

Asking for too much? The voices of students with disabilities in Botswana

Emmanuel Moswela^a and Sourav Mukhopadhyay^{b*}

^a*Disability Support Services, University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana;* ^b*Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana*

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Students with disabilities are under-represented in higher education (HE) institutions in Botswana. The number of students with disabilities is on the rise but parity has not been attained. The struggle of students with disabilities to access and participate in HE remains an issue of great concern for disability activists and researchers. This paper sought to document the experiences of university students with disabilities in their struggle to access and participate in HE. Seven students with disabilities took part in the study. Data were gathered through semi-structured focus group interviews. Later on these data were triangulated with an access-audit of facilities. Constant comparison methods were used for data analysis. Six themes emerged, namely: attitudinal barriers; resource barriers; structural barriers; policy related issues; lack of support mechanisms; and lack of skills and knowledge. Implications of the findings to institutions of higher learning are discussed in order to promote wider participation for students with disabilities in HE in Botswana.

Keywords: higher education; access and participation; Botswana; qualitative research; social model

Points of interest

- Students with disabilities at one of the institutions of higher learning shared their experiences on access and participation in university programmes and activities.
- The research found that students with disabilities find it difficult to gain access to university programmes and activities.
- Social barriers exist in the form of negative attitudes which limit access and participation. This calls for creating awareness in the form of workshops.
- Botswana Tertiary Education Policy is silent on disability and higher education and this has to be addressed to promote access and participation.
- The research recommended that all programmes and services should be inclusive.

Introduction

This paper sought to document the experiences of students with disabilities as well as barriers to access and participate in higher education (HE) in one of the universities in

*Corresponding author. Email: mukhopa@mopipi.ub.bw

Botswana. Despite government support at school level, students with disabilities are failing to meet the entry requirements for HE, and thus are under-represented in HE institutions in Botswana. Although the number of students with disabilities entering institutions of HE is increasing, parity has not yet been actualized (Moore 2001; Stodden et al. 2001).

The importance of higher education of students with disabilities

Access and participation in HE has beneficial outcomes for all students. On the other hand, research (Stodden et al. 2001) indicates that there has been a limited progress in quality of life of individuals with disabilities. HE is considered to be a vehicle for improving the quality of life for individuals with disabilities (Wehman 2006). Widening access of students with disabilities in HE would increase their chances of: (1) obtaining and maintaining employment; (2) earning a higher income; and (3) creating a means for lifelong independence and quality of life (Wehman 2006). Therefore, it is important that students with disabilities are made aware of skills necessary to enable them to deal with social and academic challenges presented by HE life. Without these skills, these students may be overwhelmed by the demands of HE and may not be able to adapt to HE environments. Succeeding in HE depends on various factors such as institutional support services. Some of the commonly requested supports for students with disabilities include textbooks on tape, note makers, extended time, information accessible points and self management skills. Wehman reminds us that it is important for students with disabilities to explore all the services available for all students in the campus. Exploring such services would enable them to successfully meet their academic work demands. Legislation makes reference to challenges and changes that institutions need to be aware of and be proactive in providing for students with disabilities (Republic of South Africa. Department of Education 2001).

Developing provision for higher education for students with disabilities

In recent years, the number of students with disabilities entering HE institutions has significantly increased in developed countries such as the USA, UK and Australia (Herderson 2001). For example in the UK alone the proportion of students with disabilities in HE institutions has increased from 4.7% to 6.9% of the total number of students over the last five years (Vickerman and Blundell 2010). This development could be attributed to the Disability Discrimination Act, pressure groups as well as the Commission for Equality and Human Rights and political will on the part of UK government. In addition, more students are declaring their disability status. Tinklin, Riddell, and Wilson (2004) reported that in recent years the number of students disclosing their status as having dyslexia has doubled.

Participation and access to HE for students with disabilities is still a contentious issue in developed countries. A significant body of research has identified several barriers that restrict students with disabilities to participate, progress and succeed in HE. These barriers are mostly attitudinal, structural, and resource-related (Stodden et al. 2001) and are over emphasized in literature (Shevlin, Kenny, and McNeela 2004). However, Boxall, Carson, and Docherty (2004) argued that this line of research fails to address critical issues such as curriculum delivery, alternate assessment procedures, progress and success in HE.

