

Accomplishments and Challenges Facing Students with Disabilities at the University of Dar es Salaam: Thirty Years of Navigating the Hill

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Abstract

The first special schools in Tanzania were established by charitable organizations. Although some children and youth with different special needs are receiving education at present, still the majority of them are not in schools. Some students, who are lucky enough, have attained degrees from different Universities including the University of Dar es Salaam. The University of Dar es Salaam is celebrating thirty years since the first two students with special needs were admitted for degree programs in the academic year 1978/79. Nineteen students with different disabilities were involved in this study. Interviews, documentation and observation methods were used. The results indicate that there are achievements that are worth noting, but tough challenges also persist. One obvious achievement is that the number of students with different special needs, and staff to cater for them has increased. In addition, students are now enrolled in different undergraduate and postgraduate programs. Despite the achievements, students with special needs at the University of Dar es Salaam still have to contend with a plethora of challenges, including accessibility problems and lack of and/or inadequate equipment and materials. The University has the ability to make life easier for persons with disabilities, by making necessary modifications to its environment and making the community aware of these students' special needs. The celebration of thirty years should be a wake-up call for everyone in the community to work hard and diligently towards meeting the special needs of persons with disabilities.

Introduction

Special education in Tanzania started in 1950 when Mr. Wilson Carlile under the aegis of the Anglican Church established Wilson Carlile School for Blind Boys (now Buigiri) in Dodoma Region. At this time females with special needs were not catered for. The schools that followed were also established by charitable organizations. At present we have primary schools, secondary schools and institutions of higher learning that nonetheless offer education to very few students with special needs. Tungaraza (2007) learned from 57 (45.24%) parents that their children with special educational needs, who were of school age, were not in school due to the lack of services

for them. It is estimated that only about one percent of children with special needs are enrolled in schools in Tanzania (Karakoski & Strom, 2005). Both male and female students are receiving education although female students at all levels are fewer than male students. Tungaraza and Mboya (2005) found out that only 26 (16%) students with special needs enrolled at the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) were female students. The researchers commented:

This gender under-representation is prevalent throughout the whole educational system. The scarcity of programmes at lower levels of education for girls with disability, limits the possibility of increasing their enrolment at the institutions of higher learning (p. 20).

The government of Tanzania has shown an interest in educating of persons with special needs, though some primary and secondary schools are still run by charitable organizations, and the students who are enrolled are very few.

The University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, was established in 1964. This was the first public university, started soon after Tanzania became independent in 1961. The UDSM main campus is situated on the west side of the city of Dar es Salaam, occupying 1,625 acres on Observation Hill, thirteen kilometres from the centre of the city (UDSM, 2001). Well known as The Hill, the main campus of UDSM has beautiful scenery. However, the environment poses hurdles for persons with special needs, especially students with visual and physical impairments.

It was not until the academic year 1978/1979 that history repeated itself when the first two male students with visual impairment were admitted to the UDSM. As mentioned earlier, the first special school in Tanzania was for male students with visual impairments. Today we are celebrating thirty years of the education of persons with special needs at the UDSM. The number of students has increased to some extent and students with a variety of special needs are now studying at the University. There are, for example, students with visual and physical impairments, deaf students, and students with albinism. The majority of these students are enrolled in the School of Education and Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

The undergraduate population has increased from two students in the academic year 1978/79 to 227 students in the academic year 2008/09 as Table 1 indicates. In addition, students with different disabilities have been enrolled.

Table 1: The number of undergraduate students enrolled at the UDSM from 1978/79 to 2008/09

	Blind	Albino	Physical disabilities	Deaf	Total	%
Females	14	3	24	3	44	19.4
Males	50	8	120	5	183	80.6
Total	64	11	144	8	227	100
%	28.2	4.9	63.4	3.5		100

This study investigated the views of the students with disabilities, who recounted what they considered to be the achievements of the university and what they thought were still the various daunting problems facing them.

The purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore the achievements of the UDSM and the challenges still facing students with special educational needs at the UDSM, as we celebrate 30 years since the first two students with visual impairment began to navigate the Hill.

Research questions

Two main research questions guided this study. They were:

- What are the main achievements that students with special educational needs at the UDSM are aware of?
- What challenges do students with special educational needs face as they study at the UDSM?

Research Methodology

A case study was employed to collect information from students with special needs, enrolled at the UDSM, Main Campus.

Geographical Area of study

This study was carried out at the UDSM Main Campus, which was selected because this is the campus that enrolled the first visually impaired students in the academic year 1978/79 and which has continued enrolling them ever since.

