



Feeling Their Way: Negotiation and Accommodation for Students who are Visually Impaired or Legally Blind at UWI- St. Augustine.

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Note- **ASDLU** is the Academic Support/ Disabilities Liaison Unit at UWI
St. Augustine

Background

In 2012-2013

- No. of ASDLU registered students with disabilities- 269
- Visits to ASDLU by students with disabilities seeking assistance with academic support- 181
- Visits by students with disabilities seeking medical support- 53

One subset of students with disabilities on campus is students who are legally blind or Visually Impaired (VI).

- UWI has 4 registered (VI) students at the St Augustine campus.
- Unlike their sighted peers, these students experience unique challenges related to their lack of vision.

Background

- Based on the disproportionate frequency with which incidences involving visually impaired (VI) students were arising when compared to their sighted peers, we decided to collaborate to conduct a research study.
- The intent was:
 - To investigate strengths and weaknesses in equity and inclusive provision for (VI) students at UWI St Augustine
&
 - To provide evidence for informing practices and policies for accommodating (VI) students and improving their learning outcomes.

The Literature

- Tertiary education leads to better employment opportunities and improved life outcomes.
- For many individuals with disabilities, attaining a university degree remains an elusive dream.
- Persons with visual impairment (VI) enter university with an additional challenge.
- Owen-Hutchinson et al. (1998) suggested that barriers to obtaining higher education (HE) which visually impaired persons experience can be placed into four broad categories: *attitudinal, institutional, environmental* and *physical*.

The Literature

- **Attitudinal barriers** refer to the attitudes of significant individuals with whom (VI) students interact, which significantly affect student experiences. To minimize the effect of such attitudes training is required (Jones, 2000).
- Also when (VI) students are having difficulty coping, academic staff may view this as a sign of failure. This leads to the view that (VI) students need special treatment rather than viewing these students as having the right to obtain an education (Borland & James, 1999).
- (VI) students also face **Institutional barriers** when resources are not presented in an accessible format. E. g. information is not given in a printed format (Harris & Oppenheim, 2003).

The Literature

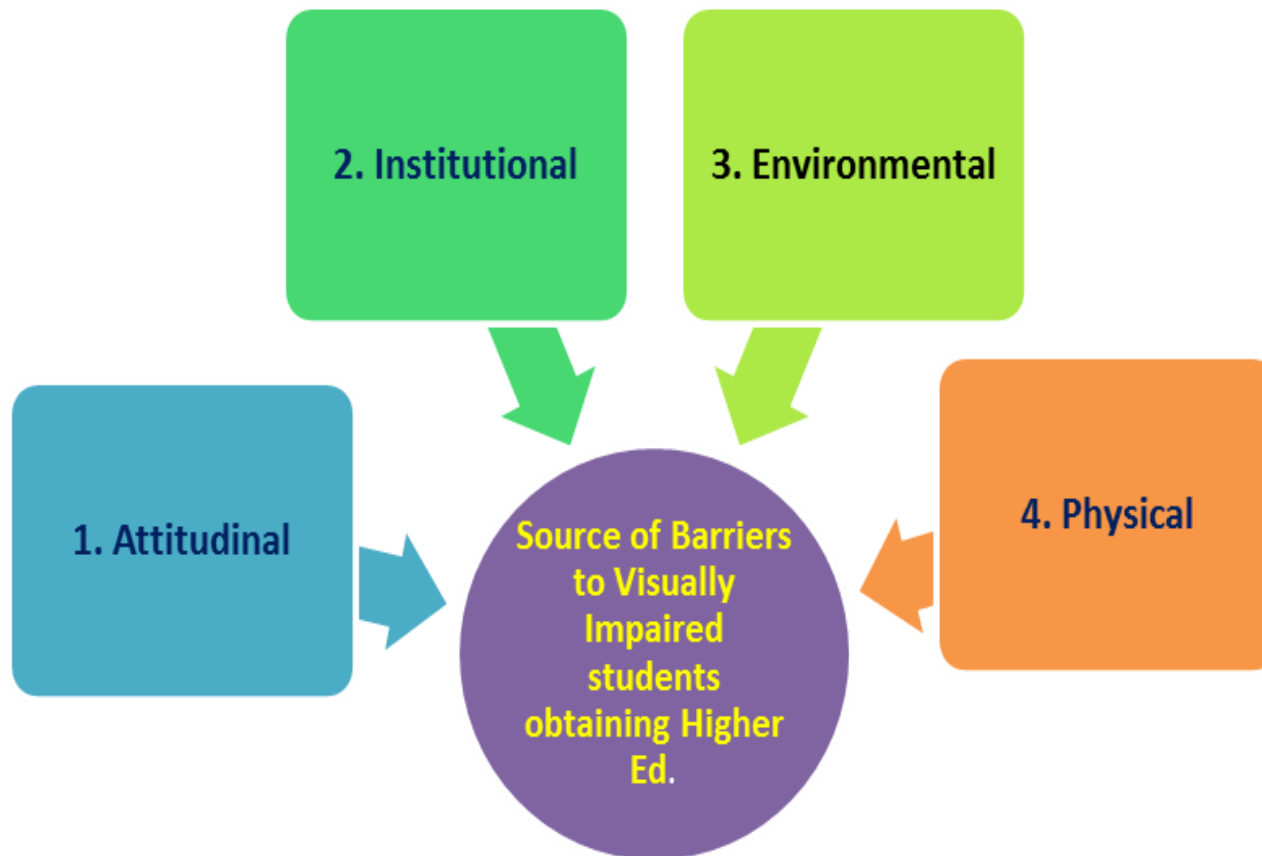
- **Environmental barriers** include access to buildings, negotiating the campus & locating classrooms. Getting around a university campus, locating buildings and accessing classrooms can be challenging. Richardson and Roy (2002) noted that without lifts, automatic doors and adequate signage **environmental barriers** could be challenging for persons with (VI).
- A British study by the Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB) (2002) found that 47 % of FE and HE students with a visual disability :
 - ❑ did not usually receive books in a format they could read and
 - ❑ 39 % struggled to use the library.