Higher education for students with disabilities in Southern Africa

Students with disabilities have long been denied opportunities to pursue HE around the world (Konur 2006). Despite recorded growth in participation of students with disabilities in HE (Chataika 2010), access to HE has remained limited for students with disabilities in Southern Africa. In the Sub-Saharan region there is no deliberate effort to widen access and participation of students with disabilities in HE, and this has led to under-representation of this group of students in HE. While countries like Zimbabwe and South Africa have a legislative strategy on disability, this development has not significantly improved access and participation of students with disabilities in HE (Chataika 2010; Howell 2006). For example, barriers such as negative attitudes, lack of assistive and instructional technology, traditional learning and teaching processes, lack of transitional services and inflexible curriculum still exist which further marginalize these learners in South African HE institutions (Howell 2006). Chataika reported similar findings in her study in Zimbabwean HE institutions. These researchers recommended that HE institutions need to re-culture their practices by linking disability issues to wider strategic priorities as a way of enhancing access and participation of students with disabilities.

Provision of students with disabilities in higher education in Botswana

Despite being a signatory to a number of United Nations world conventions on education for all, the government of Botswana has not ratified Article 24 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities. Over the last two and a half decades educational provision for individuals with disabilities in Botswana has been guided by the Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) (Republic of Botswana 1994). However, RNPE gave more thrust to promoting access and participation of students with disabilities at primary and secondary levels than to higher education level. Inequalities of access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities in HE institutions still exist. There is no radical turn to ensure equitable education for all students.

The advantages of HE are an indubitable topic. It is for this reason that the government of Botswana intends to increase access to HE from 11.4% (2007/08) to a minimum of 17% by 2016 and then to a minimum of 25% by 2026 (Republic of Botswana 2008). Nonetheless students with disabilities in HE are still under-represented. The recent 2008 Botswana Tertiary Education policy document acknowledges the need to widen access, equity and participation for students with disabilities in HE (Republic of Botswana 2008). It remains elusive how the government will ensure access, equity, participation and progress of students with disabilities at HE level. Notwithstanding increased diversity in the student population in Botswana HE institutions, there is no code of practice that could assist HE institutions in widening access and participation of students with disabilities. It is for this reason that HE institutions have remained reactive as opposed to being anticipatory to the needs of these students.

Undergraduate programmes in Botswana

Fulltime undergraduate programmes in Botswana usually take four years after Botswana General Certificate in Secondary Education (BGCSE), which is equivalent to International General Certificate in Secondary Education (IGCSE). Currently more than 15,000 students have enrolled in undergraduate programmes. The undergraduate programmes offer degrees in humanities, education, social sciences, engineering,

Table 1. Students with disabilities in the institution.

Problem	No.	Gender	Programme of study
Visual impairment	7	5 Female, 2 Male	Humanities (4), Education (3).
Physical impairments	12	6 Female, 6 Male	Science (4), Education (1), Humanities(2), Social Science (5)
Cognitive impairments	1	1 Female	Humanities (1)
Speech impairments	2	2 Male	Science (1), Business (1)
Chronic health impairment	32	15 Female, 17 Male	Business (4), Humanities (6), Social science (4), Education (3), Science (2), Others (13) did not reveal their programme of study.

health sciences, and general science. Only 54 (0.36%) students have disclosed as individuals with disabilities and sought the support from Disability Support Unit. Table 1 displays the students and their areas of impairment. Out of 54 students 27 (50%) are female while the remaining 27 (50%) are male.

Disability support services unit

The Disability Support Services unit (DSS) of the specified university was established in 1982. DSS exists to promote equal opportunities through creating opportunities for promoting the same educational experiences and enrichment services for students with disabilities (DSS 2001). At its inception, DSS enrolled five students (two students with a visual impairment, one student with a physical impairment and two students with a hearing impairment). When the unit was established it had no resources for students with disabilities. Furthermore, the university environment had physical access restrictions that compelled the student with a mobility impairment to change the course owing to barriers to access to classrooms and science laboratories. In 2001, there were 27 students with disabilities enrolled with DSS (DSS 2001) and this rose to 54 in 2010. While it is difficult to find statistics of students who enrolled with DSS over the past 10 years, it could be deduced that the enrolment of students with disabilities is on the rise.

All the operations of the unit are funded by the university. There are three fulltime (one manager, one assistant manager and one Brailleist) and one part-time (scribe) professionals to service the unit. In addition, the unit recruits student assistants to support students with disabilities. In 2009, the university procured a special bus to enhance transport services for students with disabilities in and around the campus. The university is committed to enhancing access and participation of students with disabilities as part of its strategic plan.

