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## BARRIERS TO ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: CHALLENGES OF MOZAMBI...

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## BARRIERS TO ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: CHALLENGES OF MOZAMBICAN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS

### Abstract

The second half of 20th century saw the emergency of Universal Declaration of Human Right in 1948, with proposals to guarantee equal rights and duties to all citizens. These same were reinforced at the end of 20th century by the Salamanca Statement. This served as an impulse for a deep reflection on education inclusion in Mozambique. However, even after several decades of adaptation reinforcement by the National Educational System, we assert that discussing education infusing in High Education, in Mozambican context, is still premature. Despite the superficial implementation in some Universities, this article aim to discuss the barriers faced by disabled students in accessing High Education. The obtain date, a structured interview was conducted with administrative staff, which provided date on the number of enrolled disabled student. A regarding reduction in enrolment was observed, as well as limited acceptance due to the lack of institutional adaptability to accommodate special needs student. This led us to conclude that Universities Urgently needs to (1) consider the adaptation physical space to accommodate special needs individuals, (2) revise and adapt the curriculum, collaborate across sectors, and (4) invest in infrastructure and qualified human resources to ensure a fully inclusive education in high education for the social, economic, and educational advancement of the country.

**Key words:** Inclusive education, discrimination, high education, Mozambique

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## Introduction

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) emerged in the middle of the twentieth century, in 1948, as a way to defend not only the rights of a part of humans, but also human beings who had some social exclusion. The emergence of this document encouraged the world meeting that brought together about 92 countries in Spain and this conference aimed to discuss the exclusion that has always been discharged to people with (i) Motor problems (those who have mobility disabilities, whether of organic or environmental origin); (ii) Sensory (those who have a total inability to read (blind), those who (iii) communicate through alternative forms, namely sign language (deaf))), to those who (iv) have hearing amplification devices (hypoacoustic); (v) Intellectuals (those who do not have mind control for the learning process); (vi) Processological (to those who have problems in receiving, organizing and expressing information; as well as to (vii) sick and (viii) elderly. This World Conference culminated in the approval of the "Salamanca Declaration (DS)" committed, especially, to enabling "Education for All".

Before the approval of the SD, several countries created inclusive schools mirroring the UDHR of the twentieth century and one of these examples, according to Nhapuala (2014), is Mozambique, which had already implemented inclusive education within the framework of the looser laws that govern the educational system, and this implementation is scarcely observed in some primary and secondary schools, differentiating itself from Higher Education, hence, in this article, we have chosen two Universities respectively: Púnguè University – Tete Extension and Zambezi University (Faculty of Agrarian Sciences) and we intend, in these Higher Education institutions, to know if (1) They have specific policies to serve disabled students; (2) If the geophysical space is adapted to meet these studies; (3) If it has diversified material to serve special students; (4) If there are teachers trained to assist these students; (5) Promote awareness and sensitization on the inclusion of students with disabilities; (6) Sufficient and diverse material is made available for disabled students; (7) Whether they have already received, in the last two years, disabled students and (7) the challenges faced by the institution in the process of inclusion.

## Theoretical framework

Currently, the public that suffers the most exclusion, whether in the educational or social spheres, is the one with disabilities, leaving out the elderly and sick who otherwise receive

attention and redoubled love, differentiating themselves from what used to be guessed. In ancient times, discrimination was not only on disabled people, but also on teachers and the elderly. This exclusion, for Carmo (1991) happened in the Christian age (Spartan), because the population was nomadic, did not have a fixed place where they could camp and live for life, and was fed by their own power, by nature, which is why all people who were sick, or disabled or old, which made it impossible to move, were seen as "lazy". The treatment of these people was characterized by acceptance, tolerance and support; and another, which was based on contempt, elimination or abandonment in the middle of the forest where the animals also lived, thus starting to use their bodies as food. On the other hand, Nhapuala (2014) adds that the disabled person in those times was subject to (i) stoning, (ii) infanticide, (iii) drowning in rivers and seas, and (iv) hanging, chaining, or (v) weakness in the forest.

As can be understood, exclusive behavior comes from antiquity, and perhaps it can be judged today, but when we look at the life that our ancestors led, nomadic, it can be understood that they resorted to these decisions because of the setbacks that these people brought in the process of locomotion. This period is considered to be that of the gods, that is, the public believed in supernatural powers, hence these people were seen as "the wrath of the gods" as stated by Bianchetti (1995)

But, over time, in the Middle Ages, due to the influence of Christianity, around the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, the way of thinking about "disabled, elderly or sick people" became uneven, because every human being was seen as a "creature of God", hence, for Simionato (2016) disabled individuals were no longer exposed to death, but neither did they have the right to education. This was because, at the same time that they were considered to be people chosen by God for divine missions, they were also considered beings dominated by evil forces, who were punished by God with disability. For this reason, Bianchetti (1995) states that in the Middle Ages the disabled person came to be associated with Guilt and Sin, and the practice of stoning individuals considered possessed by the devil or impure before the Divinity became common.

