



THE ACCESSIBILITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION SERVICES: A FOCUS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN ARBA MINCH UNIVERSITY, SOUTH ETHIOPIA

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Abstract:

This study focused on examining the accessibility of higher education services for students with disabilities in selected Campuses of Arba Minch University. To this effect, a case study design of a qualitative research approach was used. Purposive and convenience sampling techniques were employed to select 7 students with disabilities, 3 faculty deans, 4 head of their departments, a president of students with disability association, 2 coordinators of special needs students' service and 2 coordinators of students' service offices from two campuses of the University. Data was collected via semi-structured interview, observation, and document review methods and the qualitative theme analysis technique was used. The finding revealed that in Arba Minch University students with disability enrolment was increased annually, due attention giving was started in re-designing and constructing new buildings, classroom and dormitory are arranged at ground floor, and provision of financial, educational and special services was appreciable. On the other hand, minimal awareness on the university legal and practical documents, lack of comprehensive information about university services, being reluctance to be identified as a student with disabilities, failure to admit students with severe disability, Prohibition to admit in some field of studies, limitations in facilitating special educational consideration, no any special consideration for students with hearing impairments, poor ramp design and absence of ramps in some buildings, inaccessible pathway to offices/classes, and no counseling services at all were the major findings that hinder the inclusiveness of students with disabilities in Arba Minch University.

Keywords: inclusion, impairment, disability, higher education, accessibility of services, students with disability

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1. Introduction

Higher education in Ethiopia has a relatively short history and a succession of new policies was designed and implemented, with the Education and Training Policy being the first major framework for systems reform and transformation [6]. The policy stressed issues of quality and relevance in educational programs and emphasized the linkage of higher education and the country's development. According to the revised higher education proclamation 1152/2019 article 4, one of the major objectives to establish higher education in the country is to prepare sufficient knowledgeable, skilled, and attitudinally mature graduates in relevant disciplines with competence to support peace, democracy, and national development that can make the country internationally competitive [7]. In the country higher education is going through a decisive phase of reform and expansion; as a system, it is increasingly required to respond and gear adequately to the development needs of the society and the country. Due to the governments and development partners' commitment to prioritizing the sub-sector, that access to higher education has opened to the wider population [14].

According to the government fifth Education Sector Development Program 2015 to 2020 in the past ten years, the government has demonstrated continued commitment to expanding equitable access to quality and relevant higher education. Since 2004/05, the number of public higher education institutions has increased, distributed across all regions of the country. Private higher education institutions have also expanded. This extra capacity has allowed rapid increases in intake in both under and postgraduate studies. Participation of students with special educational needs in technical and vocational education training and higher education has risen. The number of students eligible for higher education that have special educational needs is partially constrained by the number who complete grade twelve. In addition to improving access in higher education institutions and to training staff with appropriate skills and offering adapted learning materials joint initiatives with general education are required to rapidly increase the participation rate of students with special needs [15].

Among Ethiopian higher educational institutions, Addis Ababa University has a relatively large number of students with disabilities and a better service than other institutions. The University has also a Special Needs Support Center, [20] explains that the Special Needs Support Center is preparing to offer many services to students with disabilities, including educational assessment and intervention; student support service such as tutoring and counseling, administrative support, life centered career development, education knowledge support for college faculty to accommodate the need of students with disability. However, Addis Ababa University experiences reveals a limited instructor-student interaction both in and outside the classroom. Unlike non-disabled students, students with disabilities have a serious problem to have contact with their instructors because of the physical barriers to get access to their offices.

Moreover, [17] asserts that lack of an inclusive educational setting which tries to address the special need of students with disabilities is the main challenge for most of the students with disabilities at Ethiopian higher education institutions. Most of the students with disabilities who joining in higher education institutions of the country have a major problem of getting accessible and barrier-free educational services; this in part can create a high degree of a barrier to their education. In view of the above, this paper is structured to deal with the status of higher education in making accessible services for students with disabilities in one of the first-generation universities of the country, Arba Minch University.

2. Statement of the Problem

In recent times, the number of Universities offering services for students with disabilities has grown considerably and higher education providers have attempted to offer structures to improve the learning opportunities of students with disabilities. There are numerous examples from tertiary education providers world-wide that acknowledge a change in the way the academic community views disability and the disabled student [1]. Nevertheless, not all students with a disability receive an adequate and equal level of support across countries or even nationwide. Providing effective academic services for students with disabilities demands among others thorough planning, appropriate organizational scheme, human resources with specific expertise, advanced technological support, considerable implementation effort, and functional evaluation.

