

External factors influencing academic success among students with Visual Impairments at one University in Masvingo, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

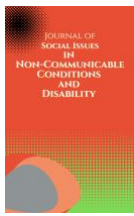
This study explores and discusses the perspectives of students with visual impairments (SVIs) on the external factors influencing their academic success in higher education (HE) at a university in Masvingo, Zimbabwe. Using African Strengths Theory (AST) advances the argument that access alone to higher education institutions by SVIs is not enough. Missing in the literature are perspectives of SVIs in Zimbabwe on the role of external factors in influencing their academic success in higher education. Data was gathered using African Research Methodology through dialogue with six SVIs and Indaba with four university lecturers. In-situ primary analysis was used, as data was collected. Evidence from the study revealed that SVIs need support from peers, family, the community as well as the institution's disability support services to ensure their academic success in their studies in higher education institutions. The study concludes that efforts must be made to increase support from the mentioned stakeholders to SVIs in HE. It is recommended that the government and HE institutions should come up with disability support programs aimed at equipping the many stakeholders with skills to be supportive of SVIs for their academic success and well-being.

Key words

academic success, disability, higher education, visual impairment, inclusive education, students, Zimbabwe

Key points

1. The study focused on students with visual impairments at a university in Masvingo, Zimbabwe.
2. The study is grounded in the African Strengths Theory (AST), which provides a unique perspective on the experiences of students with visual impairments.
3. The study used African Research Methodology, which is appropriate for exploring the perspectives and experiences of SVIs.
4. The study highlighted the importance of support from various stakeholders (peers, family, community, and disability support services) for the academic success of SVIs.
5. The study makes a strong case for the importance of supporting students with visual impairments in higher education institutions.



Introduction

Academic success by SVIs continues to be a dream realized by a few. This is even true in higher education institutions. SVIs are met with internal and external hurdles in their academic journey which deter their academic achievement. Some end up failing to complete their higher education studies (Mlambo and Ndlovu, 2021). Though some of the factors impeding SVIs' success in higher education have been explored elsewhere, the researchers noted with concern the scarcity of literature focusing on the external factors influencing their academic success in Masvingo, Zimbabwe.

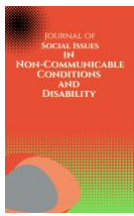
Such studies are important, provided that inclusive education in higher education has become a global movement as evidenced by the national and international commitments towards the empowerment of persons with disabilities (PWDs), especially with the right to education. Evidence from other sources shows how internal factors such as hard work, self-awareness, and endurance influence the academic success of students with disabilities in HE. Findings from this study, therefore, can go a long way in making necessary accommodations to improve the academic success of persons with disabilities in higher education in Zimbabwe.

This study explores the external factors that may be influencing the academic success of SVIs at one university in Masvingo. The first sections will interrogate the background of this study, the theoretical framework, and the literature review of key factors influencing the academic success of SVIs.

Background

Access to higher education among young persons with disabilities has been a challenge in Zimbabwe (Daitai, 2023). University enrolment of persons with disabilities continues to rise with each passing year. On the other hand, in America for instance, research shows that as many as 96% of college and university classrooms have students with disabilities in them (Santos et al., 2019). With global commitments to ensure equal access to education for all, championed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the rise of inclusive education, there has also been a rise in enrolment of persons with disabilities in higher education (HE) institutions. However, despite the increase in enrolment of a student with disabilities (SwDs) in HE institutions, the level of academic success of these students remains limited and biased in favor of their able-bodied counterparts, (Santos et al, 2019; Parsons, McColl, Martin & Rynard, 2021). Despite this growth, students with disabilities have not yet reached academic parity with other students (Santos et al, 2019). Although graduation and completion rates have considerably increased for both SwDs and the non-disabled, more students with disabilities than their non-disabled peers do not complete their university studies (Santos et al., 2019). Understanding more fully the factors that influence academic success for students with disabilities is needed (Santos et al, 2019). Although entrance to college or university is a major first step, the ultimate goal is degree completion.

