

THE EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
IN A GHANAIAN UNIVERSITY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	vi
List of Abbreviations	viii
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures	ix
List of Appendices	x
Acknowledgements	xi
Dedication	xii
CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Personal interest and motivation in the study	2
1.2 Ghana: country and education system	4
1.2.1 Ghanaian education system.....	5
1.2.2 The development of inclusive education in Ghana	8
1.2.3 Socio-cultural beliefs and inclusive practice in Ghana ...	10
1.3 The concept of disability	12
1.4 Disability studies in education	15
1.5 Problem statement	17
1.6 The organisation of the thesis.....	19
CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW	22
2.1 Models of disability.....	22
2.2 The concept of inclusion	27
2.3 Accessibility and participation in higher education	32
2.3.1 Disclosure of disability	35
2.3.2 Selecting a location to study	38
2.3.3 Sources of support for students with disabilities	40
2.3.4 The value of higher education	43
2.4 Discrimination and stigmatisation.....	46
2.5 Policy framework and implementation	50
2.6 Summary	56
CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY	58
3.1 Social constructionism.....	58
3.2 Critical Disability Theory	60
3.3 Research approach.....	64

3.4 Research design	66
3.5 Research methods	68
3.5.1 Selection of site and participants.....	68
3.5.2 Data collection methods	71
3.5.3 Data analysis	81
3.6 Rigour	86
3.7 Ethical considerations.....	89
3.8 Summary	91
CHAPTER FOUR - Understanding inclusive policies in Ghana ..	92
4.1 International policy framework and conventions on disability education	92
4.2 Inclusive policies and provisions in Ghana	97
4.2.1 The right of persons with disabilities to access higher education in Ghana	98
4.2.2 The gaps and inconsistencies in inclusive policies in Ghana	107
4.2.3 Translating policies into practice	111
4.3 Summary	113
CHAPTER FIVE - Motivation and sources of support.....	114
5.1 Reasons for accessing higher education	114
5.1.1 Role model.....	115
5.1.2 Familial and societal recognition	118
5.1.3 Physical strength and dynamics of jobs.....	120
5.1.4 Financial benefits	122
5.2 Reasons for choosing a particular university	124
5.2.1 Maintaining relationship.....	124
5.2.2 Academic programmes and cost	125
5.2.3 The influence of friends	128
5.3 Sources of support for students with disability education.....	128
5.3.1 Family support.....	129
5.3.2 Peer support	132
5.3.3 Institutional support.....	135
5.5 Summary	139

CHAPTER SIX - Accessibility and belonging	140
6.1 Factors influencing accessibility and belonging in higher education	141
6.1.1 Attitudinal factors	141
6.1.2 Institutional factors	153
6.2 Coping mechanisms	171
6.3 Summary	175
CHAPTER SEVEN - DISCUSSION.....	176
7.1 Summary of the findings	177
7.2 Discussion:	178
7.2.1 Policy implementation.....	179
7.2.2 Higher education a means to an end?	184
7.2.3 Achieving inclusive education in higher education.....	192
7.3 Engaging critical disability theory and social constructionism discussing students with disabilities experiences	201
7.4 Arriving there	204
7.5 Summary of the discussion	208
CHAPTER EIGHT - CONCLUSION	210
8.1 Take home message	210
8.2 Implications of the study	212
8.3 Recommendations	216
8.3.1 Recommendations for improving practice	217
8.3.2 Recommendations for policy development	218
8.3.3 Future research considerations	219
8.4 Limitations of the study.....	220
8.5 Lessons learned.....	221
8.6 Final word	223
REFERENCES.....	224
APPENDICES	264

Abstract

In general, there has been an increase in the number of students with disabilities accessing and participating in higher education across Africa. In Ghana, higher education qualifications have become a requirement for obtaining employment. Increasing numbers of students with disabilities in higher education calls for consideration of their interests and welfare in planning educational services. Although this would suggest the need for research into the views and experiences of people with disabilities, there are limited research to this effect in Ghana. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, this study provides an in-depth understanding of the experiences of students with disabilities in a Ghanaian university. Social constructionism and critical disability theory lenses were used to guide this research. Data was generated through in-depth semi-structured interviews with eleven participants (two females and nine males) from the university, and through observations and documentary analysis of national and institutional policies. Purposive and snowball samplings were used to select research participants. Data were analysed thematically.

The study indicates that the Ghanaian understanding of disability is influenced by socio-cultural and medical conceptualizations. The association of disability with evil influences the way students with disabilities are treated both on the university campus and in traditional Ghanaian societies. This conceptualization has resulted in marginalization, discrimination and stigmatisation of students with disabilities in higher education. A number of disability policies have been developed in Ghana but implementation remains a challenge. The study found inadequate resources, poor understanding of disability issues, superstitious beliefs and a lack of support from non-disabled people including staff and students to be the main reasons for poor implementation of policies. The motivation to access and participate in higher education by students with disabilities has been influenced by their desire to be role models, familial and societal recognition, physical strength and dynamics of job and financial benefits. The study also found that education of students with disabilities was hampered by inadequate resources, inaccessible built environment, poor information flow and negative attitudes of many non-disabled people toward students with disabilities. Notwithstanding this, non-disabled people including lecturers and peers who have knowledge on disability issues supported students with disabilities in their daily activities at the university.

Although this study showed that higher educational institutions have been making efforts towards the realisation of inclusive education, a lot remains to be done as students with

disabilities continue to experience challenges. This study recommends that encouraging the education of students with disabilities requires transformation of the physical, social and learning environment and this should involve all stakeholders. Minimising gaps in the implementation of inclusive policies will also go a long way to support these students.

List of Abbreviation

CDT	Critical Disability Theory
DEAP	Disability-Inclusive Education in Africa Programme
DSE	Disability Studies in Education
EFA	Education For All
FOTIM	Foundation of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis
GETFUND	Ghana Education Trust Fund
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
ICT	Information Communication Technology
MoE	Ministry of Education
NCTE	National Council for Tertiary Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PWD	People with Disabilities
SEA	Special Education Act
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNCRDP	United Nations Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USD	United States Dollars
WHO	World Health Organisation

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Profile of study participants..... 62

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 A map of Ghana..... 4
Figure 3.2 Thematic data analytical framework.....70

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A. information sheet for students

Appendix B. Information sheet for lecturer

Appendix C. Consent for students

Appendix D. Consent form for lecturer

Appendix E. Acceptance letter

Appendix F. Interview guide

Appendix G. Ethic approval from University of Canterbury

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Dedication

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Chapter One

Introduction

Disability is a global phenomenon. Current estimates show that more than 1 billion people experience some form of disability, a figure which represents 15 percent of the population in the world (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2020). Although this figure continues to rise partly due to high prevalence of chronic diseases (WHO, 2018), disabled people have not received attention in various spheres of life (WHO, 2011). One area where people with disabilities (PWD) experience challenges is education. Evidence shows that a significant number of PWD face marginalisation, discrimination and stigmatisation within institutions of learning (Haihambo, 2010; Mullins & Preyde, 2013; Sachs & Schreuer, 2011; Strnadova, Hajkova & Kvetonova, 2015; UNESCO, 2009). This is in sharp contrast to provisions in international conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities [UNCRPD –24 2(a)], which enjoins nations to ensure that PWD are not excluded from education on the basis of their impairments (United Nations, 2006). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2016-2030 consider inclusion and equity as fundamental to quality education (United Nations, 2015). Other conventions affirming the rights of PWD to access education include Education for All (EFA), the Salamanca Statement, and the Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2005; 2006).

Despite global efforts to ensure access for all people, PWD in sub-Saharan Africa continue to experience challenges in accessing mainstream education (Ametepee & Anastessiou, 2015; Chataika et al., 2012; Matonya, 2016). Those disabled people who obtain the opportunity to access education can drop out at basic levels, leaving insignificant numbers who proceed to the higher levels (Ametepee & Anastessiou, 2015). Several factors have been adduced for the inability of PWD to access higher education in Africa. These include poverty, inadequate

disability knowledge, poor policy frameworks and belief systems that portray PWD as incapable of participating in mainstream education (Ametepee & Anastassiou, 2015; Chataika, Mckenzie, Swart & Lyner-Cleophas 2012; Mantey, 2014). In most societies in sub-Saharan Africa, a person with a disability is usually perceived as a liability in the family and community, with many of them ending up in the streets of cities and towns begging to fend for themselves (Kassah, 2008; Ocloo & Dogbe 2008). This notwithstanding, there are some PWD who make it through these challenges to enter higher institutions of learning. It is therefore important to explore the lived experiences of these students to understand their motivation to access higher education, their experiences in higher education with a view to identifying relevant insight for policy and practice. Additionally, there is limited research on how socio-cultural, political and economic factors influence the education of students with disabilities in sub-Saharan Africa. This thesis, presents an analysis of the experiences of students with disabilities in a Ghanaian higher educational institution. This chapter provides background information on what is known of the experiences of students with disabilities in higher education globally, with emphasis on sub-Saharan Africa and Ghana. The chapter also highlights the development of inclusive education by drawing inferences from the literature. This chapter further examines the concept of disability and the field of disability studies in education before detailing the problem statement of the thesis. The chapter ends with an overview presentation of the organisation of the chapters in the thesis.

1.1 Personal interest in the study

My interest in issues of disability started when I was an undergraduate student at a university in Ghana. At that time, due to high enrolment, students (both disabled and non-disabled) experienced difficulty registering for courses and finding seats during lectures. I observed on

many occasions that a friend who was visually impaired was pushed to the floor. Sometimes too, he struggled to find his way out in the university due to the obstructions caused by the physical environment. I asked myself how he coped with the situation without assistance from me or others. In a university where the buildings and the lecture theatres seemed to have been constructed without considering the needs of students with disabilities, campus life became difficult for such students. For example, there were no elevators and ramps to facilitate access for people living with a physical disability. Furthermore, lectures were often held on top floors without considering the needs of students with disabilities. In such situations, peer tuition was the option for students with mobility challenges because it was difficult for them to attend most of the lectures. This triggered my interest in advocacy for students with disabilities.

After my studies, having taken a role teaching geography and economics at the pre-university level, I again came face-to-face with the realities of these experiences again. As a guidance and counselling coordinator addressing students' problems, I witnessed the maltreatment of students with disabilities from colleague teachers. My interest in disability prompted me to pursue a master's degree in special education with the research focus on comparative studies in Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome education among students with disabilities and non-disabled students in Ghanaian senior high schools. While collecting data for my master's degree thesis, a student recounted how he struggled to gain admission to study at high school level. He explained that schools were not ready to accept him, stating that they could not assure his safety at the school. The school in which the computerised placement system (where student placements are managed through a centralised placement to avoid pressure on some schools) had placed him refused to admit him because of inadequate facilities to accommodate him. I realised that something must be done to enable stakeholders to obtain a better understanding of what students with disabilities go through in their education as this could inform policy decisions on disability and inclusive practice.

Accordingly, the underlying issues that motivated my decision to embark on this research come from my experiences as both a student and teacher, and a desire to use research to advocate for people living with disabilities.

1.2 Ghana: country and education system

Ghana is located in West Africa and shares boundaries in the north with Burkina Faso, in the south with the Gulf of Guinea/Atlantic Ocean, in the east with Togo and in the west with Ivory Coast. Ghana is the centre of the world, the location where the Greenwich Meridian meets the Equator (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS] 2014). Ghana was a British colony and the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to obtain independence in 1957. It is currently a democratic state. The population of Ghana is estimated at 31 million (GSS, 2020; Worldometer, 2020). The population is principally youthful with over forty per cent under 15 years of age. Ghana is a decentralised state. Administratively, Ghana is divided into sixteen regions and 216 districts with Accra as the capital. The administrative regions and districts are managed through a three-tier structure comprising Co-ordinating Councils, Metropolitan/Municipal/District Assembly (depending on the population) and Urban/Town/Zonal or Area Councils/Unit Committees (Owusu, 2004). A District Assembly has a population of 75,000 or more, a Municipal Assembly a population of 95,000 or more and a Metropolitan Assembly a population of 250,000 or more (Forkuor & Adjei, 2016). The Assemblies are the basic unit of government where developmental decisions are taken (Forkuor & Adjei, 2016). Although Ghana's educational system is managed by the District/Municipal/Metropolitan directorate of education, they report to both the corresponding administrative assemblies and the regional directorates of education.



Figure 1. A map of Ghana

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13433790>

Ghana is an agricultural economy and endowed with many mineral resources including gold, diamond, bauxite and oil. Ghana used to be called the Gold Coast because of the abundance of gold. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), most Ghanaians live below national poverty line, engaging in small-scale subsistence farming for their livelihoods (ILO, 2006). Although inequality is a major challenge in Ghana, experts believe that with the current average growth rate of seven per cent, Ghana's economy will improve with a corresponding increase in income levels (Cooke, Hague & Mckay, 2016)

1.2.1 The Ghanaian education system

Ghana's education system has experienced high levels of development since independence. Currently, the education system in Ghana is divided into three categories: Basic, Senior High School and Tertiary. The first stage of entry is kindergarten at age four. The categories of the

education system are 2- 6-3-3-4/3 with basic education comprising two years in kindergarten, six years in primary school, three years in junior high school, three years in senior high school and four years at the university or three years in college. The pre-tertiary education in Ghana are free and compulsory, that is, from kindergarten or primary to senior high school (Takyi, Amponsah, Asibey, & Ayambire, 2019; UNESCO, 2012). The tertiary education sector in Ghana comprises all post-secondary educational institutions. These consist of the colleges of agriculture, nursing and education. The others are technical universities (formerly polytechnics), public universities and private tertiary institutions (Takyi et al., 2019). At independence, Ghana had only two public tertiary institutions (Akyeampong, 2010). At present, Ghana has eleven public universities, ten technical universities and several other private tertiary institutions. Other tertiary institutions include twenty-two nursing colleges, forty-six colleges of education and other institutions offering Higher National Diploma programmes. The phenomenal increase in tertiary institutions can be attributed to high demand for tertiary education. However, there is a demand-supply gap of about fifty-one per cent (Takyi et al., 2019). In this thesis, the term higher education refer to universities and tertiary education denotes all post-secondary institutions.

Tertiary education institutions in Ghana obtain funding from different sources with the government grant, Ghana Education Trust Fund (GETFUND), being the main source (Okebukola, 2015; Takyi et al, 2019). Other sources include funds from development partners, private organisations, philanthropists and internally generated funds through students' contributions. The GETFUND has been the main source of funds for infrastructural development of public sector education. Private tertiary institutions are, however, not eligible for public funding. Funding for tertiary education is managed by the governing council of the institutions, with their activities being coordinated by the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE). Tertiary educational institutions receive their budgetary allocation from

government through NCTE which advises the Ministry of Education (MoE) on allocation of funds. The total amount of funds allocated to these institutions depend on the amount of money released to NCTE by the Ministry of Education. Criteria for allocation of funds to tertiary institutions include the previous year's allocation with minor variations, the bidding and bargaining powers of the universities and the amount of funds released by the Ministry of Finance to the NCTE (Ministry of Finance, 2017).

The cost of higher education has increased with rising demand for infrastructural development. This notwithstanding, government allocation for higher education has been erratic. Available figures between 2011 and 2015 reveal an unstable trend in funding (39.7 per cent in 2011; 79 per cent in 2012; 49.2 per cent in 2013; 46.6 per cent in 2014; and 41.0 per cent 2015). The 79 per cent funding allocation indicated against 2012 was an aberration, the result of exceptional demand from institutions to GETFUND for infrastructural development that year (Okebukola, 2015). Erratic funding allocations are not peculiar to Ghana but a common phenomenon in the whole of sub-Saharan Africa (Materu, 2007). Evidence shows that while the enrolment of students into higher education in sub-Saharan Africa keep increasing, government expenditure declined by 28 per cent between 1980 and 2002 (World Bank Edstats, 2008). Expenditure on each student dropped from USD 6,800 in 1980 to USD 1,200 in 2002. In 2004/05, the average expenditure per student in sub-Saharan Africa stood at USD 980 (World Bank Edstats, 2008). There is no doubt that the limited access to higher education by PWD can partly be attributed to inadequate funding opportunities as this make it difficult for institutions to provide the requisite infrastructure to support these students when admitted (Mosia, 2017). Students with disabilities are, therefore, confronted with what could be described as 'double jeopardy', contending with a lack of disability friendly infrastructure and their impairments.

1.2.2 The development of inclusive education in Ghana

The education of students with disabilities was started by the early missionaries and the first special school was established by the British in 1936 (Avoke, 2001). According to Baah (1994), the school was for the visually impaired and started with two students. In 1946, the Presbyterian Church established the school for the visually impaired at Akropong in the eastern region of Ghana. It was reported that the curriculum for the school was not different from the mainstream schools except that the teaching materials were adapted (Baah, 1994). Anson (1977) reports that the Methodist church opened a school for physically disabled people in 1958. In 1951, Ghana passed the Accelerated Education Plan emphasising free education for all students. Although the Accelerated Education Plan resulted in an increase in basic education enrolment, it did not address the education of PWD (Akyeampong, 2007; 2010).

In 1961, international influences forced the government to enact laws to safeguard the education of people living with disability in Ghana. According to Adu-Gyamfi et al. (2016), the 1961 Education Act made education free and compulsory for all children of school going age. The 1961 Education Act also enjoined the government to construct schools and resource them with teaching and learning materials needed for students with disabilities (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016). This suggests that the Act made provisions for the education of students with disabilities to be included in the general school system (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016). However, admissions of these students were processed after the assessment by professionals to determine whether a student with disability should join the mainstream educational system or the special school. Ofori-Addo (1994) notes that parents were not involved in the assessment procedures and decision-making regarding which school was suitable for children with disabilities. The Act further specified that students whose disabilities were complex and severe and who could not be admitted into the mainstream education system were referred to special schools. In 1962, the government enacted the Special Education Act (SEA) emphasising the education of

students with disabilities in mainstream educational institutions. With the SEA, children with learning difficulties and visual and hearing impairments were not only to enrol in the mainstream education system but also receive special education classes (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016). Thus, the education of PWD in Ghana was established in 1962 through the enactment of the Special Education Act which emphasised mainstream education for some children with disabilities. This suggests that Ghana had a well-defined policy framework for the education of PWD in the early 1960s. In 1970, the government established the first school for the mentally handicapped (Avoke, 2001).

Although these policies represented useful steps toward the education of PWD in Ghana, significant strides were made following the 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution which in part recognise higher education as a right. The purpose of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana is to promote and protect the educational rights of all persons including students with disabilities (Republic of Ghana, 1992). The constitution also emphasises free Compulsory Universal Basic Education in Ghana. The free Compulsory Universal Basic Education aims to increase access to education and provide support for all students. Although the free Compulsory Universal Basic Education programme increased access to the basic education, it could not provide the support needed for achieving inclusive education (Gadagbui, 2010).). In 2003, Ghana enacted the Education Strategic Plan 2003-2015 to ensure that all her citizens with mild to moderate disability would be included in school by 2015. However, realising this aim was difficult due to confusion in setting clear and measurable inclusive goals (Ametepee & Anastasia, 2015). Consequently, another Education Strategic Plan 2010-2020 was enacted to remedy difficulties of Education Strategic Plan 2003-2015. In 2015, the Standard Guidelines for the practice of inclusive education and implementation plan was drafted in Ghana (MoE, 2015). The aim of these Standard Guidelines and implementation plan was to provide assistance to educational institutions in providing accessible buildings, learning equipment and materials as well as

adaptable curriculum and pedagogy for inclusive practice. Education Strategic Plan 2018-2030 follows Education Strategic Plan 2010-2020 with the aim of improving access to world-class tertiary education and achievement of Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 (Republic of Ghana, 2018).

Originally, Ghana's inclusive education system was designed for pre-tertiary students. However, the successful completion of more students with disabilities in pre-university education called for inclusive practice in higher educational institutions. Consequently, in 2006 and 2018, Ghana enacted the National Disability Act (Act 715) and Education Strategic Plan respectively to promote and safeguard the educational rights of students with disabilities at all levels of education. The indication is that Ghana is committed to providing quality, accessible and equal educational opportunities for all regardless of age, tribe, colour or physiological makeup. Promoting this right for all Ghanaians was the reason behind Ghana's ratification of the UNCRPD documents in 2012 (Mantey, 2014).

1.2.3 Socio-cultural beliefs and inclusive practice in Ghana.

Inclusive practice in higher education is influenced by socio-cultural norms and beliefs in Ghana. These socio-cultural norms and beliefs influence individuals' social construction and their attitude toward other people. This has influenced the meanings people attach to disabilities, impacting on attitudes and behaviour towards people with impairments. In Ghana, the belief system influences societal classification of disabilities, indicating that socio-cultural values and norms have some powerful forces that influence individual choices as to what to accept, reject or label (Agbenyega, 2003). Consequently, educators and policy makers sometimes overlook the potentials of students with disabilities and rationalise their actions based on the attributes society gives to these students. Most often, PWD are classified by their kind of impairment and how society has labelled that impairment (Avoke 2002). If a particular

society engenders negative attitudes towards PWD, there is the likelihood that individuals from that society may show negative behaviour in institutions of learning as well, and this eventually affects both students with disabilities and others who may be in contact with these students. Hence, Okyere (2003) indicates that societal attitudes towards persons with disabilities determine how they are treated and supported at institutions of learning.

Furthermore, Ghanaian society's perceptions and attitudes toward PWD dehumanise, ostracise and exclude them from mainstream institutional, social and communal life including social events and education (Ocloo et al 2002). Mantey (2014) argues that usually, educational provisions are not made for PWD in the mainstream because other people believe that they would not survive for long due to their impairment. Agbenyega (2003) maintains that these cultural beliefs are a threat to inclusive education. The assumption is that when PWD are treated as social misfits or social outcasts, it becomes problematic for any meaningful interaction to occur between them and their non-disabled counterparts, a situation that affects inclusive practice (Agbenyega, 2003). Moreover, explaining disability based on the belief system that makes people shun people with disability is a way of succumbing to the archaic and negative ways of influence which some people consider as a cultural heritage (Agbenyega, 2003).

It has been observed that one of the major factors affecting education of students with disabilities and the practice of inclusive education in Ghana is the teachers' attitude towards students with disabilities (Gadagbui, 2010). A considerable amount of research suggest that teachers and non-disabled students' beliefs about disability affect the education of students with disabilities (Mama et al. 2011; Matonya, 2016; Meijer et al, 2003; Nketsia, 2013; 2016; Norwich, 2014; Ntombela, 2013). For example, when teachers refuse to give attention to students with disabilities because of the belief that they are cursed by the spirits, inclusive education would be thwarted. The fear and superstition concerning the causes of disability make others withdraw from students with disabilities (Bott & Evans, 2010). This fear has

caused most of the mainstream teachers to pay little or no attention to students with disabilities as compared to the attention they give to non-disabled students (MoE, 2008). Inclusive practice is therefore affected when students with disabilities are not given needed support in their place of studying. Hence, researchers believe that a change of attitude from teachers is needed to positively influence inclusive practices in the Ghanaian education system (Alghazo & Gaad, 2004).

1.3 The concept of Disability

Disability is a “multifaceted experience covering impairment, activity limitations, and participation restrictions, referring to negative aspect of the interaction between an individual (with health conditions) and that individual’s contextual factors (environmental and personal factors)” (WHO/World Bank, 2011 p.4). In this explanation, impairment is considered as a problem in the body function (health conditions); the challenges experienced by an individual in performing a task are considered as activity limitations (environmental limitations); while participation restrictions refer to difficulties PWD encounter in their involvement in life situations. Thus, disability is not only a health issue but a multifaceted phenomenon showing the interaction between the personal characteristics of an individual and the characteristics of his or her social and physical environment. Disability is, therefore, seen as an outcome of an individual’s association with his or her health condition, physical environment and other external factors which represent the circumstances in which the individual lives (WHO, 2001). The emphasis placed on health, environment and external factors create assumptions that every individual has or can have some sort of disability. This description suggests that disability is recognised as a universal human experience which can affect anybody irrespective of time of life, colour, sex, ethnicity or social class (Baffoe, 2013; WHO/World Bank 2011). Overcoming

the challenges students with disabilities experience necessitates transformation that could remove attitudinal, social and environmental barriers. Article One (1) of the United Nations Convention on the Right of Persons Disabilities (UNCRPD) explains disability as;

Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on equal basis with others (UNCRPD, 2006 p.4).

The emphasis on interaction suggests that disability is not only related to individual characteristics but is also caused by the barriers created by external factors. This suggests that improving social participation of PWD could address the difficulty they experience in their day-to-day activities. Thus, the environment is significant in the experiences and level of disability; participation and inclusion of PWD is enhanced when the environment is accessible (Mosia, 2017; Opoku et al., 2017)

In general, understandings of disability in sub-Saharan Africa are influenced by different models of disability including the medical/individual, superstitious/religious, charity and social model (Anthony, 2011). These models have differently influence people in their perception of individuals with disabilities in society. According to WHO/World Bank (2011), there must be a balancing approach of medical and social models of disability in order to better support individuals with disabilities in society. The concept of disability has shifted, to a large extent, from the medical perspective to the social model. Thus, more emphasis is placed on the perspective that disability is created when social structures that help people to function are not in place, rather than being created by individual impairments (Kaufman, 2011; WHO, 2011).

In Ghana, the common understanding of disability is that a person is unable to perform an activity because he or she has a problem with part(s) of the physiological makeup or the mind (Avoke, 2002). The Disability Act 2006 (Act 715) describes a person with disability as:

An individual with physical, mental or sensory impairment including a visual, hearing or speech functional disability which gives rise to physical, cultural or social barrier that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of that individual (Republic of Ghana, 2006, P.17).

The above definition indicates that disability occurs when there is negative interaction between a person and his or her social environment. During the 2010 National Population Census, the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) defined disability as:

A condition which limits the ability of a person to perform specific tasks/activities due to loss or non-function of some parts of the body as a result of impairment or malformation (GSS, 2014).

For the GSS, a person is said to be disabled when he or she is unable to or is restricted in the performance of specific tasks or activities due to an impairment. The GSS definition focuses on the impairment as the reason for the failure to perform a certain role rather than society's inability to provide support to the persons with disability to function well. Generally, disability in Ghana has negative connotations, with widespread perception that PWD are unproductive and unable to contribute to the socio-economic development of the society; a phenomenon which has been seen as a recipe for marginalisation, stigmatisation and discrimination (Al Tarawneh, 2016; Anthony, 2011; Baffoe, 2013; Kitchin, 1998; Wolbring, 2011).

In this study, however, the phrase "person with disability" is understood as someone who has difficulty in performing certain functions due to barriers created by the institution of learning.

The understanding is that the physical impairment, activity limitations and participation restrictions are created by lack of support for PWD. Thus, in higher education settings, the inability of students with disabilities to perform specific tasks emanates in part from the institution's reluctance or inability to cater for the needs of these students or lack of suitable arrangements and support for students with disabilities in the institutions

1.4 Disability Studies in Education (DSE)

Different perspectives of disability have been put forward in education by researchers (Baglieri, Connor & Gallagher, 2011; Gabel, 2005). These perspectives include social constructivist, postmodernist, poststructuralist, and legal and structural-functionalist (Taylor, 2008). Researchers argue that despite this diversity in perspectives, there is a key theme within these disciplines and this is the assumption that disability is a social construct (Anastasiou & Kauffman 2013; Taylor, 2008). According to Gabel (2005), there are implications for policy and practice when disability is understood as a social phenomenon. Gabel (2005) observes that disability studies in education (DSE) is different from disability studies in general because DSE concerns itself with educational issues. In this way, DSE examines disability in social and cultural contexts in order to position students with disabilities well in their educational lives (Morton, 2012; Smith, 2010). Thus, this study is positioned in DSE because it offers opportunities that build and sustain inclusive education. Besides, DSE questions how disability is constructed and challenges social, cultural and institutional barriers that militate against the education of persons with disabilities (Taylor 2008). The role of DSE in this perspective is to ensure professional discourses are held on new forms of participation, solidarity and equality (Gabel & Danforth, 2008).

In a broader perspective, researchers argue that DSE deepens understanding of the meaning of disabled students' experiences in schools and higher education throughout contemporary society, cultures and within different historical contexts (Connor, Gabel, Gallapher & Morton 2008). Thus, DSE has been connected to inclusive practices, with Connor et al. (2008) maintaining that the main duty of DSE is to create and sustain inclusive and accessible educational institutions. Within this recognition, the main purpose of DSE has been to provide advocacy and feasible approaches which can engender meaningful and substantive educational inclusion. Disability studies in education therefore questions people's constructions of disability and provides understanding of disabled individuals' stories. In addition, DSE emphasises how people can embrace disability as a natural part of diversity (Connor et al., 2008). Connor et al. (2008) believe that working within DSE positions individuals to clarify their thinking, critique existing exclusionary practices, build alliances with Disability Right Organisations and collaborate on the best ways the lives of all students and educators can improve.

The usefulness of DSE in the current study can be observed through the insight it provides in understanding the lived experiences of students with disabilities. Within DSE, students with disabilities experiences and non-disabled people perceptions toward disabled students are interpreted. Disability studies in education focuses on and supports the emancipation of PWD including students with disabilities by emphasising the injustices and inequalities against PWD (Connor et al., 2008; Danforth & Gabel, 2006; Rao & Kalyanpur, 2013). Disability studies in education therefore provides opportunity for PWD to express who they are and their experiences in their lived domain. Hence, within higher education, DSE provides students with disabilities the opportunity to define and direct their own studies (Gallagher, 2004). Disability studies in education, therefore, advocates for the full participation of students with disabilities in their lived domain. Hence, obtaining insight into the experiences of students with disabilities

may assist in understanding of disability to influence the behaviour and attitude of stakeholders in the education of these students.

1.5 Problem statement

In general, the needs of students with disabilities in higher education are seldom recognised in sub-Saharan Africa especially when compared to non-disabled students (Chataika et al., 2012; FOTIM, 2011; Lorenzo, 2003). Although the Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015) and United Nations Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities (2006) all guarantee and support the education of persons with disabilities, this has not received enough attention in sub-Saharan Africa. Research across Africa has shown that the education of PWD is yet to receive the needed attention (FOTIM, 2011; Ntombela, 2013; Matonya, 2016; Mwapopo et al., 2011; Mosia, 2017; Opini, 2012). In particular, the policy framework to support the education of PWD remains weak and dysfunctional, with the voices of these people not given adequate attention in research and discussions (Mosia, 2017).

In Ghana, studies have been conducted on the education of students with disabilities. However, there is overconcentration of research on pre-university level of education (Ametepee & Anastessiou, 2015; Botts & Owusu, 2013; Mantey, 2014; Opoku, Agbenyega, Mprah, Mckenzie, & Badu, 2017). While this is relevant, education goes beyond the basic level. Research shows that higher education fosters dignity and recognition of students with disabilities in Africa (Teague et al., 2015), provides employment opportunities (Hoskins & Ilies, 2017; Riddell et al., 2010), and enhances the development of the individual and society (Sarkar, 2012; Smith, 2020). Despite these benefits of higher education, implementing the necessary processes that could make university education responsive to the needs of all students remain a challenge in Ghana (Baffoe, 2013; Naami, Hayashi & Liese, 2012; Mama et al. 2011).

Ghana has pursued different policies aimed at ensuring the education of students with disabilities at higher levels (MoE, 2018; Republic of Ghana, 1992; 2006). In addition, Ghana is signatory to many international conventions and declarations aimed at fostering inclusiveness at all levels of education. However, research shows that students with disabilities in Ghana experience challenges including limited policies, inadequate resources and superstitious beliefs (Korboe et al., 2011; Associates for Change, 2011; UNESCO, 2010). The few studies conducted in higher education focus on the people who provide services to students with disabilities such as university teachers, teacher trainees and non-disabled students (Mamah, Deku, Darling & Avoke, 2011; Naami & Hayashi, 2012; Nketsia & Salovitta, 2013). It is, however, unlikely that lasting solutions to these problems can be found without taking into consideration the views and experiences of the affected students, namely, students with disabilities. Therefore, addressing these challenges calls for an exploration of the lived experiences of students with disabilities as this will provide the requisite evidence for policy formulation and implementation. In addition, this may help address some of the attitudinal issues that affect education of these students at the higher level. The exploration of the experiences of students with disabilities may additionally help to draw the attention of various stakeholders to the needs and challenges of these students and to tackle them appropriately. Understanding these experiences, motivation, perceptions and expectations may assist the transformation agenda to support the education of PWD.

There is limited research in Ghana on the lived experiences of students with disabilities and their perceptions with respect to access, participation, retention, and motivation to access higher education in Ghana. Therefore, there is the need to investigate the lived experiences of students with disabilities at the higher level of learning to inform policy and practice. In addition, while those studies that do exist adopted only one method of data collection such as interviews (Mamah, Deku, Darling & Avoke, 2011; Naami & Hayashi, 2012; Nketsia &

Salovitta, 2013; Tudzi, Bugri & Danso, 2017), the current study adopted different methods of data collection including semi-structured interviews, observation and documentary analysis. The aim of this research is to gain understanding of the experiences and perceptions of students with disabilities and their implications in relation to inclusive practice in a Ghanaian university. In achieving this aim, the following research questions were set;

- a. How does the policy environment influence the education of persons with disabilities in a Ghanaian university?
- b. What motivates students with disabilities to access and participate in university education?
- c. What are the experiences of students with disabilities in relation to access and participation in higher education in Ghana?

1.6 The Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis is made up of eight chapters. Chapter One is the introductory chapter and discusses the background of the study. My motivation to embark on this research journey and a brief introduction to Ghana are provided. The historical perspective on the development of inclusive education as well as the policy context of inclusive education are discussed. The socio-cultural beliefs and inclusive practice, concept of disability and disability studies in education precede the discussion of the research problem.

Chapter Two discusses the literature related to the study. The chapter begins with literature on the models of disability that influence the conceptualisation of disability in Ghana. The chapter further explores literature on the concept of inclusion. In addition, literature on accessibility and participation of students with disabilities in higher education is explored. Literature on discrimination and stigmatisation as well as the value of higher education to the students with

disabilities and the society are also explored. The Chapter also investigates literature on the policy framework and implementation in higher education.

Chapter Three focuses on the methodological approaches adopted for the study. The chapter explains the philosophical, theoretical, research approach and design of the study. The research methods and analysis are also discussed in this chapter. Trustworthiness and rigour as well as ethical considerations of the study are described in this chapter.

Chapter Four describes the international and national disability and inclusive education policies that influence the education of students with disabilities in Ghana. In this chapter, international frameworks, declarations and conventions that guide the educational rights of persons with disabilities education are explored. The national and institutional policies in Ghana are also examined. In addition, this chapter discusses the gaps and inconsistencies in the policy provisions for inclusive education in Ghana. The chapter further discusses the difficulties in translating inclusive policies into practice.

Chapter Five elaborates on the discourses of students with disabilities' motivation to access university education. Different factors influence students' access and participation in higher education and include their desire to be role models and familial and societal recognition. Other motivations are physical strength and dynamics of jobs and financial benefits. Participants' decision to access a particular institution of higher education are also examined. These comprised maintaining relationships, programmes of the university and the cost of study. The sources of support for the education of students with disabilities including family, peers and institutional support are discussed.

Chapter Six focuses on how students with disabilities feel a sense of belonging in the university where this study was conducted. Accessibility of the university as experienced by the students with disabilities is discussed. The factors influencing accessibility and belonging in the

university are examined. In addition, the coping mechanisms adopted by participants to deal with the challenges they encounter in the university are also discussed.

Chapter Seven discusses the main findings of the study. The chapter begins with a summary of the key findings. Policy implementation as well as students with disabilities' motivation to access university education are discussed. The elements influencing the achievement of inclusive education in higher education are discussed. This chapter further engages social constructionism and critical disability theory in the discussions of participants' experiences. Next, this chapter discusses the backstories of participants' experiences.

Chapter Eight concludes the study. The main ideas and the implications of the study are presented. In addition, the limitations of the study and recommendations for improving practice, policy development and future research are examined in this chapter. The chapter concludes with the lessons I learned from the research and final remarks.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature related to the education of students with disabilities. The chapter is sub-divided into five sections. The first section begins with an overview of the models of disability, presenting how these models influence the conceptualisation of disabilities in Ghanaian society. The second section explores the concept of inclusion and how it is used in different contexts, and the third section examines inclusion in detail with emphasis on accessibility and issues influencing accessibility in higher education. The disclosure of disability, location of institution and sources of support in higher education are discussed as factors influencing accessibility. Next, a discussion of the value of higher education to students with disability is presented as another factor influencing accessibility. Section four discusses discrimination and stigmatization as key concepts of inclusion, with a focus on previous studies and their influence on the education of students with disabilities. The final section of the chapter presents literature on the policy framework and implementation as they relate to inclusive education in Ghana and Africa.

2.1 Models of disability

According to Llewellyn and Hogan (2000), a model denotes a particular kind of theory which describes phenomena in reference to an abstract system and mechanism. Within concepts of disability, models are used to define impairments and this influences the mechanisms societies arrange in meeting the needs of persons with disabilities (Rialland, 2006). According to Oliver (1996), models allow understanding but do not explain phenomena. This means models do not explain the nature of disabilities but rather they facilitate the understanding and perceptions of issues of disabilities. Thus, models of disability are frameworks which describe different

understandings and perspectives of disability issues (Rialland, 2006). In African contexts, different models including medical, superstitious, charity and social models of disability influence the understanding of the concept (Anthony, 2011).

The medical model of disability places the source of disadvantage experienced by individuals with disabilities as a medical condition and considers such individuals as “abnormal” (Hosking, 2008; Oliver, 1996). The underlying issue within this model is that disability is located within the individuals themselves and they have to be cured in order to restore them to function in an acceptable or “normal” way (Anthony 2011). This model draws attention to the person’s impairment rather than focusing on the needs and abilities of the person. The model depicts a cycle of dependency and exclusion rather than social justice and equality (Avoke, 2001). In educational settings, this model allows people to be screened by their impairment and this is used to group them for the purpose of instruction or for the placement of the individual in a particular school (Haegele & Hodge, 2016). The medical model positions the individual to adapt to the environment that surround them in order to fit into the mainstream paradigm. In effect, the medical model does not question the lack of society’s response to the needs of people with disabilities as the cause of disability. It stipulates that people with disability need rehabilitation to make them normal (Hammel et al., 2015). The model has been criticised for contributing to the discrimination and marginalisation against PWD because of the distinctions it makes between “normal” and “abnormal” (Degener, 2016). Critics of the medical model assert that classifying people according to normality and abnormality connotes lack, limitation, tragedy and deficit (Ferri et al., 2005; Mercieca & Mercieca, 2010; Roets & Goodley, 2008; Shakespeare, 2006). This assertion sees people with disabilities as lacking and unable to play their full roles in society (Dewsbury et al., 2004). The medical model’s attention to individual functional limitations eventually legitimises the social exclusion of people with disabilities (Anthony, 2011). In addition, PWD have criticised the medical model for failing to connect

their lived experiences to their world, a situation that makes it difficult to meet their needs (Riddell & Watson, 2014). Moreover, the model has been criticised for its emphasis on medical professionals and other experts who determine how disabled people should live their lives (Hodkinson, 2015). It has, therefore, been argued that reliance on these professionals affects the empowerment of the disabled, stressing non-disabled people's domination in the lives of people with disabilities (Brett, 2002).

A related model is the superstition-based-model which is similar to the medical model of disability in many respects. In most African communities, individuals' attitudes towards PWD are shaped by beliefs and fears that such persons have wronged deities or gods who are considered to influence law and order and, who are capable of exacting punishment to those who stray away from the norms of society. This belief is so intense that even with the introduction of Christianity and Islam, people still persist with the idea that disability is retribution from the 'gods' for offences committed by the individual with disability or by their families against the society. Parents and children are therefore blamed for bringing 'disability' upon themselves (Avoke, 2002). According to Obeng (2007), this model is accepted when the people are superstitious and fatalistic. The superstitious model of disability is prevalent in African societies as a result of lack of education and ignorance of the causes of disability together with a combination of superstition and beliefs (Chataika et al., 2012). The superstitious model influences Ghanaian understanding of disability. In several societies in Ghana, people feel justified to maltreat and use pejorative labels against persons with disabilities because disability is strongly attributed to superstitious forces (Anthony, 2011; Avoke, 2002; Botts & Evans, 2010; Gadagui, 2010). The influence of this model is seen in avoidance and stereotyping attitude against people with disabilities.

