

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
INNOVATIVE RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE**

ISSN-2213-1356

www.ijirk.com

**CHALLENGES OF INCLUSIVE UNIVERSITY
EDUCATION IN UGANDA– ANALYSIS OF THE
DISABLED STUDENTS’ GOVERNMENT
SCHOLARSHIP SCHEME**

Yuda Taddeo Kaahwa*

Lecturer, Department of Foundations and Curriculum Studies,
School of Education, Makerere University, P.O.BOX 7062, Kampala

Kasamba Juliet

Lecturer, Department of Foundations and Educational Psychology,
Kyambogo University, P.O. Box 1, Kyambogo

***Corresponding Author**

Abstract

The study examined challenges of inclusive university education in Uganda using a case of the disabled student’s scholarship scheme. The study examined whether the scholarship scheme is equitable in terms of opportunity and process of university education in Uganda. With equity of opportunity, the study assessed access to university education by the categories targeted by the scholarship scheme. Equity of the process of university education was examined assessing physical and material access constraints, participation in study and assessment, campus support services, campus interactions, policies and administration; and university plant in relation to the special needs of the scholarship beneficiaries. A descriptive single case study design was used with qualitative data collection methods from a sample of 15 respondents that included special needs students in 3rd year of 2018/2019 academic, officials from the academic registrar’s department and dean of student’s office. The study found out that though information on public universities joint admissions is published by the Ministry of Education and Sports, it lacks elaborate guidance on the steps students with special needs go through to qualify for government sponsorship. This lack of clear guidance in the guideline’s booklet could be limiting access to the scholarship by many students. With the physical conditions, the study

found out that old building have not been remodelled to enable easy access by special needs students. The study found out that lecturers are not informed about the special needs of some students in their class and prepare lecture materials uniform for everyone. Lastly the study found out that special needs students do not have any challenges in interaction with their fellow students that was affecting their studies. On interaction with lecturers some students are not free to express their challenges to their lecturers. The study concluded that The Disabled Students Scheme has brought equity of opportunity for the disabled students to access university education on government scholarship however, the scholarship scheme doesn't cater for equity of the process of education.

Key Words: *Equity, Equity of Opportunity, Equity of the process, special needs, scholarship*

Background

In many developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, education is viewed as the most important tool to achieve modernization (López Gavira & Moriña, 2015). One of the features of a modern society is the gradual move towards the realization of social justice, equal rights, equal opportunities and self-realization of all the citizens. Education is seen as an agent through which society cultivates, preserves and reinforces the features of a modern society through training of man power needed for development and also through the equalizing effect to learners that are born and raised in difference circumstances such that differences in school performance and later social positions and opportunities in life are only attributable to individual talents and abilities. This technocratic and meritocratic pursuit cultivates equity in society whereby social position and status are achieved by those who have the requisite talents, abilities and personal drive. University education viewed as an engine of development and modernization is supposed to be accessible by all qualifying citizens irrespective of their ascriptive characteristics and physical conditions. This is done through policies and practices that bring about equity of opportunity and process in university education. In providing the equalizing effect, public universities in Uganda have schemes of allocating government scholarships that are meant to achieve equity across different socio-economic groups and physical conditions. These schemes among others include the Disabled Students' Scheme which was introduced in 1998 to ensure equity for disabled students during the award of government scholarships. Currently One percent (40) of the government scholarships each year is reserved for students with special needs. Given the inherent unfairness in the social structure, the study examined the equity implications of the disabled students scheme since it is an affirmative action scholarship. This study considered equity as fairness in the distribution of opportunity and process of education to all students who are willing and able to study regardless of their gender, socio-economic status, location or physical condition. Equity in disabled students' scholarships to university implied fairness in allocation of scholarships to the intended beneficiaries so that people are not disadvantaged or advantaged by ascription in accessing the scholarships and participation in university education. Fairness was examined at the level of opportunity and process of university education. With equity of opportunity, the study assessed access to university education by the categories targeted by the scholarship scheme. Equity of the process entailed examining physical and material access constraints, campus support services, campus interactions, policies and administration; and university plant in relation to the special needs of the scholarship beneficiaries.