Employing the social model of disability as a theoretical framework, this study explored the experiences of students with disabilities in one of the HE institutions in Botswana.

Methodology

Research site

This research was carried out at one of the universities in Botswana. It was initiated by DSS to identify the challenges that limit access and participation of students with

disabilities in all activities of university campus. Data collection took place between October and November 2008.

Research design

Qualitative research methodology was chosen for this study for three main reasons. First, there has been limited research exploring views of students with disabilities at HE level. Second, this method offered a platform for understanding the plight of students with disabilities (Lincoln and Guba 2000). Third, researchers were interested in hearing the voices of students with disabilities; therefore, qualitative research design was used. Researchers adopted an emancipatory paradigm and used the social model of disability as critical lenses to examine the practice of inclusivity.

Participants

Seven undergraduate students with various categories of disabling conditions voluntarily participated in this research (three males and four females). Table 2 displays the details of the participants who took part in this research.

Instrumentation

A semi-structured focus group interview schedule was specifically designed for this study. The interview guide focused on the experiences, availability of resources, infrastructure facilities, attitudes, knowledge and skill.

Data collection procedures

The focus group technique is more exploratory and interpretive and thus resonated well with the researchers' choice of approach. Focus group discussions were carried out in English throughout the interview sessions. However, participants had the choice to communicate in Setswana (national language of Botswana). Since the first author of this paper was a native speaker of Setswana, he translated some phrases into English. The focus group was used in this study and researchers made sure that the composition of the group was maximally varied to gather 'rich and thick' data from participants. The duration of focus group sessions lasted one hour and thirty minutes. Later on, data were triangulated with an interview of the DSS manager and an access audit to enhance the authenticity and credibility of this research.

Table 2. Participant descriptions.

Name (Pseudo names)	M/F	Year of Entry	Programme	Reported disabilities
Able	M	2006	Science	Physical (Mobility)
Mike	M	2005	Social science	Sensory (Visual)
Roy	M	2005	Science	Physical (Mobility)
Dolly	F	2006	Humanities	Speech (TBI)
Fifie	F	2006	Humanities	Sensory (Visual)
Erica	F	2005	Humanities	Physical (Paralysis of upper limb)
Kedi	F	2005	Humanities	Physical (amputee lower limb)

Procedures

The data were collected in three phases. In phase one, researchers obtained permission from the section head of DSS and familiarized themselves with the settings for three weeks. The participants were recruited using an advertisement at the DSS office, requesting students with disabilities to participate. During this phase researchers informally discussed experiences of students with disabilities in the university and explained in detail the current research and sought their consent. The researchers recruited those who gave consent to take part in this research voluntarily. This process helped the researchers to build rapport with the participants of the study (Chilisa and Preece 2005; Miles and Huberman 1994). During the second phase, participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interviews protocol. Before collecting data researchers rehearsed the interview guide to familiarize and gain consistency in data collection procedure. The first author moderated the focus group discussions and recorded the interview using Digital Voice Recorder. Later on the interview was transcribed directly in the MS Word 7 using Express-scribe.

Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim. A constant-comparison method (Strauss and Corbin 1990) was used to examine the similarities and differences in reflections across the participants. Data were analysed in step-by-step fashion. In Step 1, the data from each participant were analysed employing line-by-line open coding. In Step 2, each transcript was examined separately, and whenever a new theme emerged, it was highlighted. The identified themes within the transcript were then compared across transcripts in Step 3. Overall, themes were then developed in Step 4. This procedure was followed for each transcript. Selective coding was employed, which enabled the researcher to confirm themes so as to organize the results. A summary of all transcripts was compiled in which sub-themes were compared to come up with overall themes that were later used to report the findings of this study. This process of data analysis was carried out by individual researchers and then compared among them to agree on the final themes. This process enhanced the reliability of the data analysis.

For the purpose of conformability, researchers presented their preliminary findings to the participants in a group for the member check exercise. The exercise lasted approximately one hour. The major themes that were identified were presented to the participants to comment on. This stimulated recall and further evoked the participants to discuss and add to the existing information. The participants were free to discuss the themes and agreed that they represented their own opinions (i.e., to comment on the accuracy of the information). All participants agreed with the summaries and informed the researchers that the information accurately reflected their contributions to this investigation. This information was then used to confirm primary categories established and to further understand relationships as they exist among the categories. The final coding themes were attitudinal barriers, resource barriers, structural barriers, policy-related issues, support mechanisms and curriculum issues.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to elicit, examine and report on the experiences of students with disabilities in one of the HE institutions in Botswana. Based on the

analysis of the collected data, access and participation appeared to be limited by numerous factors. These factors are discussed under the following themes.