Participants

The participants in this study were 19 students with visual, hearing, physical impairments and students with albinism, taking different degree programmes at the UDSM. The respondents were purposively selected through the Special Education Unit. The names of 32 students were obtained from the Unit, and those who volunteered for interview were picked from that list.

Data collection techniques

Three methods were used to collect information. These were documentation, interviews and observation. Documents from the Special Needs Education Unit at the UDSM were read with a view to getting information and statistics kept by the Unit on students. Open-ended interview questions were utilized to obtain detailed in-depth information from the students and staff. Furthermore, the observation method was also used to collect information from the environment where the students live, move about, and learn.

Results

Background information of the respondents

The respondents included students with albinism, students with visual impairment and students with physical impairment. These were undergraduates enrolled in different courses at the UDSM. A total of 19 students were involved in the study. Of these, ten were females and nine were males as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Number of student respondents by type of disability and gender at UDSM, 2008

Type of disability	Students who responded	
	Male	Female
Visual impairment	2	2
Albino	0	2
Physical impairments	7	5
Deaf	0	1
Total	9	10

Source: Field record

Programmes of study: The student respondents were enrolled in different programmes at the UDSM. Their ages ranged between 21 and 35 years of age. Six (31.6%) respondents were enrolled in the BA (Education) programme, five (26.3%) were studying Sociology and four (21.1%) were enrolled in the BEd (Psychology) programme. One respondent each was enrolled in BEd Commerce, BEd Science, BA Economics and BSc Education.

Years of study: The student respondents were taken from different years of study. Four were in their first year, seven were in their second year, five were in the third year and three respondents were in their fourth year of study.

Achievements as reported by the students

The respondents were asked to reflect on the achievements that they felt had been attained by the University since the academic year 1978/79 when the first students with disabilities were admitted to the University. Different achievements were mentioned.

Increase in number of students: As we celebrate 30 years, there are a lot of achievements that we can credit the university with, and discuss. The respondents mentioned several achievements that had been attained by the UDSM since the academic year 1978/1979, when the University

first opened its doors to persons with special needs. As Figure 1 shows, one of the most significant achievements was the increase in number and type of students with special needs at the University. All students (100%) mentioned the increase in the number of students as one of the major achievements. In the academic year 1978/1979, two male students with visual impairments were enrolled in undergraduate programmes. By 2007, a total of 203 students had registered with the UDSM Special Needs Education Unit, as seen in Figure 1. It is important to note, however, that some students do not register with the Unit, for personal reasons, and, therefore, they are not included in these statistics of students with special needs because they are not known.