Providing barrier-free service to students with disabilities to gain full access to education and university facilities will make higher education more inclusive and accessible. [3] asserts that to make higher education accessible and barrier-free institutions a responsibility is to restructure its programs by including the provision of assistive devices, academic accommodation, supporting aids and services, modification of the classroom and campus environment, sign language interpreters developing awareness-raising about disability, developing a positive attitude, among others. But, Students with disabilities face multiple barriers when entering higher education institutions, yet relatively little research has been carried out to identify the kind and nature of such barriers.

In a study conducted by [1] identified many barriers faced by students with disabilities in higher education: lack of personal support like getting previously from their family, facing a very difficult situation to adjust with the new environment and learning system, physical inaccessibility, institutional support barriers, attitudinal barriers from faculty and students, cumbersome and time-consuming accommodation processes, and difficulty to access equipment are some of few barriers they face while joining higher education institutions. Therefore, as one of a higher education institution and from a researcher practical experiences, Arba Minch University is not free from the majorities of indicated barriers, there is also need to carry out research on identifying the level of services and barriers related to placement and provision of services, resource

allocations, constructing suitable buildings, and pedagogical knowledge of teachers for students with disabilities. That is why this research was planned and processed to investigate the higher education services accessibility for students with disabilities in Arba Minch University.

2.1 Research Questions

In the course of the study, the following basic questions are expected to be addressed:

- What are the specialized facilities and support services available in the university?
- What is the response of students with disabilities to the specialized services made available by the university?
- What are the main challenges in providing relevant support services for students with disabilities?

2.2 Objective of the Study

The general objective of this study was to explore the accessibility of higher education services for students with disabilities in selected campuses of Arba Minch University.

2.3 Significance of the Study

This study will provide recent information and scientific shreds of evidence about the accessibility of higher education services and challenges faced by students with disabilities for the university higher officials, staff, educators and researchers. Likewise, it is significant for other kindred institutions as a source document to find out the evidence-based solution for the identified problems and understands the status of inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education. It also may lay a base for other professionals who are interested to conduct further study in the related areas.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Study Design

To achieve the purpose of this study, it was adopted a single case study design of a qualitative method. Because, it was found to be a convenient design to show the existing situations of the campuses of the university and specifically it is appropriate for a study of this nature as it can give a depth of the practices and challenges in the provision of services for students with disabilities in the study area, Arba Minch University.

3.2 Description of the Study Area

The study took place at Arba Minch University. It is found in Arba Minch town administration, in Gamo Zone, Southern Nation and Nationalities Peoples Region, 505km South West of Addis Ababa, the capital city of a country. Arba Minch University is one of the first generation and well-established Universities in the country. It was established in 2004 at the premises of the former Arba Minch Water Technology Institute, which was established in 1986. Currently, the University has six campuses namely the

Main Campus (Water Technology & Technology Institutes), Chamo Campus (College of Social Sciences and Humanities, College of Business and Economics, School of Pedagogical and Behavioral Sciences and School of Law), Abaya Campus (College of Natural Sciences), Kulfo Campus (College of Agricultural Science), Nechi Sar Campus (Health and Medicine science) and Sawla campus (newly opened campus with multidisciplinary field of study)

3.3. The Study Participants

In these study students with disabilities from selected departments of Main and Chamo Campuses, deans of respective faculties, head of the respective departments, president of students with disabilities association, coordinators of special need students' service and coordinators of students' service offices were used as major participants.

3.4 Sampling Techniques and Size

The purposive sampling technique was employed to select the campuses, faculties, departments, and students with disabilities. Dean of the faculties, head of the departments, president of students with disabilities association, coordinators of special needs students' service and students service office of the university were selected by convenience sampling technique. As indicated in Table 1 the two Campuses namely Chamo and Main, which have large number of students with disabilities with respective faculties and departments were selected; 7 students with different types of disabilities (out of 66), 3 faculty deans, 4 head of the departments, 2 coordinators of special need students service, a president of students with disabilities association and 2 campus coordinators of students' service office were selected.

