



# Listening to Students: The Experiences of Disabled Students of Learning in a Selected University in Zimbabwe

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**Abstract:** *Disability is one of the most neglected forms of diversity, which usually results in the different forms of discrimination at community level. Nonetheless, more institutions of higher education are making an effort toward creating more inclusive settings for the students and staff. This study examined the lived experiences of the students with disabilities in an institution of higher education in Zimbabwe. Student experiences and disability are the main themes in this study. This study is phenomenological research that was carried out with a questionnaire survey which was conducted among seven participants. This was triangulated by interviews that involved two participants. Overall results showed that physical disability is the most prevalent amongst the students in the institution considered for the study. Moreover, the disabled students faced challenges at home and in their life at university, which affected them psychologically. In addition, while the students were conscious of the existing international and national protocols that promote their welfare, they were not well aware of those embedded within their university policies. Results also reveal that the disabled students suffered socially from stigma and negligence from their able-bodied counterparts and staff. Further, they had limited access to some of the physical structures that lacked ramps and lifts. To promote full participation of the disabled students in academic life, the institution is expected to formulate and implement a binding disability policy that promotes diversity and inclusive education. In addition, infrastructure, especially the old structures need to be refurbished with the disabled in mind.*

**Keywords:** Disability, Students, Inclusive education, lived experiences, challenges

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## 1. Introduction

This study examines the experiences of the disabled students involved in higher education, but with emphasis on a university in Zimbabwe. Higher education is perceived a prerequisite to a better future, since employment opportunities increase for those with education than those without (Magnus, 2006). As a result, personal experiences of the disabled amongst the tertiary students is imperative if they are to compete. Generally, students with disability have been observed to face persistent barriers towards enjoying their basic human rights needs with the inclusion of access to education (Ben-David & Nel, 2013). This is juxtaposed

to the country being signatory to a number of international conventions and agreements that promote inclusive education that also cover the disabled. These include the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, among others (Dube & Baleni, 2022). This study gives credence to Goal number 4 which focuses on inclusive education. Albeit policies and frameworks that are in place, history reveals that individual with disabilities have struggled in society against prejudices, stigma and discrimination. Consequently, they encounter socially reproduced attitudinal and environmental challenges that prevent them from free participation in

daily activities that are enjoyed by their counterparts (Emil & Aytas, 2020). Challenges faced by students with disabilities towards accessing inclusive education are socio-economic related and include inadequate learning centres, general family poverty and HIV and AIDS-related barriers (Prinsloo, 2001). In addition, WHO (2011) postulates that, despite the magnitude of the challenge, awareness and scientific information on disability lack.

Challenges that are faced by the disabled are historic. For instance, the ancient Greek philosopher, Plato, suggested that individuals with incurable diseases, had physical injuries or were impaired, were not supposed to be administered to medical treatment, but allowed to die through passive euthanasia and exposure (Keifer, 2014). Over the years disability was viewed by society with superstition, rejection and fear and was associated with shame, witchcraft and evil (Barnes, 1991). The result should have been perennial stigma against the disabled and the non-disclosure attitude of the disabled, as a way of protecting themselves, especially during the period when they physically harmed. Perspectives towards the disabled might have continued to change over a protracted period of time though.

Another dynamic shows that certain individuals, families and communities have remained traditional and their treatment and perspective of the disabled have not changed (Wa Munyi, 2012). In such contexts, it has also been observed that females have largely been on the receiving end hence it is common for a disabled women to be hidden from society and deprived of benefiting from stretched resources (Atshan, 1997; Maruzani & Mapuranga, 2016). While a gender approach to disability and its impact on education calls for further research, Choruma (2006)'s study suggested that younger disabled girls and women attained lower educational outcomes compared to men. Moreover, Choruma postulated that, in Zimbabwe, 34 percent of disabled girls, compared to 22 percent amongst the male counterparts, never attend school.