Several factors that influence the academic success of SwDs are well represented in the literature. Internal factors to the students themselves have been discovered to include self-motivation and better awareness (Parsons et al, 2021), taking the initiative to reach out and registering for university support services, organizational skills, clear academic goals, and



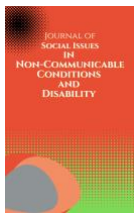
appropriate study skills and habits requesting accommodations from the university (Santos et al, 2019) among other factors which the student could control. External factors have been cited to include among others, support and effective accommodations from the university (Abu-Hamour, 2013), faculty attitudes and learning and curriculum accessibility (Podzo & Chipika, 2019; Abu-Hamour, 2013), social support from family and peers (Abu-Hamour, 2013). Universities, therefore, seem to be unprepared for the number of students with disabilities entering their institutions (Gibbons et al., 2015) and hence fail to provide the necessary support for academic success. There is however dearth of literature in Zimbabwe on the student experiences of the various interplay of these factors on how they influence their academic success. This study, therefore, seeks to explore the lived experiences of students with visual impairments (SVIs) on the external factors influencing their academic success at one university in Masvingo.

Theoretical framework

This study adopted the African Strengths Theory. African Strengths Theory (AST) is a groundbreaking approach to understanding human potential, rooted in African culture and values. Developed by Dr. Wade Nobles, AST challenges traditional Western-centric models of human development, instead highlighting the unique strengths and resilience of African people. Key principles include Ubuntu (Interconnectedness) which emphasizes community and collective well-being over individualism; kujichagulia (Self-Determination) meaning, fostering autonomy and self-directed growth; ujamaa (Cooperative Economics) which encourages shared resources and collaborative success; Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility) that is, promoting shared efforts and mutual support; and Imani (Faith) that is, trusting in the potential and goodness of oneself and others. African Strengths include Resilience and Adaptability; Community-Centric Orientation; Holistic Problem-Solving; Emotional Intelligence and Empathy; and Spiritual and Cultural Connection. The theory was adopted because of its plausibility to assist in efforts to foster inclusive learning environments (among SVIs and inculcating culturally relevant curricula. African Strengths Theory offers a transformative perspective on human potential, recognizing the unique strengths and cultural heritage of African people. By embracing AST, we can create more inclusive and empowering environments, unlocking the full potential of individuals and communities worldwide.

Literature review

Individuals with disabilities are defined as people with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (Vincent and Chiwandire, 2019). Social support systems that include family support and motivation from peers have been discovered to be crucial in promoting academic success by students with disabilities. A study conducted on African American students with disabilities achieving academic success revealed that support by both the family as well as teachers contributed to academic success by SwDs. The study revealed that SwDs attributed their academic success to their caring and materially supportive parents as well as caring and supportive teachers at school.



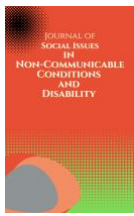
It is important to take into consideration that the academic progress of students with disabilities in colleges and universities is significantly affected by the attitudes of faculty members, as well as by their willingness to provide accommodations (Abu-Hamour, 2013). Specifically, academic engagement, often described as student efforts to participate and interact with faculty members and peers in social and educational activities as part of university programming, has been strongly linked to student success (Newman et al., 2021). Although the number of students with disabilities has increased in the past two decades, many of these students drop out because they feel unsupported, misunderstood, unwelcome, and/or excluded by the institution (Santos et al., 2019).

In line with the above, SwDs have alluded that they do not feel that faculty and administration know how to deal with their needs. It is the individual faculty member who interacts directly with the students in the classroom and is, therefore, the one in the best position to make the greatest impact on or become a barrier to student success (Vincent and Chiwandire, 2019). The more awareness faculty and administrators have about students with disabilities, the more likely the student is to stay and the more successful the student can be (Santos et al, 2019). Lack of family support services and also negative attitudes of faculty members and peers pose challenges that impede SwDs' academic success (Aguirre et al., 2021).

