

Self-advocacy for Inclusion: A Case Study of Blind Students in the University of Gondar, Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the self-advocacy practice for inclusion of blind students in the University of Gondar. A case study design with qualitative inquiry approach was used. In-depth interview guide which was developed out of comprehensive review of literature was used as data gathering instrument. The in-depth interview instrument on its content and construct validity was checked by one blind special needs education professional who works as an instructor in the Department of Special Needs and Inclusive Education in the University of Gondar. There were only five blind students in the university; three were taken as the rest two were unwilling. The data collected through semi-structured interview guide was analyzed thematically in four dimensions of self-advocacy: knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication and leadership. Additionally, there was a theme that investigates how the blind students were self-advocating in fighting back their challenges. Results indicate that the blind students were not found to be self-advocates for their inclusion. Except in knowledge of self to some extent, they were found to have limitations in their knowledge of rights, communication and leadership. Recommendations such as improving knowledge of rights, communications and leadership have been forwarded.

Key words: Blind Students, Communication, Inclusion, Knowledge of Rights, Knowledge of Self, Leadership, Self-advocacy

INTRODUCTION

All too often students with disabilities (SWDs) enter Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) lacking the proper understanding of how their disability affects their learning (Brinkerhoff, McGuire, and Shaw, 2002; Getzel and Briel, 2006; Getzel and McManus, 2005). As a result, these students are not able to effectively self-advocate the services and supports needed to address the academic challenges in HEIs. SWDs often-times perceive themselves as unprepared for the increased rigor of HEIs; as a result, they are frequently challenged in both their transition to HEIs and in their retention to complete a degree or certificate (Hilary, 2006). This can lead to anxiety and difficulties with academic expectations leading to decreased retention rates (Connor, 2012; Reed, Kennett, Lewis, Lund -Lucas, Stallberg and Newbold, 2009).

Self-advocacy studies are conducted mostly in the developed northern world and the studies coming from these corners of the world indicated that self-advocacy is important for students with disabilities for their adjustment in universities. For example, Katharine (2007) conducted a study in USA to see the difference between students with disabilities and students without disabilities in their attribution style to both positive and negative events, university adaptation and perceived self-advocacy. She took 230 SWDs and 115

SWODs from four universities and one college. She concluded that an increase in self-advocacy skill was associated with an increase in psychosocial adjustment to disability, institutional attachment, and academic adjustment.

In the African continent, the issue of disability and self-advocacy of SWDs in HEIs as research agenda is severely lacking. Supporting this idea, Croft and Morley (2011) from Brighton, United Kingdom, came to Africa to undertake a study on the issue at hand focusing in Ghana and Tanzania, but they were unable to find out adequate research findings in the continent. They finally concluded in their research,

In research, links between higher education access, equalities and disability are being explored by scholars of the sociology of higher education. However, with the exception of some small-scale studies from Zimbabwe, South Africa, Rwanda, Namibia, Uganda and Pakistan, literature tends to come from the global North. Yet there is a positive correlation between disability and poverty – especially in the global South (Croft and Morley, 2011; p. 383).

Coming to Ethiopia, over the last few years, HEIs (public universities) in Ethiopia increased from 11 to 44 and enrollment rate also reached to 100,000 per annum [current-

ly, more than that]. However, the number of SWDs in the HEIs is still low (Tirussew, Daniel, Alemayehu, Fantahun, Sewalem and Tilahun, 2014). Those who joined the HEIs are experiencing challenges of different type ranging from academic, social to physical. For example, Almaz (2011) in her study revealed Ethiopian College students have negative attitude towards students with visible disabilities. Furthermore, Birhanu (2015) in his study of three experienced HEIs (Addis Ababa, Haramaya, and Adama Science and Technology universities) depicted that SWDs were facing instructors and students' misconceptions and lack of knowledge about disabilities, negative attitudes, and insufficiency of effective educational tools.

