Inclusive Policy and Service Needs Survey among Students with Disabilities in an Institution of Higher Education

A. K. Tugli[1], M. Mokonoto[2], N. J. Ramakuela[3] and L. M. Netshikweta[3]

[1]Department of Public Health, University of Venda, P/Bag X5050,
Thohoyandou 0950, South Africa
[2]School of Public Health. Gauteng Provincial Legislature, South Africa
[3]Department of Advanced Nursing Science, University of Venda, Thohoyandou, South Africa
E-mail: [1]<Tugli.augustine@univen.ac.za>

KEYWORDS Educational Inclusion. Policy Framework. Students with Special Needs. Support

ABSTRACT Policy and service needs can be crucial in strengthening educational inclusion for students with disabilities in educational institutions. However, inclusive policies and acts have challenges in terms of implementation on the ground. This paper examines inclusive policy and service needs of students with disabilities at the University of Venda. The study employed a cross-sectional descriptive design using questionnaires to collect data. Of the 132 questionnaires administered, 67 were returned. The participants' ages ranged between 19 and 44 years and 34 (50.7%) were males. Almost 2 in 5 (41.8%) were mobility impaired, whilst 10 (15.0%) participants indicated that there was a need for an all-inclusive policy in the institution, about a quarter (25.5%) indicated the need to improve safety and sanitation services. The findings suggest that needs of students with disabilities heavily outweigh the existing inclusive policy practices. Hence, disability policies should be informed by the needs of affected students.

INTRODUCTION

Though social and educational inclusion of students has been given human rights prominence, its realization is still far from being a reality (MacLachlan et al. 2016). Human rights hinge on the ways policies and acts are formulated and implemented. Hence, Williams et al. (2008) and MacLachlan et al. (2016) allude that addressing policy and service needs can be crucial in strengthening inclusion and making reasonable adjustments to accommodate students with disabilities. Generally, students with disabilities fall in the broad categories of intellectual, communicative, sensory, physical impairment including behavioral problems, and as such they require special and specific educational and service needs (Pearson Education 2014; Pancsofar and Petroff 2016).

It is estimated that between ten and thirteen percent of the school-age population has exceptionalities, which make them easy targets for social, economic and educational exclusion (Pearson Education 2014). Kuvini et al. (2016) in their study identified teaching materials and support staff as important elements for inclusion. For example, Daniels (2015) pointed out that the biggest obstacle to accessing education by deaf people is the difficulty of finding interpreters.

The issue is that there is no compelling policy provision on the provision of sign language interpreters for the deaf or guide dogs for the blind in educational institutions.

In a needs assessment survey to determine specific services that would make the biggest difference in students' ability to access education, the top four responses were:

- Educating staff about the needs of students with disabilities (71.0%)
- Making support services compulsory for education providers (39.0%)
- Improving communication between support services and teaching staff (36.0%)
- Reducing bureaucracy and paperwork required when seeking adjustments (34.0%) (Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) 2011).

Viewing disability as a human rights issue, there is the need for ensuring equitably resourced educational environments conducive for learning without marginalization or discrimination of any group (UNESCO 2000; International Christian University (ICU) 2014; Roberts and Simpson 2016).

In South Africa, after the demise of apartheid in 1994, the plight of people with disabilities finally became a part of the social and economic transformation agenda with the recogni-

tion that everyone, irrespective of their disability status, can play active roles in transforming their own lives, and can contribute to society (Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) 2013; ICU 2014). To this end, many policies were adopted to promote the rights of people with disabilities. At the policy level to manage disability at the post-school educational institutions, the White Paper 6 of 2001 on Special Needs Education and Building an Inclusive Education and Training System was published. This policy, among others, provides the blueprint for inclusive education in South Africa as a means to address the challenge of disability across the education landscape (DHET 2013).

Despite strong legislative and policy framework for addressing disability and inclusion in the education sector, access and support for people with disabilities remains slow and limited (Wildeman and Nomdo 2007 cited in Dalton et al. 2012; Foundation of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis (FOTIM) 2011; DHET 2013; MacLachlan et al. 2016). By admission of failure and ineptitude in this regard, DHET (2013) emphatically points out that currently there is no national policy on disability to guide education and training institutions in the post-school domain. It further argues that the management of disability in post-school education remains fragmented and lacks the capacity, or even the policies to cater for students and staff with disabilities. This implies that policy and legislative strategies exist in principles and are failing to address critical issues facing special needs students.

