

# 9-Pa Imam

*by 9 Pa Imam*

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# CHALLENGES FACED BY STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN UNIVERSITIES: IMPLICATIONS ON THEIR RETENTION

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**Abstract** - *The aim of this study was to examine challenges faced by university students with special needs (SwSNs) and the implications the challenges have on such students' retention. The study adopted a cross sectional survey design employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The study participants (N=34) were SwSNs who were purposively selected from three universities (comprising: two public, and one private university). Quantitative responses were analysed using simple descriptive data analysis techniques, to generate frequency counts and the respective percentage scores. Thematic content data analysis was used to analyse qualitative data. The researchers further applied the Tesch's (1990) procedure of open coding method of data analysis, which involves a systematic process of examining, selecting, categorising, comparing, synthesising and interpreting data to unpack the major research question of the study. Findings reveal that SwSNs in some Ugandan universities experience challenges such as: lack of suitable facilities, difficulty to access learning materials, lack of understanding and respect from both fellow students with special needs and the ordinary students (those without special needs). One of the findings is that some of the key challenges faced by SwSNs were lack of coordinated efforts across the universities. It is further established that SwSNs feel they had to work harder than other students, because they had to manage a double workload. Generally, these challenges negatively affected SwSNs' retention. The study recommends that for SwSNs to be assisted to overcome the existing challenges, the universities should provide necessary and appropriate facilities as far as is possible with the resources available and without compromising academic standards.*

**Keywords:** *Challenges, retention, students with special needs, special educational needs, disabilities, impairments, universities, Uganda*

## **Introduction**

The concept of special needs is a condition that may interfere with the normal way an individual behaves or carries out activities for daily living. The concept is wide and it encompasses a variety of sub-conditions that range from: persons with disabilities (PwDs) (such as those with sensory impairments, like visual, hearing, cognitive/intellectual and motor/physical impairments), special educational needs (SEN) (individuals who may not have any form of disabilities, but cannot learn and develop without extra support), specific learning difficulties (individuals who are slow in learning, cannot spell words, face challenges with numeracy, have communication, language and speech difficulties, social emotional and

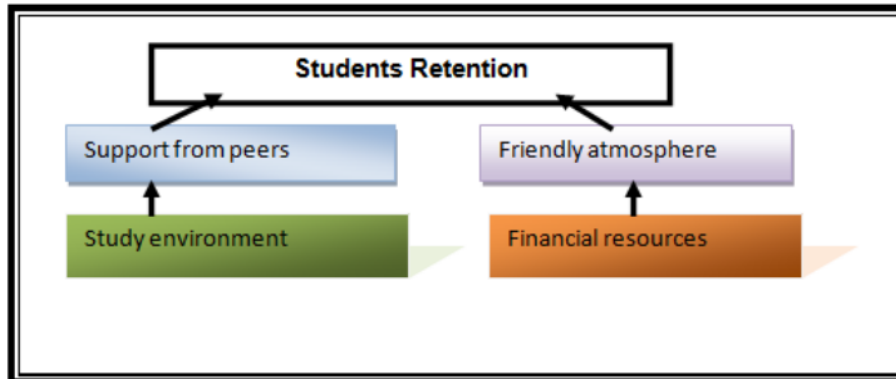
behavioural difficulties, the talented and gifted, individuals who are traumatised, those living in streets, the disadvantaged (orphans, children from broken families, child soldiers, child parents, etc), individuals with chronic health problems (such as diabetes, epilepsy, HIV, asthma), to mention, but a few (Kirk, Gallagher, Anastasiow & Coleman, 2006).

History of retention in universities interest in student success and retention in particular, has grown tremendously over the past decade, the world over (Tinto, 2006). There has been such growth in interest in this area that an entire business field has grown from it. Retention firms, retention products, and retention consultants all seem to have the latest answer to student retention problem (Tinto, 2006). Students are beginning to examine the retention rates of universities as they make academic decisions. This information leads to potentially growing admission rates for colleges that are retaining students. The Government of Uganda funding sources are beginning to increase funding for public universities that show growing retention rates, and retention rates are being highlighted in the law (Bazanye, 2017). Although retention efforts are in focus at many post-secondary institutions, the actual retention rates of students with special needs (SwNs) have remained static (Kibuuka, 2017). While admitting more students to universities is important, helping them complete their degree requirements in a timely manner is vital. University student's retention has been one of the most widely studied areas of higher education for the past thirty years, however, there is scarcity of studies on student's retention, as far as those with special needs in universities are concerned (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2017). Within this area of study, many theories of university student's retention have emerged. Throughout history, theories have been based on the economic benefit (Becker, 1964), the organisational perspective (Bean, 1980b), the psychological processes (Astin, 1984), the sociological perspective (Rootman, 1972), and perhaps the most widely cited theory, the interactionist perspective (Tinto, 1975). Each of these focus areas and the theories within represents a widespread need to understand what makes university students persist towards graduation while others stop out and never return to achieve the goal. These theories also represent the history of retention efforts for the past decades.