In a comparative study with Kenya and Tanzania, in Ethiopia ten Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges were taken from five regions of the country to see the availability of policy and legal instruments and how training packages were rendered to SWDs in a way that meets their special needs to meet inclusion in TVET trainings. It was found that the trainings of SWDs in the institutions were unsatisfactory due to lack of appropriate strategy, prioritization and implementation and lack of facilities and skilled human power. Yohannes (2015) undertook a qualitative case study in Hawassa and Mekelle HEIs to see the inclusion practice of students with visual impairments (SWVIs). He found out SWVIs were found to be challenged with non-interest-based department placement, inflexible curriculum, non-accommodative assessment and unfriendly learning/institutional environments.

In the existence of the above scenario, though making HEIs inclusive for SWDs is the responsibility of HE communities and other stakeholders, SWDs are also expected to play a role by being self-advocates. Hence, study of this kind that focuses on self-advocacy for inclusion by SWDs in HEIs in the country is worth undertaking.

Nevertheless, self-advocacy of SWDs for their inclusion in the HEIs is supported internationally and nationally by different laws, policy and strategic documents. Internationally for example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948), the UN Convention Against Discrimination in Education (1960), the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1990), the World Declaration on Education for All, EFA (1990), the Salamanca Declaration on Inclusive Education 1994, United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (2006) and the like. These all can be used by SWDs for their inclusions in HEIs.

Whereas nationally, Education and Training Policy (MoE, 1994), Special Needs/Inclusive Education Strategy (MoE, 2012), a Master Plan for Special Needs Education/Inclusive Education in Ethiopia 2016-2025 (MoE, 2016), the Ethiopian Constitution (Transitional Government of Ethiopia, 1994) and Higher Education Proclamations in the Country (No 351/2003) 2003 and 2009 E.C (Federal Negarit Gezeta of The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia) are all used for the same purpose.

Statement of the Problem

There are quite few studies conducted in the country (for example, Abebe, 2017; Almaz, 2011; Birhanu, 2015; Tirussew, Alemayehu, Fantahun, Sewalem and Yirgashewa, 2013; Tirussew et al., 2014; Yohannes, 2015) reporting the situation/inclusion of SWDs and their challenges in HEIs in the country. These studies revealed that SWDs are facing diverse challenges. For example, lack of awareness on disability issues and negative attitude of HEIs' communities, lack of facilities and materials, unsatisfactory exam accommodations, non-accommodative teaching methodologies and lack of skilled human power and employment problems too after graduation.

However, none of the above studies raised self-advocacy as one major issue to see the role of SWDs for their inclusion in the HEIs in the country. The studies externalized SWDs' inclusion to external agencies of the HEIs' communities and to the stakeholders of the HEIs'. To fill this research gap, this small scale study was undertaken as a starting point for future large scale studies in the area.

To meet the purpose of the study the following research questions were raised:

1. How do the blind students explain their knowledge of self?
2. How do the blind students describe their knowledge of rights to assert their inclusion in the university?
3. How do the blind students explain their communication experience to assert their inclusion in the university?
4. How do the blind students explain their leadership to assert their inclusion in the university?
5. How do the blind students explain their practice of self-advocacy to solve encountered challenges in order to ensure their inclusion?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Self-advocacy

Self-advocacy often referred as a component of self-determination, and has been used interchangeably (Field and Hoffman, 1996). Field and Hoffman (1996) stated self-advocacy as "taking action on one's own behalf; acts of self-advocacy lead to greater self-determination" (p. 42). Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) stated, "self-advocacy skills include learning how to be assertive but not aggressive; how to negotiate, compromise and use persuasion; how to be an effective leader and team member" (p. 253).

Using the definitions of self-advocacy as a starting point, Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer and Eddy (2005) synthesized self-advocacy literature to develop a conceptual framework. This self-advocacy framework was primarily derived from a literature review that identified 26 self-advocacy definitions and 20 intervention studies published from 1972 through 2003 that included individuals with disabilities as participants and promoted self-advocacy or identified components of self-advocacy. Furthermore, input was requested from 30 stakeholders on the working drafts of the framework, of which seven provided feedback. Stakeholders included two self-advocates three researchers, and two adult

self-advocacy training organizations. Based on the analysis and synthesis of research and input from stakeholders, Test et al. (2005) identified four components. These components included knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication, and leadership.