Table 1: Description of Participant Students with Disabilities

Name	Sex	Age	Disability Type	Level of Disability	Department/ Faculty	Campus	Year level
AT	F	20	Physical Impairment	Moderate	Management	Chamo	2
MM	F	22	Deaf	Severe	Psychology	Chamo	3
KG	M	21	Low vision	Moderate	Geography and Environmental Studies	Chamo	2
YB	M	23	Deaf	Severe	Special Needs & Inclusive Education	Chamo	2
HM	M	21	Low vision	Moderate	Civil Engineering	Main	3
HA	M	20	Physical Impairment	Moderate	Hydraulic & Water Resources Engineering	Main	4
AD	F	23	Physical Impairment	Severe	Water Supply & Environmental Engineering	Main	4

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

To obtain the required data, a semi-structured interview was used as a major instrument to get data from students with disabilities (interview with deaf students was done by using an interpreter), faculty deans, head of the departments, president of students with disability association, coordinators of the special need students service and coordinators of students' service center. Observation and review of written documents were also used to complement and crosscheck the obtained data through interviews.

3.6 Data Analysis

Qualitative information obtained through interview, observation and document review was first coded by respondents' special character and categorized according to the nature of research questions and responses of participants. Then by creating four themes descriptive analysis technique was employed.

4. Results

4.1 Admission and Placement of Students with Disabilities

In Arba Minch University the admission and placement cases of students with disabilities were linked with the University registrar office and students' service center directorate. Regarding this admission, coordinators of students' service office and special need students' service center commonly revealed that in this university, the cases of students with disabilities admission was administered under the university registrar office in collaboration with the students' service center directorate. Recently, under the students' service center directorate two personnel have been assigned to facilitate disability-related activities of the university. One of these coordinators of special need students' service in his response said that:

"for the last five years, the admission of students with disabilities in this university was not based on plan and preparation. But they were simply placed by Ministry of Education and we think that their placement seems as the Ministry simply considered their first-choice university and directly placed them to the universities they chose. To admit these students our university admission policy is also open, yet in practice students with disabilities are restricted to join in some field of studies for reasons such as lack of resources and the perception that they will not cope."

In his elaboration, the coordinator also added that in Arba Minch University students with different types of disabilities are studying at undergraduate and graduate programs. Most of the time students with hearing impairment were joined at some departments under the College of Social Sciences and School of Pedagogical and Behavioral Sciences whereas, a large number of students with physical impairments were placed in different programs. After the admission of students with disabilities in specific

departments, the University was trying to accommodate and support them by prioritizing within the frame of available resources.

One of the informant coordinators of special need students' service also reported his last year placement experience of a student with visual impairment as:

“since the establishment of this university, no blind students were joined in a regular program. I remember that in the last year's placement of the Ministry of Education a blind student was placed and came to register. But our university officials were discussed on the issue and decided to send him back to be placed in a better accessible university. In their discussion, they were mainly concerned and worried about the difficulty to provide appropriate and enough educational facilities and services within this short period of time after a students' admission.”

In line with this, Chamo Campus students' service coordinator added that I know a student with physical impairment, who has a severe mobility problem and uses a wheelchair was admitted to the Department of Management and after a semester he transferred to the nearby university of his homeland. The reason for his request to transfer was related to the physical inaccessibility of the Chamo campus and to get additional services from his parents.

4.2 Physical Accessibility Services

Examining the university physical accessibility for students with disabilities is more focused on examining buildings and campus physical environments especially for the needy groups like students with visual impairments and physical disabilities.

Regarding the accessibility of buildings' and physical environments of the two campuses of Arba Minch University, one of the informant deans of the faculty from the main campus noted that:

“in my department, there is a student who lost her lower limb/a student who uses artificial leg. According to my observation of the physical environment of this campus, there is a good attempt to consider students with disabilities by modifying buildings and roads, but, some students with physical disabilities were still facing challenges to move around the buildings and rods; in their travel from dormitory to a classroom then to another laboratory class which is far apart. In some cases when students reach class on time, classes could be on the second or third floor. Sometimes even the teacher may change the class which further worsens students' problem and wheelchair users face the worst difficulty. With these constraints, some students with physical disability are struggling to complete and to be competent with non-disabled students.”