By the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is estimated that more than 600 million people, nearly 10 percent of the world population, had some sort of disability (Quinn et al, 2002). Later statistics put said that more than one billion people or 15 percent of the world's population had disability globally close to 20 years after the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Muranda-Kaseke & Mbawuya, 2021). Further, the World Health Organisation (2011)'s statistics across 59 countries revealed that a majority of people with disability were located in developing countries, with vulnerable groups of females and those above 60 years dominating. Despite the efficacy of the figures, Muranda-Kaseke et al (2021) highlight that figures from developing countries, such as Malawi, Lesotho, Mozambique and Zimbabwe among others, need more factoring.

## 2. Literature Review

This part covers the literature pertaining to the global experiences in dealing with disability in higher education.

### 2.1 Disability amongst Students in Developed Countries

While disabled students in higher educational institutions in the developed countries faced challenges similar to elsewhere, much of the concern in the 1990s was over the lack of the nature of the barriers they encountered in their educational environment (Paul, 2000; Baron, Phillips & Stalker, 1996). In addition, the previous studies were accused of lacking the lived experiences of the disabled students (Hurst, 1996). Another challenge was a result of small numbers of between 6 and 22 students with disability that were involved in reliving their experiences through in-depth investigative studies (Baron et al, 1996; Holloway, 2001). The efficacies of students with disability in higher education reliving their experiences include them highlighting the physical (Jayram & Scullion, 2000) and hidden (Gaze, 2000) barriers that they would have encountered.

Fuller, Healey and Bradley (2006)'s findings in a study that covered lived experiences of disabled students in higher education in Austria, Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States revealed some of the challenges faced in developed countries. They were largely related to academics and included lethargic class attendance and struggles with dissertation, concentration, confidence, note taking, participation and completion of tasks. Moreover, the same disabled students noticeably struggled with coursework and examinations, especially those that required essays, but were relatively comfortable with multiple choice and oral presentations (Fuller et al, 2006). As with the other times, they faced difficulties due to tiredness, lack of concentration, structuring and time taken.

In the United Kingdom, despite being protected by part IV of the Disability Discrimination Act of 2002, hence anticipation of reasonable adjustments to provide the disabled access to adaptive technology (Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012) and adjustment to the learning, teaching and assessment processes (Redpath et al, 2013), the disabled students in higher learning remained apprehensive due to fear of stigma. The findings are also synonymous with Vickerman and Blundell (2010)'s, which confirmed that students feared stigma hence could not reveal their disability before enrolment as stipulated by law. In the context, they faced barriers, such as unfriendly physical structures, including rooms, accommodation, library and support services, which resulted in their poor performance, compared to their able bodied counterparts. Though policy frameworks to cushion the disabled students in institutions of higher

education are on paper in the developing countries, there is evidence that a lot still needs to be done if the aforementioned barriers are to be addressed.

## 2.2 Experiences of the Disabled African Students in Higher Education

Study reveals that the global number of disabled students has been on the increase parallel to the upward demographic changes (Allen & Seaman, 2014). Existing evidence in the likes of Ghana though suggest that tertiary experiences of students with disability remains unexplored. What is clear though is the fact that disability in the West African country is associated with magical powers, evil and sorcery, despite the existence of a parliamentary enactment which sought to protect individuals with disability (Naami & Hayashi, 2012). In addition, in 2007, Ghana also adopted the UN General Assembly's Convention of Persons with Disability of 2006, but many human rights activists and policymakers were concerned about the country's lethargic implementation of the acts meant to protect the disabled (Sossou & Yogtigba, 2016). Moreover, a majority of tertiary institutions in Ghana were still unaware of the existing legislations and policies that were meant to promote the position of the disabled (Gavu, Tudzi & Shani, 2015). Other additional barriers that work against the 2.5 million disabled persons in Ghana, including tertiary students, are poor communication, lack of appropriate policies, inadequate healthcare professionals and lack of coordinated care (Agyekum, 2021). Agyekum's findings in Ghana produced mixed results, for instance, the participants confirmed that they could access the library and use the computer laboratory, access loans, benefitted from the on-campus stress management programme, participate in lectures, while the instructors provided notes and hand-outs and could share knowledge, information and ideas with peers in groups. On the other hand, the respondents revealed that they also suffered from forms of scolding, stigma and being yelled at amongst other negatives. Additionally, some of the respondents averred that the library, computer laboratories, some lecture halls and administrative offices were not user-friendly for the disabled.

