AN INVESTIGATION INTO FACTORS LEADING TO THE EXCLUSION OF PART TIME STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

This article reports on Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) students' experiences of learning as part time students in one South African Higher Education Institution. The aim of the study was to find out if part time students are fully included in the life of the university. This has been necessitated by the countries call for full inclusion of learners in teaching and learning. This study reveals the experiences and the feelings of students regarding the way they perceive teaching and learning as part time students. This is a qualitative study located within an interpretive paradigm. Two focus group interviews were conducted with PGCE students. These students were randomly selected from a pool of part time students. Each focus group consisted of six students. Data were transcribed and later were analyzed using phenomenological steps. The results suggest that in most cases part time students do not get the attention full time students get. There are some activities full time students are exposed to which cannot be done with full time students. This includes inadequate teaching and learning contact sessions and communication breakdown. Lecturers offered by guest lecturers who are experts in different fields are also one of the ways in which part time students are excluded. This study highlights the importance of equating services given to these students as stakeholders in higher education institutions (HEI). Without consideration of full inclusion of students into the full life of the entire institution, the aim of producing more and better teachers is unlikely to materialize. The study concludes by making necessary recommendations to remedy the situation.
Key words*: exclusion, experiences, foundation phase students, full time students, higher education institution, part time students, services.*

Introduction

In one South African University, PGCE qualification is offered to full-time students for one year and two years to part-time students. Students who enroll for this qualification already possess three year degrees from different fields. This qualification is multi-sited, offered in satellite centre and other students are fortunate enough to be based at the main campus. The lecturing of all specialization module lectures starts at 15h00 for 90 minutes each week and both part time and full-time students are combined. Other modules are offered as block sessions during the holidays. Both full-time and part-time students attend together and activities given to them are the same in all respects. They sit for the same examination together on the same day even and those who are in satellite venues write their exam in their respective venues.

The country is very particular about inclusion of all learners in every academic institution and this is the legacy of the democratic government that came into existence in 1994. South African democracy gave rise to a new education system which is responsive to the needs of all learners. The South African constitution provides a good framework which underpins the education system. This constitution emphasizes equality and respect for human rights. Before democracy, the education system excluded many learners in terms of race and disabilities, socio-economic background, religion, language to mention a few. Therefore, the current education system strives to redress the inequities of the past. It is against this background that the Education White Paper Six came into existence. This policy is about acknowledging that:

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"...all children (learners, including university students) can learn and that all children need support. It further states that people or teachers should accept and respect the fact that all learners are different in some way and have different learning needs which are equally valued. The whole idea of inclusive education is about enabling education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners. This means that teachers should give learners labeled as disabled additional support so that they can fit in or be integrated into the normal classroom routine" (Department of Education, 2001, p. 21).

According to the South African Constitution, every child (learner) has the right to descent education, higher education students are no exception, UNESCO (2000) affirms the right of all children to relevant and good quality education. Education must be designed in such a way that enhances the potential of learners, be it young or adult learners to respect themselves and others, participate in decision making in the society, live in peace and dignity and earn a living, (UNESCO, 2000). This is only possible if the teacher in charge of the classroom has a potential to design lessons which cater for all learners in the classroom, therefore the issue of teacher (lecturer) agency plays an important role.

Research Problem

The researcher, as a lecturer in one South African university, noticed that some students miss lectures because of a number of reasons. They would state that they were battling to find lecture venues; others are always late because they work far. They miss deadlines for the submission of assignments and so on. During the teaching practice session some get frustrated because time does not allow them to leave their jobs for Work Integrated Learning (WIL). I therefore wanted to further investigate if these students are fully integrated into the entire life of the university or there is something the institution is not doing well to meet the needs of these students.

Research Focus

This is a case study of one South African University. The focus of the study is on part time students who are specializing in the foundation phase. The main focus is to find out the extent to which part time students are included in one South African university. This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- To what extent are part-time PGCE students included into the entire life of an institution?
- If there is exclusion going on, what form of exclusion are these students exposed to?

