UNIVERSITY OF DAR ES SALAAM
DAR ES SALAAM UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

Voices of Students with Disability on Assessment Accommodations in Higher Education in Tanzania

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Dr. Florence Kyaruzi, Mr. Rajabu Shafii, & Mr. Rashidi Mzambili
Department of Educational Psychology and Curriculum Studies

Outline

1. Assessment Accommodations – What are they?

2. Problem Statement and Research Questions

3. Methodology

4. Findings

5. Discussion and Conclusion

6. References

Introduction

- Assessment accommodation - an intentional modification to the examination process to make the examinations more accessible to students with disabilities is increasingly needed (Sireci et al., 2005).

- Sustainable Development Goal 4 calls for universal access to inclusive and equitable quality education for all (UNESCO, 2017).

- Education and Training Policy in Tanzania calls for educational equity for all social groups at all levels of education (MoEST, 2017).
  - the National Strategies on Inclusive Education (2009-2017) and (2018-2021) to enhance quality education for children with disabilities.

Statement of the Problem

- Accommodations for students with disabilities promote equity and inclusion (Lovett & Leja, 2013; Weis & Beauchemin, 2020).

- If not practiced effectively, assessment can exclude and marginalize disabled students (Nieminen, 2022a, 2022b).

- Ableism where assessment is designed for non-disabled ones and disabled students are regarded as others (Nieminen, 2022b).

- The study ascribes to Assessment for Inclusion (AfI) which fosters inclusion by involving students with disability (Nieminen, 2022a).

Research questions

1) What are the existing assessment accommodations for students with disabilities at the university?

2) What perceptions do students with disabilities have about the existing assessment accommodations offered at the university?

3) What are the assessment accommodations barriers for students with disabilities at the university, and how could they be addressed (if any)?

Methodology

- A mixed research approach combining student questionnaires (N = 49), focus group discussions with students (N = 5), and interviews with staff in the special needs department (N= 5) to collect data on students' experiences with assessment accommodations.

- The study was conducted on two campuses of a university that started offering inclusive education in 1978 in Tanzania (Tungaraza, 2012).

- Questionnaires were adapted to the needs of respondents (e.g. Braille, Large fonts) and written interviews were conducted with deaf students who did not master sign language.

Participants and Type of Disability
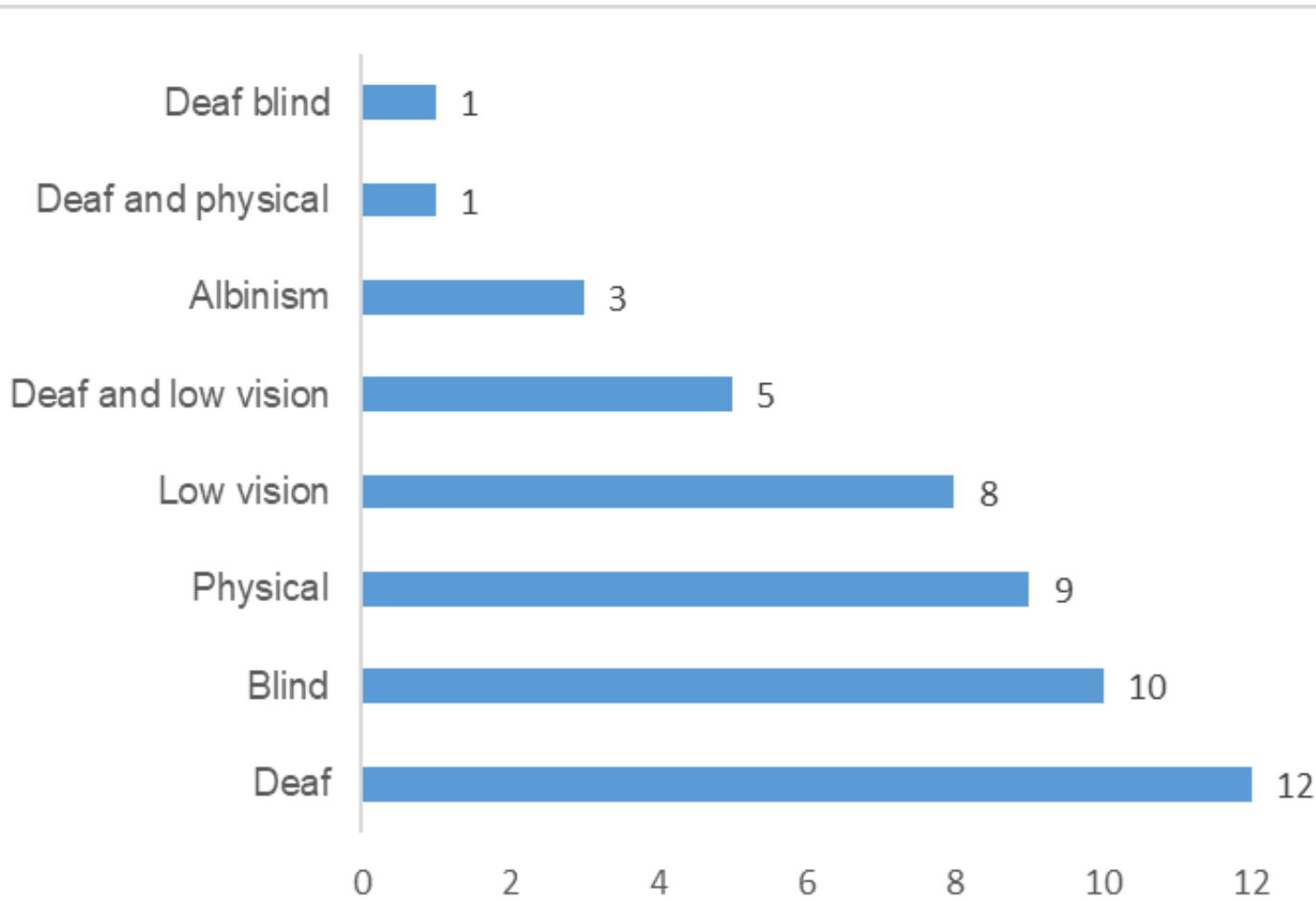
Type of Disability	Frequency
Deaf and physical	1
Deaf blind	1
Albinism	3
Deaf and low vision	5
Low vision	8
Physical	9
Blind	10
Deaf	12

