

EXPLORING WAYS IN WHICH STUDENTS WITH SPEECH DISABILITY CAN BE ASSISTED IN ORAL ASSESSMENT: A CASE STUDY OF A UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SOUTH AFRICA

Hlohlolo, Sephiri David

Dr., Lecturer: Department of Communication Sciences, Central University of Technology, Free State, South Africa, shlohlolo@cut.ac.za

Abstract

This study explored the University of Technology's student stammers situation in their classrooms during oral presentations, as an assessment tool. This study is a descriptive cross-sectional quantitative design where self-administered, questionnaires were used to collect data, using 50 participants. The data collected was analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 19. From the results, 60% that is 30 participants were males, and 40% that is 20 participants were females which were randomly selected (inclusive of stammers). All the participants were aware of the disability rights. 56% of the respondents reported that they are not comfortable in speaking in public (classroom), to avoid being labelled by other students. 31, 3% of the participants were uncertain, also reporting that they were once verbally abused and 12, 7% of participants reported that they experienced stigmatisation. Though the study found that 56% of the respondents were not comfortable at all, in doing public speaking in the classroom. This study, therefore recommend that alternative methods of assessing such students, such as presenting in the lecturer's office, and a programme to help such students needs to be introduced at the Universities of Technology in South Africa.

Keywords: Stammers, Oral Assessment, Abuse, stigmatisation, Verbal abuse, Public speaking

1. INTRODUCTION

There has been a lot of discussion around access to curricula at higher education institutions (HEIs) especially for minority groups of students with disabilities. This paper is only interested in addressing a disability associated with speech (stammers). It must be noted that University students with such disabilities tend to keep quiet, and University lecturers are at times unable to notice their disabilities and assist accordingly. Generally, people with disabilities are seen as an 'at risk' due to their vulnerability to abuse, lack of education, poverty, as well as poor access to health facilities and other related services. United Nations (2006) postulated that people with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, sensory impairments or intellectual, as well as speech impairments that in interaction with various barriers could hinder their effective and full participation in society on equal basis with others. This study, therefore intends to indicate the problem of stammers (people with interrupted speech), particularly University students who are to be assessed orally, and their problems or difficulties they encounter. As a result of such assessment

(oral), these students are unable to show their abilities, as they are judged and labelled and stigmatised by their fellow students. UN (2004) had a concern for the well-being of people with disabilities as well as their right is rooted in its founding principles, which are based on human rights, fundamental freedoms and equality of all human beings. UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (2006) in its preamble recognises the importance of accessibility to the physical, social, economic and cultural environment, to health and education as well as information and communication, in enabling persons with disability to fully enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

WHO (2011), Lawson et al. (2008) and Fuller et al. (2004) contended that disability need not be an obstacle to success, but regrettably, University students with disability constantly face various challenges and barriers in their educational environment. University students with disability in South Africa have been identified in various governmental policy documents as being historically disadvantaged and deserving of unique or special attention. In justification, South African government formulated many post-apartheid policies and acts to be able to gear towards the promotion of the rights of people with disabilities. DHET (2012) postulated that regardless of these moves the majority of University students with disabilities continue to experience violations of their rights in institutions of higher education and training.

Against this background, this study sought to explore the oral assessment at University of Technology versus students with speech disability (stammers). More-over, this study will look into the rights of these students at institutions of higher education and training.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Currently, there are some difficulties faced by University of Technology students with speech disability (stammers) with regard to oral assessment which is normally conducted in the lecture rooms in the presence of other students who do not experience this type of disability. Therefore, University of Technology students with speech disability (stammers) always encounter problems in presenting during official oral assessment process. They are likely or normally experience stuttering during this assessment as they are most likely to stumble over one's words (splutter). As a result of this stuttering, they become disillusioned, and in most cases wishes to stop speaking. Due to the activity (oral assessment), being used to assess them, they always continue speaking shaking. It always frustrates them if they are to do it in front of their classmates, who are most likely to laugh at them when the stammer. This may also expose them to being stigmatised and labelled by their classmates, and this always makes them loose confidence and perform badly. If this problem is not addressed, these University of Technology students with speech disability (stammers) are likely to drop-out or keep on failing because of the oral assessment.

Therefore, this seeks to address this situation wherein lecturers will have to help these students (an alternative to the problem has been recommended in the relevant sub-heading below).

2.1. Theories Underpinned In This Study

Both Greenberg (1987) and Jones & Skarlicki (2012) concurred that the organisational and **Individual Justice Theory** plays a vital role in the development of individual. This study will be based on organisational and individual justice theory, which has three elements: (1) **Distribute justice** which is based on equity theory, referring to fairness of outcomes an individual receives; (2) **Procedural justice**, referring to the extent to which fair procedures are used to make decisions; (3) **Interactional justice**, referring to the quality of interaction between individuals. For this study, individual University of Technology students require that they be given justice by their institutions of higher education wherein their disabilities are considered in some decision-making processes, particularly in the oral assessment.

