

Full Length Research Paper

The lived experiences of students with severe mobility impairment at Addis Ababa University (AAU): A phenomenological perspective

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A qualitative approach, specifically a descriptive phenomenological approach, was used to explore the lived experiences of students with severe mobility impairment at AAU. Accordingly, nine students with severe mobility impairment in different fields of study and year level provided written descriptions to the questions posed to them. Analysis of their responses yielded three major themes, each major theme with its own sub-themes of two or more. The three major themes were subjective experiences of difficulty, dissatisfaction with the institutional and social supports available and coping strategies employed. Subjective experience of difficulty were described as temptations and challenges ever faced and which consisted of inaccessibility of facilities, fatigue and inconvenience at library, mobility-related difficulties and difficulty in accomplishing Activities of Daily Living (ADL). Discontentment with the institutional and social support systems available involves feelings of dissatisfaction with the financial, materials, facilities, etc provided by the university and academic and social supports from instructors, administrative staff and non-disabled fellow students. Coping strategies employed entails depending on self or on others in order to overcome the difficulties experienced.

Key words: Students with disabilities, lived experiences, physical impairment.

INTRODUCTION

Following expansion of the number of universities in Ethiopia, over past few years, the number of students who join university each year increased drastically. Similarly, universities, especially Addis Ababa University (AAU), have experienced a significant increase in the enrollment of students with disabilities, a trend that has resulted in more students with disabilities in general, and students with physical impairment in particular. The number of Students With Disabilities (SWDs) at AAU is

not negligible. For example, according to Tirussew and Lehtomaki (2010), there were about 100 students with visual impairment, 90 students with motor disorders and three students with hearing impairment though the data may not be accurate.

However, there are no systematic research studies that attempted to address each group's shared experience or each individual's unique experience of being a SWD at AAU in order to address their unique (special)

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educational needs. Though there are a few small scale studies, these also suffer from at least three main methodological flaws. First, many of the studies were surveys that tended to treat all SWDs as having similar experience. For example, Tirussew's (1998) study involved 34 completely blind students and 17 students with motor disorders. In this study, blind students and students with motor disorders were treated as having similar experience while, in reality, their experiences might be quite different due to the nature of their disability. Second, previous studies failed to take into account an individual's unique experience in each group. In other words, the researchers tended to regard all SWDs with similar disability (e.g. students with visual impairment or students with hearing impairment) as having quite similar experiences and problems. However, it is difficult to conclude that students with similar disability have similar (or common) experience, problems or characteristics may be due to the degree of severity of their disability, differences in pre-college social and academic background, difference in perceived or actual social and institutional support available to them and the effectiveness of coping strategy each student adopts. In support of this view, Orr (2004) states that it is difficult to label SWDs as having a certain characteristics as a group though there are certain group characteristics that can be identified and can be helpful to promote SWDs' success in college.

In the first case, two entirely different groups were stuck together and treated as having similar experience, characteristics or challenge. In the second, individuals with similar disability but varying degree of severity were stuck together and studied as having similar characteristics, experiences, or challenges. In both cases, researchers seemed to be interested in the common characteristics, experiences, or challenges of SWDs rather than capturing their unique subjective experiences and problems. Although identifying common characteristics and experiences of SWDs is helpful to promote SWDs' success in college, capturing their personal, subjective experiences and challenges is of greater significance in meeting the unique needs of each SWD.

The third flaw with previous studies is that many of them were quantitative surveys. But due to the nature of the subject (disability,) it is difficult to give the intricate details of the phenomenon using quantitative research methods. In other words, previous researchers were interested in assessing and identifying superficial characteristics of SWDs (e.g. attitude, self esteem, perception...) rather than exploring, uncovering and understanding the "lived experiences" of SWDs which might be of greater significance in meeting the unique needs of SWDs at AAU.

Three things are apparent from the discussion. First, research on SWDs at AAU is negligible. Second, even those small scale studies available give us little understanding of SWDs at AAU because of their

methodological flaws discussed. Third, phenomenological oriented studies that attempted to capture the essence of the lived experiences of SWDs, particularly those with severe mobility impairment, are totally absent.

The current study, therefore, aims to introduce phenomenological research into the study of disability and to contribute to the existing studies with SWDs at AAU and beyond through the use of descriptive phenomenology. My aim is to show the value and appropriateness of qualitative research, particularly phenomenological research, for understanding the situations of SWDs at AAU in general and those of students with severe mobility impairment in order to meet their special (educational) needs and ensure their success in college and then in life.