As found elsewhere, Lesotho's Higher Education Policy via section 8.3.5.2 (c) commits itself to "...monitor the efforts of HE institutions, both public and private, to accommodate students with disabilities" (Mosia & Phasha, 2020: 16). However, disabled students in Lesotho face challenges from the period of enrolment, hence there might be deliberate avoidance to recruit them into the tertiary institutions. For example, a study in 2011 highlighted that only two higher education institutions out of 13 registered with the Council on Higher Education had enrolled a total of 10 or 0.02 percent of students with disability (CHE, 2012). Mosia and Phasha (2017)'s study revealed that the disabled students enrolled in higher education in Lesotho struggled to

access teaching and learning resources, information and communication technology resources, including assistive gadgets. In addition, they could not access programmes in some faculties, due to assumed weaknesses (Matlosa & Matobo, 2007). In this vein, for instance, the visually impaired students could only enrol into programmes such as law, humanities and education, but not mathematics nor statistics, since the institutions lacked resources for the latter programmes (Mosia & Phasha, 2017). In the study they carried at the National University of Lesotho, Mosia and Phasha found out that, disabled students had challenges with infrastructure, since some of the lecture halls were too far apart; there was also lack of paving, furniture was unsuitable, lecturers were unsupportive and ablution facilities were made for able bodied students.

The 1996 revised Disabled Persons Act of Zimbabwe postulated that a disabled person is "A person with physical, mental or sensory disability, including as visual, hearing or speech functional disability, which gives rise to physical, cultural or social barriers inhibiting him from participating at an equal level with other members of society in activities, undertakings or fields of employment that are open to other members of society" (Chataika, 2007). While the definition might have been medically induced and meant for the war veterans and does not mention of students, Chataika's study, like elsewhere in studies carried out in Africa, critically lays part of the main challenges facing the disabled on culture. Accordingly, the terms used, such as "chirema" (ChiShona for a disabled person) and "isilema" (IsiNdebele for a disabled person), reveal how the group is belittled, demeaned and loathed (Chataika, 2007). While perception of the disabled might have changed in Zimbabwe, a few beliefs linger, including that it is caused by unhappy ancestors and/or by bewitchment (Kisanji, 1995). As a result, rituals and appeasing ceremonies may be required of the family (Peters & Chimedza, 2000). In addition, disability was also associated with myths in Zimbabwe. For example, there was a belief that, whoever laughed at a disabled person, would result in the transfer of the disability to the one who laughed and the same could said of how pregnant women were not supposed to associate with the disabled persons, as this would result in the birthing of a disabled child (Mpofu, 2000). This has led to proverbs, such as "seka urema wafa" (ChiShona on why one should not laugh on the disabled).

In Zimbabwe, the existing inclusive and education supportive position mostly focuses on disability and not on the barriers that are experienced by the students (Sithole & Mafa, 2017). As a result, there is no consensus on the meaning of inclusive education at tertiary level, hence lack of a comprehensive inclusive policy framework. This suggests for a holistic approach that include identifying and eliminating factors that preclude student accessibility to formal education if tertiary institutions are to speak with the same voice. While the

number of state and private universities have been on the increase in Zimbabwe, Chataika (2010)'s findings revealed that a number of them did not have Disability Resource Centres.