Many potential solutions have developed out of these theories of student retention. Need-based financial aid has made universities more affordable to those students most affected by the cost. In addition, a higher focus on post-graduation life has been implemented through the development of university career planning centres and placement offices. These services allow students to have a glimpse of what may be available to them after graduating from universities. Focusing on these potential careers can protect the view of the investment in the long term.

Retention variables may operate as barriers to the social integration, participation and retention of students with disabilities in university settings. Saenz and Marcoulides (1999) explored relationships between university experience and academic performance among minority students as measured by grade point average. These variables include, among other things, levels of fathers' education, self-understanding, friendships with students of different backgrounds, adequate financial resources, making practical applications of material learned in the classroom to environments outside the campus, talking with a professor about a course, advice from friends about academic probation, participation in campus life, scanning notices of campus events, attendance at athletic events, use of the library for studying, attending campus fine art events and positive experiences with the educational equity programme. These variables were shown to account for almost all of the variation in universities experiences. Fig. 1 illustrates the challenge routes.

Figure 1. A conceptual Framework Illustrating the relationship between the Study variables



Source: Saenz and Marcoulides (1999)

Tinto (1975) widely denoted the influence of culture on retention in community. An area of similar concern to race is cultural differences between a person's place of origin and the institution they are attending, which Tinto's (1975) theory fails to take into account. Tierney (1999) asserts that it is inappropriate for Tinto (1975) to assume students must reject their cultural past and abandon the segregative tendencies. Tierney (1999) views Tinto's model as requiring a student to undergo "cultural suicide" (Austin, 1984), whereby the students with disabilities are expected to make a clean break from communities and cultures in which they are raised then integrate and assimilate into the dominant cultures (Tierney, 1999). Astin (1984) also notes the outcomes of students as strongly related to their incoming characteristics, and the differences between institutions as strongly related to the different characteristics of the population it serves. Given the demographics of university students are changing, attention to the individual characteristics' students bring is even more important (Reason, 2017).

Although the university system now has the potential to support greater participation by students with disabilities in universities, barriers still remain (Reason, 2017). Traditional attitudes and stereotyping of the abilities of learners still lead to exclusion and reinforcement of the notion that learners with disabilities do not have a future in university education. Barriers are exacerbated by inequalities inherent in university education. This includes the ways in which universities are structured and function, dominant attitudes that inform and shape the practices of such higher education as well as the role that universities play within society as a whole (Kibuuka, 2017). For example, students with special needs are still being excluded or channeled based on mere perceptions of their capabilities where the need for fieldwork or practical development in off-campus facilities or use of graphic materials or specific types of equipment are used as excuses for not allowing them to participate in non-traditional courses and degree programmes. Although it would probably in most cases be extremely difficult to prove outright discrimination against students or potential students with special needs, anecdotal evidence suggests that such students are often "persuaded" to follow certain courses viewed as suitable for them and/or institutional exclusion is based on the perceived "unreasonableness" of accommodation requests that goes unchallenged (Mubiru, 2017).

It has been suggested that the continued use of a medical discourse of special needs, and specifically disability, has also influenced the way in which institutions respond to such categories of students, particularly in terms of addressing their needs within the teaching and learning process. Specifically it is alleged that it has deflected attention away from the extent to which the methods and materials of teaching and learning used, the manner in which classes and learning have been managed and organised and the nature of assessment practices may in fact act as a barrier to equitable participation of students with special needs (Kibuuka, 2017). Barriers are indeed inherent in the curricula itself. Whilst facilities and assistive devices play an important role in supporting students with special needs and have received much attention from universities, limited attention has been paid to the extent that teaching and learning



processes marginalise or exclude these learners. A lack of curricula flexibility and lack of inclusive teaching and learning methodologies remain important barriers within university education that must be further interrogated.

The way in which learning support and services are provided currently in Uganda universities to students with special needs has also been criticised. Available evidence suggests that the initiatives and structures in place at the various institutions vary considerably in what work they do and the services they offer. In many cases the universities experience resource constraints that limit the nature and extent of services that they can offer. Most importantly, support services to students with special needs, where they do exist, tend to operate separately from or have limited collaboration with broader teaching and learning support initiatives in institutions of higher learning (Kabumba, 2017). Where links do exist the collaboration is mostly with student counselling services rather than those dealing directly with teaching and learning. The structural separation of learning support for SwNs from other learning support is criticised and an integrated approach is seemingly preferred. It is further alleged that support provision in many cases in universities is based on the assumption that all of a students' problems can be remedied by a particular piece of equipment (the classic "technological fix" mentality) without an attempt to understand the social context and other factors exacerbating the barriers experienced by the student (Reason, 2017).