The charity model of disability also recognises PWD as individuals who cannot fend for themselves. It positions PWD as individuals who cannot contribute to society but rather take

from others in society (Shakespeare, 2009). Such people are, therefore, perceived as being handicapped by their impairment and need to be pitied because they need assistance (Avoke, 2002; Manset- Williamson & Nelson, 2005). In sub-Saharan African contexts, this model is used to clarify and identify persons with disabilities. The dominant belief in sub-Saharan Africa is that persons with disabilities need special services and charity rather than being in the mainstream of social life. Understanding disability through the charity model reduces PWD to beggars in the streets to fend for themselves in most African countries (Devlieger, 2018; Kassah, 2008; Namwata, Mgabo, & Dimoso, 2012; Ndlovu & Walton, 2016; Rogoho & Sizaba, 2014). The charity model has, therefore, been criticised for causing low self-esteem, emphasising the disability rather than the person and positioning PWD as imperfect (Harris & Enfield, 2003).

In recent times, there has been a paradigm shift from medical and its related models (such as the superstitious and charity models) of understanding disability toward the social model of disability (Lindsay, 2003). The social model interprets disability as a barrier created by discriminatory attitudes of society and the physical environment but not intrinsic features that 'disable' the individuals and prevent them from participating fully in society (Anthony, 2011; Brown and Boardman, 2011; Kinsella and Senior, 2008). This model states that the social, cultural, economic and environmental challenges to participation and accessibility that people with impairments experience are created by the society and not their individual deficits (Baffoe, 2013; Burchardt, 2004; Rocco, 2011; Thomas, 2004). The assumption is that when these barriers are removed, people with disability would be less restricted in performing their daily activities (Baffoe, 2013). Therefore, the social model has been seen as an emancipatory approach capable of transforming repressive societies and educational systems through human rights and values that welcome diversity (Anthony, 2011). This model provides a powerful ground through which many people with disability, academics, movements and international

policy advocates champion issues of disability (Thomas 1999). In educational settings, the social model considers the whole educational system as a potential source of difficulty rather than the impairment of the person (Kinsella & Senior, 2008; UNESCO, 2001).

Removing barriers created by society is considered an essential theme in the social model and inclusion in higher education (Gabel & Peters, 2004; Kinsella & Senior, 2008). A view of disability consistent with the social model means that educational provisions and arrangements should be equal for all persons irrespective of their backgrounds or physiological makeup or impairment. Some proponents of inclusive education suggest that achieving inclusive education depends on a conceptualisation of disability based on the social model of disability (Avoke, 2002; Haegele, & Hodge, 2016). They suggest that if an individual or community's collective perceptions and understanding of disability is not in line with the ideals of the social model, successful and meaningful inclusive education may be difficult to achieve. However, the social model has been criticised for ignoring individual experiences of impairments and presenting people with disability as a single group when, in reality, different factors such as race, gender and age influence disability (Hosking, 2008; Oliver, 2013; Smith & Bundon, 2018). An in-depth understanding of the models of disability is critical as differing conceptualisations of disability suggest that adoption of different educational programmes and policies are based on these models (Lindsay, 2003). Using these models gives better understanding of disability issues in higher educational settings and society. Thus, the models may be used as tools for understanding the way disability is perceived and responded to in Ghanaian society. In addition, these models could help provide understanding of the conceptualisation of inclusive education in Ghanaian societies.

2.2 The concept of inclusion

Inclusive education as defined by United Nations General Comment Number 4 (2016, p4) “is a process of systemic reforms embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences”. The United Nations definition suggests that placing students with disabilities within the mainstream institutions without corresponding structural changes to, for example, environment does not constitute inclusion. This implies that within inclusion, there is learning-friendly environment where everyone feels safe, supported and recognised. The United Nations definition was used to guide this study. Some researchers have explained inclusion as demanding restructuring or reconceptualising institutions of learning such as universities to address the diverse needs of all learners (Doughty & Allan, 2008; Messiou et al 2016; Deiner, 2005; Morina, 2017; Prowse, 2009). This explanation suggests that it is the institution of learning that should adapt to meet the diverse needs of all students. Inclusive education, therefore, involves transformation in structures, curriculum and strategies that takes care of all learners within institutions of learning. Indeed, inclusive education is considered a hallmark of quality learning (Carter & Abawi, 2018).

Although the philosophy of inclusive education has been widely accepted, its operational meaning in terms of which groups are to be included and the defining features of the institutions of learning are not clear. However, participation of the down-trodden in society remains central to inclusion. Booth (2000) stresses increasing participation while reducing exclusion from the society and mainstream institutions such as universities. Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006) maintain that institutions of learning ought to focus on measures that can increase retention and participation of people who have been marginalised historically. The operational meaning has

also been conceived to include fairness to persons with disabilities in all societal endeavours. Barnes (2007) expands this, adding that inclusive education should be based on equity and social justice that is consistent with the social model of disability. In all the above explanations of inclusive education, one common element is that it is the environment or society that disables the individual, not the impairment.

According to Dyson and Howes (2009), inclusive education practice is multifaceted. This means that there is no universally accepted approach that indicates what and how inclusive education should be practised. The best practice could mean an approach that encourages mutual interaction among all students without regard to physical, mental, social or emotional restrictions. This suggests that inclusion is never about making people as “normal” as possible as put forward by the medical model of disability. Although the question of inclusive education is both multifaceted and contentious, it is influenced by social, historical, cultural, global and contextual factors. The meaning of inclusive education can neither be equated to integration nor accommodation of people who have been traditionally marginalised. It is about transforming the society and its institutions like universities to suit the needs of all students including students with disabilities. It is making sure that the rights of all persons detailed in the Universal Declaration of Human Right (UDHR) in 1949 are recognised (UNESCO, 2003). Although inclusive education is influenced by contextual factors such as culture, beliefs and conventions, some researchers observe that inclusion is about the need to create, support and provide the requisite resources to ensure that all students have access to education (Morina et al., 2015; Prowse, 2009). This means that inclusive education ought to embrace all persons and it is the obligation of everyone within institutions of learning to ensure that all persons realise their right to belong.

Inclusive education has the capability to build the educational potential of students with disabilities. Nevertheless, some researchers argue that the practice of inclusive education is

difficult since there has not been any universal definition (Sheehy, Rix, Nind & Simmons, 2004; 2005). Advocates for inclusive education have, therefore, noted that it should be seen as an ongoing and evolutionary process in order to meet the varied needs of all learners rather than a single event (Ainscow, 2005; Mufambisi, 2018). Some experts support this position, arguing that inclusive education is a process, in that it demands a search for possible and better ways to respond to diversity, living with difference, learning from different perspectives and valuing difference (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Florian, 2014; Morina, 2017; Stepanova et al., 2018). Inclusive education can, therefore, be explained as a process of finding ways through which all students can be catered for, in order to embrace all measures that would make it fruitful to enhance retention and participation of learners.

As a process, inclusion has been seen not as an end in itself but a means to an end (Barton, 1997). This suggests that inclusive education could bring the necessary transformation that can break the deep seated structural barriers for change (Barton 1997). The indication is that successful inclusive outcomes depend on the interaction of key elements such as teachers' knowledge and policies in institutions of higher education. Shanon, Schoen, and Tansey (2009) maintain that people with expert knowledge (individuals with special skill in teaching students in inclusive settings) play a key role in the formation of attitude and behaviour. For example, if teachers demonstrate accommodating attitudes and behaviour towards students with disabilities by involving them in the classroom interaction, there is the likelihood of successful inclusive practice. Inclusive education, therefore, involves transformation and restructuring the curriculum to assist learners to succeed. Thus, inclusive education gives prominence to learners who could be victims of marginalisation, exclusion or underachievement. In contributing to this discussion, Ainscow and Miles (2008) are of the view that inclusion is about recognising the presence, participation and achievement of all students.

Although there are differences in how people describe inclusive education, certain elements are common in the conceptualisation including commitment to building a just society and equitable educational system (Green, 2001). Inclusive systems should be seen as a process of finding a better way of responding to diversity (UNESCO, 2005). Inclusive education, therefore, involves providing support for all students with emphasis on those who may be at risk of marginalisation, exclusion and underachievement. Morina (2017, 2019) posits that inclusion means placing students in a setting which makes available the support that meets the diverse needs of all learners. In the light of the above discussion, inclusion could be regarded as a process whereby all learners receive their education in the mainstream with available resources that ensure their participation and progress.

Other studies affirm inclusion as a relevant aspect of successful educational systems (Carter & Abawi, 2018; Gairin & Suarez, 2014). Proponents of inclusive education argue that its implementation is based on fundamental human rights and a means of providing equal educational opportunities to all students (Lipsky & Gartner, 2013; Gresham & MacMillan, 1997; Walker, Ramsey & Gresham, 2004). According to Loreman et al. (2014), inclusive education is a basic human right and a means to reduce discrimination and create a just society. Consequently, it has been seen as a way of providing a high quality response to students' needs in order to enhance their participation in education (Ainscow, 2015; Ainscow & Messiou, 2018; Messiou et al., 2016). The indication is that within inclusive systems, the needs of all students including students with disabilities are catered for through a transformation of the existing learning environment to provide equal opportunities to all (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Westwood, 2014, 2018). Thus, diversity is considered an asset rather than a challenge in an inclusive system, with the assumption being that all students must benefit from the learning process. Similarly, other researchers believe that inclusive education leads to better social and academic skills for all students especially those with disabilities (Freeman & Alkin 2000;

Fryxell & Kennedy, 1995; Kennedy, Shulka & Fryxell, 1997; Westby, 2013). This assertion suggests that students who learn together associate well with each other. Thus, inclusive education has been associated with improved social relationships and networking, increased achievement, higher expectations and increased collaboration (De Graaf et al., 2014).

Although most countries in the world are responding to inclusive education, some researchers maintain that it is difficult for institutions of higher education to meet the needs of students with disabilities. These researchers assert that most higher education teachers either lack the skills to accommodate students with disabilities or to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of all students, including students with disabilities (Christie, 2013; Kuchung, 2011; Lorenzo, 2003; Louren & Swartz, 2016; Morina, Lopez & Molina, 2015). However, this idea has been opposed by other experts, with Mama et al. (2011) arguing that all persons are educable when given the opportunity. On his part, Mittler (2000) emphasised that persons with severe intellectual impairment could not only attend ordinary schools but succeed in passing the ordinary school leaving examinations. This suggests that if such students could do well at the ordinary level, what stops other students with disabilities from excelling in other levels such as the university? This can be even more possible if there are people who are ready to support students with disabilities at the higher institutions. Thus, inclusion means giving equal opportunity to all students irrespective of age, gender and the physiological makeup of a person. This position has also been supported by Madriaga et al. (2011) who suggested that higher educational institutions should ensure that students with disabilities should be given equal opportunity as non-disabled people.

The challenge, however, is making the necessary changes and adaptations to enhance inclusion (Mittler, 2000). The necessary changes and adaptations according to Mittler (2000) fall within ourselves, our attitude, behaviour, fear, underestimation, exaggeration about the challenges students with disabilities may encounter, and our pessimism about their achievements in an

inclusive environment. In Africa, researchers believe that successful inclusion hinges on a change in attitude in the social environment through awareness creation of disability issues among all stakeholders (Charema, 2010; Bott & Owusu, 2013; Donhue & Bornman, 2014). The change should not be limited to the academic staff of the institutions of learning but also to all stakeholders including government, policy makers and non-disabled students. The fact here is that although inclusive education at higher levels is at its infancy in sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2018), it has been recognised as important for the socio-economic development of the individual and society. Understanding inclusive education is therefore significant in appreciating the experiences of students with disabilities.

2.3 Accessibility and participation in higher education

Accessibility and participation remain a central issue in inclusive education. Accessibility, as explained by Hanafin et al. (2007) is multi-layered and contains attitudinal, physical and other institutional elements. Access to higher education is therefore more than just accepting students with disabilities into higher education institutions. The key issue is to engender a sense of belonging, which according to Beauchamp-Pryor (2013), transcends the mere acceptance or admission of higher numbers of these students. Emphasising excellence in the social and learning experiences of these students once they are accepted into higher education is paramount (Gibson, 2015; Fuller et al 2004; Jacklin, Robbinson, O'Meara & Harris, 2007; Morina, 2017; Quinn, 2013; Thomas, 2016; Wilson et al., 2016). This acceptance and belonging promotes a feeling of satisfaction and the realisation that students with disabilities truly belong in institutions of higher education and their presence is valued (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2013; Swart & Greyling, 2011). Thus, when persons with disabilities are given the opportunity to access and participate in higher education, attention should be on which type of education

suits these students. While some researchers call for inclusive education designed and tailored for persons with disabilities (Gibson, 2012; Liasidou, 2014), others argue that this would be a challenge in higher education (Morina, 2017; Mufambisi, 2018).

Internationally, there is a clamour for inclusive education due to the issue of fundamental human rights (Cardona, 2011; De Becco, 2014). Promoting these rights means students with disabilities will be able to access mainstream educational opportunities as a way of combating discrimination, marginalization and stigmatization (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Hutchinson & Martin, 2012). Therefore, responding to the diverse needs of all students becomes paramount in ensuring accessibility. Whilst Porter (2014) argues that the responsibility for responding to diverse needs of students should be on government, other researchers maintain that it should be the responsibility of higher educational institutions (Doughty & Allan, 2008; Prowse, 2009). The underlying issue is that all students should be supported to access and participate in higher education through the provision of an enabling environment (Porter & Smith, 2012; Prowse, 2009; Reiter & Vitani, 2007).

The ability of students with disabilities to access different opportunities at institutions of learning is a related concern. Such opportunities include ability to access guidance and counselling services, participate fully in university events (curricular and extra-curricular activities) and being able to access general information in the university (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2013). Thus, true accessibility is realised when the learning environment is adjusted to suit the educational needs of all learners (UNESCO, 2008), with the ability of students with disabilities to orientate themselves within educational institutions an important ingredient (UNESCO, 2008; Seale, 2013). Other studies position accessibility as an ongoing phenomenon which entails the involvement of learners in the whole process of education where they are valued and supported as people with different needs, aspirations and ideas (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2013; Drame & Kamphoff, 2014; Maina, 2010; Thomas, 2016).

Accessibility and participation in higher education for students with disabilities have also been viewed from the perspective of access to ICT resources in education. For Maina (2012), one cannot take fairness and social justice out of the equation, extending the discussion to include access to the latest ICT resources that will boost the education of students with disabilities. The importance of ICT is considered paramount as it allows students to access materials they would have depended on others to assist them to access (Ndume, Tilya & Twaakyondo, 2008). However, if access is taken for granted in institutions of higher education, there is higher risk of students with disabilities dropping out prematurely as compared to non-disabled students (Quinn et al 2013; Seale, 2013; Lombardi, Murray & Kowitt, 2016).

Encouraging persons with disabilities to access and participate in higher education requires government and institutional commitment to reduce inequality and ensure equity. Equity in this respect does not only entail placement of students with disabilities in the university but also ensuring that they are given the needed support that would enhance their successful participation and completion (Gibson, 2012; Quinn, 2013; Thomas, 2016; Wilson et al. 2016). According to Kisanji (1998a), poor assessment strategies, lack of adaptive technology, poor practical activities and restrictive teaching within higher education affect the achievements and participation of students with disabilities. In the light of this, accessibility that focus only on the built environment is limited as other elements including social environment also have some consequences (Chataika, 2010). In addition, meaningful accessibility and participation not only depends on the flexibility of the curriculum or better assessment strategies; it also involves the provision of teaching and learning materials in alternative formats. Although enrolling many students with disabilities in higher education does not necessarily guarantee full accessibility, such an increase is equally considered significant since it paves the way for students with disabilities to access higher education (Chan, 2006). Different factors including disclosure of

disability, selecting a location to study, support services available in the higher education and the value of higher education influence accessibility.

2.3.1 Disclosure of Disability

Disability disclosure involves making what is secretive public in daily communications (Prince, 2009, 2012). Disclosure encompasses individual choices and statements which are dependent on how people understand disability (Kerschbaum, 2014; O'Toole, 2013). Studies on dynamics of disclosure show that it is a way of establishing advantages of sharing, building links and a movement to interrupt the perceptions of differences and discrimination (Pearson & Boskovich, 2019). Disclosure is, therefore, believed to engender a sense of fulfilment and belonging, with some experts indicating that it is a way of ensuring that the needs of students with disabilities are provided for by the institutions of higher education (Moriña, Sandoval, & Carnerero, 2020).

The disclosure of disability is acknowledged as a difficult and multifaceted process that affects the experiences of students with disabilities in higher education (Jacklin et al 2007). Students often experience a dilemma about what, when and how to disclose disability (Beauchamp-pryor, 2013; Fuller et al 2009; Matthew, 2009; Redpath et al., 2013; Vickerman & Blundell, 2010). Sometimes too, they are concerned and ignorant about what higher educational institutions would do with the information they provide (Elliot & Wilson, 2008; Grimes, Southgate, Scevak & Buchanan, 2019; Roberts et al., 2009). Consequently, disabled students have to gauge whether the benefits of revealing a disability in higher education would expose them to disadvantages such as stigma, discrimination, marginalisation, isolation and labelling (Matthew, 2009; Riddell & Weedon, 2014; Jacklin, 2011). The decision to disclose is therefore not an easy one and has been described as “an intricate decision process” dependent on the

perception of effects of disclosure on the students' educational lives (Olney & Brockman 2003 p. 49). For example, in exploring the experiences of disabled students in Wales, Beauchamp-Pryor (2013) observed that disabled students entering higher education institutions were concerned that disclosure of impairment would deny them access to some programmes. Consequently, the majority of these students did not disclose their disabilities. Evidence shows that students only reveal their disabilities when they realise that non-disclosure may obstruct their experience in higher education (Matthew, 2009). Students' hesitation to disclose or not can therefore be perceived as a means of controlling evidence and a way of reducing the effects of impairment on their educational lives (Venville, Street & Fossey, 2014). It has, therefore, been suggested that there should be greater transparency in the application process and the way the information supplied by applicants are used and preserved in higher education (Sanderson, 2001). This is necessary as early disclosure enables higher educational institutions to make provisions to support these students (Kranke, et al., 2013). Students with disabilities have therefore been urged to evaluate the consequences of their action during the disclosure process (Olney & Brockman, 2003). This is done in order to avoid the effect of negative features associated with disability (Olney & Brockman 2003).

Students' willingness to disclose their impairment in higher education is affected by a number of reasons (Grimes et al, 2019; Roberts et al., 2009). Students previous experiences have been known to influence their decision to disclose disability, especially if these experiences were negative (Chaudoir & Quinn, 2010). The fear of stigma associated with disclosure is one main reason influencing disclosure (Elliot & Wilson, 2008; Roberts et al., 2009). Socially, students' reluctance to disclose disability comes from the knowledge that their disability would overshadow other important qualities they possess (Magnus & Tossebro, 2014) while others have internalised oppression (Liasidou, 2014). Non-disclosure of disability has therefore been attributed to negative effects of disability on persons living with these conditions (Grimes et

al. 2019). However, it is important for students to disclose any disabilities because it facilitates provision of support (Kerschbaum, Eisenman, & Jones, 2017). Studies indicate that students normally disclose their disability in order to access support services (Riddell et al., 2009; Roberts et al 2009). For most students, such support services include suitable accommodations (Blockmans, 2015; Cai & Richdale, 2016; Cesarei, 2015). In addition, students disclose their disability when they believe it will have positive effects on their academic achievement or when they realise that without it, they will experience academic crises (Lightner et al., 2012; Mullins & Preyde, 2013).

Furthermore, the decision to disclose is influenced by the kind of disability the student is living with. According to Olney and Brockleman (2003) and Roberts et al. (2009), students with disabilities are willing to disclose disability upon realisation that their disability may not have any negative effects on their academic experience. For example, Deal (2003) reported that students with dyslexia were less concerned in disclosing disability and attributed the reason to the ‘newness’ of the disability. Similarly, Elliot and Wilson (2008) considered the ease of disclosure of dyslexia in higher education to changes in attitude towards it as people are now familiar with difficulties students with dyslexia experience. The willingness to disclose certain types of disability has been described by Deal (2003 p.11) and Bantjes, Swartz, Conchar, and Derman, (2015 p.9) as “hierarchy of disability”, indicating that disabled students compare peoples’ attitude toward their disabilities to other group of disabilities, and this influence their decision whether or not to disclose. Other studies exploring the experiences of students with disabilities in higher education reveal that students with one or more impairments may conceal this because of the perceived effects on their educational life (Majoko, 2018; Kranke et al., 2013; Roberts et al., 2009). Accordingly, some disabilities may be disclosed with ease when the student thinks that this is visible and the effect on their social life is minimal (Evans, 2017;

Tinklin et al. 2005). Thus, the disabled students keep the discussion of their impairment minimal when it is not visible, especially those related to emotional challenges.

Additionally, disclosure is influenced by the time an individual experienced disability. Research has shown that people who experienced disability in their youthful or adult stages of life are usually apprehensive about disclosure and this mirrors self-oppression and pity (Deal, 2003; 2007). This could be due to the nature of the disability (Deal, 2007). Although the literature provides significant insight into the perceptions of disclosure to obtain support services, these studies often did not distinguish between the disclosure of disabilities to higher educational institutions and peers in higher education (Grimes et al., 2019; Kranke, 2013; Madriaga et al.2008; Majoko, 2018). However, Madriaga et al. (2008) reported that majority of students with disabilities did not disclose their disabilities to peers because of the perception of negative consequences. In addition, Watson (2002 p.255) found that students with disabilities did not disclose disability to peers because they perceived that “there is no social status to be gained from coming out disabled”. This suggests that the peers of students with disabilities may not be able to provide the needed support for these students. Understanding students with disabilities motivation to disclose or otherwise is therefore significant for discussion as it enables institutions of higher learning to identify how to plan for students with disabilities.

2.3.2 Selecting a location to study

The decision to pursue higher education begins with a choice of where to study as this has an influence on participation and inclusion (Whitehead et al., 2006). Although both disabled and non-disabled students consider choice of location of higher education important, disabled students see this as more crucial because of anxiety associated with impairment and the desire of obtaining extra support (Beauchap-Pryor, 2013). For students with disabilities, the decision

to choose a particular higher education institution is influenced by the desire to maintain relationships and the presence of support (Foster 2009).

The desire to maintain relationships with family and friends influences students with disabilities' choice of higher educational institutions. Being closer to family and friends enhances students with disabilities' ability to receive continued support (Elliot & Wilson, 2008; Mama et al., 2011). This ensures that students who are concerned about the complexities of living alone are able to maintain relationships and obtain support (Puncell et al. 2008; Foster, 2009). The indication is that being closer to the support network influences the decision to select a particular location to study (Brooks 2004; Foster, 2009). In general, students with complex needs wish to be closer to people who understand their situation and needs (Harnet, 2016). However, this may deny such students the opportunity to obtain their preferred academic programmes. For example, if disabled applicants are city dwellers whose local institutions receive a higher number of applications, competition for admission may reduce opportunities for disabled applicants. Alternatively, other institutions, particularly those in rural areas, may have fewer applications and therefore target under-privileged students in order to increase student numbers (Beauchap-Pryor, 2013), although the location may make it difficult for a disabled applicant to consider applying for admission. Notwithstanding this, students with disabilities sometimes select institutions that are far away from the home environment, Pampaloni (2010) argues that this is influenced by the presence of a family member or a friend who can offer support services to them. Accordingly, for Beauchap-Pryor (2013), although the programme of study may be a factor, the presence of family members where support can be obtained precedes all motivators.

Perceptions of support available for students with disabilities at higher educational institutions also influences decisions to select a particular location to study. This suggests that special provisions of support available to students with disabilities who are admitted also influences

disabled applicants to select a particular higher education (Beauchap-Pryor, 2013; Fuller et al, 2009; Liasidou, 2014; Seale et al. 2013). Evidence show that students with disabilities experience challenges in their institutions of learning (Leathwood, 2005; Morina, 2017). They, therefore, consider the support the institutions would provide when selecting a location to study. However, research shows that provision of institutional support services available for those who are admitted into higher educational institutions in sub-Saharan Africa are limited (Fotim, 2011; Odhiabo, 2016). This, according to Odhiabo (2016), is an indication that admission into higher education is biased towards non-disabled students.

2.3.3 Sources of support for students with disabilities' education

Support has been noted as an important element that aids the accessibility and belonging of disabled students in higher education, hence, an important aspect of inclusive practice (Wray, 2013). The effective implementation of support services in higher education has positive effects on the experiences of disabled students (Elliot & Wilson, 2008; Holloway, 2001; Wray, 2013). It assists in removing challenges and allows for an inclusive environment (Fuller et al., 2009; Jacklin and Robinson 2007; Redpath et al. 2013). Similarly, the provision of support services in higher education provides disabled students with equal opportunities which enhances their academic achievements (Madriaga et al., 2011; Morina et al., 2017; Piggot & Houghton, 2007). The provision of requisite support has also been seen as a source of empowerment for students with disabilities since it reduces their dependence on non-disabled students (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2013; Vickerman & Blundell, 2010).

The challenge, however, is that students with hidden disabilities are usually unaware of the existence of disability support services (Elliot & Wilson, 2008; Sanderson, 2001). The lack of awareness may be due to ineffective communication and promotion of disability support services at the institutions of higher education. Elliot and Wilson (2008) explore this issue in

detail, showing that communication and promotion of support in higher education is essential for students to be proactive in receiving advice to access the requisite support. In other instances, support may be provided but this may not be of great benefit to students with disabilities. A case in point is in United Kingdom where Vickerman and Blundell (2010) acknowledged that in some situations disabled students are given information about support services but the majority of students do not find the information useful. While the study failed to clarify why the information provided was not useful, the findings strengthened the significance of effective communication in identifying sources of support in higher education. This, notwithstanding, other studies have identified that some disabled students are not willing to pursue support for their disabilities, a situation that signifies the heterogeneity of disabled students in as far as accessing support in higher education is concerned (Robert, 2009; Jacklin & Robinson 2007).

Furthermore, it has been recognised that poor support (those that does not meet the diverse needs of students) negatively affects disabled students experiences in higher education (Redpath et al., 2013). It does not only affect the social life of these students but also leads to personal frustrations (Jacklin & Robinson, 2007)). This has been associated with “doing battle” where disabled students become “battle hardened” in order to demand the rights to which they are entitled (Goode 2007 p.44). Other studies explain that provision of support is most often absent at the beginning of disabled students’ studies and has to be arranged for them (Piggot & Houhgtton, 2007; Redpath et al., 2013; Robert, 2009). For instance, in the United Kingdom, students had to request support from the university (Piggot & Houghton, 2007), a condition that made them spend time away from academic activities arranging for support (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2013; Goode, 2007). Although these studies did not state how the students battled or arranged for support, they acknowledged the fact that disabled students experienced difficulties in obtaining support in the universities. Studies in sub-Saharan Africa show that students with

disabilities experience difficulties accessing support services and in most cases students have to arrange them with staff and non-disabled students (FOTIM, 2011; Mosia, 2017; Morley & Croft 2011). The active involvement of disabled students in organising support means they have additional commitments which further cause emotional stress because they have to battle for support as well as manage the challenges of university life (Robert, 2009 & Goode, 2007). Thus, disabled students experience more challenges when support services are not provided efficiently in higher education.

Sometimes the challenge of receiving support from higher educational institutions is constrained by delay in the provision of equipment and the absence of knowledge or incapability to use the equipment (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2013; Riddell et al., 2005). The presence of equipment without adequate knowledge of its use makes support provision difficult to achieve. Research reveals difficulties of implementation of support services to be associated with the attitude of staff who are mandated to provide such services (Huskin, Reiser-Robbins & Kwon, 2018; Riddell et al., 2002). According to Huskin et al. (2018), positive attitudes encourage non-disabled people to render support services to students with disabilities, with those who understand disabled students providing the support required in the teaching and learning process (Harnett, 2016; LaForce et al., 2016; Roberts, 2009). This suggests that awareness of disability is paramount in the provision of support in higher educational institutions. Making provisions of support accessible and transparent so that both the staff and students are aware of the support processes has been recommended (Matthew 2009). The information on support procedures according to Matthew (2009), should specify what support services are available, and when and how they can be accessed. This can be done through collaboration between departments in higher education since this has been noted to ensure effective support coordination and provision (Georgeson 2013). However, departmental

collaboration is difficult due to staff beliefs, departmental codes and university policies which are sometimes contradictory (Georgeson 2013).

Informal processes such as interaction between disabled students, peers and lecturers have been noted as an essential gateway through which these students can receive support in institutions of higher learning (Jacklin & Robinson 2007). Students with disabilities academic achievement is enhanced when there is good association with non-disabled students, a situation that makes them feel a sense of belonging in higher education (Roberts, 2009). However, in sub-Saharan Africa where issues with disabilities are linked with spirits and evil, associating with students with disabilities is challenging because of myths surrounding disability. This suggests that students with disabilities in sub-Saharan Africa may find it difficult to access higher education if these beliefs are not targeted through awareness creation.

Evidence shows that there is no significant difference in the academic achievements of students with disabilities who receive support, and the academic achievements of non-disabled students (Madriaga et al., 2011). However, a significant difference has been noted in academic achievement between students with disabilities and their non-disabled counterparts where support services were not provided for the former (Madriaga et al., 2011). Hence, institutional support can be considered essential to the success of students with disabilities in higher education. Obtaining an understanding of the impact of support services available to students with disabilities in higher education can help guide institutions in planning support for these students. However, research in Ghana is silent on the support services available in institutions of higher education and its impact on students with disabilities.

2.3.4 The value of higher education to students with disabilities

Globally, education is increasingly considered as a means of achieving political, social, economic, cultural and personal development of the individual and society. In achieving these,

higher education becomes the gateway. Higher education has been perceived as a way through which people can be lifted out of poverty (Terzi, 2008, 2014). James (2007) observes that the role of higher education in changing the lives of people including persons with disabilities is significant as it aids career possibilities and lifelong learning. This suggests that higher education may be essential in assisting persons living with disabilities to have access to the labour market, reducing the level of unemployment among disabled people and providing opportunities for them to be independent in their lives (Riddell et al., 2010).

Obtaining good paying jobs has been one reason for students accessing higher education. Studies show that disabled students pursue higher education with the aim of obtaining economic gains (Madriaga, 2007; Marandet & Wainright, 2010; Hoskins & Newstead, 2009; Morley, 2012b; Ndlovu, 2017; Ndlovu & Walton, 2016). Thus, higher education qualification assists in obtaining employment (Elliot & Wilson, 2008; Burchardt, 2004; Hadjidakou et al., 2008; Hoskins & Ilie, 2017). Although society has been structured in such a way as to expose PWD to various difficulties including poverty and lower employment rate as compared to non-disabled people (Shah, 2016), higher education has been perceived to ensure good employment opportunities for PWD (Sarka 2012). Thus, a higher education qualification is perceived to widen opportunities for PWD. This suggests that any act by non-disabled people or the institutions of learning to compound the challenges students with disabilities experience is unfair. Therefore, Kreider, Bendixen and Lutz (2015) as well as Leonardo and Grubb (2018) suggest that the challenges disabled students experience in accessing higher education portrays unfairness that exists in the education system. This unfairness arises because people working with students with disabilities do not recognise higher education as a sustainable progression route for them because disabled students have been associated with lower expectations and poor academic capabilities (Wray, 2013).

Acquisition of new knowledge for social and economic development of an individual and society is one reason PWD access higher education (Hadjikakou, & Hartas, 2008). In the context of knowledge acquisition, higher education does not only become an agent for scientific and technological change, but an avenue to train people capable of using the new technologies to aid production and management (Sarkar, 2012). This implies that higher education enhances people's capacity to develop new skills which increases productivity. For example, the ability to use technology depends on the accumulation of knowledge, information and abilities which are obtained from education. In the current world where knowledge interchanges with physical capital, acquisition of new knowledge has become the main source of growth for the individual and society (Bertolin, 2018). Thus, higher education is recognised as the main agent for the growth of the knowledge world. Recognising the merits of higher education in the production of knowledge influences students with disabilities to access and participate in higher education, a condition that could make PWD useful to themselves and societies.

The worth of higher education has also been noted in its ability to provide equal opportunities for all people, contributing to social equality (Smith, 2020). Consequently, higher education becomes one of the avenues through which people contribute to the socio-economic development of societies. Higher education has, therefore, been the conduit through which expertise are developed, a primary tool for individual and community development. According to Teague et al. (2015), higher education provides opportunities for PWD to obtain respect and dignity in society. This recognition in society resulting from higher education could overshadow an individual's disability which otherwise would have been more visible. A study by Hout (2012) shows that higher education provides leadership opportunities, professional development and personal growth which is able to transform marginalised individuals including PWD to become prominent in society. Other studies maintain that people with higher

education qualifications demonstrate democratic attitude and opinions which reduce prejudice, discrimination and stigmatisation (Hout, 2012; Hillygus, 2005). The underlying issue is that higher education creates opportunities for people to be dynamic, tolerant and responsive to the socio-economic needs of society (Smith, 2020).

Despite all the benefits offered by higher education, a few limitations have been noted particularly in relation to PWD. Research shows that a higher education qualification is not necessarily a panacea to unemployment among PWD since they find it difficult to obtain employment even after obtaining such qualifications (McCloy & DeClou, 2013). This has, however, been attributed to employers' reluctance to engage the services of these people due to perceived low level of skills possessed by PWD (Riddell et al., 2010). Although people with disabilities expect to be treated like their non-disabled counterparts, it has been observed that they are unfairly treated with respect to finding employment (Wilson, 2004). This confirms Burchardt's (2005) argument that although PWD have high aspirations, these have not been transformed into equivalent job-related opportunities in many countries. In all these, the value of higher education has been underscored in research, with evidence showing that people with disabilities who have higher educational qualifications have lower unemployment rate compared to those without such qualifications (Naami, Hayashi & Liese, 2012). Higher education has, therefore, been recognised as a means of obtaining recognition in society since employment has been linked with independent living and ability to support societal development (Riddell et al., 2010).

2.4 Discrimination and stigmatisation

Discrimination is defined as any form of inhuman treatment, whether intentional or unintentional meted out to PWD because of their impairments (Goreczyny et al., 2011). This

suggests that discrimination is a different form of negative treatment experienced by PWD as a result of their impairment. This negative treatment towards people with disabilities can include visible or invisible barriers that pose difficulties for students with disabilities in institutions of learning (Goreczyny et al., 2011). Article 2 of UNCRPD defines it as follows:

Discrimination on the basis of disability means any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. It includes all forms of discrimination, including denial of reasonable accommodation (UN, 2006 p.4).

Article 17 (3) of the Constitution of Ghana also defines discrimination as:

To give different treatment to different persons attributable only or mainly to their respective descriptions by law, place of origin, political opinions, colour, gender, occupation, religion or creed whereby persons of one description are subjected to disabilities or restrictions to which persons of another description are made subject or are granted privileges or advantages which are not granted to persons of another description (Republic of Ghana, 1992 p.13).

The above definitions show that discrimination arises due to other people's negative attitudes and behaviour towards people with disabilities.

The significance of understanding the ways in which discrimination originated has been emphasised by different researchers. According to Coleridge (1993), discrimination originates from people's attitude and behaviour. Coleridge argues that if other people did not react with horror, fear, anxiety or patronising behaviour towards people with disabilities, there would be no discrimination. Available evidence indicates that people with disabilities encounter discrimination due to lack of non-disabled people's understanding of their condition (Gleeson,

2001; Imrie & Hall, 2001; Mantey, 2017). Usually the discriminatory attitude towards people with disabilities are visible in the social and cultural environment which exacerbates the social distance between people living with and without disability. Baffoe (2013) argues that discriminatory treatment towards people with disabilities emanates from the general misconception of the causes of disability and the belief system. He believes that discrimination can lead to devaluation of self-worth of people, aggression, exclusion and oppression of those who are affected (Baffoe 2013). Thus, discrimination could affect all facets of an individual's life including accessing and participating in education as well as engaging in meaningful relationships.

Several studies in sub-Saharan Africa maintain that students with disabilities in higher education experience discrimination because their non-disabled peers and lecturers do not feel comfortable to accept them (FOTIM, 2011; Lorenzo, 2003; Mama et al. 2011; Motonya, 2016; Mosia, 2017; Opini, 2012). For example, Mama et al. (2011) stated that students with visual disabilities in some Ghanaian higher educational institutions experience discrimination because some lecturers do not feel comfortable when they see disabled students in their class. The discrimination students with disabilities experience from the university community does not pertain only to sub-Saharan African countries but in advanced countries as well. In Spain, Morina, Cortes and Melero (2014) reported that the majority of lecturers in higher education demonstrate discriminatory attitude toward students with disabilities. Similarly, Strnadova, Hajkova and Kvetonova (2015) and Hopkins (2011) found in Czech Republic and UK universities respectively that lecturers were indifferent to the needs of students with disabilities. In Ghana, most people equate disability with inability, with the general perception being that people with disability cannot make any meaningful contribution to themselves and society (Bott & Owusu, 2013). Discrimination as perceived by Ghanaians is deeply rooted in the generally shared attitude, values, and beliefs. Realising the effects of discrimination, there have

been some attempts by the government of Ghana to eradicate discrimination against people living with disability and this is evidenced in the National Constitution of Ghana (Republic of Ghana 1992) and the Disability Act 2006 (Act, 715) (Republic of Ghana, 2006). However, Lamtey et al. (2015) reports that this has not been achieved since there is widespread discrimination against PWD in every facet of life. The effect of discrimination is devastating because PWD feel isolated, rejected and have lower self-esteem when making friends (Harnett, 2016). Although discrimination has been recognised as a major challenge in education especially as pertained to those with disabilities, it may be reduced or even eliminated if there is intensive education on the causes of disability in order to increase knowledge and awareness. Furthermore, a good collaboration between disabled students and non-disabled peers can ensure educational inclusion and co-construction of disability understanding (Gabel, 2017).

Closely related to discrimination is stigmatisation, another factor that influence inclusive practice in institutions of higher education. Stigmatisation has been defined as a negative and prejudicial way people with disabilities are perceived and labelled (Agbenyaga, 2003). A stigmatised individual is believed to possess qualities that express social identity which is undervalued in a particular context. Stigma has been conceptualised as convergence of interrelated components which occur when differences are labelled, linked to negative stereotypes, and allow people to be categorised as different from others (Link & Phelan, 2001). Stigma occurs when other people realise that there is a feature in a person that is divergent from a 'norm' in a social unit where the "norm" is seen as a shared belief and characteristic that a person needs to show at certain times in order to be accepted as "normal" (Fishbein 2014). In sub-Saharan Africa, stigmatisation experienced by people with disability arise due to superstition, ignorance, inadequate disability knowledge as well as socio-cultural beliefs (Agbenyega, 2003; Baffoe, 2013; Chataika et al., 2012). Indeed, stigma can be classified as a complex social problem which creates social inequalities which can only be addressed through

understanding of the social systems that create them. Stigmatisation remains a threat to the education of students with disabilities and inclusive practice since it makes students with disabilities frustrated and uncomfortable in institution of learning (Mantey, 2014).

In many instances, stigma has been noted from the perspective of PWD themselves. Self-stigma occurs when persons with disabilities internalise the negative attitudes experienced in their environment leading to low self-esteem (Dhar, 2009). Sometimes, people with disabilities unconsciously admit stigmatising attitudes and behaviour although this admission is socially disempowering (Vlachou & Papananou 2015). Stigma, therefore, leads some people with disabilities to consider themselves with disdain, seeing themselves as worthless due to lack of social recognition (Corigan et al., 2016; Vogel et al., 2013). Negative labelling has been a dominant experience of persons with disability in Ghana, a condition that forms part of public degradation which defines disability identity (Agbenyega 2003). These labels are usually socially defined and reflect the value systems of the society. It has, therefore, been suggested that it is only when we examine the cultural values in context that their full effect on persons with disability can be realised (Norwich, 1999).

2.5 Policy framework and implementation

Globally, there has been international commitment towards safeguarding the education of PWD in mainstream educational settings (Fuller, Riddell, & Weedon, 2009a; Hadjidakou & Hartas, 2008). Several policies including the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (UN, 1994), the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), the Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006) and Sustainable Development Goals (2015) have all supported

the education of PWD. Pivotal among these international policies is the 1994 Salamanca Statement which positions inclusive education as the most effective means of safeguarding the educational rights of PWD (UNESCO, 1994). However, a critical analysis of these documents shows that with the exception of the UNCRC which enjoins governments to ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access general tertiary education without discrimination, most of these policies focus more on the education of children with disabilities. Thus, sufficient attention has not been given to the education of students with disabilities at the tertiary level. Access and participation of students with disabilities in higher education may not be actualised unless there are clear institutional or local policies informed by national policies. Studies have shown that ineffective institutional or local and national policies on inclusive education at higher educational institutions create accessibility challenges for students with disabilities (Hadjikakou et al. 2010; Matshediso, 2007).