Majoko (2018)'s findings from a Zimbabwe university revealed some of the barriers faced in dealing with the disabled. For instance, some of the lecturers were not trained on how to deal with the minority group and when they gave assignments, they did not distinguish the group and where they did, the disabled felt they were being stigmatised. In other terms, the disabled felt neglected, but they also had a challenge with being considered for special treatment. Another identified challenge pertained to the ever-increasing numbers of the disabled students in tertiary education, which made it difficult for the lecturers to attend to the individual needs of the disabled (Majoko, 2018). Critically, the study also found out that a majority of the lecturers did not give hand outs nor notes that benefitted the disabled students, the students lacked assistive devices, and they had fear of stigmatisation for insisting on certain special provisions and being pitied. The study also showed that certain institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe provided necessities for the registered disabled including easier way to register for the semester, free food and accommodation, technological devices, transport, braille machine, computers and printing facilities and transcription of the braille and extended time for assignment submission and sitting for the examinations. The same can also be said of the physical infrastructure, whereby, there was provision of paved routes, the rails and ramps and user-friendly lecture rooms and toilets.

The Zimbabwe context can be defined as a mixed bag, whereby, the higher learning institutions are at different levels of addressing issues that affect the disabled, be it academically (or instructionally) or physically or administratively. According to Muranda-Kaseke and Mbawuya (2021), the higher education sector via the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, still needs to institutionalise policy and legal frameworks that promote inclusive education at a faster pace, if the barriers faced by the disabled are going to be addressed.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What forms of disability are prevalent amongst the students in the University under study?
2. How has the institution under study responded to the welfare of the disabled students in relation to the existing frameworks for the disabled?
3. What are the challenges faced by the disabled students at the institution under study?
4. How can the current position of the disabled students in higher education be strengthened?

### **2.3 Theoretical Perspective on Disability**

This study adopted the social model, which reveals that disability is a socially constructed occurrence

(Henderson & Bryan, 2004). Accordingly, Purtell (2013) avers that disabled people are "disabled" by the society that they live, as well as by societal attitudes and structures. This is also echoed by Mirabito et al (2016), who postulate that disability is a social construct and oppression, whereby the disabled's participation in education and socio-economic are protractedly hindered. In similar fashion, Dube et al (2021) proffer that the social model is conscientised by policy and system factors which focuses on discriminatory policies that segregate the disabled students from participating in education; social and community factors which involve communal stigma and negative attitude of the family towards children with disability hence depriving them of accessing education; school environment which suggests that children with disability face discrimination and stigma, not because of impairment, but the environment, including the one involved in education. Alternatively, the social model focuses on how the barriers that hinder the disabled people's participation can be remedied (Pfeiffer, 2003). This study grappled with experiences of the disabled students in the setting of an institution of higher education in Zimbabwe.

### **2.4 Conceptual Framework**

A number of titles, some of which border on derogation, have been used by the non-disabled to refer to the disabled, including "handicapped," "crippled" and "invalid" (Borsay, 2005). This perspective of the disabled was found across the different countries and global communities and Zimbabwe is not exceptional. In the Zimbabwe context, a disabled person was often referred to as "chirema" (Chataika, 2007), which has a negative overtone for someone who is seriously unable to do anything. It was with this prevailing challenge that the World Health Organisation (2014)'s definition changed the tone by referring to disability as any restriction to perform certain activities as a result of impairment.

Staub and Peck (1995) aver that inclusive education emphasises on full-time placement of children that have mild, moderate and severe disabilities in the regular classrooms. In addition, inclusive education might be most ideal towards tackling the challenges face by the disabled students (Mahanya, 2016). The general tendency by the late 1980s was discrimination of disabled students, who were enrolled into separate schools and special education globally (Ballard & Dymond, 2016). An earlier observation in a study related to discrimination of the disabled student was also noted by the likes of Chataika (2007), who asserted that they were still treated as "other." It was only from around 2010 that most countries drifted from deep discrimination against the disabled students hence change from them being referred to as "disabled," to "differently abled" (Majome, 2017).