The Literature

- Students may also experience **Physical barriers**
- These include illnesses e. g. headaches or tiredness caused by longer periods of reading or studying.
- Vancil, (1997) expressed the view that the four barriers mentioned can lead to (VI) students becoming self- advocates.

The 4 barriers were used to analyze the data to determine how they impacted the university experience for (VI) students at UWI St. Augustine.

Theoretical Model- Owen-Hutchinson et al. (1998)



Research Questions

- 1. What are the factors influencing negotiative and navigation efforts expended by students who are blind or visually impaired to succeed in the programmes they are pursuing at The University of the West Indies St. Augustine?
- 2. What is the nature of the supports provided by The University to Visually Impaired students?



The Participants- 2

1 Female- had disability on entry to UWI	1 Male- had disability on entry to UWI
Age Group: Over 40. Legally Blind. With low vision- below 3%. Retina detachment.	Age group: 20-24. Cataract in both eyes, left eye completely blind, right eye partially sighted, about 20% of vision of a normal person. Retina is smaller than usual, causing participant to see things smaller than usual.
Faculty- Humanities & Education, School of Education. Undergraduate degree- Early childhood Care and Education	Faculty- Social sciences Undergraduate- Economics
Started UWI -2007	Started UWI 2013/2014

Methodology

- **A Qualitative Case Study**
- 2 DATA SOURCES:
 - *semi-structured student interviews &
 - *questionnaires emailed to heads of department and administrative support staff of the faculties to which students belonged to determine departmental policies on accommodating students with disabilities.

The student interview schedule included-

- Questions to obtain student demographics &
 - Allowed for the respondents to provide additional information.
- Ethical principles- written student permission was obtained.

Assumptions & Limitations

Assumption We assume that:

- Student responses accurately represent their lived experiences and were not modified because students felt intimidated by the researchers' positions of authority on campus.

Limitations:

- The data collected represents the view of half the population of (VI) students. Challenges of meeting coursework deadlines prevented the other two students from completing the questionnaire.
- Although the same questions were asked, it is possible that the participant who responded by email may have provided less details than the participant who responded to a face- to- face interview.

Findings

- Analysis in relation to 4 barriers identified by Owen-Hutchinson et al. (1998)
- **In response to Research Question 1-**

What are the factors influencing negotiative and navigation efforts expended by students who are blind or visually impaired to succeed in the programmes they are pursuing at The University of the West Indies St. Augustine?

