



Covid-19 and Disabilities in Higher and Tertiary Institutions in Zimbabwe.

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Abstract

This study was motivated by the fact that despite all the interventions by government and NGOs in aiding students with disabilities during pandemics and disasters, the assistance is usually inadequate to cater for the needs of the students. This leads to a scenario where the students drop out of their studies as they fail to cope with disaster induced challenges. The study used the qualitative research methodology in acquiring research data and this proved to be flexible as it brought out in-depth information about experiences of learners under COVID19 pandemic and what they are experiencing now. Amongst other findings, the study noted that, despite the various interventions, learners living with disabilities dropped out of university in the wake of the COVID 19 outbreak. The study recommends that, there is need for the government and NGOs to consider the rights of students living with disabilities in universities by providing them with all the necessary equipment for them to do their studies and complete their studies in time during the times of disasters and pandemics.

Key Words: COVID 19, disabilities, lockdowns, pandemics.

1. Introduction

Active participation of people living with disabilities in tertiary institutions has been investigated in the recent times particularly in the third world countries. Universities the world over have put in place mechanisms and opportunities to enhance the participation of students living with disabilities in tertiary institutions. However, their participation has been limited due to a number of factors. The current study provides a conceptual analysis on how rights of persons living with disabilities are advanced and protected in tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe and globally, with particular focus on Great Zimbabwe University.

The advent of the COVID 19 has revealed that much needed paradigm shift on disability (Quinn, 2021). Persons living with disabilities have always been discriminated in Zimbabwe's tertiary institutions. For instance, curfew and lockdown measures were not adequately communicated to different groups of persons living with disabilities (Quinn, 2021). COVID 19 pandemic worsened living conditions of students living with disabilities in Universities since they were discriminated and were forced to do online learning despite limited resources. In addition, people living with disabilities did not get sound medical advice when compared to their abled counterparts (Quinn, 2021). COVID 19 pandemic had a significant change on nearly every area of society, and higher education was no exception. COVID 19 effect painted a bleak picture for tertiary students, especially those living with disabilities that were affected by COVID 19 induced lockdowns and students suffered also in post lockdown effects. Due to disabilities, students were



further discriminated from entering tertiary education due to online applications and admission processes and for those who gained entry, found it difficult to continue and complete their studies. This study is set to investigate experiences of learners at Great Zimbabwe University during the COVID 19 induced lockdowns and post COVID 19 induced lockdowns in Masvingo.

1.2 Literature Review

In August 2006, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its Optional Protocol to promote and protect the rights of people with living with disabilities. The endorsement of this convention by Zimbabwe confirmed the country's commitment to recognize and advance the rights of people living with disabilities and as a state party to the CRPD, Zimbabwe assumed the obligations to domesticate, promote, protect, and enforce the rights of people living with disabilities. As good as the vision of the CRPD seems to Zimbabwe, its directives require actions that go beyond mere ratification to effective implementation. That is the only way the Convention can become a progressive framework to transform societies and bring an end to rampant discrimination and violation of people living with disabilities. Students living with disabilities were further discriminated with the coming of the COVID 19 pandemic lockdowns hence they were not compensated for the impact they endured from the pandemic during their studies, in which most of them have dropped out of university due to the pandemic. It is therefore of importance to consider the pre and post COVID 19 pandemic effects.

Most people living with disabilities are found in the Global South, where they experience exclusion, vulnerability to abuse and violence, lack of access to health services, employment, education, income inequalities, social support, and civic involvement. The Constitution of Zimbabwe, under Section 83, provides for elaborate rights of people living with disabilities. The inclusion of people living with disabilities' rights under the Bill of Rights in Zimbabwe's constitution is an additional positive step towards showing the importance accorded to people living with disabilities in the Zimbabwean society.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the CRPD) guarantees people living with disabilities the right to education without discrimination and based on equal opportunities. For Great Zimbabwe University in order to help ensure that there is adherence to the aims of the CRPD, has made an initiative that leaves no one behind, this can be witnessed by its creation of, the Disability Resource Center (DRC), which accommodates all students inclusive of their disabilities, race, religion or gender.