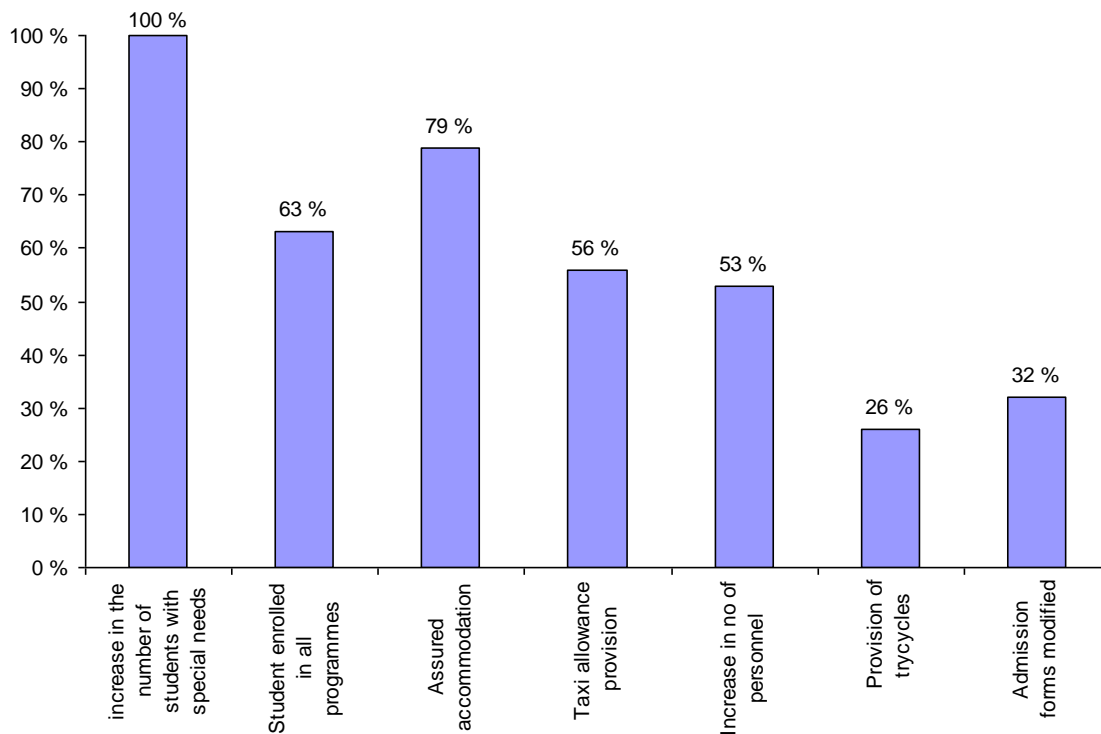


Figure 1: Achievements of UDSM mentioned by students with special needs shown in percentages

The first two students enrolled in the academic year 1978/79 were visually impaired. This group remained alone until the academic year 1989/90, when four other students with physical impairments were enrolled. The number and type of disability has increased since then, and at present the UDSM has enrolled students with visual hearing impairments, and impairments and

students with albinism. Students with hearing impairments just recently got the chance to join the University and eight such students had been enrolled at the UDSM by 2009. One student had this to say:

We cannot complain much. Some of us never even knew we would get a University education. The number of students is increasing each year at this University and a reasonable number of students with special needs also get a chance to join the University. To some extent, I would say, we have been recognized despite our disabilities.

Besides undergraduate students, some students have pursued Masters degrees and others have taken Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) courses at the UDSM. The records of the Special Needs Education Unit for the academic year 2007/08 showed that eight students with visual impairments had obtained Masters degree and one had a Postgraduate diploma. Two students with physical disabilities had a Masters degree, two had an MBA and another two had PGDE qualifications. Of those with postgraduate degrees, two were females and ten were males. All three PGDE students were males.

Enrolment of students in different programmes: The first two students were enrolled in the Faculty of Education in 1978/1979. In 1979/80 two more students with disabilities were also enrolled in the Faculty of Education. Changes were seen in 1980/81 when three students were enrolled in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences in the Department of Sociology. Ten years after the first two students were admitted to UDSM that is in 1988/89 the number of students increased to 22, all in the Faculties of Education and Arts and Social Sciences. Only students with visual impairments were admitted at the University up to 1988/1989. In 1989/90, two students with visual impairment and three with physical impairments were admitted to the University. To date, there are more students with physical disabilities at the UDSM than others. One science student commented on being disabled and studying science, saying:

I know one student who was denied enrolment in the Faculty of Science because he had physical disabilities. The professors did not think he would make it especially during laboratory practice because he could not walk. One thing that the professors forgot was that such students had taken science at secondary school

level and passed examinations. I am glad I was admitted to study Science because that is where my interest lies.

Table 3: Number of undergraduate students who have been enrolled at UDSM since 1978/1979 to 2007/2009 by programme of study

<i>Program</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Visual impairment</i>	<i>Hearing impairment</i>	<i>Albino</i>	<i>Physical</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
Education	F	13	-	1	7	15	7.4
	M	32	4	3	63	93	45.8
Arts & Social Sciences	F	1	2	2	15	17	8.4
	M	10	1	1	37	48	23.6
Law	F	-	-	-	2	2	1.0
	M	8	-	2	2	9	4.4
Science	F	-	-	-	-	-	-
	M	-	-	-	2	2	1.0
Engineering	F	-	1	-	-	-	-
	M	-	-	-	6	6	3.0
FIVE	F	-	-	-	-	-	-
	M	-	-	-	3	3	1.5
Commerce	F	-	-	-	1	1	0.5
	M	-	-	2	6	7	3.4
Total		64	8	11	144	227	100

Source: UDSM Special Needs Education Unit, 2009

The records kept by the Special Needs Education Unit revealed that in the academic year 2007/2008, the University had 43 students with different disabilities enrolled in various programmes. The total numbers of undergraduate students who had been admitted at the University of Dar es Salaam, and who had registered their names in the Unit between 1978/79 to 2008/09 were 227. The majority of these students were students with physical impairments, followed by students with visual impairments. It is important to note that “visual impairment is one of the most least prevalent disabilities in children” (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1997 p. 356).

As years the passed, some students with disabilities joined other faculties. At present some students are enrolled in the Faculties of Education, Arts and Social Sciences, Law, Science, Engineering, FIVE and Commerce and Management as Table 3 indicates. This is an achievement, acknowledged by 63 percent of the respondents.