Knowledge of self refers to an individual's understanding own likes, dislikes, strengths, limitations, interests, goals, learning styles, disability awareness and needs (Fiedler and Danneker, 2007; Test et al., 2005). Knowledge of rights is an individual's understanding on his/her won rights as citizen, as an individual with disability to ensure their inclusion in school, higher education institutions and employment by requesting necessary supports, services and accommodations for which they are legally entitled (Fiedler and Danneker, 2007; Test et al., 2005).

While communication: is all about communicating knowledge of self and knowledge of rights by blind students to access appropriate supports and services to ensure inclusion for example in HE (Test et al., 2005). It includes asserting oneself, negotiating, persuading, listening, articulating and compromising. Whereas leadership primarily refers to "learning the roles and dynamics of a group and the skill to function in a group" (Test et al., 2005, p. 50), it also includes learning group dynamics and roles as well as learning to advocate for others and causes.

METHODS

Design and Approach

To attain the research objective, the study employed case study design where qualitative research approach inquiry was adhered.

Study Respondents and their Selection

In 2018, in the Faculty of Education, in the University of Gondar, there were hundreds of students who were attending their education in summer program in Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching (PGDT). Among these students, there were only five blind students. At first, there was an interest to take them all. However, two of them were unwilling to be involved in the study. Hence, only three blind students were taken.

Case 1 is male and 35 years old. He is adventitiously blind at the age of 6. He is now working as a teacher in a *Woreda* high school, teaching Civics and Ethical studies with three years of teaching experience. Case 2 is male and 28 years old. He is adventitiously blind at the age of 11. He is also a teacher of Amharic working in *Woreda* high school. He teaches Amharic since the last two years. Case 3 is male and 29 years of old. Onset of his blindness was adventitious at the age of 11. He teaches History in *Woreda* high school with one year teaching experience.

Instrument

To collect data, a semi-structured interview guide was developed by the researchers based on comprehensive review

literature. The research questions were categorized in five major parts. The first part was on SWDs' knowledge of self with two semi-structured interview guide questions. These were "what is your understanding about your disability?" and "how do you describe yourself, your strength and weakness parts for example?" The second part was on SWDs' knowledge of rights with one semi-structured interview guide question. The question was, "when you learn in the university tell me those laws, policies and legal documents both internationally and nationally that you know to claim your rights for appropriate services and supports in the university for example?" While the third was on SWDs' communication with one question, "what do you do, to make your classmates, friends, teachers and all the university's community live, understand and support you?" The fourth was on SWDs' leadership with one question. The question was, "do you make an effort to mobilize your fellow blind students to pressurize the university's communities to understand and support you for example?" And while the fifth was on SWDs' self-advocacy requiring challenges with one question. The question was, "what challenges do you encounter in the university, and what do you do?" The Instrument was checked for content and construct validity by one blind special needs education professional with master's degree in Special Needs Education in the Department of Special Needs and Inclusive Education in the University of Gondar.

Procedures

The participant students were informed they will have interview two weeks before the interview session. Meanwhile, there was an effort to get supportive person in recording the interview. Hence, a blind teacher from the Faculty of Education in the university was willing to cooperate in the interview session. Then it was on Sunday afternoon, in the weekend that the interview sessions with all the interviewees were made, approximately for 20 to 30 minutes. The interview was made in Amharic. Then, after all the sessions were over, it was transcribed. Then, it was translated back into English with maximum accuracy. Then, the data was sorted and sifted theme by theme for the next stage of analysis.

Analysis

The collected interview data was transcribed, coded and categorized into themes of the research, based on the research questions. These were knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication and leadership and fighting back against challenges by blind students for their inclusion.