The purposes of the present study is thus to explore, uncover, and describe the lived experiences of students with severe mobility impairment (students who use wheelchair or two crutches for movement) at AAU.

Research questions

Specifically, the present study aims at answering the questions below:

- i) What does it mean to be a student with severe mobility impairment at AAU?
- ii) How do students with severe mobility impairment see the institutional and social supports available to them?
- iii) How do students with severe mobility impairment at AAU accomplish activities of daily living (ADL)?

RESEARCH METHODS

A qualitative approach to research was used to allow the participants' personal perspective and experiences related to being a student with severe mobility impairment at AAU. Specifically, a phenomenological approach to qualitative research was employed to explore and understand the lived experiences of the participants, that is, students with severe mobility impairment who use either wheelchair or two crutches for movement. As pointed out at the onset, the purpose of this research was to explore and understand the lived experience of students with severe mobility impairment at AAU from their own perspective and subjective experiences. In order to achieve this propose, phenomenological research is suitable because the objective of phenomenological research is to describe the full meaning and structure of what an experience means to those who live it (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). In addition, it aims to capture the richness and complexity of the lived experiences of the participants' emotional life.

Phenomenology originated initially in the late 19th century in reaction to positivism which could not adequately address the problems being presented to the humanities and is most often associated with the German mathematician and philosopher, Edmund Husserl (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). However, phenomenology as a qualitative research method can be traced to philosophy and psychology (Howwit, 2010). According to Patton (2002), if the researcher's intent was to derive meaning from human experience, the appropriateness of phenomenological research approach cannot be questioned.

Participants

Data for this research came from students with severe mobility impairment attending AAU. A purposive sampling technique was used to recruit these participants because it is believed to lead to information rich participants (Patton, 2002). Three inclusion criteria to select the participants were set before contacting the participants. These were (1) be a full time AAU student (2) be a student with severe mobility impairment who use either wheelchair or two crutches ; and (3) be voluntary to participate in the study. Therefore, of the students approached 9 students met the three criteria above and participated in this study.

Data collection

After securing informed (oral) consent from the participants, the researcher administered to the participants a questionnaire that consisted of some 14 questions. The first question in the questionnaire asked demographics such as age, sex, field of study, and year level. The remaining 13 questions in the questionnaire were open questions that asked the participants to provide a written description of the issue asked. These 13 questions were worded and structured in the manner they could generate a full range of the subjective experiences of the students participated in the study. First, two broad, general questions that guided the study at hand were forwarded, viz; (1) what does it mean to you to be a student with severe mobility problem at AAU? and (2) How do you experience what you experience? The rest (11 questions) were less general, but open questions that the researcher thought may arise from the two guiding questions. The questionnaire was first prepared in English and then translated into Amharic to allow participants' maximum understanding of the questions and provide rich information. Participants were given enough time and asked orally to provide as much information as they are comfortable to give.

Data analysis

Data analysis in qualitative, general and phenomenological research in particular is an iterative process in that the researcher is required to move forth and back between steps as suggested by Creswell (2007) and Patton (2002). The steps used throughout the analysis were as follows: First, the responses provided by the participants to the open questions were read several times and a separate sheet of paper was used to make notes of anything that appeared significant and of interest. The second stage involved returning to the participants' responses afresh and using the notes taken on the separate paper to transform the responses and notes into more specific themes or phrases. The third stage involved further reducing the data by establishing connections between the preliminary themes and clustering them appropriately with these clusters given descriptive label that conveys the conceptual nature of the themes therein. Finally, a table was produced. The table shows each higher order theme and the sub-themes that build it. The production of the table involved an iterative process in which the researcher has moved forth and back between the various steps of data analysis to ensure the integrity of what has been provided by each participant.

Careful analysis of the written description given by the nine (9) participants using the aforementioned steps yielded the main themes and subthemes given in the Table 1 hereunder.

RESULTS

Descriptive demographic information about the nine participants was compiled comprising eight male

adolescents and one female adolescent. The participants were regular students of undergraduate programme (8 students or about 89%) and graduate programme (1 participant or about 11%). The undergraduate student participants were on-campus (lives in the main campus of AAU) while the graduate student was off campus (does not live in the campus). Their average age was 22.56 years with standard deviation being 2.92 and was from different departments and in differing year levels. Table 2 gives the summary of the demographic information about the participants.

