WRETCHED PROSPECT FOR STUDENTS WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENT IN HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS, TANZANIA

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Abstract

Difficulty in hearing is recognized as one of factors which deter communication between people involved in conversation. Its invisibility in the learning process particularly in higher Institutions makes easy for teachers to forget about it and treat the students as if they are all normal. Mixed research methods were employed for this study whereas both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from two selected government higher learning institutions. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) programme was used for analyzing quantitative data, and content analysis was used for analyzing qualitative data. The study revealed that admission systems in the surveyed institutions were not helpful in identifying and planning for the needs of Student with Hearing Impairment (SWHI). As a result, majority of lecturers and instructors were not aware of the presence of SWHI in their institutions. Furthermore, none of the surveyed institutions had either instructors or translators with skills to teach SWHI. Moreover, no extra coaching was provided to SWHI. None of the surveyed institutions had set future plans for easing learning and teaching environment to SWHI. The study concludes that lack of lecturers with special skills to

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attend SWHI stand to be a very big challenge to the surveyed institutions. Admission systems had not been of any help to identify and plan for SWHI needs, other disabilities other than hearing impairments have been considered. It is recommended that institutions have to consider SWHI academic needs as well as learning environment (teaching equipments and presence of special teachers or translators as well as books and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) intended for SWHI. In this regard, the higher learning policy in general should set priorities and make sure that those plans are realistic, reliable and implementable. Otherwise, teaching and learning environment are subjecting SWHI to fail examinations unnecessarily.

Keywords: *Hearing Impairment, Learning Environment, Tanzania, University of Dodoma, Institute of Rural development Planning*

1.0 Background Information

Disability is recognized as one of the least visible yet most powerful factor in educational marginalization (UNESCO, 2010). This is in line with the standard rules and equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly at its 48th session on 20th December 1993 (Resolution 48/96). The Standard Rule Number 6 states that;

> "*Countries should recognize the principle of equal primary, secondary and tertiary education opportunities for children, youth and adults with disabilities in integrated settings".* It further states that *"In countries where education is compulsory, it should be provided to girls and boys with all kinds and all levels of disabilities".* According to UN Standard Rules, *equalization of opportunities implies that the needs for each and every individual are of equal importance, and that these needs must be made the bases for planning of societies (Kizito, 1998). The Education Act No. 25 (56) (I) of 1978 states that every Tanzanian has the right to receive such category, nature and level of education as his/her ability may permit.*

It should be understood that disability is one of the unexpected happenings to all people. This presses a need for the government to consider people with disabilities when implementing ongoing reforms in education sector, especially at higher learning institutions where skills and knowledge of people with disabilities are developed into professionals.

Currently the government of Tanzania is on its programmes of enhancing the education sector reforms from primary schools to tertiary levels. In doing this, new tertiary colleges have been established while others have been upgraded and accredited into offering advanced diplomas and degrees (URT, 2010). Before this massive development in the education sector, it was only the University of Dar Es Salaam particularly Main campus by then *Mlimani* which was enrolling people with disabilities, specifically those with physical-mobility and vision impairments (Possi, 1996).

It has been reported that four out of ten children with disabilities aged between 7 and 13 years

attend school in Tanzania. When it comes to secondary and tertiary education for people with disabilities (PWDs), only 5% had attended secondary school and less than 1% attends tertiary education, however, these figures seem to be unrealistically high (ILO, 2009). Besides, records show that by 2008 there were only 16 special schools in Tanzania, and 159 special units integrated into regular schools. About 2% of children with disabilities were reported to attend these schools. Furthermore, there were only two Special Teachers Training Colleges in Arusha and Tanga, owned by the government and the private sector respectively which train teachers for children with disabilities (URT, 2008). Nevertheless, notable progress has been made, by 2012 special schools have increased to 66 (29 primary schools and 37 secondary schools) with a total of 242 units (MoEVT, 2012).

In view of the fact that the education Act No. 25 (56) (I) of 1978 states that every Tanzanian has the right to receive the level of education as his/her ability may permit (URT, 1978) as cited from Possi, (1996), yet most of schools and colleges where people with disabilities attend lack the necessary facilities, especially teaching equipments (URT, 2012). The situation is just wretched at the higher levels of education, especially in vocational colleges that were initially designed for people with disabilities (TOMRIC, 2000). It is from this ground that the study intended to undertake a situational analysis on the learning and teaching environments to students with hearing impairments (SWHI) in higher learning institutions in Tanzania; specifically the study was conducted at the University of Dodoma (UDOM) and the Institute of Rural Development Planning, Dodoma (IRDP) during June to September 2012.