The United Nations (2006) postulates that some of the characteristics of human rights include their universality and inherence to all human beings and their promotion of human dignity, irrespective of race, sex, colour, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, language, ethnic or social origin, disability, or any distinguishing characteristic. The international institution further asserts that, since they are acceptable to all states, their application is equal and indiscriminately to every person and they are the same for everyone in any place. Bourdillon (2000) opines that, due to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, legally, the rights of every child should apply, irrespective of abilities. Consequently, inclusive education should be understood as a human right approach to all education hence no one should be discriminated (Mahanya, 2016). It is with this in mind that Majome (2017) argues that Zimbabwe's legal provisions and human rights thrusts are married to inclusive education without the consideration of abilities.

### 3. Methodology

This case study is qualitative in nature, since it explored and sought to understand individual's experiences, opinions and feelings, as well as the interpretation of their actions (Denzin, 1989). The efficacy of case study include exploring a phenomenon within a particular environment through various sources of data (Baxter & Jack, 2010). As a result, a phenomenon can be viewed from a number of angles. The case study and qualitative approaches were appropriate in an endeavour to appropriately capture the everyday life experiences of students with disability in a higher education institution (Bryman, 2012). Due to lack of immediate data pertaining to students with disability in the institution, snowball sampling was used to reach potential participants. Through this, the researchers were able to reach their network.

A total of nine students with different types of disability agreed to participate in the study. Out of these, three were female. All the participants were between the ages between 20 and 30 years. Six participants were single and three were single parents. Of the nine participants, seven were in the part time study programmes. The participants had physical and impairment types of disabilities.

Ethics was ensured through providing limited individual demographic information of the respondents. Given their small numbers, sharing of personal information may break the participants' anonymity. Resultantly, the participants were assured that identity would not be revealed, while their confidentiality and anonymity were secured. The intentions of raising the voice of the disabled students meant that the data they provided is detailed.

In an attempt to understand the experiences of students with disability in an institution of higher learning,

collected data was analysed using the interpretative phenomenological analysis. The interpretative phenomenological analysis explores how people ascribe meaning to their experiences as they interact with specific environments (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). Smith and Osborn (2008) aver that the approach uniquely relies on a specific context rather than through a rough generalisation. The researchers used the approach to reveal the code connections and interactions and to create the thematic categories. The thematic approach was used to systematically identify, organise and grasp an insight into patterns of meaning across the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Data for the study was collected through a questionnaire survey that involved seven students, and was triangulated by interviews that included an additional two participants.

### 4. Results and Discussion

In this section, the experiences of the disabled students will be reported under the following four themes and their sub-themes: *Forms of Disability prevalent amongst the Students in the Institution under Study; Institution's Response to the Welfare of the Disabled Students in Relation to the Existing Frameworks for the Disabled; The Challenges Faced by the Disabled Students at the University under Study; Strengthening the Current Position of the Disabled Students in Higher Education.*

Under the *Forms of Disability prevalent amongst the Students in the Institution under Study*, this study found out that the most prevalent disability amongst the students in the institution might have been upper or lower limb disabilities, for which eight participants could be categorised, while one was visually impaired. Of these, two participants were born with disability, while the rest had been disabled for periods ranging from 4 years to 15 years. While students with disability can be categorised in the same bracket, Dube et al (2021)'s findings revealed that those with visual and hearing impairments were usually identified as having no disability, compared to, for example, the wheelchair bound. This shows a general misunderstanding of the types and nature of disabilities found in the education institutions, which might lead to negligence of some of the disabled students.

Pertaining to the sub-theme that focused on when they became conscious of their differences from the able bodied, the participants involved in this study mentioned various periods. One participant born with disability highlighted that he noted this difference over a period of time:

*“As my interaction expanded from family to communal level.”*

The above assertion has similarities with one participant who became conscious of her condition “As I visited other communities.” This also suggests that, while some of the respondents fitted well within their families, as they started to associate with a wider community, the more they appreciated their differences from the able bodied.

There is also evidence from data collected that some of the participants came face-to-face with the reality of their condition when they commenced their education, with one averring that the wake-up call was “When I started going to school.” With pupils from different backgrounds and a time when disability was perceived as “inability,” school establishments might have presented one of the biggest challenges for the disabled.