For any policy to be meaningful and to have the desired effect, it must have inputs of the target group during its formative stage. Against this background, this study examined the policy and service needs of students with disabilities in line with the popular slogan: *"... nothing about us without us…"*

Purpose of the Study

This paper examines inclusive policy and service needs of students with disabilities at the University of Venda, Limpopo province, South Africa.

Objectives

- To determine and describe the policy and service needs of students with disabilities at University of Venda.

- To determine other needs that participants think can influence policies in their institution.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

In this study a descriptive cross-sectional design was used. This design seeks to determine the current status of population characteristics at one point in time while also attempting to discover the relationships among variables (Brink 2008; Vanderstoep and Johnston 2009). The use of a descriptive cross-sectional design in this study is justified, as it allowed a once-off administration of the survey tool in order to obtain data among the study participants, that is, students with disabilities.

Study Population and Sampling

A target population is the entire group of people or objects that are of interest to the researcher and hence meet the criteria the researcher is interested in (Katzenellenbogen and Karim 2007; Burns and Grove 2009; Vanderstoep and Johnston 2009). The target population for this study included all the students with disabilities who were studying at the University of Venda during the period of the study. In order to avoid any methodological challenges associated with determining who the 'students with disabilities' were for this study, the researcher focused only on those with disabilities listed in the database of the institution's Disability Unit in the 2011 academic year. However, the current study excluded all the students who did not register their disability statuses at the unit.

The database at the time of the study had information on 132 students with disabilities. Due to the small number involved and to avoid excluding some disability categories in the study, the researchers did a total population survey. That is, all the students with disabilities who were registered at the unit became the target population as well as the sample for the study. By recruiting all the registered students with disabilities, selection bias was avoided since the sample was a one hundred percent representative of the true target population.

Data Collection

Data collection involves applying the measuring instrument to the sample or cases select-

ed for investigation (Mouton 2009). In this study a structured data collection instrument was used to obtain data from participants. Before embarking on the data collection process the researcher had collected preliminary data from the staffs that were working at the UDU. The purpose of this exercise was to use the findings from the preliminary survey to develop and enrich the main instrument that would be used in the study. A self-report method of data collection technique (Vanderstoep and Johnston 2009) was used to collect by asking participants to answer questions on their own. The instrument was developed in English and solicited information on demographic profile, disability type and policy and service needs of participants.

Validity and Reliability

The validity of the instrument was ensured through the review of a wide range of literature. This was further enhanced by the findings from the preliminary survey conducted among the staff members at the disability unit. Furthermore, the reliability of the instrument was also bolstered by adapting it from the World Health Organization Disability Assessment Schedule (WHODAS 2011). In addition, the instrument was pre-tested using some students with disabilities who volunteered to take part in this exercise. This exercise helped assess the instrument's wording and clarity of the questions, and also the constructs in a questionnaire. It also helped assess the reliability and objectivity of the instrument (Akinsola 2005; Burns and Grove 2009). Valuable feedback received from the pretesting results was used to rephrase and modify some aspects of the questionnaire, and thus making it user friendly and more meaningful to the participants.

Data Analysis

Data were grouped according to common issues and analyzed using the Microsoft Excel software. Frequency distribution tables were used for the presentation of data.

Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the Research and Innovation Directorate of the University of Venda (Project No. SHS/11/PH/06/E0811). Since the study involved vulnerable students, access to the participants was negotiated with the offices of the Council for Higher Education, Teaching and Learning (CHETL) and the Disability Unit of the institution. Above all, the researcher ensured that ethical issues of voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality and complete anonymity were addressed and ensured before and after the administration of the questionnaires. The time and place for the administration of the instrument negotiated were negotiated with the students and the Disability Unit staff.