Accommodation: Assured accommodation on campus was another achievement mentioned by 79 percent of the respondents. The UDSM can no longer accommodate all students on campus because the number of students is more than the rooms available. Some of the students, therefore, have to find accommodation outside the campus. However, students with disabilities are guaranteed accommodation on campus, unless they do not want it. The UDSM Students Accommodation Policy (2005) states:

The University recognises that students who are severely disabled or suffer from mental health disability or severe medical impairment cannot effectively carry out their university studies unless they are provided with University accommodation. The University Students Accommodation Bureau (USAB) will, therefore, consider giving accommodation to students on medical grounds and disabilities before considering other groups of students (p.4).

Campus accommodation has made life easier for these students. Life is more secure for them on campus than living off campus, and that is an important accomplishment.

Taxi allowance: Ten (56%) respondents mentioned taxi allowance as one of the achievements. The public transport system in Tanzania is not user-friendly for persons with disabilities. Some students, especially those in wheelchairs, cannot take public transport because wheelchairs cannot be accommodated on any of the public buses. The UDSM provides each student registered at the Special Needs Education Unit with a taxi allowance to enable students get to bus terminals or the airport when going home or coming back from vacation. Showing his appreciation and gratitude one student reported:

Taxi assistance has been of much help to us. Now we can call a taxi when going on vacation or coming back from home and the University pays for us. It has made life easier because we do not have to depend on other people for assistance. In addition, we do not have to think about losing our belongings 'daladals'.

Taking a taxi is expensive, and yet it is the only means that some students with special needs have at their disposal. This financial support is a recent introduction; before that, students had to dip into their own pockets.

Increase in number of personnel: The UDSM Special Needs Education Unit began with only one Braille transcribers. At present there are three Braille transcribers and two sign language

interpreters for students with visual and hearing impairments, respectively. This has made it easier for students because they have more than one person to turn to for help. Eleven (53%) respondents thought this was an accomplishment. Deaf students are happy and one said:

The number of students who are deaf is increasing slowly now. There was a time when deaf people were not admitted to this University at all. But we are glad that the University has seen the need for employing language interpreters to give students who are deaf a chance to get education.

In addition to three Braille transcribers and two sign language interpreters, the respondents said that the number of readers has also increased to meet the needs of students with visual impairments. At the time of this study, there were 23 readers who helped students with visual impairments. Readers are an essential part of students' education because some students can only access information written in Braille. Unfortunately the UDSM Library does not have books written in Braille and, for that reason, readers are essential for blind students to be able to access information contained in standard script books.

Provision of tricycles: The UDSM Main campus extends over a large area. Yet, some students have to crawl from one place to another, which is not only difficult, but also painful and time consuming. Five (26%) respondents appreciated being provided with tricycles, which help them move around faster, with greater ease and more comfortably. The UDSM had started a system of procuring tricycles for students with physical disabilities, after the approval of the medical officer.

Admission forms modified: Another success is that the existing admission forms at the UDSM require that students indicate if they have a disability. Six (32%) students thought that was one of the achievements that had recently been attained. However, some students admitted that some of the students do not indicate their disabilities for fear that they might not be selected for admission due to their disabilities. One student said 'If you reveal your disability the chances are that you may not be selected. Many of us, therefore, hide our identity so that we may get the chance to be selected.' This is a legitimate, and also a serious concern, particularly because discrimination is still a problem in our communities.

In short, we found that students with disabilities appreciate some of the achievements of the UDSM in relation to students with special needs.

Challenges still facing students with disabilities

The students also felt that, despite all the advances made so far by the UDSM, they still had a plethora of challenges to contend with, as their responses below indicate. Students with disabilities at the UDSM, just like many other students with disabilities in this country, face a lot of challenges. The truth is that not a great deal has been done to meet the special needs of persons with disabilities. The respondents provided the challenges shown in Table 4.