2.0 Research Methodology

A cross-sectional study design was used for this study, according to Bryman, (2001); a cross sectional study design involves gathering data from a specified population once at a given point of time. This approach was sought to fit this study because it gave researchers time to observe what they wanted to see, it allowed studying many variables at once and it was less costly and

time effective as compared to other longitudinal study designs. Both qualitative and quantitative methods of investigation were employed during data collection. In total 100 respondents were involved in the study as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Categories of Respondents

Category	Number of Respondents		Total
	UDOM	**IRDP**	
Students	37	33	70
Deans of students	01	01	02
Teaching staff	16	10	26
Registrar/Admission officer	01	01	02
Total	**55**	**45**	**100**

The above studied sample was taken from the population by means of non probability sampling. Purposive sampling was used to identify academicians, admission officers and deans of students; whereas students were obtained through convenience sampling. In this method, the researchers met the respondents during lunch time in cafeteria and requested them to provide the needed information.

Varieties of qualitative techniques of investigation were used in this study depending on the nature of data being sought. Methods such as key informants interviews, questionnaires, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and observations were mainly used to gather information on the current status of learning and teaching environment for SWHI. The key informants included; registrars, dean of students and some members of teaching staff. Observation was done on the infrastructure and other facilities currently provided and used in teaching including those with hearing impairments. The information gathered from FGDs and key informants were used to offer descriptive and explanatory information on teaching and learning environment to SWHI.

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Qualitative data were manually analyzed using thematic analysis, while quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16. The analysis of quantitative data included; running descriptive statistics, cross tabulation and the analysis of the statistical relationships between various independent variables in the study. Tables and charts were used in presenting the analyzed data.

3.0   Results and Discussions

About 38.6% of respondents were from the School of Social Sciences- UDOM while 24.3% of respondents were from the department of Rural Development Planning-IRDP; 10% of respondents were from Environmental Planning Department IRDP, 8.7% of respondents were from the Department of Development Finance and Management Studies IRDP; 7.1 % of respondents were from the Department of Population Studies, IRDP and 11.4 % from School of Education, UDOM respectively and very few respondents (2.9%) were those pursuing Diploma in Development Planning at IRDP. The summary is given in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Faculty

Category	Frequency	(%)
Department of Rural Development –IRDP	17	24.3
Department of Environmental Planning-IRDP	7	10.0
Department of Population Studies-IRDP	5	7.1
Department of Development Finance-IRDP	6	8.7
School of Social Science-UDOM	27	38.6
School of Education-UDOM	8	11.4
Total	**70**	**100.0**

3.1 Admission of Students with Disabilities

Both IRDP and UDOM had no official admission records to show the exact number of students with disabilities (SWD) who were admitted from the time when these institutions commenced.

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Moreover, the current records found were not giving segregated information regarding to students' sex and nature of disabilities despite the section in the admission forms from all institutions inquiring students to state their body physique status. This was revealed and observed during interviews with officers from the deans and registrars' offices in both institutions.

> *"....Yes, I do understand there are students with disabilities here but I cannot tell exactly how many and even disaggregate their disabilities..."* said one of the administrative officers at UDOM.

> *"....So far we have not been enrolling many of them, unfortunately we have not been keeping the records to tell exactly how many do we have now and how many have been enrolled since the institute started to offer studies..."* said an officer at the deans of students office at IRDP

This implied that none of the institutions had kept records on the nature and number of SWD admitted in past and in the present.

3.2 SWHI Attendance, Learning and Teaching Environment among SWHI

Findings from multiple response analysis indicated that 52.6% of students (respondents) said that SWHI were not regularly attending lectures because they were not getting the expected support from lecturers. While 31.6% of respondents said SWHI were not attending lectures regularly because it was hard for them to understand the lecturers; whereas 15.8% of respondents said SWHI were not attending lectures because of feeling bored as it is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Reasons for not attending Lectures Daily

Reasons for not Attending	Frequency	(%)
Hard to understand the lecturer	42	31.6
Feeling bored	21	15.8
Not supported by lecturers	70	52.6