Later on, the transition from Feudalism to Capitalism as Simionato (2016) argues played an important role, as people focused on the development of their businesses through great navigations, enabling them to pass through different parts of the world and these movements marked, consecutively, the evolution of science and through these evolutions, a new

understanding and a new language about disability gradually emerged, then related to the dysfunctionality of the body.

4 The discrimination of disabled people has gained new paradigms over time and it was only in the middle of the twentieth century, in 1948, after World War II, that the United Nations proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and this document maintains that human beings have the right to "be born free, equal".

6 It should be noted that, even before the proclamation of this document, some countries such as Brazil already had institutions that served disabled individuals, as is the case of the Institute of Blind Boys (1854), and in the case of Mozambique, until the second decade of the second half of the twentieth century, it was still dominated by the Portuguese, which is why the effects of the UDHR were not fully felt, because the discrimination, social and educational exclusion that would occur not only for disabled people, but for all Mozambicans and only at the end of the twentieth century, after independence, the UDHR was witnessed. it gained prominence, culminating in the elaboration of law 6/92 regarding the implementation of inclusive education by the National Education System, which, in 1994), suffered, as Nhapuala (2014) states, some readjustments because of the Salamanca Declaration, which maintains that "it is not enough just to insert the student in the classroom, but that there is socialization of them for cognitive development", inserting activities that respect the uniqueness of the students. it gained prominence, culminating in the elaboration of law 6/92 regarding the implementation of inclusive education by the National Education System, which, in 1994), suffered, as Nhapuala (2014) states, some readjustments because of the Salamanca Declaration, which maintains that "it is not enough just to insert the student in the classroom, but that there is socialization of them for cognitive development", inserting activities that respect the uniqueness of the students.

## Methodologies

The research was based on a qualitative approach of the exploratory type. As an empirical field for discussion, we bring the theoretical reflections that underlie the study, and support the analysis of the data from the structured interview directed to the administrative staff of the Púnguè University Extension of Tete (UNIPÚNGUÈ – TETE) and the Zambezi University – Faculty of Agrarian Sciences (UZ-FCA), specifically, in the Departments of Academic

Registration (RA) and in the Gender and Social Affairs (GAS) departments where we had access to other information regarding the inclusion of disabled students.

The interview at UNIPÚNGUÈ was directed to the Director of the Educational Psychology Course who also teaches the discipline of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and at FCA it was directed to the Deputy Director for the Extension Research Area responsible for the GAS Department. As a way to reinforce the research, a documentary analysis of the Internal Regulations of UNIPÚNGUÈ and FCA was made in order to know about the existence of policies inherent to educational inclusion in higher education and these two data collection techniques helped us to compare the data obtained.

## Results and Discussion

During a documentary analysis of the Internal Regulations of the Faculty of Agrarian Sciences provided by the institution, we verified the existence of some policies related to the support of disabled students. See Article 50 of the Gender and Social Affairs Bureau number 2, 2.1, paragraph (g) where it is stated that one of the missions of this Bureau is "To promote social assistance to vulnerable groups, namely women, children, the elderly, people with disabilities and people with chronic diseases". Despite the existence of this policy in a generalized way, the interview addressed to the Deputy Director for the Area of Extension Research (DDAER), responsible for the Social Affairs Gender Department (SAGD) elucidates other realities. During the analyses, we found that there is a lack of knowledge on the part of not only DDAER, but also by the other members that make up the faculty.

The lack of knowledge, which would invoke discussions about the importance of including these individuals, is in itself an attitudinal barrier to accessibility. And these barriers prevent disabled people from doing higher education, which can also be considered as discrimination and violation of Human Rights. According to the information obtained by the DDAER, we also verified the existence of a programmatic barrier, which is the lack of initiatives, lack of future plans with disabled people, lack of financing programs for the acquisition of the basic resources necessary for the implementation of inclusion and the lack of commitment to people with SEN.



Another barrier faced by FCA regarding educational inclusion is the instrumental, which refers to the absence or scarcity of instruments and tools to assist people with SEN. (Pivetta et al., 2016) apud (Rodrigues, 2019)

The other barriers faced by FCA are architectural, referring to the inescapable adaptations in the entire building, from the bathrooms, the computer room, the library, the parking lot, the stairs. These physical conditions violate not only Article 1 of the UDHR, which states that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Endowed with reason and conscience, they should act towards each other in a spirit of fraternity.", but paragraph 2 of the SD is also violated in the 1st point that defends that "every child has the fundamental right to education and should have the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning" as well as the 2nd point that defends that "education systems should be planned and educational programs implemented with in view of the vast diversity of these characteristics and needs".