In realising the significance of national and institutional policies in the education of students with disabilities in sub-Saharan Africa, several countries including Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Zambia have all developed strong inclusive policies safeguarding the education of students with disabilities (Chataika et al. 2012; Dart, 2009; Johnstone, 2007; Mwapopo et al., 2011; Opini, 2012;). These policies are developed to influence attitudes, support and equip non-disabled people including lecturers with requisite skills to meet the needs of students with disabilities. For instance, Botswana has integrated inclusive education into their teacher education programmes (Dart, 2009).

The promulgation of policies on inclusive education in Africa signals the determination of African governments to make education at all levels accessible to their citizens. Recognizing the policy efforts being made by African countries, development partners have sought to help Ghana and other African nations to strengthen the policy structure. The Disability-Inclusive Education in Africa Programme (DEAP) by the World Bank is one such initiative assisting

Ghana and many African countries to strengthen inclusive policies (World Bank, 2018). The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF), recognising that disability-inclusive policies and strategies can help improve education of persons with disabilities starting from the systems level, have been spearheading programmes that aim to raise awareness of inclusive policy and planning practices across Africa (Mcclain-Nhlapomark & Banik, 2018). Among other things, these programmes aim to provide policy and programmatic support and appropriate tools to implement key interventions in African countries. With the support of development partners and appropriate programmes, the policy framework in Ghana and other African countries can only get stronger (Owusu et al. 2019).

Although most sub-Saharan African countries have enacted inclusive policies, there are implementation challenges. Several studies indicate that there are gaps regarding equity and quality in stated policies and standard practice of these policies in an inclusive settings in many countries (Amadio 2009 Chataika et al. 2012; Dart, 2009; Johnstone, 2007; Mwapopo et al., 2011; Opini, 2012). For example, evidence from Kenya, South Africa and Tanzania all indicate that although there is existence of inclusive policies, there are implementation challenges, a key one being poor awareness (Engelbrecht and De Beer, 2014; Disability Policy of Republic of Kenya, 2015; Morley and Croft, 2011). In contrast, in higher income countries such as the United Kingdom and Norway, policy awareness on inclusive education has been found to be high among stakeholders in education (Brandt, 2011; Kendall, 2016). Studies support the fact that where stakeholders feel involved and become aware of the policy development process, they support implementation (Owusu, Basu & Barnett, 2019; Howlett & Ramesh, 1995). From the foregoing discussions, it can be deduced that sub-Saharan African countries have several challenges preventing the implementation of inclusive educational policies.

This notwithstanding, education of students with disabilities in higher education has gained traction because institutions have recognised that they cannot remain closed to these students (Morina, 2017; Mwapopo et al., 2011). The social justice and equality movement positions inclusive education as one of the most important policies countries should embrace. Nevertheless, it has not been satisfactorily carried out in many sub-Saharan African countries because there are no clear and enabling local or institutional policies (UNESCO, 2010). There is evidence that inclusive practice in sub-Saharan African countries have been influenced by different factors including attitudes of non-disabled people, policy knowledge, inadequate resources, large class size and inaccessible built environment (Amadio, 2009). These factors are a threat to inclusive learning when they are not addressed in both national and local policies.

One of the main factors influencing implementation of inclusive education policies in sub-Saharan Africa is attitude of stakeholders (Opini, 2012). Usually, policy implementation is affected by attitude of stakeholders in institutions of learning. If stakeholders demonstrate positive attitude towards students with disabilities, there is the likelihood that inclusive policy implementation would be effective (Banks & Banks, 2019). For example, lecturers with positive attitude may play important roles in policy implementation in higher education. Studies show that lecturers with positive attitude demonstrate socially inclusive pedagogy that is culturally responsive, engaging and sensitive to the needs of all students (Banks & Banks, 2019; Lombardi et al. 2015; Lombardi et al. 2011; Morina, 2017; Smyth, 2011). Conversely, policy implementation becomes challenging when there is negative attitude of stakeholders in higher education (Karangwa, 2008). The negative attitudes lead to inadequate policy support from non-disabled people such as lecturers and this affects the smooth implementation of policies (Lombardi, Murray & Kowitt, 2016; Quinn, 2013). For example, in Zambia, it was seen as illogical to spend money on education of students with disabilities because of the belief that they could not be integrated seamlessly into the society (Kalabula, 2000). Investment in

their education is therefore seen as a waste of resources. According to Shevlin, Kenny and Neela, (2004), the negative attitude by non-disabled people emanates from the fact that the current arrangement that allows students with disabilities access to higher education is ineffective due to inadequate knowledge to manage these students. This suggests that obtaining policy knowledge and disability information ignite positive attitude toward implementation of policies (Owusu et al., 2019). For example, Carlson and Witschey (2018) found that undergraduate students portrayed positive attitude toward students with disabilities after a semester course in disability studies. The indication is that when non-disabled people obtain insight into issues of disabilities, they provide reasonable accommodation (Zhang et al., 2010). However, UNESCO (2010) reports that there is scarcity of personnel with insight into disability issues to ensure policy support in sub-Saharan Africa. The implication is that if the knowledge base is not strong to influence positive change in the attitudes of university staff and non-disabled students, policy implementation would be difficult (Forlin, 2010). In Ghana, most non-disabled people within institutions of higher learning have negative attitude towards students with disabilities (Baffoe, 2013; Mama et al., 2011). This makes inclusive practice in Ghanaian universities difficult.

Another factor influencing implementation of policies and inclusive practice in higher education is inadequate resources. Insufficient resources have been widely accepted as a critical barrier to inclusive practice in educational institutions (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Claiborne et al., 2011; Marginson, 2016; Rowe, Muchatuta & Wood, 2010; Shevlin, Winter & Flynn, 2013). This challenge is so pronounced that even some of the advanced countries use it as an excuse for unsuccessful inclusive practice (Madriaga et al. 2010). Educational institutions are, therefore, not able to provide the necessary support for the needs of few disabled students who are able to access higher education (Matshediso, 2007; Meteru, 2007; Ramaahlo, Tönsing, & Bornman, 2018). According to Ramaahlo, et al. (2018), inadequate resources in higher

education deepen accessibility challenges because underprivileged students such as students with disabilities find it difficult to access the requisite services. In the context of Africa, several studies indicate that higher educational institutions lack resources to support disabled students because of low commitment of national governments towards the education of people with disabilities (Lorenzo, 2003; Chataika, 2010; Matshediso, 2007; Materu, 2007; Mwapopo et al, 2011; Opini, 2012). This leads to access and participation challenges in inclusive practice, damaging the image of the educational system in many countries (Madriaga et al., 2010).

Large class size and overcrowding are critical impediments to successful implementation of policy and inclusive practice. Madriaga (2007) observes that large class sizes make it difficult for lecturers to identify the diverse needs of individual students, with other researchers indicating that this creates excessive workload for lecturers (Salome et al., 2013). Consequently, the lecturers tend to use a “one size fits all” approach in teaching, a view which Chataika (2010) and Govero (2019) observe as challenging because it makes it difficult for achievement of inclusive education. In Kenya, overcrowding makes inclusive practice challenging because students with disabilities are forced to stand in the corridors to learn when classes are in session (Salome, Mbugua, & Ong’eta, 2013). In the Ghanaian context, Yelkperri et al. (2012) report that inadequate staffing, infrastructure and equipment have led to large class sizes which affects the quality of teaching and assessment of students. This suggests that students with disabilities in Ghanaian universities experience double jeopardy as they have to battle with disability and overcrowded classroom.

The built environment including the stairs, lifts, toilets, walkways are considered one of the main factors influencing policy implementation and inclusive practice in higher education (Hadjikakou et al., 2010; Morina, 2017). Different studies exploring the experiences of students with disabilities indicate the critical effects of the built environment on inclusive practice and policy implementation in higher education (FOTIM, 2011; Hadjikakou et al., 2010; Lorenzo,

2003; Morina, 2017; Madriaga et al., 2010). The inadequate transformation leading to inaccessibility of the built environment of institutions of higher education has been attributed to policy makers' reluctance to give priority to disability issues (Balabanova, Mills, Conteh, Akkazieva, Banteyerga, Dash, McKee, 2013; Mwaipopo et al. 2011). The presence of these physical barriers in the institutions of higher education pose a threat to inclusive practice (Chataika, 2012; FOTIM 2011; Lorenzo, 2003; Ntombela, 2013). The negative effects of inaccessible built environment is evident in sub-Saharan African institutions and other universities in advanced countries, with this negatively affecting inclusive practice (Hadjikakou, Polycarpou & Hadjilia, 2010; Koca-Atabey, Karachi, Dirik and Aydemir 2011; Strnanova, Hajkova & Kvetonova, 2015). If the built environment which is fundamental to the success of students with disabilities is inaccessible, it makes daily activities of these students difficult.

Notwithstanding resource constraints affecting implementation of policies and inclusive practice, some countries in Africa are making efforts to transform the built environment in higher educational institutions to suit the needs of students with disabilities. In Lesotho and Tanzania, Mosia (2017) and Mwapopo et al., (2011) observe that a conscious effort is being made to ensure that the physical environment and facilities within universities become accessible to students with disabilities. This is in consonance with other studies which enjoins universities to respond to the needs of all students (Fuller, Bradley & Healey 2004; Doughty & Allan, 2008; Prowse, 2009).

2.6 Summary

This chapter highlighted key issues in the education of students with disabilities. The chapter discussed pertinent issues on how people understand disability through the models of disability.

This chapter emphasised that non-disabled people in sub-Saharan Africa including Ghana understand disability from the perspectives of medical and its related models such as superstitious and charity models and this affects their attitude towards PWD. The chapter further elaborated that achieving inclusive education is difficult since there is no universal understanding of the concept of inclusion. However, the best way to eradicate stigma, discrimination and marginalisation is through inclusive education. Literature on understanding of accessibility and its effect on the education of students with disabilities were discussed. It was discussed that location of university, disclosure of disability and support services at the university influence the accessibility of a university. Furthermore, the chapter established that the motivation for students with disabilities to obtain higher qualification overshadows the difficulties they perceive to experience in higher education. This chapter further stressed that although there has been proliferation of inclusive policies in sub-Saharan African countries, there are implementation challenges including discrimination, stigma, inadequate resources and lack of policy knowledge

Chapter Three

Methodology

This chapter describes the overall methodological approach and methods used in the study. The chapter begins with a presentation of an overview of the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings upon which the research is based. Next, a description of the research approach as well as the research design adopted for the study are discussed. The chapter then outlines the methods used for data collection including interviews, observations and documentary sources. This is then followed by an explanation of the analytical procedures used for the study. Additionally, the chapter outlines the methods used to ensure rigour and trustworthiness of the study findings. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how ethical principles were adhered to in the study.

3.1 Social constructionism

This research was conducted based on the tenets of social constructionism which posits that meanings are not discovered but constructed (Crotty, 1998). There have been many discussions about the meaning of social constructionism by researchers (Burr, 1995, 2015; Crotty, 1998; Cojocaru & Bragaru, 2012; Owen 1995). According to Burr (1995, 2015), social constructionism is the conviction that knowledge about a particular phenomenon goes with social action and that what we classify as ‘normal’ or ‘abnormal’ is influenced by the attributes people within a particular society give to a phenomenon. The indication is that meanings are not discovered but constructed through interaction between a subject (individual) and an object (society) (Crotty 1998)). According to Cojocaru and Bragaru (2012), these meanings are products of the prevailing framework of social, cultural, linguistic, discursive and symbolic practices. This suggests that it is the individual’s interaction with the environment or society that influences the interpretation and co-construction of their world (Burr, 2015; Crotty, 1998).

In contributing to this discussion, Owen (1995, p. 186) highlights the role of culture, stating that “social constructionism is the claim and viewpoint that the content of our consciousness and mode of relating to others is taught by our culture and society”. Social constructionists therefore maintain that socio-cultural norms and beliefs influence the way people relate to others. This means that individual identity is determined by others, hence, socio-cultural standards influence the categories used to describe people (Dudley-Marling, 2004). Social constructionism, therefore, requires people to take a critical position in understanding commonplace issues in the real world (Burr, 2015). It can, therefore, be argued that taken-for-granted elements such as other peoples’ attitudes that pose challenges to students with disabilities in a particular context may be socially constructed.

An important philosophical attribute of social constructionism is the concept of truth in knowledge. Social constructionists argue that there is no absolute ‘truth’ and that people’s thoughts are not only influenced by a particular culture and history but also by the socio-economic conditions prevailing within a particular society at a point in time (Burr 2015, 1995; Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007). This means that there is no universally accepted truth about a particular phenomenon since individuals are born into the world where the concepts and categories used by societies are always in the process of social construction (Burr, 2015). Thus, social constructionists put emphasis on different dimensions of reality of knowledge and examine how meanings are constructed. To put this in perspective, MacArthur and Quinlivan (2012, p.240) indicated that “socially constructed understandings are constantly being produced, and then challenged by new social interactions”. This suggests that the culture upon which an individual is born influence their knowledge about truth. Thus, peoples’ perceptions and understanding toward a particular phenomenon are different based on the culture, context and time (Philip & Jergensen, 2002).

Social constructionism is significant in the current study because it highlights the socio-cultural elements that influence attitudes and behaviours which affect the daily experiences of students with disabilities. One of the philosophies used in obtaining deeper understanding of phenomena that involve human action in qualitative enquiry is social constructionism (MacArthur & Higgins, 2007). In the present study, understanding how disability is constructed in Ghanaian contexts could facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities in the teaching and learning space of the university. Social constructionism could also guide the understanding of exclusionary practices or barriers that impact the education of students with disabilities. Thus, social constructionism could draw attention to taken-for-granted issues that affect students with disabilities in the university. In this way, the necessary changes that influence the education of students with disabilities could be achieved. Thus, social constructionism draws attention to negative attitudes toward students with disabilities and proposes possible ways this could be changed. Social constructionism would therefore help in understanding these socio-cultural elements that affect inclusive practice and experiences of students with disabilities in higher education

3.2 Critical disability theory

The theoretical framework underpinning this thesis is Critical Disability Theory (CDT). In addition to its main objective of human emancipation from oppression, CDT seeks to champion the transformation of societies (Goodley, Liddiard, & Runswick, 2018; Hosking 2008; Meekosha & Shuttleworth 2009). This theory emerged from Critical theory which looks into the possibility of developing a systematic way of thinking where historical circumstances can be incorporated in order to challenge and address problems associated with unjust societies (Anderson, 2006; Anyon et al., 2018; Giroux, 2009). Different historical conditions come with

different challenges and need different solutions. Giroux (2003) believes critical theory defines and is defined by the difficulties created by the circumstances it attempts to address. Critical theory is both descriptive and normative, with the aim of emancipating people from the domination of others in power and authority. Despite the inherent objective of human emancipation, critical theory according to Hosking (2008), has not addressed the specialised needs of people with disability. This is because it has failed to balance the experiences of PWD and the challenges the social environment creates that impede the daily lived experiences of these people, hence, the emergence of Critical Disability Theory (CDT).

Critical Disability Theory asserts that encouraging the education of students with disabilities in the mainstream requires transformation of the environment in order to enable students who are marginalised, stigmatised and discriminated against to participate in education (Hamraie, 2016; Hosking, 2008). Critical Disability Theory, therefore, advocates for systemic changes in the social system (Schalk, 2017). In arguing for the use of CDT to guide discourses on disability issues, Bohman (2012) reports that the core of CDT is to explain what is wrong with the current social reality, identify actors for change and provide clear norms for criticism and goals that may be achievable for social transformation. Similarly, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) maintain that the intention of CDT is not to give account of society and behaviour but to build a society which is grounded on equality and democracy of all members. Thus, the purpose of CDT is not only to understand situations and phenomena but to change them, emancipate the disempowered (such as persons with disabilities), address inequality and encourage accessibility, participation and success of all people in society (Bohman, 2012; Goodley, et al., 2018; Hosking 2008; Meekosha & Shuttleworth 2009).

One of the central purposes of CDT is to contest discrimination against people with impairment. Baynton (2001) and Rocco (2005) affirm that sometimes discrimination against students with disabilities is so ordinary that it remains invisible to be challenged. However,

CDT provides an opportunity to identify and challenge these seemingly ordinary issues that militate against students with disabilities in higher education (Goodley, 2016). Furthermore, this theory provides an opportunity to understand different issues that relate to disability and equality. Evidence shows that CDT could provide the foundation for understanding the relationships that exist between the legal, economic, political and social reasoning for inclusion of PWD and the systemic challenges and oppression that position PWD as unequal citizens (Devlin & Pothier, 2006; Rioux & Valentine, 2006). In this regard, CDT contests the conception that accentuates individual impairment as the cause of disability. Critical disability theory therefore argues that disability is caused by the lack of society's response to address barriers that create the disability (Devlin & Pothier, 2006), a view equally shared by social constructionists.

Research shows that students with disabilities have systematically been denied access to higher education in many countries as a result of marginalisation and subjugation (Chataika et al., 2012). However, this practice has been justified on the basis of students' biological deficiencies (Chataika et al., 2012; Hadjidakou et al. 2010; Liasidou, 2014; Morina, 2017). As a result, issues of students with disabilities are not taken into consideration when discussing concerns of unequal and discriminatory treatment (Baynton, 2001). Critical disability theory recognises educational rights as obligatory for the promotion of equality and inclusion of individuals with disabilities in all aspects of society including in the context of university education; and at the same time, welcoming and valuing students with disabilities' participation in higher education (Liasidou, 2014). To gain insight into persons with disabilities' experiences, CDT emphasises different factors including voice, language, and equality and social right (Hoskings, 2008).

The voices of PWD are fundamental components of CDT. The voice of students with disabilities have been under-recognised and marginalised in institutions of higher education and communities (Hosking, 2008; Liasidou, 2014). Critical disability theory builds on a

reflexive approach to social inquiry which depends on the stories of individuals with disabilities. Hosking (2008) believes that the only way to understand and value the worth of students with disabilities is to listen to their stories in order to recognise that living with disability does not prevent a meaningful life. Accordingly, CDT ensures that attention is given to students with disabilities to articulate their views and values they bring to higher education (Liasidou, 2014; Gale & Tranter, 2011). This indicates that considering students with disabilities' voices and perspectives should be dominant in any research that has the aim of promoting inclusive policies and practices (Gibson, 2012; Barton, 2005; Barnes, 2007).

Another component of CDT is the influence of language on the concept of disability and the status of people living with disability. This component is associated with the words and images used to describe or label people living with disabilities, and is very important because the language people use to describe individuals with disabilities affects their status and self-concept (Kress-White, 2009). Thus, the language non-disabled people direct at individuals with disabilities could motivate or demotivate them. In the African context, the language used to describe PWD is demeaning and influences negative attitudes toward them (Agbenyega, 2003). Usually, in higher educational institutions, the print and the visual media use words such as "deficient, pitiable, evil, wicked or maligned, dangerous or valueless" to describe students with disabilities (Baffoe, 2013 p.190). Critical disability theory, therefore, investigates the influence of these negative attitudes that portray disability as a tragic event and render persons with disability powerless, vulnerable and dependent (Hosking 2008).

This study adopted CDT for three reasons. First, the theory highlights the educational rights of people who are marginalised and discriminated against. Proponents of this theory believe in equality and social rights of people who are marginalised such as students with disabilities (Bohman, 2012; Goodley et al., 2018; Kress-White, 2009). It considers access to education for students with disabilities as a human rights issue destined to curtail marginalization of

individuals with disabilities in societies (Hosking, 2008). This theory is therefore suitable for this research as it could be used to expose hidden motivators that influence marginalisation and discrimination. Second, CDT provides the theoretical basis for the development of effective policy response to disability which could influence political and social institutions meant to safeguard the education of persons with impairments. In the present study, this theory provided understanding that guided me in exploring how policies have been implemented to influence the lived experiences of students with disabilities in the university. Third, the theory also provided guidance on selection of methodology, analysis, interpretation and discussion of the meanings and understanding of the lived experiences of students with disabilities in the Ghanaian higher education. Finally, CDT emphasises the transformational actions that could emancipate students with disabilities from the discriminatory social and environmental circumstances that are evident in sub-Saharan African societies (Baffoe, 2013; Chataika et al., 2012; Opini, 2012).

3.3 Research Approach

A qualitative research approach was used in this research. This approach puts emphasis on obtaining insight into the interpretation people make of their lived experiences in a given context. According to Taylor et al (2016), researchers who employ qualitative approach are concerned with obtaining in-depth understanding of the meanings participants make of their social world. Qualitative researchers, therefore, concern themselves in understanding the way individuals construct, interpret and provide meaning to their lived experiences (Marriam, 2009). The indication is that qualitative research approach allows researchers to interact with the social world of participants in order to empower them to share their stories (Creswell, 2013). In this, qualitative researchers empathise and identify with the people they study so that

they can understand how they perceive things in their social world (Patton, 2002; 2014). This is important to the current study since it focuses on how students with disabilities explain and understand their experiences in higher education (Bryman 2012).

Furthermore, qualitative researchers acknowledge how people think and act in their natural settings (Taylor et al., 2016). These researchers adopt strategies that solicit information on how people act in their natural environment (Rallis & Rossman, 2012). Consequently, qualitative research approaches allow meanings to emerge as participants share their experiences. Thus, “there is no hierarchy of credibility in qualitative research”, with every point of view being considered relevant because there is something to be learnt from it (Taylor et al 2016., p 10). In this regard, qualitative researchers begin interactions with normal conversations rather than a formal question-and-answer exchanges (Taylor et al., 2016).

For the current study, a qualitative research method was considered suitable because of the nature of the research under investigation. The study sought to answer ‘what’ and ‘how’ research questions. According to Yin (2009), qualitative research approaches are more suitable for exploring and answering ‘what’ and ‘how’ questions. Therefore, answering questions such as ‘what’ motivates students with disabilities to access higher education, and ‘how’ the policy environment influence the education of such students would be better explored using this approach.

Additionally, this approach allows researchers to obtain insight into people’s experiences from the perspectives of the participants involved in the study. Patton (2002) contends that qualitative research methods provide opportunities for researchers to understand phenomena from the perspective of participants. This is usually attained through contextual dialogue. In a study that deals with marginalised individuals, the research method should encourage contextual dialogue. Qualitative research methods are suitable for this study because they allow

participants an opportunity to share their lived experiences, allowing researchers to make sense of the patterns and meanings of participant's such experiences.

The qualitative approach was also adopted for this study because depth of information was required. This was important to this study because the focus of this research was to obtain in-depth understanding of participants experiences in a particular context (Mertens & Mclaughin, 2004; Ary, Jacobs, Irvine & Walke, 2018). This approach facilitated my ability to give rich description of the context in which students with disabilities in Ghanaian higher education learn. Besides, this approach has been used by different researchers investigating the experience of students with disabilities in different contexts. For example, Mosia (2017) used this approach to investigate access to higher education for students with disabilities in Lesotho. In the same way, Matonya's (2016) investigation of accessibility and participation in Tanzanian higher education from the perspectives of women with disabilities was done qualitatively. This approach has also been used effectively by Ntombela (2013) to research inclusive education and training in South African higher education: Mapping the experiences of a student with physical disability at a university. This suggests that qualitative approach is suitable in guiding research involving the experiences of students with disability. Using this approach to guide the current research is also appropriate.

3.4 Research design

Phenomenological design was adopted and used in the current study. This design focuses on the commonality of lived experiences of a particular group of people (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019). There are two approaches to phenomenology, descriptive and interpretative (Beck, 2019). While descriptive phenomenology focuses on describing the experiences of participants, interpretative phenomenology focuses on explaining the meaning of participants'

experiences. This study aligns with interpretive phenomenological framework which, aligned with social constructionism, share interest in obtaining in-depth understanding of phenomena. In this study, the phenomena is the lived experiences of students with disabilities. Phenomenology has, however, been seen to be more than looking at the day-to-day experiences and perceptions of an individual as it explores deeper into the meaningful incorporation of emotions, thoughts, culture and bodily experiences of an individual (Carel, 2013; Creswell, 2017). According to Maxwell (2013), phenomenology extracts the most pure, untainted data. For example, phenomenological account of an individual with physical disabilities would not only concern his joy and hopes but his frustrations, fears, anger and the difficulties he/she experiences each day.

Van Manen (1990) explains that “Phenomenology asks for the very nature of a phenomenon, for that which makes a ‘thing’ what it is, and without which it could not be what it is” (p.10). Therefore, in order to discover what the experiences of students with disabilities are in a Ghanaian university, it is necessary to understand the complex nature of their experiences. The job of the phenomenologist then is to deeply explain and interpret a phenomenon so that the reader can understand the “lived quality and significance of the experiences in a fuller or deeper manner” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 10). Phenomenology also takes this experiential essence and carries with it a “moral force” that may influence others actions and choices (Van Manen, 2016, 1990).

For in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, the phenomenological design enjoins researchers to listen to the voices of persons experiencing a life event as they tell their stories (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). Thus, this design allows people experiencing a phenomenon such as disability to be active agents for the change they expect in their lives, an important reason why this research design was chosen for the present study. This is because it is believed that lived experiences constitute “an integral part of the atmosphere and tone for any change within our

lives and our interaction with others, whether they be disabled or non-disabled” (Overboe, 1999 P.81). Thus, through this design, an in-depth understanding of people experiencing a common phenomenon may be provided. The understanding of these common experiences is considered important as deeper insights could assist in informing policy and practice.

A phenomenological design allows researchers to co-construct the meaning of participants’ experiences in order to uncover taken-for-granted elements both visible and invisible that influence their education (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). Hence, I listened to participants stories in order to obtain the understanding of their lived experiences in their lived domain. In addition, phenomenology is applicable when the researcher uses different methods for data collection (Creswell, 2013). In the current research, different data collection methods including interviews, observations and documentary analysis were used for data collection.

3.5 Research methods

3.5.1 Selecting research site and participants.

The selection of the research site is critical in the research process as it provides an opportunity for the researcher to generate context-specific data that sheds light on the issue of concern (Marshall & Rossman 2011). In the current research, I considered accessibility and possibility of obtaining participants when selecting the research location. One factor considered was the presence of disability unit at the university. Having a coordinated unit assisted in identifying suitable participants. This is because this served as a starting point to access information about potential participants. In addition, the promptness with which the university granted me access also influenced the selection. This was influenced by the University’s interest in understanding the experiences of students with disabilities on the services it provides for them.

I used purposive and snowball sampling to select research participants. According to Creswell (2013), purposive sampling is an intentional selection of participants for a study. The power and logic of purposive sampling is based on the opportunity it provides the researcher in selecting information-rich cases that would be of great importance to the purpose of the study (Patton, 2014; 2002). In addition, the snowball sampling technique is used when the researcher identifies an existing participant who provides a referral to recruit persons who have the desired characteristic of interest (Etikan & Bela, 2017). In the current study, purposive and snowball sampling guided me in selecting participants that showed characteristics which were of interest to this study.

In recruiting students with disabilities, I collaborated with the Disability Unit of the University to put notices on the notice boards of the university to invite students to volunteer to participate. The notices included my personal information (email and mobile phone number), rationale and the aim of the research as indicated on the information sheet. The following criteria also guided my selection of students' participants: the participant must be enrolled in the university, must be interested and ready to volunteer for interview and must be disabled. In this study, I did not want to involve any research assistants due to the sensitive nature of disability issues in Ghana. The snowball sampling commenced after one student showed an interest in participating in the study. The first volunteer student (Bash) served as an informant who introduced me to other possible participants. Hence, snowball sampling was a valuable supplement to increase the size of the population of this study. Information sheets and consent forms were issued to these students who volunteered to participate to reflect their participation. See table 3.1 for details of participants of the study.

Purposive sampling technique was also used in selecting a staff participant who is disabled and a former student of the university. In selecting the staff member, I wrote to the identified staff who possessed the desired characteristics officially to invite him to participate in the study. The

rationale and aim of the research was explained to him. The invitation note also contained my email address and phone number he could use to contact me. In all, eleven participants participated in this study, ten students and one lecturer.

In this study, there were only two female participants. This was influenced by the educational inequality between female and male students with access favouring male students (Atuahene & Owusu-Ansah, 2013). A number of reasons have been implicated in gender-disparity in higher education in Ghana and include socio-cultural practices and gendered social practices (Casely-Hayford, 2011; Morley et al., 2010). Culturally, parents in the rural areas mostly sacrifice the education of the girl-child by asking them to support the family economically by engaging in petty trading (Atuahene & Owusu-Ansah, 2013). This becomes even more serious when the female child has impairment as this strengthens the case for their exclusion from formal education. Obtaining two female students who were interested in participating in this study was therefore considered important.

Table 3.1

Profile of study participants

Name	Type of disability	Male	Female	Age	Programme	Level
Akwasi	physical disability	1		26	Creative Art Educ.	500
Akosua	visually impaired		1	20	Special Education	200
Kwadwo	physical disability	1		28	Special Education	200
Adwoa	physical disability		1	24	Special Education	400
Kwabena	visually impaired	1		39	Special Education	600
Kwaku	physical disability	1		29	Soc. Science Educ.	300

Yaw	physical disability	1	25	Science Education	300
Kofi	physical disability	1	31	Special Education	400
Kwame	visually impaired	1	40	Special Education	400
Bash	physical disability	1	36	Special Education	300
Dr. Joe	physical disability	1	56	Special Education	

3.5.2 Data collection methods

In this research, I used different methods of data collection in order to gather comprehensive information from the participants of the study. Using different methods to gather information on a phenomenon makes it possible for the researcher to triangulate. One of the reasons is that where one method falls short the other methods would fill this gap. In addition, it enhances trustworthiness and validity and the researcher gains a wider view of the situation under investigation. Moreover, in a phenomenological research design, using different methods for data collection enables the researcher to obtain detailed understanding of participant's experiences (Creswell, 2013). I used semi-structured interviews, observation and policy documents to generate data for this study (Creswell & Poth 2016; Patton 2002, 2015).

Semi-structured interview. In-depth semi-structured interviews allowed investigation into the social world of participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Miller & Glassner 2011). Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault (2016) maintain that in-depth semi-structured interviews are necessary when the researcher cannot obtain enough information on a phenomenon of interest by using other methods such as observation. In contributing to the discussion, Seidman (2013) observes that semi-structured interviews are sufficient if the researcher is interested in understanding the experiences of participants' in a lived domain. Other studies have acknowledged semi-structured interviews as useful for conducting research which investigates

people's perceptions, experiences, feelings or individual's viewpoints (Gray, 2009; Hennick et al., 2011; Newby, 2010). Moreover, semi-structured interviews provide the researcher an opportunity to observe nonverbal behaviours which normally give meaning to the issues of investigation (Taylor et al., 2016). The flexibility of semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer and interviewee to ask for clarifications and questions at different periods contingent on the way the conversation with each participant goes during interview sessions. Therefore, the usage of semi-structured interviews indicated that the context and subjectivity of the participants were recognised (Hennick *et al.*, 2011). Other researchers maintain that semi-structured interviews are used when a study deals with present and past experiences of participants, an aspect which cannot be observed (Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2014). The current research involved past experiences of students with disabilities which cannot be observed. In addition, the current research employed semi-structured interviews because I wanted to obtain the opportunity to seek clarifications through follow-up questions.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) maintain that participants are experts of their own experiences. As such, the researcher should listen to their stories intently in order to ascertain the primary message they are articulating and facilitate the free flow of the conversation. In obtaining detailed information on participants' experiences, Doody and Noonan (2013) recommend the development of interview schedules, but advised that it should be used as a guide in a flexible manner. Doody and Noonan (2013) further contend that interview guides should incorporate questions that begin from broader issues (emic) to more specific (etic) topics. Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick (2008) recommend that the interviewees should be aware of what the whole process is about in advance to afford them enough time to reflect on their past and present experiences and to avoid 'surprises' during the interview process. Accordingly, the information sheet provided detailed account of the areas the research will

cover. This also assisted participants to give detailed account of their lived experiences at the university.

During the interview sessions, different factors were considered in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewees. Such factors included the physical space, the status of the interviewer, the tools for recording, the questions, the answers and the comments (Raply, 2004). Maykut and Morehouse (1994) observe that when research aims at obtaining in-depth information about the experiences of students with disabilities, the researcher needs to perform a key role by making the participants understand him during the research process. Consequently, I used appropriate and simple language to enable the participants to understand the questions asked and ensured that they answered the questions using their own views and experiences. Thus, I used everyday language during the interview sessions and the participants were allowed to use any of the English languages (real English or 'pigin' a campus English which is mostly associated with students) or both, that is, what they considered suitable for them. This was significant as it enabled participants to express themselves freely and also broke the traditional gap between the researcher and the 'researched' (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The interview process was flexible as it allowed the participants to raise concerns that were relevant to them (Lichtman, 2012).

Establishing good rapport between the researcher and the participant has been considered significant in the research process because it ensures that participants feel comfortable in discussing their experiences, thoughts and perceptions (Hennick et al., 2011; Lichtman, 2012). To ensure that participants were willing to discuss their experiences and perceptions with me, I took a number of steps to establish rapport with people at the disability unit and students. First, I visited the disability unit a number of times to familiarise myself with both students and staff. Second, I visited students in their halls of residence on several occasions. Third, I had telephone conversations with potential participants where we sometimes went beyond

discussing research issues to touching on some of their personal challenges. Between January and April 2018, fifteen interviews were conducted. Some of the participants were interviewed two times while others had only one session depending on participants' time schedules. Interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of participants except one who declined but allowed me to take notes. Each interview session lasted between forty-five minutes and one hour thirty minutes depending on the probes and follow-up questions.

Moreover, each interview session started with informal conversations to make sure the students were relaxed before the actual process. This assisted me in setting an informal tone in the interview process. I reiterated that their personal experiences and perceptions were for only academic purposes (things that related to schools and tertiary institutions). Furthermore, studies show that researchers should be attentive to the physical space where interviews are conducted (King & Horrock, 2018). In this regard, I offered the interviewees the opportunity to select their preferred venue where they would feel comfortable and safe in the interview process. This was done to ensure that there was mutual understanding between the interviewer and the interviewees in the research setting (Lichtman 2012). In all instances, interviewees preferred the office allocated to me by the Department of Special Education as it was quiet and private. Participants consequently had no worries about their safety or other people hearing their discussions with me (Bryman, 2012a; Rapley, 2004).

Furthermore, the significance of listening was acknowledged in sustaining rapport within the interview process (Bryman, 2012a). This was paramount because it allowed me to gain insights into participants' experiences in order to honour their voice. Likewise, ensuring eye contact during the interview process was significant. I arranged the seating in such a way that I could observe body language and facial expressions of participants during interview sessions. Additionally, I was not unsympathetic during the interview process; I acknowledged when

participants were giving account of some difficult situations and emotional experiences in their life (Braun & Clarke, 2013, 2006).

For depth of information, researchers are encouraged to use probes (Doody & Noonan 2013; Taylor et al 2016). Smith et al. (2009) observe that probes require good listening skills by the researcher so as to be able to ask relevant follow-up questions. Identifying when and how to probe entails expertise and understanding of the purpose of each question (Polit & Beck 2014). When probes are used appropriately, it enables discussions to flow in a natural way, and this enables researchers to solicit for detailed information from the participants (Dempsey, Dowling, Larkin & Murphy, 2016). In the present study, I listened to participants during interview sessions and this allowed me to ask questions that helped me to elicit more information on issues from participants. An example of how probes were used during interview session with one of the participants is presented below:

Researcher: You have shown that you do not have social life in the university, but you obtain support from few non-disabled students who understand you?

Respondent: Yes, some of my course mates support me when I am in need of their services.

Researcher: What specific support services do they provide for you?

In the above example, the probe was used to obtain information from respondent who went on to explain how non-disabled students who understand PWD provide various academic and non-academic services.

In ensuring the quality of the interview process, interview guides were developed to support data collection. Qualitative researchers believe that questions in an interview guide must be open-ended, not too broad or too narrow and must create direction and knowledge (Alvesson

& Sandberg, 2013; Stake, 2010). Agee (2009) observes that it is unadvisable for the researcher to design research questions and interview guide in the field. However, it is recommended that although interview guides must be prepared in advance before entering the research site for the actual interview sessions, it has been advised that researchers must be flexible to allow possibilities for the participants to come up with issues that may not be expected by the researcher (Hugh-Jones, 2010).

In ensuring the appropriateness and suitability of the interview guides, a pilot study was conducted in December 2017, and included two students with disabilities, one visually impaired and another physically challenged. The pilot study was done to test inconsistencies, wrong use of language and clarity in the interview guide. During piloting, information about students' knowledge and understanding of inclusive policies, perception, motivation to pursue university education, the support services available for students, the challenges students with disabilities face and the coping mechanisms adopted by the students were explored. The interviews were transcribed and the feedback facilitated some necessary changes in the interview guide. After piloting, some additions were made to the interview guides especially on students understanding of disability, the socio-economic background of the participants and students motivation to disclose their disability status at the university. Moreover, piloting the interview guide enabled me to redefine some of the questions that seemed unclear and reconsidered interview times. These measures were done to ensure the collection of specific data which were significant for the purpose of this study (Kombo & Tromp, 2006).

Observation. An observation is a purposeful and organized way of listening and looking at a phenomenon as it unfolds in its natural environment (Kumar 2005). In qualitative research such as the present study, observations are valuable in generating data to support other methods used. In the current study, I used overt observation technique for data collection. This allowed me to make notes as I obtained detailed evidence of participants' experiences and

factors that led to such experiences in the university. According to Creswell (2013), observations are based on the purpose of the research and research questions the study seeks to answer. Therefore, I observed events in the research site purposively. Data from observational sources were used to check consistencies or otherwise with data from other sources (Rao, 2006). To obtain in-depth understanding of students with disabilities experiences at the university, the focus of the observation was on the built environment, learning environment and the social environment.

In observing the built environment, I embarked on campus tour to familiarise myself with the physical environment of the university. Different areas of the university were observed. I went to all the halls of residence to observe the nature of the built environment. While observing the halls of residence, I focused on elements such as the presence of assistive technologies including ramps, elevators and disability friendly toilets and shower rooms. Facilities in the Junior Common Rooms in the halls of residence where social activities are conducted were also observed. Other areas I observed included the library, the administration block and the classroom blocks. The physical environment including routes and pavements were observed to ascertain how it was impacting the lives of students with disabilities. In all this, field notes were taken meticulously in my notebook.

Another point of observation was the learning environment. I watched participants as they carried out their classroom activities in the university. I watched the seating arrangement, lightening in the classrooms and the sound of the speakers. On five occasions, I went to classes to observe participants experiences in the learning environment. I sat at the back taking notes while observing proceedings without disrupting classroom activities. Each classroom observation lasted for about 60-90 minutes.

The social environment of the university was also observed. The main focus was on the attitude of non-disabled people toward students with disabilities and its effects on their daily activities in the university. Observation of the social environment was an ongoing process from the beginning of my field work to the end. I observed non-disabled students and lecturers' attitudes toward students with disabilities. Participants' facial expressions, body language, struggles, determination and resilience in the university campus were key points of observation. In addition, I observed participants experiences in partaking in extra-curricular activities of the university and how they affect the experiences of students with disabilities. I wrote what I observed each day in my field notebook. The writings were done based on initial codes I assigned to every observation. Classroom observations were audio-recorded and this allowed me to refer back to when reviewing observation notes. I used abbreviations to represent issues in my research dairy during the observation process. For example, D was used for discrimination, S for stigma, V for avoidance and Phy for physical environmental challenges. Using abbreviation saved time and assisted in determining possible codes and categories during the analysis of data. After every observation, I sat in my office and wrote my thoughts and reflections about the observation. In this process, I used audio recordings and field notes as a guide. I re-read the observational notes at least three times and cross-check with the field notes to ensure accuracy. The observational process assisted in reflecting my understanding and allocation of codes in the data analysis process. For example, reading the observational notes several time provided insight of recurring words such as discrimination, struggle and avoidance that helped in the coding process.