It is immediately apparent when researching institutions of higher learning that there is an increase in activity toward accommodating SwNs at universities in Uganda (Kibuuka, 2017). Enrolment trends of SwNs in Uganda, for example, shows a continued increase over time with some recent enrolment estimates for 3 – 4 year university programmes ranging from 9.3% to as high as 17%. Despite this increase young adults with special needs still remain less likely to pursue post secondary education when compared with ordinary individuals (those without disabilities). Of concern in Uganda is that post-secondary completion for individuals with special needs has dropped (MoES Report, 2016). A lack of persistence and retention of SwNs are becoming a matter of concern (MoES Report, 2016). In 2016, two out of ten university students had special needs (NUDIPU, 2017). The scope of this study did not allow for an exhaustive review of what is happening elsewhere but does provide an overview of national trends and best practices that are emerging specific to the functioning of universities in relation to retention of SwNs in Uganda. This study set out to investigate how universities would make sure that they promote equality for SwNs, and address discrimination practices to enhance student's retention. The main impairments included: visual (and partially sighted (low vision) and blind; hearing impairment (hard of hearing impairment), but only a few universities dealing with deaf students who would be using sign language; motor (physical) impairments and wheelchair users; communication difficulties, including: dyslexia, dumbness, stammering; specific learning difficulties, including: slow learning, calculia (difficulties with numbers), difficulties with certain subjects; chronic illness/medical conditions.

Not all universities address all these impairments. This is usually a strategic decision based on the availability of the infrastructure, staff and funding for the institution. In one case it is further influenced by the fact that many of the students come from special schools for students with visual and motor (physical) impairment in the surrounding areas which primarily feed universities in Uganda. Few universities provide assistance with sign language interpreters, sighted guides, guide dogs, wheel chair supporters.

The study aimed at examining the challenges and implications faced by students with special needs (SwNs) in universities in Uganda with regard to their retention.

## **Methodology**

### **Study design**

The study (conducted between August 2018 and December 2018) adopted a cross sectional survey design employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The mixed approaches were applied in sample selection, data collection, data quality control and data analysis. Creswell (2014) supports cross sectional survey design for the reason that it helps in generalising the results from the selected sample population, specifically by providing a description of the trends in benefits derived by members of support groups.

This design was used for a further reason provided by Gray (2014) that it helps in providing information on associations between variables.

#### Study Sample

The population for the study was drawn from students at three universities in Kampala coded as: **A-University** (public university), **B-University** (public university) and **C-University** (private university). It was established that a total of 66 students with special needs were enrolled in the three selected universities.

A total of 34 SwSNs (15 males & 19 females) out of the 66 were purposively selected from the three universities. The 34 questionnaires were distributed to the SwSNs who expressed interest in participating in the survey. A total of 20 interviews were carried out with some of the students picked from the study sample of the 34 student participants. In terms of gender 15 out of the participants were male students and 19 were female.

#### Instrumentation

Interview guides and questionnaires were the data collection instruments adopted. The questionnaire tool involved questions printed in a definite order according to the research objective then administered to the respondents. Each item in the questionnaire addressed a specific objective. The questionnaire consisted of open ended items. The procedure comprised: oral administration of an interview guide by the researcher. It involved face to face encounters between the researcher and the respondents. In addition, interviews gave an opportunity to the researcher to revisit some of the issues that may have an over sight when using other questionnaires.

#### Data Collection Procedure

Each student received a copy of the survey questionnaire, including a cover letter which included the consent form for participation. Each student was asked to read and sign the consent form and to return the completed survey questionnaire in a sealed format. In addition, the in-depth interviews (which involved face-to-face interaction, whereby the researcher personally recorded the responses by hand) conducted in the selected three universities established the nature of challenges that had direct and indirect impact on the challenges associated with students' retention at the universities.

#### Data Analysis

After the data collection, the quantitative responses were analysed using simple descriptive data analysis techniques, to generate frequency counts and the respective percentage scores, while the qualitative data were extracted into themes for discussion, to be presented in verbal quotes where deemed necessary. Specifically, thematic content data analysis was used, involving identification, coding, and categorising patterns in the data as recommended by Creswell (2013). The researcher further applied the Tesch's (1990) procedure of open coding method of data analysis, which involves a systematic process of examining, selecting, categorising, comparing, synthesising and interpreting data to unpack the major research question of the study (Yin, 2012). Therefore, this article attempts to reflect a better understanding of the challenges that influence retention phenomenon, and thus enable more effective measures for curbing the challenges so as to improve on student retention, in the Ugandan context, to provide better facilities and encourage SwSNs to adapt and succeed in universities.