Findings- What the students said

- **Attitudinal Barriers**

1. **Social Relationship Issues**- (greatest barrier)

- a) **On campus**- Peer discrimination

Lecturer Insensitivity

- b) **Personal life**- Need for Family support

Need for a supportive companion

- c) **Dependence on people**-

- (VI) Students have to work with their assistant's time.

Findings

2. Resilience & Self Advocacy Skills Necessary

Student Quotes:

“Perception of self is important. It affects discrimination. I walk with self- confidence. You have to win-over lecturers and make them understand your needs.”

“Generally, people would tend to underestimate me and look at me differently. Some would even have a fright to speak to me or just would not talk with me naturally because of my type of disability.

“The level.....of knowledge....I will put it like that. Some people were not exposed to visually impairment. The language that they may speak may appear to be offensive.”

Findings

“When I enrolled (some) students laughed. My motto-
They will learn. They have changed.”

“I have to work two times as hard....Qualities I have..
Determination, perseverance, resilience acquired over
time.”

“You place your full faith and belief in God. Yes the
spiritual dimension of it. Knowing who you are and what
you can accomplish through God, is an asset knowing that
and even how you view obstacles you face... as stepping
stones.”

Findings

Institutional Barriers

3. Academic Issues

On campus readers

Timely resources in accessible form

Breaches in confidentiality by academic and support staff

Exam support (improving)

No special orientation to University

No specific faculty policy on students with disability



Findings

Environmental Barriers

4. Transport & Economic Issues

Off Campus- Transport problems at rush hour
Expense to hire transport
Unemployment

On campus- Access to buildings, library, toilets,
Cafeteria
Lack of Highlighted doors,
Insufficient parking facilities for persons with disabilities

Quote- “I have walked into glass doors. No bold paint to highlight door or glass for (VI) students”

Physical Barriers

Fear of not being employed

(There was no mention of personal health issues as a barrier)

Findings

In response to Research Question 2

What is the nature of the supports provided by The University to Visually Impaired students?

Improved over the years. Improvements to ASDLU and improved attitudes

Quote- “**Changes over the last seven years has been tremendous....** lecturers who were originally hostile are now accommodative. They ask you now, in the past I had to tell them.”

Findings

ASDLU Services provided include-

- exam accommodations: someone take you to the room and come back for you if requested. Extra time for exams.
- peer tutoring programme, liaison among lecturers, other teaching staff and the unit, physical tours to locate new classrooms for the first time

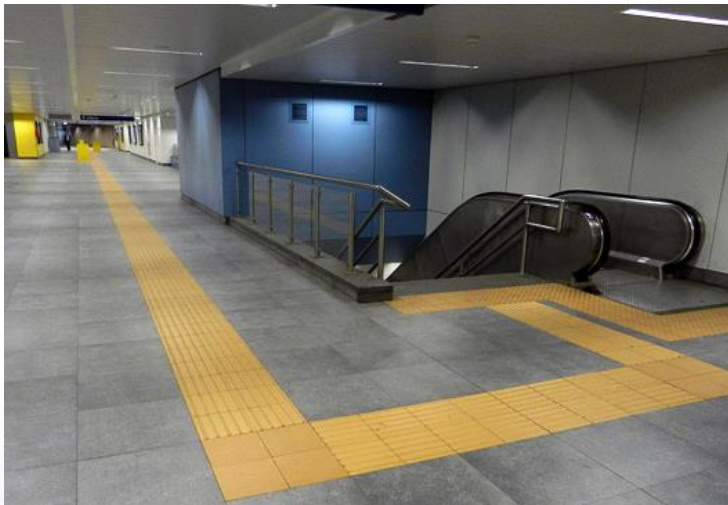
Lecturers email stuff, lecturers make sure presentation integrate with **Jaws Programme**.

- “I received a tour around the library when I just came. Staff were able to be aware of me and they are encouraged to look out for me ... The only problem is that I was not given a complete walk around in the library but only to confined areas. This took away from the quality of the induction .”

Conclusion & Recommendation

- Many factors impact on the education of (VI) students at UWI.
- There has been some improvement but more supports are needed.
- Features to assist (VI) students in physically accessing the university compound are needed. e.g. Automatic doors, braille & tactile signage, Yellow plates on door handles
- Assistive technology such as- GPS technology to navigate the environment
- Departmental policy for persons with disabilities informed by persons with disabilities
- Formalised student advocacy group
- Further research

Possibilities?



THANK YOU!