Document analysis. Document analysis as a form of data collection instrument uses published or unpublished written documents to provide information that is useful for a particular research and these include reports, policy documents, agendas and memoranda (Niewenhuis 2007). According to Bowen (2009), documents are 'social facts' which can be

produced, used and shared in a socially organised way. In the present study, relevant documents were examined to elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Bowen (2009) describes numerous merits of using documents in research. He observes that documentary analysis is an efficient method of data collection because they save time as they involve data selection rather than data collection. Most documents are in the public domain and can be accessed at any time with least restrictions from the authors. This makes documentary analysis a better choice for qualitative researchers. Documents are less costly than other qualitative sources of data. Documents are stable and non-reactive as the presence of the researcher does not change what is being studied (Bowen, 2009). Notwithstanding the merits of documentary analysis, there are some limitations (Fitzgerald, 2012). Since documents are often produced without any research agenda, they sometimes provide insufficient information (Bowen, 2009) and may be difficult to retrieve (Yin, 2015). Selectivity may also be biased due to incomplete selection. Due to some of these challenges, data from documents were used to support that from interviews. In addition, I carefully selected documents that were relevant to the present study in order to reduce biases. Documents used in the present research are available on the internet or upon request from the relevant stakeholders of the institutions involved.

In the present study, documentary sources were used for the following reasons. Firstly, documentary sources guided in formulating some questions to be asked and what is to be observed in the data collection process (Bowen, 2009). Written materials could be significant when used as a secondary source of data to support other sources of data collection such as interviews and observations since some information are difficult to find with other data collection methods (Hays & Singh, 2011). This suggests that documentary sources provide additional information that were valuable to the knowledge base. Moreover, Bowen (2009) and Yin (2013) demonstrated that qualitative researchers must seek convergence and collaboration

by obtaining information from multiple sources. Documentary sources were used in order to gain insight into the transformation and development that has occurred in the study site. Therefore, documentary sources provided supplementary information on how the various policies on inclusive and disability education in the university have been implemented. Documentary sources provided a picture of how policies and programmes fared over time (Bowen, 2009).

Documents were purposively selected Niewenhuis (2007) and this included; University corporate strategic plan, Ghana's inclusive policy, the constitution of Ghana and Ghana disability act (715). Other international documents such as the UNCRPD, sustainable development goals, education for all and United Nations standard rules on the equalisation of opportunities for persons with disabilities also provided data. Two of the policy documents (university strategic plan and Ghana disability act (715)) were requested from the Dean of Faculty of Education's office after it was suggested by the lecturer participant and they were made available to me. The other documents were accessed from the internet. In selecting these documents, I considered all the United Nations, Ghana national and the university's inclusive policy documents. Using the research question as guide, I selected documents which have influence on the education of students with disabilities in higher education. The rationale for the selection of the United Nations and national inclusive policy documents was to understand policy development, implementation, and policy response and other activities towards the education of students with disabilities. In addition, the documents from the Ministry of Education and the university were useful in understanding policy response activities, policy implementation and issues hindering inclusive practice in higher educational institutions in Ghana. I read all the documents in order to identify and select portions that are significant to the purpose of the present study. Data generated from the documents revealed consistencies and inconsistencies of the experiences students with disabilities shared during interview

sections. Besides, the documents gave additional data which the observation and interview could not provide.

3.5.3 Data analysis

In the present study, data were organised and analysed through the adaptation of Braun and Clarke (2006) principle of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis as explained by Braun and Clarke (2006) is a method of organising and breaking data into manageable units and synthesising them in order to discover and report patterns that are significant to be learned. Originally, this method was developed for analysing data in psychology but has been adopted in analysing data by various scholars in the last decade and is now identified as one of the rigorous ways of analysing qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In educational research, it has been used in different perspectives. For example, Prince and Kirkwood (2014) used this method in analysing their research entitled; “using technology for teaching and learning in higher education: A critical review of the role of evidence in informing practice”. In addition, Fagerstam (2014) also used it in analysing high school teachers’ experience of the educational potential of outdoor teaching and learning. Moreover, Moore et al. (2017) used it in analysing educators' experiences of managing students with disabilities. Furthermore, Matonya (2016) used it to explore accessibility and participation in Tanzanian higher education from the perspectives of women with disabilities.

Thematic analysis is suitable for the present study because it provides a systematic procedure which is simple to follow and make provision for the analysis of data obtained from different methods including semi-structured interview, observation and documents (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Furthermore, this method is responsive to both inductive and deductive thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013) recognised the theoretical flexibility of thematic

analysis and classified it as just analytical method rather than methodology. As a result of its flexibility, different analytic options are allowed and this gives the researcher the opportunity to decide aspects of the data to focus (Bryman, 2003). In addition, thematic analysis works well with a wide range of research questions and data (both primary and secondary) especially those concerning human experiences or understanding. Moreover, it can be used to analyse large or small data and produce data-driven analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Braun and Clarke (2006) identified six stages or phases of thematic analysis and warn that these phases should not be observed in a linear model, rather analysis should be a recursive process (figure 3.2).

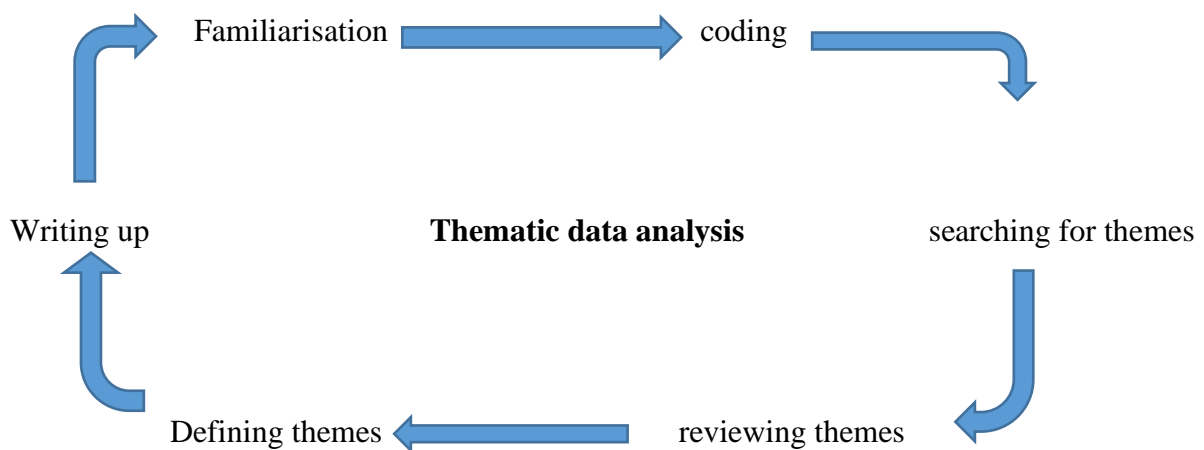


Figure 3.2. Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic data analytical framework

The first stage of thematic analysis is for the researcher to immerse himself or herself and become familiar with the data. Immersion and familiarisation involve reading and re-reading transcripts in an active way in order to obtain deeper knowledge from the data and understanding their meaning and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2013, 2006; Cohen et al 2007; Creswell, 2013; Taylor et al., 2016). At this phase, the researcher starts to make notes and take notice of ideas for coding. This commences the proper coding procedure. In ensuring familiarity of the data, every day after the interview sessions I went through the data collected and contrasted it with previous interviews. I then began to transcribe the data verbatim. Research shows that although transcription is time consuming, frustrating and sometimes

boring, it is seen as a nice way of familiarising oneself with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Seidman, 2013). Furthermore, other studies maintain that data transcription should be observed as a significant phase in the data analysis process within the interpretive qualitative methodology (Tracy, 2019; Schratz, 2019; Creswell 2017; Taylor et al, 2016). The transcription process is recognized as an interpretive process where meanings are generated, rather than writing down articulated sound (Taylor et al., 2016). During the transcription process of the present study, I noted all the obstructions such as cell phone ringing, coughs, laughs, sighs, pause and other interruptions which were recorded during the interview process. I also searched for ambiguous answers and identified the responses that were well stated and clear. Usually, each interview session took me about three to four hours to transcribe. The time variation emerged due to the way the participants answered the interview questions as well as the probing questions that came up during the interview process.

Moreover, the attention needed to transcribe data assisted the critical reading and interpretive skills needed to analyse the data (Creswell, 2013). After the transcription, I devoted much time in acquainting myself with the data and examining the transcript against audio recordings in order to gauge exactness. Based on the objectives of the present study, the information obtained was reduced to obtain significant, interesting and quality data that reflect the research objectives. In all these processes, I discarded my earlier assumptions and approached the data with open attitude, looking for essential things that emerged from the text. I used colours to highlight essential passages and this made it easy to identify what is important in the transcripts. Alongside highlighting the important materials, I began to analyse, interpret and deduce meaning within them. Thus, I read through the data carefully, analytically and critically in order to reorganise and rearrange the data to make sense.

The coding phase began after I had read and familiarised myself with the data and had taken notice of the essential ideas in the data. This phase encompassed making the initial list of ideas

and attention-grabbing issues covered by the data. The coding was done to identify issues and important concepts captured in the data. Subsequently, I developed the coding process which assisted in generating the initial codes (Matthew & Ross, 2010). I then formed a profile for each individual participant and grouped them into categories that made sense of their age, type of disability, year of study, degree programme studying, work experience and marital status. The identified codes were matched up with the data extracts that demonstrated the codes. This involved copying extracts of data from individual transcript and collating codes together in separate computer files. I made a table and associated participants with their passages, grouped these passages into categories and began to study the categories for thematic connections with each other. In the present study, coding was viewed as a continual process throughout the entire process of data analysis.

I started to search for themes in the data. This phase began when data had been coded and collated after a long list of diverse codes had been recognised in the entire data. This process involved sorting the various codes into potential themes and collating all the essential coded data extracts within the recognised themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this way, I considered how to combine codes to form overarching themes. Afterwards, I began to explore the connections among codes and categories to form different levels of themes. Thus, some of the initial codes formed the main themes while others were recognised as sub-themes. The codes that did not seem to belong anywhere were put in a file captioned miscellaneous. Generating good groupings of the central themes and sub-themes for analysis required the researcher to read and consider how the collated data could be arranged in an orderly manner (Freebody, 2003; Matthew & Ross, 2010). This assisted in making sense of the essence of individual themes. At this stage, all the themes created were kept as it was uncertain whether some of the themes may be combined, refined and separated or discarded.

In reviewing the themes, I refined the themes and sub-themes developed. Similar themes were combined and sometimes broader ones were collapsed into different themes. In doing this, I read the entire data multiple times to make sure the themes generated corresponded to the data. Also, additional data within themes which were missed were coded (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). Then I tried to grasp the central ideas of the main themes, how they fitted together and the meaning they carried about the data. At this phase, I made sure that the data within the themes were coherent and clear with identifiable distinction between proposed themes (Creswell, 2013; Punch, 2009). This helped to obtain a fair idea about the meaning each theme presented and how they matched together with the stories they proclaimed about the data.

Defining and naming the themes, the next phase of the analytical process began when I developed the themes for final improvement. Braun and Clarke (2006) explained that this phase involves identifying the reasons for involving each theme and determining what part of the data each theme represents. To achieve this, I revisited the collated data for each theme and organised the themes in a logical way to make it internally consistent with the participant's stories and research objectives (Punch, 2009; Seidman, 2013). Here, I identified what is interesting about the content of the narratives and why (Miles et al., 2014). For each theme, I wrote a detailed analysis and the accompanying story each theme presented and considered how it fits in the broader overall story of the data and the research questions. Thereafter, I considered the themes themselves, and acknowledged whether a theme had sub-themes or not. Then I made a detailed analysis of individual themes in relation to the research questions. The themes were clearly defined and tested to find out if each theme could be described with few sentences. Each theme was given a title which clearly provided a reader a sense of what the theme was about. In the present study, there were six main themes that emerged from the data. Theme 1: understanding inclusive policies in Ghana. Theme 2: Reasons for pursuing university

education. Theme 3: Students with disabilities' reasons for choosing a particular university. Theme 4: Sources of support for students with disabilities. Theme 5: Factors influencing accessibility and belonging. Theme 6: The coping mechanisms to overcome challenges at the university. Furthermore, all the significant information relating to each theme were combined together under it. For example, theme 3 had twelve sub-themes, after a careful consideration and advice from my supervisors, these were refined into five sub-themes. Next, I wrote a summary associated with the themes and the sub-themes and began to write a report.

The final phase, writing the research report, began after I had developed fully worked-out themes. The write-up provides evidence of the themes within the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested that significant evidence of the themes must be revealed in relation to the data with the research questions and purpose being a guide. In the present study, the majority of the data were organised and presented in a narrative form with some interpretations that related to the text. In addition, some of the facts were presented as direct quotations from the text. To ensure good thematic analysis, the interpretation of the participant's experiences were consistent with the data, research questions and the theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). As a result, I focused on the data and its assumptions, implications, conditions and participants views about the topic.

3.6 Rigour

In qualitative research, trustworthiness and rigour on how the study was conducted is important to the integrity of the findings (Cope 2014). Trustworthiness and rigour of a study are processes used to ensure quality and confidence in the data used in the study (Pilot & Beck 2014). According to Amankwaa (2016), every researcher must adhere to some processes and procedures that would make his/her research worthy of consideration by readers. To ensure

trustworthiness and rigour of the current study, I adopted Lincoln & Guba's (1985, 1994) criteria for ensuring trustworthiness and rigour which include the following; credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability.

Credibility is defined as the confidence that the researcher has truth value of the research (Ary et al., 2018). The credibility of a study is obtained when the researcher engages the participants for a long time through persistent observation, member-checking, reflective journaling, triangulation and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). This meant that I needed to be on the field for a considerable period of time to allow me to obtain rich information for my study. To ensure credibility of the present study, data collection process was quite long (six months) and this allowed me to have informal engagement with the participants. For example, I had several informal visits to the study sites and acquainted myself with participants to engender trust, confidence and encouragement in order to influence participants to articulate their views without fear. This helped me to obtain all the needed information that reflected the experiences of the participants of the study. In ensuring triangulation, I used different methods of data collection such as observations, interviews and documents. Using different methods for data collection provided valuable information which could have been missed had only one data collection method been used. The use of different data collection methods also provided an in-depth understanding of students' experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) and this meant I obtained diverse perspective of the students' experiences (Ary et al 2018). Also, transcripts from interviews were made known to participants and this allowed them to do cross-checking to ensure that they represent their views. Moreover, I am confident about the value of the present research because the codes, themes and sub-themes were grounded in the data from the participants, documents and my observations. Furthermore, in all situations I cross-checked whether the findings appropriately associated with the codes and the themes. Gray (2009) reports that credibility is assured when the data gathered could be reviewed severally. Regular

meetings with supervisors assisted me to remain focus on the data. During these meetings, the supervisors asked questions, provided advice and general guidance to ensure that the findings reflected participant's construction of their experiences.

Dependability relates to stability of the data over time dependent on the same conditions of the study (Polit & Beck 2016). According to Shenton (2004), dependability signifies whether the same research can be repeated to obtain the same results. Dependability of a study can be obtained through the maintenance of the audit trail of the process logs and debriefing with a colleague (Connelly 2016). The process logs, according to Connelly (2016), are the researcher's recording of all activities that happened in the research site such as whom to interview and what to observe. In the current research, detailed description of all the activities that happened in the field have been documented so that in future other researchers can repeat the entire process.

Confirmability is the degree by which the researcher ensures that the findings of a research are the true reflections of the participants' experiences and ideas rather than the researcher's opinions and preferences (Shenton, 2004). Triangulation as emphasised already is noted as one way of ensuring confirmability as it reduces the effects of researcher's biases. This indicates that confirmability is the extent to which the researcher goes beyond his personal predispositions (Miles, Huberman & Saldana 2014). In this way, the researcher reports the methods adopted, the reasons for adopting the methods and weakness in the methods used. Connelly (2016) observed that confirmability can be achieved through the maintenance of 'audit trail' which offers step-by-step account of the decisions made and procedures described. In the current research, I elaborated on the merits and demerits of the methods used. Besides, the weaknesses of the methods used have been explained. In addition, my personal assumptions, characteristics and preferences which could have affected the findings were discarded in order to present the data without personal influence.

Transferability denotes the extent to which the findings of a study could be applied or useful to other settings (Polit & Beck, 2014). Transferability can be possible when researchers support their study with in-depth description of the context, participants, location and a transparent data analysis process (Connelly, 2016). In the current study, analysis was based on the detailed data from the research location, context and participants of the study. The continual member feedback and the use of different methods for data collection strengthened the transferability of the current study.

3.7 Ethical considerations

According to Mills and Morton (2016), ethical considerations provide security to all participants in the research process including the researcher. Mills and Morton (2016) further stated that every aspect of research has an ethical dimension. This indicates that ethical issues that guide research should be considered throughout the research process; from planning, designing, gaining access, reporting and even in the act of reciprocity. In that way, ethical considerations guide the researcher to identify how to address challenges when it surfaces at any stage of the research process (Mill & Morton, 2016). In this research, I obtained ethical approval from the Education Research Human Ethics Committee (ERHEC) of the University of Canterbury. I wrote a letter to the department of special education to grant me access to conduct research. The purpose and the benefits of the study to the university, Ghana and the wider world were stated and I was granted permission (see appendix H). I considered and addressed ethical issues such as informed and voluntary consent, respect for right of privacy and confidentiality, protecting participants from harm and limitation of deception (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

In social research, participants must give their consent to taking part and that consent must be informed by making them aware of what they are taking part in (Seidman, 2013). Seidman (2013) indicated that participants should not in any way be coerced to participate but must freely choose to participate or otherwise. Similarly, Mills and Morton (2016) maintain that informed consent assumes that all parties involved in the research process have agreed to the very notion of the research activity. In the current research, I disclosed to the participants the aims and objectives of this study, what is expected of them and the benefits of the research to participants, the university and the nation at large before data collection began. After the disclosure, consent forms were voluntarily signed by the participants to signal their willingness to participate (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). Also, I asked for participants' approval before recording the interviews. Additionally, I offered the participants the opportunity to pull out from the research process anytime they did not feel comfortable with the proceedings. However, they were advised to withdraw before the write-up of the final thesis. The consent form and information sheets were given to participants to study at least for a week before the interview sessions.

Another essential principle was ensuring confidentiality of the participants. I assured the participants that no information provided could be traced to their identities as I used pseudonyms as a way of guaranteeing confidentiality and anonymity. Where pseudonyms could not be used, I ensured that the sentences were written in such a way that no traces of the participants or the university could be found. In addition, all soft copies of data were kept in a password-protected server provided by University of Canterbury whilst hardcopies of data remained locked in a University of Canterbury cabinet.

In Ghana, disability issues are considered sensitive. The language used with persons with disabilities must be cautiously selected in order not to cause emotional harm or damage to participants. This is because some individuals with disabilities sometimes find it difficult to

understand certain issues. Therefore, I made participants to understand what they were getting involved in through the provision of information sheets and by verbally explaining the implications of their participation at the beginning of each interview session. Similarly, I continued to involve participants in the whole research process. The transcripts from interviews were made known to participants to check for omissions and misrepresentations. Since the current research aims to facilitate change or transformation by helping to remove barriers that affect the day-to-day activities of students with disabilities, I communicated in such a way that the language used would not have a negative effect on the change/transformation agenda of this research.

3.8 Summary

In this chapter, I described steps taken in embarking on this research journey. The approach and design used for this research aligns with interpretative phenomenological framework that shares with social constructionism. This led to selecting different data collection methods including semi-structured interviews, observations and documentary analysis. The open-ended interview guide used in this research assisted in exploring into details the experiences of students with disabilities. In addition, the step by step account of how the analysis of this study was done including familiarising with the data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes and write up were discussed. Although different approaches have been developed to ensure trustworthiness and rigour in qualitative research, this research ensured trustworthiness through different criteria including credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Ethical issues which guided the entire research process were discussed. The next chapter discusses policy documents safeguarding the education of students with disabilities in higher education in Ghana.

Chapter Four

Understanding inclusive policies in Ghana

This chapter investigates international, national and institutional policies concerning the education of students with disabilities in Ghana. These policies influence institutional inclusive practices and regulate access to and participation of students with disabilities in higher education in Ghana. The purpose of this chapter is to take an inventory of the regulatory and policy frameworks underpinning inclusive education in Ghanaian higher institutions. This would provide deeper understanding of how inclusive practice is grounded in higher education in Ghana. This section of the findings emanated from documentary analysis. In this analysis, particular attention was given to issues on access and participation of students with disabilities within the policy frameworks of Ghana. The chapter begins with analysis of the international conventions and protocols influencing the inclusive education policies in Ghana. This is followed by analysis of the inclusive education policy provisions in Ghana. The focus of this analysis was on the right to access where accessibility and support provisions were analysed. The gaps and inconsistencies in the policy provisions as well as how the policies are translated into practice was also analysed. The chapter ends with a summary of the main themes that emerged in the study.

4.1 International frameworks and conventions on disability education

Ghana is signatory to many international conventions, declarations, standard rules and protocols relating to the education of PWD. These include United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child [(CRC 1989)], World Declaration on Education for All (1990), United Nations Standard Rules and Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993), Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO 1994), the Dakar Framework for

Action (UNESCO, 2000), the United Nations Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities (2006), and Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015). All these conventions and declarations aim to safeguard the rights of PWD to education. As Ghana's policies are influenced by these protocols and declarations, an examination of these policies sets the tone for understanding the Ghanaian situation. Moreover, it provides a frame of reference through which Ghana's inclusive policies and programs could be assessed and understood.

The principle of inclusive education has been a central theme in the discussions of the United Nations and other organisations advocating for the education of students with disabilities. For example, the Convention on the Rights of the Child [CRC (1989)] advocates for the educational rights of persons with disabilities. For example, article 28 (1c) of the CRC states:

States parties shall recognise the right of the child to education, and with the view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular: Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means.

Similarly, the UNCRPD also stipulates the right to inclusive education as an important element for persons with disabilities. Article 24 (1) of the UNCRPD states:

States parties shall recognise the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realising the right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunities, states parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning directed to the full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity, the development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential, enabling persons

with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society (United Nations, 2006 p.16).

Article 24 (2) of the UNCRPD further states:

In realising this right, state parties shall ensure that persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability ...
(UN, 2006 p.17).

The main argument here is that CRC and UNCRPD consider the mainstream education as a basic right for all children. This suggests that segregating students with disabilities from the mainstream educational system for any reason is considered a denial of their rights.

Other international conventions and protocols also emphasise PWD access to education. The UN Standard Rules in the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities is deeply rooted in inclusive education. Rule 5 states:

States should recognise the overall importance of accessibility in the process of the equalisation of opportunities in all spheres of society. For persons with disabilities of any kind, states should (a) introduce programmes of action to make the physical environment accessible; and (b) undertake measures to provide access to information and communication (UN, 1993 p.4).

Rule 6 specifies as follows:

The states should recognise the principle of equal primary, secondary and tertiary educational opportunities for children, youth and adults with disabilities. They should ensure that the education of persons with disabilities is integral part of the educational system (UN, 1993 p.5).

This position is forcefully brought home by the *Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education*. The Salamanca Statement recognises inclusive education as a necessity and urgency of providing education for all within the mainstream education system. It stipulates that children with special educational needs should have access to regular schools and adds:

Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system (UNESCO, 1994 p.7).

In achieving the above statement, the Salamanca statement enjoins state parties:

To give highest policy and budgetary priority to improve their education system to enable them to include all children regardless of individual differences or difficulties and adopt as a matter of law or policy, the principle of inclusive education, enrolling all children in regular schools (UNESCO, 1994 p.7)

The stipulations in the frameworks, declarations and the standard rules suggest that all persons should be able to access and participate in mainstream institutions of learning. This requires the diverse needs of students with disabilities to be catered for at all levels of education. The understanding is that the Salamanca statement supports inclusive education as an effective means through which discriminatory practices could be eliminated. This suggests that all practices that discriminate against students with disabilities in their education may be eliminated if these provisions are adhered to. It can therefore be argued that the provisions in the Salamanca Statement which support Education for All (global movement led by UNESCO

to ensure that all children get access to education) creates opportunities for students with disabilities to develop their educational potentials. Hence, this United Nations position assumes disability as part of human diversity and that institutions of learning through the support of the state, should adapt to the needs of these students rather than the students adapting to the learning process. Although international clamour for inclusive education is gathering traction, the Salamanca statement and the framework for action on special needs education focused more on the education of students with disabilities in mainstream pre-university education. This has perhaps influenced certain countries to pay less attention to the education of students with disabilities at the institutions of higher learning. In addition, these documents seem to suggest that most of the United Nations' declarations and protocols on education give more attention to access and equal opportunity without focusing on the quality of services provided to the students with disabilities.

Currently, further impetus for the inclusive agenda at all levels of education has been promoted by the UNCRPD. This suggests that institutions of higher education have the obligation to make provisions for students with disabilities who qualify to access and participate in higher education. In ensuring equal accessibility of education of students with disabilities at all levels, Article 24 (5) of the UNCRPD states:

The state parties shall ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others (UNCRPD, 2006 p.18).

This provision in the UNCRPD challenges countries including Ghana to make education accessible to all persons irrespective of their physical, mental, emotional, linguistic or social background. The UNCRPD therefore advocates and promotes the inclusion of students with

disabilities in the mainstream institutions of learning. Thus, access to education should be devoid of discrimination by giving equal opportunities to all people at all levels of education.

One of the roles of higher education is to ensure sustainable development of the individual and society and this has been reiterated through provisions in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015). Goal 4 of the SDGs seeks to:

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunity for all (UN, 2015).

Although SDG 4 did not specifically mention higher education, the aim of this goal is to promote quality education to ensure that students acquire skills necessary to advance sustainable development of the individual and society. This means that higher education being an important influencer and catalyst for change, has an important role to play to ensure the realisation of this change. The indication is that promotion of quality education is required to develop the skills needed for sustainable development by all people. Goal 4 of the SDGs therefore place emphasis on quality education where inclusive education is promoted.

4.2 The inclusive education policy provisions in Ghana

Ghana has enacted national policies to guide the education of all her citizens. Among them are the 1992 Republican Constitution, Disability Act of Ghana (Act 715) of 2006, Education strategic plan of 2003; 2010; 2018 and the Ghana Inclusive Education Policy of 2013. The aim of these policies is to safeguard the education of every Ghanaian especially PWD. According to Ministry of Education (2013, p.14), the inclusive education policy of Ghana has these objectives:

To promote a child-friendly environment for enhancing the quality of education for persons with disabilities.

To increase participation in educational access for persons with disabilities and enhance management of education services for persons with disabilities.

To improved equitable access to and participation in inclusive education at all levels

The provisions in the inclusive policy show that every child is unique and must be given an opportunity for education. The assumption is that the institutions of learning would be disability-friendly to encourage access and participation of all students. This suggests that these institutions of learning would be supported in achieving disability-friendly environment. The call for educational provision for students with disabilities in Ghana is based on right to educational access.

4.2.1 Rights of persons with disabilities to access higher education in Ghana.

Ghana's educational policies including the Disability Act (Act 715) and the Constitution of Ghana consider access to education at all levels as a fundamental human right for all Ghanaians including persons with disabilities. For example, Article 25 (1a) of the Constitution of Ghana guarantees the right to education for all persons including persons with disabilities. The constitution states:

All persons shall have the right to equal educational opportunities (Republic of Ghana, 1992 p.20).

Although the provisions in the constitution did not overtly mention inclusive education, in the context of the present study, equal right to education can be aligned with inclusive education. This is because under this constitutional provision, Article 17 (2) states that no human being

should be discriminated against on any grounds irrespective of the person's physical, mental, psychological and economic status. This indicates that both disabled and non-disabled people would have the right to obtain support to participate fully in institutions of learning. Accordingly, the issues of right has been highlighted in the Disability Act (Act 715), the Constitution of Ghana and the University Corporate Strategic Plan. The policy provisions of the right to access and support is discussed below.

Accessibility. The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, the Disability Act (715) and University Corporate Strategic Plan all emphasise that university education should be accessible to students with disabilities. This shows that the needs of students including students with disabilities would be catered for in the institution of learning. For example,

Article 25 (1c) of the constitution of republic of Ghana states:

Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular, by progressive introduction of free education (Republic of Ghana, 1992 p.20).

Article 38(b) also emphasises accessibility:

There shall be equal access to university or equivalent education, with emphasis on science and technology (Republic of Ghana, 1992 p.30).

The provisions above seem to be more aspirational at the national level than referring to what might happen in the higher education. This implies that the necessary efforts would be made in the university environment to support students with disabilities. Moreover, making higher education accessible by 'every appropriate means' as specified in the National Constitution aligns with the provisions in the CRC and suggests that the institutions of learning would be disability-friendly as accessibility and participation of students would be promoted. In addition,

making education free for all persons indicates that the rights of persons with disabilities is indirectly safeguarded as the barrier of cost would be minimised. However, the Constitution of Ghana relates access to capacity ‘on the basis of capacity’. This appears to focus on the capacity of the students to successfully go through university education rather than institutional capacity to admit disabled students and provide the necessary support for their education. Thus, equal accessibility may only be for those who are determined to have the necessary capacity. This is a problem in the context of Ghana where PWD are seen of having little capacity for anything. Since the constitution did not explicitly state the meaning of ‘on the basis of capacity’, it may make it difficult for educational institutions to understand and implement this provision.

In responding to the needs of all students, Article 25 (e) and 29 (6) of the Constitution explain this as follows:

25 (e) The development of education with adequate facilities at all levels shall be actively pursued (Republic of Ghana, 1992 p.20).

29 (6) As far as practicable, every place to which people have access to shall have appropriate facilities for disabled persons (Republic of Ghana, 1992 p.21).

Article 38 (1) and 38(3a) of the National Constitution further state:

The state shall, provide educational facilities at all levels and in all the regions of Ghana, and shall to the greatest extent feasible, make those facilities available to all citizens 38 (1) (Republic of Ghana, 1992 p.20).

The state shall, subject to the availability of resources, provide equal ..., equal access to university or equivalent education, ... 38 (3a) (Republic of Ghana, 1992 p.30).

In article 29(6), the constitution emphasises accessibility of facilities in public places and this include the university. Even though the constitution did not define ‘appropriate facilities’, in the context of inclusive education, it could be understood as the provision of facilities that would enhance the activities of students with disabilities. This suggests that the university would make the learning resources and programmes accessible to students with disabilities so that their participation in higher education would be influenced positively. However, evidence from the university where this current study was conducted in 2017/2018 shows that there is little appropriate facilities at the university to support the accessibility of students with disabilities (see 6.2.2). This may be due to some conditions attached to the provisions of making learning facilities in higher education accessible for all students. For example, Article 38 (3a) provides a leeway for the state, with the provision of learning resources being made subject to ‘availability of the resources’. Hence, provision of facilities would be subject to government prioritisation, a situation that can lead to inadequate attention to the needs of students with disabilities.

The Disability Act (Act 715) considers mainstream education as the most appropriate means to promote social inclusion for persons with disabilities. As a result, the policy document promotes education of persons with disabilities in mainstream educational settings and has criminalised the denial of admission to a person with disability based on impairment. Section 20 (1) of the Disability Act (Act 715) stipulates:

A person responsible for admission into school or other institution of learning shall not refuse to give admission to a person with disability on the account of the disability unless the person with disability has been assessed by Ministry responsible for Education in collaboration with the Ministries responsible for Health and Social Welfare to be a person who clearly requires to be in a special school for children or persons with disabilities (Republic of Ghana, 2006 p.7).

Section 20 (2) adds that:

A person who contravenes section 20 (1) commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding fifty penalty units or imprisonment for a term not exceeding three months or to both (Republic of Ghana, 2006)

Although the Disability Act (Act 715) has strong provisions for the education of persons with disability, there are exceptions as shown in section 20 (1). The provisions endorse special schools for certain groups of persons with disabilities through assessment by experts from Ministries of education, health and social welfare. This provision in Act 715 focuses on an assessment and capability of the person as the determinant of access to a particular educational institution. This, however, contravenes provisions in the UNCPRD which advocates for mainstream education for all students including students with disabilities, repudiating the need for special education. The UNCPRD stresses the necessity for the elimination of discrimination in the enrolment of students with disabilities at all levels of education. Even though Ghana has ratified the UNCPRD provisions which perceives disability as a social problem, the stipulations in the Disability Act (Act 715) as stated above adhere to the medical discourse of disability. Declaring a person fit for admission through assessment places people into ‘normal’ or ‘abnormal’ categories, a phenomenon which reflects the medical model of disability. In addition, the determination by experts of who is to be admitted or not is a way of accepting non-disabled people’s dominance of PWD.

Realising the role local communities play in the education of students with disabilities, the Education Strategic Plan emphasises the advocacy and sensitisation of disability issues.

In order to improve community understanding and support for children with disabilities, including increasing early detection, advocacy and sensitisation in

relation to SEN will be increased and linkages with local health authorities strengthened.

The policy direction to sensitise the public on disability issues is encouraging and suggests that attitudes people show towards students with disabilities are influenced by the beliefs in societies they are born and nurtured. As societies are always in the process of social construction, advocacy and sensitisation may influence individuals' construction of disability. This may assist in building positive attitude towards students with disabilities. However, the policy did not elaborate on the kind of sensitisation that could change non-disabled peoples' attitudes towards PWD. This suggests that implementation of the policy may be difficult as it leaves stakeholders to speculate as to what to do. Thus, although sensitisation and advocacy with clear guidelines and support could bring changes in peoples' attitude, the policy did not provide these guidelines and sources of resources to support it.

University Corporate Strategic Plan and Accessibility: In ensuring accessibility of higher education to all students, the University Corporate Strategic Plan of 2014 puts emphasis on increasing access for persons living with disabilities. A passage on page 54 of the University Strategic Plan states:

The University shall make the environment accessible to persons living with disabilities. Ramps and escalators shall be provided where appropriate. The university shall make campus environment disability friendly. Handicapped accessible washrooms shall be provided, open drains shall be covered and walkways shall be provided along all streets and lanes in the university. The university shall make academic and non-academic facilities accessible to people living with disabilities.

The policy initiatives to make the university accessible to all students is inspirational and a demonstration that the university wishes to provide equal opportunity and quality education for all students. This provision suggests that the university would make its built environment accessible to all the students. Furthermore, making the university environment disability-friendly is recognition that the built environment, one of the factors negatively affecting students with disabilities at the university would be made accessible. This reiterates the provisions in the National Constitution which enjoins educational institutions to provide appropriate facilities and equipment in educational institutions in order to enhance access. It seeks to address specifically, facility challenges which persons with disabilities encounter in their daily activities at the university.

In addition, the University Strategic Plan also states:

The University shall improve library resource and make facilities accessible to all students. The university shall provide assistive technology to aid accessibility.

The provision above from the University Strategic Plan emphasises the significant role the university plays in ensuring access and participation of students with disabilities. Making the library accessible shows that all students would get opportunity to obtain the requisite materials for their studies.

Support services. The University Corporate Strategic Plan makes provision of support for students with disabilities. The Plan emphasises the provision of adaptive materials that would ensure retention, participation and belonging of students with disabilities. The University Strategic Plan states:

The university shall improve upon students support services... establish student's support services centre within students' affairs division. Also, the

university shall establish prospective students' office...design affirmative action policy for students living with disabilities ... and develop a scholarship scheme for people living with disabilities (University Corporate Strategic Plan, 2014 p. 53).

Appropriate accommodation shall be provided within the university Campus for people living with disabilities. The university shall provide persons living with disabilities training and support in the use of assistive technologies (University Corporate Strategic Plan, 2014 p. 53).

The University Strategic Plan further reports that:

Within this strategy, the library shall be computerised while the library stock shall be increased and renewed. The university shall provide accessible work station in the library for students with disabilities. Furthermore, the university shall provide course materials in alternative formats such as braille, audio books and electronic text for people living with disabilities. (University Corporate Strategic Plan, 2014 p.29).

The university shall organise training workshops for both academic and non-academic and support staff to enhance inclusion of persons with disabilities (University Corporate Strategic Plan, 2014 p. 53).

Establishing student support centers within student affairs division is an important condition for access and participation of students with disabilities. It would make access to support services closer to students as they (the students) will know where and how to assess support services both internally and externally. Providing affirmative action programmes suggest the university would want to encourage the education of students with disabilities by adopting ways of making the public aware of such provisions for these students. Publishing the

affirmative action documents demonstrates one possible way the university may want to project the quality of support services available to attract students with disabilities.

Furthermore, the Plan recognises the significance of making reasonable adjustments on the teaching and learning environment to support students with disabilities. In this regard, providing library materials in alternative format shows that students with disabilities would not lag behind in their studies. In addition, making the teaching and learning environment supportive of students with disabilities suggest an opportunity to ensure equal access to resources both in and out of teaching space. As course materials are made accessible in different formats such as disk, braille, tape, audio books and e-text, students can make informed choices of appropriate support media. Moreover, making available teaching and learning materials in alternative format (as a form of support) should not only show their presence at the university but these materials should be located in places that would not make it difficult for students with disabilities to access. This means that these provisions should be accessible to students with disabilities. Another form of support stated in the Plan is the provision of scholarships for disabled students. This provision is an indication that the attention of policy makers of the university is not on how students with disabilities should adapt to the challenging conditions in the university but to reduce the economic and environmental challenges they experience in the university. Additionally, provision of training and support in the use of assistive technology in the university suggest that such materials (including computers) would be available for use by students with disabilities in the university.

Evidence shows that the university is making some progress by making two elevators and couple of ramps to support students with disabilities (see 6.2.2). Despite these efforts, students with disabilities are excluded from the university on the basis of their impairment. Thus, there is no affirmative action in place, no provision of training of assistive technology usage, no proper housing accommodation and the library is not accessible to students with disability (see

6.2. 2). This suggests that although the university is making efforts to support students with disabilities, such efforts come in slower pace and sometimes institutional policy provisions lack commitment to enforce it. The conditions at the university therefore deepens the struggles of these students and this could affect their academic achievement. This notwithstanding, the university cannot be blamed solely for their inability to implement the provisions in the policies due to her reliance on the central government for financial resources. Without the necessary support from the central government, it would be difficult for the university to carry out the responsibility of providing the necessary support for the students to develop their academic potential.

4.2.2 The gaps and inconsistencies in the disability policies of Ghana

The current study identified some gaps that make understanding and implementation of the policy provisions on inclusive practice difficult. For example, the definition of disability as stated in section 59 of the Disability Act (Act, 715) makes understanding of disability difficult. The Disability Act (715) define disability as:

An individual with physical, mental or sensory impairment including visual, hearing or speech functional disability which gives rise to physical, cultural or social barriers that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of the individual (p. 17).

A careful look at this definition of disability suggests that the concept centres on the biomedical perspective which considers pathology, impairment or dysfunction as the cause of disability rather than attributing the cause of disability to limitations of opportunity as a result of social and physical barriers created by society. This suggests that the disability policy focuses less on the responsibility of the society to remove social barriers created by society that restrict persons with disabilities in their daily activities at the university.

In addition, this definition appears problematic as it affects the nature of provisions in the policy as well as the rights conferred on PWD. This aligns with the biomedical perspective which does not address the influence of cultural beliefs, attitudes and behaviours as factors which influence disability but rather, puts emphasis on impairment as a functional limitation that leads to physical and socio-cultural barriers. In addition, the definition appears to site the issue with the individual which is characteristic of a medical model perspective. In this regard, the policy tend to institutionalise the medical model of disability.

Even though the disability policies describe the punishment for the offenders of the policy, this provision is yet to be enforced. For example, sections 37 (1 & 2) of the Disability Act (Act 715) state:

(1)A person shall not call a person with disability derogatory names because of disability of the person; (2) a person who contravenes subsection (1) commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding fifty penalty units or to a term of imprisonment not exceeding three months or both
(Republic of Ghana, 2006 p.10).

Although the Disability Act (Act 715) emphasises the educational right of persons with disabilities as enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, students with disabilities continue to experience challenges. Fourteen years after the passage of the Disability Act, (Act 715), students with disabilities are given derogatory names which are stigmatising that require punishment by offenders (see 6.2.1). However, the provisions in the Disability Act (Act 715) are yet to be achieved due to weak enforcement. Thus, institutions of higher education are under no obligation to enforce such regulations as enshrined in the Disability policies for students with disabilities.

Ghana has declared her allegiance to international principles, however, local disability policies and provisions are, in some aspect, in opposition to international ideals. Such inconsistencies arise as a result of the belief systems which influence local understandings of disability. The conceptualisation of disability in Ghanaian society which is influenced by cultural beliefs and norms, is consistent with the individual/medical models of disability rather than the social model which influences international conventions on disability. For example, one of the rationales for the National Disability Policy is as follows:

Persons with disabilities are met with many obstacles preventing them from fully participating in everyday life activities. Some of the problems are environmentally sensitive and require new conceptualisation of disability and handicap. The disability policy, therefore, recognises and addresses the needs of persons with disabilities to receive appropriate training, adequate technical aids and necessary support to increase their capabilities (MoE, 2000).