Issues inherent in the lived experiences expressed by the participants reflected three super-ordinate themes (a) subjective experiences of difficulty (b) discontentment with the institutional and social supports available and (c) coping strategies employed.

Subjective experience of difficulty were described as temptations and challenges ever faced and consisted of inaccessibility of facilities, fatigue and inconvenience at library, mobility-related difficulties and difficulty in accomplishing ADL.

Discontentment with the institutional and social support systems available involves feelings of dissatisfaction with the financial, materials, facilities, etc provided by the university and academic and social supports from instructors, administrative staff and non-disabled fellow students. This super-ordinate theme is reflected in participants' (a) open expression of the inadequacy of supports available to them and (b) denial of the need for support. The third super-ordinate theme emerged was coping strategies employed in overcoming the difficulties experienced and consisted of (a) self-reliance and (b) relying on others.

Subjective experiences of difficulty

Perhaps the most compelling aspect of this study is the participants' use of this opportunity to lament and grieve about the challenges and difficulties they faced as a result of their being students with severe (physical) mobility impairment. Most significantly and often-expressed challenges and difficulties faced were (a) inaccessibility of facilities, (b) fatigue and inconvenience at library (c) mobility/movement challenges and (d) difficulty in accomplishing ADL. Each of these contexts and forms of subjective experiences of difficulty has been presented below with representative illustrative quotes from participants.

Inaccessibility of facilities

Inaccessibility of classrooms, offices, latrines, bathrooms and other facilities was the most significantly and often expressed challenges ever faced. Being unable to access these facilities was mourned by several members (participants) of this study as the quotes that follow

Table 1. Themes and subthemes that emerged from the step by step analysis of the data.

Categories	Steps
Theme 1	Subjective experiences of difficulty
Sub-theme 1.1	Inaccessibility of facilities
Sub-theme 1.2	Fatigue and inconvenience at library
Sub-theme 1.3	Mobility challenges to attend classes
Sub-theme 1.4	Difficulty in accomplishing ADL
Theme 2	Dissatisfaction with the institutional and social supports
Sub-theme 2.1	Denial of the need for support
Sub-theme 2.2	Open expression of discontent with the supports available
Theme 3	Coping strategies employed
Sub-theme 3.1	Self-reliance
Sub-theme 3.2	Reliance on others

Table 2. Descriptive demographic information of the participants.

Fictitious Name/ Code	Sex	Age	Level of study	Year of Study
P001	Male	23	Undergraduate	4 th
P002	Male	20	Undergraduate	4 th
P003	Female	20	Undergraduate	2 nd
P004	Male	21	Undergraduate	3 rd
P005	Male	24	Undergraduate	1 st
P006	Male	22	Undergraduate	4 th
P007	Male	20	Undergraduate	2 nd
P008	Male	29	Graduate	3 rd
P009	Male	24	Undergraduate	4 th

illustrate:

... getting around the university buildings is always difficult for me because they are away ... for example, some times you may be required to attend classes at the main campus while your residence is at FBE campus ... you can imagine how much this can be difficult for a wheelchair user... (P002).

And yet, being unable to reach offices, classrooms and other facilities in proximity but when they are at first, 2nd, or 3rd floor or beyond seemed to elicit participants' feelings of sadness:

... classrooms and offices are not easily accessible: I suffer a lot in accomplishing affairs and concerns I have at offices beyond my reach ... I get mad when classes are held at first, or second floor, or beyond (P003).

Fatigue and inconveniences at library

This is another context and form of subjective

experiences participants of this study most often expressed. Several participants grieved that their being in wheelchair or one with severe mobility impairment impacts negatively their use of library and then their academic performance as reflected in the two representative quotes:

... being on wheelchair and reading at library for long time tempts me a lot. I become exhausted within a short time. I have to lie down on a soft mattress or lean against soft support to read for a longer time; but chairs at our library were wooden or metal chairs with wooden or metal back support. They were not convenient enough for non-disabled students let alone for students with disabilities (P007).

Another participant who uses two crutches for movement adds:

.... I am an amputee; I cannot stay seated in library for longer time, because seats (chairs) at library are not

convenient. In addition, I could not stay at library during night time because electric power may go or rain may come, or any other problem might happen. Under such conditions, you may suffer a lot (P008).