RESULTS

Biographic Characteristics of Participants

Out of 132 questionnaires distributed, 67 were returned. Most (n=56; 84.8%) of the participants hailed from the Limpopo province with 31 (46.3%) from the Vhembe District where the study was conducted. The age range was between 19 and 44 years, and 34 (50.7%) were males and 33 (49.3%) females. Whilst 12 (19.0%) and 21 (33.3%) participants reported that their parents or guardians were either very poor or poor, respectively. Twenty-eight (41.8%) were mobility impaired, 20 (29.9%) were visually impaired and 9 (13.4%) were albinos.

Policy Needs

Participants in the study were also asked to express their needs in terms of policies in their present institution. As shown in Table 1, 10 (15.0%) participants indicated that there was a

Table 1: Policy needs

Policy needs	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Need for all inclusive policy	10	15
Disability policies must be, improved, revised and enforced	8	12
Need for safety and protection without abuses and discrimination.	7	10.5
Need for proper consultation with students with disabilities before policy is drafted	3	4.5
Need to do away with the policy of not allowing students to take a particular course for more than 3 times	1	1.5

need for an all-inclusive policy in the institution, while 7 (10.5%) reported that their policy needs must include issues that will ensure their safety and protection without abuses and discrimination. Furthermore, twelve percent (n=8) of the participants indicated the need for disability policies to be improved, revised and enforced whilst 3 (4.5%) indicated the need for proper consultation before policies are drafted.

Service Needs

Table 2 shows various service needs expressed by the participants in response to the open-ended question in the questionnaire on service needs. Most (n=17; 25.5%) of the participants indicated the need to improve services with regard to safety, security, hostel, water and sanitation. Whilst 6 (9.0%) of the participants indicated the need in the improvement of academic support services, 3 (4.5%) stated that they needed non-discriminatory services. Also, highlighted by the participants were the need for special services at cafeteria and other service points (n=2; 3%) and the need for counseling services (n=2; 3%).

Table 2: Service needs

Service needs	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Improve academic support services	6	9
Improve safety, security, hostel, water and sanitation services	17	25.5
Need for special services at cafeteria and other service points	2	3
Need for counselling services	2	3
Need non-discriminatory services	3	4.5
Need for cleaners of the dormitories	1	1.5

Other Needs

The participants in this study were also asked to freely express their needs in other areas in the institution. The responses were grouped and analyzed according to common issues raised (Table 3). Among the needs raised, 22 (33%) participants called for adaptive facilities and provision of easy access to classes, library and residences, 11 (16.5%) indicated the need for trained lecturers on disability issues, whilst 9 (13.5%) stated the need to end discrimination, stigmatization and isolation of in sports and field trips. Provision of recreational facilities (n=6; 9%),

grants for all students with disabilities (n=3; 4.5%), and regular evaluation of the quality of life of students with disabilities (n=3; 4.5%) were also expressed by the participants.

Table 3: Other needs that can influence policies

Participants recommendations	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Need to have adaptive facilities, easy access to classes, library, residences and other facilities, including ramps, lifts and transport	22	33
Need to do away with disabled students being limited to the ground floors of the hostels	1	1.5
Need to be provided with assistants to clean our rooms, assist us to go to classes, interpreters etc.	2	3
Need for the provision of adequate assistive devices and support material e.g. internet facilities, books	2	3
Need for grants for all students with disabilities	3	4.5
Need for recreational facilities	6	9
Need for lecturers to be trained and made aware of disability issues	11	16.5
Need to abolish use of white boards in lecture rooms	1	1.5
Need for regular evaluation of the quality of life of students with disabilities	3	4.5
Need for representation in top management	1	1.5
Need protection and security	1	1.5
Need for improved communication between university and students with disabilities	1	1.5
Need to eliminate discrimination, stigmatisation and isolation of students with disabilities in sports, field trips etc.	9	13.5

DISCUSSION

The study sought to examine the policy and service needs that can enhance and strengthen educational inclusion of students with disabilities in a tertiary institution. Inclusive policies, when properly formulated and implemented, can bring about positive changes, which can be critical in transforming the lives of people with disabilities in educational institutions (MacLachlan et al. 2016).