To shed light to the inclusion or exclusion of part time students, two concepts inclusive education and exclusion are used to provide a framework for this study. According to Department of Education (DoE)

"Inclusive education 'recognizes and respects the differences among all learners and building on the similarities. It is about supporting all learners, educators and the system as a whole so that the full range of learning needs can be met. The focus is on teaching and learning actors, with the emphasis on the development of good teaching strategies that will be of benefit to all learners,' (Department of Education, 2001, p. 17).

On the other side it is stated that exclusion of learners in learning is a serious offence and the violation of learner's rights. UNESCO states that:

'Exclusion of a learner is part of an intricate web of human right violations', (UNESCO, 2000, p.36).

This means that in the teaching and learning process the teacher has an obligation to acknowledge and respect differences in learners whether due to age, gender, ethnicity, language, class, disability or HIV status as DoE (2001) maintains. All learners should benefit from each learning experience. The concepts of inclusion and exclusion were therefore used to structure the research instruments. The research instruments incorporated all aspects in which inclusion is expected and different aspects in which exclusion could take place in the university under study.

In some cases learners needs are not met because of the disabilities of students but because the system fails students to meet their needs. In that way students are denied their right to proper education, and that act is referred to as an exclusion. UNESCO further states that:

'Exclusion from education is understood as the complex of conditions and factors with together act to keep a child from participating in effective relevant and well–organized learning experiences', (UNESCO, 2000, p. 41).

Exclusion in education is in the form of being denied the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, capacities and self-confidence necessary, (UNESCO, 2000). Exclusion occurs in different forms, there is academic exclusion, social exclusion, socio-economic exclusion to mention a few. This study is an exploratory study which wishes to explore if there is any form of exclusion in this particular institution. Varying literature has been studied to gauge the level of inclusion and exclusion in different higher education institutions across the globe, and the findings will then point to the exact kind of exclusion that is taking place in this institution if there is any.

Many studies bear testimony to the exclusion of learners, be it a Higher Education Institution (HEI) or an institution for basic education. Studies reveal that students are excluded from different aspects in the life of institutions. Some are excluded through curriculum policies, the language of learning and teaching, some are excluded in extra mural activities (sports), in other institutions it is the factors related to transport and in others, tuition fees are the cause of exclusion (Kenyon, 2012; Cerdeira, Cabrito & Patrocinio, 2011; Lumadi, 2008; H'elot & Young, 2005).

Exclusion happens in different ways in higher education institutions. Kenyon (2012) reports on the student experience of transport, within the context of two hitherto distinct discourses. Firstly, the transport and social exclusion discourse, which highlights the role that low mobility plays in the experience of exclusion. Secondly, the widening participation discourses, which emphasize inequitable access to and achievement in higher education by non-traditional students as a component of social exclusion. The results of Kenyon (2012) study suggest that inadequate access to transport is a substantial barrier to access and achievement in HEI, for these students. This highlights the influence of transport upon the successful implementation of social policy. Kenyon claims that without consideration of transport and the physical accessibility of HEI, the aim of increasing and widening participation in HEI is unlikely to be realized.

In the study conducted by Cerdeira, Cabrito & Patrocinio (2011) on the exclusion in Portuguese higher education in the framework of the global financing crisis, the results reveal that for many students it is becoming difficult to face the costs of higher education as well as living cost. Students were concerned about their inability to pay for their studies.

Education is a fundamental human right and therefore access to all levels, including higher education, should be equally available to all as the Parliamentary Assembly (1998) states. The curriculum in most cases is to blame. Some learners are excluded in the education process because of the curriculum that does not accommodate diversity that does not empower learners from diverse backgrounds (Lumadi, 2008). Teachers that are envisaged are those that are able to break down ideological barriers by using the linguistic and cultural diversity of learners as a resource for learning (H'elot & Young (2006). As mentioned above, exclusion in the teaching and learning context occurs in different forms. This study highlights exclusion of learners in sports, through the language of learning and teaching and due to their academic performance or abilities.

The Global Report (2009) defines inclusive education as the education where learners enjoy learning and they are dynamic active participants in the process of learning. Children are denied education and to participate as a result of conditions not of their own choice. These could be disabilities (mental and physical), language, socio economic factors, gender, race etc. UNESCO (2000) states that schools exacerbate or mitigate exclusion by how it interact with the children, families and communities it serves and education policies are influenced by the overall national political regime of the country. Some of these policies injure children in many ways. The Language in Education Policy of 1997 is one good example of these policies. This policy has a good intention but is not implementable where learners are diverse in terms of race and language background. This is worsened by the fact that there are many children who have taken refuge in South Africa no one knows their mother tongue, this makes the policy even harder to implement.