In this quotation, there is evidence of influence of social model of disability in the first two sentences as the policy acknowledges that the environmental factors sometimes impede the daily activities of disabled students. However, the third sentence recognises an adaptation by the people with disability, an indication of the influence of the individual model of disability because ability is linked with adaptation of the student. This is inconsistent with the ideals of international conventions such as UNCRPD which seeks the removal of these environmental factors rather than disabled people adapting to the environment.

Another inconsistency can be seen in the aims of Ghana's inclusive policies. The policy seeks to:

Create enabling environment for persons with disabilities to enhance their capacity to perform better to improve their social status (MoE, 2013).

The first part of the statement recognises the need for institutions of learning to make appropriate transformations that could enable disabled students to function well. This shows that despite an individual's impairment, when the barriers in the environment are removed, they (students with disabilities) can perform their duties well. Conversely, the second part of the statement is positioned in the medical model of disability because it concentrates more on functional limitation as a result of a person's impairment. Consequently, capacity is linked with social status. The emphasis is on the individual's ability to make the difference rather than the society (university) making changes to ensure a person with disability can perform his or her duties without much restrictions.

Furthermore, the idea that inclusive education is not suitable for all students with disabilities is an indication that the Disability Act (Act 715) is sometimes at odds with the international understanding of inclusive education. For example, section 18 (2) and 20 (1) of the Disability Act (Act 715) states:

The government shall establish special schools for persons with disability who by reason of their disability cannot be enrolled in schools or mainstream institutions of learning (Republic of Ghana, 2006 p.6).

... unless the person with disability has been assessed by Ministry responsible for Education in collaboration with the Ministries responsible for Health and Social Welfare to be a person who clearly requires to be in a special school for children or persons with disabilities (Republic of Ghana, 2006 p.7).

Here too, the sections did not describe what the assessment requirements might entail. It presumes it is self-evident. The above statement indicates that placement of students with disabilities is challenged by the use of differential identification and labelling because students are classified based on assessment. The establishment of special schools and assessment that

may deny some students with disabilities access to mainstream education is inconsistent with the provisions of article 24 (2a) and (2b) of the UNCRPD which Ghana is a signatory. Certainly, the inclusive education policies of Ghana seek to include persons with ‘mild to moderate’ or non-severe disabilities. Moreover, a critical examination of some sections of the Disability Act (715) of Ghana such as sections 18(2) seems to support the separation of certain students with disabilities despite Ghana being signatory to international conventions which supports inclusion of all students with disabilities at all levels of education. This makes inclusive education practice difficult since educational practitioners would be confused as to which policy ideals they should apply when there is an issue with a student with disability.

4.2.3 Translating policies into practice

The national policies as described above are influenced by international conventions which are sometimes written without considering possible implementation challenges at the local levels. For example, the language used in writing aspect of the disability policy documents make understanding difficult. Sometimes the relevance of shared values, knowledge and understanding of the concept of inclusive education are assumed by policy makers, a situation which leads to limited understanding of the policies. This limited understanding may have contributed to limited commitment to the implementation of disability policies. In effect, Ghana’s inclusive policies can, therefore, be said to be a rhetoric mirroring the international conceptualisation of disability but failing to make changes to practice. The international discourse of disability which is articulated in the Salamanca Statement on effectiveness of inclusive education and its ability to eradicate discrimination seems compelling and attractive. The Salamanca Statement observes that:

Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building

an inclusive society and achieving Education for All; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children (UNESCO, 1994 P. 11).

Although the Salamanca Statement made no reference to higher education, it could also apply to the higher education context. The quote above implies that inclusive education can mitigate prejudice, however, the policies did not show how inclusive education can make society tolerate PWD. The implementation of the policies could be problematic in Ghana since ideals in the international conventions are at odds with the Ghanaian understanding and conceptualisation of disability. This is because the Ghanaian disability policies do not address issues of beliefs and social norms which characterise discrimination, marginalisation and stigmatisation. This suggests that the socio-cultural norms which undergird discrimination, marginalisation and stigmatisation would be difficult to be reduced or possibly eliminated.

In addition, Ghana's inclusive education programmes are usually supported by international donors. In most instances, the government has little options since the specification on how the funds should be used are directed by these donors for inclusive activities in Ghana. Usually, these directions adhere to the dictates of international conventions which are sometimes at odds with local understanding, a situation that gives the policy maker little or no opportunity to address these socio-cultural issues influencing implementation of inclusive education in Ghana. The issue here is that implementation of holistic universal international development agendas may not be flexible in accepting local cultural norms and authority and this potentially makes implementation difficult. This means that a careful consideration must be given to these cultural norms at the strategic planning stage of policies in order to minimise the likelihood of less-than-optimal achievements. Thus, the 'hidden curriculum', that is, the fundamental cultural values that influence society's perception and attitudes must be deeply-rooted in every educational policy on inclusion. Hence, the socio-cultural norms that influence inclusive education must be altered in support of inclusive education. The indication is that ensuring

successful inclusiveness would require the international conventions to be applied in a way that can contest problematic conceptualisations that pose challenges to inclusive education within local contexts.

4.5 Summary

This chapter provided insight into the international, national and institutional policies that influence the education of students with disabilities in a Ghanaian university. The chapter revealed that the Ghana national policies on inclusive education are influenced by international conventions and declarations which are positioned in the social model of disability. However, there are confusions in the national policy provisions and practice as understanding of disability in Ghanaian society is positioned in individual model of disability. It was evident that Ghana's inclusive education policies were designed to secure educational right of students with disabilities. Placement of these students in educational institutions is challenging as the policies do not explicitly define who qualify for mainstream education. This chapter also reported that implementation of the policies could be difficult due to certain aspects of the policies that seems to support the inadequate support for students with disabilities, for example, 'on the basis of capacity'. Thus, while the international policies advocate for inclusive education for all students, Ghana's inclusive policies advocate inclusive education for students with mild to moderate disability, a view which is contrary to international conventions principles. In the next chapter, students with disabilities motivation to access higher education and sources of support services are discussed.

Chapter Five

Motivation and Sources of Support

This chapter explores participants' reasons for pursuing higher education. In addition, it investigates reasons for selecting a particular higher educational institution as well as the support mechanisms influencing disabled students' pursuit of higher education. It concludes with a summary of essential themes identified in the chapter. Motivation as used in this study deals with essential elements that drive students with disabilities' willingness, need, and desire to access and become successful in higher institutions of learning. Although students with disabilities have the urge to pursue university education, this motivation does not automatically lead to full participation. Consequently, these students need support from relevant stakeholders to ensure their full participation in higher education. Support in the context of this study means the provision of requisite services and materials that would ensure students with disabilities' full participation at the university. This support provision is crucial because obtaining in-depth understanding of how students with disabilities participate and gain support is an underpinning factor of inclusive practice. The findings are presented in themes and sub-themes evident in the data solicited from participants.

5.1 Reasons for accessing higher education

The findings in the present study show that different factors influenced students with disabilities to access and participate in university education. As participants considered university education as a means-to-an-end, they were motivated by number of factors. These include their desire to become role models in their communities and families. Familial and societal recognition also motivated them to access and participate in higher education. The

desire to widen career opportunities and personal development was also another motivating factor. Other reason found in the study included financial considerations.

5.1.1 Role models.

One motivation for students' pursuit of university education was their desire to become role models. Being a role model was observed from two perspectives; the students becoming role models themselves, and their looking up to PWD who they perceive as successful in life through higher education. Nine participants indicated that they wanted to be "ambassadors of hope" to other PWD who have not experienced university education and those who have limited knowledge of issues with disabilities in Ghana. For these participants, a university education did not only mean a positive change through confidence-building in their lives, but also an opportunity to devise and obtain different means to support others with similar challenges. Participants explained that the desire to obtain a job that would allow them some time to reach disabled people or students with disabilities influenced their decision to access and participate in university education. Participants reported that in their communities, non-disabled people regard PWD as those who are incapable of achieving higher education and wanted to use their achievement in higher education to prove them wrong. Two students described their reasons for pursuing university education:

I want to use my life to give hope and encouragement to people especially those with my condition to acknowledge that with perseverance and hard work they can achieve their full potentials. I want other people and families to realise that impairment is not disability (Akosua).

I want to be someone that people can look up to and be encouraged to access university education. I want to use my educational achievement and success in

life as a podium for parents to motivate their children in the same situation as mine to go to school and possibly university (Akwasi).

The desire for participants' to bring a change in perception of non-disabled people in society motivated them to pursue university education. Akwasi's comment shows his desire to serve as a model for others. Akwasi wants to raise the hopes of other families to cope with their children experiencing disabilities and offer them the necessary support. The presence of PWD who have experienced university education ignites some confidence and determination in others as it encourages them to set higher goals for education. This suggests that some students with disabilities pursuit of university education was influenced by their desire to demonstrate that although there are some challenges, disabled people can stand above the challenges and succeed in life through university education. For example, Akosua believes that disability is not inability. As such, when students with disabilities are encouraged and supported, they can realise their educational potentials.

Moreover, inspiration from other people who have succeeded in progression through higher education was another source of motivation for students with disabilities to access university education. Here, students were motivated not by their desire to inspire others but by other disabled people who have been successful in life through higher education inspiring them. They wanted to be like them. For example, Kwadwo said he became motivated to pursue university education after recognising that Dr. Danaa, a visually impaired person who rose to the position of Minister of Tourism and Culture in Ghana, became successful despite his impairment. To him, this recognition and appointment was an additional impetus for university education. In effect, the exemplary achievements of other disabled people fuelled participants to develop new attitudes, perception and motivation that influenced their decision.

When I envisaged what some disabled personalities like Dr Danaa and Mr Kwabena Sarfo, former member of parliament for Offinso South Constituency have achieved, it gave me that can-do spirit which urged me to pursue university education. I know after my university education, I will be able to achieve success in life like them. They are my heroes and I want to be recognised in my family, community and possibly the whole nation as an important personality. With my condition, I can only attain such status by pursuing university education (Kwadwo).

Kwadwo's comment suggests that university education is a means to obtain higher achievement in life. The comment could also mean that there is overconfidence in the power of higher qualification.

The study further reports that awareness of the relevance of university education to students with disabilities at pre-university level was a motivating factor. Six participants stated that they did not receive any information about university programmes and career prospects prior to their university education, a situation they did not want other pre-university students with disabilities to experience. This suggests that the students' motivation originated from their personal experiences that they considered challenging, a decision which could assist in doing away with discouragement experienced by disabled students at pre-university level. Kofi, a physically challenge student who uses crutches recounted his experiences as follows:

When I was at the pre-university level of my education, I never received any information about access to the university. I had no information about life in the university.

This finding shows that some PWD may find it challenging in adjusting to university environment due to inadequate information. Kofi's comment indicates that students with

disabilities at pre-university institutions in Ghana usually find it difficult to obtain the right information about life at university and programmes.

5.1.2 Familial and societal recognition

Some of the participants reported that their desire to maintain family ‘tradition’ and ‘reputation’ motivated them to pursue university education. To some participants, university education has become a family norm and were therefore determined to make it to the university. In addition, three participants indicated that their parents’ educational level were significant in motivating them to access university education. For example, Adwoa and Akosua stated that all their siblings and parents have university degrees and did not want to ‘miss out’ on university qualification. Adwoa narrated her experience as follows:

My parents didn't want me to be the odd one out not having higher education degree(s). All my siblings have either completed or are in the university so I was influenced by their achievements in education. Besides, my parents have completed university, so I am determined to attain the same level of education as my parents.

Adwoa’s comment shows that her family tradition and parent’s educational background motivated her to access and participate in university education. The indication is that students with disabilities within families with educated parents and siblings had opportunity to model themselves along the lines of influential members and pursue higher education. The findings of the present research suggest that students with disabilities whose parents have experienced higher education are highly motivated to experience university education than those whose parents have no such experiences.

Obtaining dignity, respect and social recognition also emerged as other factors that influenced students with disabilities decision to pursue university education. According to some of the

participants, their decision to enrol in the university was influenced by the dignity, respect and social recognition people ascribe to those who have university education. This indicates that the perception and recognition from family and community members influenced these students to attain university education. To some participants including Kwabena, Kwame and Yaw, they are already experiencing this recognition and respect although they have not yet graduated. For example, Kwame indicated that people in his community and family used to look down upon him but these negative attitudes and behaviour have reduced considerably following his admission into the university. Consequently, some of the participants believed that university qualification would make them achieve recognition in their societies and families. This suggests that people in similar conditions could look up to their achievements and access higher education. Kwabena recounted his experience as:

I have grown to realise that Ghanaian societies cherish people who have higher education. Their status usually change as they become accepted, valued, respected and people always listen to them whenever they are given platforms to talk. This has been the desire I want to obtain. I am optimistic that when I am able to complete my university education I will get positive recognition in my community as now people who know that I am in a university give me respect and attention. In my family too, I am consulted when important issues come up for discussion.

The desire for participants' to bring a change in perception of non-disabled people in society motivated them to pursue university education. Kwabena's remarks emphasises the value of having university education as it enables disabled people to become involved in key matters, particularly, in decision-making in the family and community. In most Ghanaian societies, the dominant perception is that persons with disabilities are inferior and are considered to be less important, a description some of the participants wanted to change. Kwabena's statement

shows that higher education could contribute to make PWD earn respect and recognition in their communities. This shows that some participants considered university education as a means of dealing with cultural, economic and social barriers which undermine their status. The indication is that a student like Kwabena believes that university education offers a sense of self-worth, identity and self-sufficiency. This is significant in promoting self-esteem and self-actualisation of the individual with disability.

5.1.3 Physical strength and dynamics of jobs.

Another motivation that influenced participants to access higher education is physical strength and job requirements. Some participants linked the level of their education to their ability to obtain the kind of job that corresponds to their physical strength. The participants including Kofi and Adwoa who use crutches and Kwaku who uses wheel chair maintained that by their nature they would not be able to do jobs that require much physical exertion and hoped that with university education, they would obtain jobs they can comfortably do. The participants reiterated that secondary education qualification in Ghana is associated with menial jobs that require some level of physical effort. This was put in perspective by Yaw as follows:

Getting a better job that does not require much physical strength urged me to access university education. I need to continue my education to a higher level so that my dream of getting a job which does not demand much physical effort can be realised.

Yaw's comment presupposes that university education may be more essential for students with disabilities as it influences the kind of job they are offered. The participant's decision was therefore influenced by his realisation that ability to obtain a particular work is linked to their impairment. In addition, the reflections from participants' views indicate that they would be excluded from certain jobs without university qualification. Consequently, students' decision

to access university education in order to obtain certain types of jobs was logical and encouraged them to consider the employment prospect more prudently. Participants recognised barriers in obtaining employment. This they believe, stems from the influence of societal perceptions which portrays people with impairment as incapable of performing jobs that require physical exertion. This belief shows that participants have accepted societal perceptions. However, participants need to realise that given the right support, they can perform creditably in many fields of endeavour. This perception can be linked to deficit thinking where disability is seen as a limitation.

Closely related to the above is the strategic way participants went about selecting programmes that could lead to immediate employment following graduation. Seven participants intimated that they pursue university education in order to obtain their desire jobs in areas where there are shortages and where tertiary education is valued. With the persistent shortage of graduate teachers in Ghana playing on their minds, many participants selected teaching profession as their preferred occupation. They believed that the shortage of graduate teachers meant that they would be able to obtain employment without much difficulty after graduation.

I believe studying educational programmes will assist me to get ready employment after graduation since there are vacant positions all the time with Ghana Education Service. I have seen many university graduates who are struggling to get employment after graduation. However, all those who did education programmes have obtained employment (Kofi).

It could be argued that Kofi's decision to pursue educational programme was due to the fact that he wanted to avoid undue competition. This suggests that Kofi's decision to study education was influenced by the belief that other career fields may not accept him because of his poor physical strength.

5.1.4 Financial benefits

Financial considerations was another motivator for participants in accessing higher education. It was reported that one of the reasons that influenced participants to access university education was the belief that higher education would increase the opportunity for obtaining financial benefits. As many as nine participants reported that higher education would increase the opportunity for obtaining desired jobs since different opportunities would be opened following graduation. To some participants, increase in opportunities means they would obtain jobs with corresponding increase in remunerations. The desire for better remuneration packages was a significant motivator to almost all the participants. By this, the participants such as Bash and Kwame who were working before coming to the university indicated that although they were having the same workload as their counterparts with university qualification, they received lower remuneration. Therefore, they believed that they would obtain promotion with corresponding increase in salary and other conditions of service (including free or subsidised accommodation) following university qualification. This suggests that students with disabilities see university education as a key element for obtaining remuneration that would support them to manage and control their lives and become independent despite being disabled. Bash, a physically-challenged student explained his reasons as follows:

I thought of pursuing university education after realising that other staff members in my school were receiving higher salaries than me although we all had the same workload. I realised that the university graduate teachers' salaries were higher than the rest of us with diploma and certificate 'A', I therefore decided to pursue university education so that I can get promotion and higher salary. Also, university education will increase my skills and knowledge in my subject area.

An increase in financial rewards acted as motivation for these students to access university education. For example, Bash's comments suggest that university education could lead to promotion with corresponding increase in remuneration. This shows that some students with disabilities pursue university education with the expectation of enhancing their future prospects in terms of financial security and other personal benefits. The belief is that holders of university qualification are in a better position to create more wealth than their counterparts without such qualifications. The general notion among participants, therefore, was that higher qualification increases wealth and income far above the level an individual would achieve without a university degree. This means that higher education assist students with disabilities to break through the social, economic and psychological barriers and restrictions created by society.

Some participants linked improved remuneration to family responsibility. Eight participants explained that they are obliged to take care of their nuclear and extended families. To them, their duty of care within the family emanates from Ghanaian cultural beliefs where children are expected to cater for their parents when they are old and enfeebled. This challenge arises due to lack of social support mechanisms that cater for the needy. The lack of political will by government to provide support services to the needy means that children are expected to shoulder the responsibilities of care for their parents during old age, retirement or sickness. Thus, the social responsibility of students with disabilities towards family members acted as a drive for the pursuance of university education. This was to a large extent, influenced by the desire to obtain better remuneration packages which would improve their position to support their families, and their belief that such remuneration would result from higher education.

I want to acquire university qualification so that I can obtain higher paying job that would position me well to be able to cater for my family. Well, from my family root, I am a witness to the struggles my parents are going through just

to make sure I do well in future. I know their expectation is to support me so I can cater for them in future when they are old (Kwabena).

For some students, future family responsibility remains a motivator for attending university. Kwabena's perception is that university qualification is linked to the acquisition of a higher-paying job which would eventually assist him to perform his family role. Looking at the struggles and sacrifices his parents have made to see him through the university, he sees this as a reciprocal responsibility to care for them.

5.2 Reasons for choosing a particular university.

Taking a decision on where to study was deemed to be one of the most important choices students make before pursuing university education. In this study, factors that influenced student's decision to access and participate in a particular university included maintaining relationships, study programme and cost of study at the university and friends influence

5.2.1 Maintaining relationship.

According to participants, the close location of the university to their home town and family relations was an important consideration for university selection. The majority of participants disclosed that it is more strenuous travelling for long distances given their disabilities. The participants further indicated that they selected their current university because of the strategic location of the city where the university is located. To them, this location makes travelling to their homes and family members easier and cheaper as compared to the location of other universities. To some participants, proximity to family members means that the requisite support would be received on time when needed. Those who have partners and children said this proximity would ensure familial support and prevent disconnect between them and their

families. Kwabena, Bash and Kwadwo indicated that being able to see their wives and children almost every week was significant in their decision. Therefore, the important role location plays in influencing the choice of university for all students including disabled students in particular was acknowledged.

I was motivated by my family to choose this university because they did not want me to travel very far since other universities are far away. They want me to be close so that I can fall on them whenever I am having problems. My closeness to them would also make it possible for them to visit me all the time (Akosua)

I want to be close to my wife and children so I can maintain my relationship with them while I am still studying. I want to be with them every weekend that is why I chose this university (Kwabena)

The students' comments show that students with disabilities may require more support and care than their non-disabled peers. This calls for effective collaboration between the university and family, hence, requiring relations to be close to disabled students. The views of the students indicate the need for support from outside the university, that is, from the family and other acquaintances while studying at the university. For example, Akosua's comment shows that her choice of university was informed by the family's desire to see her frequently and the support she could obtain from them.

5.2.2 Academic programme and cost.

Another factor influencing selection of a particular university is academic programme and cost. The selection of a university according to participants was influenced by the nature of the academic programmes run by the university. Most participants indicated that their desire to choose their present university was influenced by academic programmes that could lead to a teaching profession as this would enable them to obtain employment with ease. It was also

indicated by the participants that the availability of programmes that could give them insight into disability issues in Ghana also encouraged them to select their current university. Participants including Akosua, Kwaku, Kwame and Bash stated that although they have one impairment or the other, they have limited knowledge of disability issues. As a result, they were influenced to select their current university in order to have insight into disability issues from the programme they are studying. Some of the participants added that but for university education, they would not have had any idea about the laws and the privileges enshrined in the constitution for disabled people. The participants maintained that such an insight would assist them in their campaign against socio-cultural norms that affect their daily experiences.

I decided to come to this university because I wanted to know more about the issues of disability. I believe studying special education would assist me to keep myself abreast of the issues of disabilities. In that way, I can argue for my rights wherever I find myself in Ghana (Kwame).

Here, Kwame linked insights into disability issues with his ability to argue for his rights. The students' desire to have knowledge on disability issues indicate that they wanted to be fully equipped with disability information so that they can advocate for themselves and assist others who may be having similar challenges.

In addition, participants indicated that they selected their current university due to the reputation it has built for itself over some time due to the quality programmes the university runs. These participants identified that the university is noted for producing high quality graduates in the field of education. They further explained that the university is recognised in terms of opportunities after graduation in education and that people who graduate from the university have high reputation and are given respect in the communities where they work. Kwadwo, a physically challenged student shared his experience:

I know when it comes to studying education, this university is ranked high in the country. I have realised that employers like the students who graduate from this university. I believe completing this university would increase opportunities for me.

The cost of university education was another factor disabled students considered in making a choice of university. Some disabled students including Bash, Kofi, Kwaku and Kwadwo stated that they opted for their current university because the tuition fee is comparatively lower than other universities with the same standard in Ghana. In addition, the majority of participants identified that the cost of living in the city where the university is located is comparatively lower than other towns and cities with other universities.

I was motivated to choose this university because it has the lowest tuition fees in Ghana right now. Besides, the cost of living in where the university is situated is comparatively very low when compared to other cities with universities (Bash).

The issue of cost of education and living expenses emphasised by participants is dependent on the financial position of the student's family or themselves. As many participants indicated that they were from poor backgrounds, cost considerations became paramount in the decision-making process regarding selection of a university. Thus, family income level influenced the decision about what kind of institution participants selected. A decision based on lower cost of the university tuition and living expenses suggests that students and parents' burden of support would be minimised.

5.2.3 The influence of friends.

Friends influence was also recognised as another factor that influenced participant's selection of their current university. Some of the participants reported that they decided to attend their current university due to the influence of some friends at senior high school. According to some of the participants, they chose their present university because of the assurance of support from their friends at the university. For example, Akosua explained that she was influenced to apply for admission as her closest friend at high school was also preparing her application. She believed that since she knew her already, she would get someone to relate to at the university. Some participants also indicated that they did not want to disconnect the long-standing relationship they had with some friends. A participant shared his experience in this way:

All my circle of friends I used to study with at senior high school decided to come to this university so I decided to join them. My decision was also influenced by the assurance of support from my friends. Besides, some of my peers at the university advised me on the quality of teaching and academics (Akwasi).

Akwasi's statement shows that he believed that being among people who understand him would minimise the challenges he will face at the university. Although the recommendations by peers were considered significant, it concentrated on awareness while neglecting an in-depth evaluation of the conditions at the university.

5.3 Sources of support for students with disabilities

Obtaining admission to university is not enough to guarantee students with disabilities' participation in higher education. Measures must be put in place by stakeholders to enable the

students to go through their studies successfully at the university. The findings of the present study showed that participants were able to maintain their status as university students due to some support mechanisms including family, peer, and institutional support systems.

5.3.1 Family support.

Family encouragement on the role of higher education in changing lives was cited as critical for students with disabilities in accessing and participating in university education. Some of the participants reported that although their parents were less educated or completely illiterates, they encouraged them to access and participate in university education. For some participants, the encouragement they received from their parents enabled them to persevere in the midst of difficult situations such as discrimination, marginalisation and stigmatisation. The students further explained that without their parents' positive attitude, advice and willingness, they would not have been able to maintain and sustain their studies at the university. Some of the participants also reported that their parents motivated them to set difficult but achievable objectives to guide their education. For some of the students, their parents have always instilled that positive and optimistic attitude that they have tapped into to succeed. They were, therefore, encouraged to study hard in order to achieve this objective. For example, the encouragement from some participants' parents assisted them to overcome the psychological trauma and physical challenges they experienced daily at the university. Adwoa reported her experience as follows:

My parents made me to understand that higher education is significant in sustaining my life in Ghana. My parents encouraged me that a person could acquire money and properties but they could come to an end but education has no end and could support me for the rest of my life as no one can take it from

me. As a result, my parents encouraged and sometimes persuaded me to pursue university education so as to widen my options in life.

Some of the participants reported that although their parents were less educated or completely illiterate, they supported them to persevere in their studies. Kwadwo, Kwaku and Kofi indicated that although their parents were peasant and subsistence farmers, they, nevertheless, supported them in every way possible to access and participate in university education. The support from the family came in the form of financial and material resources such as tape recorders, braille papers and laptops. They indicated that since they did not receive materials like laptops and recorders from the university, it would have been difficult for them without the support of their families. Kwame, a visually impaired participant shared his experience:

My parents are very supportive of my education, they provide all my educational needs including tape recorder and lap top. They also cater for all my financial needs.

Married participants including Kwabena, Kwadwo, Bash and Kwame maintained that their wives were inspirational to their academic achievements. To them, their wives provided psychological, moral and material support while at the same time encouraging them to work hard and succeed. A participant, (Kwame) reported that his main source of support came from his partner who is visually impaired and had completed her master's degree in disability studies. He reiterated that his partner's understanding and awareness of the challenges associated with the education of visually impaired students meant that he received the requisite support which lessened his stressful experiences. He further indicated that his wife provided useful information which has been beneficial to him. He shared his experience:

At first, I was worried about the conditions at the institutions of learning in Ghana so I decided not to continue my education anymore after Sixth- form but

my wife encouraged me, bought the application form for me and has been supporting me all the time.

Kwame's comment shows that his partner offered motivation for him to access and maintain university education. It is therefore plausible to state that without the support from partners, some participants would not have been able to cope with the pressure that come with higher education. The participants' stories also indicate that those who have experienced university education could provide information that would support their partners to enrol in university education since they have walked the path.

Although participants indicated family support was important in assisting them in their university education, seven students suggested that their financial standing could be better if they are able to obtain a government loan to support the assistance they receive from their family. Participants stated that although all students have the opportunity to access government loans, the processes involved are laborious and challenging. They explained that applicants for the loan need to obtain three guarantors who are contributors to the fund so that in case of default, the sponsored institution could deduct the money from the guarantors' contributions. The problem is that people are hesitant to act as guarantors for students with disabilities who they least trust to pay back on time after graduation. Consequently, most of the disabled students are unable to access these loans. A participant shared his experience as follows:

For two years I have tried to find three guarantors so that I can obtain the student loan to support myself but I have not got anyone. If your family members are not contributors to the Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT) fund, nobody wants to guarantee for you (Kwadwo).

Kwadwo's comment reveals that students with disabilities experience frustrations regarding accessing financial support for their university education. The unwillingness of the contributors

of the fund to guarantee for these students, as well as that of the loan institution to make requirements flexible, leave disabled students with limited funding options. It can, therefore, be said that although there is an avenue for obtaining loan concessions, the procedures governing such funds prevent some students who need these loans the most from accessing them. Kwadwo's comment suggests an approach where students with disabilities could be exempted from finding guarantors who are contributors to SSNIT. This indicates that in order to promote the education of students with disabilities at all levels, higher education could be made free for students with disabilities.

5.3.2 Peer support.

Support from both disabled and non-disabled peers was important for the participants. Friendship with non-disabled students was a source of support for the participants of this study. Participants explained that students with disabilities cannot feel comfortable without assistance from their peers and emphasised that socialising with non-disabled students was essential. Some participants stated that they were assisted in both academic and non-academic tasks by non-disabled peers. For example, participants with visual impairments indicated that they were not given a disability specific orientation when they arrived at the university. Hence, they relied on their peers to orientate them within the university campus by showing them some important areas on the campus.

In this university my closest friends are everything for me, they are my sight, light, teacher ..., we were friends before my impairment so they understand me better and are ready to help me all the time (Akosua).

Kwaku a manual wheelchair user reported that he relies on other students every day to get his manual wheelchair to lecture theatres which are located on top floors of buildings as there are no elevators in a number of campus buildings.

Each time I go for lectures in this university, I need to crawl and beg other people to assist me in carrying my wheelchair to the lecture hall, other than that I drag my wheelchair by myself along as I crawl... Also, my peers normally assist me in fetching water and carrying it to the bath room for me when the tap is not flowing (Kwaku).

Participants' comments show that students with disabilities are constrained by the university's physical environment. They receive limited support from the university and rely on their peers to assist them familiarise themselves with the environment. Participants' experiences underscore the relevance of peer support received at the university. Their experiences show that some of their peers who understand disabled students empathise with them and are ready to assist them to overcome some of the challenges they face at the university. Hence, without peer support, students with disabilities would find university life more challenging. This suggests that aside their own academic pursuits, peers sometimes perform extra roles of care giving to students with disabilities, a responsibility the university should carry out. The challenge, however, is that these kind of supports may not be right for students with disabilities since peers may lack the professional nous to provide the requisite support to these students. The issue here is that students with disabilities experience challenges at the university (see 6.2.2) which require support, and their peers provide these services to them (students with disabilities).

Participants also experienced peer support through collaboration among themselves. This support comes in the form of sharing of information, materials and lecture notes among students with disabilities themselves. For example, participants with visual impairment stated that sometimes they share the same recorder, transcribe lecture notes together and distribute it among themselves. The participants further emphasised that they collaborated well with their course mates as they cooperate with each other through notes sharing.

In this university most of the time we move in groups, those of us with visual impairments are always together at the basement of the department, we share almost everything including listening to recorded lectures, transcriptions and food. Besides, the nature of the university is such that I cannot live independently so I share with non-disabled peers what I think they may need from me, for example, soft copies of notes I receive from some of the lecturers (Kwame).

Participants' comments demonstrate collaboration with both disabled and non-disabled students is valuable for navigating the university world by students with disabilities, with implication being that opportunities for shared experience is a vital aspect of support in higher education and networking.

Support sometimes come in a specific form of peer tutoring. This form of support involves non-disabled students serving as a guide to students with disabilities in their academic activities. To some participants their peers acted as campus tutors and supported them in different ways. Some of the participants also declared that their peers provided them with the latest academic information at the university. For example, Akosua and Kwabena, visual impairment students indicated that without their sighted peers it would be difficult for them to know the happenings in the university. This becomes even more crucial during examinations since they depend on them for all information and directives relating to assessments and tests. They stated that time tables for examinations and assessment results are displayed on the notice boards at the university. They therefore rely on their tutors for such information. It was reported that institutional provision for peer tutoring was absent in the university for all the participants. Hence, they depended on their peers' voluntary support for information.

The university did not give us peer tutors. Some of my peers have sacrificed to be my peer tutors. They provide me with the information at the university, without them it will be difficult to obtain information on test and examination schedules (Akosua).

Findings from the study show that the importance of peer tutoring was evident in the current study. Akosua's comment suggests that the university's preparedness toward guiding disabled students to obtain needed academic information is limited. An ineffective flow of information may lead students with disabilities to rely on their peers for support, a situation that affect their ability to be independent. This suggests that students with disabilities would struggle to obtain the requisite information in the university without the support from some of their peers. The indication is that peer tutoring is important especially in an institution where other forms of support mechanisms such as electronic transmission of information are absent. The willingness of some non-disabled peers to support disabled students could mean that there is perceived understanding between the disabled students and some of their non-disabled peers and this is important as it creates a free and conducive environment in which they could express their feelings and challenges.

5.3.3 Institutional support.

Participants in the present study discussed the influence of institutional support (support from the university and other government agencies) in their academic achievement at the university. The majority of participants indicated that institutional support or the lack of it has a major impact on their studies. To them, the learning environment at the university requires that the university provides some form of support to assist students with disabilities in their day to day activities. According to the findings, some academic and non-academic staff provide support

to students with disabilities in several ways. The support services discussed by participants included psychological, academic, and financial.

Psychological support. Psychological support is provided for disabled students through the guidance and counselling services unit. The visually impaired participants indicated that the university assigned them to counsellors to aid their psychological wellbeing. Contrarily, the physically challenged participants decried the poor and infrequent guidance and counselling service provided by the university. This suggests that some of the participants expressed misgivings about the guidance services provided at the university. Participants stated that their daily experiences at the university means that they need guidance and counselling services frequently, as they have to go through a daily ordeal of provocation and hurtful comments from non-disabled people. The psychological challenges are usually compounded by a debilitating physical and teaching environment of the university, a scenario which underscores the urgent need for frequent guidance and counselling services. Probing further, the physically challenged students stated that the counselling unit does not have enough staff, with the limited personnel concentrating more on teaching. As a result, appointments are always delayed and this puts students off from accessing counselling services.

I would say the students with disabilities do not obtain the needed counselling support they require. This department does not have enough experts in guidance and counselling so it is always difficult to find people to assist students' particularly disabled students. Nevertheless, some lecturers assist some of the students who request for counselling. The university counselling unit lack personnel to cater for the students' needs. At the moment we do not have a programme that is focused on disabled students. The department is working on operational plans that would apply directly to students (Dr. Joe).

The comment by Dr. Joe suggests that even though students may be experiencing challenges which may require psychological support, the university's preparedness in meeting such needs is limited. A number of reinforcing factors may contribute to the limited utilization of the services offered by the counselling unit. According to Dr. Joe, inadequate preparedness on the part of the university is due to shortage of staff at the counselling unit. However, remedying the shortage of staff situation is challenging given that the university is constrained by inadequate resources. Infrequent use of counselling services at the university by the students is an indication that either the students are unsatisfied with the delayed appointments or do not recognise the significance of the counselling services in helping them to manage their challenges. It could also mean that the participants have accepted the dominant perception that psychological support is not necessary because impairments are associated with such limitations in Ghanaian society.

Academic support. Academic support was provided through the voluntary assistance received from university staff especially the teaching assistants. The intent has been to assist students to access information from the internet for their assignments, tests and examinations. In addition, visually impaired participants stated that the resource assistants usually read examination questions for them to braille before they could answer especially when the only embosser in the university develops mechanical fault. Participants with visual impairment further stated that they sometimes receive support from certain lecturers as they give them lecture notes and resources to support their studies. Support sometimes come from non-academic staff. For example, some of the students who were able to access the library specified that they received support from the librarians in finding information they needed.

The resource persons are always ready to offer me any assistance I need. Right now one of them has installed a software on my laptop that allows me to edit my assignment and other works before submission. I have a software which

translate text into audio through the assistance of these resource persons. Sometimes too they provide extra tutorials for some of us free of charge. In fact, without their assistance, my life at the university would be more challenging and complicated (Kwabena)

Students experiences of academic support show that there are some people in the university who are ready to support them to succeed, and that there is some access to technological support. Although participants did not experience support all the time, they considered the limited support valuable because it facilitated their learning and reduced dependency on their peers.

Financial support. Institutional support also comes in the form of financial help some of the participants received from the university and external sources. Akosua, a visually impaired student said she has once obtained financial support from the university although this does not happen with any regularity. Two participants' Yaw and Kwadwo indicated having received financial support from local government at the initial stages of their university education. However, this ceased after a couple of months. Other students indicated not receiving any form of assistance from either the university or external institutions.

I have once received financial support from the university through the assistance from one of my lecturers. Although it was not much, it assisted me in paying my tuition fees (Akosua).

The findings of the current study show that institutional financial support is not reliable given that only few students have experienced this support. The indication is that students cannot rely entirely on such sources of funding for their upkeep in the university. However, there are no established scholarships or hardship grants that could support students with disabilities in their daily activities except vice chancellor's scholarship which is given to best student in each year

group. This means that the students' relied upon familial financial support which are sometimes not enough for their upkeep. The indication is that the institutions may not have funds that have been specifically allocated to support students with disabilities.

5.5 Summary

This chapter has examined students' motivation to access university education and the kind of support they receive. The findings of this chapter indicate that students with disabilities decision to pursue university education was influenced by their desire to live an independent life, obtain dignity and respect and also being able to support their families. Another factor was participants desire to broaden their knowledge of disability issues in order to cause changes in other peoples' perception about PWD. The students' desire to maintain relationship (family and friends), university's programmes and cost as well as friends influence affected participants decision to select their current university. In achieving their desire for accessing university education, participants received support from different sources including family, peer and institutions. The next chapter discusses accessibility and belonging of students with disabilities in higher education in Ghana.

Chapter Six

Accessibility and Belonging

This chapter examines data on how students with disabilities experience accessibility and belonging in a Ghanaian university. The first section of the chapter reports students' experiences of other peoples' attitude and behaviour towards them. The second section discusses the institutional factors that influence accessibility and belonging of the students at the university. Thus, this section examines the admission process into the university, disabled students experiences of the physical or built environment and other institutional factors that affect accessibility and belonging. Next, the coping mechanisms adopted by disabled students to deal with accessibility and belonging challenges have also been discussed. The chapter ends with a summary.

Accessibility as used in the current study depicts transformation in the physical infrastructure, teaching, learning and social environments of the university to support students' development and achievements. Accessibility explains students with disabilities' experiences on how the university has structured the facilities and built environment to meet varied needs of students. Thus, accessibility denotes the ability of participants to live independently with least to no support from others. Consequently, participants in the present study advocated for removal of barriers that negatively influence the academic potentials of disabled students in the university. Accessibility in the context of the present study presupposes that the necessary human and financial resources are made available to support students with disabilities and ensure that their needs are addressed and learning opportunities improved. The understanding of access influences students with disabilities perceptions of belonging. Belonging is the perception that the built, learning, and social environments support the lived experiences of students with disabilities in the university.

6.1 Factors influencing accessibility and belonging in higher education

Accessibility and belonging in the university was influenced by attitudinal and institutional factors. Although some of the participants experience positive attitude especially from non-disabled people having understanding of disability issues, they nevertheless face various challenges. The challenges include attitudinal barriers (discrimination and stigmatisation) and institutional challenges (inadequate support) which affects the university's ability to provide services that meet the needs of these students. As stated in section 1.2.1, the government who is the main funding agent for the university keeps decreasing funds allocated to these universities despite increasing student numbers.

6.1.1 Attitudinal factors influencing accessibility and belonging

Disability Knowledge. The findings of the present research indicate that there are some non-disabled people in the university who showed positive attitudes toward students with disabilities and this encouraged a sense of accessibility and belonging. The participants indicated that one major factor that influences positive attitude towards students with disabilities is non-disabled people's knowledge of disability issues. According to the participants, the positive attitude seems to have a link with individual experiences, particularly, the subject areas they study or teach. The participants observed that students who have knowledge of disability issues were ready to associate with them (students with disabilities). Some participants stated that their course-mates who have insight into disability issues are more tolerant, supportive, caring and willing to interact with them compared to other students without knowledge of disability issues. In addition, others indicated that some non-disabled peers who were not their course-mates still demonstrated positive attitude towards them. Probing further, the participants reported that the positive attitude of these people might have come from their personal experience. For example, having a person with disability in their

home or have had encounter with someone with disability. Some participants narrated their experiences as:

Some of the non-disabled students are so caring and cooperative, they are always ready to assist me. Even if I am not able to go for lectures they come to me in my hall of residence to deliver any information that would be beneficial to me during my absence (Adwoa).

Sometimes when I am walking with my friends and I am unable to understand them when they are prompting me of an obstacle on the way, they carry me on their arms to cross such obstacle (Akosua).