Contextualizing the Study

There are statements about equity in different laws and policies of government. For example, the (The Republic of Uganda, 1995) Constitution Chapter Four 21 (2) states that a person shall not be discriminated on grounds of sex, race, color, ethnic origin, tribe, birth, creed or religion, social or economic standing, political, opinion or disability. 21 (3) discriminate means to give different treatment to different persons attributable

only or mainly to their respective descriptions. According to the (The Republic of Uganda, 2001) universities and other tertiary institutions act 2001, 24 2 (b) the role of universities is dissemination and giving opportunities of acquiring higher education to all persons including; persons with disabilities wishing to do so regardless of race, political opinion, colour, creed and sex. Subsection C stresses the need for provision of accessible facilities to the users of public universities.

Makerere university students with disability policy (2014) aims at “promoting effective management, inclusion, participation and visibility of students with disabilities and special needs in all activities of the university through a deliberately supportive, sustainable and friendly physical and non-physical environment”. The policy is guided by the principles of equity and non-discrimination; confidentiality; inclusion and participation in all university activities, academic and non-academic alike; as well as awareness, guidance and support. The policy has provisions for affirmative action during admissions, registration and orientation of students; provision of accessible accommodation for students and their helpers within university halls of residence for government sponsored students and private students who can pay for it, easy access to meals, a sighted helper/guide and money for instructional materials (braille) for government sponsored students. The policy has a clause on teaching, learning and supervision of the students with disabilities, including examination and field attachment which highlights the need for a conducive teaching and learning environment with adapted teaching methods that address the learning needs of students with disabilities and availing them with assistive devices for learning. In relation to examinations, the policy prescribes giving examinations in a relevant format such as braille and large print and brailled scripts translated for marking, allocating separate rooms and invigilators appropriate to the students; and giving extra time for writing examinations, coursework tests and assignments where necessary, although the extra time to be given is not specified.

However, (Butterwick & Benjamin, 2006) argue that without reviewing actual procedures and practices with the involvement of the disabled students, laws became insufficient to ensure equity in higher education for the disabled students. The same view is advanced by (Konur, 2006) while assessing public policy issues affecting disabled students in higher education argues that although there are laws and policies that provide the framework for supporting students with disabilities, but such students withhold disclosure of their disabilities for fear of negative consequences like being denied a course of their first choice. Engelbrecht and de Beer (2014) in their study of access constraints experienced by physically disabled students at a South African higher education institution argue that, to enable disabled learners’ access higher education, higher educational institutions should put in place adequate mechanisms to support students with physical impairment where necessary. However, Kristensen, Omagor-Loican, Onen and Okot (2006) argue that policies of universal primary education and universal secondary education do not explicitly cater for special needs education. Where policy documents exist, they have not been followed with requisite pedagogical facilities thus promoting inequality in the context of school environment. The disabled students’ scheme was meant to cater for the inclusion of students with special needs in government sponsorship in order to increase equity of opportunity and equity of the process in university education. The study examined how the scheme has achieved equity in terms of opportunity and process of university education in order to inform the policy direction of achieving equity in university education.

Theoretical Review

The barriers to equity of opportunity and equity of the process have been elaborated by the social justice model which postulates that it is not the effect of impairment that makes people disabled, but prejudice and discrimination embedded in the social context that “Labels” people with negative and disempowering “Labels” such as crippled, lame, abnormal thus stratifying them into disadvantaged social classes. According to the social justice model, disability is socially created, constructed; it is not an attribute of an individual rather a complex collection of conditions many of which are created by the social environment. It is the