Besides, a student “HA”, who has mild physical impairment from the Main campus said that; currently some areas of the campus environment were not that much difficult to move to offices and classrooms. But, if students with wheelchairs joined this

campus, things become worse, will suffer a lot to go to the dormitory, library, cafeteria, playground, computer center, etc...On the same issue, "AT", a student with physical impairment from Chamo campus reported that like other campuses of the university our campus officials are working to make the Campus compound very conducive and attractive for all students. In her summary also added that; I observed that in redesigning and constructing new buildings and roads in this campus officials are trying to consider students with disabilities. Recently, in some buildings, we are looking ramps, and a little consideration was given for accessible toilets. In contrary to this, the informant "KG", partially sighted student from Chamo Campus stressed that; this campus is new and consideration for students with disabilities was at a very minimal stage. Nothing was done for students with visual impairment in general and partially sighted in particular.

To complement the interviewed data on the physical accessibility of the two campuses the researcher was made an intensive observation at the main service areas and reviewed different related documents. Presentation of the summarized review of the researcher starts from Chamo Campus: The leading path to the main gate of the Chamo campus is well built that it is free of obstacles. It was understood that persons with disabilities are allowed to get in through the car entrance. When turning to the right with few meters there is a Library, to get the entrance of this library there exist two consecutive ramps and there is adequate maneuvering space in the library for wheelchair users. In library tables and chairs are good for all students. In one of the underground classes of this library, there is a very narrow room for special needs students' as a resource center. It is new and not well known by students with disability and the entrance has no ramp and even it is difficult for students who use crutch.

Classrooms for College of Social Science and Humanities, School of Pedagogical and Behavioral Sciences and School of Law located on two closed G+2 buildings. The ground floor of the building is assigned for offices of different departments while the upstairs is meant for classrooms. There is a steep stair at the entrance to the ground floor of the building and it does not have a handrail at both sides. By near distance, Lecture Theater classrooms are also assigned for the indicated college and schools. The pathway leading to the classrooms is clear and free of obstacles. There is a ramp to the entrance door and chairs are densely fixed in the room, so that, there are no walkways between them. Also, the classroom of the College of Business and Economics is located at two G+2 buildings where classrooms are upstairs while the ground floor is assigned for offices. On the leading way to the building, there is an un-covered ditch and a threshold. The stairs leading to the upstairs are installed with handrails at both sides. The door of classrooms is wide and sufficient for wheelchair passage.

In higher education, the other highly expected service is an ICT laboratory. In Chamo Campus the center is well organized for students with disabilities to offer the internet and other ICT services. This laboratory is located on a reserved ground floor of a G+2 building. The leading route from the main road to the laboratory is free of obstacles and accessible for persons with disabilities. There exists a ramp entrance and the entrance door have two swings. Computer tables and keyboard holders are fixed hence, it is

reachable by wheelchair users and the computers in the room are not installed with a screen reader.

Regarding dormitory, among the existing buildings for male students' dormitory the ground floors of two buildings namely, block 8 and 9 are reserved for students with disabilities and it was given by the existence of better facilities and services compared with others. The pathway leading to block 8 dormitory is free of obstacles. At the entrance to the building, there exists a ramp and the width of the building corridor is sufficient to pass two wheelchairs at a time. Block 9 dormitory pathway is covered by grasses which may hinder the movement of students with disabilities. A stair with three steps exists at the entrance to the dormitory and the stair has no handrails. Similarly, the observation on females' dormitory also showed that there are five buildings assigned for females' dormitory, among these ground floors of two buildings have been reserved for students with disabilities. The leading pathway from the main road to the reserved dormitory is free of hazards and accessible for the movement of students with disabilities. The pre-existing stair at the entrance to the dormitory corridor is replaced by a ramp though it does not have a handrail at both sides. The corridor entrance and the aisle are wide, both sufficient for wheelchair movement.

Likewise, the researcher observation and document analysis report of the second campus is presented as follows; the main gate has two entrances and like the Chamo campus it was understood and observed that persons with disabilities are allowed to use the car entrance. To the left of the main gate, the University's main registrar is there, which is the main service center for all students, is located in a G+2 building. The university's students' service center directorate and special need students service coordination office is found at this building. The building, at its entrance, has a stair with 3 steps and there exists an alternate steep ramp entrance, which is accessible to pass only one wheelchair at a time. The ramp has no handrails at both sides. The main entrance door has two swings and both are functional. An inner part of the building is accessed through stairs, but the special need students' service coordination office is located on the ground floor.