University accommodations which are systemic, environmental, and curricular have also been discovered to be influential to SwDs' academic success. According to Podzo and Chipika, (2019), most literature has cited accessibility in its three forms that is curricular, structural, and systematic as major hindrances to the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education. Physical barriers such as lack of accessible infrastructure such as ramps, assistive learning devices such as braille note takers for SVIs (Mabvurira, Mandicheta & Ndebele, 2019; Mutswanga & Chataika, 2016) and inaccessible curriculum and assessment (Podzo & Chipika, 2019a, Podzo & Chipika, 2019b; Podzo, 2020) also negatively influence academic success of SwDs. In line with the above, curriculum coherence has also been found to be a driver for academic success by SwDs. Literature also suggests that faculty who clearly understand the intricate connection between instructional goals and student assessment can both communicate their expectations to students and measure student learning in ways that foster student success without lowering standards.

Methodology

This study adopted the African Research Methodology (ARM) punctuated by the Ubuntu Research Approach (URA). ARM incorporates African ways of generating and analyzing data (Khupe and Keane, 2017). URA values Ubuntu principles when conducting research including using Ubuntu philosophy, knowledge, theories, ethics, and techniques (Mugumbate, 2020). This article aimed to explore factors influencing academic success among SVIs at one University in Masvingo, Zimbabwe. Data were gathered using a dialogue approach among six SVIs and dare or indaba among four lecturers who were humanely selected to generate information for this study. Driven by the URA the researchers also utilized local languages in seeking consent, collecting data, and communicating findings, using language that the SVIs



understand. Thus, the local language approach (LLA) was utilized in all stages of the research process.

The participants voluntarily contributed to the study and the researchers utilised pseudonyms. Ubuntu-driven research values humane approaches and discourages cheating, deceit, harm, disrespect, and injustice (Mugumbate, 2020). The researchers therefore conducted the research in line with the ethical requirements of the total agreement technique (TTAT) whereby the researchers were granted permission to conduct the study by the Ethics Clearance Committee of a university in Masvingo.

The in-situ primary analysis was used as the analysis was done as data was collected and the main themes that emerged include the importance of family support, community and peer support, and institutional and staff support towards the academic success of SVIs. In-situ primary analysis has been utilized similarly in disability-related studies in Zimbabwe by scholars such as Munemo and Mwapaura (2023). After the research was completed, a debriefing was conducted. This concurs with Ubuntu's philosophy which emphasizes on the importance of communicating the findings to the participants. Munemo and Mwapaura (2023), (2023) note that debriefing involves a conversational session focused on exchanging and analyzing information after a specific incident has occurred.

Research findings

External factors influencing SVIs' academic success

Participants in this study revealed that the support from their family, the community, and peers plays a pivotal role in contributing to their academic success. All participants in this study alluded to the fact that social support is crucial in ensuring their academic success. SVIs indicated the crucial significance of financial and emotional support from family, emotional support from walking and studying assistance from friends and peers, and mobility assistance from the community.

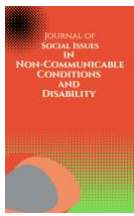
i. Family Support

On the role of the family in influencing their academic success, SVI 1 had this to say:

On the support of family, if your parents have supported you with the needed finances through fees, accommodation, and assistive technology that we use, that is pivotal in contributing to my academic success.