Ethics

The data was collected after consent of the respondents. The collected data was transcribed, translated and analyzed based on the collected data with confidentiality and results were used for academic purpose.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Knowledge of Self

As indicated in the review literature, knowledge of self consists of a blind student's understanding about own likes, dislikes, strengths, limitations, interests, goals, learning styles, disability awareness and needs (Fiedler and Danneker, 2007; Test et al., 2005). In other words, the blind student in our case is expected to have a comprehensive understanding about self. However, when it comes to the respondents of this study, the three cases were found not to have a comprehensive understanding of self. In fact, the three case respondents were found to be very good at this dimension compared to the other dimensions of self-advocacy. This was known after the cases were asked a question of, "What is your understanding about your disability?"

The first expected knowledge of self is to have a good awareness about one's disability; in other words, accepting one's disability as part of one's life, not a complete of it. Meaning, disability cannot prevent one person with disability from becoming successful in any walks of life be it in academics, for example. Supporting this idea, Field and Hoffman (1996) stated that "acts of self-advocacy lead to greater self-determination" (p. 42). In this regard, the respondents of this study were found to have this acceptance/awareness. For example, case 1 stated that:

Disability has its own side effect. But, the issue in life should be accepting your disability and look for solution. Disability can occur either by human made or naturally. However, finding a solution by accepting one's disability is being wise.

The remaining two cases shared this view. And it seems possible to infer that this self-knowledge facilitated their determination and zeal to achieve their first degree and to be able to be in their current position. Their knowledge of self seems to spur them to believe education was a way out for their independent lives since early childhood period. That is why; educators often argue children and youth with disabilities should be given access to appropriate education. Education is believed as a fundamental instrument for independence. Case 2 stated that:

The lessons that I have learned so far in my education at different levels has helped me to understand well my disability and life. Education is the shield of my life. Though I have economic, political and social problem, I console myself through the lessons I got from my education. I have no any other source of encouragement than I do get from my education.

Case 3 further reinforced what case 2 stated in the above. He said;

Though problems exist, as much as possible, I have the belief that it is manageable. It is clear the problem has its own side effects. Though impossible to avoid the problem, it is possible to minimize the effect. In my life, I use this principle or view of life.

From this belief of the cases' explained above, is possible to infer the self-knowledge would help the respondents to develop healthier personality and can serve them as fertile

ground to facilitate their inclusion in the university. Also, their love of and determination in education would probably take them in scaling up into higher levels. For example, the three cases had their first degree and they are now attending their PGDT which paves their road to success by creating opportunities to master's and the next terminal degrees. In addition to this, their good knowledge of self is being supporting their inclusion especially their social inclusion in the university especially with their classmates and campus students. They have witnessed this during the interview sessions made, they are sociable and friendly. Logically, as a person of disability if you accept your disability, everybody accepts you and if you do not vice versa, as a saying goes in Amharic, "if salt is despised by the owner the lender won't accept it"

The cases were asked, "How do you describe yourself?" They were found to be in a better position of knowing their strong and weak sides very clearly. Case 3 stated;

Everything is and was not adequate. Besides, we are not accessible to things equally. So, overcoming all the challenges and being here I consider myself as effective person. Others with adequate materials and supplements they are/were not successful. On the contrary, I am here due to my effort and I consider myself as strong. However, I do not have the culture of stepping forward to the finish whether solutions are provided or not. This is expected from me to go further up to the last concerned body to find out a solution to my problem. But I do not apply it. Because, I do not think there could be positive response. Ensuring one's rights should be the first priority belief to everybody, which I do not have.

Leaving aside the weakness part for the moment as it is going to be discussed in the next other sections, the three cases seem to have the same understanding about self, expressed in greater commitment to education; and it is which helped them to be here. Whatever challenge is placed at each aspect of their life including their academic, pressing ahead with all required determination is their life principle. It is theoretically and practically true. Because, whatever facilities, services and supports are provided to a SWD if he/she is not putting self-effort he/she will not be successful (Getzel and Briel, 2006; Getzel and McManus, 2005).