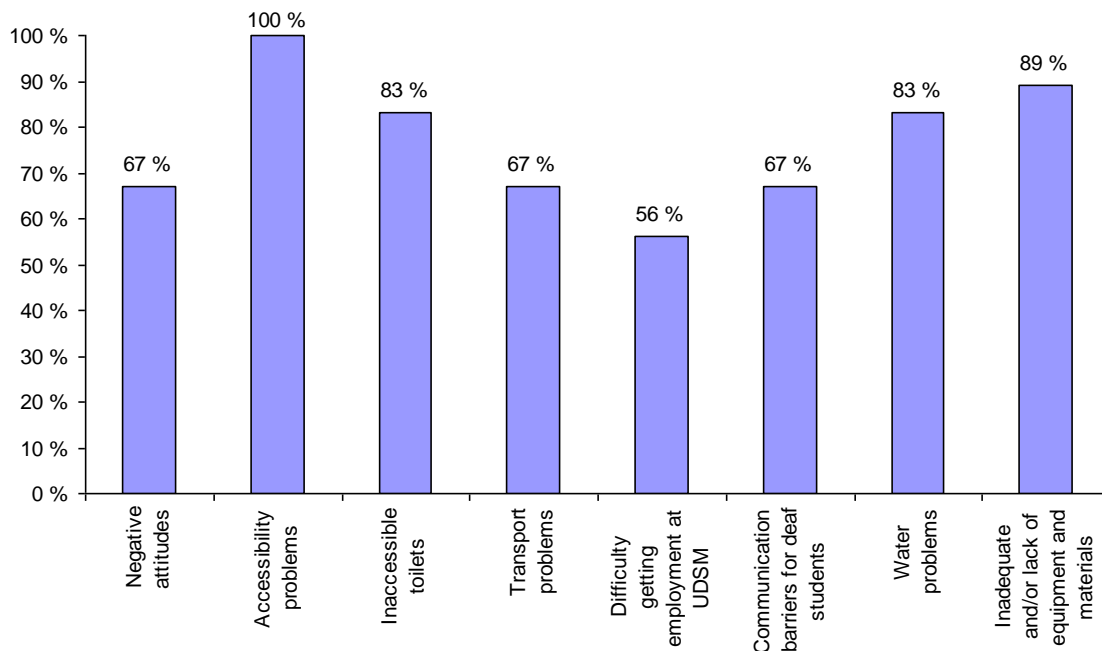


Figure 2: Percentage of participants mentioning various challenges facing persons with disabilities at the Hill

Negative attitudes: History gives a number of examples of persons with disabilities worldwide who have been killed, ridiculed, left to die or been condemned to permanent exclusion in asylums (Pritchard, 1963). **Without a doubt**, persons with disabilities have travelled through a frightening, uncertain and unkind environment. Negative attitudes persist to date, although there

is some positive societal awareness of disabilities and of persons with disabilities. For example, a few attend school and others are even employed.

However, despite the knowledge people have about persons with disabilities, negative attitudes to them are nonetheless still evident. Twelve (67%) respondents of this study mentioned negative attitudes as one of the challenges persons with disabilities face at the UDSM. For example, one student narrated the story that he went to see his professor over an academic problem, and was taken for a beggar and sent away before he had even opened his mouth to say what he wanted.

The student recounted:

One morning, I went to my professor's office because I had an academic problem. I knocked at the door and he told me to come in. When he saw me crawling, his face changed and said, "sorry I have nothing to give you today. Can you get out because I am busy please?" I took some time to let him know that I was one of his students and that I needed some academic help and I was not there to beg. After saying that, the professor gave listened to me.

It is unfortunate that, perhaps due to the exceedingly large classes, some students go unnoticed in the classrooms. Definitely awareness programmes are needed to make that the special needs of students with disabilities are known and appreciated. Without serious plans and implementation efforts to make sure that their needs are known and met, persons with disabilities will continue to suffer discrimination.

Some students claimed to have experienced such negative attitudes in different places, such as the library, science laboratories, Institute of Development Studies, UDSM Press and the Church. It was sad to learn that one student, who was crawling, went to see a priest for some spiritual help, and was told: "Sorry we do not give alms here", even before he got to the priest for help. Another student narrated sadly how he was turned away from Mlimani City Supermarket when he went there for shopping. He said:

I will never forget the 12th of November 2007 when I was refused permission to enter Mlimani City Supermarket by the security guard. He told me that the management directed them not to let persons with disabilities in, because they go there to beg instead of buying things. When I insisted that I was not a beggar and had to go in, I was pushed out. People who saw me being pushed came and helped me arguing vociferously that I was being discriminated against due to my disability, which was actually true!

Clearly, this is a major problem, especially because these negative attitudes come from even the learned community who, one would think, were aware of the needs of persons with disabilities. It is easy to notice persons with physical disabilities because they may look different from the people around them.

Just like all of us, persons with disabilities have the right to live in a just society that recognises their needs and helps to reduce or eliminate all the barriers confronting them. Due to people's ignorance or prejudice, persons with disabilities are prevented from participating fully in the life and activities of their communities. This is unfair and unacceptable and we must fight it together so that persons with disabilities can live a peaceful and respectable life to the full.

