSM?
3. What are the challenges related to supporting services provided to SWD in HEIs in Tanzania?

II. METHODOLOGY

Study design

The study was descriptive because it intended to provide concrete answers regarding the availability of support services offered to SWD in HEIs in Tanzania. Only UDSM was selected as a case study among all HEIs. The study used both primary and secondary data collection methods to collect data from individuals, observations, and documents. The study was guided by a qualitative approach and enhanced by a quantitative approach wherever needed

Study site

The target was HEIs, UDSM in particular since it is the oldest higher learning institution in Tanzania, rich in information for the study, and accessible.

Target population

The study involved a total of 173 respondents including students with and without disabilities, trainers, College management and DARUSO leaders who had information over the support services available at UDSM.

Sample size and sampling procedures

Purposively and randomly sampling methods were employed in the selection of the respondents. The respondents included 18 management staff who manage the special education unit and all other supporters, thirty-five (35) trainers, forty (40) DARUSO leaders, 33 SWD and 47 students without disabilities. Of all 33 SWD ten(10) were visually impaired, five(5) low vision, seven(7) hearing impaired, three(3) Albino, seven(7) Physically impaired, and one(1) speech impaired.

The instruments

The study used the questionnaire to collect data from students and trainers; the interview was scheduled for management leaders; Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was used to collect data from DARUSO leaders; observation was used to collect data over the availability of supporting facilities around UDSM, and Documentary review was done by tracking and reviewing various documents including students By-laws, an inventory of available assistive technology for SWD,

students' accommodation guidelines, and other documents related to support services and SWD at UDSM.

Data analysis

Data obtained from respondents were analyzed quantitatively using Microsoft Excel 2010 and qualitative data was analyzed relying on their content.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents characteristics

The respondents' characteristics were based on gender, years of study, and working experience. In this study, information was collected from 173 respondents whereby; 27.2% were students without disability, 23.1% DARUSO leaders, 20.2% trainers, 19.1% SWD and 10.4% management Officials. Table 1 demonstrates the results**.**

Table 1: Respondents Profile

S/n	Respondents				
	Category	Male	Female	Total	Frequency
1	Management	9	9	18	10.4%
2	SWD	15	18	33	19.1%
3	Students	24	23	47	27.2%
4	Trainers	18	17	35	20.2%
5	DARUSO leaders	22	18	40	23.1%
	Total	88	85	173	100.0%

Source: Field data, 2020

Gender analysis

Respondents were asked to mention their gender to assist the researcher in examining features of the population of respondents. Table 1 presents (51%) male respondents and (49%) female respondents. There was a slight difference between the number of male participants and female participants, indicating that, gender issues were considered seriously during data collection.

Working experience

The study revealed the working experience of UDSM staff respondents whereby (46%) had working experience below 5 years, (39%) had working experience between 6-10 years, (15%) had working experience between 10-15 years and there were no respondents with experience of more than 16 years. This was an expression that most respondents had adequate experience with the institution enough to provide relevant information to the study.
Table 2 illustrates the result.

Table 2: Working Experience of the Respondents

Item	Assessment Working experience	Responses
Working experience of respondents	Below 5 years	46%
	Between 6-10 years	39%
	Between 10-15 years	15%
	More than 16 years	0%

Source: Field data, 2020

Years of study

Respondents, especially students, were asked to indicate their year of study and the result showed that (45%) of respondents were in 2-3 years, (37%) below 2 years, (18%) of respondents within 3-4 years and there were no respondents with more than 4 years. This showed that the researcher considered presentations from different years of study, which has made information gathered bias-free**.** Table 3 shows the result.

Table 3: Year of Study of Respondents

	Assessment of years of study	Responses
Years of study of respondents	Below 2 years	37%
	2-3 years	45%
	3-4 years	18%
	More than 4 years	0%

Source: Field data, 2020

Awareness of the Existence of SWD at UDSM

Respondents were asked whether they were aware of the existence of SWD in the institution and the "education for all" policy. All of them were aware hence it was the right case study area. Figure 1 illustrates the results. DFID (2012) states education for all as the right to every person without considering his/her condition. It included creating a favourable environment for SWD to study and cope with institutional life. Most of the respondents said,

Students with disabilities are enrolled here because it is right for all people to get an education [Resp 1].