Attitudinal barriers

Students with disabilities were asked to reflect on their everyday life experiences at the university. They expressed concerns about attitudes of lecturers, students and counsellors. Perhaps their concerns about attitudes could best be summed up in the following excerpts. For example Mike, a student with visual impairment who received support from the resource room while at a secondary school, had this to say:

When I told one of my lecturers that I can't see, he did not understand what I was talking about. He did not pay any attention to my concern and continued to teach the same way that he was teaching for the entire semester. I find it very difficult to keep up with the pace. It took me a long time to adjust with the pace of learning in this university. I came from a senior secondary school where people there knew how to deal with people like me who have visual problem.

He continued to lament that 'it takes time to acclimatize to the situation at the university'. Still on the issue of attitudes, Abel a student with physical impairment who uses artificial limb, said:

In one of the semester I had to write three examinations in one day. On that day it was cloudy and I missed the examination due to my condition. I requested for a special examination, the department of examination and records informed me that they do not offer special examination. I went to the examination board I was told the same thing and I had to retake some of the courses. Disability Support Services wrote a letter to concerned department, still nothing was done.

Roy's experience was not different from Mike and Abel. He was quite frustrated, which was evidenced by his statements:

When you have a disability you are undermined it is even difficult to accept yourself. It's like you belong to a minority tribe and some people call you names.

Echoing the same sentiment, Kedi said:

People tend to judge disability than what you can do. If you bring the concept of disability it's like you have ruined everything one starts telling you that I am not a medical doctor there is no how I can help you. You have to read! Read! and Read!

Expressing the concern about attitude towards people with disabilities, Dolly revealed that:

First of all I want to touch on the issue of lectures at the university. The lecturers are catering for those who are able and neglect those who are like me who can't write. I normally use a tape recorder to capture lectures. Some of the students and lecturers would ask me; why are you not writing? They do not know but their departments know that there are students who are like this and that. The departments do not orientate lecturers on issues of disabilities and how to teach students with disabilities and ultimately we suffer.

Erica, a young lady with upper limb monoplegia (post road traffic accident), could not hide her anguish about the prevalence of negative attitudes towards people with disabilities. She narrated her experiences in this manner:

Writing with left hand, my writing was not discernible and when I was given extra time students would complain about why I was given an extra time and I ended up saying you know what I am not going to bother anybody.

The interview data seem to reveal that negative attitudes people with disabilities are quite prevalent in the institution. It appears that lecturers are not ready to change and accommodate the learning needs of the student with disabilities. The data also indicate that other students did not exhibit favourable attitudes towards students with disabilities.

Resource barriers

Participants were asked to comment on the availability of resources for individual students with disabilities. The issue of resources generated discontent in voices laden with emotion. Their statements would be highly punctuated with phrases such as; 'we have not been catered for', 'we have been forsaken', 'we are always taken for granted', and 'wheelchairs and Braille are not the only resources'. On the issue of lack of resources, Mike aptly made the following observations:

You go to the library because some of the legal cases are written on the course outline ... The cases are written in size 8 font. Size 8, itself is a problem. Imagine if you have to read 25 pages ultimately you lag behind because you cannot keep pace with other students. The library does not have CCTV or magnifier.

Still on the issue of resources, one of the students with visual impairment, Fifie revealed that:

I am visually impaired student in the faculty of humanities. The first two years I was forced to do English literature. English novels are available in a Braille format. I took up the matter with the library staff to let them know that I am a student with visual impairment. They told me that the books that they do not have books available in Braille format in Botswana. They had to communicate with the people overseas, by the time the books arrived the semester was over. It was quite a challenge and inconvenience for me because I had to request my friends to read for me. I do not feel ok when somebody reads for me. Turning to the library there are no books, which suits my needs. I can't read printed materials, I have little vision left in one eye which I need to use but it is extremely strenuous. I try but it's tough.

Still on the issue of resources, Abel stated that:

There is no assistance to move from point A to B. By the time I get to the lesson the most of the content of the lesson would have been covered. Most of the time there will be no chair for me. I to need go around looking for a chair, by the time I get back, the lecture is already over. It is very difficult for me to carry a chair because I use crutches.