The major problem of this study is that, despite various interventions in the assistance of students with disabilities in Universities, most of the students living with disabilities cannot afford to go to university and complete their studies in time and graduate. This means that they are further marginalized as they will not be able to look for job and business opportunities in time compared to students living without disabilities. The major issue of this study is that despite the government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOS) and private player's policy interventions in the protection of students living with disabilities in universities against all forms of discrimination, most of the



students living with disabilities still experience exclusion in tertiary institutions. Those students who can gain entry in Universities are affected by various factors such as the COVID 19 pandemic induced lockdowns and post lockdown effects. For example, few university students have had access to electronic devices such as laptops, smart phones, and various technologies that are required to access the internet and use e-learning tools. Likewise, financial insecurity prevented most University students from exercising their right to education since they are unable to complete their studies owing to lack of funds resulting in them dropping out of university. In terms of the compulsory industrial attachment programme, students living with disabilities face an increasingly uncertain environment, as they struggle to secure placements in various organisations.

The existing inherited colonial inequalities and bottlenecks in Zimbabwe's tertiary education system dates to the colonial era where the white minority class was discriminating against the indigenous people. The colonial era increased discrimination against people with disabilities in Zimbabwe and this phenomenon is continuing. Thus, the students living with disabilities in Zimbabwe's Universities are being discriminated and are suffering from discrimination suffered from the colonial period in primary and secondary education. Most black people were not able to proceed to university. Disability continues to be one of the major causes to discrimination in tertiary education. In Africa, tertiary education has only been accessible to the rich and a few intellectuals, while people with learning disabilities have had limited access. Considering the above, it is important to note that, advancement of rights of persons with disabilities does not only require recognition or awareness but also proper infrastructures at universities that, help with the easy access of such pupils to lecture rooms. Students living with disabilities are not being treated as subjects with rights and who are able to claim their rights, make own decisions and make free choices in the event that they suffer from risks and shocks which live them vulnerable from dropping out of University education. People living with disabilities form the largest minority group in Zimbabwe.

In the year 2000, global countries convened to establish the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which had the major aim to achieve specified developmental goals by the end of a 15-year period in the year 2015. These MDGs included among them the goal of gaining universal basic education as one of its major objectives. The focus had moved from just school attendance but to learning outcome and gaining of quality education through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by the year 2030 and it was aimed at completing the entire education cycle, from early childhood to higher education, with a focus on literacy and learning. This study considers the fate of the United Nations' (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its potential to serve as a vehicle for advancing just, sustainable, and rights-affirming recovery policies (Lyons, 2021:174). University education is a process that must be treated holistically both within and beyond the classroom. The coming of the COVID 19 pandemic has come as a setback in achieving these universal goals simply because it has posed a serious threat to university students' learning environments, driving up needs and causing high economic dire costs and increased pressure on parents and guardians and universities. All university students, including those with special needs (those



with disabilities), benefit from quality tertiary education, and they should have equal access to it to grow and nurture positive experiences in their own lives. In Uganda in the DRM report from Uganda stated *'I know two PWDs who have been shot at because they were outside in curfew time'* (Quinn, 2021). It is critical that individuals have access to crucial resources that support their learning, such as disabled-friendly university materials, extra attention, and opportunities.

Different nations are now actively working towards according to people living with disabilities basic human rights in line with the United Nations' Human Rights Convention (UNHRC). Persons living with disabilities do not face the same circumstances, in their journey to the attainment of tertiary education, as do people living without disabilities. Studies have revealed that people living with disabilities are often invisible and not identified at an early stage. Generally, the attaining and completion of a degree could be challenging for students living with disabilities in Universities, but very stressful to the students with learning disabilities. This study aims in showing how the Great Zimbabwe University, a tertiary institution in Masvingo is advancing the rights of persons with disabilities, however there are challenges in offering services, which might be deemed complicated. Unsurprisingly, there was a measurable uptick in homelessness of persons with disabilities (Quinn, 2021). This clearly shows that students living with disabilities were not spared with the pandemic and are still suffering from post-COVID 19 effects.

This study looks at how universities may include and support students living with disabilities in completing and attaining their studies without major challenges. This study is looking at students living with disabilities as agents of change and their right to participate equally in the democratic space, politics, and governance; hence they are not being included in universities. The way universities infrastructure are built and their day to day services, for instance Great Zimbabwe University hardly accommodates students living with disabilities who are in difficult circumstances and vulnerable and this makes it difficult for students living with disabilities to attend lectures and they end up dropping out of university before they complete their studies or graduate. Most of the students living with disabilities who lived in remote areas were neglected during the rime, up to now there is no compensation on those people. This lack of preparedness was worsened by the coming of COVID 19 pandemic which affected most university students. Universities are mostly built in a manner that accommodates people with minimum or no special cases. It is the right of every person; especially those who are living with disabilities to participate in complete their studies in time with all the support and be able to participate in the politics of the day so that their voices are heard. University students living with disabilities are thereby being ignored hence they are important actors in the development of the country as the whole. Students with disabilities suffered more since they did not have access to resources. There was undetected violence in the homes. Living in such an isolation, persons with disabilities tended to lack access to basic commodities including food nutrition and medical goods and services (Quinn, 2021).