It also appears that the participants who got disabled later in their lives were more conscious of the transitions that took place, with one claiming that “As my mobility became reduced and as I became more dependent, I became aware of the direction my life was taking.”

Results from collected data also reveal that almost all the respondents were psychologically affected by their condition in the different environments. One of them said:

*“I lost confidence in myself, since others thought that my brains were also disabled; as a result, they couldn't listen to my contributions, decisions, suggestions and inquiries-overall, I felt neglected within the societies.”*

This is also synonymous with one respondent’s assertion that “I felt neglected within the societies that I was meant to do my daily routines.” Phrases, such as “disturbed social life,” “stigmatisation and discrimination” at home and in the school setting were also raised under the impact of disability on the participants.

Reflecting upon the *Institution’s Response to the Welfare of the Disabled Students in Response to the Existing Frameworks for the Disabled* theme, there was evidence that 8 respondents knew the individual rights that are enshrined in the international policies and frameworks, with one hinting that:

*“Before joining the University, I knew the provision towards the disabled enshrined in the likes of the CRPD, the African Protocol and through the Sustainable Development Goals.”*

The same participants also showed awareness of the national policy frameworks for the disabled, such as the “NDS1” and “NDP.” While the participants revealed that they were sharing information on the existing framework that seek to increase the voice of the disabled, one respondent revealed that he “Had no idea of any international nor national protocols.” This might have

been a result of the fact that the participant had been disabled for less than five years.

While a majority showed awareness of the existence of the international and national frameworks for the disabled, only one participant highlighted knowledge of the University’s framework for the disabled and how this dovetails into the broader frameworks. Consequently, most could not measure the performance of the University’s framework in relation to the international and national protocols and frameworks on people studying with disability. This is also despite the fact that some of the participants averred that the University needed to do more for the disabled students, with some alluding that “My rights are constantly infringed,” “My rights are not fully recognised and exercised,” “Not all rights are enjoyed,” and “There is divergence.”

Under *The Challenges Faced by the Disabled Students at the University under Study* social sub-theme, all the participants highlighted that they had been impacted negatively at the University. Rhyming words and phrases in this section included “ignored,” “neglected,” “stigma,” “discrimination,” “disrespected,” “looked down upon,” “discrimination and loneliness,” “inaccessibility of the school environment,” and “discrimination and stigma.” It is with this in mind that Eunyong and Aquino (2017) aver that there is still a lot of inequalities and exclusion of the disabled students in a lot of higher education institutions, which might also explain why some of the students prefer non-disclosure of their disabilities at the point of entry into higher education (Dube & Baleni, 2022).

Under the academic sub-theme, findings for this study showed that the students’ challenges included access to relevant information and materials. For instance, one participant hinted that:

*“I have limited or reduced access to information, since materials have not been provided in an inclusive format, which also affect my overall performance.”*

Under the same sub-theme and related to the challenge above, another participant postulated that:

*“Limited friends translate to limited access to discussion with the other brains; moreover, I tend to understand more from discussions more than from reading for myself.”*

One respondent hinted on the struggles associated with staying off-campus, since:

*“I can’t walk for long distances and can’t even clean where I live, yet I am forced to walk for a distance of about 5 kilometers from where I stay, to the facilities where I learn.”*

Some of the respondents showed concern about the “Inaccessibility to some of the school facilities.” This challenge was also raised by one physically challenged student, in case he had to travel to the main campus pertaining to fees issues hence “I ended up accessing my results late, which also delayed my registration, since proof of payment was needed before registration took place.”

Under the same sub-theme, some of the respondents postulated that they faced challenges in relating with some of the staff and students hence “There was negative attitude towards my disability by staff and students,” and “Some of the staff and students left a lot to be desired in how they responded towards me.” Finding of this study are synonymous with those of Emil and Aytas (2020) in Turkish universities, where it was observed that, students with disability faced negativities, discrimination, prejudice, unfair treatment and mobbing, due to their condition. Another factor with the Turkish findings, which might also apply to this study relates to the ignorance on the part of students and staff pertaining how to respond to disabled students when they become available. For instance, in the Turkish case, some of the staff had not been oriented nor conscientised on the presence of the disabled nor how they were to be handled. In addition, the same findings confirmed that some of the students and staff, including lecturers and administrators were very supportive.