Our university is a non-discriminatory institution. That is why it accepts SWD [Resp 2].

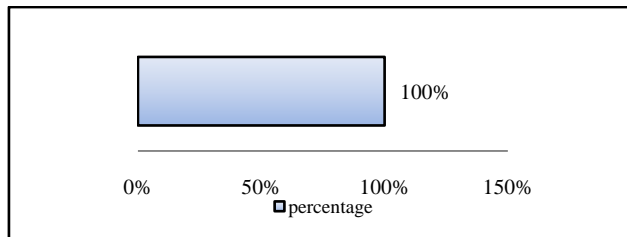The university enrolls both abled and SWD to support each other [Resp 3].

Figure 1: Awareness of the Existence of SWD at UDSM

Source: Field data, 2020.

A. Support Services Provided to Students with Disabilities Enrolled at UDSM.

In the case of SWD support at UDSM, the respondents were required to report on available support services. The support services that were reported included; special attention and care, leaders, psychological support, academic support such as readers, note-takers, large fonts and sign language interpreters. Also infrastructure accessibility, for example; elevators, flat washrooms and transport facilities, financial support and primary health care. Table 4 shows the type of disability and support services provided. Here are some comments from management personnel,

After admission to our institute, the SWD is accommodated to the ground floor because it is easily reachable and has no stairs. Also, they are assigned with leaders to help them [Resp 1].

The government cannot fail to accommodate SWD because they are few in Tanzania when compared to the abled population, their needs and services required are always prioritized[Resp 2].

The University of Dar-es-Salaam student accommodation Policy of 2015, states about giving priority to accommodate students with health problems but did not state about accommodating SWD. However, the SWD accommodations had been prioritized in UDSM students By-laws of 2017. To support this finding Rao (2015) in his study stressed that SWD in learning institutions had been documented in admissions, estates, and buildings and strategic plans. These documents provide information on how the institution delivered services to SWD to ease their learning process.

Table 4: Type of Disability and Support Services Provided

S/n	Type of disability	Number of students enrolled academic year (2019-2020)	Support services provided
1.	Visual impaired	34	note taker, readers, leaders, Primary health care, special attention, students loans, accommodation, psychological support
2.	Low vision	50	Primary health care, special attention, students loans, accommodation, psychological support, Large font.
3.	Hearing-impaired	34	Readers and note-takers, sign language interpreters, psychological support, Primary health care, special attention, students loans, accommodation,
4.	Speech impaired	01	verbal cues example repetition, extra time Primary health care, special attention, students loans, accommodation, psychological support
5.	Physical impaired	32	Primary health care, special attention, students loans, accommodation, leaders, psychological support, transport
6.	Albinism	06	Primary health care, special attention, students loans, accommodation, psychological support

7.	Challenges and other special needs.	03	Primary health care, special attention, students loans, accommodation, psychological support
	Total	160	

Source: Field data 2020

The extent to which University Infrastructures and Facilities Support the SWD

When asked the extent to which university infrastructures and facilities support the SWD, (46%) of respondents said it was satisfactory supportive (40%) of respondents said good, 12% of respondents said very good, 2% of respondents said poor and non-replied excellent. In one discussion, the following were responses,

Sometimes I miss the sessions because the Hostel is located far from lecture rooms, and there is no transport [Resp 1].

The washroom in some of the lecture rooms, especially the old ones are not inclusively hence I have to move to another new block with supportive washrooms [Resp 2].

Based on the data above, it was concluded that infrastructures and facilities available support the SWD was available though there were some improvements to be done to make sure that they were in such a way that they met the needs of the SWD. Table 5 illustrates the result. To support this finding Kabuta (2014) pointed distance from one lecture room to cafeteria, to remote hostels as one of the physical barriers to SWD.