collective responsibility of society at large to make policy and environmental modifications necessary for full participation of the people with disabilities in all areas of social life. The social justice model of disability holds that barriers to learning are socially constructed; they are not a consequence of some inherent medical deficiency in the students as claimed by the deficit medical model (Kioko and Makoelle, 2014). This study relied on the social justice model in examining whether the government scholarships at university have put into consideration the context required by special needs education students. Being successful at being admitted to university does not indicate total removal of access constraints and equity of opportunity for the disabled students. Konur (2006) argues that disabled students may have access to the program as their non-disabled peers but if reasonable adjustments are not made to accommodate their special needs in the program, they find difficulties in accessing the curriculum which includes actual teaching/learning and assessment. Konur, (2006) further argues that program access is not uniform across academic disciplines within a university or across universities. Fuller, Bradley and Healey (2004) while investigating disabled students' perceptions and experiences within an inclusive higher education environment found out that disabled students had difficulty in participating in class like contributing to discussion or question and answer sessions because they could not hear properly or could not catch up with the quick pace of the discussion due to impairments. (Fuller et al., 2004) further reported that some students faced difficulties in written course works and examinations because the amount of time given for such work was not enough for them which created anxiety and exhaustion. The same findings were made (Madriaga et al., 2010) while analyzing challenges faced by disabled students in learning assessment experiences reported that disabled students find difficulty in taking notes during lectures and accessing learning materials in the formats appropriate to their needs. This according to (Konur, 2006), represents exclusion from the curriculum because examinations determine the class of the degree, which subsequently determines how one will be competitive in the labor market. Redell et al (2002) cited by Fuller, Bradley and Healey (2004) argue that learning difficulties encountered by disabled students at university makes them to perform poorer than their non-disabled counterparts in spite of having comparable qualifications at the point of joining university. This study was deemed relevant to assess the barriers faced by disabled students on government scholarship, whether and how has the scholarship package help the students to overcome barriers of access to the curriculum.

The Problem

Equity in society is a cornerstone of social harmony, stability, fairness in social mobility and progress. The institution of education is supposed to provide the equalizing effect to students who are disadvantaged by ascription through social mobility. This is through policy and practice that ensures equity of opportunity, process and outcome. Equity in awarding government scholarships to students joining university removes the discrimination suffered by sections of students due to ascription thereby reducing the effects of the social inequity existent in society. The disabled students' scheme was introduced in 1998 to improve equity of access and opportunity to university education by disabled students. Review of admission records of public universities reveal an elaborate admission criterion on disabled students' scheme, and an elaborate policy framework but there is need to evaluate the impact of the scheme in the real pedagogical and compass life of the beneficiaries. Literature review further reveals that though the scheme may have visible impact on access, the impact on equity of the process is not clear and it has not been analyzed. Universities may continue implementing the scheme when it is not achieving the intended goals. This may negatively affect the disabled students and in turn negatively affect achievement of sustainable development goals. The study examined how equitable is the disabled students' scheme in terms of access and process of university education with a view of informing the policy direction of awarding scholarships so as to achieve equity in education in particular and a fair and harmonious society.

Purpose and Objective

The purpose of the study was to assess the equity implications of the disabled students' scheme on access to and process of university education in Uganda. Specifically, the study examined how the disabled students scheme caters for the special needs' students' access to and process of university education in Uganda in an equitable manner.

Methodology

Leaning on the constructivist paradigm which postulates that individuals construct their own meaning from their social context and interactions, the study adopted descriptive single case study design. The study adopted the social constructivist paradigm because in examining how the disabled students scheme address the special needs variations in access to and process of university education, relied on collecting the views of different stakeholders. Equity is a social concept viewed differently by different social classes and there is always no consensus on existence of equity in each social group thus in line with the constructivist view that reality varies from one social group to another or within the same social group but to different individuals. Since the study was qualitative the constructivist paradigm becomes more appropriate. The unit of analysis was Makerere University, the oldest government university in Uganda where the disabled students' scheme has been implemented for over 20 years. Unlike many other public universities in Uganda, Makerere University has a comprehensive disabled students' policy which outlines how equity will be achieved in the teaching-learning and overall compass life of the disabled students. The target population was disabled students on government scholarship, officials in academic registrar's department and officials from the dean of students' office. This population was considered relevant for this study because it constituted the main beneficiaries and other decision-makers on the disabled students' scheme. Specifically, the sample included 15 disabled student in 3rd year in the academic year 2018/2019, registrar in charge of admissions, and dean of students. The students were conveniently sampled and the study reached the sample size through data saturation. Other participants were purposively sampled for they occupy decision making offices regarding selection and placement of students. interview guide was used to collect data which was analyzed thematically.