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The Global Report (2009) states that millions of children are excluded from education because they are excluded from developmental benefits and this results to them being poorly served and treated wherever they are. Children who are excluded in most cases are children from poverty stricken backgrounds, children living with burden of diseases, disability, sexual exploitation, indentured and injurious labour or forced involvement in civil and military conflict as the Global Report states. Studies report that inclusion still exists in school despite the policies stressing equal treatment of all learners. To some extent, exclusion is based on attitude and prejudices people have against people with disabilities as the Global Report (2009) states. Exclusion has different patterns. The exclusion could be as a result of the system, the bureaucracy, the school itself and the teachers. Schools exclude when they are not learner friendly, do not support their teachers as professionals and do not welcome families as partners, (UNESCO, 2000). They exclude when they apply narrow paradigms of what children are and how they learn. They exclude when they are unable to deal with diversity. They fail to recognize and to accommodate each child. School exclude when they fail to provide their teachers with the learning and professional status they need to be effectively competent, responsible and motivated.

Language of learning and teaching is one of the most important aspects through which learners experience exclusion. Most studies indicate that if learners are taught in the language they do not understand they are being excluded from the learning experience. Hay (2009) in her study conducted on indigenous communities and mother tongue teaching in Namibia states that most San communities have very limited and unsatisfactory experiences with formal education. She states that even the drop-out rate is extremely high with very few learners obtaining or progressing to the next level, the reason behind this is that they did not have access to education in their own language. Skutnabb-Kangas (2009), agrees with Hay (2009) in his study on linguistic diversity, linguistic human rights and mother tongue based multilingual education. He states that in schools where children are addressed in a foreign language there is less progress followed by high drop-out rates because learning is not interesting. The Global Report (2009) characterizes education as the enjoyable and dynamic experience where children are active participants. Studies bear testimony to the benefits of mother tongue teaching as Hay (2009) and Biseth (2006) confirm. Skutnabb-Kangas claims that '*even when children have a year or two of mother tongue medium education before being transitioned to education through the medium of dominant language, the results are disastrous educationally, even if the child may psychologically feel a bit better initially*'(Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009, p.23).

This means that learners are to be taught in the language they best know, which they use as an instrument of thought (mother tongue) according to Alexander (2009). Studies maintain that mother tongue should be retained until the learner is ready to learn through the First Additional Language (FAL), however parents have the right to choose the language they want their children to be taught through, the Department of Education (1997). However teachers who deal with classroom which are diverse in terms of languages have a challenge of implementing the Language in Education Policy as a result some learners are excluded.

Exclusion in sports is one of the issues that affect children the most. Most studies Tsai & Fung (2009), Pedersen & Greer (2008), Soumi & Soumi (2000), Nixon & Howard (2007), Morley, Bailey, Tan & Cooke (2005) and Rizzo, Faison-Hodge, Woodard & Sayers (2003) report that some learners are excluded in physical education and sports due to their disabling condition. Tsai and Fung (2009) in their study highlights the experiences of parents of learners with mental handicaps as they sought inclusion of these learners in sports (full participation during rehearsals and should form school teams and compete as well. This study maintains parents of learners gave up their effort due to rejection by staff and other stakeholders. It is recommended in the study that in order for the inclusion of learners with disabilities to be successful, attitudes of teachers need to change.

Pedersen & Greer (2008) state that disabled learners should be included in sports so that they become exposed to a wide range of culture of global sport participation. They add that this could also empower students' leadership skills and can help foster physical activity to all children whether disabled or not. Soumi & Soumi (2000), discovered that there are barriers encountered in creating and maintaining an inclusive physical activity and sport. It is a mere fact that learners with disabilities cannot participate in all sorts of sports available in the school, but they must be given a chance to participate if they want to. Nixon & Howard (2007) suggest the restructuring of sports and sports settings to accommodate the participation of people with disabilities as serious competitors. Morley, Bailey, Tan &

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Cooke (2005) suggest that teachers need professional development and teacher trainers are required to develop teachers on how to involve learners in sports and the kind of activities that are accommodative of their capabilities.