Barriers to Accessibility: Accessibility issues are crucial for successful inclusion programmes. Some persons with disabilities cannot be included effectively, if they have problems moving around their environment. For example, persons in wheelchairs cannot access the physical environment where there are stairs. A barrier-free environment is not only meant for persons in wheelchairs; persons with other disabilities can also experience accessibility problems and this should be known and dealt with.

Nineteen (100%) respondents mentioned accessibility barriers as one of the challenges facing some students at the UDSM. One student who has a physical disability recounted:

Sometimes I cannot go to places due to stairs. Besides, some buildings and staff offices are not accessible due to stairs and/or narrow doors, and I find it difficult to go to meet my lecturers if I have an academic problem. I have also missed some classes owing to the unfriendly environment. Even the library, the most important place for students, is not accessible for some of us. There is a need for change!

It is true that the physical environment of the UDSM Main campus causes a lot of mobility difficulties for persons with disabilities, especially those in wheelchairs. Accessibility to information is also a big problem that needs special attention. It is the sad truth, for example, that some students graduate from the UDSM without ever using the Main Library because it does not have books written in Braille. Students with visual impairments at the UDSM depend on readers to read for them since the library does not have books written in Braille. Information written in

Braille is lacking everywhere on the Main Campus of the UDSM and this is a barrier to all students with visual impairments. Cartwright, Cartwright and Ward (1995) pointed out that persons who are blind 'may require Braille instructions in elevators, bus stops, restaurants and other public places' (p. 226).

Inaccessible Toilets: A toilet is an important place for all humans, but, if not kept clean, toilets may be the source of many diseases. Fifteen (83%) respondents felt that one challenge facing persons with disabilities at the UDSM was toilets being inaccessible to some students. It is difficult for student in a wheelchair to access toilets easily due to stairs or steps leading to the toilets and/or narrow doors. In addition, some respondents who have to crawl to get in, feared for their lives because some of the toilets are not kept clean. One student had this to say:

Sometimes I do not take breakfast if I have many classes because I fear using the toilets around the campus. In addition, besides being inaccessible, sometimes they are so dirty that they are a peril to my health since I have to crawl.

Persons with disabilities sometimes need special toilets because some can neither use Asian nor European types of toilets, if not modified to suit their physical condition. There is need for the University to promptly find a solution to this problem.

Public Transport problems: There is no public transport in Tanzania that caters for persons with disabilities. Students at the UDSM fail to attend some social, community or personal activities outside the campus owing to transport problems. Twelve (67%) respondents mentioned transport as one of the problems they are facing. One student had this to say:

Sometimes I wish I could just take a bus and go to visit friends and relatives, or even attend some social functions such as relatives' weddings, but when I think of the hustle and bustle and congestion on the 'daladala' buses, I decide to just forget it, because it is not worth the trouble!

Difficulty getting employment: Ten (56%) students interviewed mentioned the difficulties persons with disabilities encounter when searching for jobs. Employment of persons with disabilities is not easy because many employers look at their disabilities first rather than looking at what these people are capable of doing. Here is an example of their complaints:

Sometimes we struggle and study hard under very difficult conditions in order to learn, pass examinations, and go to get jobs and become independent. However, we get discouraged when we find that some students with disabilities years after graduating do not get a job. Even the university that knows fully our strengths and the challenges we have to contend with is not prepared to employ us. Of course lecturers see us in classes but do not think about us beyond university life.

Evidently, students with disabilities, just like other graduates, need job-searching skills and guidance so as to make a successful transition from college to the world of work. At the same time, there is need for the community to understand that, notwithstanding these people's disabilities, they do have the ability to work.

Communication barriers: Twelve students (67%) expressed their concern about the communication barrier that deaf students experienced at the University and even outside the University. Deaf students, who are admitted to the University, usually use sign language, but unfortunately, with the exception of their two language interpreters, no-one else knows and uses that language. This leads to isolation and loneliness. To show how serious a problem the communication barrier was to them one respondent asked:

Imagine you travelled to a country where the only language used was sign language and you did not know the language. People talked, laughed, but you did not understand. How would you feel? Now put us in that situation. We are isolated due to this language barrier. Some people need to learn the language so as to help us socialize.