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Total	133	100.0

Note; Frequencies exceed number of respondents due to multiple response

A student with hearing impairment from IRDP had this to say with regards to lecture attendance;

"Sometimes I decide not to attend lectures because some of our lecturers do not consider us [SWHI]. They use speakers which end up making noises such that it becomes difficult for students with hearing disability like me to follow what he/she is lecturing. May be if they change the mode of teaching like attending us independently"

Another student without hearing impairment from IRDP commented that:

"The Institute has recently improved the learning and teaching environment for students without hearing challenges (normal students) by fixing public loud speakers in lecture halls while leaving SWHI helpless. This is because the lecture theatres and halls were not built with sound proof systems and have not been meant to enable SWHI to hear appropriately!"

The above expressions imply that the loud speakers in the lecture theatres and halls do not help SWHI. The question from survey findings which intended to know whether teaching and learning environment was conducive or not conducive revealed that 74.3 % (52) of respondents said learning and teaching were not conducive to SWHI while 25.7% (18) of respondents said the teaching and learning environment was conducive (see table 4). The learning and teaching environment is not set in a way that it can meet the needs of students with hearing impairment. This implies that SWHI are treated equally to students who can hear properly. No attention is given to their training needs. Yet, extra support to SWHI is highly needed especially for the lecturers to ensure SWHI understand during classes, acquire the intended knowledge and skills and eventually pass their examinations.

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Table 4: Learning and teaching Environments for the Students with Hearing Impairments

Category	Frequency	(%)
Conducive	18	25.7
Not conducive	52	74.3
Total	**70**	**100.0**

3.3 What Signifies Un-conducive Teaching and learning Environment?

Table 5 indicates that, 33.8% of respondents said that the teaching and learning environment were not conducive because there was lack of special teachers whereas 32.4% of respondents claimed that teaching and learning environment were not conducive because there were no sign language interpreters during lectures. On the other hand, 20.3% of respondents contended that there were no teaching equipments. While very few respondents (13.5%) argued that there were no special lecture rooms for SWHI. This implies that there is a high need of special teaching equipment and lecturers who have skills for teaching SWHI. This will help the SWHI to understand more and improve on their performance as well as to have ability to integrate what they learn with the real world.

Table 5: Reasons for the Learning Environments to be Un-conducive

Category	Frequency	(%)
No teaching equipments	42	20.3
No sign language interpreters	67	32.4
Lack of special teachers	70	33.8
No special lecture rooms	28	13.5
Total	**207**	**100.0**

Note; *Frequencies exceed number of respondents due to multiple response*

However, lack of sign language interpreter is one of the factors that hinder the performance of

students who have hearing disabilities to perform better in their studies. This is so because none of the surveyed institution was found to have a member of teaching staff who had specialized in teaching SWHI. In this regard, the national education policy and the national disability policies have not been integrated to save and favor people with hearing disabilities especially when it comes to higher learning education level. This is well seen from this study where IRDP which was considered to be an institute aging over 30 years and UDOM a newly University with modern buildings, all lack supportive learning infrastructures for SWHI.

Furthermore, a respondent with hearing impairment said;

> *"Actually we are students in higher learning institutions yes, but in real sense the teaching and learning environment are not set to fulfill our academic needs rather set to suit physically fit students' needs! I fail to understand how does information on the application form which asks applicants physical disabilities help IRDP as a planning institute to plan for SWHI? Can you imagine! Some lectures were not aware of my disability until when they were told of my problem by my classmates! Besides this was when I was in the second year! This is so disappointing! This signifies that the information collected during admission do not help lecturers!"*

Cross checking this from teaching staff side, one of the lecturer' at IRDP had this to say;

> *"I was not aware that in my class there was a SWHI, I came to realize it when I had taught about 75 per cent of the module. I treated the whole class as none had hearing impairment!"*

> *"I am not aware at all of the presence of SWHI at IRDP and more particularly in my class"* Said another lecturer at IRDP.

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The above narrations show that students' personal information during application process has not been helpful to both IRDP administration and teaching staff members. This can easily be justified from the narrations provided by lecturers and SWHI as above.

3.4 Alternatives to Rescue SWHI

The findings show that all the students who were interviewed said that SWHI got cooperation from their fellow students as shown in Table 6.This reveals that most of non-hearing impaired students sympathized with SWHI. Non-hearing students were so sympathetic in the way that they wanted to ensure that SWHI got along with their studies and improve their academic performance. This was so because the teaching and learning environment seemed not to be conducive to SWHI as it has been revealed in this study. During interview one of students with no hearing impairment at IRDP had this to say;

"I do help my colleague SWHI because it's my pleasure to see that she performs very

well in her studies; and   eventually become self reliant and not dependent".