Participant's gender and degree programs

S/N	Degree program	N
1	B.Ed. Sc.	2
2	BSc with Education	3
3	BAEd	25
4	BED Arts	7
5	BA Disaster and Risk Management	1
6	BA in Fine and Television	2
7	BA Disaster and Risk Management	1
8	Masters of Educational Management and Administration	2
9	BA Economics and Statistics	1
10	BSC Applied Microbiology and Chemistry	2
11	BED (Adult and Continuing Education)	2
12	PhD in Education	1

- Participants' representation in terms of gender:
  - 25 Males
  - 24 Females

Existing Assessment Accommodations

Types of Assessment Accommodations	Frequencies	Percentage
Special rooms	41	91.1%
Extended time during test/examination	41	91.1%
Preferential seating	38	82.6%
Large print	38	82.6%
Testing in a small group	37	82.2%
Reading the test items aloud	34	73.9%
Using assistive technology	33	75.0%
Sign language interpreter for direction	32	69.6%
Individual administration	32	72.7%
Invigilation by a known person	29	64.4%
Dictate/sign response for scribe	19	45.2%
Breaks during test/examination	18	40.0%

Perceptions of Existing Assessment Accommodations

Construct	Sample excerpt from focus group discussion
Promotes accessibility of the exam rooms	*It reduces disturbances because we are aware of our venues which are near and accessible (Participant 2, Physical Disability, Campus_1)* *We are given special rooms, so it reduces disturbances and wastage of time looking for venues. At the same time, large fonts help us read easily (Participant 2, Low vision, Campus_1).*
Promotes performance	*The accommodation helps to raise our performance, particularly in extending time in examinations and tests that allow us to complete questions (Participant 5, Physical Disability, Campus_1)*
Conducive examination environment	*Assessment accommodations are helpful to a certain extent. Before we go to the special text unit, follow up to know our needs and make us comfortable answering questions like extending time (Participant 3, Low vision, Campus_1).*

Barriers to Assessment Accommodations

a) Negative Perceptions from Instructors

You can explain your challenges to the instructor that I am not feeling good, and teachers respond that you take advantage of your disability to avoid examinations. I suggest that assessment accommodation training and seminars should be provided to the instructors (Participant 5, Physical Disability_Campus 1).

Some invigilators think there is no need for a time extension for students with low vision after being given large print exams. Invigilators need to understand that students need enough time to read. For normal print, a student can have 5 pages but a student who uses large print can have more than 20 pages on the same exam/test (Staff in Special Needs Department _Campus 1).

Barriers to Assessment Accommodations

Sitting for several exams on the same day

I did a test the whole day because I was accommodated by extending time, but it was not favorable. It was an assessment accommodation, but it became a burden to me. (Participant 4, Low vision, Campus_1).

Test format – e.g. Matching Items

The challenge is only on the format of matching items and the way they are arranged (Participant 1, Low vision, Campus_1).

One matching item question can have more than one page (in Braille), so it takes time for them to match the items – to find answers they need to open several pages (Staff in Special Needs Department _Campus 1).

Discussion & Conclusion

- The findings indicate that several assessment accommodations are in place (mostly low-tech – such as Braille) and students positively rated the existing assessment accommodations.

- Nevertheless, improvements are warranted to address constraints emanating from the nature of the test format, frequency of exams, and lack of knowledge on assessment accommodations.

- To realize the potential of assessment for inclusion, education should be provided to a wider audience of instructors (Nieminen, 2022a), availing high-tech assistive technologies to students with disability to promote independence (Ngonyani & Mnyanyi, 2021).

End

Thank you for your attention.

For any inquiries please contact us:

Dr. Florence Kyaruzi (sakyaruzi@gmail.com)

Mr. Rajabu Shafii (rajabu.shafii@yahoo.co.uk)

Mr. Rashidi Mzambili (rmzambili@gmail.com)

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