Table 5: Extent by which University Infrastructures and Facilities Support the SWD

Item	Level of satisfaction	Responses
How do you rate University infrastructure to support SWD?	Excellent	0%
	Very good	12%
	Good	40%
	Satisfactory	46%
	Poor	2%

Source: Field data, 2020

B. Challenges Related to the Support Services Provided to SWD in Higher education institutions in Tanzania

1) Lack of enough assistance and cooperation:

Providing support and attention to SWD was essential for breaking social and intellectual barriers. The study's findings revealed that 51% of respondents argued that the challenge facing SWD at the institution was the lack of enough assistance due to insufficient special supporting staff and poor cooperation. Some of the abled students thought that SWD was a burden and they isolated them. Also, there was a lack of full responsibility on the side of lectures as they moved from place to place while facilitating which made it difficult for proper recording of the lesson and lack of understanding for the deaf and hearing-impaired since they need to look at the

facial expression and read mouth movements. Also during lecturing, other students were making noises that interrupted recording. Some of the respondents said,

I sometimes feel like getting out during lectures because I am tired of hearing the lecturer demonstrating using general terms as 'it is like this', 'do you see this and that?' without mentioning/describing the terms /item he is referring to. He forgot that the class is inclusive and some of us do not understand because we cannot see [Resp 1].

It is difficult to read the facial expressions and mouth movements because the lecturer is not stationary he keeps on moving from place to place during facilitating [Resp 2].

Some classmates fear and isolate her thinking that she is a burden to them [Resp 3].

To support this finding, Bolingo (2019) stressed that the negative attitude towards treatment and consideration of SWD from the society and the students themselves has been pointed as a challenge towards creating a favorable environment for SWD.

2) Inadequate supportive infrastructures:

Isolation of some classes made it difficult for SWD like physically and visually impaired to catch up the lecture rooms on time as outlined by 49% of respondents. Most of the infrastructures were old and were not designed inclusively. This example was revealed at DUCE. The buildings had stairs that made it difficult for SWD especially the physically and visually impaired to reach classes, washrooms, and hostels. Respondents replied,

The lecture rooms are located far from the hostel. This takes me a long time to reach the classes [Resp 1].

Some of the lecture rooms are upstairs. For example, this old building has no lift so it is difficult to reach class with my crutches [Resp 2].

They brought us the sports equipment but there is no playground designed to play those games [Resp 3].

To support this finding, Ngonyani and Mnyanyi (2021) in their study, added challenges facing SWD as the absence of sufficient supportive infrastructures and distant located buildings that limited SWDs to move around the University surroundings.

C. Overwhelming the Challenges

1) Improvement of infrastructure facilities:

The construction of user-friendly infrastructures could make the everyday lives of the SWD enjoyable. However, the research revealed that 37% of respondents said, among the measures to improve learning processes to SWD were to establish conducive infrastructure facilities. These involved building special toilets for SWD, transport for going to and from remote hostels and lecture rooms. Also, new lecture halls and hostels should be constructed to accommodate the needs

of SWD, especially putting slants or ramped paths for the wheelchairs by physically impaired and visually impaired instead of stairs. Here are some of the responses,

In all washrooms there must be special seats for the disabled, they should be used with respect and cleaned all the time to avoid dirty, for I am crawling [Resp 1].

All new structures that are planned or under construction must be user-friendly to SWD [Resp 2].

I ask the University to add more tricycles because the available ones are not adequate [Resp 3].

Rao (2015) suggested that HEIs needed to make sure that the lecturer rooms, labs and washrooms were arranged in such a way that they could accommodate the SWD, especially those with mobility needs. Physical support included landscapes of buildings, buildings, and lecturer room access. Other services such as lift and elevators system, restrooms as well as parking facilities within a University should be accessible. Physical support was one of the significant support services for these students as per their diverse needs.