Findings of the Study

The research question that guided data analysis was; How does the disabled students scheme address the special needs students' access to and process of university education in Uganda? Data was analysed in order to determine; how special needs students access information about availability and process of getting government scholarships, the physical and material access constraints faced by the students with special needs on government sponsorship, the campus support services provided by the government to beneficiaries of the special needs' scholarships and the on-campus interactions challenges facing students with special needs on government scholarship.

Ways in which Special Needs students get information about availability and process of getting government sponsorship to public universities

Through interviews with official from the academic registrar's department, students with special needs in third year and review of information on public universities joint admissions guidelines, the study found out that information on public universities joint admissions is published by the Ministry of Education and Sports and given to schools to guide senior six students when applying to join public universities and other government tertiary institutions on government sponsorship. Information on public universities joint admissions details courses available on government sponsorship at various universities, subject combination for those courses, and previous cut off points to guide students while making choices. However, there is no elaborate guidance on the steps students with special needs go through to qualify for government sponsorship. During an interview with the registrar in charge of admissions the study found out that advertisement is made in the

national media calling for people to apply for scholarships on the disabled students' scheme. Students must be interviewed by a special committee of senate that determines who qualifies for the scholarship. That process is not mentioned in the information about public universities joint admissions yet that is the guide available to students when applying for government scholarships. When asked about the possibility of many students missing out on accessibility to information about the interview arrangements one registrar revealed that the university relies on the official government communication channels; there is no way they can disseminate information to everyone.

The channel of communication that can reach everyone now are F.M radios, but we cannot put announcements on all radios in Uganda. The beneficiaries are supposed to be on the lookout because this is a routine activity they should be knowing.

Relying on the national print media implies that very few students with special needs get to know the availability of such opportunities thus many could be denied access, yet they would have qualified. Findings reveal that majority of the students on the disabled students' scheme are from the central region which might point to the skewed information flow to the deserving students. Review of admission records of special needs students for 2018/2019 academic year reveals that majority of the beneficiaries are from central region of Uganda as presented in figure 1.

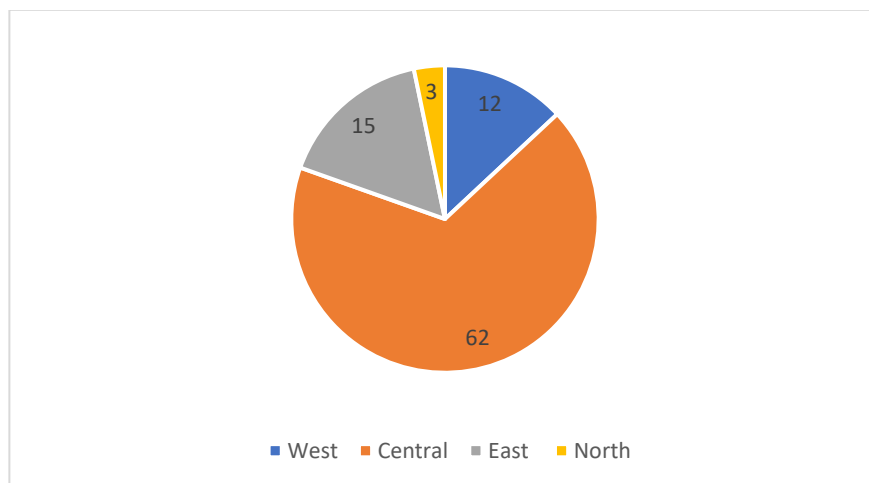


Figure 1: Percentage of Special needs students on government sponsorship at public universities per region for 2016/ 2017 academic year

Data in Figure 1 reveal that 62% of the special needs students on government sponsorship were from the central region, followed by 23% from the Eastern region, 12% from the western region and 3% from the northern Region. Access to information by the students through newspapers could be the reason why most beneficiaries are from the central region where it is relatively easy to access newspapers. During interviews most students revealed that they themselves or their parents got the information about the dates for interview from newspapers; others revealed that they were informed by their former teachers. One student commented:

There are many people with disabilities in rural areas who desire and are qualified to have such opportunities, but scholarships are mostly given to people from urban areas. There should be sensitization by government so that the target group is able to access such privileges.