Regarding the library, the researcher tried to observe the old library, it is found near to management building and the main leading path to the library is full of obstacles such as stones and opened ditches that hinder the movement of persons with disabilities. At the entrance, there are two consequent thresholds, followed by a stair with no handrail. At the back of the library, there exists an alternate entrance with a ramp, but nobody knows the existence of the ramp as there is no sign/symbolic indication and the ramp is so steep. The width of the ramp is wide enough to pass more than two wheelchair users at the same time. The route leading to this ramp is covered by leaves, stones, and holes that hinder the wheelchair and crutch users to move. The entrance door to the ground floor of the library is wide enough for wheelchair entrance.

At the main campus, there are many blocks to serve as classrooms; in one central area of the campus there are a series of G+2 buildings for classroom and there is a wide pathway leading to the classes from different ways. Steep ramps and stairs found at the

transferring point from one to other blocks. The Lecture Theater hall is also used as a learning classroom and the entrance to the door is of two swings. Chairs in the hall are fixed and have no tables or armrests. The other building examined by the researcher was Architecture Building, it is found in G+3 and used for multipurpose, where architectural students pursue their education along with practical experiments/exercises. Students with disabilities, other than those with hearing impairment, can't access the building. The front entrance to the building is built with a huge stair and with no handrails at either of its sides. The entrance at the back is full of grasses and insecure floor coverings that can hinder the movement of persons with disabilities particularly wheelchair users.

Different from Chamo Campus, there is a well-organized special need students resource center. The center is found on the ground floor of G+2 building and is meant for use of computer for students with disabilities in the university but there is no signage to show the direction of the center. There exist 20 computers in the room though it doesn't install with JAWS (Job Access with Speech) reader. At the entrance to the resource center, there is a ramp and no handrail at both sides. The entrance door is wide enough for wheelchair entrance. At this campus students' dormitories are gender-based; among many existing building blocks of Males' dormitory, one block is reserved for persons with disabilities. On the pathway leading to the dormitory from the main road, there exists a threshold and a ramp is found at the entrance to the corridor of the rooms. The ramp has no handrail and gaps/empty spaces exist at the turning point from the pathway to the ramp. Regarding Female students' dormitory, the pathway to their dormitory is cleared except the existence of two consecutive thresholds. Two blocks, among the existing ones, are reserved for persons with disabilities. At the main entrance to the first reserved block, there is a ramp without handrails and the entrance door to the corridor is of two swings. The corridor is wide and enough for the passage of one wheelchair at a time.

4.3 Educational Consideration/Services

Regarding the accessibility of educational resources, facilities and services for students with disabilities, one of the informants, dean of a faculty from the main campus said that:

"in our faculty meeting and informal contact with an administrative staff we were discussing to address the individual educational needs of all students' proactively and confidentially. I'm also observed that my faculty instructors and technical staff were trying to address by giving a tutorial class for students with disabilities with those academically weak, and female students. However, there is no individual assistance and no special tutorial class for students with disabilities. Even some instructors have no interest to assist students with disabilities. Especially instructors who give common courses are not interested to give the tutorial class."

On educational consideration the informant student "HM", low vision student from the Main campus also reported her evaluation as; at the classroom level, our colleagues left front chairs to a seat and sometimes our instructors provide large font

handouts. At one time the university provided eyeglasses and cataract surgery for low vision students in collaboration with Orbis international Ethiopia, which is a non-governmental organization that works on the cases of visual impairment at Arba Minch town.

On the same issues, two heads of the departments from Chamo campus who have deaf students commonly reported that for students with hearing impairment there were some considerations like giving learning materials/handouts, seating them at a front chair, giving tutorial class with female students, using gesture and a lip reading as a means of communication were trying to use. Regarding sign language interpreting services one of the heads of these departments added that;

“in our department, deaf students were frequently asked to assign a sign language interpreter for a course. To address their quest, we are trying and communicating with university higher officials. We strongly feel that how it was difficult to learn and teach without sign language interpreter, in most cases whenever deaf students go to different offices; they cannot communicate and convey their message to the concerned officials. At least to reduce the large communication gap at campus level School of Pedagogical and Behavioral Sciences special needs unit delivered three months training for heads of department, instructors and administrative staff who have direct contact with deaf students. But the problem is wide and not yet addressed until hiring academic interpreter of sign language and we confidently believe that this service intends to reduce remote interpersonal communication with peers, instructors and administrative staff of the university.”