3.5 Type of Assistance Obtained from Fellow Students

Study findings explored several assistances provided to SWHI by fellow students who are normal. Among the assistances given to SWHI from their fellow students included self prepared notes (44.9%), accepting SWHI in group discussions (27.6%), moral support [encouraging them to read and feel free to ask for assistance] (16%) and reinstructing them (11.5%). This is depicted in Table 7. This portrays that SWHI were supported academically by their fellow students in order to improve their performance in various subjects.

Table 7: Type of Assistance Obtained from Fellow Students

Category	Frequency	(%)
Give notes	70	44.9
Share Group Discussion	43	27.6

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Moral Assistance	25	16.0
Reinstructing	18	11.5
Total	**156**	**100.0**

Note; Frequencies exceed number of respondents due to multiple response

3.6 Support from Lecturers during class hours

Findings from the field indicated that 81.4% of respondents reported that SWHI did not get support from their lecturers during lecture hours while 18.6% of the respondents said that SWHI got support from their lecturers as indicated in Table 8. Despite of all efforts done by the government, still, evidence suggests that at the tertiary education level most of students with disabilities who are able to get admission "are on their own" as they receive no special support to help them on their courses (Eleweke, 1997; Kiyimba, 1997). This is similar to what was found in this study; majority of students with hearing impairment are not supported by their lecturers to ensure that they follow lectures properly.

 A student with hearing impairment condemned;

> *"You know most of our lecturers do take things for granted! They assume that we all hear properly. Some of them [lecturers] cannot be condemned because they are even not aware that we [SWHI] exist in classes which they lecture. On the other hand, there are some lecturers who tell us not to condemn them in any way rather we should condemn our government that does not facilitate learning and teaching environment for us [SWHI] because the government needs to employ lectures with special education or it could provide interpreters/translators for us [SWHI]"*

The supports SWHI expected from lecturers included to be provided with extra time for coaching, to be provided with lecture notes and handouts as well as accessing lecturers for consultation. When asked if SWHI have ever been denied such supports, no clear response were provided instead, SWHI interviewed seemed

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to have self stigma of their disability because no evidence revealed that they have ever been denied lecture notes and handouts as well as accessing lecturers for consultation.

Table 8: Support from Lecturers during Class Hours

Category	Frequency	(%)
Get support	13	18.6
Do not get support	57	81.4
Total	**70**	**100.0**

3.7 Challenges Facing Hearing Impaired Students in the Whole Learning Process

It was reported that there were many challenges that hindered students with hearing disabilities in accessing equal learning environment as compared to students with none hearing impairments at IRDP and UDOM. These challenges included; lack of learning facilities (37.8%), hard to understand lecturers (21.6%) lack of interpreters, being disregarded (19. 5%) some were forced to seat in the front of the class even if some of them would not prefer but they were compelled to so that in any case they could catch up from lectures.

However, poor performance (7.5%) and lack of confidence (6%) were the factors that affected most of the SWHI in their performance as well as getting the reliable skills and knowledge in the field of their studies. Lack of assistance from lecturers (4.9%) was mentioned by the respondents to be among the factors that hindering SWHI in the whole process of learning at UDOM and IRDP. Few students (2.7%) have reported that lack of cooperation from fellow students was the minor factor that hindered them in the learning process as shown in the Table 9.

The influence of faculty, administration, staff and other students as socializing agents shape the experiences of students with disabilities. A positive influence can lead to a positive experience

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and a negative influence can lead to a negative experience (Collins, 1995; Kawauchi, 1990). The situation found at IRDP and UDOM is similar to what TOMRIC reported about 14 years ago that "the situation is pathetic at the higher levels of education, especially in vocational colleges that were initially designed for people with disabilities as they lack specialist teachers to provide important advisory services that would assist regular teachers to manage the learners with special needs who were being integrated into public schools (TOMRIC Agency, 2000; Eleweke, 1999).

