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**Breaking Barriers, Building Bridge: A Twin-Track Approach to Inclusive  
Higher Education**

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### **Abstract**

The United Nation Sustainable Development Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) has set a target of ensuring that all members of the society are treated equally irrespective of their disability, gender, race, religious inclinations, or economic status by end of the year 2030. Therefore, for any nation to flourish and attain sustainable development goal 10, people with disabilities, regardless of the nature or severity of the disability, the needed related services should be provided. The present study assesses higher education for physically challenge students and barriers to inclusion for attainment of the sustainable development goal 10. The assessment reveals that attaining sustainable development goal 10 (equality, inclusion and opportunities for all before the end of the 2030) is not feasible with current practice of higher education for physically challenge students. The information gathered from the assessment show that many people still maintained the beliefs that educating disabled students is senseless and futile. Therefore, the study recommends that the Twin-Track Approach presented in this study should be adopted by all tertiary institutions as potential way to mitigate these barriers and facilitate the development of inclusiveness in higher education. This research extends our knowledge of higher education for physically challenge students and presents to us that Twin-Track Approach to inclusion is capable of addressing complex social, economic, and environmental issues, and facilitates inclusiveness in higher education through Quality of Leadership-Knowledge and understanding of disability and capacity to build integrated and inclusive communities

*Keywords: Higher education, physically challenged students, barriers, inclusive education, SDG goal 10*

## **Breaking Barriers, Building Bridge: A Twin-Track Approach to Inclusive Higher Education**

Providing opportunities for the physically challenged students to attain their long term ambition and fundamental human right is one of the Sustainable Development Goals thematic areas identified by United Nations, targeted to be achieved before the end of the year 2030. The sustainable development goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) emphasises that people with disabilities regardless of the nature or severity of the disability and need for related services should be provided with equal access to quality and inclusive education so that every individual within the society is self-sufficient for the entire world to prosper. The goal 10 reiterates further that for any nations to flourish, equal treatment should be availed to every member of the society irrespective of his gender, race, religious beliefs or economic status. Despite the call for inclusive education (UN, 2023), argued that most of the physically challenged students at higher education institutions lack access to educational assessment services, and enabling learning support which will enable them to benefit from higher education training like their counterparts who are without disability. Recently, researchers have shown an increased interest in higher education for disabled students (Benjamin, 2018; Christopher, 2020; Newman et al., 2011). The attitudinal and physical barriers experienced by students with disabilities in higher institutions of learning over the past decade remain unprecedented. Evidence suggests that some higher institutions of learning endeavor to offer reasonable supports—mainly in the form of accommodations and modifications (Christopher, 2020). However, research has consistently shown that these students lack access to educational assessment services and enabling learning support (Larocco & Wilken, 2013; Lombardi & Murray, 2011; Love et al., 2015; Perry, & Snell, 2015). The issue has grown in importance in light of recent call for inclusiveness in education and attainment of sustainable development goal 10, before the end of the year 2030. Researchers have not treated higher education for disabled students in much detail and presented potential ways that can mitigate these barriers and ensure attainment of the sustainable development goal before the end of the year 2030. This indicates a need to understand the various perceptions that exist among staff, students and

disabled students about inclusiveness in higher education. So far, however, there has been little discussion about twin track approach in higher education for disabled students. This paper seeks to remedy these problems by presenting twin track approach as one potential way to mitigate these barriers and attain sustainable development goal 10.

### **Barriers to Inclusion in Higher Education**

The attitudinal and physical barriers experienced by students with disabilities in higher institutions of learning are increasingly recognized as a serious, worldwide educational concern to the attainment of sustainable development goal 10. A primary concern of barriers to inclusion in higher education is that, students with disabilities face hurdle due to persistence of the biased behaviours, lack of supportive learning environment and educational assessment services. Recent developments in inclusive education have led to a re-newed interest in inclusiveness in higher education for disabled students. A considerable amount of literature has been published on barriers to inclusion in higher education (Bandara & Ankur, 2017; Clough & Corbett, 2000; Jiha, 2002). The most powerful among them are:

