Teaching and Learning Brief for the Introduction of the Sector Policy on Inclusive Education and its Implications for the University of Namibia

HHMCYN 001 HAIHAMBO CYNTHY K.

COURSE: AHS 41182: MONITORING DISABILITY IN SOCIETY

NOVEMBER 2015 EXAMINATION PAPER

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
1. INTRODUCTION

As part of the Monitoring Disability in Society Course, we were required to develop a teaching and learning brief on one of the disability issues we have identified during our attachment period to one organization which focusses on disability issues. My team mate and I were assigned to a Unit within a University that aims to facilitate inclusive and equitable learning and socialization for students with disabilities and special needs. The organization we were attached to identified three main barriers in that hinder their success:

a. Although there are various policies that reiterates the importance of equal rights to human dignity and inclusion, the Namibian society has not yet undergone transformation towards inclusive cultures. As a result, students with disabilities experience exclusion and stigmatization throughout their lifespan. This hinders their full participation in education.

b. Lecturers and students alike do not recognize and respect the rights of people with disabilities to education.

c. Key role players in the University do not understand the concept of inclusive education and how it should be applied.

Based on these three points, I have decided to write a teaching and learning brief on the newly rolled out Education Sector Policy on inclusive Education (2013), Ministry of Education.

2. TITLE OF THE BRIEF: Higher education for Students with Disabilities: Is it a favor or a right?

By: Cynthy Kaliinasho Haihambo: Inclusive Education Researcher, University of Namibia.

3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During our period of attachment to the organization, herein referred to as the UDU, we had opportunities to encounter and access life experiences of students and service providers of the UDU. Amongst their experiences, students with disabilities revealed how they are either ignored or left to their own devices by their lecturers or, worse still, told to leave the classed because the lecturers claim not to have the skills or mandate to deliver quality education to students with such diverse needs that adaptation in teaching and assessment approaches are needed.
Staff members/service providers revealed that many students with disabilities had such negative experiences throughout their lives that it had negatively affected both their self-esteem and resilience skills. These in turn pose a barrier to their ownership of their learning processes. They also reported that they often encounter lecturers who come to the UDU to report that they have a student in their class who is blind, and therefore, they are providing the lecture material to the UDU as they are paid for the function of enabling learning for “those” students. When informed about the internal policy of the University as well as the Education Sector Policy on Inclusive Education, many lecturers seem to say that it is the first time they hear about it and they feel that they were not properly informed about the expectation to provide equitable access to education for all students. Some also indicate that they have heard about the Policy and Principles of Inclusive Education, but they do not really know what it entails.

This Teaching and Learning Brief targets members of academic staff and institutional top management. The brief departs from the observed norm summarized in the question: Higher education for Students with Disabilities: Is it a favor or a right? Despite the existence of many other policies, guidelines and directives in favor of inclusion of diversity in education, I have decided to focus on the Sector Policy on Inclusive Education in an attempt to clarify the role and responsibilities of the university towards students with disabilities. The Education Sector Policy on Inclusive Education was approved by Cabinet in April 2013 and was launched on 15 September 2014 for implementation across the education sector. This Policy is thus new, although inclusive education as a principle is enshrined in almost all existing legal instruments nationally and internationally. In the next section, I will briefly provide a contextual framework in relation to disability inclusion.

4. CONTEXT, CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK AND VALUES
In this section, I provide the contextual and conceptual frameworks and values behind the Sector Policy on Inclusive Education (2013).

Namibia is committed to Inclusive Education through both international and national directives that guided special education provisions. Namibia participated in various international forums and signed various agreements that paved its way towards inclusive education for all its citizens. Some of the prominent documents are:

*Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)* outlines the right not to be discriminated against and the right to education and training to help learners with special needs achieve the greatest degree of self-reliance and social integration possible in their society.

*UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)* ensures that children with special needs have effective access to and receives education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities in a manner conducive to the child’s achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development. Also in recognition of their vulnerability to segregation and discrimination it states that children with special educational needs should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child’s active participation in the community.
The Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All (1990) reaffirms that education is a fundamental right for all people, women, and men, of all ages and that every person—child, youth and adult—shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs.

Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993) stated that the general education authorities are responsible to provide for the education of persons with disabilities and their national educational planning, curriculum development and school organization should take their needs on-board.

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994) reinforced that schools accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This included children who were gifted and talented, those with disabilities, those with other difficulties such as street children and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups.

Constitution of the Republic of Namibia (1990) provides that all persons shall have the right to education. Primary education shall be compulsory and free of charge up to the age of 16 with the State to provide reasonable facilities to render effective this right to every resident within Namibia.

The National Education Conference, 2011, renewed the call for a complete overhaul of our education system from segregation to inclusion.

The 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2015) emphasizes the importance of inclusion, thus ruling out exclusion and discrimination on the basis of race, religion, ability, ethnic origin or any other factor.

The Sector Policy on Inclusive Education (2013) aims to provide access, equity and quality education to all children. It aims to ensure that education system becomes inclusive, sensitive and responsive to the needs of all children, and that all children receive education, it has specific focus on children and young people who have been, or are, or are more likely to be, educationally marginalized.