In this study about 1 in 7 (15.0%) of the participants were more concerned with the need for an all-inclusive policy to be implemented. Others (n=7; 10.5%) wanted policies that would ensure their safety and protection without abuses and discrimination. This implies that there is either lack of policy to accommodate all students in the learning environment or the existing policies in the institution have gaps that need to be filled. Consistent with this assertion, Nkoane (2006) in his study found that about seventy percent of academic and support staff suggested that poor understanding of policy issues informing them about students with special educational needs constituted a major barrier among staffs and students. According to Naidoo (2010), the majority of the able-bodied population on campus is unaware of the needs of students with disabilities, and as such they are unable to provide the necessary assistance to this group of students in terms of their needs. To this end, MacLachlan et al. (2016) pointed out that policy processing needs to be broadened on the ground taking into account all stakeholders.

Needs of individuals with disabilities are many and vary according to the disability category one belongs to. Hence, having policies in place to accommodate all students in educational institutions needs the involvement of all stakeholders who must ensure that policies are widely understood, practiced and monitored. For example, in their study, Hirano and Rowe (2016) point out that parent educational involvement has been shown to be a predictor of in-school and post-school success for all students including those with disabilities. In another study, Pancsofar and Petroff (2016) argue that the provision of individualized specific needs can greatly enhance and facilitate inclusivity. This will be disability specific support, which though can be costly especially for developing countries.

As found in this study, about 1 in every 4 (25.5%) participants requested improvements in hostel, water, sanitation and security services. As an indictment of how dire the situation could be in this setting, Ramakuela and Maluleke (2011) and Akintunde (2011) in their earlier studies pointed out that students with disabilities face deplorable sanitation conditions including inadequate supply of water to residences in the institution. The experience of water shortage in the hostels and poor sanitation environment especially for students with disabilities can be harrowing and a nightmare. Hence, their support needs should not be a debatable issue, but must be an integral part of institutional policy change.

In this study, whilst about 1 in 10 (9.0%) participants indicated the need for improvement of academic support services, 11 (16.5%) also indicated the need for lecturers to be trained and made aware of disability issues. Corroborating these findings, Kuvini et al. (2016) identified similar needs of students with disabilities and proposed that teaching materials and support staff can be key in addressing inclusivity of all students in the learning environment. Without such provisions, students with disabilities will be mainstreamed in their institutions without making any reasonable adjustments for their inclusion.

Fair access and equity are the backbone for reshaping the inclusive educational landscape so that the marginalized and the most vulnerable group will also realize their life outcomes. To address issues of access and equity, AYAC (2011) argue that making support services compulsory for education providers and educating staff about the needs of students with disabilities would make the biggest difference in their educational attainment. Unhindered access within the build and physical environments in educational institutions can go a long way in making educational inclusion a reality for students with disabilities.

About a third (33%) of the participants in this study indicated the need to have adaptive facilities, easy access to classes, library, residences and other facilities, including ramps, lifts and transport. Roberts and Simpson (2016) noted similar barriers that impede academic success for students with autism. This situation calls for a change wherein policies are formulated and implemented. Institutional policy framework and programs, therefore, need to be broad-based (MacLachlan et al. 2016), and must focus on the individual needs of the marginalized groups such as eligibility, admission, academic and non-academic services (Plotner and Marshall 2014; Kuvini et al. 2016).

CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that policy needs of students with disabilities heavily outweigh the existing inclusive policy practices in the institution. This study, has in a way, provided the plat-

form for students with disabilities to express their needs, which are vital in addressing existing policy practices in higher institutions, and can also assist in designing more workable inclusive policies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that it must be mandatory for all educational institutions to have a disability policy that must be informed by a yearly needs assessment survey carried out among students with disabilities. In addition, all policies must also have monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that the minimum standards are met, practiced and enforced by the government.

REFERENCES

Akintunde TI 2011. *Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices of University of Venda Resident Students on Environmental and Personal Hygiene, Thohoyandou, South Africa.* Masters Dissertation, Unpublished. Thohoyandou: University of Venda.

Akinsola HA 2005. *Research Methods in Medical and Nursing Practice.* Ilishan- Remo, Nigeria: Babcock University.