This study is significant in a sense that it is going to raise awareness to academics involved in the education of part time students. This study could help academics to ponder on the way part time students are handled. It is therefore believed that institutions will embark on inclusive strategies to better the situation. Given the fact that in most cases full time students perform better than part time students, it is taken for granted that the cause of underperformance by part time students is the fact that they are working and are therefore over loaded with work. This study is going to make a clear stance between what is anticipated as being the cause of underperformance and what is the actual cause of the problem.

Methodology of Research

General background of research

This is a qualitative study located within the interpretive paradigm. This paradigm is deemed relevant to this study because it is associated with human sciences where people's behaviours, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes are investigated as Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007) state. The aim of the research was to get an in-depth knowledge about how students experience learning as part time students. McMillan & Schumacher (1993) regard qualitative research as any kind of research that produces findings that are delinked from statistical quantifications or other means of quantification.

Sample of Research

In order to obtain research participants random sampling which falls under the non-probability design was used. This form is the most common type of educational research tool as McMillan & Schummacher (1993) state. This sampling design was chosen because it allowed for flexibility in the choice of respondents as a result every informant has equal opportunity of being chosen for the study. According to Welman & Kruger (2001) in this method, researchers rely on their experience and ingenuity to deliberately obtain units of analysis in such a manner that it can be seen as being representative of the relevant population. This method allowed the researcher to pick up any Foundation Phase part-time student available. Participants included both former and current cohort of students. Eighteen students turned up for the study.

Research instruments and procedures

Semi-structured interviews were used to generate data. This instrument was found to be important in this study because it allows the respondents to speak without limits and it also allows the interviewer to do follow up on the answers given by the respondent which Henning (2004) calls a two way communication. It also allows the interviewer to deviate if need be. This instrument is believed to be the best in exploring the lived experiences of part-time students. Three focus group interviews were used. Each focus group consisted of six students.

Data Analysis

There are three steps that were followed in the analysis of data. These steps are data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification according to Miles & Huberman (1994). Within the data reduction phase there are also four steps that were followed as suggested by McMillan & Schummacher (1993). Step one was about reading the data set as a whole to get the sense of it. Secondly, topics which emerged from the data were identified. Thirdly, the list of topics that have emerged from the data sets were checked if there is no duplication. After checking they were then categorized into themes. Finally the provisional classification system on all the data sets was applied, after which coding next to the appropriate piece of data took place. After classifying data, the relationship or patterns

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between categories was checked in order to understand the complex links between various aspects of students' experiences of attending part time classes.

Ethical issues

Permission was obtained from students and consent letters were signed, and they were informed that participation is voluntary; they may withdraw at anytime should they feel like doing so. Students were also informed that confidentiality will be maintained and their names will be withheld to protect their identity.

Results of Research

Findings reveal that students are concerned about how information is dispersed to them about spontaneous changes that take place in the lectures. They mention that sometimes they don't get information on the change of some activities as a result they come to campus and be surprised to discover that a lecture has been shifted. One informant said:

'We do not get information on time and sometimes not at all. When classes are cancelled we do not know. We travel from where we work only to find out that there are no classes'
'Sometimes we get frustrated by the change of venues and some lecturers do not bother writing a notice for our information. We move up and down looking for lectures venues until the end of the period'.

When changing venues, lecturers sometimes forget to write notices, students who come after the lecture has commenced find themselves wandering about for the duration of the period, trying to locate their counterparts. On days where there is student demonstrations (strike action) by full time students, part time are not part of it, they are not informed of the action. They live their jobs early only to find that there are no lectures. This creates inconvenient to those who have to beg their employers for early leave in order to attend lectures. If the protest continues for the whole week, students will be travelling

I have also observed that visiting lecturers are a good idea however they become a problem if they are not going to see all students in different sites where the programme is offered. This is a good practice where students get quality information from experts however it cannot be applied to all students because of distance as mentioned earlier that PGCE is a multi-sited programme. This marks a total exclusion of part-time students in some opportunities presented to full time students. Some students get a privilege of being visited by specialist is some field while part time students are being deprived of such an opportunity. If students are to be exposed to the same examination they should be given the same opportunities in every activity given to them.