On the other hand **Critical theory** as postulated by Thompson (2007) as aiming to explain and transform all circumstances that enslave human beings. Thompson (2007) further posited that critical theory has to meet three criteria to be adequate, namely (1) it must be **explanatory**; (2) it must be **practical**; (3) it must be **normative**. To be explanatory implies that it must explain what is wrong with current reality. For this study, what is wrong (**explanatory**) is the fact that University of Technology students with speech disability (stammers) are not being afforded the opportunity to be orally assessed in an environment suitable for their disability. In terms of being **practical**, implies being able to identify the actors to change the prevailing situation. For this study, the actor to be identified and change the situation refers to responsible University of Technology Management. Further-more, to be **normative** attest to being able to provide both clear norms for criticisms and achieve practical goals for social transformation. For this study, this attest to responsible lecturers being able to come up the solutions that may yield the same results without compromising quality.

2.2. Material And Methods

2.2.1. Study design

This study adopted both qualitative (interviews with lecturers) and quantitative (questionnaires with students) approaches (mixed) by engaging a descriptive cross-sectional design to explore and describe value of oral assessment against the University students with speech disabilities. Burns & Grove (2009) posited that this design seeks to determine the current status of student population characteristics at one point in time while also striving to uncover the relationship among variables.

2.2.2. Population and sample

Salkind (2006) defined population as a group of potential participants whom the results could be generated and generalised. For the purpose of this study, target population comprised of University of Technology students with speech disability (stammers) who have registered for undergraduate programmes during the academic year 2019. This population was difficult to find as students with such a disability were initially afraid to come up, to avoid being stigmatised and labelled. At last, on discovering that the study will help them address their plight, they voluntarily availed themselves for the study. This study managed to have fifty (50) participants, in a University population of about six thousand (6000). The sample number is influenced by the population size of such participants. More-over, five (5) Department of Communication Sciences lecturers were interviewed about their approaches in doing oral presentations in their respective lecture rooms.

2.2.3. Instrument and data collection procedure

A structured questionnaire was developed based on the World Health Organisation Disability Assessment Schedule (WHODAS: 2011). The questionnaire was composed of sections that capture demographic information as well as sections on assessment, speech disability, and educational experience, and social experience with both closed and open-ended questions. In ensuring validity of the research tool (questionnaire) a scholar on disability issues was consulted to help with language to be used and scope. Above-all, the research tool was administered to University of Technology students with speech disability who consented to participate in this study.

2.3. Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance procedure was followed with Central University of Technology, Free State before data was collected, and a clearance certificate was awarded to show that the study met basic ethical standards and posed no threats to the well-being of the participants. Struwig & Stead (2001) stated that conducting a research is perceived as an ethical enterprise. It is imperative that moral behaviour should be considered upon conducting a research. The researcher was granted ethical clearance approval by the University of Technology Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities to conduct the study. The researcher indicated that at no stage will his participants be known to any person. Further-more, the researcher indicated that participants' rights and privacy will be considered and protected, permission will be obtained to record the session and hence they will have an option of disclosure or non-disclosure of their identification. Of importance, participants were made aware that, should they feel offended at any point, they are free to discontinue with the research, as they took part willingly. Over and above, adhering to principles of voluntary participation and informed consent, participants were also requested to fill in the consent forms and were also guaranteed confidentiality of their responses and anonymity of their identities.

2.4. Data Analysis

Burns & Grove (2009) detailed that data analysis is a process conducted to reduce, organise, and give meaning to data. The Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 19 was used to perform the analysis of the data. Data were summarised and presented. Wiid & Diggines (2013) defined data analysis as how the researcher spells out the purpose and logic of analysing, explaining the way gathered information will account for variations in some quality of responses. The data collected was analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 19. SPSS was used to analyse quantitative data, especially in exploring relationships between responses to different questions. Further-more, SPSS was also used in generating descriptive statistical data for question responses. From the results, 60% that is 30 participants were males, and 40% that is 20 participants were females which were randomly selected (inclusive of stammers). All the participants were aware of the disability rights. 56% of the respondents reported that they are not comfortable in speaking in public (classroom), to avoid being labelled by other students. 31, 3% of the participants were uncertain, also reporting that they were once verbally abused and

12, 7% of participants reported that they experienced stigmatisation. The study found that 56% of the respondents were not comfortable at all in doing public speaking in the classroom/ lecture room.

2.5. Results

2.5.1. Socio-demographic profile of the participants

A total of fifty (50) University of Technology students with speech disability (stammers) took part in this study, of which thirty (30) were males, i.e. 60% and twenty (40%) were females. All the participants were from a University of Technology in South Africa. In this study the minimum and maximum ages were 24 and 26. The participants all had a speech disability, and the study did not cater for any other disability they may have. Lecturers as the people responsible for implementing the oral presentation are important in this study.

2.5.2. Knowledge about oral assessment and their disability rights

The participants as per their responses showed that they have knowledge about oral assessment at University of Technology. With regard to disability rights, only 20% of respondents (students) were aware about their rights. Those who knew about their rights were not aware of their right to be assessed in the same way as others but with special care. All the respondents were aware that they have a right not to be discriminated against. The most popularly known right by the respondents was the 'right to education', as well as the right to social relationships and life. Participants indicated that they are not aware of the right to adapted built environment. Implying that, another environment can be set for them to be able to be orally assessed without being stigmatised and labelled. Lecturers (100%) knew about disability rights but not clear on the creation of an adapted built environment.