Moreover, respondent students with hearing impairment “MM” and “YB” from Chamo Campus also commonly revealed that except photocopy service or hand out provision we did not get any additional educational assistance specific to address our special needs. The absence of services may include audiometric assessment, counseling services, assistive devices like hearing aids, stationery materials, training like computer-based skills, life skills, communication skills, etc.

The other participant, President of students with disability association also added about educational provisions for students with disabilities and his report summarized as;

“there was a good attempt to place students with disabilities by their interest and in some cases, peer support was arranged for both academic and mobility problems, and provision of handouts, photocopy service, printing, and the binding senior essay was common to all. To facilitate their learning computer centers are organized on ground floors, and for students who scored C- and D in previous semester courses tutorial class and re-exams were given in different departments.”

In higher education, the other important service to improve students’ academic performance is counseling services. In researcher careful observation at two campuses,

there is no counseling center at all, two counselors who are graduated by Sociology and Social Anthropology were assigned as a counselor without having counseling training. On this issue, “KG” and “HA” from two campuses commonly assure the importance of counseling service and said that; yes, we need counseling service or advice on interpersonal and social relationships, academic difficulties, low self-esteem, anxiety and phobias, and the like that make us strong in our everyday academic life.

In relation to educational services, the existing university legislation on article 86 sub article 1 and 6 stated as; special provisions shall be made for female students and other socially disadvantaged groups that require affirmative action and physically challenged students shall be placed in accordance with the general regulations governing placement, taking into consideration wherever necessary, their specific needs. In addition, article 147 stated that any student of the University shall have the right to receive institutional legal protection from any form of discrimination or harassment and be permitted to equitable and fair treatment in all respects of the teacher-student relationship and to an environment conducive to stimulate learning.

4.4 Other Special Support Services

For the question related to the provision of special support services for students with disabilities, the informants, president of students with disability association and coordinators were reflected that; separate toilet and shower rooms were built, let them get into cafeteria without waiting for a turn, provision of prosthesis and crutch(in collaboration with Arba Minch rehabilitation center), to assist a student who loses or have a problem on his upper limbs cloth washer was hired, chairs were provided for left-handed students, and to give professional services two personnel’s who are graduated by special needs and inclusive education were employed. Not only this, to enhance their capacity, training was delivered entitled orientation about life in campus, life skill training, HIV AIDS and reproductive health, leadership skill, how to write curriculum vitae and entrepreneurship and job-hunting skill for graduating class students in collaboration with Ethiopian Center for Disability and Development.

According to the researcher review of a new guideline for an incentive payment for Ethiopian higher education, which was effective in all public universities including Arba Minch, under its payment for teaching-learning process article 5 sub-articles 24, 25 and 26 respectively stated that for students with visual impairment it is allowed to pay 250 Et. Birr as pocket money, universities can hire sign language interpreter as a permanent full-time worker and it is allowed to pay 90 Et. Birr per exam for a reader of students with visual impairment. Moreover, in annual reports of special needs students’ service office; organization of resource centers, the establishment of a disability clubs, participation of students with disability in extracurricular activities, photocopy and printing service, and delivery of training to enhance the capacity of students with disabilities were given high emphasis.

4.5 Encountered Challenges in Rendering Services

The informants, coordinators of the special need students' service said that there are several challenges students with disability were facing in this university; one of the coordinators addressed that; in this university, the absence of reliable and comprehensive information about students with disability was a considerable barrier to the planning and monitoring of services, and students' reluctance to be identified as disabled were the major challenges in two campuses. The other informant, Chamo Campus students' service coordinator also reported about the challenges to render services for students with disabilities as;

"here at this campus the number of students with disability was large, 31 students are there. In most cases, higher officials were not giving due attention and not give an immediate response for a request to address the problem of students with disabilities. In my experience, I know that a student with motor impairments who have back pain and facing challenges to wash his cloth and I asked frequently to hire an assistant but, yet I didn't get an immediate response"

A president student with disabilities association added about challenges encountered by students with disabilities as;