Australian Youth Affairs Coalition 2011. Survey Results: Disability and Tertiary Education. From <http:/ /www.ayac.org/.../Report%20on%20Survey%2 0Results%20for%2 0Disability% 20and%20 Education% 20(Tertiary).pdf> (Retrieved December 10, 2011).

Brink H 2008. *Fundamentals of Research Methodology for Health Care Professionals.* Cape Town: Juta and Company Ltd.

Burns N, Grove SK 2009. *The Practice of Nursing Research.* 6th Edition. St Louis, Missouri: Saunders Elsevier.

Daniels R 2015. Deaf Teacher Challenges Universities. *Brocott's Mail,* Thursday 14 May 2015.

Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) 2013. *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training: Building an Expanded, Effective and Integrated Post-school System.* Pretoria: Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET).

Foundation of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis (FOTIM) 2011. *Disability in Higher Education.* South Africa: FOTIM.

Hirano KA, Rowe DA 2016. A conceptual model for parent involvement in secondary special education. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 27(1): 43-53.

International Christian University (ICU) 2014. Basic Policy for Students with Special Needs. From <http;/ /www.icu.ac.jp/en/about/activities/ssn_policy.html> (Retrieved on 25 July 2016).

Katzenellenbogen J, Karim SA 2007. *Epidemiology: A Research Manual for South Africa.* Cape Town: Oxford University Press Southern Africa (Pty) Ltd.

Kuyini AB, Yeboah KA, Das AK, Alhassan AM, Boitumelo Mangope B 2016. Ghanaian teachers: Competencies perceived as important for inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education,* 20(10): 1009-1023.

MacLachlan M, Mannan H, Huss T, Munthali A, Amin M 2016. Policies and processes for social inclusion: Using EquiFrame and EquIPP for policy dialogue. *International Journal of Health Policy Management,* 5(3): 193–196.

Mouton J 2009. *Understanding Social Research.* Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Naidoo A 2010. *Students with Disabilities' Perceptions and Experiences of the Disability Unit at the University of KwaZulu-Natal-Howard College Campus.* Faculty of Humanities, Development, and Social Sciences. Masters Dissertation, Unpublished. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Nkoane MM 2006. *An Analysis of Factors Inhibiting the Access of Students with Special Needs to Higher Education in the Free State.* The Centre for Higher Education Studies and Development, Faculty of the Humanities. Bloemfontein: University of the Free State.

Pancsofar N, Jerry G, Petroff JG 2016. Teachers' experiences with co-teaching as a model for inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education,* 20(10): 1043-1053.

Pearson Education 2014. Students with Exceptionalities. From <https://www.teachervision.com/special-education/new-teacher/48459.html? page= 2anddetoured=1> (Retrieved on 16 November 2014).

Plotner AJ, Marshall KJ 2014. Navigating university policies to support postsecondary education programs for students with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies,* 25(1): 48-58.

Ramakuela NJ, Maluleke TX 2011. Students' views regarding the social and learning environment of disabled students at the University of Venda, South Africa. *African Journal for Physical, Health Education, Recreation and Dance*, 2(1): 285-294.

Roberts J, Simpson K 2016. A review of research into stakeholder perspectives on inclusion of students with autism in mainstream schools. *International Journal of Inclusive Education,* 20(10): 1084-1096.

UNESCO 2000. *The Dakar Framework for Action. Education for All: Meeting our Collective Committments.* Paris, France: The World Education Forum Drafting Committee, UNESCO.

Vanderstoep SW, Johnston D 2009. *Research Methods for Everyday Life: Blending Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches.* San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons, Inc. Jossey-Bass.

Wildeman RA, Nomdo C 2007. Implementation of inclusive education: In: EM Dalton, JA Mckenzie, C Kahonde (Eds.) 2012: The implementation of inclusive education in South Africa: Reflections arising from a workshop for teachers and therapists to introduce Universal Design for Learning. *African Journal of Disability,* 1(1): Art. #13, 7 pages.

Williams B, Copestake P, Everley J, Stafford B 2008. *Experiences and Expectations of Disabled People.* London: Office for Disability Issues.

WHODAS 2011. WHO Disability Assessment Schedule 2.0. From <http://www.who.int/classifications/icf/whodasii/ en/index.html> (Retrieved on 27 October 2014).