Availability of appropriate resources enhances participation, reduces activity limitation and facilitates learning. The data indicate that at this university there is an acute shortage of appropriate resources for students with disabilities. Document analysis

revealed that DSS has a dedicated fund for procurement of equipment which was inadequate to meet diverse needs of students with disabilities. Turning to the computer laboratory, it was found that there were computers with dedicated software such as JAWS, embosser, CCTV and Braille machines. The findings reflected that the university had plans to minimize learning barriers. But still on the issue of resources, the manager of DSS lamented over budget constraints which did not enable DSS to function optimally. This finding provided a backdrop against which access, participation and progress in HE for students with disabilities could be measured.

Structural barriers

Most of the buildings in the university are not accessible for individuals with mobility impairments. For example the Faculty of Education building was not at all accessible for individuals who use a wheelchair. Describing the problem of structural barriers, Abel said:

I can't access the buildings which do not have lifts; I can't climb with my crutches. There was a time when I needed to see my lecturer; it was very tiring for me to climb the staircase. I avoid going to my lecturer even if I have to.

Echoing the same sentiments, Mike expressed that:

While in some of the new buildings they are going to make them accessible, take an example of toilets and some of the building you will realize that we have not been catered for. Buildings are built without taking into consideration that there are students with mobility impairments.

During the access audit exercise it was observed that the halls of residence for students with disabilities in the university were not suitable. This was instanced by no assisted bathrooms, toilets and adjustable furniture. In addition there were no adapted doors for wheelchair users. While there were ramps, assisted toilets, lifts, rails and automated doors in some of the buildings, it was interesting to find that the gradient of the ramps were steep and very slippery for students with physical impairments to use. In addition some of the library sections were not accessible. While the library has been built according to cutting-edge technology, it was found that the same was not used to facilitate access for students with disabilities. This was instanced by the fact that there were no ramps in the library or assistive devices for individuals with disabilities. On a positive note the library had provisions for e-books and on-line journals. However, it was found that the library remained a 'no go zone' in a way for students with visual impairment. There were no resource books that were in Braille or as enlarged prints. It was interesting to find out that there were no personnel directly responsible for assisting students with disabilities.

Policy issues

Mike was highly critical about the policy for students with disabilities:

I read the policy which appears on the Student Manual. The person who wrote the policy has worked with people with disabilities. But the person did not go into depth on the services required by people with disabilities. A person will say for mobility we offer this and that. Things appear on paper but not in practice.

Still on policy issues, Roy lamented that:

When these policies are crafted only the big bosses get involved. They do not come here and ask us; what is it that you ask? Where should we improve? They write things which date 14 years back.

Illustrating lack of involvement in policy issues, Kedi said:

After buildings have been completed when one comes to them and say; we have not been catered for that is when it clicks to their minds that there are students with mobility impairments. Had they come to us and said; look this is what we want to do. What can we do to cater for you? Such kind of consultation would cut unnecessary costs by bringing in everybody.

Data seem to suggest that while there is a policy for students with disabilities, students with disabilities are hardly involved in the process of its development. The policy seems to be devoid of the voices of students with disabilities in shaping the policy. The policy appears to be more prescriptive and does not to reflect the real needs of students with disabilities. In addition to this, there is a gap between policy and practice instanced by ideas outlined in the policy which do not reflect the true practice on the ground.

Support mechanisms

The students with disabilities were enthusiastic about the level of support they received from the guidance and counselling centre. One of the students said:

At counselling centre they have really helped me to put myself together instead of waiting for people to feel sorry for me. I want to make it big and give the world something to talk about and some people what I am really made from.

In contrast, some of the participants of the study remained cynical about the counselling centre. They found it to be unhelpful, not well resourced in handling issues of disability. When further probed into their unwillingness to utilize services offered by the counselling centre, some of the students raised concerns that some counsellors saw a disability in them before they could see a person. Because of this attitude the concerned students felt 'pushed away'. Generally, participants of the study felt that career counselling was not preparing them for life beyond the university. Instead, the counselling centre remained steeped in issues which border around university with little emphasis on exposing them to the world of work.

Still on the issue of support mechanisms, all the students revealed that mostly they get an overwhelming support from the DSS staff and their colleagues. For Dolly, going to church gave her an incredible support network and she described her church members as supportive and very sympathetic towards her, which helps her to cope with living with a disability.