2.5.3. Social encounters

The social encounters experienced by University of Technology students with speech disability are stressful and embarrassing in most cases. 56% of the respondents reported that they are not comfortable in speaking in public (classroom), to avoid being labelled by other students, whilst 31,3% of the participants were uncertain, also reporting that they were once verbally abused and 12,7% of participants reported that they experienced stigmatisation. Other respondents reported that they are being verbally abused as compared with other forms of abuse such as physical abuse and sexual harassment. Of the uncertain respondents (31, 3%) some reported that they enjoy special treatment (given more time to talk) as a result of speech disability, especially when they are to discuss their personal feelings on certain issues. Further-more, they reported that they felt they were being exploited because of their speech disability.

2.6. Discussion

The United Nations (2004) acknowledged that people with disabilities are entitled to exercise their political, civil, social and cultural rights on an equal basis with non-disabled people. Further-more, it is also imperative on the part of people with disability to know their rights. With regard to disability rights, all participants (100%) indicated that they knew the right not to be discriminated against. 100% of participants indicated that they know the other rights most popularly known by them as the right to inclusive education, and right to participate in social life and relationships. All participants (100%) reported that they did not know of the right to adapted built environment, and this right is important for their disability as they will be assisted by their lecturers and created an environment suitable for their speech disability. It is always said, 'knowledge is power' however, it is another thing having knowledge about disability rights but is another hurdle to enjoy those rights, or rather being accorded the rights that everyone is entitled to.

The social problems (10%) experienced by the University of Technology students with speech disability can pose a frightening stumbling block in the self-development, full potentials of such students, as well as their self-actualisation. Responses from respondents based on their social encounters in the institution (University of Technology) revealed that about 10% of them at times felt rejected by their fellow students. Article 16 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) enshrined that freedom from all forms of exploitation, violence and abuses, including gender-based aspects, are to be enjoyed by all human beings. Further-more, 100% of the participants indicated that they believe that intervention by University of Technology management have the ability to rectify the current situation.

Ngwenya (2013) posited that a shift from traditional ways of looking at disability as individual impairment to focussing on ways to creating an enabling environment is critical. Therefore, it is vital to view disability from a different perspective. Above-all, it is again disturbing to point out that in this study that the rights of these vulnerable group such as students with speech disability are being grossly violated in a number of ways. Therefore, the above can be attributed to an intolerant society that is not accepting the phenomenon of

disability as an integral part of human nature. This perceived attitude could give rise to further marginalisation of students with speech disability and suppress disclosure of such a disability. Weedon et al. (2008) and Tinklin et al. (2004) concurred with the above statement in their studies that disclosure and acceptance of the label of 'speech disability/ stammer' may continue to be problematic for some University of Technology students with speech disability of violations and reported above are allowed to continue with impunity. On the other hand, one (1) lecturer did not know more about the treatment or how to handle the situation, and decided to give these students another form of assessment, such as a written exercise instead of oral presentation. Two (2) used their offices to do oral presentations at the convenient time for both (lecturer and students). The other two (2) lecturers sent those students to Student Support Service of the University, wherein there is no section responsible for stammers. As a result, students were not helped.

Table 1: Disability rights and social interaction

Responses

Students	YES	NO
Knowledge of disability rights in general	100%	
Knowledge of disability rights on education	100%	
Knowledge of inclusive education	100%	
Knowledge of adapted built environment		100%
Social interaction problems experienced	10%	
Interaction to rectify the current situation	100%	

Table 2: Disability rights and social interaction

Responses

Lecturers	YES	NO
Knowledge of disability rights in general	100%	
Knowledge of disability rights on education	100%	
Knowledge of inclusive education	100%	
Knowledge of adapted built environment		100%
Social interaction problems experienced	100%	
Interaction to rectify the current situation	100%	

2.7. Implications/ Recommendations

- ❖ The study recommends that there is a need to design and embark on 'speech disability' programme.
- ❖ A clear policy document concerning the support of students with disabilities be developed with the following intentions in mind:
 - ✓ Define roles that different university departments should play
 - ✓ Facilitation of access to curricula for all university of technology students
 - ✓ The influence suitable for development of teaching and learning resources for students with disabilities
 - ✓ Relevant stakeholders, including students with specific disability (speech), including disabled persons' organisation, disability rights activists as well as university of technology staff members to be involved in drafting such a policy

- ❖ Further-more, an awareness programme dealing with different disabilities among the entire University of Technology community is needed, and various dissemination of information to all stakeholders.
- ❖ It is further recommended that lecturers be supported through a staff development or / and an in-service training on the teaching and oral assessment of University of Technology students with speech disability. It is evident that a creation of adapted built environment is needed.

2.8. Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it can be seen that there is an extensive gap between the speech disability rights on the other hand, and the approach and practice on the other hand. To-date, people with disabilities in general are still being discriminated, despite efforts from government through laws and policies, as well as advocacy groups.

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