As the two quotes above from the two participants vividly illustrate students with severe mobility impairment could not stay at library and study well due to different factors that originated from their disability (e.g. fatigue) and from the environment (e.g. inconvenience of library chairs). Furthermore, as the later excerpt exemplifies, fear of some controllable and uncontrollable misfortunes compromise this group's effective use of library during night time which in turn, is likely to negatively affect their academic performance and then completion of college education.

Mobility/movement challenges

This is another context and form of subjective experiences that most of the participants expressed. Being unable to attend classes at floors of high buildings, go to field trips and inconvenience of roads were some of the situations that elicited participants' feeling of sadness.

.... There are times when you are required (or expected) to attend class sessions at third, fourth, fifth and sixth floor; this really challenges and concerns me... (P001).

Another participant laments how being a student with severe mobility impairment precludes from academic works that require field trips as:

I am a fourth year student and I am required to write graduation senior essay. This is a difficult undertaking for me because I cannot move from place to place easily without someone's support. So how can I collect the data I need for my senior essay? (P002).

Another participant adds:

I am a graduate class student and all graduating students in our department are to go out for educational tour. But, it is difficult for me to make such kind of educational trip. Is this not upsetting? (P006).

The three illustrative quotes given above show us that mobility impairment poses mobility challenges and difficulties to the students with mobility problem which in turn damages their emotions and feelings.

Difficulty in accomplishing activities of daily living (ADL)

Washing our clothes, taking bath, shopping, going to latrine, etc are all that human beings are required to carry out in order to survive. Most of the participants of this

study expressed the difficulties they faced in accomplishing these activities not due to their impairment alone but due to the inaccessibility and inconvenience of facilities required to accomplish these activities as clearly expressed in the words' of participants themselves below:

.... accomplishing activities of daily living is all difficult; you need support to accomplish most of them. This is because facilities are not accessible or they are not convenient for SWDs (P004).

P005 adds *"I cannot wash my clothes because I cannot stoop down....."*

P006 vividly points out why accomplishing ADL is challenging for students with motor disability as:

I accomplish some of the ADL my self. But, in most cases I ask help from those around me. For example, I cannot wash my clothes without help because the facilities are not convenient for us. If they were convenient enough, I can wash my clothes with minimum help.

P003 elaborates why and how accomplishing ADL is difficult for students with motor/mobility impairment as follows:

My impairment does not prevent me from accomplishing all activities; what prevents me from accomplishing most of the ADL is the inconvenience of places, facilities, big buildings, vertical stairs..... If these barriers were not there, I can accomplish most of the ADL without support.

As can be understood from the words of the participants above, most of the participants attributed difficulties in accomplishing the ADL not to their impairment per se but mostly to the environmental barriers.

Discontentment with the Institutional and social supports available

This is another super-ordinate theme that emerged from careful analysis of the written descriptions provided by the participants. This super-ordinate theme is reflected in many specific forms and contexts. Some participants openly expressed their discontent with the institutional and social supports they received from the University and its community. Others expressed their discontent with the supports indirectly by denying or rejecting the importance of such supports. These discontents with all the supports available to them were expressed in the following forms and contexts.

Discontentment with academic support

It is obvious that students with disabilities need some

kind of academic support such as flexibility of academic schedules, flexibility and modification of instructional techniques, provision of reading materials, etc in order to be successful and graduate from a college. In general, curricula and instructional flexibility and modification are necessary to accommodate their disability.

Most of the participants of this study expressed their discontent with such supports (academic supports) rendered to them from AAU professors either directly (openly) or indirectly as quotes below illustrate:

“..... no academic support at all ... you are treated as if you were non-disabled student.”(P004).

P006 expresses his dissatisfaction with the way academic staffs have been treating him as:

“Faculty and department members are not considerate and helpful; they are indifferent and treat you just as if you were non-disabled.”

P007 adds “... my teachers do not provide me with any type of special support and care...”

Moreover, P008 elaborates on the issue as follows:

Students with mobility impairment cannot move easily; they cannot read at library exhaustively; they do not get materials and information in time.... Therefore, they need additional academic supports such as tutorials, handout provisions and grading systems based on assignments in order to help SWDs to become successful in college. But, this is unthinkable at AAU.

On the other hand, few of the participants expressed their discontentment with the academic support they require by denying that academic support is not important for students with mobility impairment as exemplified by the words of one participant (P009) below:

“On my part, I don’t want any academic support from my teachers...and I also don’t think other students similar to me want academic supports from their teachers.”