Weighing in on the role of family as social support, Lecturer 1 observed:

“One of the important external factors is having a strong support system that gives SVIs peace of mind. They need a strong support system, and the family to support them having a healthy relationship around them is good for them. If you are in an abusive



family then obviously, your performance is also affected. Funds also contribute, if they constantly skip school, they are bound to fail, be it funds from the family or donors.”

ii. Support from peers, friends, and the community

Most of the participants in the study revealed how important community and peer support is to their academic success. The community through assisting SVIs to walk to and from campus as well as with directions on campus played a pivotal role in ensuring that SVIs navigate public and campus environments with ease of access thereby increasing their time to focus on studies. The majority of participants appreciated the role support from their peers and friends as well as the community play in influencing their academic success. Weighing in on the role their social system plays in their academic success, SVI1 noted:

“One external factor that I consider so important to us to succeed in our studies is social support. The emotional and assistive support that you get from friends, lecturers, and everybody who is around you, will build up your confidence. You will feel welcome at a place and that you feel accommodated as an SVI.”

Although almost all participants of this study commented on their friends, peers, and the community for their supportive assistance to them, they noted that lack of it is detrimental to their academic success. They also alluded to the fact that some elements of negative attitudes persist among some of their sighted colleagues. In that regard, SVI 2 had this to say:

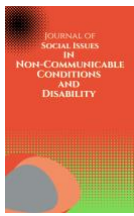
“There are friends who really encourage us and assist us here and there, but as you know it is not everyone surrounding you who can understand your situation. We meet some who cannot understand that you can't see so you may need some kind of assistance. Some feel pity for us degrade us and see us as people who cannot do anything on their own. Sometimes when you need notes and some help, some will not have time to help you”

In the same vein, weighing in on some observed elements of the negative attitude of the community, SVI 3 had this to say:

“While traveling and walking around, there was lack support from the community, to assist us walking on the path. You end up being stranded if it is raining you may be drenched standing in the rain. Without awareness of the community, the society rejects you, to an extent that you may fail to find accommodation because you have a VI, that's stigmatization.”

Institutional/university support and accommodations

All participants in this study acknowledged the crucial significance of institutional supports and accommodations to their academic success. Major themes that emerged were (i) Provision of AT and Accommodations (ii) Teaching methods, curriculum accessibility, and assessment methods, and (iii) Provision of accommodation services.



(i) AT and Accommodations

Participants in this study appreciated the institution for providing basic AT and necessary accommodations such as Braille, and some computers with JAWS software and highlighted that this was positively contributing to their academic success. SVI 1 observed:

“Learning and teaching materials are being delivered not only in visual means but also in non-visual means. More of the materials are adopted and modified so that we as VI students have access i.e. Braille, transcribing, recording, and making some necessary changes to materials that we use for learning. Also, as VI students we are receiving considerable support as to the fact that we would perform well academically. There is the student affairs department that coordinates support for our learning.”

Participants, however, highlighted that other AT devices and accommodations are lacking which would ensure their maximum capacity for academic success such as recorders, Braille printing machines, limited computers with JAWS software, and other necessary accommodations. In this regard, SWV 3 had this to say:

“The university lacks some resources such as recorders that we need which are not yet there at the school. Some of the external factors that negatively affect our academic success include the issue of assistive technology such as talking books we should use talking books and we do not have such books currently at the university. One of the things that may impede our success is that we are given braille papers but there are no files to arrange them well even binders to store them well, so sometimes you may even lose your papers as well and that may even affect our education but some of the materials are provided. We are very limited in terms of the resources that we should be using as VI students that is, applications,”

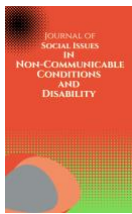
Teaching methods, curriculum accessibility, and assessment methods

Almost all participants in this study noted that the university staff are very supportive and also noted the beginning of a positive trend towards curriculum reform. They reported that these were positively affecting their academic performance and success. One participant noted:

“University staff assist us very well, the institution being an inclusive institution, we have no problems with staff. The staff and lecturers are very supportive of us in our learning and assessments, they even extend a helping hand when we would not have understood, and they are always free to provide extra individualized explanations to us when we need such. During examinations, we write in a quiet place where there are no distractions.”