Time constraints are also the cause for concern. As students are combined (full-time and part-time) the starting time is not convenient for part-time students. Specialization module classes start at 15h00 and students who are teaching in schools as contract teachers finish at 14h30. They only have 30 minutes to travel and get to the lecture venue no matter how far they are coming from. This interval is very limited. It is even worse with students who work in places afar and who finish later than this. Most of the time they get to the campus late and it is even worse with those who do not have their own transport who rely on the public transport. Regarding this issue one student responded:

'Classes start at 15h00, I feel this time is too early for people who are working, it does not accommodate us part timers. In most cases I come late for lectures'.

My observation as a lecturer supports what the student above is stating. I bear evidence to students who always come at the middle of the lesson. This proves how less accommodative the system is.

They way assessment activities are administered is somewhat problematic to part-time students. They are given group assignments as a class. They battle to get work done. This kind of assessment activity suits full-time students well because of proximity. It does not work well with part-time students. One student commented thus:

'Group activities do not suit us as we work in different places. It is very difficult to find someone to work with'.

The number of assignments given to students matters a lot. They end up not producing quality work because of the divided effort. The dates on which these activities are due coincides most of the time. Full time students are employed people some of them are parents (responsible for the upbringing of children). They sometimes do not cope with pressure. They said:

'Many assignment activities are due on the same date. We work during the day, in the afternoon we study, we get home late, sometimes there are classes we attend during weekends, there is very little time we have and it becomes impossible to meet the deadlines'.

As a lecturer I have observed that most part-time students ask for the extension of dates for the submission of assignments. Some of them produce work of poor quality compared to work done by full-time students.

Discussions

Many issues emerged from the data and they are highlighted below:

Information Dissemination

Most of the time information and special announcements do not reach part time students on time or at all. They made an example where lecturers sometimes attend workshops. They give a short notice and that notices reaches full time students only. Lecturers put such notices in the morning when students are already at work. When afternoon comes, they rush to attend their lectures only to find that there is no lecture. They maintained that they find the situation very discouraging and not fair as they travel long distances to get to the venues sometimes leaving their learners unattended to and paying a lot of many for transport. Students need to be informed about the spontaneous changes that take place in their absence at the campus. In their discussions they mentioned that when special arrangements are made about the change of lecturing times, they do not get information, they also do not get information about the cancellation of lectures. This becomes unfair to them since they travel all the way for nothing and travelling is expensive. This includes the writing of notices to inform part time students about the change of venues so that they do not miss out while they are already in the campus.

Overwhelming Activities

Students maintained that they are given too many activities. They pleaded that the number of activities be revised since each lecturer gives too many long activities and it makes it difficult for them to meet the deadline for the submission of these tasks. The number of activities is also something to be taken into consideration. Some students mentioned that they are not coping with activities given to them. Many activities compromise the quality of work students are expected to produce. Students are overloaded with activities to be submitted. Giving students too much work may sometimes compromise the quality of their education. Skutnabb-Kangas (2009) and Hay (2009) in their study discovered that there is less progress followed by high drop-out rates in institutions where learners are excluded. This finding is therefore in support of their study.

Mismatching Activities

Some activities require students to work in groups. Students reveal that these kinds of activities make things worse for them since they are working and only come together during lecture times. They also maintained that the factor of proximity should be taken into consideration when their activities are designed. Students also raised an issue of assessment activities like group work where they have to cooperate. Students find this activity difficult. They feel that group activities should not be given since getting the work done in groups becomes a challenge. As a result full-time students team up together and

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they have all the time to do their work together and they do not include part-time students. As a result part-time students feel isolated. It is difficult for them to team up with other part-time students because of the contexts under which they work. They end up being unable to submit on the stipulated time.

Communication Breakdown among Lecturers

Lectures do not sit together to plan the activities to be given to students. There is a repetition and overlapping of activities, where lecturers give the same activities to students. Lecturers do not communicate about when these activities should be submitted. They maintained that sometimes three activities by different lecturers would be due and on the same date there is a test that will be written alongside the submission of these tasks. They then tend to study for the test and compromise the submission of tasks; as a result they end up failing to meet the deadlines.