**Table 1:** Interview addressed to the Department of Social Action and Academic Registration of the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences (FCA)

Question	Answers
1. Are there any specific policies at FCA to meet the needs of students with disabilities?	"Yes, there are."
2. Does FCA provide sufficient and empowered financial and human resources to support students with disabilities?	"FCA does not have financial resources. As you have heard and seen, the college plan is very far from inclusion. We have some colleagues who went to do a master's degree and others a PhD, if there was a plan, one of them would be taking a course that is related to educational inclusion."
3. What is FCA's policy regarding the geophysical adaptation of the institution to ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities?	"The policies exist, but there are no financial resources to carry out this project. Note that neither in the enclosure nor in the stairs that give access to the first floor, nor are the classrooms adapted for people, for example, who are blind or have mobility problems. So, there is no adaptation, except for the ramp placed outside that gives us access to the Auditorium. I don't see anything else."
4. How many students with disabilities have been enrolled in the university in the last two years (2021 and 2022)?	"We had ONE student, I think if memory serves me correctly, one or two students two years ago"
5. What are the modalities used in the process of conducting entrance examinations for students with	"I don't know why our exams come from Beira. It is difficult to answer because here we have never had disabled students I need adaptations in the entrance"

disabilities?

exams"

6. Is there any awareness program on the inclusion of students with disabilities at the university?

" It does not exist. The sensitization we have done in the communities is really about adherence to our courses and not about inclusion."

7. What are the main limitations faced by FCA in the process of inclusion of students with disabilities?

"The Faculty has the will to work for inclusion, but due to lack of resources, whether financial or human."

8.How does FCA monitor the academic progress and well-being of students with disabilities?

"Yes, in the year we had the disabled student, assistance was given."

9.What is FCA's approach to ensuring accessibility for students with disabilities in all areas of campus?

"I don't remember having done this type of monitoring or approaches."

10.What improvements or changes does FCA plan to implement in the future to promote the inclusion and well-being of students with disabilities?

"The only problem is the availability of funds and plans with the training of the teaching staff in these areas, at FCA we still don't have this."

Source: Author, 2024.

The Púnguè Extension University - Tete, as can be seen in the table(2), shows, in a way, a slight concern around Inclusive Education (ECE) and one of these proofs is the signing of memorandums with some reception centers for disabled people. In addition, as the data show, there was a need to adapt the geophysical space in some classrooms, including some concerns about sending some teachers to the training processes for the Master's and PhD levels in order to answer the questions related to inclusion in higher education. However, during some direct observations made in some compartments of the University, such as the steps that give access to the Academic Record, Directory, Bathrooms, Libraries and all the offices of the Faculties, we noticed the lack of ramps for students with motor disabilities, wheelchair users. Further on, the bathrooms and the Library are not adapted to serve students with motor disabilities, nor those who have SEN at a Sensory level such as the Blind, which is a huge barrier to access to Higher Education courses

One of the studies carried out by Lopes et al (2020) looks at the lack of financial resources as one of the key elements that makes ECE in higher education "a utopia", however, during the interviews held, we found that the biggest challenge, first, is the lack of will by those at the top, that is, the lack of the spirit of "humanism" as it was described, and the lack of meetings, dialogues, initiatives by the entities responsible for these areas. This lack of Intersectoral

communication between the diversified establishments means that research, evaluation, teacher training, preparation of training programs and production of materials are scarce, which visibly demonstrates the lack of commitment to inclusion. In this, LOPES et al (2020) argue that having this communication between institutions would be extremely important because it would allow the creation of various ideas regarding the continuous training of teachers, as well as there would be direct support making inclusion a more practical and less theoretical issue.

Intersectoral communication would discuss the role of disabled individuals in society, in academic life, suggestion of training teachers for training or capacity building in order to know the basic care for the treatment of individuals with SEN as well as adaptation of the geophysical and curricular space. These brief decisions would culminate in the identification of the types of SEN that each student has as well as the possible materials to be acquired, only after this, it would be possible to obtain the necessary costs for this purpose and the sending of the budget proposals to the competent authorities.