"this year frequently I asked students service center directorate to hire sign language interpreter for a deaf student, till not yet hired. No practice of arranging experience sharing sessions with a model person with disabilities, lack of experts who serve students with disability in the computer laboratory and computer services are not working for 24 hours (especially at exam time), lack of follow-up of their admission, non- grade (NG), F_x and re-admission cases, special needs professionals are doing unrelated works and usually gives their tasks to students with disability club, and lack of higher officials visit and appreciation are challenges that I observed in my presidency of this association"

Generally, the majority of respondents have commonly raised challenges in rendering services for students with disabilities and issues that hinder the accessibility of this university. When summarized their response; early identification of students with disabilities by their severity level, placement problem by considering their interest, lack of educational material to accommodate this groups, absence of sign language interpreter, negative attitude of the faculty members and administrative staff, constraints of assistive technology and services at disability centers, reference materials/books are not uploaded on computers at resource centers, lack of library space reserved for deaf students and large gap to interact with sign language, absence of aids for students who have low vision and blind, inaccessible classrooms and stairs at administrative and library buildings, absence of counseling service centers and counselors at all, and lack of information on legal and theoretical principles of inclusion and failure to inform the existing rules and regulations of university leads to inclusive education.

5. Discussion

The interview and observation, as well as review of different documents of the study, have generated numerous findings on the accessibility of services for students with disabilities in Arba Minch University, however, only some aspects have been singled out for discussion based on the guiding questions of the study.

At the very beginning, the result of the study revealed that in Arba Minch University there was encouraging progress in annual admission and placement of students with diverse disabilities. The university admission policy is also open to all students. Meanwhile, the interview result showed that the placement of these students with disability was not based on the university plan and preparation, students with some disability categories were restricted in specific field of studies, no efforts were made to place blind students, and the university legislation privileges regarding admission and placement was not well known and practiced by implementers. In supporting this, a study conducted by [18] shows that significant proportion of the students are not placed based on their first choice. In most cases, students with special educational needs do not have equal access to all fields of study and often tend to be placed to study Special Needs Education [14]. Likewise, [16] stated that being students with disabilities may affect the ability of students to undertake a course at higher education institutions.

Although one of the focuses of this research has been on the physical accessibility of the two campuses for students with disabilities; interview of participants, observation, and review of documents revealed that; special need students' resource center is well-organized at the main campus, and in some buildings of the two campuses ramps are constructed and campus physical landscapes take into consideration. By verifying the importance of these services, the Ethiopian higher education proclamation article 41.3 stated that building designs, campus physical landscapes, computers and other infrastructures of institutions shall take into account the interest of students with physical disabilities [7]. Besides, [1] also stated that an accessible campus environment creates a positive learning experience for students with disabilities and it will also reduce the barrier they will face during their education.

On the other hand, findings of the study also showed some of the physical inaccessibility conditions in the study areas; on the leading way to dormitory, offices, and classrooms there exist uncovered ditches and thresholds, many buildings and streets of the campuses are not easy to move for wheelchair users, no one student with a physical impairment can access the Architectural building at the Main campus, absence of physical consideration and preparation for blind students, buildings which provide basic service do not have ramps and the existing ramps also need to modify the slope and needs to install a handrail at both sides of the ramp. The result also revealed rethinking and restructuring the majority of the physical environment of the campuses to remove physical barriers that hinder students' access to essential services. In line with this, a study conducted by [19] identified barriers of students with disabilities encountered in higher education institutions as; inaccessibility of buildings and classrooms, lack of

elevators, and parking modes. Also, [12] stated difficulties of students with disabilities in universities as; accessing buildings, bathrooms, bookstores, campus shops, dining halls, dorms, and classrooms. The main problem areas for students with disabilities were poor ramp designs, lack of curb cuts, lack of working elevators, lack of accessible building entrances, narrow doors, inaccessible auditoriums, and small bathroom spaces [3][10][12]. Higher education accessibility barriers including physical, architectural, service deliveries, provisions of learning materials and equipment, attitudinal and cultural influences [11] [13].

The other major findings on the provision of educational services indicated that for students with disability several considerations were identified in two campuses of the university; classrooms were arranged at ground floors, the tutorial class was given with other students, peer support for both academic and mobility problems, provision of learning materials (Provision of handouts, photocopy service, printing, and binding), and for students who scored C- and D grades re-exams were arranged. By confirming this [7] stated that institutions shall, to the extent that situations and resources permit, relocate classes, develop alternative testing procedures, and provide different educational auxiliary aids in the interest of students with physical disabilities and learning disabilities. Under the same article, the proclamation also stated that students with physical challenges get academic assistance, including tutorial sessions, exam time and submission date deadline extensions.