Discontentment with material and service supports

The participants also expressed their discontentment with material, financial, and service facility supports available to them either openly or indirectly. Excerpts from the participants’ written expressions below clearly show their disappointments with material, financial and other services available to them from AAU:

“.... I receive 120 ETB from disability centre monthly: I also get ICT service from the centre...Finished!” (P001)

“.... I can say no support at all except movement supports (e.g. crutches), 120 ETB and access to

computer service....” (P008).

“..... limited amount of support; but this not enough” (P005)

“.....some amount of pocket money from disability centre” (P006)

Discontentment with social supports from non-disabled students

Almost all the participants of this study acknowledged and appreciated the social supports available to them from their non-disabled counterparts, but with some degree of direct and indirect reservation as reflected in the participants’ own words given hereunder:

“... they are fair even if they cannot be said helpful enough...” (P005)

“... some of them are helpful enough but others are not...” (P004 and P007)

“..... I am comfortable with my class and dorm-mates; for that matter, most of the students here are too kind and helpful.....” (P002)

“... Most of them are not ready to help students with disability...” (P003)

“..... I do have good relationships with my class and dorm-mates....” (P001)

However, one participant appreciates the social supports he receives from non-disabled students around him as:

“... I found them beyond my expectation: they are helpful. For example, they wash my cloths; they help in shopping, etc. They are cooperative to you as much as they can.....” (P009)

Coping strategies

The third super-ordinate theme that emerged from the data was that the participants employ certain kind of coping strategy in overcoming the subjective experiences of difficulty reported. This super-ordinate theme consisted of two sub-themes: relying on oneself and relying on others. That is, most of the participants expressed that they relied on others (e.g. classmates, dorm-mates) when they faced difficulties and were unable to accomplish activities of daily living such as washing cloths while few expressed that they relied on themselves rather than seeking help from fellow students or others around them. The first four excerpts illustrate reliance on others while the last excerpt shows self-reliance:

“... support in activities of daily living is important, but we don't get any support of such kind from the University..... My friends help me well in this regard.” (P004)

“... my friends support me when I fail to accomplish tasks that I am supposed to accomplish...”(P007)

“I try to carry out some of the tasks myself; I seek help from my dorm-mates for those beyond my capability. Concerning washing cloths janitors help me just by payment.” (P003)

“..... you can't do most of the routines yourself; most of the time you need and seek support from those around you.”(P001)

“I try to do all routines myself; I don't like to ask for help....” (P008)

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to describe the lived experiences of students with severe mobility impairment (those who use wheel-chair and two crutches for movement). Careful analysis of the data obtained from the participants' responses that they gave to the open-ended questions forwarded to them yielded three super ordinate themes each with its own sub themes.

Subjective experiences of difficulty was one of the super-ordinate theme that emerged. Participants expressed this subjective experience of difficulty in different forms and under different conditions (contexts). Inaccessibility of facilities was one of the difficulties that most of the participants expressed bitterly. This result is perfectly in accordance with Tirussew and Lehtomaki (2010) observation and noted students with disabilities, particularly students with motor disabilities, had no access to toilets in the dormitories, classroom buildings, and elsewhere in the campus and even some of them had never taken shower in the campus throughout the whole years of their study.

Fatigue and inconvenience at Library was another form of experience of difficulty that several participants grieved. This is also in line with the findings from previous studies. For example, Tirussew and Lehtomaki (2010) have revealed that students with severe mobility impairment, especially those who had spinal problem, have difficulty in sitting and stay reading at library for a long time because of the nature of their impairment.

Most of the participants openly expressed that they repeatedly faced mobility or movement challenges. With regard to this, Tirussew and Lehtomaki(2010) stressed that students with motor disorders faced mobility challenges because of the fact that facilities such as dormitories, classrooms, dinning halls and pathways are

not disability friendly and thus these students suffer a lot to get around.

Difficulty in accomplishing activities of daily living (ADL) was another difficulty that the participants expressed most frequently. Most of the participants expressed that they continually faced difficulties in accomplishing activities of daily living such as washing cloths, using toilets and bathrooms and other daily routines not due to their impairment alone but due to the inaccessibility of the facilities required to undertake these routines. This finding supports previously available observations. For example, Tirussew and Lehtomaki (2010) noted similar findings from their recent study with SWDs at AAU. Okoye's (2010) study with physically challenged students at the University of Nigeria has also revealed that difficulty of accomplishing activities of daily living was one of the difficulties that these students face.