Although, as noted in Chapter 5, some students are willing to provide support to their peers, they may not have the right training for this. Since students may have limited knowledge about supporting disabled people, it raises questions about the quality of support that they render to these students. However, these disabled students have little or no option than to welcome the support services that may come from these inexperienced students in the university.

Participants stated that lecturers who have knowledge of disability issues understand and support them in many ways. In particular, the participants stated that lecturers from the Special Education Department were sympathetic to the cause of disabled students. The positive attitude come in many forms including encouragement, giving them preferential treatment in class and giving of soft and hard copies of lecture notes, as well as making test and examination papers in alternative format. Support from these lecturers also come in the form of advice about the programmes to select and techniques to be used to succeed at the university. Thus, having insight into issues of disability influenced these lecturers to understand these students. Two of the participants explained their experiences as follows:

Most of the teaching staff in my department (special education) are very kind towards me especially if I compare them to people from other departments. For example, they give me the opportunity to be in front during lecture periods. They are also lenient with me even when I'm late in class (Kwaku).

The attitude of some of the lecturers towards me is good, they are always ready to assist me when I approach them. They are always ready to give me soft copy of their notes after their lectures (Kwabena).

Kwaku's experience reflects the positive effects of lecturers having insight into issues about disabilities. Kwaku's view explains that lecturers with insights into disability issues were not skeptical about supporting disabled students at the university. The students also observed the provision of support as a sign of good attitude. In addition, participants' experiences show that daily interaction and closeness with students and lecturers who have knowledge about disability issues engender a feeling of empathy and understanding among them. Therefore, it can be said that interaction by non-disabled students with students with disabilities and insight into disability issues are key factors that influence a positive attitude toward disabled students. In effect, participants believe that where such positive attitudes are exhibited, accessibility and belonging are encouraged.

Despite the positive attitudes students with disabilities experience when non-disabled people have knowledge of disability issues, some participants explained that non-disabled people including staff at the university lack knowledge of disability issues. Notwithstanding this, the university is not doing enough to make staff and students become aware of issues of disabilities. Although periodic training has been suggested in the corporate strategic plan of the university to keep the university community abreast of issues of disability, this is yet to be implemented. A lecturer participant explained:

The university has limited plans for students with impairments yet admits them. They preach that the university is an inclusive institution yet nothing here is inclusive. The university does not sensitise or organise training for staff on issues with disabilities (Dr. Joe).

Dr. Joe's comment suggests that the university has been less successful in getting lecturers informed about issues of disability due to inadequate support. The low support suggests that majority of lecturers may not have the requisite skills to teach students with disabilities. This brings to the fore the issue of disability awareness. This lack of awareness among non-disabled staff signifies the significance of staff development and consciousness on disability issues in ensuring accessibility and belonging of students with disabilities in higher education.

Discrimination. Another factor influencing disabled students accessibility and belonging is discrimination. Participants stated that they experience negative attitudes and behaviour from the majority of their non-disabled peers, hall administrators and some lecturers. To the participants, this behaviour and attitude emanated from cultural, social and traditional practices of the communities from which people are born and nurtured in Ghana. Participants in the present study indicated being discriminated against in the university's social settings. They reported that majority of their peers in the university act with horror, fear, anxiety and patronising behaviour towards them. For example, one physically challenged participant commented that non-disabled students would usually shake hands and talk with their non-disabled peers but only wave at disabled students or ignore them entirely. Other participants reported that non-disabled people hardly sit close to them in a bus. According to these participants, this has engendered a feeling of discrimination towards them.

Sometimes when I am lucky to walk with some of the non-disabled students and we meet other students who are not disabled, they will be shaking hands with each other and wave at me, they will never shake hands with me because of my disability (Akwasi).

In a bus, sharing space is a problem. My non-disabled peers are uncomfortable sitting close to me. Sometimes when I sit beside them they will either leave the whole seat for me or move away from me as if I'm not a human being or disability is infectious (Kwadwo).

Participants drew on the example of study groups to provide more details of how they experienced discrimination. The participants reported that within these groups, students are allowed to choose their group leaders. In lecturer-formed groups, the group members have no option than to accept students with disabilities in their groups. Within these groups, decisions (such as meeting times) are taken by consensus and this poses difficulties for students with disabilities. Most of the difficulties reported were related to peer cooperation and clashes on meeting times. For example, disabled students feel embittered about discussion of venues and time for meetings which are usually decided by the majority against their wish and convenience. The physically challenged students for example, reported that sometimes they felt rejected from the group as meetings are normally scheduled at night which is not comfortable for them to attend due to the nature of the built environment. For example, two physically challenged students reported that when they manage to go for meetings, their contributions are not treated with any seriousness. The participants indicated that non-disabled students treat them with disdain as their opinions and contributions count for nothing.

In this university if you are disabled they don't consider you as important, all the time when group work are given by a lecturer, the non-disabled group

members do not take my opinion serious especially when it comes to meeting schedule and discussions (Bash).

Related to the difficulties students with disabilities encounter in joining lecturer-formed discussion groups is the challenge of participating in student-formed discussion groups. Some of the participants stated that they feel isolated and rejected in normal academic work. These students elaborated that it is difficult for them to join student-formed study groups. They revealed that these student-formed groups are voluntary groups formed by the students themselves for the purpose of their academic enhancement. The participants explained that in these student-formed groups, the leaders decide who to accept and reject. Therefore, students with disabilities reported that they are normally rejected with the reason that the groups are full but at the same time these students would be accepting new non-disabled members into the groups. For example, visually impaired students stated that some of the non-disabled group members do not welcome them because they are concerned about disabled student's availability for discussions as they were not keen to support them to attend group meetings. In effect, disabled students are forced to form their own groups which sometimes limit the effectiveness of discussions owing to limited information and other materials to which they have access.

Joining discussion groups involving non-disabled students seems to be a daunting task in this university. I know they doubt my ability to have a meaningful discussion with them. However, they are comfortable to engage in group discussions with their non-disabled peers. This experience is exasperating. I have been wondering, what is wrong with me? Am I not a human being like them? This makes me feel helpless and insecure because I am surrounded by people who do not want to have anything to do with me (Yaw).

Although there are advantages associated with group discussion sessions as it fosters deeper understanding of concepts and peer support, accessing discussion groups was challenging for majority of the participants in the current research. The disabled students' experiences show that academic shared experience is recognised and valued as an important facet of support at the university. However, Yaw's comment suggests a feeling of distress as he is uncomfortable in joining discussion groups. Though Yaw felt bad about the challenges he experienced in joining a discussion group, his statements revealed that the non-disabled students' hesitation to accept students with disabilities may lead to a feeling of insecurity and helplessness of disabled students in the university. Thus, the disabled students thought that non-disabled students have failed to recognise that they have abilities and strengths that could contribute meaningfully to achieve academic goals. This has the potential to negatively affect disabled students' academic achievements.

Another aspect of discrimination related to difficulty in accessing lecture notes and other materials even from some course lecturers. The visually impaired participants reported that generally, lecturers do not provide lecture notes in alternative format, making it difficult for them to access the necessary information about their courses. Some participants indicated that they experienced resistance from some lecturers who argue that they had no knowledge of students with special needs in their classes. However, they reported that after lecturers become aware of their presence in the class, they continue to avoid them. For example, it was stated that although some of the lecturers were willing to assist and interact with non-disabled students, the same lecturers were reluctant to support these students even when they asked their lecturers for assistance. Probing into why these lecturers were unwilling to offer support, disabled students believed their requests for support were usually construed by their lecturers as a way of seeking favour and preferential treatment, a perception which discouraged and demotivated these students from seeking further assistance from lecturers. Disabled students

contend that this lack of academic support from lecturers is a source of marginalization which also affect their sense of belonging in the university. A participant explained his experience as follows:

I think some of the lecturers find it difficult to believe and accept the presence of visually impaired students in the class because they believe a student with visual impairment cannot make it to the university. Even when I raise my hand to answer questions or seek clarification in class, these lecturers don't call me. Besides, I can sense that most of them are not comfortable when they see me in their class. Most often they say they are unaware that a visually impaired student is in the class but continue to show open discrimination against me in class after they become aware of me in the class (Kwabena).

The disabled students reported that during examinations and tests, their frustrations in the university deepen as examiners do not make provision for them when allocating rooms for examination purposes. The students explained that they are arranged according to the university identification number which usually positions them in the upper floors. Accordingly, the lack of mobility support facilities at the university positions them at a disadvantage as it becomes stressful for them to access these rooms. Moreover, they are not given any extra time even when they are delayed due to a change in examination venue at the eleventh hour. For example, Kwaku stated that in one examination he was offered a room on the fifth floor. When he complained, he was given a room alone at the basement of the building which was full of broken tables and chairs. He added that although his peers started the examination over 30 minutes before him, he was not given any extra time. He further stated that when he complained about the time due to a change in venue, the invigilator said *'what at all are you writing, even the normal students couldn't do it'*. According to the participant, the invigilator's attitude was demeaning because it undervalued the abilities of disabled students at the university. Kwaku

further stated that the limited time allotted coupled with the invigilator's comment unsettled him and contributed to him failing that paper:

In examination situations, the condition at the university is very stressful. Most often I write my examination in the upper floors, I get tired walking to the examination room before the exam begins and this affects my performance (Kwaku)

The visually impaired participants were concerned that sometimes tests and examination papers are not in alternative format. In such situations, their test and examination questions are read for them to braille before they can answer. Although they use extra time to brail the test questions, they are denied additional time. The participants explained that this phenomenon may be the result of resource constraints and according to participants, low priority on the part of university authorities for issues relating to students with disabilities. However, efforts from the Disability Unit which coordinates the activities of disabled students to ensure that the requisite materials are available and in the right format have not always been successful. This could be attributed to different factors including the failure of the university to develop comprehensive disability policies to address such issues and inadequate resources. The University Corporate Strategic Plan which embodies aspects of the welfare of students with disabilities only addresses broad issues relating to mobility but is silent on examination related issues. In effect, such frustrations and lack of support undermine PWD feelings of belonging as they believe their needs are not factored into mainstream planning in the university.

In examination situation, sometimes the questions are not in alternative format for the visually impaired students, therefore I have to brail before I can answer but all these must be done within the same time as non-disabled student who answers the questions directly without Brailleing (Kwame).

The participants reported that they experience discrimination in regards to the social activities of the university and this affects their sense of belonging. They added that the timing of social activities at the university is not convenient because these are usually held at night. With difficulties in accessing the physical environment a major issue for students with disabilities (see 6.1.2), they are not keen to attend such programmes. Some participants stated that usually students struggle for space during social activities and since they do not have the energy to compete with non-disabled peers, they avoid such meetings. For example, the participants indicated that every year there are a number of entertainment and sporting programmes such as inter-halls debate competitions and university hall weeks. These university activities require all students to converge in a selected auditorium where students struggle for seats. One participant reported her experience:

My social life has been cut off, I do not go for university social activities, I do not want other students to look down upon me. The way these social events are organised are also not good for me. The social activities are organised at night so I have decided not to worry myself in order not to increase my burden and that of my friends who assist me. I am sure in such gatherings most of the students would not be happy to see me because they would not be from my department. In such situations, they will pass negative comments which may hurt me. I have therefore decided not to attend those events to save myself from embarrassment from other students. Besides, most of these social events are held after lectures which normally travel deep into the night, these periods are also not good for me to move around due to my impairment (Akosua).

Akosua's remark is a demonstration that disabled students are not considered when planning social activities. As a result, their needs are not considered in social events. The lack of provision for disabled students shows that they would rely on their friends for support, a

situation Akosua wants to avoid. Besides, there was perception of anxiety as Akosua felt that she would be embarrassed upon attending social events. Therefore, students with disabilities decision to avoid attending certain social events could be a strategy to protect themselves in an otherwise inhospitable environment. However, there are implications for avoidance because it denies students with disabilities the opportunity to network and make new friends, a vital tool to widen career prospects. The timing of social activities in the university also suggests that the planners of these social activities may be oblivious to the needs of disabled students.

Stigmatisation. Participants indicated that they experience stigma in many ways. To them, every action they take is interpreted by non-disabled students as though something was wrong with them. Most of the disabled students believe that their non-disabled peers and the general university community look at them with some reservations, a situation which apart from negatively affecting their sense of belonging, also makes them feel insecure and uncomfortable. The main reason for the constant doubt according to participants is that some of their peers associate them with bad luck, witchcraft and evil.

Usually, my fellow students call me 'blind man', one day I overheard someone saying; what at all is this blind man doing around here, I don't want to see him, ... anytime I see him my day becomes bad (Kwame).

In this university, most of the students who are aware of my condition do not want to get closer to me. I know the nature of my eyes deceive some of them. I look normal to outsiders but when they get to know my situation they avoid me. Some of the students who used to come to my room have stopped coming there after realising that I am visually impaired. They think I am evil so they don't want to have any association with evil person (Akosua).

Here, participants perceived that their peers were avoiding them because of their beliefs about impairments. This may mean that non-disabled people's perceptions on the attributes of disability creates unfounded fears which make them to disassociate from disabled student like Akosua. Nevertheless, the non-disabled people's attitude and behaviour reveal limited knowledge and understanding of disability issues. This may further widen the gap created by the belief system leading to isolation.

Apart from the general feeling of doubt, some participants stated that they experience stigmatisation through 'labelling', that is, they are given unpleasant names because of their disabilities. These labels are usually socially defined and reflects the value system of the society. For example, Kwaku reported that he has experienced his fair share of labelling and is now referred to as the 'wheelchair man' whilst others call him 'the crippled man'. Bash's name has also been changed to "the Pozzo man", a derogatory name derived from a famous Ghanaian musician who is physically challenged. Although Bash has no family association with the musician, he has been labelled because he exhibits similar features. In all instances, the students said their labelled names have overshadowed their real names at the university. Some of the participants further indicated that these 'labels' prevent them from attending social gatherings since people would tease and ridicule them by shouting their labelled names which makes them uncomfortable. Experiences such as these are likely to have negative impact on the students with disabilities access to and sense of belonging in the university. Bash commented as follows:

Many people don't know my real name because of the name they have given me. They now call me 'pozzo' which I have grown accustomed to since I don't know how they are going to call me should I stress myself over this one. Although it is stigmatised, I like it because they have more demeaning names for some of

my friends. They call some of them “apakye nyansani” (A clever crippled man) which I hate.

Bash’s statement shows that although he is not comfortable with the ‘label’ given him, he has accepted it as normal part of his life at the university. This suggests that when disabled people are surrounded by those who look down upon them, they begin to ‘accept’ the dominant belief which influence non-disabled peoples’ attitude and behaviour towards them. It appears disabled students like Bash’s acceptance of such ‘labels’ was significant for some reasons. Firstly, Bash has no control over non-disabled students’ decision about the name given to him, as such he has to ‘play along’. This suggests that Bash has limited choice to reject the current ‘label’. Secondly, it could be interpreted that Bash was picking his battles since it would be difficult for him to succeed in changing non-disabled students’ opinions about him. Fearing that a worse ‘label’ may be ascribed to them, disabled students such as Bash are resigned to such undignified labels. Three, it could be interpreted that the policy provision against using derogatory names for disabled people has not been activated at the university. Such labelling of disabled students by non-disabled peers indicate that it is possible that non-disabled students are not aware of the impact of the labels they give to their disabled peers.

6.1.2 Institutional factors influencing accessibility and belonging

This section presents the findings on institutional factors affecting accessibility and belonging of students with disabilities in the university. Two themes emerged from analysis of data and relate to participants experiences in the admission process (disclosure of disability) and the physical environment. Participants reported that sections of the application form oblige them to disclose their disability status. All the participants disclosed their disability during the application and admission process.

The admission process. The participants of the present study reported that there is equal opportunity for admission into the university. They further revealed that the university does not have a quota for students with disabilities, with the admission process not being influenced by individual's impairment. The participants also indicated that there were two groups of people involved in the application process, students who made direct entry application and mature applicants who applied through interview and entrance examination. It was revealed in the current study that participants who made direct entry application experienced less difficulties in the admission process compared to mature applicants. The mature students (both disabled and non-disabled) write entrance examination and attend interviews which further affects their access to university education. In terms of accessibility and belonging, this is significant as all students are given equal opportunities for admission. This brings equal opportunity in the admission process since all applicants are considered using the same criteria. Bash, a physically challenged participant shared his experience as:

Locating the entrance examination centre and interview venue was not easy, I had no one to assist me. I had to struggle for the venue, a situation which was stressful.

Notwithstanding the equal opportunity for admission, the application process requires students to declare their impairment, with disabled students having additional sections of the form to complete. The decision to disclose disability on the application form is influenced by the perception of the individual about the effect of disclosure on student life at the university. Participants in the current study self-identified as disabled and disclosed their disability on the application form. Seven participants were confident about the opportunity to disclose their impairment during the application process as this offered them hope for possible support at the university. To them, the university community's perception would be positive unlike the communities in which they live, hence, were less concerned about disclosing their disabilities.

Others reported that they disclosed their disability because people's perception about their kind of disability seems positive (such as mildly physically challenged students).

I disclosed my impairment on the application form. I needed to do that since I knew I would need support in the application process and in my university life upon admission. I imagined that if I didn't do that how would the university get to know that student 'A' or 'B' is having this problem and therefore require assistance. So I disclosed my disability with the anticipation of possible support from the university. Besides, I am having physical disability which is visible, so I am cool with that (disclosing disability) (Bash).

Bash's comment shows that different factors influence students' decision to disclose their disability on the application form. First, Bash stated that he was not concerned particularly because his disability is visible, hence, people would recognise his disability even without disclosing it. This shows that he did not have to gauge whether to disclose his disability or not. In addition, Bash's reason for disclosure was to receive support in the application process and upon admission to the university. However, Bash stated that he neither received any support during the application process nor upon admission at the university. Moreover, some disabled students' lack of concern in disclosing disability was associated with the nature of their disability. For example, Yaw stated that he felt confident to disclose his disability since he felt people are less concerned about those with mild physical disability. Therefore, it can be argued that the desire for opportunities for support at the university was an incentive for disabled students to disclose their disability on the application form.

However, not all participants were satisfied with the requirement to disclose disability status in the admission process. Although they ended up disclosing their disability status, Akosua and Akwasi appeared to be in a dilemma regarding the purpose for the disclosure. To them, their

decision to disclose involved extensive evaluation. Their evaluation of disclosure indicates that they had to gauge the amount of information to provide on the application form since they perceived this could put them at a disadvantage in the future. They were concerned their impairment could be used against them and would be stigmatised.

I was scared, I didn't want the university to reject me because of my impairment. Besides, I thought it would give others the opportunity to label and stigmatise me because of my impairment but I had no option since I thought that without disclosing, I will not be considered for opportunities associated with disability at the university (Akwasí).

The issue of disclosure has been a difficult one for some disabled students. Although it is expected that disabled applicants would disclose their disabilities on the application form, some students were in dilemma due to the perception that it could affect their admission and students life when admitted. This suggests that some disabled students were concerned about disclosing their disability on the application form due to the social stigma, discrimination, shame and embarrassment associated with disability and how they thought the university authority would perceive this. Socially, disabled students' scepticism to disclose their disability was due to the perception that their disability would overshadow their important qualities. Akwasí's comment reflects the effect of social and attitudinal challenges that influence his fear to disclose his disability.

Furthermore, some disabled students' hesitation to disclose seems to be perceived as their means of controlling information and lessening the influence of their impairment and others over oneself. Thus, Akwasí and Akosua were worried about what higher education institution would do with the information they provide as this would lead to inadequate control and empowerment of students in the application process. Disclosure could, therefore, be seen as a

way of organizing prospects of sharing, building links and a movement to disrupt the walls of perceived differences that lead to discrimination, marginalisation and stigmatisation. Self-disclosure by Akwasi and Akosua during the application process may be seen as an individual and audacious investment that could bring a change in the experiences of disabled people while envisaging all-inclusive and democratic educational prospects and accomplishments. Although some participants had genuine concern about the disclosure of their impairment on the application form, they went ahead to disclose, a situation which showed that their perceived need for disclosure was more important than their anxiety about disclosure during the application process. Disclosure is, therefore, believed to engender a sense of acceptance and belonging, hence the need to disclose.

Notwithstanding the advantages of disclosure, one participant did not disclose all his disabilities, citing a lack of medical certification of his disability as the main reason. He also stated that the university did not provide the reason for the disclosure. In addition, he revealed that the space provided on the application form could only contain description of one disability, a situation which showed that the admission committee did not perceive a student could have multiple disabilities. He shared his experience:

The space provided on the application form to describe the disabilities were too small. I therefore ended up disclosing my physical impairment leaving my other impairment, (arthritis). Besides, it is not visible so people would not see even if I did not disclose (Kofi).

The non-disclosure of all disabilities by Kofi reflected the restrictions on the application form. This indicates that he had to weigh the impact the two disabilities would have on his academic work and disclose one. His decision to disclose his physical disability meant he thought the impact of non-disclosure could be devastating. It could also be interpreted that his personal

experience influenced him to disclose his physical disabilities. For example, his perception that the university's built environment would be challenging for him and the need for support might have influenced him to disclose the physical disability. The limited space to describe all his disabilities also means that the application process failed to empower disabled students because he was restricted in describing different categories of his disabilities. Additionally, although the students disclosed their disability, there were concerns as to how the information provided were used. For example, the visually impaired participants reported that even though they declared their disability status during the application process, the admission letter and other supporting documents were not in alternative format. Therefore, they engaged sighted persons to read and guide them to fill the acceptance form at a cost, creating extra financial access challenges.

The study further showed that there is poor coordination relating to the sharing of information about students with disabilities to the various faculties and departments. The participants said they were frustrated to find that the information they provided when applying for admission was not used in any way. For example, the participants stated that the various departments responsible for the welfare of students such as the Department of Students Affairs and the Academic Department did not consider the health status of students when allocating rooms in the halls of residence, planning academic activities, and in choosing teaching strategies. The visually impaired students indicated that they had to inform every lecturer who came to their class about their impairment because they had no prior information regarding the presence of such students in the class. One participant articulated her experience:

The conditions at the university show that the lecturers and other non-teaching staff are not aware that students with disabilities are admitted each year into the university. They only become aware when they see you in class so they don't plan ahead before students arrive or for the wellbeing of disabled students. The

*situation at the university shows that I disclosed my disability for nothing.....
So the application form and all the paper work I went through during the
admission process amounted to nothing..... (Adwoa).*

The ineffective communication among departments led participants to query whose responsibility it is (whether prospective disabled students or the Admissions Office) to inform the various departments in the university about the health status of students who are admitted. This is an indication that there is no clear process through which information is disseminated in the university. The students with disabilities suggest that the various departments such as Disability Unit and Department of Student Affairs who were supposed to preside over their welfare at the university were oblivious about their presence. This suggests that data collected about students with disabilities remain at the University Administration Office. Thus, the disclosure of disability during admission may be merely for academic, and perhaps for statistical purposes, rather than for supporting disabled students. For example, the participant who is a lecturer confirmed that they have never obtained any disability data while handling applications of students in his department. He further stated that the department is supplied with students' names and their certificates including transcripts without any knowledge about their disability status. This leads to poor collaboration across departments and reflects disregard for the wellbeing of disabled students which demoralises these students. The current study findings also show that when institutions of higher education fail to recognise the relevance of disability data, it becomes difficult for the institution to meet the diverse needs of all the students. Examining the findings of the current study, it can be seen that disabled students consideration of disclosure did not end at the stage of the admission process since they had to disclose their disabilities to some lecturers, a situation that makes disclosure an on-going process.

Physical environment. The participants considered the physical environment as significant to their welfare since it communicates a powerful non-verbal message concerning their place in the context of the university. Some of the participants stated the need for the university to make the built environment accessible for all students. This shows that the way the university responds to accessibility issues can communicate a message on how the university welcomes diversity and inclusion.

In the present study, accessibility of the university's physical environment (which comprises the campus physical lay-out, the buildings and the facilities within the buildings) was viewed by participants as challenging. In particular, the participants' were concerned about accessing areas such as the library, lecture halls, halls of residence, pedestrian routes and pavements, and the health facility at the university campus. Both staff and participants acknowledged the effort the university is making to create access for students with physical and visual impairments. These changes include creation of ramps and elevators to access various buildings. For example, the participants reported that the university clinic is accessible and a good example of the effort the university is making towards the creation of a disability-friendly environment. The lecturer commented:

The senior managers of the university are making efforts to ensure the university becomes accessible for all students. As stated in the university strategic plan ramps are being built, they have also fixed two elevators to the tallest buildings on campus where most of the classes are held (Dr. Joe).

The university's effort to make the physical environment accessible may be construed as a means of engendering access and creating a congenial environment where students with disabilities can feel belonged and are catered for. During my observation at the university, I noticed that there were two unused elevators in one big building where most lectures are held.

Probing further, participants indicated that the elevators are newly-built and have not been officially opened for use. Also, I observed few ramps in some areas to aid accessibility. The gradual transformation through the construction of elevators and ramps means that the university is making conscious efforts to ensure that the campus environment becomes less challenging for disabled students.

Although there have been few initiatives to make the university environment accessible, the participants reported that they still encounter a number of practical challenges created by inaccessible built environment. According to participants, access to university buildings including the library remain a daunting challenge. The participants reported that the library which provides critical services to all the students is inaccessible. Despite the library having five floors, there is no working elevators to aid accessibility. Students with disabilities are, therefore, forced to climb stairs, a time-consuming and physically strenuous activity. For example, Kwaku, Adwoa, Kofi and Akwasi all indicated that the difficulty in accessing the library due to the high number of stairs they needed to climb was a constant source of worry. To the participants, the halls of residence are always noisy and therefore, the library offers a conducive environment for studying. In addition, those who struggle but are able to access the library indicated that there are no rooms within the library for small group discussions, a contradiction to the provisions in the University Strategic Plan (see 4.3.1). For some disabled students, difficulty in accessing the library where important readings and references could be accessed affects their academic performance. Furthermore, the participants stated that they found it difficult to locate appropriate materials for referencing during assignments and examinations. The inability to access the library by the visually impaired was reported to affect their ability to produce credible notes and synopses, as some students who usually read for them fail to pronounce certain key words in the books properly or omitted them entirely. The visually impaired participants reiterated the need to read the books themselves because this

would assist them in making understandable notes and summaries. Although improper pronunciation and omission of words could be considered a challenge, the university may have little or no power to adequately address this problem. However, providing technology enhanced learning solutions such as digital library and audio reading books could help improve access to learning materials by students with disabilities. Thus, disabled students felt that the inability of the university to make the library accessible meant the university is doing less to ensure their success at the university. Akwasi commented:

Accessing the library is a problem for me, no matter where you want to pass to the library there are stairs awaiting you, if you want to pass through the front gate you will climb and when you take the back gate you will descend. I see the library each day but it's not accessible to me. Besides, accessing the materials on hold at the library is always difficult as they are located at the upper floors which is difficult to reach due to lack of elevator. In addition, the way the shelves are arranged demands that someone needs to assist you in picking a book from the shelves.

The failure to make the library accessible for all students appears to suggest that the library was established with less acknowledgement to the needs of disabled students. Akwasi's comment indicates that disabled students unlike their non-disabled peers experience frustration because they are unable to obtain the necessary materials to support their academic work, adversely affecting their academic work. My observation of the built environment confirmed the students' claims about the library. I observed the presence of stairs and lack of elevators at the library as stated by participants. In addition, my observations further confirm that accessing materials at the library makes disabled students dependent on non-disabled students since they find it difficult to take books from the shelves. The inaccessibility of the library leads to

marginalisation of students with disabilities, a phenomenon which affects their sense of belonging in the university.

According to participants, the physical lay-out of the university campus affects their mobility. It was emphasised by participants that most of the buildings at the university are surrounded by open drains and these obstruct them from accessing the buildings. The few ramps available are further away from the main entrance of buildings and sometimes difficult to locate since there are no signs to guide students to where they are located. The students reported that this challenge creates stress and delays for them. The steepness of the topography of the university land calls for the presence of open stairs and this makes it difficult for disabled students to navigate themselves within the university. In addition, participants complained about uneven surfaces and potholes on the few narrow pedestrian routes available at the university. The participants specified that this compounds their challenges as they need to walk slowly and carefully when moving in the university campus. The poor physical accessibility appears to undermine the stipulations enshrined in the University Corporate Strategic Plan which is geared towards promoting the education of people living with disabilities by ensuring that the university becomes disability-friendly. All the participants declared that the university needs to do more to make the campus environment friendly to PWD. Akosua a visually impaired participant expressed her experience as follows:

Navigating through this university is very difficult due to the nature of the physical environment. There are open drains everywhere you go even in front of all the halls of residence. One day I fell into one of the gutters when my friends forgot to prompt me that there is an open drain over there. I sustained many bruises but I could not blame them since their attention was on the bus we were going to board.

Akosua's comment reflects the effects of negative experiences disabled students go through in an unsupported university environment. This experience of Akosua, like other participants is disturbing as she experienced physical injury because of the challenges posed by the physical environment, a situation which is quite embarrassing and loss of personal dignity. Participants' experiences therefore restrict them from participating in academic and social activities. In effect, students with disabilities are made to feel like outsiders, a condition that affect their sense of accessibility and belonging at the university. The issues discussed here go beyond having access within the physical environment to health and safety concerns. Akosua's statements above signify insecurity which adversely affects the health conditions of students with disabilities.

Furthermore, participants gave details of safety and other issues in the physical environment that make it difficult for them to feel a sense of belonging in the university. It was stated by majority of participants that there are no pedestrian crossing and routes along some key roads in the university forcing them to share roads with moving cars, exposing themselves to unnecessary danger. This suggests that students are forced to walk along the edges of the road leading to the main buildings where lectures are held. Although all the students experience the consequences of this, disabled students are worse off as some of them stated that sometimes they are unable to walk along the edges of the road because the roads are narrow. A participant shared his experiences as:

In this university, students and cars share the same road and this makes it difficult to move around without anybody supporting you. Looking at my condition with little carelessness on my part or that of the driver, my life can be cut short. There are no well-developed pedestrian routes, the few available are difficult to use since it is narrow and have uneven surfaces and potholes
(Kwabena)

Additionally, the students complained about the poor lighting situation at the university. The participants stated that it is difficult for them to walk in the evening due to poor lighting. The visually impaired students further revealed a lack of audio sensitive traffic lights on campus. The poor lighting at the university according to the participants affects their social and academic life as they are unable to partake in activities which are held at night due to unfriendly nature of the physical environment. Probing further, the participants indicated that campus health and safety measures are poor. The lecturer participant also confirmed that there is no workable health and safety unit or measures except the security people seen around every day. A participant explained his experience as:

My social life has always been in solitude and isolation, in the night most places are dark due to poor lighting system. The poor lighting system coupled with poor physical environment do not allow me to attend social activities which normally takes place at night (Kwadwo)

Nine students reported that their rooms at the halls of residence were located on the upper floors of the buildings and this made it difficult for them to access it. These students further stated that usually their water run out and this forces them to come downstairs to fetch buckets of water to their floors. The physically challenged student who uses wheelchair and those with crutches indicated that when the water is not running they have to seek assistance from non-disabled people (not necessarily students) for support. They added that sometimes the support comes with financial commitments as people sometimes charge them before they render services to them. One of the participants shared his experience as follows:

The hall situation is difficult to comprehend, sometimes the water would not be flowing in our floor and all the students need to go downstairs to fetch water. When such a situation occurs and there is nobody to assist me with fetching the

water, it means that day I would not get water to do anything. Sometimes the non-disabled peers who help us collect money or exchange their services with provisions such as milk and other canned products (Kwame)

Kwame's situation shows that he is saddled with multiple challenges including room location, his own disability and access to water. The extra financial commitment with respect to fetching water reflects the complexity students of disabilities experience at the university. The students' experiences suggest that senior managers of the university are unaware of some of the challenges that students with disabilities face, a situation which can be attributed to poor dissemination of disability data.

Another area that must not be forgotten in terms of the built environment is the hygiene issues within the university. All the participants indicated that there is no single disability-friendly toilet or bathroom in the whole university. Consequently, disabled students share toilet and wash rooms with non-disabled peers and these are most often water-logged and slippery. The women further complained about a lack of toiletries at the toilets, a situation which compounds the sanitation challenges at the university. Due to the poor sanitation at the toilet and erratic nature of the water supply in the university, the visually impaired students stated that whenever they wished to use the toilet, they have to ask their sighted peers to check its condition for them first, a situation which deepens their dependency on non-disabled people in the university. As there are no ramps but stairs leading to most of the toilets and bathrooms, physically challenged students are more at risk, with the wheelchair users particularly affected since they have to crawl to the wet bathrooms or bath in the wheelchair.

Although I was lucky to get a room in the basement which is ok for me, wash rooms and toilets within the buildings are not disability-friendly, they are too

small. We all use the same washroom which is normally slippery and wet but I manage it with the assistance of some of my colleagues (Adwoa)

The issue here is that certain things that could be considered as necessities to ensure students with disability's belonging and dignity in the university have not been catered for. Adwoa's comment demonstrates that not only do the disabled students have to contend with all the challenges already highlighted but also, the lack of suitable facilities and amenities in the university campus compounds these challenges. With their independence already affected by the unfriendly nature of the built environment, disabled students mostly rely on their peers for support (see 5.4.2).

Despite the challenges associated with the physical environment in the current study, some of the participants especially the visually impaired students stated that they were not given any orientation about how to access the unfriendly university environment. The students had to contend with finding their way through the university built environment, compounding their problems at the university. Two visually impaired participants shared their experience:

There is no mobility training for some of us. We struggle to locate everything in the university. There are no braille signs too, so it is always difficult if you don't have someone to assist you to find your way (Kwame).

Access to information is very difficult. I was not given any orientation on how to locate the buildings that would be useful to me. For example, no one orientated me on important locations such as my room, the washroom, common rooms... (Akosua).

The inaccessible built environment to support students with disabilities is due to the fact that the university is constrained by insufficient financial resources. A lecturer participant observed

that available financial resources only target priority areas and this was supported by students' views. He explained:

Almost everything we do here for students with impairments come from the internally generated funds from the department. However, we can't blame the senior managers of the university because where many projects are competing for funds, the attention of the university would be shifted to those projects that would benefit majority of the students (Dr. Joe).

The statement from Dr. Joe shows that although the university and the departments may be willing to support disabled students in the university, they are faced with financial constraints. This means the university would find it difficult to support these students as expected due to lack of resources.

Teaching and learning environment. The study identified some general learning and teaching challenges that negatively affect disabled students in the university. The difficulties of learning in large classes resulting in overcrowding and noise were major challenges mentioned by participants. According to some of the participants, the large class size might be a contributory factor to lecturers' inability to meet the individual needs of various students. The visually impaired participants further reported that they learn by hearing but sometimes they find it difficult to clearly hear what is being said by some lecturers due to the way they pronounce some key words. In that way, they get concepts and understanding wrongly which affects their academic performance. Furthermore, participants reported that they sometimes find it challenging to follow lectures because some lecturers use demonstrations and visual aids and since they cannot see, it becomes difficult for them to get understanding of what they are teaching. A visually impaired participant narrated his story as follows:

Visually impaired students like me learn by listening to what the lecturers say. But some of them (the lecturers) use demonstrations which I find it difficult to follow. Some of the lecturers pronounce words in such a way that it is sometimes difficult to identify those words especially if you cannot see. This makes understanding them very challenging. In addition, when they are teaching and writing on the chalkboard, sometimes they say 'you see this or that', as for me I can't see this or that and so it becomes confusing for me. This means they don't prepare their lesson to suit students like me. It then becomes difficult for me to follow lessons and this is negatively affecting my academic performance (Kwame).

This comment shows that the lecturers did not demonstrate pedagogical versatility in delivering lessons in a way that suit students with disabilities. The lecturers who do not diversify their lesson delivery to meet the needs of students with disabilities exclude them from their lessons. This means accessibility of students with disabilities especially visually impaired is constrained since the lecturers could not identify and meet their needs.

The effects of poor accessibility were a source of worry for many participants. For example, some of the participants stated that sometimes the complexities in how the academic timetable has been structured prevent them from going to class on time to occupy front seats. In such situations, they are forced to stand outside or at the back of the class because the class would be full, affecting hearing and visibility. To them, this occurs because timetables are not planned to cater for the needs of students with mobility challenges, creating unwarranted reliance on others for notes since it is always difficult for disabled students to take notes while standing.

In this university, the administrators don't think about the wellbeing of disabled students. The time table for lectures are too tight, sometimes the period between

lectures are too short that students need to run in order not to be late for the next lecture. I can't run so in such situations I get to the venue late, sometimes I reach the venue half way the lectures. Sometimes I am prevented from joining the class and this is affecting my academic performance (Kwaku).

Kwaku's comment shows that students with disabilities encounter difficulties in meeting the demands of some of the lecturers since they cannot be in class on time. This shows that the university may not be taking into account the needs of students with disabilities when planning the academic time-table of the university. Although fiscal constraints may have caused timetables to be tight due to limited number of rooms, digitalising teaching could be a means to curtail some of these challenges.

Unsustainable classroom situation made learning challenging for disabled students. While some of the participants complained about the narrow space created between chairs and tables, others described the chairs as uncomfortable to use due to the height of the tables. Some of the participants complained about the difficulty in adjusting the classroom tables and chairs, with a wheelchair user preferring to use his laps to support his books when writing. A participant narrated his experience:

The furniture is very stressful to use, it is not adjustable, and always I need to force myself to sit in it. It's a dual desk with very small space between the chair and the table and this makes it difficult for me to use (Kwadwo).

Kwadwo's comment above suggests that the classroom situation positions disabled students as people who are not welcomed since the furniture were designed with only non-disabled students in mind. Therefore, the continued stay of students with disabilities in the classroom means they have to endure a fair degree of pain and discomfort. The classroom experiences also underscore students with disabilities' perseverance in the midst of challenging

circumstances. However, one can read marginalisation undertones because the university is not making adequate provisions for students with disabilities in the classrooms.

6.2 Coping mechanisms for accessibility and participation

Although students with disabilities experience challenges in this Ghanaian university, they continued to be active with their academic work. In the face of the challenges disabled students encounter, they have devised coping mechanisms. In general, these coping mechanisms created and used by students are significant in assisting them to overcome some of the challenges they encounter in the university. According to the study, participants' mechanisms they have been using include group discussions, self-acceptance and determination and getting to class early.

The participants believed joining group discussions would provide an opportunity for them to engage in more thorough deliberations with peers, share ideas and understand courses they are jointly enrolled in. The participants also stated that being a member of a discussion group allows them to raise questions and seek clarifications on issues they could not understand in class and obtain suggestions from their peers. Although disabled students generally find it difficult to join groups formed by non-disabled students, it was revealed that sometimes some of the disabled students get the opportunity to join discussion groups involving peers who are sympathetic to their needs. Sometimes, they form groups among themselves when it becomes so difficult for them to be accepted in other groups.

Finding discussion groups to join is not easy, most of the non-disabled groups don't want to accept some of us so we have managed to form one ourselves (Kwame).

The statements by participants show the importance of group discussion in the education of disabled students. Looking at the challenges disabled students encounter at the university, joining discussion groups is an effective way to obtain comprehensive understanding of the lessons they found difficult to understand in class. However, Kwame's comment shows that accessing these groups is difficult and this has effects on their academic achievements.

According to some of the participants, they have grown to accept their disabilities as part of human diversity. To them, accepting their disabilities assisted them to realise their abilities. In addition, self-acceptance guided them to understand themselves, their strengths, weaknesses, and to identify how to motivate themselves over the challenges they experience in the university. As a result, building self-confidence enabled them to be free from self-criticism and self-pity, enabling them to focus on managing the challenges that affect their academic pursuits. Thus, they refused to be defined by their disability but rather considered their impairments as a challenge which needed to be harnessed positively in their academic endeavours. However, one participant who experienced disability later in her life said she has not come to terms with the realities of her situation. For example, Akosua, who lost her vision after senior high school, stated that it is always difficult for her to find strength in her current situation as the thought of her present condition makes her question the source of her disability and the perceptions of others, undermining inner strength. One student shared his experience:

I have realised that there is nothing I can do to change my condition so I have accepted it and feel normal. This self-acceptance has been assisting me to strive for success in my academic achievement. It sets a challenge that puts me in a certain position that I need to be top of my cohort academically in order to make me unique in a way. I realised that if I fall within average they will say I am an average person and I will not get the needed attention. However, if I become the icon among my cohort, then they will recognise that although I am

physically challenged, I am unique. Right now I don't go to them (non-disabled students) rather they come to me for academic support (Akwasi).