People living with disabilities in tertiary institutions



On paper, the government of Zimbabwe is very clear on the rights of people living with disabilities. Zimbabwe ratified the United Nations (UN) Convention of persons with disabilities that was passed in 2006 and Zimbabwe ratified it in 2013. This agreement changes approach to children with disabilities for Zimbabwe and many other countries. The traditional view was treating children with disabilities as objects of charity, sympathy, medical treatment, and social protection. This agreement has less emphasis on the inclusion of students living with disabilities in acquiring and completing university education in the stipulated time. University students living with disabilities are not being treated as subjects with rights and who are able to claim their rights, make own decisions and make free choices in life. Students living with disabilities must all human rights and fundamental freedom hence they are not enjoying their fundamental rights because they are not being fully included in tertiary education. Cultural factors in Zimbabwe contribute more to this since youths living with disabilities are not viewed as decision makers in Zimbabwe patriarchal society, so they see no need to send them to university. There is need for university projects to eliminate all forms of violence against students living with disabilities in households as this acts as a barrier for them completing their tertiary education. Zimbabwe has the lowest representation of people living with disabilities in influential positions. Students living with disabilities have often fallen victims of rape, killings, victimization in political conflicts scenarios. Lack of assistance and funding for university students is causing continued university dropout rates amongst students living with disabilities. Despite the government efforts, the political and domestic violence phenomenon is continuing in Zimbabwe's rural households, affecting students, especially those in difficult situations like disabilities, who are further marginalized. There is lack of funding and knowledge about disability rights. There is therefore need to mainstream the rights of children living with disabilities into every peace building project and strategy. Students living with disabilities have not been meaningfully engaged and they have limited knowledge about their rights to tertiary education, some university staff view students living with disabilities as a liability and they have no option but try to assist them. Students living with disabilities experience all forms of violence that include among it gender based violence, intersectional violence, denied sexual reproductive health. The impact of COVID 19 has worsened the challenges as existing programmes have given inadequate attention to their unique needs living them vulnerable. University students living with disabilities are living in fear, they lack information, and this causes communication barriers from the university system. They do not have means to access legal and social protection from both government and NGOs. The rights of university students living with disabilities are guided with the religion, culture, society. Most students are not aware or their rights and therefore they face discrimination, abuse, and lack of tertiary education.

State of students living with disabilities in Zimbabwe

This study looks at how University programmes can include students living with disabilities in their completion of university education and peace initiatives thereby building their self-development. Girl child sensitive development mechanisms are necessary to those children who are affected by structural and institutional violence in Zimbabwe. This study is looking at university students living with disabilities as agents of change and their right to participate



equally in the democratic space, politics and governance and education hence they are not being included in tertiary education around the country. It is the right of the students, especially those who are disabled to participate in the politics and complete their education in time so that their voices are not silenced in future. Student living with disabilities in Zimbabwe have the lowest representation in influential positions and therefore the statistics of women with disabilities participation in local and National development agenda is in the periphery. Social protection mechanisms must ensure that students living with disabilities are involved in tertiary education locally and internationally in the event of university dropout's phenomenon. African governments including Zimbabwe are signatories which ratified the Convention on the Rights of the people living with disabilities adopted by the United Nations General Assembly 1989 committed to the principle. Students and youths living with disabilities are the most affected because of the patriarchal nature of the Zimbabwean society, in which violence against children is rampant and is experienced on a day-to-day basis. Zimbabwe is a country that had a history of conflicts and violence, and this has seen students with disabilities suffering from discrimination, gross inequalities in universities, political and domestic violence.