Water problems: The UDSM, just like many other parts of the city, is constantly plagued by the problem of water shortage, or the total lack of water, often for extended periods. Sometimes students are forced to go out and fetch water from standpipes. For students with disabilities, especially those with physical and visual disabilities, this can be a difficult if not insurmountable challenge. Many times such students have to depend on others for help. This is fine, but one student had this to say:

I must admit that we get a lot of help from other students. Some are ready to carry buckets of water for us all the time, as needed. We are grateful for their help. However, we would also like to be independent and do things for ourselves. We are adults and we do not want to behave or be treated like children. But what can we do? It is painful sometimes!

Lack of and/or inadequate equipment and materials: Some students such as those with visual impairments need extra equipment and materials to enable them to take notes, write examinations, and learn effectively. For example, they need Braille machines, typewriters and tape recorders. However, the University does not have enough of these for every student. Sixteen (89%) respondents mentioned this as one of the problems they face. The respondents complained that the number of students has increased, but the amount of equipment and materials has remained the same. One student said, for example:

During lectures we have to use tape recorders, but sometimes we find that there are no batteries. As a result we just sit in lecture rooms, but we cannot take notes. We try to listen, but we cannot remember everything at the end of the lecture. Sometimes we fail to perform well, not because we are not intelligent, but because we lack the necessary equipment and materials.

It should be noted that such equipment and materials are not optional; they are a must for students with special needs. The lack of such gadgets affects learning adversely, and as a result, some students fail to perform well during examinations and/or tests.

Discussions

This study aimed at finding out from students with disabilities what they thought had been the achievements of the University of Dar es Salaam in relation to the education of persons with disabilities in the past thirty years. In addition, the study sought to identify the challenges that students with disabilities at the UDSM faced. The findings revealed that there had been some accomplishments, but that there are also challenges the students still have to contend with.

The accomplishments included the increase in the number of enrolled students, taxi allowance, assured accommodation, the supply of tricycles and modification of admission forms. It is an indisputable fact that the number of students has increased over the years. However, this number is still negligible, especially when compared with the number of those who graduate from primary and secondary schools, let alone the total number of persons with disabilities in Tanzania. For example, in 2007 there were about 922 students with different disabilities in secondary schools in Tanzania (The United Republic of Tanzania, 2007), but only fifteen students were admitted to the UDSM in the academic year 2007/08. In addition, despite this

achievement, the issue of gender and education for persons with disabilities is still a matter of grave concern. There is clearly no equal access, and this is evident even at the lower levels of education. Now, tertiary education leads to better employment and improved life outcomes, but for many people with disabilities, college remains an unrealized dream (Bremer, Timmons, and Johnson, 2007).

Campus accommodation is important for all students. All students with disabilities are assured of rooms on campus and each one of them, unless it is his or her choice to live off campus, gets a room. However, the campus has no facilities for married students. Some married students have to live off campus especially when they have children. This has proved to be a much bigger problem for students with disabilities who get married and start families while studying. Assured accommodation is no longer available in those cases.

Recently, the admission forms have been modified to enable students to indicate that they have disabilities during the application process. This is definitely a very good idea, and the students mentioned this as one of the achievements. However, some students did not report their disabilities for fear that they may not gain admission because of it. In order for these forms to be useful, students with disabilities must be assured that no-one will fail to get admission due to his or her disability. In addition, it is obvious that admission officers have not used such statistics for the benefit of persons with disabilities. If such information were used for the benefit of students with disabilities, then the University would be able to know how many students with disabilities applied and to prepare for them ahead of time, before the term started. The change is welcome to be sure, but it must benefit the people it is intended for.

Buying tricycles for students with physical disabilities has helped a lot of them to easily move from one place to another. However, it is now becoming difficult for the University to buy tricycles, after the establishment of the Loan Board, from where students are supposed to get loans. The Loan Board does not have that option for students who may need tricycles. Some of the students, therefore, do not have currently tricycles although they need them, because the University does not have a budget for them at present. This otherwise great achievement is therefore now turning out to be a disappointment and a great problem for many students who

require tricycles. There is a need, no doubt, to look for alternative sources of funding, especially from the government so that both the University and students with special needs may benefit from them continuing to have tricycles.

Students mentioned several challenges that they faced. These included negative attitudes, accessibility barriers, the difficulty of getting jobs after graduation, and communication barriers for students who are deaf. Perhaps one of the main challenges that students face is accessibility barriers. Such barriers may affect even those without disabilities. As Werts, Culatta, & Tompkins (2007) have observed, 'Equally troublesome is architectural discrimination in the form of barriers that deny people with physical impairments access to facilities easily available to those without disabilities' (p. 230). There is a need for accessibility standards, which means that 'the environment must be free from obstacles that prevent students with disabilities from having the same convenience as individuals without disabilities' (Wood, 2002 p. 296). New buildings at the University should definitely be more accessible and efforts should be made to have even temporary ramps added to the old buildings that are currently not easily accessible by persons with disabilities.