The document review revealed that small portions of the university legislation and guidelines were mentioned about the special educational considerations for students with disabilities in accordance with the general regulations, and the right to receive institutional legal protection from any form of discrimination or harassment and be permitted to equitable and fair treatment in all respects of the teacher-student relationship. As one of the informants responded the issue of disability in the university legislation is described in a very shallow and narrow sense, that is, the issues of students with disabilities in the university policy are highly overlooked and provision of services is in its infant stage or very minimal in Arba Minch University.

Since the availability of appropriate educational resources is vital, the lack of these materials on campuses is likely to hamper the effective education of the students. Therefore, on the other hand, this study revealed that lack of educational material to accommodate students with disabilities, absence of sign language interpreter and absence of efforts in availing special support for students with hearing impairment, computers in the resource center did not install with the appropriate software, lack of counseling services and individualized assistance to facilitate their learning was the major encountered educational challenges. Many studies have identified the importance of educational considerations and consequences when it fails in provision. Study findings by [5] verified the fact that lack of teaching and learning materials limits the ability of children to study and succeed thereby acting as a demotivation factor to others. Due to a lack of support, the majority of students with learning difficulties or disabilities are left

without any opportunity to continue their studies. Consequently, their participation in work life and broader society is seriously limited [15].

In addition, the research also addressed challenges related to admission, physical accessibility, and educational considerations under the result section, major ones are challenges in rendering services for students with disabilities include an absence of reliable and comprehensive information to identify students with disability and some students' reluctance to be identified and leveled as a disability group, unwillingness of university officials to admit students with visual impairment and reluctant to fulfill the required services, lack of experts who serve students with disability at a computer laboratory and resource centers, and absence of sign language interpreter. A study by [2][4][16] identified barriers of students with disability faced at a higher educational institution as; physical inaccessibility, the problem in accessing curricula, negative attitude, and lack of disability wide policy, inability to get information, lack of awareness towards students with disabilities, and problem in examination and assignment. The finding of the study also showed a lack of awareness or negative attitude of faculty members and the university community on how to teach and treat students with disabilities was the other challenge in this institution. In supporting this, [9] stated that the limited awareness of the need of people with disabilities prevents staff members and other academic personnel from providing the most suitable approach to enhancing the access and ability of students to learn. A study conducted by [19] identified the negative attitude of university community towards students with disabilities, and inadequate resources for learning as barriers of students with disabilities encountered in higher education institutions.

6. Conclusion

In Ethiopia, access options of higher education and students' services provisions are getting better than before, however, for students with disabilities, the situations seem to remain unchanged. According to this study, there were many appreciable activities done to make Arba Minch University more disability inclusion, the beginning of attention giving on the provision of services, except blind students the most common disability groups were joined and their number was increased. However, unplanned admission and placement, failure to admit the severe disability groups, limitation to join some field of studies, and lack of awareness and implementation on the legal privileges to be placed were major problems that hinder admission and placement of students with disabilities.

The result of the study also revealed that in Arba Minch university there is a consideration of students with disabilities in re-designing and constructing new buildings, the arrangement of classroom and dormitory at ground floor, and campus physical landscape accessibility was discussed as a proactive result. Whereas, poor ramp design and absence of ramps in some buildings, the inaccessible pathway to different offices/classes, and lack of attention in physical accommodation of students with visual impairment were identified factors that influence full participation of students with disabilities in the study area.

Regarding educational and special support services findings of the study showed that provisions of educational materials, tutorial class and re-exams, sign language training, reinforcement to high achievers, financial support, wheelchair, crutches, spectacles, and organization of resource centers were appreciable. On the other hand, the evidence collected in this research showed that there were many barriers encountered in the educational career of students with disabilities. Among these barriers lack of comprehensive information to categorize and students' reluctance to be identified as a disability group, shortage of educational material and assistive technologies, lack of individual-level treatment and support, inadequate service at disability center, absence of sign language interpreter, communication problem with deaf students, absence of counseling services, low level of awareness on disability issues, and lack of awareness on the existing related policy document and guidelines were the major challenges faced by students with disabilities and challenges in the journey of Arba Minch university more accessible.

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