The development of coping strategies to deal with the challenges disabled students experience connote self-determination which creates a sense of discipline and motivation to pursue higher education. This indicates that students who have come to terms with their disability were willing to invest much effort in dealing with the challenges associated with disabilities. They are able to live with the recognition that they are disabled but can rise above this challenge to pursue their academic goals. For example, Akwasi's comment above shows that he realised the best way to become relevant among his peers was to work hard to be on top of his cohort so that they (non-disabled students) would associate with him. Thus, when students with disabilities display a positive attitude and exceptional academic performance in the social environment or higher education, others are more likely to react favourably and begin to accept them, a situation that boost their acceptance and belonging.

Furthermore, some of the participants stated that they make efforts to draw close to non-disabled students in order to make them (non-disabled people) understand disabled students and thus, demonstrate appropriate social behaviour towards them. Thus, they thought trying to associate with non-disabled students would increase their (disabled students) participation and belonging in the university since their colleagues would accept them as people deserving of love and association. One participant shared his views:

Always I try to make friends in this university. I have realised that most of my peers resist me but I have not stopped making effort to associate with them (Yaw).

Although there is resistance from some of the peers, he perseveres upon realising the significance of peer association, insisting that the nature of the university environment demands

the support of non-disabled people in order to succeed. Therefore, Yaw's decision appears plausible as friendship with non-disabled students would improve their willingness to support disabled students.

Another mechanism used by the disabled students to cope with challenges in the university is pragmatic: to be in class early to get front seats. The participants stated that this coping mechanism gave them an opportunity to be identified and served when materials are shared. To achieve this, the participants indicated that they set off from their hall of residence early so that they would be among the first students to reach the classroom. In addition, when it becomes difficult to get to class on time, they sometimes ask their peers who associate well with them to reserve a front seat for them. For example, Kwaku indicated that because he could not use the desk provided by the university, he always placed his wheelchair in such a way that it would not distract others from seeing the lecturer and what he wrote on the chalkboard. One of the participants shared his experience:

All the time I go to class early in order to get front seat, however, when I am unable to be in class on time due to short intervals between two lectures, some of my peers arrange a front seat for me. I have few friends who are ready to interact with me and who have come to like me and are ready to assist me when need be (Kwadwo).

Kwadwo's experience shows that disabled students make efforts to obtain front seats in classrooms because of the advantages they may obtain from being at the front seat. It can also be observed that although majority of non-disabled people have negative attitude towards students with disabilities, making friends with them sometimes leads to attitudinal change as non-disabled people begin to understand disabled students. Although it is challenging for disabled students to attract friends, the findings show that it could assist them (disabled

students) in overcoming attitudinal challenges. In general, the coping mechanisms students with disabilities created and used are significant in assisting them to overcome some of the challenges they encounter in the university. Besides, these mechanisms guide them to realise who they are and the best way to cope with impairments positively.

6.4 Summary

The chapter examined key issues influencing students with disabilities accessibility and belonging in a Ghanaian university. The key issues affecting accessibility and belonging including attitude of non-disabled people and institutional factors were discussed. When discussing attitudinal issues influencing accessibility and belonging, disability knowledge, discrimination and stigmatisation emerged as key issues. Regarding institutional factors influencing accessibility and belonging, disclosure of disability and handling of disability data were discussed. It was realised that although disclosure of disability is mandatory, the information provided have no effect on the decisions concerning students with disabilities. Further, this chapter discussed influence of the built environment and the learning environment on the education of students with disabilities. It was recognised that both the physical and learning environment aligns with ableism and normalism, suggesting that students with disabilities experience challenge in their educational lives. Given that students with disabilities experience challenges at the university, mechanisms they use to maintain and participate in their education were discussed. The next chapter discusses the main themes of this study relative to literature.

Chapter Seven

Discussion

University education has been recognised as a critical element for the socio-economic development of a nation and the individual (Kohoutek, Pinheiro, Čábelková, & Šmídová, 2017). The challenge is how to offer this opportunity to all students who qualify for university access. In addressing this challenge, countries - including Ghana - have considered educational provision as an integral part of their political agendas through the adoption of various national and international policies and conventions. Using the lenses of critical disability theory and social constructionism, this chapter discusses the findings of the study in further detail with emphasis on understanding the intersections and contradictions in the light of current research on higher education and students with disabilities. The chapter further focuses on the implications of the findings for policy, the inclusive agenda, and their broader effects on the recruitment and success (achievements) of students with disabilities in higher education. The chapter begins with a general overview of the purpose of the research and research questions. A summary of the findings is also presented. This is then followed by a discussion of policy implementation and the participants' reasons for accessing university education. Finally, the chapter discusses the key elements broached in relation to inclusive education as well as the backstory of participants' experiences.

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of students with disabilities in a Ghanaian university. To accomplish this aim, three research questions were set:

- a. How does the policy environment influence the education of persons with disabilities in a Ghanaian university?
- b. What motivates students with disabilities' to access and participate in university education?

- c. What are the experiences of students with disabilities in relation to access and participation in higher education in Ghana?

7.1 Summary of the main findings of the study

The findings of the study have been presented in Chapters Four, Five and Six. Chapter Four explores international frameworks, declarations and conventions as well as both the national and university policies for inclusion that influence the education of persons with disabilities in Ghana. Ghana's inclusive policies align with the focus of international frameworks, declarations and conventions on rights-based approaches to education. However, the current study revealed inconsistencies in national policies which have been influenced by international organisations and conventions. For example, in some policy documents including the National Disability Act (Act715) experts categorise people as problems, and then identify the correct educational place to manage them as a problem, while other policy documents including the National Constitution define disability as a social and environmental problem.

Chapter Five explored students' motivation to access university education, the sources of support and their reasons for choosing a particular university. It was found that several factors influenced students with disabilities' decision to access university education. These factors include the desire to be role models, familial and societal recognition, their physical strength and the dynamic of jobs and financial benefits. This study showed that the majority of participants recognised family as a key source of support for their participation in the university. Support also came from peers and the institution. Most of the institutional support received did not come as part of non-disabled peoples' roles in the institution but from their own volition, usually on sympathetic grounds. The chapter indicates that maintaining relationships with family and peers, the programmes of study and the cost of the university influenced students with disabilities' selection of their current university.

Chapter Six examined how students with disabilities experienced accessibility and belonging at the university. Two factors were influential: attitudinal and institutional factors. Knowledge of disability, discrimination and stigmatisation were attitudinal factors that influenced students' accessibility and belonging at the university. The participants in this research all disclosed their impairment during the application and admission process, but the university did not use this information effectively. This chapter illustrated how students with disabilities experienced barriers that related to the built and teaching environment. The findings of this chapter revealed that the university is unable to provide essential services to students with disabilities: in a context of fiscal limitations priority was not given to issues experienced by people living with disabilities.

7.2 Discussion

Education of students with disabilities has been underpinned by both international and national policies. In Ghana, national policies have been promulgated, with international protocols and conventions being ratified to safeguard the participation of students with disabilities in higher education. Consequently, the implementation of these policies is essential to ensuring that students with disabilities can access and participate successfully in higher education. This section discusses relevant issues influencing policy implementation that were generated from the data analysis. These issues include conceptualisation of disability, awareness creation, policy knowledge and understanding, inadequate resources and priority setting.

7.2.1 Policy implementation

Ghana's inclusive policy framework guarantees access to education at all levels. The National Constitution enacted in 1992 and the Disability Act (Act 715) of 2006 confer educational rights on persons with disabilities (Republic of Ghana, 1992; 2006). The aim of Ghana's inclusive

policies is to expand access to education and bridge the gap between people who are considered disabled and those who are not (Republic of Ghana, 2006). Ghana has ratified some international conventions which guarantee the educational rights of persons with disabilities. These conventions and declarations provide the framework upon which the national inclusive policies are built. At the institutional level, the study university, although not having a comprehensive disability policy, nevertheless, has a strategic plan which contains certain provisions that safeguard the education of persons with disabilities. Thus, the policy discussions in this section consider how the international, national and institutional policies affect the local experiences of education for students with disabilities.

The current study shows differences in policy understanding of the concept of disability. Ghana's policy definition of disability falls short of the notion that disability emanates from society's responses rather than a person's impairment, a position which fails to recognise the relevance of providing appropriate support systems for individuals living with impairments. Ghana's policy definition which denotes that disability emanates from impairment is contested by critical disability theorists and social constructionists (Baffoe, 2013; Burr, 2015; Devlin & Pothier, 2006; Hosking, 2008; Pinto, 2015). Hence, the understanding of disability from the policy definition is rooted in the medical perspective and this puts less emphasis on societal actors to provide the needed infrastructure and support for students with disabilities (Hosking, 2008; Oliver, 1996). For example, this study avers that the inability of participants to get to the fifth floor of lecture buildings is not caused by their impairment but the university's inability to provide assistive technology such as elevators in the buildings. If the university is unable or unwilling to prioritise provision of the physical infrastructure to support students to function with minimal stress, it is creating disabilities for these students. For effective policy implementation, from a critical disability theory standpoint, disability should be conceptualized through the recognition of the crucial role societal and structural actors such as educational

institutions, governments, NGOs, civil society organisations and students play in supporting disabled people. This implies that the needs of students with disabilities should be considered in the infrastructural development of the institutions of learning.

Additionally, Ghana's policy conceptualization puts little emphasis on elimination of social and cultural beliefs that fuel discrimination, marginalisation and stigmatisation of students with disabilities. Instead, the policy suggests that disability leads to socio-cultural barriers that emanate from impairments, maintaining beliefs system that influence marginalization, discrimination, and stigmatization. This implies that understanding socio-cultural beliefs that influence non-disabled peoples' attitude towards PWD is crucial for policy implementation because, in Ghana, these socio-cultural issues underpin how PWD are treated (Lamptey et al., 2015). In effect, Ghana's policy scenario aligns with the medical model view of disability as it focuses on 'curing' the impairment in order to remove such barriers, thus, partially absolving society of its responsibilities of providing requisite support for these students. This could have far-reaching implications for understanding and implementation of inclusive policies in Ghana. As noted by Smith (2014), educational policies must be closely related to local contexts where socio-cultural issues influencing the concept of disability are considered, without which implementation may be fraught with challenges. There is, therefore, the need for a reorientation or a paradigm shift of understanding of the policy framework such that disability will be understood as a barrier created by society rather than individual impairments. The policy framework must integrate mechanisms such as public advocacy and education to deal with socio-cultural elements that negatively influence people's perceptions about persons living with disability. This notion will encourage policy actors to pay attention to contextual beliefs and norms in policy design and implementation for better outcomes.

Participants' views about the existence and effectiveness of inclusive policies at the national and institutional levels were mixed, with the majority of them not being aware of such policies.

However, what was common in the responses of those who were aware and those who were not, was the level of implementation of these policies. Participants who were not aware of the existence of inclusive policies indicated that even if these policies were available, they were yet to feel the impact. The lack of awareness of these university students who are important stakeholders in the policy framework raises concerns about the nature of the policy implementation process. Studies have found that policy implementation depends on the awareness of the policy by stakeholders (Omar et al., 2010; Owusu, Basu & Barnett, 2019; Robles, 2004). For policies to be implemented effectively, all the major stakeholders should understand the stipulations and be ready to play their role in the implementation process. This involves both their willingness and knowledge of the policy.

The awareness issue may stem from the effectiveness of the initial stages of developing the policy. For example, the ability of policy makers to involve all stakeholders during the consultation and dissemination stages of the policy development process is critical to implementation (Howlett & Ramesh, 1995): an effective stakeholder consultation process means that all actors feel involved and believe their interests have been catered for in the policy development phase and are therefore prepared to support implementation. However, at the national level, the legislative arrangement enjoining institutions to enforce the provisions in the policies are weak and this is a major issue affecting awareness. As a result, educational institutions are not under any obligation to provide policy awareness programmes for students with disabilities. At the systems level, these participants, as members of society, should be aware of the policies even if they are not able to access university education. The lack of disability policy awareness in Ghana means that educational institutions have to take matters into their own hands and design programmes that enlighten students on inclusive policies to enable them play their role as key stakeholders in implementation. In this study, however, the lack of a comprehensive disability policy in the university affected the implementation of

inclusive policies. This is because higher educational institutions may not be able to address students' challenges effectively without a working institutional disability policy (FOTIM, 2011).

The inclusive policy knowledge by university staff is critical to the effective implementation of policies. Participants of the current study perceived poor knowledge and appreciation of disability issues on the part of some university staff. To participants, university staff are central to this discussion since these university staff perform significant roles in the implementation of educational policies. As found in some other studies, for the implementation of a policy to cause changes in inclusive educational settings, it requires staff to demonstrate positive attitudes to support and cooperate with other stakeholders in the teaching and learning space (Banks & Banks, 2009; Smyth, 2011). This suggests that university staff are important stakeholders who should be trained in order to acquire basic knowledge of inclusive policies to guide them in discharging their professional duties. One of the participants, Dr. Joe, averred that the in-service training stated in the institutional strategic plan has not been provided, a situation that makes it difficult for staff to meet the needs of students with disabilities. This corresponds to Mama et al. (2011) and Chataika et al., (2012) who reported inadequate knowledge of disability issues by teachers in Ghana and Zimbabwe. Similar findings have also been reported in Spain by Morina et al., (2015). The implication here is that inadequate policy knowledge and understanding by university staff affects their ability and disposition to diversify their teaching and support methods to suit the varied needs of students with disabilities. It is therefore important that university staff are aware of policy provisions in order for them to play their roles to assist with implementation of disability policies.

Inadequate resources at both national and institutional levels was considered an implementation challenge in the present study. With the university not receiving sufficient funding from government, internally generated funds remain the key source of revenue to run the Disability

Unit and offer support to students with disabilities. Insufficient funding has implications for implementation of inclusive policies. The participants in the present study perceived a lack of prioritisation for issues of disability as successive governments have not demonstrated the will to commit resources to this course of action as the main reason. Two main issues are relevant for this discussion. First, it is evident that Ghana, like other low and middle income countries, has limited funding. Several studies corroborate the funding gap as one of the main hurdle for the implementation of inclusive policies in Africa (Chataika, 2010; Lorenzo, 2003; Materu, 2007; Mwapopo et al, 2011; Opini, 2012). As stated by the WHO/World Bank (2011), a government's commitment to providing funding for the implementation of inclusive policies determines its success. Recognising the funding gap in Africa, the World Bank and other partner agencies are providing financial support to ease this burden. The Disability-Inclusive Education in Africa Program (DEAP) is one such initiative being used by the World Bank and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to support the implementation of inclusive policies across Africa, with Ghana receiving a grant of \$250,000 (World Bank, 2018).

Closely related to the above argument is the challenge of priority-setting, which, according to the participants of this study, affects the implementation of inclusive policies negatively. According to the participants, inadequate financial resources also means priority must be given to the most pressing issues on government's agenda, else all will become disabled. Since disabled people are usually in the minority, their issues may not be of prime concern when compared to majority interests, an issue that impede the participation of students with disabilities. Inadequate support from government therefore hinders implementation of inclusive policies because it may prevent universities from undertaking support programmes for students with disabilities. In general, where leaders have shown political will to commit resources to the implementation of policies, it has yielded positive results (Balabanova et al.,

2013). For example, the political commitment by Meles Zenawi to commit resources to health and education assisted in the implementation of policies in these sectors in Ethiopia (Balabanova et al., 2013). The limited priority and inadequate funding opportunities in Ghana suggest that the institutions of higher education should look beyond obtaining funds from only one source. Governments and educational institutions can solicit for support from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), philanthropic individuals, corporate institutions, donor agencies, and international organisations. Such funding sources may, however, ignore local exigencies and adaptation which may create challenges during policy implementation (Smith, 2014).

7.2.2 Higher education: A means to an end

Globally, studies have shown that the number of students with disability entering universities have increased (Liasidou, 2014; Morina, 2017; Seale et al. 2013). This requires universities to accommodate these students and to understand their reasons for accessing higher education in order to make provisions for these students. Although participants in the current study experienced challenges, a number of reasons influenced their desire to access university education. This section discusses students with disabilities' reasons for pursuing university education. Among the reasons are their desire to be role models, to preserve family reputation and to secure jobs that pay well. In addition, this section further discusses participants' urge to support their families and to obtain dignity and respect in their prejudiced communities. In general, participants connected their lived experiences with their motivation to access university education.

Participants desire to be role models emanated from the fact that there have been very few people with disability who have obtained higher qualifications in their communities. This, as was found in the present study, has been attributed to the societal perception that people with

disability are incapable of participating in higher education. This perception of ‘incapability’ usually attributed to persons with disabilities has been noted in other studies in Ghana (Baffoe, 2013; Mantey, 2014). Since it is common in Africa for communities to doubt the ability of persons with disabilities to make meaningful impacts in society (Matonya, 2016; Opini, 2012), it was not surprising that participants in this study wanted to trigger changes in society by serving as role models. The perceived incapability of PWD have been found to be so ingrained in the fabric of African societies that some people question scarce resources being utilised in the education of PWD (Kalabula, 2000; Ruosso, 2015). Considering the fact that positive community perceptions have been found to motivate PWD to access higher education (Weir, 2004; Hickley & Alden, 2005), one would have thought that the negative societal perceptions would dampen participants’ spirit and motivation. However, participants in the present study believe their experiences provide them with the requisite impetus to cause a change and this has to begin with their determination and perseverance to obtain university qualification. In this way, negative and disparaging experiences are being channelled into positive energies geared towards the pursuit of higher education.

As many students with disabilities encounter challenges in their communities in relation to their ability to cope with the pressures of education, participants of the current study considered being able to attend university as an achievement that could encourage families of persons with disabilities in their belief that their children can also succeed. With research suggesting that persons with disabilities are less motivated to pursue higher education in Africa and elsewhere (Lopez-Govira, Morina & Morgado, 2019; Opini, 2012), the participants’ desire to be role models is significant in inspiring others. This inspiration is particularly relevant in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Ghana, where few PWD have obtained formal education (Ametepee & Anastessiou, 2015; Heiman, 2006; Macha, 2002; Ruosso, 2015). The implication is that the

presence of PWD who have experienced university education could ignite some confidence and determination for disabled people to set higher goals for education.

Another motivator for the participants in the current study was the achievements of influential PWD in society. Some participants in the present study reported seeing PWD who have been successful in life because of higher education. Participants in this study, considered disabled teachers and politicians with higher education as particularly, influential in their lives. This encouraged the participants to persist in the face of challenges created by learning institutions and the community. Writing from Tanzania, Matonya (2016; 2020) reported after studying accessibility and participation of women with disabilities in university of Dar es Sallam that the teaching profession easily accepted persons with disabilities and that disabled teachers were a good source of inspiration for students with disabilities. Participants in the current study were inspired by people who were economically independent despite their disability. Higher education is seen as a way for PWD to live independent lives (Kyllonen, 2011; Oreopolos & Salvanes, 2011).

A common motivation influencing participants in the current study to access higher education was advocacy and awareness creation. Participants connected awareness creation of disability issues and advocacy against discrimination and stigmatisation experienced in educational institutions and communities. Participants of the current study were motivated to pursue university education to increase their knowledge of disability issues in Ghana so as to be positioned to better challenge social and cultural perceptions that hamper the education of people with disabilities. Participants' desire to create awareness is also important because it has the power to help non-disabled people to recognise the capabilities of disabled people and their contribution to society (Mullins & Preyde, 2013). This is, however, a difficult task to achieve given there is little or no evidence of a well-coordinated advocacy and awareness campaign that has been effective in changing the attitudes of people around individuals with

disabilities (Wildeman & Nomdo, 2007). However, Carlson and Witschley (2018) conducted a study in Zambia and described that advocacy through a semester course in disability issues was able to make changes in non-disabled students attitude towards students with disabilities. The fact here is that if advocacy through disability studies in education could make some changes in non-disabled students' attitude towards students with disabilities in Zambia, it may also be possible for disability studies to change non-disabled peoples' attitude in other institutions in Africa given the same conditions. It would therefore be significant to call for advocacy that raises the awareness of community and family members on the role of higher education in supporting students with disabilities in living an independent life.

The desire for better remuneration was another common motivation that urged study participants to pursue university education. The role of higher education in raising the employment prospect of PWD has been acknowledged in research, with Naami et al. (2012) indicating that PWD who have higher educational qualifications have higher employment rates compared to those who do not have such qualifications. Similarly, other studies show that while university education is not a panacea to unemployment involving persons with disabilities; it narrows the gap between the employment of such persons and those with no disabilities (McCloy & DeClou, 2013). Nevertheless, although some participants who were already employed accessed university education to obtain promotion and higher remuneration, the urge to attract better job opportunities and the concomitant higher remuneration packages were important motivation for participants in this study who were not employed. Similar reasons of employment prospects have been cited by students with disabilities in other studies for accessing higher education (Hoskins & Newstead, 2009; Marandet & Weinright, 2010; Riddell et al. 2010; Elliot & Wilson, 2008; Burchardt, 2004; Hadjidakou et al., 2008; Hoskins & Ilie, 2017). Some studies have identified related issues such as economic independence and

increased life opportunities as important reasons for accessing higher qualification (Morley, 2012b; Ndlovu, 2017; Ndlovu & Walton, 2016).

Participants of the current study were aware of the challenges being experienced by persons with disabilities without higher education in Ghana, with some indicating that they did not want to end up on the streets. However, there are a few complexities here since this has been compounded by ineffective social welfare systems in Ghana, a condition which leaves persons with disabilities to fend for themselves. This ‘fending for oneself’ phenomenon has led to many PWD remaining on the streets of major cities in Ghana begging for alms as has been reiterated by Kassah (1998; 2008). Rugoho and Siziba (2014) indicates a similar phenomenon in Zimbabwe where begging has been ‘institutionalised’ on the streets of major cities. Having access to higher education is therefore perceived by most participants as a way of avoiding unemployment since they believe that university education will make it possible for them to have decent careers and earn good salaries, thereby being able to take care of themselves. The implication is that higher qualification not only encourages economic independence and career prospect but assists in changing the dominant perception that persons with disabilities are incapable of fending for themselves.

Closely tied to better remuneration was the burden of family responsibility on students with disabilities. Participants of the current study believed that obtaining higher education would enhance their ability to cater for themselves and their families. It is a custom in most African cultures for children to take care of the elderly especially their parents when they are incapable of supporting themselves. In Ghana, this is reflected in a popular Akan adage that says “*deɛ w’ahwe wo ama wo se affiri no, ɛwo sɛ wo hwɛ no ma ne se tutu*” roughly translated “one good turn deserves reciprocity”. The indication is that at both family and community levels, children are supposed to take care of their families and the community at large. Thus, in Ghana people are judged by the role they play in the family and community. The perception of most

participants in this study was that university education would prepare them for their future family roles of taking care of themselves and family. Thus, participants believe that university qualification would assist them to obtain a job with good remuneration. Although family responsibility has traditional cultural undertones, there are other nuances. The social system that supports old people is weak and often absent, as in most African countries (Cox & Stark, 2005), making it difficult for persons with disabilities to absolve themselves from their traditional responsibilities. As indicated by Conway (2019) and Evans (2010), children are considered a source of security and insurance for their parents. Thus, participants of this study recognised university education as a means of obtaining money to accomplish their family responsibilities and this aligns with the findings of other studies which explored general students' motive for pursuing university education (Morley, 2012; Morley & Croft, 2011; Purcell et al. 2008). It is therefore evident that within the context of sub-Saharan Africa, there is high level of confidence, perhaps misplaced, in what university education can accomplish in the lives of students and their families.

Furthermore, the current study revealed that students with disabilities' desire to obtain respect, dignity and to "become somebody" in society motivated them to access higher education. With participants being treated with disdain in Ghanaian communities, they believed that university qualification would offer an escape route to overcome challenges associated with low dignity and respect in Ghanaian societies. The indication is that university education is perceived as an opportunity that strengthens students with disabilities' personality in the midst of social and cultural ideologies that undermine their respect and dignity (Morina et al., 2015; Zakour & Gillespie, 2013). Evidence has backed higher education as a means of confronting unsavoury societal norms that affect people with disability (Opini, 2012). In Kenya and Tanzania, it was reported that students with disabilities enrolled in university education to contest non-disabled people's pre-conceived beliefs and perceptions about them (Motonya, 2016; Opini, 2012). The

phrase “to become somebody” was used by Morley and Croft (2011 p.387) to underscore societal recognition as a source of motivation by PWD for higher education in Tanzania and Ghana. The issue here is that there is a perception that if a person obtains university qualification, society begins to see the qualities of the individual rather than focusing on the impairment. University education is therefore perceived as an important element in remedying some of the ill-conceived societal perceptions about PWD (Opini, 2012).

In addition, some of the participants reported that their decision to pursue higher education was influenced by their desire to maintain family reputation. To participants with educated parents and siblings, their families have created a niche for themselves within higher education and did not want to be the odd ones to damage the family reputation. This means that parents’ and siblings’ educational background played an important role in participants’ decision to access higher education. It can therefore be argued that these participants put higher education at the forefront of their decision-making process in order to fit well in the family. Participants wanted to at least achieve the same standard of education as their parents and siblings. This also suggests that some of these participants were privileged coming from educated families with good employment. As Khan et al. (2015) noted, students with educated parents are confident and motivated to aspire to reach the same level as their parents or higher. However, the present study found that some participants with illiterate parents obtained their motivation from these parents. As indicated by Al-Yousef (2009), this happens when such parents come to appreciate the importance of education, a notion which is consistent with Hegna and Smett (2017) who found that parents, both literate and illiterate who accepted the idea of higher education encouraged and supported their children’s university education. Although there was diversity in participants, their motivation and confidence emanated from the support they garnered from their family. The implication is that the role of the family even becomes more paramount in the lives of students with disabilities especially when they appreciate the relevance of (higher)

education. Arguing from the critical disability perspective, society should appreciate the importance of the education of students with disabilities and provide support to meet the diverse needs of all students.

Another source of motivation is the family's willingness to support the education of students with disabilities. Participants in this study received financial and emotional support from their families and this enabled them to participate and maintain their status as university students. Since there are no established mechanisms to provide financial support for the education of students with disabilities in Ghana, the family unit becomes the main pivot around which such commitments revolve (Lamprey, 2015; Kassah 2008). Studies have found that in families where students with disabilities' education are valued and given equal opportunities as non-disabled students, they are able to excel just like their non-disabled peers (Beauchamp-pryor, 2007; 2013; Mosia, 2017). A case in point is in Tanzania, where Macha (2002a) reported that the positive perceptions of family members urged them to provide financial support for students with disabilities. This, however, is an aberration since the most dominant societal belief in sub-Saharan Africa indicates that PWD are unable to cope with the pressures of higher education, hence, neglecting the education of such persons (Kisanji, 2006; Motonya, 2016; Opini, 2012; Opoku et al, 2017; Rugoho &Siziba, 2014). Families do not consider the education of students with disabilities as a priority in sub-Saharan Africa because of the belief that there may not be any returns on such investments (Badu, 2016; Botts & Evans, 2010; Gregorius, 2016; Opoku et al, 2017). In fact, most families are yet to come to terms with the realisation that students with disabilities can be equal to the task when given the same chances and privileges as other non-disabled family members, hence must be supported (Kisanji, 2006). It could therefore be argued that families who understand the importance of higher education defy the dominant belief that PWD are incapable of participating in higher education by supporting the education of their disabled child. The differences in perceptions may be attributed to the experiences and

socio-cultural and economic backgrounds of the families involved. Although, the social order classifies PWD as needing to be supported rather than empowered to be independent (Kassah, 1998, 2007; Baffoe, 2013), making available equal opportunities for such persons and non-disabled people within families and the larger community has been acknowledged to have positive effects on the education of students with disabilities (Ceka & Murati, 2016).

7.3.3 Achieving inclusive education in higher education

Inclusive education practice in Ghana is understood through the concept of accessibility and participation of the students who are marginalised. The focus is on the presence, participation and achievement of all students. Thus, inclusive education involves active combating of all barriers that exclude some students from the learning environment (Ainscow et al., 2013). According to Ministry of Education (2015), inclusive policies have been accepted as a framework to encourage and improve education in Ghana. Before the Dakar Conference (2000) and Salamanca Statement (1994), Ghana provided separate educational services for students with disabilities in special schools and mainstream education for non-disabled students. Envisioning the advantages of inclusive education, Ghana made provisions for this at the basic level and further extended it to higher educational levels following the passage of the Disability Act 2006 (Act 715) (Bott & Owusu, 2013). Hence, inclusive education at the higher level in Ghana is at its nascent stage, especially when compared to advanced countries (Chong, 2018; WHO/World Bank, 2011). Different elements at the institution where this study was conducted influence the process of achieving inclusive education. These elements include lecturers support, the nature of the social environment, access to the university built environment, psychological support, access to information, and teaching and learning resources. In this section, I discuss the elements of inclusion revealed in my findings along with areas where there is potential for growth. The section also provides insights into areas where sustained effort is required.

An important element of inclusion gleaned from my findings related to the support participants received from instructors in the learning process. This was particularly relevant in the study as it showed the extent to which participants felt that they belonged in the university. This is also a function of the degree to which individual disabled student needs are considered in the teaching and learning process. According to the visually impaired participants and some physically impaired participants, their needs in the teaching and learning process are not considered by most instructors at the university because they use “one-size-fit-all” approach to teaching. To ensure effective inclusive practice, there should be a deviation from the normal “one-size-fits-all” strategies that instructors without inclusive understanding may practice, a phenomenon which is common in the current university. Thus, the role of instructors who appreciate and support students with disabilities in the classroom is critical to the concept of inclusion. This role being played by some staff of higher education for inclusive purposes has been duly acknowledged in Spain and Zimbabwe (Lombardi et al., 2015; Chataika et al., 2012). However, in the current study, participants were not satisfied with the support they obtained from majority of the university staff. Participants perceived this is caused by poor knowledge of disability issues among university staff. Harnett (2016) and LaForce et al. (2016) observed that the academic success of students with disabilities partly depends on the support they receive from instructors, adding that staff who are aware of disability issues are able to provide the support required by disabled students in the teaching and learning process. With reference to this discussion, some researchers have pointed to the ingenuity of instructors in sub-Saharan Africa as key, stating that due to resource constraints, students with disabilities are dependent on this and other sympathetic staff to feel belonged in higher education (Greyling & Swart, 2011; Matshedisho, 2010). Holloway (2001) puts this in perspective, indicating that the insensitivity of staff towards the needs of students with disabilities may be due to a lack of awareness of disability issues. Consequently, there is more potential for growth in terms of

staff support in the understanding of students with disabilities from instructors. Apart from training university instructors to appreciate the diverse needs of students, it is possible to use the few university staff who understand these issues as change agents among their colleagues.

The nature of the social environment of the university community was a key element of inclusion identified in this study. Within the university community, peers were noted to play crucial roles in making students with disabilities feel that they belonged or not. In the present study, participants' experiences show that non-disabled students attitude toward students with disabilities were mixed. Although a few students who understand issues of disabilities supported students with disabilities, a great number of the university community shunned them. The implication is that peers' positive attitude is significant in developing trust and respect for students with disabilities. Studies have identified social networking and the building of confidence as an important consequence of peer support. Harnett (2016) indicated that the peer role is significant because it builds the confidence levels of students with disabilities and engenders a sense of unity among them. Other studies confirm the importance of peer support in higher education for students with disabilities and its influence on inclusive education (Jacklin & Robinson, 2007; Longden & York, 2007; Whittaker, 2008).

Participants of the current study appreciated the effort of the few students who understood them on the support they offered them, stating that without the support of their peers' examination dates would elude them. David (2011) dwelt on the role of a healthy social network between students with disabilities and their non-disabled counterparts, adding that such relationships have resulted in effective preparations for examination for students with disabilities. These positive linkages have been seen to be the result of information sharing among students (Jacklin & Robinson, 2007). Although this positive association between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers remains a key element of inclusion, participants in the present study stated this association to be weak in the study area as majority of non-disabled students avoided

them in both formal and informal social settings. This avoidance behaviour may emanate from the socio-cultural beliefs that put fear in non-disabled people with limited understanding of disability issues. According to participants of this study, the fear of association stems from the socio-cultural belief that disabled people are evil and a source of bad luck. This creates poor cooperation and social interaction between students living with disability and their peers without disability, a situation which hampers inclusive practice (Agbenyega, 2003). Participants of this study stated that the negative attitude towards students with disabilities prevents them from taking part in social activities, because their interest are not considered in the planning of these activities. However, there is more potential to integrate students with disabilities into these programmes by involving them in the planning phase of such activities. This also requires positive attitude from the non-disabled peers towards students with disabilities in order for them to feel accepted in the university community.

Evidence shows that avoidance and its accompanying discrimination, marginalization and stigmatization remain a major challenge affecting inclusive practice (Lewis, 2009; Morley & Croft, 2011; Motonya, 2016; Tugli et al, 2014). Not only did the participants in the current study feel threatened, frustrated and angry, other studies in Ghana reveal negative effects on the academic performance of these students (Baffoe, 2013; Botts & Evans, 2010; Mantey, 2014). In the present study, evidence of avoidance was shown when non-disabled students refused to talk or shake hands with students with disabilities. Research in Africa confirm that avoidance attitudes towards students with disabilities are caused by cultural prejudices and this is not peculiar to Ghana. The effects of societal myths, beliefs and stigma have also been identified as negatively influencing the association between non-disabled students and students with disabilities elsewhere (Chataika, 2012; Mosia, 2017; Opini, 2012). Also in Tanzania, such practices have led to low academic performance on the part of students with disabilities, a situation which according to research, is the result of poor cooperation and socialisation

between students with disabilities and their peers (Morley 2012; Morley & Croft 2011). It is evident that for effective inclusive practice, sustained effort is needed to purge Ghanaian and African communities of such outmoded cultural practices. The existence of socio-cultural practices that discriminate, marginalise and stigmatise students with disabilities demonstrates that some non-disabled people have limited knowledge regarding disability (Erten, 2011; Mullins & Preyde, 2013). Educational and advocacy programmes that target such socio-cultural norms in communities and institutions will go a long way to sensitise people of the need to appreciate persons with disabilities in society. Remedying this situation demands a concerted effort from all stakeholders aimed at fostering attitudinal change in order to recognise persons with disabilities as bona fide members of society.

Another key element of inclusion in higher education identified in this study was access to the built environment. The present study revealed that the development of appropriate infrastructure for students with disabilities is essential for their participation in university education. In general, there is a clamour for improvement in the built environment as an underpinning element of inclusive education across sub-Saharan Africa (Mosia, 2017; Mwaipopo et al., 2011). Participants in the current study acknowledged that the university is making an effort to improve its physical environment by building ramps and two elevators. Other studies have shown that efforts have also been intensified to improve and transform university infrastructure and the built environment in some African countries in a bid to make them useful to students with disabilities (FOTIM, 2011; Mosia, 2017). The role of the built environment in inclusive practices has also been stressed by Hadjidakou et al. (2010) as well as Hadjidakou and Hartas (2008) who reported that Cyprian universities have recognised this as an underlying issue in inclusive education and have invested heavily in improving the built environment for all students. In addition, capturing 'transformation' as an aspect of the key issues in the university corporate strategic plan is a demonstration that the university is willing

to make its environment accessible to all students. However, resource constraints could mean that the current university may not be able to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Despite the relevance of appropriate infrastructure to inclusive education, it remains a big challenge in many countries. In the current study, participants explained that the presence of these challenges suggest that the built environment was constructed under the principle of “ableism”. Research is replete with examples of inaccessible built environments in sub-Saharan African universities. In South Africa, FOTIM (2011), Ntombela (2013) as well as Engelbretch and De Beer (2014) all agreed that students with disabilities encounter challenges which restrict their access and participation. In general, sub-Saharan African educational institutions lack accessible physical environment that enhance students with disabilities’ participation at all levels of education (Lorenzo, 2003). The inaccessibility of the physical environment in most African countries may be due to ideological assumptions that students with disabilities are hardly seen in the university so their needs are not considered a priority, a condition that compel the participants in the current study to adapt to the physical environment rather than institutional transformation to meet the needs of such students (Mania & Street, 2000; Mantey, 2014). This has been noted even in some advanced countries as a common impediment to effective inclusive practice (Hadjikakou et al., 2010; Morina, 2017; Madriaga et al., 2010; Oliver, 1996). The point here is that the injustices the participants experienced affected their right of recognition at the university. Therefore, the built environment must be improved to suit the needs of all to enable students with disabilities to function independently in order to participate in their education.

Catering for the psychological and emotional needs of all students was seen as a key element influencing inclusive education. In this regard, the counselling services of the university became useful for visually impaired participants. Participants with visual impairment commented that psychological and emotional support as an aspect of inclusion was provided

by the university. It has been noted that when higher educational institutions provide supportive psychological environment where care, worth and acceptance are experienced by students with disabilities, they feel secure and have a sense of belonging (O’Keeffe, 2013). As indicated by Graham-Smith and Lafayette, (2004, p.1), “care overcomes the sense of isolation and separateness that a student with disability feels and gives him/her the permission to nevertheless belong and succeed in a frightening and challenging college environment”. Hence, access to guidance and counselling services is critical for the retention of students with disabilities as it has proven to be a good source of inspiration and care for all students (Simpson & Ferguson, 2012). Pearson (2012) believes psychological support in higher education is a good antidote to student drop-out as well as contributing to better academic performance. Notwithstanding the role counselling services play for the students with disabilities, in the present study, there were limitations as services were available only to visually impaired participants. Inadequate psychological support means that the emotional stress and difficulties the physically challenged participants experienced at the university remained unattended to and this could make them drop out of the university. In remedying this, a cue can be taken from Cyprus where the Education and Training of People with Special Needs Policy mandates the employment of professionals such as psychologists and speech therapists to support students with disabilities (Jones & Symeonidou, 2017). However, there are some complexities as the present study showed that the university is constrained by inadequate resources, a situation that could make it difficult to achieve the counselling needs of participants. This notwithstanding, Mosia (2017) argues that setting the needs of students with disabilities as a priority and efficient use of resources could make this achievable.

Another element in the current study influencing inclusive practice was departmental access to disclosed information concerning students with disabilities. Information sharing, as noted in this study, has the potential to influence inclusive practice in higher education. In the current

study, participants stated that the inability of the faculties and departments to access disability data meant they could not adequately plan support mechanisms for students with disabilities. The effect was that participants in the current study felt excluded from gaining access to relevant information concerning university activities, a situation that compelled them to rely on their peers. For effective inclusion, it is necessary to have strong information systems and processes. Research identifies effective communication and coordination among university departments as critical to inclusive practices in higher education (Brandt, 2011). It is therefore ironic to capture disability data during admission and neglect such information in key decisions affecting students with disabilities. Apart from its negative impact on academic performance and poor support from faculties and departments for students with disabilities in higher education, poor access and utilization of information has been known to trigger anxiety among these students (Holloway, 2001; Brandt, 2011). Although Holloway (2001) advocated for greater coordination among departments in higher education, institutional strengthening is necessary. As information about students with disabilities remain under-utilised in Ghana, strengthening the disability unit to coordinate with the admissions office and the department could ensure that information about students with disabilities are disseminated to various faculties and departments. In the present study, this might only require the strengthening of existing units, such as the Disability Unit, to ensure that various departments obtain the necessary information about students with disabilities and to plan appropriately for their integration into university activities. Also, arranging student tutors for students with disabilities could be another way of addressing this issue. The tutors could assist these students in their academic activities and furnish them with information on various notice boards.

Availability of teaching and learning resources was considered an important element influencing the achievement of inclusive practice. However, participants in the current study reported that there is inadequate teaching and learning resources at their current university and

this sometimes force them to stand in the corridors or hall ways to partake in lectures. This, therefore, hinders their academic achievement as they are unable to participate fully in classroom work. To underscore the relevance of a conducive learning environment to inclusive practice, Thomas (2016) stated that while the admission of students with disabilities in higher education was important, the need to provide appropriate learning resources and materials is equally paramount. Govero, (2019), Mosia (2017) and Morina (2017) all agree on this, suggesting that an underpinning element of inclusive education is the creation of enabling environment that would enhance the full participation of all students. The indication is that inclusion is not only reflected in accepting higher numbers of students with disabilities, but the provision of appropriate support for their participation (Beauchamp-Pryor's 2013). This suggests that, ideally, students' needs must be considered and planned for before they are admitted into higher institutions. However, research shows that this is a major challenge in many African countries (FOTIM 2011; Motonya, 2016). Studies have identified the effects of inadequate teaching and learning resources, with Matlosa and Matobo (2007) reporting that denying students with disabilities the necessary materials for their academic success is an anomaly since it increases the cost of education for these people. Other studies go beyond cost issues, adding that without the right materials and resources for students with disabilities, the quality of education may be compromised (MoE, 2008; Casely-Hayford, 2002). Recognising this as a planning issue, Tungli et al. (2014) and Tungaraza (2010) described this as an incongruity in the learning environment with students of varying needs. There is therefore the need for stakeholders in higher education in Ghana to go beyond advocating for the admission of students with disabilities to ensuring that provisions that could meet participants' diverse needs are made. It has been established that such provisions do not only boost the confidence of students with disabilities but also put them on par with non-disabled students as far as inclusion is concerned (Mosia, 2017).