However, participants also highlighted the lack of disability awareness and learning needs among the staff which they understood to be a challenge to their academic success. SVI 4 observed:

“We also lack specially trained lecturers who are well versed with our learning needs and technologies that we require. The institutions should have a tailor-made package, like a tutorial on how to help people who have no sight. What I mean is if a lecturer is



coming to take up SVIs, he must be well equipped with where to start, what to teach and what to expect from them, how they understand, and how they write their assignments. Students will not waste much time trying to adapt to the lecturer. The lecturers will be afraid of us sometimes, they are fearful that they may offend us with their language, because they may not be aware of how to address us and the proper language to address us as SVIs. At times language hurts, I start feeling like they are feeling pity on me and seeing me as helpless.”

(ii) Provision of accommodation services

The provision of proper student accommodation services by the university was recognized by all participants as crucial to their academic success. In line with this observation, Lecturer 1 had this to say:

“Safe, comfortable, and accessible halls of accommodations at the institution are also crucial to improve academic success among SVIs. When you have somewhere safe and comfortable to rest, it also influences your academic success, it improves your wellness, and also saves you time to concentrate on studies.”

Most participants raise a concern over the limited accommodation provided by the university. Some SVIs, especially male students revealed that commuting to school was affecting their time of study which negatively impacted their education. One participant had this to say:

“There is not yet accommodation for male students, we have to walk long distances, and I spend four hours traveling to and from school and an hour or 45 minutes in the lecture room so it is very expensive for us to navigate.”

Weighing in on the same issue, SVI another participant had this to say:

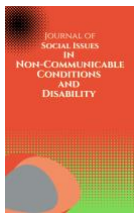
“Our school is an inclusive institution but I feel like activism is not being done properly, especially considering the way they run affairs on the accommodation side. The accommodation is still a serious challenge since we have to look for accommodation from the locations which is very costly to do so, and commute to school every day.”

Improving Academic Success among SVIs: Participants’ Suggestions

When the participants were asked their views on what could be done to improve academic success among SVIs, they proffered common suggestions. Themes that emerged were: (i) The need for improvement in the provision of Assistive Technology (AT), (ii) Accelerated Disability Awareness Programs (iii) Marketing and Awareness of the Government’s Disability Funds (iv) Adoption of Inclusion Policies in HE institution

i. Improvement in provision of assistive technology

The improvement in modern AT is a welcome development in the provision of technological accommodations in higher education. All the participants in this study lamented the unprecedented shortage of AT which is crucial in their ability to succeed in their studies. The participants noted the dire need for the institution and other stakeholders such as the government and donors to scale up the provision of AT devices such as Braille printing



machines, tape recorders, and JAWS software loaded computers. Weighing in on the above, lecturer 2 had this to say:

“One crucial external factor that influences academic success among SVIs is adequate provision of Assistive Technology. Without proper accommodations and provision of assistive devices to SVIs, they are bound to fail. What the institution and other stakeholders can do is just to provide reasonable accommodations for learners with VI. If the institution has adequate assistive technology, and adequate assistive devices for its learners, students are guaranteed to be successful. A computer lab with computers with JAWS software, provision of Braille and Braille printing machines as well as tape recorders, talking books, etc.”

ii. Accelerated disability awareness programs

It emerged amongst almost all participants of this study that lack of disability awareness, in particular about SVIs needs and expectations among the spectrum of the University staff, their peers as well as the community was one of the reasons why they may find it difficult to succeed in their studies. Although the participants acknowledged the institution’s efforts to improve disability awareness at the institution through a mandatory university-wide module on Disability Awareness, they also noted that a lot still needs to be done. The participants therefore recommended Disability Awareness programs to all partners in their education including even the lecturers, their peers, and the community at large. Weighing in on this issue, SV1 4 had this to say:

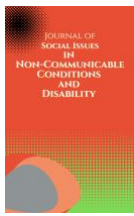
“The institutions should have a tailor-made package, like a tutorial on how to help people who have no sight. What I mean is if a lecturer is coming to take up SVIs, he must be well equipped with where to start, what to teach and what to expect from them, how they understand, and how they write their assignments. The lecturers will be afraid of us sometimes, they are fearful that they may offend us with their language, because they may not be aware of how to address us and the proper language to address us as SVIs. Our peers and the general public also need to be conscientious on how to be of support to us.”