Best of all, as a result of better self-understanding of strengths the cases seem to have better attitude to life. Case 1 stated that;

Human beings can be described in two ways, as having strong and weak sides. When I describe myself I label myself as someone who is strong. When I face challenges I think it is happening that I am a person, not due to my disability. Whether you [I] have disability or not, I will face challenges. Problems like economical or other kind. But, I believe that problem has happened because I am a human being, not because I am someone living with disability.

It is really an encouraging finding that the cases were found to have healthy outlook about them. This outlook would definitely have helped them so far and would help them in the future for their inclusion. Meaning, they try out

everything to make themselves included in the community, work place and in the university. Meanwhile if they are included they would be happy and if not they would be accepting their situation and would strive to make the inclusion to happen. In all cases, they are not going to associate things with their disabilities. And if they are not going to associate things always with their disabilities to all the circumstances, bad and good happenings in life, they will not retreat and refrain back in trying out and engage themselves culturally, socially, economically and politically. However, it was observed, though the respondents have these strengths practically this strength seemed not used to help them in their inclusion socially in except with students; with teachers and university communities.

Knowledge of Rights

In terms of having knowledge on the international and national laws that safeguard their rights as SWDs in HEIs, the cases were found to be almost naïve/strange/ignorant in this regard. That means, they are not going to be so powerful and influential while claiming their rights of access to services and supports necessary for better inclusion in the university. The cases almost responded, I do not know them, to the question, “While attending your education in the university do you know those national and international laws to realize your rights of inclusion?”

Case 1 responded;

As far as I am concerned, I do not know. I do not know which law safeguards my rights of inclusion and which does not. I do not believe there is a purposeful law that ensures the rights of people with disabilities in Ethiopia. I tell you if there is law, it is always personal. For example, if you have bad attitude against me, you will apply your bad attitude, not the law. I believe, regarding us there is nobody who does things based on the laws.

Equally terrifying is the fact that they are either holding a belief that there is lawlessness in the university in particular and in the country in general or the rules and regulations of the university do not work. As a result, they tend to have no interest at all to know and use the rules and regulations of the university. Case 2 said;

I know them, but I did not use them because the government in the university is a different one. For example, I know the regulations of the university like proper use of materials, facilities, coming in and out from the campus on time and the like. There are about 10 or 11 principles, but I do not use them.

Indeed, it is possible to argue that the cases seem to be not strong enough to go to the extent of influencing the University of Gondar to ensure their inclusion in many aspects; in social, physical and academic, for example. This has been already witnessed by case 2 under knowledge of self when he explained his weakness. He stated that,

Self-advocacy is expected up to the last concerned body until matters are resolved, but I do not have the culture of stepping forward to the finish whether solutions are provided or not; that I think there will not be positive response.

Supporting the above finding, Field, Sarver, and Shaw (2003), Fielder and Danneker (2007), and Test et al. (2005) confirmed that those SWDs who do not have knowledge of rights could not request necessary supports, services and accommodations for which they are legally entitled.

Nevertheless, at least the cases were expected to know the national laws such as The New Education and Training Policy Ministry of Education (MoE) (1994), Special Needs/ Inclusive Education Strategy (MoE, 2012), A Master Plan for Special Needs Education/Inclusive Education in Ethiopia 2016-2025 (MoE, 2016), The Ethiopian Constitution (Transitional Government of Ethiopia, 1994) and Higher Education Proclamations in the Country (No 351/2003) 2003 and 2009 E.C (Federal Negarit Gezeta of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia), that are primarily ratified and enacted to ensure the inclusion rights of SWDs in HEIs.

Hence, it is possible to argue that, despite the cases' pessimism and ignorance of their rights, they are marginalizing themselves not to receive the university's attention. Not only that, they are also unintentionally making the university remain unconscious about its customer SWDs attending their study in summer programs, in terms of preparations in addressing and fulfilling the needed services and supports. Above all, the cases were failing to fight to the finish for their rights to inclusion in social, physical and academic areas.