7.3 Engaging critical disability theory and social constructionism in discussing students with disabilities' experiences.

In this study, critical disability theory and Social Constructionism provided insights into the experiences of students with disabilities in a Ghanaian higher educational institution. As stated by Goodley (2013) “the word ‘critical’ signifies a sense of self-appraisal; reassessing where we started, where we are now and where we might be going” (p.632). The self-appraisal and reassessment suggest in-depth analysis of a phenomenon or research topic, thus, allowing researchers to explore the complex interplay of issues such as inclusion/exclusion and disability. If critical disability theory and social constructionism involve rethinking of conventional assumptions on a particular phenomenon (Shildrick, 2012), then they are positioned to challenge the structures that incapacitate the education of people with disabilities. Enabling the education of students with disabilities therefore requires systemic transformation of the environment, and change in the ideological perspectives about disability that portray students with disabilities as incapable of accessing higher education.

The experiences of the participants in this study provide insights into how the structures of control and exclusion are influenced by socio-cultural elements that affect knowledge and meaning to maintain the status quo. The participants in this study were appalled and concerned about the labels and stigmas that lead to discrimination in the institution of learning. Individuals with disability are described in a negative light, as persons who should be pitied at best, and ignored and shunned at worst due to the belief system which describes people with disabilities as accursed and evil. Insights from critical disability theory and social constructionism assisted in revealing the challenges students with disabilities experience and the transformation required in supporting them. The necessary change in perception and ideology that portray people with disabilities as accursed and evil could, I argue, be done through community-based sensitisation

on disability issues. In this context, the term 'sensitisation' describes the need to create more awareness about disability and inclusive education in society. This sensitisation effort could make people value disability as a diversity in life rather than it being viewed as an individual abnormality that needs to be cured. Thus, there is the need for effective country-wide community education campaigns aimed at eliminating the myths, negative perceptions, stereotyping, superstitions and their resultant discrimination, stigmatisation and marginalisation of persons with disabilities. Recognising resource constraints, the sensitisation of disability issues could start from the institution of learning through posters and public lectures on issues with disabilities.

One of the principles of critical disability theory is giving voice to people with disabilities and honouring their stories. Thus, this study does not only honour the students by sharing their stories but also challenges the stereotypical beliefs that have subjected people with disabilities to constant dependency. This study revealed that the voices of students with disabilities are often silenced and ignored as they are not considered as important stakeholders on issues concerning their education. This notion of silence portrays domination of non-disabled people on decisions that concern PWD, and this is influenced by the belief system that consider PWD as inferior. However, understanding students with disabilities and meeting their needs requires listening to their stories in order to realise that living with disability does not prevent participation in higher education. The experiences of participants in this study show that students with disabilities have values, aspirations, dreams and hopes that could be realised when supported. This suggests that providing opportunities and support as given to their non-disabled counterparts could help them realise their educational dreams and live an independent life which society considers valuable.

This study revealed that environmental accessibility is viewed from the principles of 'ableism' and 'normalism', thus, setting 'normality' as a standard for accessing the university

environment. This makes it difficult for students with disabilities to function, leading them to be dependent on others for their participation in the institution of learning. These ideas of inequality are passed on as acceptable norms by social institutions such as the university. This suggests that in the university, the idea of normality is used as a measure for functioning in the environment. Understanding from social constructionism shows that these ideological assumptions emanate from socio-cultural norms that consider people with disability as incapable, and views these as discriminatory and not founded on objective truth (Manias & Street 2000). In addition, the inability of the institution to transform the university's environment reflects an expression of unspoken assumptions and ideologies about ableist requirements for accessing formal education, thereby subjecting people with disabilities to feelings of inadequacy and dependency. Arguing from the critical disability theory perspective, setting ability as a condition for participation in the university environment restricts students with disabilities not only from participating in the university environment but realising their educational dreams. This suggests that there should be transformation of the environment in order to enable students who are marginalised, stigmatised and discriminated against to participate in education (Hamraie, 2016; Hosking, 2008). In the context of this study, transformation needs to start with the provision of facilities that may require less capital such as pedestrian crossing markings, disability friendly toilets, ramps and elevators.

In addition, the findings of this study show that teaching and learning practices at the institution of learning did not meet the basic equality principle of fairness where all students benefit from the teaching space. Inadequate disability knowledge made it difficult for the majority of lecturers to diversify their teaching methods to meet the needs of all students. This, according to understanding from critical disability theory, infringes on the educational rights of students with disabilities. This also shows a difference between policy and practice because the institution maintains that it is committed to supporting all students but the reality is different.

This calls for in-service training for staff to acquaint them with the basic knowledge of teaching and supporting students with disabilities. This will ensure that students with disabilities meet the minimum condition of equality. Failure to diversify teaching methods to meet the needs of all students suggest that the learning context requires students to adapt.

7.4 Arriving there

In this section two vignettes were created from all the interviews with students with disabilities in a Ghanaian university. The discussion here is not based on one participant's experience but a depiction of participants' stories that can make reference to the lived experiences of students with disabilities in their lived domain (Hughes, 1998). The two narratives aim at providing a comprehensive understanding of students with disabilities experiences at the university. My objective is to provide a backstory for my readers to assist them to obtain a pictorial representation of students with disabilities experiences at the university. The stories are based on participants' experiences which were transcribed verbatim. These stories are the synthesis of participants' experiences. I selected a male and female to represent the stories in an understandable manner.

Kwaku's Story

I was born crippled and grew up in a small village in the western region of Ghana. I had no hope of going to school when growing up. My parents are poor subsistence farmers who depend solely on what they produce. I was nine when a teacher from our local primary school came to advise my parents to send me to school. Being crippled and from a poor family, my parents were adamant looking at my condition and due to the fact that they do not have money to buy a wheelchair for me. The teacher decided to carry me through his bicycle to school each day. Although I was crawling at the school, I considered it a privilege since I had no hope of going

to school. Throughout all of my educational life, I have been crawling. Currently, I have a manual wheelchair which was given to me by a philanthropist after obtaining admission to university. My parents are illiterates but they believe obtaining university degree is the surest way of getting out of poverty. They have a high regard for people who have completed higher education and wanted their children to obtain university degrees. They believe obtaining a university degree would give me a secure future.

Although my family was excited when I obtained admission to university since I am the first among my siblings to obtain such an opportunity, my university life has been stressful. I encounter challenges in every aspect of my university life. The enrolment process was a difficult experience. As a fresh student, I needed to join long queues to finalise the admission process. The process was difficult for me since some of the queues led to the upper floors where the process was being done. The lack of elevator in the building meant I had to crawl to climb the stairs to the upper floors to complete the admission process. As a wheelchair user, I wonder why the university's physical environment and buildings are inaccessible for students with mobility challenges, with lack of disability-friendly washrooms and lectures rooms a notable worry. This can be construed as a source of punishment especially when one considers the fact that I have to climb stairs to access building crawling, an embarrassing situation which affect my right to live an independent life.

My social life is challenging, most of my peers do not want to associate with me. No matter how hard I tried, they continue to distance themselves from me. I wish I could have more friends who would understand who I am but it seems they do not have interest in associating with me. I think they feel my connection with them means they need to support me. I feel discriminated, embarrassed, marginalised and stigmatised when my peers refuse to talk with me or disperse when I am approaching them. The unreceptive attitude of most non-disabled people has led to a situation where social activities are done without factoring the needs of

students with disabilities. Notwithstanding these negative experiences, there are few non-disabled people including lecturers and students who are always ready to provide support for me. When I share my experiences with them, they encourage and advise me to persevere and be determined to succeed.

Akosua's Story

I am a woman in my early twenties and became visually impaired after my senior high school education. I come from a family where higher education has become a norm so even impaired, I am determined to complete my education in order to fit well in family and society. I have a middle class family who are determined to support me at every stage of my education. Although I am disabled, I could feel the love of my family around me all the time. I must confess, I had no intension of studying special education when I was at senior high school but my condition focused me on my current programme. Now, I have come to understand the reality of being a disabled individual. I want to know more about the issues of disability in order to support people of my kind.

I have problems with almost everything going on in this university. My experiences in the learning environment is not different from the physical environment. The pedagogical style of some lecturers is problematic, they teach while pointing to illustrations which I cannot see. Again, I find it difficult to obtain the needed academic resources in the right format and this affirms the unequal emphasis in the learning environment between students with disabilities and those without disabilities. Although resource constraints may be used to justify this, I think that the concentration on non-disabled students in resource deployment and utilisation based on sheer numbers of students for priority-setting is no justification for trampling on my rights as a student. This is not surprising because people consider me as accursed and incapable an attribute which emanates from the socio-cultural fabric of the traditional Ghanaian societies. I

therefore encounter discrimination, marginalisation and stigmatisation from both staff and non-disabled students on daily basis. These experiences, ingrained in the socio-cultural makeup of society, manifested in avoidance behaviour from peers and staff and the result of prejudices that associate disability with evil, witchcraft and incapability. The conditions at the university make me feel excluded. The poor accessibility at the university was compounded by lack of disability specific orientation.

Realising the challenges I experience at the university, I devised a number of strategies to help cope with the difficulties. First, I have decided to focus on how to turn my impairment into achieving better results after realising my weaknesses, strength and abilities. I was encouraged to learn hard to be among the best students, a strategy that could draw some people to me. Third, joining group discussions was also used to deliberate on issues I could not understand in class. Four, being in class early in order to obtain front seats was also used as a strategy to overcome challenges associated with overcrowding which make some students stand in corridors while classes are in session.

From my experience I would consider myself as survivor and achiever since only few people in my condition have obtain such an opportunity. Besides, I am able to persist in the midst of physical, social and academic difficulties. Thus, despite the challenges I experience in this university, I will forge ahead because I know I have determination, resilience, perseverance and tenacity to achieve my educational goals just like other non-disabled students.

From the experiences of study participants, it may be appropriate to describe these students as survivors and achievers as they were able to persist in the midst of physical, social and academic difficulties. Thus, despite the challenges students with disabilities experienced in higher education, they forged ahead upon their determination, resilience, perseverance and tenacity to achieve their educational goals just like their non-disabled counterparts. As a

researcher interviewing and observing these students, I appreciate the value of hard work and ambition. Thus, although there may be challenges, it is still possible to achieve our aims. Thus, while solutions are being sought to improve the lot of students with disabilities in higher education in Ghana and sub-Saharan Africa, it is important to acknowledge the meaningful contributions already made by these students. However, this realisation of determination, resilience, perseverance and tenacity to succeed should not in any way cause stakeholders to relax in their efforts to provide the requisite support for these students. A good understanding of the challenges and success stories of these students as shown in this research is only the beginning of the journey but, nevertheless, a crucial part in strengthening systems aimed at improving inclusive practices in higher education in Ghana.

7.5 Summary

This chapter discussed the main findings presented in chapters Four, Five and Six. The chapter discussed policy provisions for inclusive practices in the current university and juxtaposed this with the findings elsewhere. It was indicated that Ghana's policy framework has been influenced by international conventions which aligns to social model of disability. The chapter stressed the need for effective policy implementation, adding that this has been impacted by poor policy awareness, inadequate resources and cultural beliefs and practices. The chapter further discussed students with disabilities' motivation to access university education. The main factors motivating students with disabilities to access university education included students desire to be role models, create disability awareness and obtain higher remuneration. The achievement of other influential people with university education, family responsibility as well as family's support were other factors that motivated students with disabilities to access university education. Elements influencing the achievement of inclusive education as well as

the constraints in achieving inclusive education were discussed. This study suggested that disability data needs to be used for planning support services because failure to do so exposes the students to many barriers that compromise opportunity for success in their study.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

This chapter presents the main ideas of the thesis and highlights the implications of the study. It further provides some recommendations for policy and practice and policy development. Future research considerations, limitations of the study, lessons I learned and my final remarks are provided at the end of the chapter. The aim of this research was to obtain in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of students with disabilities in an institution of higher education in Ghana. In achieving this aim, qualitative research methods comprising interviews, observation and documentary analysis were used to collect data. The research questions posed were:

- a. How does the policy environment influence the education of persons with disabilities in a Ghanaian university?
- b. What motivates students with disabilities' to access and participate in university education?
- c. What are the experiences of students with disabilities in relation to access and participation in higher education in Ghana?

8.1 Take home message

This section provides an inventory of the main ideas of the study. It would not be good to conclude the study without a word on what could be learnt from the voices and experiences of students with disabilities and what might need to change in improving the lives of these students at the local and national levels. The following concluding remarks have been drawn from the study based on the findings and discussions of the study.

The current study throws light on the current state of the inclusive policy environment in higher education albeit with emphasis on the university considered for the study. The study reveals that inclusive practice in Ghana has come a long way and began with incipient activities in the 1960s. Although a comprehensive inclusive policy is yet to be developed, the provisions put forward in the university strategic plan is recognition of the effort the university is making towards the wellbeing of PWD.

The study has shown that the Ghanaian concept of disability is influenced by religious, social, cultural and medical considerations. Accordingly, disability has been associated with evil connotations and this has influenced the way students with disabilities are treated both on campus and in traditional Ghanaian societies. The notion of disability as a medical condition that can be cured through administration of medicine reverberated through student voices and policy documents, a position which places limited responsibility on society to create an enabling environment for these students to thrive in higher education.

The present study revealed both positive and negative attitudes towards students with disabilities. In particular, non-disabled people who have knowledge of disability issues portrays positive attitudes by providing support for students with disabilities. However, those without understanding of disability issues exhibit negative attitudes believing that they are accursed.

Contrary to the commonly-held Ghanaian notion that disabled people can offer little to society and are completely dependent on non-disabled people for all they need, this study has shown that this position is not entirely true. The current study has shown that PWD aim to defy their impairment by seeking economic independence through higher qualifications. Not only do they aim to be useful to themselves, they also seek to impact positively on their families and

societies through setting good examples for other PWD who are being looked down upon by virtue of their disability.

This study has revealed a number of challenges for stakeholders to focus on in an attempt to improve inclusive practice in Ghana. The lack of professional training for teachers, inadequate infrastructure, poor support services, poor disability information flow, exclusive social and academic activities and negative attitude from non-disabled people were the most common.

This study noted that disability data is underutilised in the planning of programmes and services for students with disabilities in higher education in Ghana. Although this data is collected during the admission process ostensibly to improve the conditions of students with disabilities when admitted, it was found that this had little effect on their situation after admission.

The study details mechanisms used by PWD to withstand the frustrations that characterise higher education in Ghana. Key strategies emanating from participants experiences included being in class early to deal with the problem of overcrowding, self-determination and group discussions to support the limited classroom work. This study revealed that students with disabilities who accept who they are could rise above their disability, a situation that increases their academic achievement and social life.

8.2 Implications of this study

Although this study was conducted in a single Ghanaian university, it could make a broad impact on the education of students with disabilities across the country and beyond. Apart from this study making contribution to knowledge, it also generated useful information that could be used to develop strategies for improving the education of students with disabilities. The study is about the experiences of students with disabilities and so the implications have been

gleaned from these experiences. This study provided an opportunity for students with disabilities to reflect on their expectations and experiences, providing insight into how they navigate around the university community. Reflecting on their own experiences could make them aware of their strengths, challenges and capabilities needed to develop the opportunities available to them. The insights from this study could have implications on policy and practice.

Policy. This study has established that Ghana, like other sub-Saharan African states, has enacted inclusive policies to guide the education of students with disabilities. However, gaps in the conceptualisation of disability, policy awareness levels, and resource constraints affect implementation effort at the local and institutional levels. Consequently, the influence of the policies are less visible in the university. This suggests that despite the enactment of disability policies, students with disabilities continue to experience significant challenges. Thus, the implementation of inclusive policies has not been effective in supporting the education of students with disabilities. This study has therefore shown that the development of a comprehensive disability policy in higher educational institutions is relevant in the realisation of inclusive practice in Ghana. Thus, institution-specific policies within the framework of the national disability policies may be required to address challenges affecting participation of students with disabilities. Having bits and pieces of disability policy provisions scattered in institutional documents may not be enough to address the multifaceted issues which characterise inclusive education. Given that inclusive policies have been recognised at both national and institutional levels, a lot still needs to happen on the implementation of these policies in order to engender an effective inclusive system.

Moreover, this study suggests that one of the components of university being able to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities is effective use of disability data. In this case, obtaining insight into disability data could inform the choices and decisions of the university. Therefore, the study emphasised the significance of disability data to the planning of support

services for students with disabilities at the university. This study suggests that the university's decision to withhold disability information undermine the opportunities for students with disabilities to access the needed support. Other challenges may include lecturers' inability to prepare their lessons to suit all students and the university's inability to include students with disabilities in their social and academic activities. Forming a disability group could assist students with disabilities in negotiating for their needs in the university. The implication is that effective utilisation of disability data could form the basis of a sound inclusive policy and program.

Practice. The study revealed that students with disabilities experience marginalisation, discrimination and stigmatisation in higher education. These emanate from the belief system that perceives PWD as evil and accursed by the gods. Although non-disabled students were aware of the presence of students with disabilities at the university, they may not know that their (non-disabled students) behaviour and attitude negatively affected students with disabilities. The negative attitudes towards students with disabilities could create anxiety and disconnect from non-disabled students. It is therefore imperative that both students and staff accept disability as a normal part of human diversity.

The classroom offers a useful platform for valuing and understanding diversity. For example, the inability of university lecturers to diversify their pedagogical styles could be a source of exclusion. Conversely, valuing diversity of students aligns well with an inclusive approach. The indication is that the shared interests of both students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers should be considered at all stages of the quest for inclusion. Thus, this study emphasises creating a university environment that promotes inclusiveness of all students. The implication here is that discrimination, marginalisation and stigmatisation have far-reaching repercussions on inclusive education and must not be left out from inclusive discussions. Although this has been established in the literature, this study shows that these practices are

very strong in Ghanaian higher education, a context of learning where one might be able to expect the prevalence of such practices to be low.

Furthermore, this study highlighted the role of the family support in the education of students with disabilities at the higher education. The support, encouragement, care and respect students with disabilities obtained from family and the larger community played a vital role in their education. This suggests that the support from the family unit is a fundamental motivation which ignites a sense of hard work among students with disabilities. This discussion ties in with social support systems in Ghana and indicates that the lack of such support systems has led to the assumption of societal roles by the family. This brings to the fore the relevance of ensuring that institutions provide the requisite support for students with disabilities to augment that which the family unit provides for students with disabilities.

Similarly, the impact of peer support in the participation of students with disabilities in higher education was identified as significant. The physical and learning environment require students with disabilities to be supported by their peers. Although this study recognised peer support as paramount, it made students with disabilities vulnerable and insecure as these peers lacked the skills needed to provide effective support. This implies that there is the need for a shift in thinking from a medical perspective to a social standpoint where these students will be empowered to support themselves and reduce over-reliance on others. In this case, disability specific orientation, disability friendly facilities and assistive technology could be provided by the university to support these students.

This study provides deeper insights into inclusive practices by going beyond the mere admission of students with disabilities. The study adduces ample evidence to support the fact that there cannot be effective inclusion without the necessary infrastructure in the learning and built environment. Thus, a lot of planning need to take place before students with disabilities

are admitted to ensure that their needs are well taken care of once they get on board. However, this study suggests that students with disabilities are excluded by the built environment of the university. Students with disabilities indicated that the lack of disability-friendly environment increases their struggles because they sometimes miss their way and fall down when they are navigating the university environment. This, according to Akosua and Kwame did not only leads to humiliation, but sometimes some bruises.

The accessibility provisions in the university must go beyond the learning and built environment to address the psychological needs of the students with disabilities. The emotional stability of students is critical to their success. Although all students face such challenges, students with disabilities suffer the most due to the additional burden of marginalisation and discrimination. This study has shown that students with disabilities encounter different challenges that make them vulnerable in experiencing multiple stressors. This brings to light the importance of psychological support and responding to the diverse needs of students with disabilities. The psychological support could be in the form of enhancing adaptive behaviour. It could also focus on anxiety, finances, fears, depression, academic pressure, time management and managing emotional stress. In this way, the academic potentials of students with disabilities could be realised.

8.3 Recommendations

This study revealed important issues that must be focused on in order to improve the education of students with disabilities in higher educational institutions. Below are a number of recommendations to improve practice, policy development and future research.

8.3.1 Recommendations for improving inclusive practice

The study showed that Ghana, like other African countries, has more to do in terms of the provision of appropriate infrastructure to support the higher education of students with disabilities. There should be full review and the identification of priorities, with timelines for implementation. Thus, an accessible and adaptable built environment should be created to facilitate access and participation of students with disabilities in higher education. Given that these institutions face financial challenges due to the fact that the government is the major financier of these institutions, alternative sources of financing such as strengthening university programmes that can attract more fee paying and international students will be an advantage. Other alternative sources of funding inclusive education in the institutions of higher education could include soliciting funds from Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs), philanthropic individuals, corporate institutions, donor agencies and international organisations.

The ability of higher educational institutions to provide psychological support for students with disabilities requires the institution to strengthen the staff base of the guidance and counselling unit to enable the students to obtain the needed support. Experts in higher educational institutions could provide in-service training for academic staff who are willing to support students in need of psychological support. This could assist in strengthening the staff base of guidance and counselling systems in higher education.

Due to the challenges students with disabilities face in accessing resources for learning, accessible ICT and other assistive technology facilities at the institutions of higher education could facilitate students with disabilities sense of belonging and accessibility. Assistive technologies such as laptops/computers, braille, audio speakers and books must be available. In this case essential information including time tables, announcements and examination schedules could be communicated to students more effectively. In addition, the library should

be digitalised to promote accessibility. Recognising the challenges of higher educational institutions organising disability specific orientation for students with disabilities, making provision for special assistance who could assist these students could be an advantage.

This study has shown that those who have basic knowledge about disability issues are sympathetic to students with disabilities. It is therefore plausible to assume that basic orientation on disability and support will go a long way to influence positive attitude towards students with disabilities. Providing in-service training for all staff members to enable them to identify, interact, support and diversify teaching methods and other services to meet the needs of these students is therefore paramount. This should be supported from time to time with seminars and workshops on disability issues to keep stakeholders abreast of inclusive education.

8.3.2 Recommendations for Policy Development

This study found that implementation of inclusive policies was challenging due to policy gaps. This is consistent with CDT argument that there must be the development of policy response to education of students with disabilities in order to ignite political and social change in the institution of learning and society. Institutions of higher education must, therefore, develop a comprehensive inclusive policy which gives prominence to the following:

- a. Details of what provisions are available for students with disabilities and what the institutions identify as special educational needs.
- b. What support services at the institutions of higher education should be, what support the students would receive and where to receive such supports.
- c. How students with disabilities data should be handled.
- d. Funding arrangement for special education needs and support services.
- e. Provision of pre and in-service training for all staff in higher education

In addition, the current study advocates for the minimisation of policy gaps by reviewing the current inclusive policies on the basis of educational right and the principles of social model of disability. The revised inclusive policies should be communicated to stakeholders at all levels of education. The policies should enjoin the government as well as the institutions to set the needs of students with disabilities as priority by making a budget to cover their basic educational needs. Thus, while inclusive policies have been enacted, effort must be made to strengthen institutions for effective implementation.

Ghana's disability policies remain silent on the influence of traditional beliefs and practices on education of students living with disabilities although this affects the very fabric of African societies. Therefore, stakeholders involved in disability policy development and implementation must define the boundaries of acceptable traditional practices in terms of their impact on students with disabilities in higher education.

This study revealed that there is no mechanism for reporting elements of exclusion in the institution of higher education. The policy must provide guidelines students with disabilities could use to report cases of exclusion at institutions of higher education.

8.3.3 Future research consideration

The current study explored the lived experiences of students with disabilities in only one university in Ghana. Obtaining broader perspectives of students with disabilities experiences call for investigating the lived experiences of students with disabilities on a larger scale. Future research studies could investigate the experiences of students with disabilities more broadly to involve two or more higher educational institutions in Ghana.

This study only involved the experiences of students with disabilities. However, inclusive education involves a plethora of stakeholders. There is the need for research involving the

views of staff, non-disabled students and students with disabilities in higher education describing views on inclusive education support and how the service should be structured.

This study has revealed that several stakeholders play important roles in the education of students with disabilities. Future research involving family, peers, lecturers, etc. would be very relevant in this discussion. Such a study will be beneficial because it will broaden our horizons about the responsibilities and challenges being faced by various stakeholders and how these may be addressed in order to provide the requisite support for these students. There has not been adequate studies on the role of different stakeholders on the education of students with disabilities and this could be an interesting area for research.

This study showed that funding inclusive education is a major challenge in Ghana. Future research could give more insight into financing inclusive education in Ghana. Attention should be given to funding dedicated scholarships for PWD who show aptitude for higher education.

8.4 Limitations of the Research.

This study has identified a number of limitations. First, the sampling size for the study was relatively small. Time and resource constraints limited my ability to explore the perspectives of other people such as non-disabled students and a sizeable number of staff. In addition, this study involved the lived experiences of students with disabilities in only one university and even within this university, only students with visible disabilities were involved. Broadening the scope to cover different types of disability within the university where this study was conducted and students with disabilities in other universities may have given additional or different data which would have enriched this research. However, I saw this as beyond the scope of the current study as PhD thesis must be written within a particular time frame.

Second, although my familiarity with the experiences of students with disabilities in Ghana could be considered a strength to this study, there is a possibility that this pre-conception could have led to a bias. Noticing this limitation, I ensured my personal judgement did not influence the analysis of data collected (see 3.7). Participants' voices were interpreted as it was, and in many occasions my supervisors contested and advised on the interpretation of the findings. This assisted in bringing out participants voices clearly.

Finally, the lack of generalisation of qualitative research such as this study is a limitation. The present study considered the experiences of students with disabilities in only one institution which makes it difficult to generalise beyond this institution. However, the current study is transferable because I have provided in-depth description of the context, participants and location. I was also transparent with the analysis of the data.

Despite these limitations, this research has provided insight into perceptions and understanding of inclusive policies and practices in higher educational institutions in Ghana. In addition, this study not only highlights a better conceptualisation of disability but also focuses on the removal of challenges which obstruct the education of students with disabilities in Ghana. Particularly, this research encourages stakeholders to conceptualise disability based on the social model where disability is regarded as a diversity in life.

8.5 Lessons learned

At the initial stages of this research, I intended to investigate perceptions and attitudes toward students with disabilities in higher educational institutions in Ghana. However, after my first meeting with my supervisor, she recommended some literature for further study and this changed the scope, direction and focus of my research. This initial review of the literature showed that very limited work has been done on the lived experiences of disabled students in

higher education. I considered this to be very important because it will be difficult to engender inclusive practice without a good understanding of the voices, experiences and stories of students with disabilities. Upon reading further, I realised that most of the studies have focused on lower levels of education, leaving a gap in higher education in Ghana the exploration of which could assist in policy formulation for inclusive practice.

Moreover, at the initial stages of my PhD journey, I prepared a timeline and assumed I could follow it strictly. However, the movement of my first primary supervisor to University of Auckland and my initial intention of going with her created a gap. After deciding to maintain studies at University of Canterbury, much time has been spent, as such, using critical ethnography which requires me to be in the field for longer time would be difficult. This made me review my theoretical underpinning from critical ethnography to critical disability theory.

Another lesson learned from this study is how to work with research participants in complex and difficult environments. I empathised with participants to establish rapport with them. Since my previous background was quantitative research methods, the current research has given me the practical experience of doing qualitative research. Thus, I have learned the application of qualitative data collection methods such as interviews, observation and document analysis which can be applied in future research. Making in-depth analysis of qualitative research data has been another experience obtained through this study.

In addition, this research has improved my academic writing and research skills. I have learned how to develop research proposal and report. My presentation skills have improved due to opportunity of presenting part of my research findings at conferences. Within my research journey, I have also learned from my participants' determination, successes, struggles and humiliations which would shape my advocacy work towards the emancipation of the disabled people in Ghana, and other parts of the world.

8.6 Final word

Informed by my previous experience and different studies in the experiences of students with disabilities, I became aware of the challenges students living with disabilities encounter in their pursuit of higher education. Based on the argued role higher education plays in the development of the individual and society, my expectation was that there would be a number of research studies in this area in Africa. However, I was surprised to realise the relative lack of research into the experiences of students living with disabilities in higher education in Ghana and Africa. This was a motivation for this research. The collation and analysis of the data explained why inclusive provisions enshrined in the various policies are difficult to implement. Although the current study showed that one higher educational institution has been making efforts towards the realisation of inclusive education, a lot remains to be done as several issues have been identified which impede the participation of students with disabilities. Solving these problems will be challenging but it is believed that the insights from this study could help to inform policy makers' of the need to provide the needed support for disabled students in higher education.

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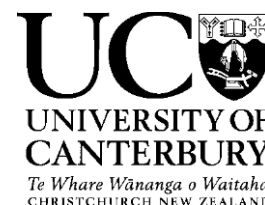
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Appendices

Appendix A



Department: Educational studies and Leadership
Telephone: +64 3369 3333
Email: educationadvice@canterbury.ac.nz
08/08/2017

The experiences and perceptions of students with disabilities in a Ghanaian university

Information Sheet for policy maker

I am Yaw Akoto, a doctoral candidate at University of Canterbury, New Zealand. I am researching into the experiences and perceptions of students with disabilities in a Ghanaian University. The aim of my research is to facilitate the building of barrier free university environment that can facilitate day-to-day activities of all students. I would like to invite you to participate in my study.

If you choose to take part in this study, your involvement will be an interviewee in a semi-structured interview. The interview section will take about 45-90 minutes and it will be audio recorded with your consent.

As a follow-up to this investigation, you will be asked to check interview transcript for further clarification, correction and omission.

In the performance of the tasks and application of the procedures, there are no possible risk of this study on your personality or in the performance of your duties at work.

Participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any stage. You may ask for your raw data to be returned to you or destroyed at any point. If you withdraw, I will remove information relating to you. However, once analysis of raw data starts four weeks after the interview, it will become increasingly difficult to remove the influence of your data on the results.

The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of the confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation: your identity will not be made public without your prior consent. To ensure confidentiality, I will use pseudonyms to represent participants and the University all the time throughout all my writings. The data would be kept in a password protected computer provided by the University of Canterbury. The hardcopies of the data materials will be kept in a secure cabinet. Notwithstanding this, data would be made available to my supervisors. The data would be kept for ten (10) years before it would be destroyed. A thesis is a public document and will be available through the UCLibrary.

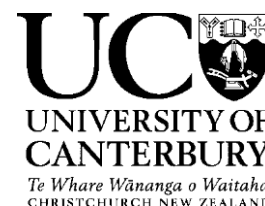
Please indicate to the researcher on the consent form if you would like to receive a copy of the summary of results of the project.

The project is being carried out as a requirement for degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Yaw Akoto under the supervision of Prof Annelies Kamp and Dr. Trish Mcmenamin, who can be contacted at annelies.kamp@canterbury.ac.nz and trish.mcmenamin@canterbury.ac.nz . They will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

Please return the consent form one week after receiving it.

Appendix B



Department: Educational studies and Leadership
Telephone: Phone: +64 3 369 3333
Email: educationadvice@canterbury.ac.nz
08/08/2017

The experiences and perceptions of students with disabilities in a Ghanaian university Information Sheet for students' participants

I'm Yaw Akoto a doctoral candidate at University of Canterbury, New Zealand. I'm researching into the experiences and perceptions of students with disabilities in a Ghanaian University. The aim of my research is to facilitate the building of barrier free university environment that can facilitate day-to-day activities of all students. I would like to invite you to participate in my study.

If you choose to take part in this study, your involvement will be interviewee in semi structured interview. Each interview section would take between forty-five to ninety minutes (45-90 minutes) and it will be audio recorded with your consent. You may be needed for about two interview sittings.

As a follow-up to this investigation, you will be asked to check transcript for further clarification, correction and omission.

In the performance of the tasks and application of the procedures, there can be risks of being socially discriminated, isolated, stigmatized and marginalized for disclosing important issues which the university and students leaders should have done but are not doing to help you in your day-to-day activities in the university. To avert this, I will not disclose your identity or the university's identity to anyone or in any of my writings or presentations. Besides, the interview sections will be done in a place devoid of other persons.

In addition, I'm aware of psychological risk that my study can cause to you since it will involve you sharing your past and present experiences which can sometimes be ugly and need not to be revisited. I can assure you that I will not ask any question which can harm you psychologically. However, if there is any information that could be of benefit to the outcome of this project I will encourage you to do so. Notwithstanding this, I have details of counsellors and psychologist who can be of assistance in case you need their service in a matter of psychological problems.

Even though there can be physical risk by the school authority, students leaders and even friends for disclosing the facts about your plight in the university to me as a researcher, I will provide maximum confidentiality in all my research proceedings.

There is no doubt that there is cultural effects in an attempt to discuss your situation to me as a researcher. As a Ghanaian, I am aware that discussing your situation with me can mean you are challenging some aspects of the cultural heritage. As a result of this, I will

work closely with my supervisory team to ensure that maximum confidentiality is provided in all my writings and presentations.

Participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. You may ask for your raw data to be returned to you or destroyed at any point. If you withdraw, I will remove information relating to you. However, once analysis of raw data starts in four weeks after the interview, it will become increasingly difficult to remove the influence of your data on the results.

The results of this project may be published, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation: your identity will not be made public without your prior consent. To ensure confidentiality, I will use pseudonyms to represent you and the University all the time throughout all my writings and presentations. The data will be kept in a pass word protected computer provided by the University of Canterbury. The hardcopies of data materials will be kept in a locked cabinet. However, data will be made available to my supervisors. The data will be kept for ten (10) years before it will be destroyed. A thesis is a public document and will be available through the UCLibrary.

Please indicate to the researcher on the consent form if you would like to receive a copy of the summary of results of this project.

This project is being carried out as a requirement for degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Yaw Akoto under the supervision of Prof. Annelies Kamp and Dr. Trish Mcmenamin, who can be contacted at. They will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in this project.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to participate in the study, you are asked to complete the consent form and return one week after receiving.

Appendix C



Department: Educational studies and Leadership
Telephone: +64
221646896/+233243419213
Email:
yaw.akoto@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

The experiences and perceptions of students with disabilities in a Ghanaian University Consent Form for student participants

Include a statement regarding each of the following:

- I have been given a full explanation of this project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand what is required of me if I agree to take part in the research.
- I understand that participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without penalty. Withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information I have provided should this remain practically achievable.
- I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and his supervisors and that any published or reported results will not identify the participants or their institution. I understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library.
- I understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and/or in password protected electronic form and will be destroyed after ten years.
- I understand the risks associated with taking part and how they will be managed.
- I understand that I can contact the researcher Yaw Akoto (yaw.akoto@pg.canterbury.ac.nz) or supervisors (annelies.kamp@canterbury.ac.nz trish.mcmenamin@canterbury.ac.nz) for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)
- I would like a summary of the results of the project.
- By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name: _____ Signed: _____ Date: _____

Email address (*for report of findings, if applicable*): _____

Appendix D



Department of Educational Studies and Leadership
Telephone: +64 221646896
Email: yaw.akoto@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

The experiences and perceptions of students with disabilities in a Ghanaian university

Consent Form for policy maker

Include a statement regarding each of the following:

- I have been given a full explanation of this project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand what is required of me if I agree to take part in the research.
- I understand that participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without penalty. Withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information I have provided should this remain practically achievable.
- I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and his supervisors and that any published or reported results will not identify the participants or their institution. I understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library.
- I understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and/or in password protected electronic form and will be destroyed after ten years.
- I understand the risks associated with taking part and how they will be managed.
- I understand that I can contact the researcher Mr Yaw Akoto (0243419213, yaw.akoto@pg.canterbury.ac.nz) or supervisor Annelies and Trish (annelies.kamp@canterbury.ac.nz trish.mcmenamin@canterbury.ac.nz) for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)
- I would like a summary of the results of the project.
- By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name: _____ Signed: _____ Date: _____

Email address (for report of findings, if applicable):

Please I will come for the consent form one week after receiving it.

Appendix E



Department: Educational studies and Leadership
Telephone: +64
221646896/+233243419213
Email:
yaw.akoto@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

The experiences and perceptions of students with disabilities in a Ghanaian University Interview guide for students

Can you tell me how you are feelings?

Can you tell me about yourself, name, age, level, programme, marital status etc?

What influenced your decision to pursue university education?

What influenced your choice of this particular university over other universities offering the same programme in Ghana?

Can you describe the admission process into the university?

Were there any opportunity for you to disclose your disability?

How accessible is the university built environment to you and other students with disabilities?

What practices are in place to facilitate access to education for students with disabilities?

Please, can you describe the kind of support services available to you in your university education?

Let's talk about your social life. How does it look like?

Please, how would you describe your relationship with the university teaching and non-teaching staff?

Do you have any strategy that assist you to cope with the challenges you experience at the university?

What policies are there to facilitate access to education for students with disabilities: national and institutional/university?

Please, do you have any question for me?

Appendix F



Department: Educational studies and Leadership
Telephone: +64
221646896/+233243419213
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yaw.akoto@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

The experiences and perceptions of students with disabilities in a Ghanaian University Interview guide for lecturer

Please, can you tell me about yourself, name, department and your role?

Please can you describe the admission process into the university?

Are there any opportunity for disabled applicants to disclose their disability?

How do the departments obtain information about the students with disabilities?

How accessible is the university built environment to you and students with disabilities?

What practices are in place to facilitate accessibility of the university to students with disabilities?

Please, can you describe the kind of support services available to students with disabilities in the university?

Let's talk about their social life. How does it look like?

Please, how would you describe their relationship between students with disabilities and teaching and non-teaching staff?

What policies are there to facilitate access to education for students with disabilities: national and institutional/university?

Please, do you have any question for me?

Appendix G



HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Rebecca Robinson
Telephone: +64 03 369 4588, Extn 94588
Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

Ref: 2017/41/ERHEC

5 December 2017

Yaw Akoto
Educational Studies and Leadership
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Yaw

Thank you for providing the revised documents in support of your application to the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. I am very pleased to inform you that your research proposal "The Experiences and Perceptions of Students with Disabilities in a Ghanaian University" has been granted ethical approval.

Please note that this approval is subject to the incorporation of the amendments you have provided in your emails of 19th October and 30th November 2017.

Should circumstances relevant to this current application change you are required to reapply for ethical approval.

If you have any questions regarding this approval, please let me know.

We wish you well for your research.

Yours sincerely

PP

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'R. Robinson'.

Dr Patrick Shepherd
Chair
Educational Research Human Ethics Committee

Please note that ethical approval relates only to the ethical elements of the relationship between the researcher, research participants and other stakeholders. The granting of approval by the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee should not be interpreted as comment on the methodology, legality, value or any other matters relating to this research.

F E S

Appendix H

8/15/2017

RE: Re:Permission to conduct research study in your department.

RE: Re:Permission to conduct research study in your department.

Yaw Akoto

Sent: Thursday, 11 May 2017 11:55 p.m.

To: Department of Special Education [sped@uew.edu.gh]

Dear Sir,

Thank you for granting me permission to conduct my research in your department at university. I really appreciate your effort in making this possible.

Thank you

Regards,

Yaw Akoto

From: Department of Special Education [sped@uew.edu.gh]

Sent: Thursday, 11 May 2017 4:39 a.m.

To: Yaw Akoto

Subject: Re:Permission to conduct research study in your department.

Mr Yaw Akoto

University of Canterbury

private Bag 4800

Christchurch, 8140

New Zealand

Dear Mr Akoto,

With reference to the above subject, you have been granted permission to conduct your research but you cannot act as at Graduate Assistant. This is because it is against the University's regulations.
thank you

Regards,

Yaw Nyadu Offei (PHD)

AG. HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

<https://exchange.canterbury.ac.nz/owa/?ae=Item&t=IPM.Note&id=RgAAAADOEbh4BxfHSaSk5wIz3FYqBwCVXKB7ICQMRL2m>