The framework presented in the preceding section demonstrates that there is a need to transform these inclusive education policy backing instruments into practice at all levels, including the University of Namibia. As lecturers, we have an obligation to ensure that ALL our students receive equitable, quality higher education that will enable them to compete, perform and achieve in their set objectives now as students and in the world of work after their studies.

Some Guiding Principles of the Education Sector Policy on Inclusive Education

The overall guiding principles of this policy are:

- Identification and addressing of challenges and/or barriers in the education system;
- Creation and development of an Inclusive Education sector;
• Development of capacity at national, regional, circuit, cluster, school and community levels;
• Reorientation of teacher education (i.e. improvement of pre- and in-service teacher training);
• Inculcation of flexible and differentiated teaching and learning approaches;
• Offering institutional support;
• Engagement of schools and communities on the issues of human and educational rights;
• Expansion of access to education at all levels;
• (Ministry of Education, 2013: 2).

Overall Policy Goals and Objectives

The overall policy goals and objectives is the achievement and witnessing of an inclusive education practice at all levels of education with adults and out-of-school youth having access to the programs on offer at the University of Namibia country-wide. This goal and objective build on and support the constitutional right of all Namibians that provides that all persons shall have the right to education (Article 20, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting: 1990).

Characteristics of full Inclusion:

• “Inclusive education can be seen as a process of strengthening the capacity of an education system to reach out to all learners.

• It is, therefore, an overall principle that should guide all educational policies and practices, starting from the belief that education is a fundamental human right and the foundation for a more just society.”


5. KEY DISABILITY ISSUES FROM FINDINGS AND TEACHING AND LEARNING CONTENT

It has come to the attention of Management that some staff members in our University show intolerance towards, and discriminate against students with disabilities by excluding them from participation in education.

Some lecturers refuse to upload their lecture notes on the Portal or give them to students who cannot access some of the lecture venues or cannot read due to impairments and disabilities.

Amongst our latest findings are summarized in a letter written by a student who uses a wheel chair at one of the campuses in Windhoek.

“I was trying to manipulate the small space in the venue with my wheelchair so obviously the wheelchair was making a noise. Then the lecturer bangs on the table and shouts: ‘stop playing with that thing’! My wheelchair is not a thing. And I do not use it by choice. I will never go back to that class again!”
This insert demonstrates a negative attitude and insensitivity on the side of the lecturer. And this student is going to miss out on classes not because she was literally told not to attend those classes, but because of this negative attitude of the lecturer.

The UDU has provided several sensitization and awareness workshops, but mostly, it the lecturers in the Departments of Educational Psychology and Inclusive Education, the Department of Social Work and the Human Rights and Documentation Center that attend. And these are the people that are already informed and practice inclusion. The one’s that needs the knowledge and skills related to inclusion the most, do not come. The top management of the University also do not attend such trainings. The UDU staff feel that, although they provide budgetary and other support, their presence will be a good example of the importance of the issue of inclusion.

While the staff do not necessarily have a problem with teaching and learning content, there have been observed serious gaps in terms of the inclusive culture and practice.

These findings do not auger well with the goals of the Sector Policy on Inclusive Education amongst which the following two goals are most relevant to higher education:

- Ensuring inclusive and equitable education in open learning.
- Empowering the educators in developing an inclusive culture.

Looking at these goals, is education for students with disabilities a right or a favor? I believe that now you know the correct answer to this question. Perhaps what you would need now are the skills and enabling attitudes to implement this Policy in our University. There are already people who are practicing good inclusive education practices and strategies.

6. EXAMPLES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PRACTICES

Some lecturers are very supportive to students with disabilities. Here are some of the good inclusive practices we have observed:

6.1 They invite the students to their offices and find out how best they learn and what support they require.
6.2 They identify study material early and bring material to the UDU to be transformed in the format that is most suitable for each student with special needs.
6.3 They create physical and emotional space for students with special needs by making them feel welcome, waiting for them to settle and set up their equipment before they (the lecturer) starts to teach.
6.4 They research and apply a variety of teaching and assessment strategies.
6.5 They provide extra time to students with special needs, depending on their specific needs – not all need extra time.
6.6 They send their lecture notes to the students immediately after the lectures.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS TO PROMOTE INCLUSIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING
7.1 Although there are Policies and Guidelines on inclusive Education, of which some have even become rhetoric, we should not assume that people can interpret and apply them.

7.2 It is very important that an institutional policy be developed, shared and workshopped to all lecturers.

7.3 Key stakeholders in an organization first have to be given a workshop on the Edu-Sector Policy on Inclusive Education.

7.4 They should then identify committees within the organization to support staff in the implementation of inclusive teaching and learning strategies.

7.5 Assessment does not have to be uniform for all students. Students can be assessed in accordance with their needs.

7.6 The implementation of the Policy should be monitored and evaluated. Each Department can use the Logic Model to monitor progress.

7.7 Rewards should be given to those that include students with disabilities in their programmes.

Inclusive Education is not a matter of choice. Neither do we do students with disabilities a favor by creating an enabling teaching and learning environment for students with disabilities. Universities should serve as pace-setter in modeling good inclusive education practices.

8. REFERENCES


9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the Management of the UDU for their willingness and tolerance of our study. Had it not been for these, we would not have had the practical experience of monitoring disability.

We also thank all the student with disabilities that were willing to share their personal experiences with us.