Communication

The cases were asked “what do you do, to make your classmates, friends, teachers and all the university's community live, understand and support you?” The cases are found communicative with all community members of the university except with the students. The respondents are quite comfortable with classmate and all campus students. They are happy with them and willing to ask support confidently. They even seem to be exhibiting superior communication experiences only with students. Hence, it is possible to infer that the cases seem to facilitate their inclusion in social and academic through the support of students. Case 3 stated;

The first thing as a strategy, what I do is, changing students' attitude. I brief the meaning of what disability is? What we will do after it has occurred. The other is, I have the inclination to show what potential I have to students.

On the contrary, the cases' communication experience with the rest of the university's communities is quite unsatisfactory and worrisome, especially with their professional fathers, the teachers. The worst is the cases hold quite negative attitude towards their teachers. They have already concluded that the teachers are extremely unapproachable, none empathetic and non-supportive. They even seem to be strongly unwilling to approach, discuss and negotiate with their teachers. They hold a firm belief that the teachers are from quite different planets. They think that their alleged differences with their teachers are irreconcilable.

Case 2 stated;

I ask students and my friends to support me to read, record, and to tutor me every day. Regarding the teachers, I have never contacted them because they are far from being approachable.

Case 1 added;

I have never done anything regarding lecturers. However, regarding students, I ask at least to record me and other similar things. Not many but few students supported me graduate in my first degree. Nevertheless, university teachers do not have awareness. Besides, for us, to create the awareness of teachers, conditions did not allow us. Even if we want to aware them, they would laugh at us and walk away from us. Thus, I do not have relationship with them.

Communication is all about communicating knowledge of self and knowledge of rights by blind students for example to receive appropriate education, services and supports to ensure inclusion for example in higher education (Test et al., 2005). This includes asserting oneself, negotiating, persuading, listening, articulating and compromising. With no doubt, it is possible to infer that the respondents lack adequate communication skills in exhibiting the characteristics of effective communicators. As a result, it can be inferred the respondents' social inclusion with teachers is under unsatisfactory condition and hence academic inclusion of the respondents is at stake apparently.

Above all, the truth is, apart from the other community members of the University of Gondar, teachers in the faculty of education and other assigned teachers from other faculties are the most immediate actors that have direct impact and influence on their profession. So if the respondents are not willing to come closer and share their wants and needs to their teachers their inclusion would be at stake. For one thing, holding a generalization that all teachers are unapproachable is wrong and for the other thing someone out of sight is out of heart. Besides, in the university all faculty members are aware of and at least have the knowledge that students are their first customers. Failing to meet this expectation on the side of the teachers could be solved in subsequent trials if failed at first and so attempts. As communication is a powerful tool to create shared understanding. And there is teacher's code of ethics in the university where breaches of code of conduct has legal consequences. The problem, however, is that the respondents already expressed lack of interest to know their legal rights.

Leadership

The cases were asked, "Have you ever made an effort to initiate or organize fellow SWDs to influence the university to provide appropriate services and supports?" In their responses, they witnessed they lacked leadership culture. The cases did not have this behavior and were found to be less self-advocates for their inclusion. In response to the question, for example, case 1 said, "No I do not" while cases 2 and 3 beat around the bush with feelings of difficulty of uncertainty, just only for the sake of replying. Case 3 stated;

I can say I did. For example, reader, exam assistant and others to be arranged; you know what. Ways that we compete with others equally and win. Meaning, I ask these things that are necessary that able us win; you know what I mean.

Case 2 added, another problem in this regard that they do not have the determination for leadership:

We are attempting. We have asked the university to cover the payment for registration and the like, but we have started, not yet finished [yet, they were about to go out from the university].