This implies that students are aware of the information constraint they face about accessing the scholarship. Since it is not easy to access information via the print media in many rural areas, majority of the disabled students could be denied access to the scholarship due to poor information flow.

The physical and material constraints faced by special needs students on government sponsorship

The researcher interviewed students with special needs and made direct observation of the physical infrastructure at the universities. With the physical conditions, the study observed access to lecture rooms, nature of the places of convenience used by students with special needs and access to administration offices. Students were asked on whether they faced challenges in accessing the lecture rooms, administration buildings and places of convenience. Findings reveal that though special needs students have not complained directly to the university authorities, they face challenges in accessing lecture rooms and other buildings at universities. Students using wheelchairs revealed difficulties in queuing for registration, payments and getting examination permits which are issued through the windows in some of the university colleges. One student commented during an interview that:

Accessibility to various offices is a big problem for some of us. In [our] university for example, almost all services are given to students through windows. It is very challenging during registration period where we must make long lines to submit forms and receipts. When you reach the window, people must help you to submit because the window is a bit high. People are good but sometimes you feel like you are bothering them". When it comes to getting examination permits, we go through the same difficulties again. We have not been supported by the university during registration and picking of examination permits.

This finding implies that universities have not put in place special services for the disabled students who must compete with everyone else to access the services which complicates their lives at university. The issue of inaccessibility to buildings was further highlighted by another student who said that:

"I cannot fully access the library services. The library space here is limited, there is no space for wheel chairs. In the Africana section where important [books] are kept, it is not accessible by the likes of me. I have to send someone to get for me the books I want but it would be better if I could be able to do it myself".

The study further observed that most old buildings at university campus do not have provisions of access by wheelchairs and most of the core administrative activities like registration, payments, student's affairs, international office are in such buildings. This implies that most buildings in public universities were not designed to cater for students with special needs implying that their admission may deal with equity of access, but equity of the process is still a challenge leading to exclusion of such students. Special needs students revealed that they have challenges in using the toilets. The toilets were not designed to cater for students with special needs. One student revealed during interview that:

Poor sanitation is a big challenge to us. The toilets in the university are not disability friendly right away from construction and cleanliness. The place is hard to use but as if that is not bad enough, they are all messed up.

This implies that the physical conditions at public universities were not originally built to accommodate students with special needs and they have not been modified to suit such students which implies that though the government scholarship has provided equity of opportunity in university scholarship for students with special needs, there is a gap in the equity of the process of university education. During interviews, students were further asked if they had any challenges in attending lectures, two students with sight impairment revealed that they face difficulty with the handouts because they are printed in small fonts not suitable for them. One student revealed that:

In every course unit, they give handouts, but I cannot read the fonts, I need a bigger font but may be lecturers are not aware of us. In the first semester when I had just come, I approached one of my lecturers and requested for a soft copy of the notes, he told me he would bring it for me in the next lecture, he did not bring, and I feared to ask again. I wish they could give us the notes in soft copy to that we can print for ourselves.

The study found out that lecturers are not informed about the special needs of some students in their class and prepare lecture materials uniform for everyone. This finding implies that apart from the physical infrastructure, there are difficulties faced by students with special needs in the actual process of teaching and learning. There are no information support services to help students with special needs and their lecturers to understand the needs of these students. Students are constrained by the physical environment like buildings and chairs but also the actual process of teaching. Much as the students access the university, they are constrained in the process of university education. The study found out that students with special needs face difficulties while answering examinations which puts them at a disadvantage. During interview one students revealed that:

During examinations we are not allowed to use our braille, yet it is what we use in lectures. Our guides must read for us questions and we dictate for them answers which is very inconveniencing and time consuming. The guides can make mistakes which counts against us. We have raised this issue with our dean and she has promised to look into it, we are waiting to see at the end of the semester.