2) Establish good cooperation:

Assisting SWD by abled ones could improve the learning process among SWD. About 41% of respondents recommended that abled students should not isolate SWD since they could not do everything on their own. Also, there should be no disruptions in classes such as noise that could interfere with the recording session. All discriminative behaviors should be avoided and help to SWD should be given accordingly. Ernst and Moye (2013), noted numerous difficulties encountered by students in primary education, including a student's feelings of social isolation. They also discovered that students with specific at-risk indicators (such as a disability, economic difficulty and the second language English speaker) were more likely to experience difficulties. Here are the responses,

Other students must not think that the SWD are a burden to them; we have one who has a great contribution to our study group [Resp 1].

The class should be quiet to avoid interference during recording processes [Resp 2].

Society should concentrate on matters pertaining the SWD, instead of wasting time discriminating against them [Resp 3].

During the lesson, I always call their names to make sure that they participate effectively especially when I ask questions and they should respond in a caring manner [Resp 4].

To manage the feelings of isolation, Ernst & Moye (2013) proposed the introduction of technology-based education classrooms that may help lessen and cure these problems. These classrooms would offer the opportunity to learn communication and socialization skills in a controlled environment that the students were familiar with, which may not be the case in normal classrooms. It was observed that students with at-risk factors were more likely to have their emotional needs met and an increased social interaction when exposed to technology integration in the classroom.

3) Special treatment:

It was suggested by 13% of respondents that SWD should be given special treatment such as sign language interpreters, note-takers, leaders to lead them, primary emergency health care and provided with necessary AT, needed to enable them to learn. Also, lectures must recognise the presence of SWD in classes and should give them the special attention they need. Here are some responses,

The video or image type notes must be incorporated with a voice to describe them so that we visually impaired can understand [Resp1].

By any means, trainers must not forget that his/her class is inclusive; he should know all SWD and the needs for each example the hearing impaired reads facial expressions and mouth movements [Resp 2].

We normally give them extra time during assignments, homework and exams especially those who use Perkins Braille or stylus because they have low speed compared to normal vision students [Resp 3].

Tcheimegni (2018), underlined the recognition of the child's special needs arising from an impairment that must be met through special support services and attention. He added that the roles of educational institutions and attitudes of support providers were crucial in inclusion, and there was the necessity of inclusive education policy to guide practical inclusive training.

4) Curriculum development should consider SWD:

The needs for SWD should be considered when crafting curriculums. About 9% of respondents said, all assessments, teaching activities, learning activities, teaching and learning resources and the means of assessment during the development of curriculum should not exclude SWD so that they could also become competent at the end.

Here are some answers,

Inclusive education in Tanzania cannot be achieved if the contents of SWD are not incorporated in the curriculum [Resp 1].

"All curriculums for teacher training colleges regardless a special education training college or not should include matters related to SWD [Resp 2].

To support this fact, Rao (2015) suggested that HEIs should not only be made changes to the physical environment in which teaching and learning took place but also to how the higher education curriculum was organized, delivered and

assessed. All these processes should be done inclusively.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study examined the support services provided to SWD in HEIs in Tanzania. The results obtained from the data gathered and analyzed in this study indicated the availability of support services offered to the SWD such as caretakers, health and psychological support, accommodation facilities which were available around the University, special education staffs such as sign language interpreters for the deaf and hearing impaired, readers and leaders for visually impaired, loans, assistive devices and other special treatments. It was further revealed that the University infrastructure such as specially prepared walkways (slants) that facilitated easy movement and washrooms for the SWD was mostly available in new buildings

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study provides the following recommendations.

To Government of the united republic of Tanzania:

- Establishment of more implementable policies that will put forward the matters and concerns of the SWD in HEIs in Tanzania
- Employ more permanent special education trainers and professionals in all HEIs

To Higher education institutions in Tanzania:

- The long time strategic planning of the Universities that involves infrastructures and all developmental and performance priorities should consider SWD
- There should be more training, seminars, and workshops for special education staff and other trainers to ensure collaboration among various HEIs that will develop basic skills in providing mutual supporting services for the SWD

Future research:

- Further studies should be done on the disability, inclusion and related policies and how they are implemented in higher education institutions in Tanzania

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