iii. Marketing and Awareness of the Government’s Disability Funds

It also emerged from this study that some persons with disabilities may not be pursuing their tertiary education because of a lack of finances to fund their education. This was reported to be emanating from ignorance of the government’s Disability Funds, a program where tertiary education students with disabilities can be funded by the government through the Ministry of Public Service, Labour, and Social Welfare. Participants stressed the need for country-wide partnered marketing and awareness of this provision by the government.

Adoption of Inclusive Education Policies

Some of the participants recommended the crafting and adoption of Disability rights policies in HE institutions to facilitate and promote a conducive learning and enabling environment for SVIs. Weighing in on the issue, Lecturer 4 had this to say:



“Universities might devise policies that facilitate and promote rights of PWDs on campus such that their university life is favorable for their success.”

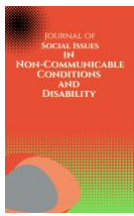
Discussion

Apart from the above, it also emerged from the study that the family is also an important source of emotional support to SVIs. On-time payment of student bills and emotional support led to limited pressure on the students and ensured that they attended classes as required. Similar findings have been found by Moriña and Biagiotti (2021) who found that support from the families of African American students with disabilities contributed to their academic success. Another study also revealed that students with disabilities recognize that support from family and friends is critical to their academic success (Gow et al., 2020). This is in line with the principle of the African Strengths Theory of Ubuntu which emphasizes family and collective well-being over individualism.

Mwapaura et al. (2022) postulate that social networks have a great impact on people’s lives, this study revealed that SVIs need that network of social support for them to succeed in their studies. These findings are similar to those observed by Moriña & Biagiotti, 2020 that beyond family support, students seek help from peers and friends; peers contribute to success because they strive to help the student set goals and facilitate access to academic material. As revealed in this study negative attitudes among some community members and peers positively impact the academic success of SVIs, Parsons et al., (2021) also note that where the attitudes are negative, there is likely to be limited financial support, and limited peer, family, and staff support as well. Parsons et al (2021) also contend that negative peer attitudes are commonly considered to be a major barrier to the full social inclusion of disabled students in schools.

The importance of AT in the education of students with disabilities cannot be overemphasized. In education, technology could play a significant role, in helping students with disabilities to overcome the academic difficulties that they face and in helping them to develop their academic skills as well (Podzo, 2020). The use of assistive technology can greatly facilitate the access and participation of students with disabilities in all facets of life thereby promoting their independence and improving their educational and employment opportunities (Podzo, 2020). This lack of adequate AT has also been found in studies like Podzo, (2020). Podzo and Chipika's (2019a) study also alluded to the fact that in most studies done in HEIs on the inclusion of SwDs, most of them have expressed a lack of adequate assistive technology and the lack of appropriate software like JAWS. AT is crucial to the teaching and learning of SVIs and as such a lot needs to be done towards proper and adequate provision of AT to promote academic success by SVs.

As Moriña and Biagiotti, (2021) put it, lecturer support has also been found to be crucial to the success of students with disabilities. Similarly, this study found that lecturers and the rest of the staff were very supportive of the learning of SVIs and this improved their academic success. This is in contrast to one South African university study on the e-learning needs of students with disabilities which found that there were lecturers who distanced themselves from the



responsibility of providing support to students with disabilities. Perhaps the sharp contrast is due to context and the fact that the university under study had inculcated quite a strong culture of inclusivity. However, although the university staff is supportive, the study noted the lack of skills and proper training in university staff to effectively respond to the needs of SVIs. Similar results were also observed in Podzo and Chipika's (2019) study at the same institution. This, therefore, suggests the need for accelerated action to be taken to train staff in disability awareness and teaching skills.