Curriculum issues

Accessing HE by students with disabilities means promoting participation, progress and success in the HE curriculum. The curriculum is to ensure that students with

disabilities receive all the necessary support to acquire the skills, knowledge and competencies required. In sharp contrast to this view, Mike lamented that:

In the university there are no special arrangements for people with disabilities to make the examinations conducive. It must be turned into a university policy.

Illustrating the consequences of the rigidity of the university curriculum and its effects on students with disabilities, Roy summed it up in this fashion:

More often than not students with disabilities have retakes but they do not ask themselves why. There is one of our colleagues who will talk to later on. He should he finished his course in 4 years but it is now 6 years since he has been here. I cannot keep up the pace and 4 months for is too short for a student with disabilities.

When probed further into this issue, Roy suggested the following arrangement:

If there was another month to make it 5 months, I would finish up well. In 18 hours that I have to attend classes within a week I attend 12 hours and miss out 4 hours which adds up to another year of retakes. This is due to the fact that the nature of my disability does not allow me to keep up the pace with other students. If you explain this to a lecturer he or she takes you for granted under the guise that I am playing tricks.

The outcome of any undergraduate programme is judged by its employability. Although individuals without disabilities are employable yet struggling to find employment, analysing the factors for poor employability was beyond the scope of the current research.

Discussion

The main goal of this study was to examine whether students with disabilities had equal access and opportunities to participate in HE in Botswana. Findings reported here tend to suggest that the university failed to provide adequate educational support for students with disabilities. There was a general lack of educational materials and infrastructural facilities as well as unfavourable attitudes towards individuals with disabilities. While students with disabilities are physically present in the university, data revealed that access to the curriculum and facilities remained complex and out of reach for them. The findings of this study seem to coincide with earlier research (Goode 2004; Shevlin, Kenny, and McNeela 2004). Participants of the study lamented the pervasive attitudinal barriers in the institution which restrict their participation in higher education. To illustrate this point some lecturers were reluctant to meet the learning needs of students with disabilities. The issue of attitudes was also comparable to a study by Shevlin, Kenny, and McNeela (2004) in which participants lamented the pervasiveness of attitudinal barriers in higher education.

None of the students with disabilities revealed having been part of policy development for students with disabilities in the university. The present policy was found to be devoid of the voices of students with disabilities in shaping it. It also emerged from the data that excellent ideas appear on paper but not in practice. The experiences of students with disabilities reinforced the notion that a clear policy which involves all stakeholders would lead to access, participation and progress in higher education for students with disabilities. As discussed by Goode (2004), while policy development

was viewed as a 'beacon of good practice,' students with disabilities were involved in the struggle of 'negotiating and navigating' their way so as to gain access to learning and teaching.

The findings show that students with disabilities are not equipped with self-determination skills that could facilitate their participation, progress and success in higher education. The findings are in contrast with those of Getzel (2008) who reported that self-determination skills are a critical component that would enable students with disabilities to participate, progress and succeed in higher education.

Conclusion and recommendation

The overall conclusion from the present study is that access and participation in HE for students with disabilities in Botswana is limited by lack of policy, infrastructural facilities, negative attitudes and inadequate funds. These findings are similar to those of studies done in southern Africa (Chataika 2010; Howell 2006; Howell and Lazarus 2003; Matshediso 2007; Nkoane 2006). It is important to note that the study used the students' own subjective perceptions of their learning climate. There was no attempt to check faculties' opinions or peers' views on access and participations of students with disabilities in HE. In spite of the shortcoming, this research presents the factors that hinder success of inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education in Botswana.

The present research suggests that there is a need for comprehensive policy on examination, instructional accommodations and improving physical structure to access venues. Furthermore, intensifying disability awareness training for staff and students as well as more funding allocation would enable the unit to functionally optimally. The findings also suggest that it is important to involve students with disabilities while developing policy guidelines. The sharpest challenge to the existing ideas about disability is the argument that disability is not viewed as a form of 'social oppression' in the context of Botswana. On the contrary, the benevolence legacy is still a prevalent model that shapes educational discourses for students with disabilities in HE. One point that needs to be underscored is that when focusing on recommendations on educational support, students with disabilities should be consulted. This would help HEs to be proactive in meeting the needs of the students. Overcoming the challenges facing students with disabilities in HE calls for a strong political will to implement inclusive education at all levels of education in Botswana. This would mainstream disability issues and help address them. The little that we have learnt from this research showed that a comprehensive audit access involving all stakeholders is more than warranted. It is hoped that the findings of such a study would give a direction for widening access, participation, information and skills to become more competitive.

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