Under the infrastructural sub-theme, some of the respondents raised a number of concerns, with one alluding that:

*“Lecture rooms, toilets, sports grounds and hostels are not friendly; in addition, I couldn’t even visit my friends for revision and for other personal reasons.”*

Statements from the physically challenged included such as “Pathways were not conducive for wheelchairs.” One student seems not to have faced a lot of challenges “Since I have a problem with my hand which did not hinder my way around the structures.”

In addition, the visually impaired student highlighted that “The environment is not easy to navigate for a visually impaired personnel.” Notably, this study did not focus on the impact of the challenges of physicality of the disabled students on their studies. Yet, in a study at one of Zimbabwe’s biggest institutions of higher education, the University of Zimbabwe, Muranda Kaseke and Mbawuya (2021)’s study found out that inaccessibility of the disabled students to physical facilities, including accommodation, had a negative impact on the students’ performance, since some struggle to attend all lectures; in addition, the same students were found out to struggle to beat the time for all lectures. The study also discovered that a majority of the buildings at the institution,

including the library and some lecture rooms, lacked ramps for the sake of those who used the wheelchairs.

Under the theme, *Strengthening the Current Position of the Disabled Students in Higher Education*, various suggestions related to infrastructure, policy implementation, orientation and attitude towards the disabled were shared by the participants. For instance, one participant felt that:

*“The University needs to have an assessment report on inclusive education, which will help towards an appreciation of what is going on and what needs to be urgently remedied.”*

In similar lines, two participants echoed:

*“There is need for the introduction of a well detailed and informing policy that is pushed by a strong team towards policy implementation” and “I kindly ask the responsible authorities to develop a policy that informs inclusive education and a code of conduct.”*

In addition, a participant called an improvement of some of the physical structure hence “Some of the building facilities should be disability friendly.”

In order to have a better understanding of the disabled and their needs taken care of, a participant averred that “The institution should introduce a quarter system, whereby some of the staff should be persons with disability.” Similarly, one added that “The University should deliberately introduce a committee works together with the administration to enhance quality education for all students.” This was also synonymous with one of the participants who believes that:

*“There should be advocacy towards raising an awareness of persons living with disability in institutions of higher education and elsewhere; we face a lot of challenges in the education systems, as well as at home.”*

Findings pertaining to the disabled students in higher education might bear similarities, but those of this study are specific to the context that was considered hence should not be generalised.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

The findings of this study led to the following conclusions:

A majority of the participants from the higher education institution under study were physically disabled, a condition that knocked and affected them at different periods in their lifetime.

A majority of the disabled participants know the existing international and national frameworks that are meant to help them, but revealed limited knowledge of those embedded in the institution of higher education that was under study. In addition, and despite limited knowledge, the participants averred that their “rights” were constantly infringed.

Since results showed that the participants in this study suffered socially and from some of the infrastructure found in the institution

Results showed there is a chasm that calls for remedial measures in the relationship between the able bodied and the disabled in the institution under study.

## 5.2 Recommendations

As a result of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proffered:

That a deliberate move be taken by all stakeholders, including households and institutions of higher education towards boosting their confidence from the outset of the realisation of disabilities.

The study recommends that the institution of higher education under study conscientise the disabled students on their rights.

It is recommended that a topical disability policy be established and enshrined in all institutional documents. Relatedly, it is further recommended that orientation and workshops be carried out, so as to impart knowledge on the administration, staff and able bodied students on the ways to deal with disability. It is also recommended that all infrastructure be user-friendly towards the disabled, especially the old buildings that might lack ramps and lifts.

This study recommends for a concerted effort of all stakeholders towards strengthening the current status of the disabled students through inclusive education and a code of conduct that promotes diversity through inclusive practices enshrined in the international protocols.

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