Discontentment with the institutional and social support available was another major theme that has emerged from the data generated. Participants of this study expressed their discontentment (dissatisfaction) with the supports rendered to them either openly or indirectly. That is, most of them openly expressed that the institutional and social supports they receive from the university and its community were not adequate and fair. Yet few of them expressed that institutional and social supports are not important to them and seems that they expressed their disappointment with the supports rendered to them through denial. Participants' discontentment with the supports rendered to them was expressed in various forms: discontent with academic support they received from academic staffs, discontentment with material, financial, service and facility supports and discontentment with informal (or relational) social supports from non-disabled fellow students.

Data were absent regarding SWDs satisfaction with the institutional supports rendered to them at AAU. However, Tirussew and Lehtomki mentioned some attitudinal barriers on part of academic staff and non-disable students and relational problems between academic staff and SWDs and non-disabled students and SWDs. The present study also reflects similar relational problems among the groups.

The third major theme that emerged was the coping strategy that physically challenged students employ to overcome the adversities they encounter. Participants expressed that they either relied on others or on self in order to overcome obstacles. Most participants confessed that they mostly depended on relations (classmates, dorm mates, and friends) and few expressed that they mostly depended on themselves in overcoming the obstacles that prevent them from functioning well. No study is conducted on the coping strategies that SWDs at AAU employ to overcome all types of obstacle they face because of their disabilities.

However, Okoye's research with physically challenged

students at the University of Nigeria reveals that the coping strategies that physically challenged students employ to overcome problems they face in accomplishing ADL vary with gender and years of study. In general, according to Okoye (2010), physically challenged students rely on friends (roommate, classmate...), relations (siblings, cousins, nephews...) and self in carrying out some of the ADL. The study further reveals that males are more likely to rely on friends for some of their ADL than females who appear to rely more on relations. In the current study, the participants' lived experiences showed that they rely either on friends or on themselves. Relational reliance (relying on siblings, for example) was not mentioned which may be owing to the fact that participants of the current study resided in the campus, not off-campus.

Summary

Following expansion of the number of universities in Ethiopia, over past few years, the number of students who join university each year increased drastically. Similarly, universities, especially AAU, have experienced a significant increase in the enrollment of students with disabilities, a trend that has resulted in more students with disabilities in general, and students with physical impairment in particular. Students with physical impairment have their own unique experiences and problems that are different from those of students with other disabilities because of the presence of physical barriers in university environments and some attitudinal barriers. In this study, the university life experiences of 9 students, 6 wheelchair users and 3 crutch users, was explored. A descriptive phenomenological research method was used. Some 14 open ended questions were posed to the participants and they were asked to provide a written description of their lived experience. Analyses of the data generated using the modified steps prescribed by Mustakas (McCaslin and Scott, 2003) resulted in the emergence of three super-ordinate themes which have their own sub-themes.

Subjective experience of difficulty was one of the super-ordinate themes that emerged from the data and consisted of four sub-themes. Results revealed inaccessibility of facilities, fatigue and inconvenience at library, mobility related difficulties and difficulty in accomplishing activities of daily living.

Inaccessibility of facilities is difficulty that is most-often expressed by participants of this study. Physical disability restricts easy accessibility of facilities within the environment and this constituted the major or real problem facing students with severe physical impairment.

It can lead to frustration in some case, which adversely affects students' success in college and their actualization of their aspiration. Inaccessibility of important places such as lecture halls (classrooms),

offices and library has been repeatedly expressed by the participants of this study.

Fatigue and inconvenience at library was another most often expressed difficulty by the participants of this study. Most participants grieved that they could not read exhaustively at library for longer time and late into night due to fatigue that might have resulted from their disability or inconvenience of reading rooms and library chairs or both. Whether it is perceived or real, inability to read exhaustively at library has the capacity to compromise these students academic achievement and then their success in college.

Mobility related difficulty was another common problem that all the participants faced due to architectural and pathway barriers, inclement weather, waiting for elevators, or equipment difficulties (e.g. maneuvering wheelchairs and crutches). It may be especially difficult for students with severe mobility impairment to get class within the time restraint of university schedules. Absence or lateness may result in missing a lesson or portion of a lesson and information, and reduction of mark that students receive for punctuality and class attendance. Moreover, it may interfere with student teacher relationships. In general, mobility disabilities often compromise students' functioning and success in university setting.