The colonial era increased structural and direct discrimination practices, and this is continuing. Youths living with disabilities in Zimbabwe are being discriminated and are suffering from discrimination suffered from the colonial period. The study implies that to achieve the culture, norms and values of tertiary education in Zimbabwe, there is need to include students with disabilities in decision making in the university systems. Empowerment programmes and civil societies must work towards including students with disabilities in tertiary education. Students living with disabilities are victims of political and domestic violence globally. Statistical studies shows that children are involved in violence in the home and societies they live in violent conflicts are mostly perpetrated by men and women in different settings. However, men are said to be the major perpetrators of political and domestic violence, hence this is open to debate, hence without education they continue to lose their rights as citizens. In this regard, for students living with disabilities the exclusion is worsened by gender, ethnicity, and economic status. One reason for their exclusion is the charity mindset towards people living with disabilities. Different organizations fail to adjust their activities, and this leads to them discrimination people living with disabilities. There is therefore need to apply a human rights-based approach to disability inclusion. There is need to recognize people living with disabilities as social actors with their own capabilities as this will transform conflicts. They must move away from the language of vulnerability and recognize the rights of students living with disabilities even in households. It's not about representation but it's about making sure students living with disabilities have a say in the design of the primary healthcare support services and tertiary education.

2. Materials and Methods

The population consisted of 30 individuals whom the study was interested in obtaining the information and making inferences on. In carrying out the study, the targeted population were learners from university that is Great Zimbabwe. Under the target population, the study also incorporated Great Zimbabwe University lecturers, Staff



members from Great Zimbabwe University, NGOs and students living with disabilities and those who are able bodied. The main reason for choosing this target population was because it helped the researcher to get detailed information.

The researcher used purposive sampling in selection of participants. This will also allow the researcher to select respondents who have a specific set of skills and qualities. The purposive sampling will help the researcher to have specific views when conducting research with regards to the experiences of learners living with disabilities in Tertiary Institutions during COVID-19 pandemic. The study will also make use of the snowballing sampling procedure in collecting data. The use of this approach was aimed at ensuring that the experiences of students with learning disabilities were chronicled. In addition, this approach allowed the researcher to understand the experiences of students with learning disabilities in the institution. Research instruments used in the study are interview guides and secondary sources of data in the field study.

3. Results and Discussion

In this section the study presents and examines the discoveries that were found during the unstructured interviews and key informants' interviews in the field. Motivation behind this part is to analyse information that was gathered during research interviews. The objective was discovering experiences of university students living with disabilities during the COVID 19 pandemic lockdowns and post COVID 19 induced lockdowns in Zimbabwe. Participants included in the research study was comprised of students with various impairments, lecturers, and university staff. Interviews were done in Shona and English language, but data presentation is done in English. Findings were presented in a thematic form, that is the main themes and sub themes.

Digital inequalities and COVID 19

Research data gathered from the field found out that respondents were having challenges in connecting to virtual online learning. Respondents indicated that online learning is disturbed by challenges caused of inadequate mobile networks which made it difficult for students living with disabilities to do online learning. After COVID 19 induced lockdowns, people living with disabilities were not compensated in universities; they continue to suffer from the after effects.

A respondent said that,

we come from the remote rural areas and where we stay the network connectivity is bad'. When conducting online lectures on WhatsApp platform or zoom platform we were not able to access online platforms. For us living with disabilities, it was worse because as for me I have a hearing problem. Even sending or receiving material via email or google class platform is difficult for me since I also have visual problems.

Another respondent said that



Challenges of network are a hindrance for us as students living with disabilities, we have to look for medication and at the same time we need to buy data to do our studies. During online lessons we used to struggle because we stay in deep remote rural areas and the network is extremely poor and sometimes we had to travel long distances to access network for us to be able to send our assignments. As for us living with disabilities it was not possible for us to travel those long distances since I'm on clutches.

A lecturer who was asked to share experience regarding online leaning revealed that,

We had an experience with a student who had disabilities and had visual impairment, this student made me to work extra hard for him to produce results. We have a student that is getting assistance from the university but the was always complaining that the management is not giving him enough assistance in terms of resources and research aids.

The above findings highlight that tertiary students living with disabilities in Masvingo urban were experiencing difficulties in connecting to online learning due to poor networks during lockdowns. Students living with disabilities were not compensated for the time lost during COVID 19 pandemic due the fact that the university was not prepared to assist students living with disabilities, in which some of them dropped out of university or deferred their studies due to challenges. Students living with disabilities were not compensated and are still suffering from post-COVID 19 effects.

