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Exploring the perceptions of students with disabilities about their social inclusion at the University of Witwatersrand

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Abstract

The South African education system has seen a remarkable increase in the enrolment of students with disabilities, but there are still some challenges that confront such development. These fundamental challenges have been linked to traditional stereotyping and negative attitudes towards people with disabilities. This undermines the drive towards the social inclusion of students with disabilities in institutions of higher learning. A research conducted by the Disabilities in Higher Education (DHE, 2014) found out, that students with disabilities constitute one percent of the student populations in most South African Universities. Thus, it is possible to forget about their existence. This research therefore explored the perceptions of students with disabilities about their social inclusion at the University of Witwatersrand. The study adopted a qualitative approach and the study population consisted of students with disabilities at the University of Witwatersrand. A sample of twelve participants was selected using purposive sampling. Semi-structured interview schedules were used to collect data and data were collected using face to face interviews. The study showed that University of Witwatersrand has made some significant efforts in providing technical supports such as aids for students with disabilities. However, the study revealed that social inclusion of students with disabilities has not yet been fully achieved. The research showed that most students with disabilities do not engage or actively participate in social activities. The major findings revealed that very few participants engaged in sport activities, assumed leadership positions and attended social gatherings. The study also showed that the University of Witwatersrand has not yet provided enough enablers that would aid the social inclusion of students with disabilities. One of the recommendations emanating from the study is that the University of Witwatersrand should engage all stakeholders in promoting awareness on disability. It is anticipated that the research findings will be used to strengthen the University of Witwatersrand's policies so that they can enhance the social integration of students with disabilities.

KEY WORDS

Disability, social inclusion, integration, stereotyping, orientation, accessibility.