Table 9: Challenges Faced by Hearing Impaired Students in the whole learning process

Challenges	Frequency	(%)
Hard to understand lecture	40	21.6
Being disregarded	36	19.5
Poor performance	14	7.5
Lack of learning facilities	70	37.8
Lack of cooperation from fellow students	5	2.7
No assistance from lecturers	9	4.9
Lack of confidence	11	6.0
Total	**185**	**100.0**

Note; *Frequencies exceed number of respondents due to multiple response*

3.8 Trend in Enrolling Students with Hearing Impairment

Records show that prevalence of people with hearing impairment still exist in Tanzania. In the year 2008 they were 5110; in 2009 they were 5046; in 2010 they were 4748 in 2011 they were 4496 and in 2012 they were 4213.Children with disabilities regardless of hearing impairment enrolled in 2012 were 28,195. This was a decrease by 7.4% when compared to the enrolment of 30,433 in 2011(URT, 2012:43-44). This alert that the government need to plan in advance how to cater for the needs of these people with disabilities particularly people with hearing impairment.

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3.9 Future plans to help SWHI

The study was interested to know whether in one way or another, the institutions under study have future plans to improve learning and teaching environment for SWHI. It was revealed that the institutions under the study had no future plans for improving learning and teaching environment for SWHI. This was well noted in existing strategic plans for each institution under the study. Neither IRDP nor UDOM has set clearly what need to be done in order to deal with a challenge of teaching and learning environment for SWHI (UDOM 2012; IRDP 2009).

3.10 Suggestions on how to Improve Learning and Teaching Environment for SWHI

3.10.1 Suggestions from Students

Most of students suggested that lecturers should be assisted by sign language interpreters during lectures. More to that, institutions should purchase teaching equipments together with hearing devices to assist SWHI. If that is impossible, institutions should provide an extra time for lecturing and couching SWHI.

Normal students should continue assisting SWHI and provide all necessary moral support so that SWHI feel loved and cared. This would help SWHI not to feel inferior and alienated. These moral supports to SWHI need to be offered by both academic and supporting staff.

3.10.2 Suggestions from Academicians

Most of academicians suggested that institutions should find ways of paying special attention to SWD and more particularly to SWHI. Furthermore, every lecturer and non-teaching staff should be informed of the presence of students who need more attention for example SWHI. This will help SWHI to be assisted by lecturers.

4.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

The learning and teaching environment is not set to the needs of students with hearing impairment. This means that SWHI are treated the same as students who can hear properly.

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Lack of lecturers with special skills to attend SWHI, failure to utilize admission's information in identifying disabilities among students and plan for their needs, imply that national education policy and the national disability policies have not been well integrated to save and favor people with disabilities in higher leaning institutions, particularly SWHI. This is well seen from this study where IRDP which was considered to be an institution aging over 30 years and UDOM a newly established University, they all lacked proper records regarding the number of students with disabilities who have studies in these institutions.

Poor lecture attendance by SWHI was compelled by poor learning support they got from lecturers, which eventually hindered their smooth learning process. Generally lack of teaching facilities and lecturers' skills in attending SWHI were among the factors that hindered the performance of the students with hearing impairment.

On the other hand, lack of sign language interpreter is among the factors that hinder the performance of the students who have hearing disabilities to perform better in their studies in the study area as well as the country in larger.

4.2 Recommendations

Information provided by students regarding their disability during application for admission should be well utilized by Tanzania Commission of Universities (TCU) and respective universities when it comes into allocating students with disabilities to higher leaning institutions. This needs to be considered because students with disabilities should be sent into colleges and universities where necessary required teaching facilities and services for SWHI are available.

In line with the above, since the government lacks enough capabilities to meet the training needs for SWHI, few areas of specialization could be designed so as to fit SWHI careers. The design should start from far, this means from lower education levels in secondary school and vocational centres.

Both government and private higher learning institutions should consider employing teaching and non-teaching staff with special skills relating to SWD so as to provide important advisory and academic support that would assist the regular teachers to manage learners with special needs especially SWHI.

Higher learning institutions in Tanzania and other development partners should ensure that teaching equipments for SWHI are available at affordable costs. This could enable them to pursue their studies smoothly. In return, the enrollment rate of SWHI to colleges would increase after improving their learning environments.

Families should encourage their children and relatives who have disabilities to study by sending them to schools and colleges so that they cannot feel discriminated and also to ensure that they get full support in terms of paying their tuition fees, buying those hearing devices that will enable them to perform better in their studies. Moreover, the community should be aware that people with disabilities have equal right to get education like any other students.

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