The fact that the cases are not effective in their leadership sends a message that they are not that much so strong in influencing the university to address their social, physical and academic inclusion. Meaning, the fate of the assurance of inclusion of the respondents is only in the hand of the university. And if anything is required from the university's community for the inclusion of the cases and if it is not in place, it remains unasked or unchallenged by the cases. Which is theoretically and practically wrong; the fact that good will of others for one's inclusion will not work sometimes. Naturally, if you do not claim/advocate you do not deserve it; as a saying in Amharic goes *Milk is given only to the crying child*.

Self-advocacy Requiring Challenges

Each respondent was asked, "What are the challenges you face in the university and what do you do to solve them?" The respondents stated that they face various challenges for example inaccessible classroom, negative attitude of teachers and lack of readers. This finding is consistent with studies conducted in Ethiopia (for example, Abebe, 2017; Almaz, 2011; Birhanu, 2015; Tirussew et al., 2013; Tirussew et al., 2014; Yohannes, 2015).

The above challenges encountered by the respondents are not the point to be emphasized as other studies did, rather the major emphasis of the current study is what really do the blind students do to solve the challenges (as explained above, for example inaccessible classroom, negative attitude of teachers and lack of readers) they are encountering by being self-advocates for better inclusion. In this regard, the respondents were found not self-advocates in fighting back the challenges. On the contrary, they were found to blame shift that they are accusing teachers and lawlessness of the university's community. For example, case 1 stated;

Epecially, when we do assignments, those students who did their assignments from what we told them, get 10/10, but for us they give us 2 or 3 out of 10. The reason for this is, the majority of teachers believe that students with disabilities cannot perform better. This had a lot of negative psychological effects. For example, when we wrote up our senior essay, we did it in groups. When they give "A" and "A+" for our group members, they give us "C-" and "C+". This situation is not good, giving unfair grade due to disability. Our disability is one part of our life, not the totality of us. If we take our case to the department or to the dean, nobody listens to us. They all are the same, either friends or working together. We do not go further believing that there is no solution, they give favor not for us but for the teacher who did the wrong thing.

More hasty generalized blame shifting comes further from case 3. He said;

Number 1, for example, I attend class at floor 5. So it is difficult for me to learn equally with others. For example, I could not attend practical classes. Equity does not prevail. This has to be solved. However, if I ask this has to be solved, others understand this in terms of righteous thing, not in terms of right and as a must to do thing).

As reiterated before, the challenges that the respondents facing are recognizable and are really counterproductive; abundantly making the inclusion effort of the blind students an uphill battle which urgently demands a feasible means as a way out, what we call self-advocacy. A self-advocate exhibits four major characteristics. These are knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication and leadership. When these characteristics pull together in an individual, blind student in our case, undoubtedly he/she will be able to be a determined individual in fighting back the challenges and ensure one's inclusion in a university, where he/she attends.

Apparently, it was clear from the discussion of each category (knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication and leadership) that the respondents were good only at knowledge of self from the category of self-advocacy dimensions. This may seem to be the reason why the respondents were accusing teachers in particular and the university community in general instead of recognizing their failure of not being self-advocates in counter attacking the challenges and ensuring their inclusion.

CONCLUSION

The respondent students were found to have better knowledge of self. They had better awareness and acceptance of their disabilities and clearly understand their strong and weak sides. However, they had poor knowledge of rights, almost none at all. Besides, they had poor communication skills with teachers and the university communities. Also, they have no leadership characteristics in terms of mobilizing fellow SWDs to pressurize/influence the university's community to address their needs for appropriate services and supports. Obviously the students are facing a number of challenges; however, the students were not actually taking any action to fight back the challenges. In other words, they were not self-advocates and were not seriously concerned on their inclusion in the university.

Whatever facilities, services and supports are provided if the self-advocacy is not done by SWDs the respondents, real inclusion in social, academic and physical is far from attainable. Hence, the respondents of this study should strive to be self-advocates diligently engaging themselves in improving their knowledge of rights, communication and leadership. From KG through grade 12 self-advocacy instructions should be given to children with disabilities; which is in fact absent in the current system of education in Ethiopia.

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