Lack of Uniformity in Lectures

Students highlighted that full time students attending their lectures at the main campus have a privilege of being taught by the guest lectures. This service is not made available to part time students those that are attending on main campus and satellite venues. Regarding guest lecturers who come to deliver information to some students, there is a feeling that students do not get equal treatment; they are being deprived of the benefit of getting information from other experts in different fields. Offering this service to all students in all satellite centres could impact on the budget. It is therefore impossible to implement it equally.

Commencement of Lectures

Students are concerned about time lectures commence, stating that since they come from afar, they need commencement time to be revised. As mentioned above that most part-time students arrive when lectures have already commenced, most students have a feeling that the commencement of lecturing times is too early for them since they travel from afar. They urge for the shifting of time for their full integration.

Distribution of Materials

Student raised the issue of materials such as study guides. They stated that material is always not enough, if there are people who will not get the materials, its part time students. They have to beg, try to locate lecturers concerned, and two months would pass having not been able to locate lecturers who coordinate the printing of materials. Cerdeira, Cabrito & Patrocinio (2011) in their study revealed that students were excluded because of unpaid university fees but in this case students were disadvantaged not because they failed to settle their debts but because they are not there when the materials are distributed and only given to those who are available at the time

The objectives of this study were to find out the extent to which part-time PGCE students are included in the entire life of an institution and to establish if there is exclusion going on and the form of exclusion are these students exposed to thereof. The results above reveal that students are included to a lesser extent since there are issues they are not content about. The study shows that exclusion happens in different forms. This study suggests that there are avenues for future research. A nature of this study in a broader sense, involving all higher education institutions in South Africa is necessary to find out the degree of inclusion and factors that lead to exclusion.

Literature reviewed (Tsai & Fung, 2009, Pedersen & Greer, 2008, Soumi & Soumi, 2000, Nixon & Howard, 2007, Morley, Bailey, Tan & Cooke, 2005 and Rizzo, Faison-Hodge, Woodard & Sayers, 2003) maintain that exclusion takes place in different forms in different institutions. This study supports findings from the previous studies that part time students are the victims of exclusion. The kind of exclusion that takes place in this case study is unintentional, and is just a mere oversight on the side of academics working with these students. However most findings revealed in this study are not mentioned in the studies revealed. This proves that students do not experience the same kind of

exclusion, but factors of exclusion take different forms depending on the kind of institutions they find themselves in.

Conclusions

The study revealed that part-time students are not fully integrated into the entire life of the institution. The issues they have raised may result to them underperforming and failing the course dismally. This could impact on the functioning of the university, resulting in many students being on a pipeline, causing a backlog. This also affects students emotionally and psychologically. Not only does it affect the university and the students concerned but the entire education sector since the programme was introduced to speed up the process of addressing the shortage of teachers in the country. To ensure that the country produces more and better teachers, issues raised by students need to be taken into consideration. Taking the above issues into consideration would be a way of including students who feel they are left out while the policy stresses they total inclusion in all aspects of education. On-time dissemination of information to accommodate part time students could eliminate possible problems of travelling to campus unnecessarily. To give students equal treatment, there should be accommodation of part time students in planning to secure space for lectures by guests or elimination of guest lecturers if impossible to organize them for part time students. Commencement of lectures should be shifted to accommodate part time students and flexibility of group activities to accommodate all students so that those who are in close proximity work together and even the total elimination if they do not suit part time students is a necessity.

Lecturers concerned in specialization modules should draw up submission timetables so that students do not submit more than two assignments on the same day. This calls for communication among academic staff where they discuss important dates so that students are not baffled with high numbers of assignments. Reducing the number of activities students are given may increase quality of work they produce.

There should be extension of time (duration of study) from two years to three years to reduce a burden these students have. Students may register few modules which they can cope with. As a result they would be able to produce quality work. Lecturers should ascertain that materials printed are sufficient for all students.

After all this higher education institutions can therefore claim that all students are fully included and that they support the notion of inclusive education which is the initiative of the country.

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