Difficulty in accomplishing activities of daily living (ADL), such as using toilets and bath rooms, washing clothes, fetching water, shopping and other daily routines, was another problematic experience that most of the participants expressed repeatedly in their written expressions of their lived experience. Inability to undertake these ADL has the capacity to impact the students' university life either directly or indirectly.

Discontentment with institutional and social supports available to them was another super-ordinate theme that emerged from the data generated and this consisted of discontentment with academic supports, discontentment with material, financial and service supports; and discontentment with social supports from non-disabled students such as perception of institutional and social supports obviously plays a decisive role in determining these students' success in college environment. Positive perception of the institutional and social supports available to them enhances their ability to cope with the disability and its impact while negative perception of it tends to tax these students' ability to cope with their disability and its impacts.

The third super-ordinate theme that emerged was that these students employ a certain kind of coping strategy to overcome the difficulties experienced. After categorizing all the strategies that the participants enumerated, I arrived at two forms (sub-themes) of strategies: Relying on oneself and relying on others. Relying on one's own self refers to preferring to do all activities by oneself rather than seeking help from others around and few of the participants expressed that they tended to rely on

themselves and were not comfortable with seeking help from those around them. Relying on others is seeking help from those around and using them (e.g. roommates, classmates, friends...) to overcome difficulties faced in all spheres of university life and most of the participants of this study expressed that they tended to rely on those around them (classmates, roommates, friends ...) in the faces of difficulties that are beyond their capability.

Research shows that the type of coping strategies that University students with disabilities adopt affects their success in college. Those who adopt effective coping strategies, including seeking help from others when necessary, are most of the time successful than those who adopt ineffective coping strategies such as exclusive reliance on oneself (Okoye, 2010).

Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of students with severe mobility impairment. Consequently, a descriptive phenomenological research method was used to uncover the lived experiences of nine students with severe mobility impairment selected from the main campus of AAU. Analysis of the data obtained from these participants yielded three major themes, with their own sub-themes, that shed light on the lived experiences of students with mobility impairment. The present study has demystified some important points about the lived experiences of the group involved and it has important implications for meeting the psycho-educational needs of SWDs in general and those of students with motor disorders in particular.

However, the present study is not without limitations. The first inherent limitation of the present study is that it generated its data from a limited number of participants (only 9 participants). The second visible limitation is that it used participants of different study and year levels, that is, heterogeneity of participants which might have precluded the identification of the very essence of the lived experiences of the group involved. The third and perhaps the most important limitation of this study is the use of questionnaire alone to generate and collect the data which might limit the validity and reliability of this study.

Albeit these limitations, the present study has added a lot to our understanding of SWDs at AAU and beyond and laid a sound foundation for further study. Thus with its limitations mentioned and other potential limitations, the current research is expected to instigate further qualitative studies into the issue and group under discussion. It is recommended that future researchers interested in the current issue use homogenous group of participants and multi-technique of data collections in order to come up with more valid, reliable and meaningful findings to promote our understanding of SWDs, their

unique personal and shared lived experiences and needs and help them in being successful in colleges and then in life.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from this study the following recommendations are forwarded. Students with physical disabilities often require accommodations to function successfully in university setting. Accommodations may vary based on the nature and degree of these students' disabilities. However, typical accommodations may include:

- i) Making sure that all facilities are accessible to student with physical disability and free from obstructions.
- ii) Advanced notice if the class activity will be held elsewhere.
- iii) Reasonable consideration for lateness or absenteeism due to difficulties in the location of classroom schedule.
- iv) Removing all architectural and side walk barriers.
- v) Improving institutional service and social supports to these students.
- vi) Enhancing these students' life skills such as relationship, coping, time management, etc.
- vii) Raising staff's awareness about the unique educational and psychosocial needs of this group.
- viii) Assigning attendants for those with profound mobility impairments.
- ix) Building positive relationship between SWDs and their non-disabled counterparts.
- x) Extended time for tests or quizzes if necessary.

Moreover, qualitative research with fairly large number of homogenous participants in terms age, sex, year and level of study and type of the impairment and with multi-method is required to fully understand the lived experiences of SWDs at AAU and fully address their unique psycho-educational needs.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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