- 1. School Barrier:** Although some tertiary institutions have documented policies that are inclusive for students with disabilities, despite the policies, their implementation process have not resulted into inclusive system of education, and the sustainable development goal of education for all is not feasible with the current practice (Jiha, 2007; Johan 2002; Kohma, 2012). The school barriers faced by disabled students who are willing to attend or have secured admission into tertiary institution are admission, accommodation, transportation system and class size. Research has shown that school berries are significant obstacles for disabled students in higher education. A study by Fernandez-Batanero et al. (2022) revealed that architectural barriers, such as lack of ramps and inaccessible signage, hindered the mobility and participation of disabled students on campus. Similarly, another study highlighted the importance of accessible infrastructure in promoting inclusive education for disabled students (Kamenopoulou, 2022).
- 2. Attitudinal Barrier:** This barrier is concern with stake-holders' negative and non-

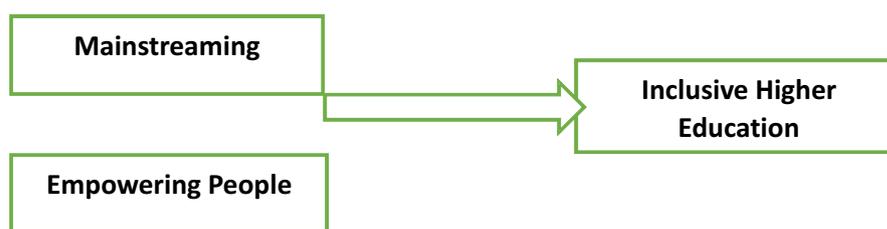
cooperating attitude that hinders inclusiveness in higher education. Although the sustainable development goal 10 (Reduce Inequalities) emphasises the importance of education for all, many people still maintain the beliefs that educating disabled students is senseless and futile (Bandara & Ankur, 2017). Perhaps this is the reason many disabled students are discriminated and socially ostracized by non-disabled students in some higher institution of learning. Some of the attitudinal barriers faced by disabled students are: Discrimination and Stigma, Social Exclusion, Peer Pressure, Lack of understanding among campus administrators, faculty, and staff. These barriers play a significant role in limiting the enrolment of disabled students in higher education. A study conducted by Shah, Gilbert, and Patel (2022) found that negative attitudes and stigma toward disability were prevalent among university staff and students. Equally, another study emphasized the need for inclusive teaching practices and disability awareness training for university staff to promote a more inclusive and supportive learning environment (Spacey, 2021).

3. **Physical Barrier:** This is one of the major constraint for disabled students as it exists among staff and students in higher education. Most of the educational assessment services provided are based on rigid system, which exclude disabled students to receive special recognition based on their ability or individual needs. The assessment services provided should be flexible and take into account of individual needs and ability.
4. **Educational Assessment Service Barrier:** This barrier is concerned with educational assessment services provided by tertiary institution to take individual needs and abilities into account. Traditionally, system of educational assessment services in most of the tertiary institution are based on rigid system which prevent disabled students from having flexibility based on their needs and abilities. These factors can be a major constraint to facilitate the development of more inclusive educational assessment services at tertiary institutions. The summary of some of the educational assessment services challenges faced by disabled students are given as; Curriculum, Special Education Need, Materials and Technology, Constraint of Resources, Untrained Teachers. In addition, Institutional

and policy barriers also affect the participation of physically challenged students in higher education. Research has equally shown that inadequate policies and procedures, lack of support services, and insufficient funding hinder the inclusion of physically challenged students in higher education (Fuller, 2022). A study conducted by Gelderblom (2022) highlighted the importance of implementing inclusive policies and practices in universities to promote equal access to education for physically challenged students.

### **Twin Track Approach to Inclusion in Higher Education**

In the history of barriers to inclusion, twin track approach has been thought of as a key-factor in reducing inequalities. A key aspect of twin track approach is that it removes barriers to inclusion and ensure inclusive society. Therefore, when implementing inclusive higher education for disabled students, one must consider two main lines of action to ensure inclusion. This is called Track A and Track B. The approach emphasises the importance of using effective teaching approaches which are capable of engaging disable students and responsive to their needs at tertiary institution level. Equally, the approach stresses that when higher institutions of learning resorts to the use of inappropriate teaching approaches that are not learning friendly, and not responsive to the needs of the learners, they can create barriers to inclusion in higher education (Albert, 2004; WHO, 2011). The approach combines two complementary paths (i.e Track A and B) to promote inclusive development in higher education. The two main lines of action are presented below:



**Fig 1.1 Twin – Track Approach**

### **TRACK A: Mainstreaming**

Central to the entire discipline of main-streaming is the concept of creating inclusive awareness, challenge discriminatory and violent behaviours, remove environmental barriers, and tailor specific measure for equal participation. This is to say that main-streaming is the process of integrating specific concern or perspectives into existing policies, programs and institution (UN, 2015). Main-streaming is increasingly important in addressing various social, economic, and environmental issues. Different researchers have studied it, and concluded by classifying it into: Gender Main-streaming (UN, Women, 2019), Disability main-streaming (UNDP, 2018), Environmental main-streaming (UNEP, 2019), and Human rights main-streaming (UNOHCHR, 2019). Main-streaming is fast becoming a key instrument in enhancing policy coherence, improving resource allocation, increasing stakeholder engagement and better outcomes and impact (World Bank, 2017; EU, 2018; OECD, 2019). Despite its importance better outcomes and impact, main-streaming disabled students suffer major drawbacks which include: limited resources and capacity, lack of political will from tertiary institution management and governance, resistance to change, and insufficient monitoring and evaluation (EU, 2018; UN, 2015; UNDP, 2018). Moreover, the following are some of the main-streaming related activities:

#### **Creating Inclusive Awareness:**

Creating inclusive awareness in higher education is the commitment of both tertiary institutions and stakeholders in education to ensure the inculcation of the spirits of inclusiveness among students, that education is the fundamental human right of every child irrespective of their gender, religious inclination and disability. Students of any gender and disability, no matter the level of their needs can grow, learn and thrive in a diverse classroom. Equally, teachers should know that any of their action could ensure inclusive practices or trigger the discriminatory behaviour in the class. Therefore, they should adopt innovative strategies to create inclusive classroom that will work for all.

#### **Challenge Discriminatory and Violent Behaviours:**

There is increasing concern that some students at tertiary institutions of learning are being

disadvantaged due to their sex or disability. This is unfair or prejudicial treatment of people or group based on characteristics. Therefore, tertiary institution of learning should ensure the implementation of their core values, and strengths to motivate their students irrespective of their disability to succeed, and perhaps challenges the discriminatory and violent behaviours. Moreover, students with disability should be encouraged not internalize other people's negative beliefs, even if they are true. Similarly, teachers and students should be cautious about actions that could discriminate against people with disability.

**Remove Environmental Barriers:**

Question have been raised about the safety of disabled students in some tertiary institutions. Many disabled students are at risk of adverse impact from hazard, stress that could subsequently threaten their right of attaining their fundamental human right. This has created vulnerability for disabled students particularly at higher education, whenever there is sudden onset hazard. Therefore, tertiary institution of learning should create physical environment that could promote a sense of belonging, self-worth and whole growth so that every students' experiences success as a key component of learning

**Tailor Specific Measures for equal Participation:**

Most studies in higher education for disabled students have only focused on the physical barriers, school barriers and educational assessment services barriers, but failed to account for the implication of attitudinal barriers that hinder effective inclusiveness in higher education. For this reason, some teachers at tertiary institution of learning failed to reflect on their teaching strategies to find out whether the methods they are using can work out for both students with disability and those without disability. Therefore, by implementing these strategies, educators can create an inclusive learning environment that promotes equal participation and engagement for all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities.

**TRACK B: Empowering People**

Traditionally, higher education has subscribed to the belief that is only meant for people without disability, this has significantly deterred many people with disability to join higher

education, and subsequently affects the attainment of sustainable development goals. Unknown to many people with this belief, tertiary institutions have a critical role to play in promoting inclusiveness and equal opportunity for all students irrespective of their disability. Empowering people with disabilities in higher education requires addressing all the challenges that prevent disabled people to attain their fundamental human right. The following are some of the activities to empower people with disabilities:

**Mind stereotypes:** Mind stereotypes is a common discriminatory behaviour experienced by people with disabilities at tertiary institution level. It's characterized by assuming people with disabilities are helpless, or dependents of others, many people believe that individuals with disabilities are limited to specific activities, and sometimes people with disabilities overlook accessibility barriers in their physical environment. This behaviour can be overcome when teachers and students at tertiary institution level begins to educate themselves about disability and inclusion. Engage with people with disabilities and listen to their experience. Government, in collaboration with stakeholders, and non-governmental organizations should advocate for accessibility and accommodations, and challenge ableism and discriminatory language,