Persons with disabilities like other students go to University so that at the end they may get a job and be self-reliant. The Disabled Persons (Employment) Act No. 2 of 1982 requires all employers to employ two percent of persons with disability, for every 50 employees in an establishment. The UDSM falls far short of that mandate. Yet, it is expected that the University should set the example and advertise the capabilities of these students to open up more markets for them.

Communication is vital for every human being. People exchange ideas, knowledge and skills through communication. In Tanzania, deaf people do not have a common language. Some use signing to communicate and others lip read. As a result, deaf people cannot even communicate among themselves, much less with people without disabilities. In addition, community members do not know how to sign and as a result deaf people become excluded in many areas. This is a matter of major concern not only for the University but also for the country in general.

Every human being needs to feel included, respected and wanted in order to be happy. The negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities may hurt their feelings and may lead to other social problems. Werts, Gulatta and Tompkins (2007), writing about problems facing people with physical or health problems, say:

In addition to their own possibly unresolved feelings, they must continually face potentially negative or stereotypical behaviours from people with whom they interact. Fear, rejection, or pity can cause a student to internalize these attitudes and become withdrawn, angry, and overly dependent (p. 229-230).

Thus, while it is evident that a lot has been done to help students with disabilities, which is much appreciated, yet some of the challenges are severe enough to adversely affect the learning and general wellbeing of persons with disabilities. The University should, therefore, now focus on how to remove some of these barriers so that students with disabilities may be included more than has hitherto been the case

One limitation of this study is that the sample was small and there are certain difficulties in generalizing the present findings to other academic institutions. Future studies should involve other respondents, such as the academic staff and administrative staff members, who work in the office of the Dean of Students. Such a step might help fill the information and/or literature gap.

Summary, conclusion and recommendation

Summary: This study was conducted at the University of Dar es Salaam Main campus. Nineteen students with disabilities were involved in the study. Interviews, documentation and observation methods were used to collect data. The purpose of this study was to explore the achievements of the UDSM and the persistent challenges facing students with special educational needs at the UDSM, as we celebrate 30 years since the first two students with visual impairment began to navigate the Hill.

It is an undeniable fact that some things have been accomplished over the past thirty years. The number of students and staff has increased, and students are now enrolled in a greater variety of faculties. In addition, some resources and services are being provided to students to make their lives easier and more manageable. However, the one question that remains to be asked is whether all students of different disabilities benefit equally from those accomplishments. If the answer is 'NO', then there is need for the University to evaluate itself, so as to make it less challenging for present and future students with disabilities to navigate the Hill.

In 2008/09 the UDSM celebrated 30 years since the first two students with disabilities were enrolled to pursue their degree programmes. There are a great number of achievements that the University can justifiably celebrate, and should be given credit for. However, many challenges are yet to be surmounted. Many students with disabilities still study under dire conditions, though they try not to give up. The challenges included negative attitudes, accessibility problems and lack of and/or inadequate equipment, and materials.

Conclusion: As we celebrate the achievements, we must also seriously think about the challenges facing students and how to solve them. Thirty years is a long period for any community and it is high time the University rose to the occasion and made requisite changes for the benefit of students and staff with disabilities. The University has the ability to make life easier for these persons, by making requisite modifications to its environment – to make it more user-friendly for persons with disabilities – and by making the community aware of their problems.

As the golden rule has it: “do to others what you would have them do to you.” This golden rule should be the University’s guiding principle, in its bid to effect requisite environmental and attitudinal changes, for we are all at risk of becoming disabled at some point in our life, it is just the timing that may differ. As we celebrate 30 years of navigating the Hill, therefore, it behooves that we change our attitudes, the university environment, and by trying our level best to make a difference in other people’s lives, because, when all is said and done, we do need one another, as we are all in this together.

Recommendations: This study has revealed that students with disabilities at the UDSM are faced by a lot of challenges. It is, therefore, strongly recommended, among other things, that:

- The Special Education Unit be strengthened and be equipped with enough personnel, equipment and materials that students require.
- Efforts should be made so as to improve the infrastructure to make the environment accessible to all.
- Access to information should also be given priority. Important information to students and staff should also be made available in Braille.
- University community members should be educated about disabilities and how to fight negative attitudes and discrimination. This could be done through seminars, talks or even publications.

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