Later on, we were taken to a Regular Center for Inclusive Education (CREI) and according to the interviewees, if the University was truly interested in ECE, the first actions to be taken would be the memoranda with the CREI that would culminate in their reception and inclusion in Higher Education. CREI is located in the same academic citadel as UNPÚNGUÈ, but there is no system for tracking or controlling the whereabouts of students who complete secondary education in that center. This lack of interest in individuals with disabilities can be considered, as Lopes et al (2020) maintain, "the disrespect for social equality", practices that most occurred in view of the Christian age, in Sparta, in which the public with disabilities was subject to isolation, segregation and excluded by (UDHR, 1948) and (DS, 1994)

**Table 2:** Interview addressed to the Department of Social Action and Academic Registration of the University of Púnguè – Tete

Issues	Findings
1. Are there any specific UNIPÚNGUÈ–TETE policies to meet the needs of students with disabilities?	<i>"I think so political. I say this because the Púnguè Tete University signed a memorandum with a Reception Center for people with disabilities in the city of Beira."</i>

2. Does UNIPÚNGUÈ - TETE offer sufficient and qualified financial and human resources to support students with disabilities?

*"The University has never received any fund aimed at the purchase of specific materials, what we do is not inclusion as such, but integration, because we only receive students who have conditions. Now, about human resources, the university does not have it for now, but there is a study plan, some are in the master's degree and others in the Doctorate, both inclined in this area of care for disabled people."*

3. What is the policy of UNIPÚNGUÈ – TETE in relation to the geophysical adaptation of the institution to ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities?

*"Adaptation as such, no, but some graves were made in the classrooms to facilitate the movement of wheelchair users. Now, other adaptations need a lot of investment and almost nothing is said about it."*

4. How many students with disabilities have been enrolled in UNIPÚNGUÈ – TETE in the last two years (2021 and 2022)?

*"In the last two years we have not had any disabled student as such enrolled. Maybe they can exist, but we don't have data to illustrate this"*

5. What are the modalities used in the process of conducting entrance exams for students with disabilities at UNIPÚNGUÈ – TETE?

*"Our exams are prepared in Maputo, so I don't have enough knowledge about the modalities used. But, I remember in one of the years I saw a wheelchair user who did the same exams next to a table. Now, for the blind, for example, or those with psychomotor problems, I don't know what has been done."*

6. Is there any awareness program on the inclusion of students with disabilities at UNIPÚNGUÈ – TETE?

*"Yes, there is. We have been going to secondary schools to publicize the courses provided by the University, our infrastructures and other services."*

7. What are the main limitations faced by the university in the process of inclusion of students with disabilities?

*"Well, the limitations I would say are the lack of communication with other institutions. Issues about inclusion are hardly talked about. See, for example, in this citadel we have an Inclusive School where, I think, they graduate up to 8th Grade or 10th Grade. So, if there, at the top, there was a desire to address inclusion, we would make a memorandum to follow up with the students trained there, this would be inclusion, so these are our limitations. First is the desire to talk about inclusion, after that, it's funding"*

8. How does UNIPÚNGUÈ – TETE monitor the academic progress and well-being of students with disabilities?

*"No. At least I don't remember ever having a meeting to discuss this."*

9. What is UNIPÚNGUÈ – TETE's approach to ensuring accessibility for students with disabilities in all areas of the campus?

*"Here at UniPúnguè – Tete I don't remember ever having a meeting to discuss this. I don't know if you know what I mean, we have a lack of Intersectoral communication, there are no initiatives right at the top. Students take the exams, take the courses and also leave, I don't remember ever hearing any approach regarding monitoring"*

10. What improvements or changes does UNIPÚNGUÈ – TETE plan to implement in the future to promote the inclusion and well-being of students with disabilities?

*"As I said, the University sent some colleagues a few years ago to do master's and other doctorates and the objective is exactly this: to guarantee inclusion, I believe that we will have mature approaches with their return."*

**Source:** Author, 2024

## Conclusion

The scarcity of students with disabilities in Higher Education as seen in the data obtained at the Púnguè University and Zambezi University – Faculty of Agrarian Sciences, as well as the lack of policies regarding the training of teachers to serve people with disabilities and the lack of geophysical adaptation of the institutions are already one of the basic elements that demonstrate the non-compliance with the Salamanca Declaration, as well as discrimination of human rights.

At the time of the study, it was found that UNIPÚNGUÈ-TETE and FCA did not have any condition to receive any student with any disability. This way of looking at educational inclusion in higher education as an option is in itself a segregationist view. This reality demonstrates a lack of commitment, not only on the part of teachers, but also on the part of the competent entities that do not create forums where issues related to true educational inclusion in higher education can be discussed.

The current conditions of these two institutions mentioned above show that the true inclusion described in the regulations is far from being put into practice. For its effectiveness, urgent action will be needed in several aspects, respectively (i) the debate on the importance of Intersectoral communication in educational inclusion as a whole, (ii) the importance of educational inclusion in Higher Education, (iii) awareness-raising mechanisms in communities, primary, secondary schools and other places, (iv) creation of a pedagogical office with human

resources trained to assist and accompany individuals with disabilities, (v) the existence of financial resources to support these people, as well as policies of adaptability to the facilities.

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