**Build self-esteem:** Recent development in empowering people with disabilities have heightened the need for self-reflection, positive affirmation, social support, self-care, building confidence and challenging negative thought. Recently investigation have examined the effects of identifying strength and accomplishment, setting achievable goals and celebrate success, practice self-compassion and self-forgiveness on ability to build self-esteem (World Bank, 2017; EU, 2018; OECD, 2019). Equally, taking calculated risk and step out from your comfort zone, celebrating small wins and accomplishment help students with disabilities to boost their self-esteem. Therefore, students and management of the tertiary institutions should encourage their students with disability to challenges any negative thought and celebrate their accomplishment no matter the level of their achievement.

**Actively involve representative organisation:**

Higher education for disabled students is increasingly recognized as a serious, worldwide

issue of concern not only in the developing countries but also in the advanced countries where access to education is readily available. This could possibly affect the achievement of sustainable development goals. In view of all that has been mentioned so far, there is need for tertiary institutions to amplify the voices of disabled students, ensure inclusive decision making, and leverage expertise and lived experience, and foster collaborative relationship among students. In order to ensure inclusiveness in their teaching and learning, they should establish advisory boards or committees of disabled students, partner on projects and initiative, consult on policy development and regularly invite representatives who excel in life to speak at events that involve people with disabilities. This perhaps will increase diversity and representation, improve understanding of disabled student's needs, enhance credibility and trust among students and stakeholders, more effective advocacies and outreaches, and ensure better decision- making and outcomes.

**Inclusive Higher Education:**

Higher education is the level of education after secondary education. A key aspect of higher education is that it enables students to acquire comprehensive knowledge and skills in their chosen area, which leads to a career pathway. Nevertheless, the term inclusive higher education is an educational experience after higher school, like college that allow anyone and everyone to feel valued, understood and able to thrive. Thus, implementing these strategies in higher education will significantly contribute to breaking barriers and building bridge in education of physical challenged students. What is interesting in this model (Twin-Track Approach to inclusive higher education) is that, when it is adopted and effectively implemented by higher institution of learning it will significantly contribute to breaking barriers and build a bridge in the following ways:

- a. **Challenging Stereotypes and Stigma:** by providing equal access to education, physically challenged students can challenge stereotypes and stigma associated with disability, promoting a more inclusive and acceptive society.
- b. **Promoting Diversity and Inclusion:** Empowering physically challenged students in higher education promotes diversity and inclusion; enriching the academic environment and

- fostering a culture of acceptance and respect.
- c. **Developing Inclusive Policies and Practices:** by involving physically challenged students in the development of policies and practices, higher education institution can create more inclusive and accessible learning environments, breaking down physical and attitudinal barriers.
  - d. **Fostering Disability Awareness and Education:** Empowering physically challenged students in higher education can foster disability awareness and education, promoting a better understanding of disability issues and reducing stigma and discrimination.
  - e. **Encouraging Assistive Technology and Innovation:** by providing access to assistive technology and promoting innovation; higher education institutions can empower physically challenged students to fully participate and engaged in academic and social activities, breaking down technological barriers.
  - f. **Building Confidence and Self-Advocacy:** Empowering physically challenged students in higher education can build confidence and self-advocacy skills, enabling them to navigate academic and professional environment more effectively and break down social and economic barriers.
  - g. **Creating a More Inclusive and Accessible Society:** by promoting equal access to education and empowering physically challenged students, higher education institutions can contribute to creating a more inclusive and accessible society, breaking down physical, social and economic barriers.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has argued that reaching the sustainable development goal 10 (equality, inclusion and opportunities for all before the end of the 2030) is not feasible with current practice of higher education for disabled students in most tertiary institution. This study has shown that many people still maintain the beliefs that educating disabled students is senseless and futile. The evidence from this study suggests that the Twin Track approach presented in this study should be adopted by all tertiary institutions as potential way to mitigate these barriers and facilitate the

development of inclusiveness in higher education. This research extends our knowledge of higher education for disabled students and opines that twin track approach to inclusion is capable of addressing complex social, economic, and environmental issues, and facilitate inclusiveness in higher education through Quality of Leadership-Knowledge and understanding of disability and capacity to build integrated and inclusive communities.

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