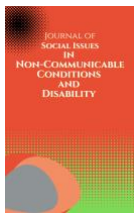
The role played by the provision of student accommodation is a vital one as far as academic success is concerned. The study though the institution under study had girls' accommodation which was provided for free to SVIs, accommodation provisions for male students are still to be completed. This was a major challenge highlighted by male students to be a deterrent to their academic success since traveling to and from campus ate more of their time for studies.

Improvement in the provision of AT has been recommended in several studies. Podzo and Chipika, (2019a); Podzo and Chipika (2019b), and Podzo (2020) all suggested the dire need for accelerated provision of AT to students with disabilities to promote their academic success. With the advent of new technologies, the institutions are recommended to invest in AT and promote academic success by SVIs, and other SWDs in general.

The study revealed that some of the university staff are lacking in SVIs teaching skills regarding how best to interact and communicate with them positively. As Podzo (2020) alludes the importance of the active engagement of students in the teaching and learning process cannot be over-emphasized, likewise, there is a need for staff training on relevant teaching skills that are best for SVIs. Similar suggestions were also proffered by Podzo (2020) who suggested that higher education institutions need to adopt and teach from the Universal Design of Learning since it allows them to act proactively and offer multiple means of expression, representation and involvement. Similarly, Parsons et al (2021) also recommended government action in teacher training and development to equip them with inclusive policies and practices.

There is a need for coordination within the formal systems from the national government to universities and non-governmental organizations (Podzo, 2020) on the awareness of Disability funds provided by the government.

A similar study revealed that a lack of policy on inclusion negatively affected operations on assessment, admission, and provisions among SwDs in higher education institutions (Podzo & Chipika, 2019a). Podzo's (2020) study on the inclusion of SwDs in HE institutions also recommended that HE institutions should draw up their institutional policies on inclusion based on national policy frameworks. It is crucial therefore that HE institutions craft clear inclusive policies that guarantee SVIs their rights in all their variety to ensure their academic success (Mwapaura, 2023).



Recommendations

To improve academic success among students with visual impairments, the paper has proffered several recommendations:

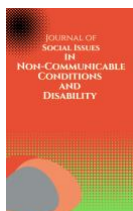
- The institution should invest in AT and ensure provisions of adequate assistive devices for SVIs
- There is a need for multi-stakeholder coordination and collaboration including the government, HE institution, and civic organizations on Disability Awareness raising.
- The government, HE institutions, and Non-governmental Organisation Partnerships in marketing the government's Disability Fund
- There is a need for HE institutions to invest in staff training on teaching skills relevant to teaching SVIs.
- There is a need for the institution to accelerate and maximize its on-campus accommodation of students

Implications

As higher education is increasingly becoming a prerequisite for gainful employment and other economic opportunities in the modern world, students with disabilities mustn't be left behind. It is not only a matter of access to higher education institutions but also whether students with disabilities are assisted properly for them to realize their full potential and complete their studies. Apart from their self-motivation to realize their dreams, students with disabilities need external support which needs a multi-stakeholder approach that takes on board the institutions, the government, the family, and the community at large to ensure that they are at par with their able-bodied counterparts and that they achieve their maximum academic potential. External support should not be mistaken to be the sole answer to the question of academic success by SVIs. It compliments their self-driven effort but yet crucial to the realization of their maximum academic capacities.

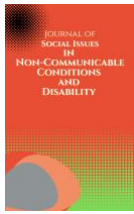
Conclusion

Persons with disabilities, students with visual impairments in particular, have the right to be afforded the necessary support which is crucial to their academic success like any other student in higher education. Globally, regionally, and locally, countries have committed on paper to provide the necessary support needed to ensure the maximum capacity of students with disabilities in their pursuit of education. The same commitment must be met with practical implementation if students with impairments are to achieve their maximum academic capacities. Every individual, able-bodied or impaired, should endeavor to be of support towards the educational support of students with disabilities.



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