The research found out that students living with disabilities were facing difficulties in acquiring data bundles during the COVID 19 induced lockdowns. Students were concerned about the internet bundle since they were too expensive hence online learning consumed a lot of internet bundles. It was revealed that students living with disabilities would sometimes miss online lectures and noted that some of the lecturers were not willing to use WhatsApp platforms for learning. Students living with disabilities opened that that they purchased internet bundle for themselves as the institution was hardly assisting them. Students living with disabilities they felt neglected during this period and the post lockdown period. They could not access facilities as most facilities they use were with the university. The only option was to dropout since it was too expensive for them to continue with their studies and complete with others.

A parent respondent said that,

Accessing internet bundle was really problematic for me as a parent since we were not allowed to go out of the home I could no longer go to work. Getting data bundles was too much expensive and beyond what I can afford for me hence we can't afford such amounts money. The worst part of our institution was not giving us data bundles but expected us to partake in online lectures. I'm also a guardian to a university student who is living with visual impairment but he is not getting any assistance from the university.



One respondent from the staff had this to say,

At Great Zimbabwe University students living with disabilities face a major challenge since the university is not doing much to assist them to acquire their tertiary education and complete their university education in time. Great Zimbabwe University does not offer assistive technology to students living with disabilities because the university has limited resources. Sometimes the university even struggle to purchase brails for students living with disabilities despite brails being cheap at institutions like Kapota. Students living with disabilities have various complex situations and stress since they are also discriminated by other students, and this proves to be a challenge given limited resources. Assistive technology enables communication and self-care of students living with disabilities.

Power cuts/Electricity related problems

The study revealed that electricity is also one of the major challenges Great Zimbabwe University tertiary students living with disabilities are facing as they are experiencing rapid power cuts which makes it difficult for them to do their studies, access internet and attend online lectures. Respondents highlighted that they stay where there is no electricity and use solar and some do not own solar facilities. This resulted in students doing their studies late, while the majority miss some of their online lectures. One of the respondents said that,

Power cuts are available in our poor neighborhood during the day which makes it difficult for me to participate in online lessons since I have a disability and this has been very difficult on my part.

Another respondent said,

Electricity outages have made it impossible for us to communicate with various students and they lecturers also delay feedback of assignments and I sometimes would find it hard to cope with these challenges. I have a disability and some students do not want to communicate with me and give me information.

Challenges with access to modern technological devices

The study found out that students living with disabilities were using their mobile phones for online learning during the pandemic. When talking about their online learning experiences, students revealed that they experienced issues with online gadgets they were using, which made it very difficult to access some websites and install certain programs required for online learning and this impact more heavily on students living with disabilities. Respondents also added that their colleagues do not participate in online learning because they do not own laptops and cell phones. The study found out that university staff also faces the same challenge of laptops and cell phones.

An interviewee stated that.



I don't have a modern gadget or a good cell phone we used to write various assignments on university computers that we find in computer university laboratories however it's not sustainable since students are many and the university staff also uses the same desktops.

The above findings establish that Tertiary students at Great Zimbabwe University experienced some level of challenges concerning the devices they use for their online learning. This suggests that students may not achieve the complete benefit of the online learning, especially those with special needs and have different impairments and are vulnerable.

COVID 19 and university student experience: The positives

The research also investigated that despite the differences of online learning some of the students, parents and other university staff was embracing the online learning strategies. One of the interviewees said that,

'learning online can be more much less expensive since we do not need bus fares for students, as for me who have a child who is living with a disability I'm no longer struggling to take him to university campus every day since my child will always be at home'.

A parent also lamented that.

online learning is better for me as a parent since do not have many expenses as compared to when my child has to go and stay in the university campus. The university campus fees are very high and with the COVID 19 it means it's a less burden. My child who stays at campus and has a disability has a special diet but now she just eats what I prepare for her at home.

One of the respondents from the Key informants' interviews had this to say,

As a university we are aware about the challenges of students living with disabilities which are associated with virtual learning, but students should embrace it especially considering the fact that we don't know when the pandemic will end, we have to embrace the new normal so that we progress.

Lack of interaction with lecturers and other university students

The research found out that COVID-19 induced lockdowns had a detrimental impact on university student living with disabilities' social experiences due to the lack of daily routines. The police were always present in the streets, and it was difficult for people living with disabilities to move around. Even though students used several platforms to communicate with others and lecturers, the lack of face- to- face interaction and instant feedback from lecturers



appeared to be a significant factor to students' dropout rate from university, affecting more those with special needs and living with disabilities.