Another student revealed that: 'the policy gives students with special needs extra 45 minutes during exams, but invigilators are not aware of the policy and insist that we have to complete on the time with the rest This finding implies that much as university administration has mainstreamed special needs issues into teaching and examination processes of the university, not all stakeholders are informed of such provisions which makes special needs students to experience unfairness in the education process. Even in cases of written policies stakeholders rarely bother to cross check for the rights of special needs students.

The study further sought to establish whether students faced challenges in on campus interactions with fellow students and staff that are unique to special needs students. Students were asked if they had any challenges in interaction with students. All the interviewees responded that they did not have any challenges in interaction with their fellow students that was affecting their studies. On interaction with lecturers some students indicated that they are not free to express their challenges to their lecturers. Others felt that their lecturers did not understand their challenges as special needs students. Some students revealed that they struggle to follow lectures because of lecturers not being audible enough while others could not follow the speed of talking in making their own notes. This implies that there is a communication gap between lecturers and special needs students especially at the beginning of the course. Lecturers assume to be teaching students with the same needs yet there are special needs students. It further implies that there is an information gap between administrators and lecturers on the special needs students because the information given by special needs students is at the point of application and registration is not passed to the lecturers to guide them in planning their materials and methods.

Conclusion

The Disabled Students Scheme has brought equity of opportunity for the disabled students to access university education on government scholarship but information about the scholarships is not well disseminated throughout the country resulting into regional imbalance in accessing government scholarships by the disabled students. Students with special needs who study in normal schools do not access official information on the availability and process of accessing scholarships on the disabled students' scheme. Furthermore, the scholarship scheme for the disabled students doesn't cater for their process of education. So disabled students face difficulties ranging from lack of information support to difficulties in the actual teaching, learning, examination and accessibility thus the scheme has not solved the challenges of inclusion for the disabled students in higher education in Uganda.

Recommendation

The study recommends that public universities should establish information service and support office for special needs students. Such office would be responsible for profiling the special needs of disabled students and communicating them to relevant university stakeholders such as lecturers and administrators. Ministry of Education and Sports should include the guidelines on accessing disabled students' scholarships in Information on public universities joint admissions details sent to all schools in the country.

References

- Butterwick, S., & Benjamin, A. (2006). The road to employability through personal development: A critical analysis of the silences and ambiguities of the British Columbia (Canada) life skills curriculum. *International Journal of Life Long Education*, 25(1), 75–86.
- Engelbrecht, L., & de Beer, J. J. (2014). Access constraints experienced by physically disabled students at a South African higher education institution. *Africa Education Review*, 11(4), 544–562. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18146627.2014.935003>
- Fuller, M., Bradley, A., & Healey, M. (2004). Incorporating disabled students within an inclusive higher education environment. *Disability and Society*, 19(5), 455–468. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0968759042000235307>
- Kioko, V. K., & Makoelle, T. M. (2014). Inclusion in Higher Education: Learning Experiences of Disabled Students at Winchester University. *International Education Studies*, 7(6), 106–116. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v7n6p106>
- Konur, O. (2006). Teaching disabled students in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 11(3), 351–363. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510600680871>
- Kristensen, K., Omagor-Loican, M., Onen, N., & Okot, D. (2006). Opportunities for Inclusion? The Education of learners with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in special schools in Uganda. *British Journal of Special Education*, 33(3), 139–147.
- López Gavira, R., & Moriña, A. (2015). Hidden voices in higher education: Inclusive policies and practices in social science and law classrooms. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 19(4), 365–378. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2014.935812>
- Madriaga, M., Hanson, K., Heaton, C., Kay, H., Newitt, S., & Walker, A. (2010). Confronting similar challenges? disabled and non-disabled students' learning and assessment experiences. *Studies in Higher Education*, 35(6), 647–658. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070903222633>
- The Republic of Uganda. The constitution of the republic of Uganda, Parliamentary Affairs § (1995). Uganda. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.pa.a052713>
- The Republic of Uganda. Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act , universities and other tertiary Institutions Act § (2001). Uganda.