Stress related problems

The study discovered that stress related problems were common among respondents. This was mainly caused by unequal health care and medical responses in the COVID 19 lockdowns period and post lockdown period. Quinn (2021) argues that many medical schools in the world still lack modules on the sensitization of future professionals to patients with disabilities and their inherent rights. Most respondents were unsure about the beginning of the new academic semester, including the resumption of classes, exams. Parents highlighted that managing their disabled university going children during this COVID 19 was a bit stressing and it even worsened their health problems, and this greatly affected their studies considering the fact that the institution was offering education for disabled students with limited resources so they had minimum assistance.

One parent said that,

this is so stressing I have a deaf university going child since the institution moved lessons online due to the pandemic, he has not been able to learn and am also failing to help since am uneducated I only know basic things

One of the respondents said that,

Am so worried about finishing my studies right now anxiety and frustration have consumed to the point where am no longer interested in anything, let alone studying, since I live with a disability, it was very hard for me during the COVID 19 pandemic induced lockdowns'

It can therefore be forecasted that the student mental state in the pandemic could affect their future because academic achievements are influenced by student's negative emotions and hinder the progression of learning.

3. Data analysis

Findings revealed that tertiary students living with disabilities at Great Zimbabwe University experienced difficulties with online learning techniques. Parents and guardians were always struggling to provide data to their children to ensure home schooling and some students could not attend lectures posing threat to their day to day studies, some university staff confirmed they could not merely conduct lectures with all students as most complained about this challenges and this exacerbated disparities in learning opportunities students living with disabilities or with special needs since they were not trained on how to handle students living with disabilities in classrooms. According to Mdhuli Matshidze and Kugara (2020) poverty is caused by unemployment, corruption and poor governance poor land use and unending political clashes, poor infrastructure diseases and poor health facilities. These people were



affected but post-COVID 19 effects were not attended to and students living with disabilities were not compensated for the difficulties they faced during this period. Aziz and Moussa (2021) support these findings by stating that during the COVID 19 induced lockdowns “Face to face meetings have been replaced with online communications. This came with difficulties among students living with disabilities since there was lack of communication and most of them were forced to defer studies.

The study findings also revealed that some of learners preferred learning online as they perceived it as easier as compared to face to face lectures. This had an advantage in that they would ask their colleagues at home to write assignments for them and give them assistance unlike when they are at university campus. Participating in online or virtual learning however was a disadvantage to those tertiary students with special needs and living with disabilities. Also, some of the parents were even in support as they regarded it as convenient and cheap. Jensen (2021) argues that health is also a human right battlefield. Globally we have witnessed the cost incurred from decades of negligent treatment of economic and social rights (Jensen 2021). The study also found out that students living with disabilities were concerned about the silence of universities and failure to recognize the need to assist students living with disabilities. Students living with disabilities were also faced with financial constraints and this was difficult since they looked forward for assistance yet they are not getting full assistance from the university. “States should give greater consideration to whether the public health aims of certain COVID 19 restrictions can be achieved by less restrictive means” (Cathair, 2021:45).

Moreover, the study findings also revealed that social the COVID-19 pandemic caused a massive loss of life among students living with disabilities. This is mainly due to the fact they lacked medical assistance and access to health facilities. Many people lost their lives during the COVID 19 pandemic and those of their relatives and some students were left with no one to support their education. Social distance has made it difficult for university students living with disabilities to organically connect through classwork and shared interest. Absence of interactions with lecturers made it hard for students in understanding the course content. “For those without access to home computers or reliable internet connections or no connection at all participation in remote instruction was effectively impossible” (Davis, 2021:69). This meant that most students dropped out due to the fact that they did not have modern technology for them to attend classes.

4. Conclusion

The impact of COVID 19 disturbed the day to day running of university activities. This study gave an idea on the lived experiences of tertiary students living with disabilities in Great Zimbabwe University during COVID 19 pandemic. As such increased dropouts among students living with disabilities, disruption in academic activities caused by the outbreak of COVID 19 had adverse effects on universities, parents or guardians and their students. COVID 19 induced lockdowns caused inequalities among tertiary students as most of the learners indicated that they could not afford to cope with the expenses that come with learning online. Those students living with disabilities were greatly affected.



Way forward

As a way forward the Zimbabwean government should assist strengthening and expanding the availability of finances that must assist vulnerable students especially those students living with disabilities. There is need to improve internet learning in the country and provide affordable packages for students to access the internet. Both lecturers and students should be given guidance and training on how to use online learning systems. The government should protect higher education for those students living with disabilities and support them whenever they need assistance with their education.

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