#### Ethical issues

Before embarking on the study, the researcher had to seek permission from the three relevant university authorities. Participants were given consent forms to fill in, to show their willingness to participate in the study. The participants were hitherto informed that their participation in the research was voluntary and that their identity would not be revealed. They were further informed that they would be free to withdraw from the research at any point if they felt they were not comfortable. Confidentiality and privacy were accordingly observed, and in case there was a third party at the place of the interview, the session would temporarily be halted until such a person had gone away. Names of the areas of study were disguised by using, for example codes: **A-university**, was one of the public universities, **B-university** was the other

public university, and **C-university** was the private university, respectively. Participants were coded as follows: PA-un1,2,3...18= Students with special needs from **A-university**; PB-un1,2,3...12=Students with special needs from **B-university**; PC-un1,2,3...6=Students with special needs from **C-university**; and PO-un1,2,3...18=Ordinary (not with special needs) student.

### Findings

The aim of the study was to examine challenges faced by university students with special needs (SwSNs) in Uganda and the implications the challenges had on such students' retention. The presentation of the results, hereof, is based on what each of the challenges revealed when analysed. The findings are presented in two sections, first, on the general overview, covering five major items of the challenges analysed (quantitatively) as shown in Tables:1 - 5. In the second section, the qualitative analysis involved identification, coding, and categorising patterns in the data. Direct verbal quotes were presented where deemed necessary. All these were meant to show whether students experienced the identified challenges or not.

**Table 1: Availability of facilities and equipment for SwSNs in the University**

Theme	Response from a university on specific challenges	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Remarks
1. How easy SwSNs benefit from the available facilities and equipment	a) <b>A-university</b>	i. Adequately available	30	88.2	Most SwSNs are contented.  They do not face serious challenge in this university
		ii. Somehow available	3	8.8	
		iii. Not available at all	1	3.0	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
	b) <b>B-university</b>	i. Adequately available	20	59.0	More than 50% of SwSNs are contented in this university.
		ii. Somehow available	12	35.3	
		iii. Not available at all	2	5.9	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
	c) <b>C-university</b>	i. Adequately available	1	2.9	Over 90% of SwSNs are dissatisfied in this university.  They face a formidable challenge
		ii. Somehow available	2	5.9	
		iii. Not available at all	31	91.2	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Primary Data (2018)

**Table 2: Accessibility to learning materials by SwNs in the University**

Theme	Response from a university on specific challenges	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Remarks
2. How easy it is for SwSNs to access learning materials	a) <b>A-university</b>	i. Easy access to learning materials	27	79.4	This university is dedicated to supporting SwSNs  SwSNs here do not face serious challenge
		ii. Accessibility somehow possible	5	14.7	
		iii. Accessibility impossible	2	5.9	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
	b) <b>B-university</b>	i. Easy access to learning materials	25	73.5	This university is increasingly making efforts to support SwSNs
		ii. Accessibility somehow possible	17	20.6	
		iii. Accessibility impossible	2	5.9	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
	c) <b>C-university</b>	Easy access to learning materials	3	8.8	Accessibility not provided by provided by the university
		ii. Accessibility somehow possible	1	3.0	
		iii. Accessibility impossible	30	88.2	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Primary Data (2018)

**Table 3: Understanding and having respect for SwSNs by other students and staff in the University**

Theme	Response from a university on specific challenges	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Remarks
3. The level at which SwSNs are understood and respected	a) A-university	i. There is good understanding	21	61.7	SwSNs in this university enjoy more recognition and respect
		ii. There is little understanding	9	26.5	
		iii. Discrimination is the order of the day	4	11.8	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
	b) B-university	i. There is good understanding	17	50.0	SwSNs reckon to receive more than 50% of recognition and acceptance in this university
		ii. There is little understanding	10	29.4	
		iii. Discrimination is the order of the day	7	20.6	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
	c) C-university	i. There is good understanding	5	14.7	SwSNs see more than 50% of negative feelings against them in this university
		ii. There is little understanding	10	29.4	
iii. Discrimination is the order of the day		19	55.9		
<b>Total</b>		<b>34</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

Source: Primary Data (2018)

**Table 4 : Co-ordination of activities beneficial to SwSNs in the University**

Theme	Response from a university on specific challenges	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Remarks
4. Evidence of co-ordination of activities beneficial to SwSNs	a) A-university	i. There is effective co-ordination from all angles of the university	21	61.8	SwSNs are contented with the way activities are co-ordinated for their benefit
		ii. There is a little bit of co-ordination	10	29.4	
		iii. There is no co-ordination at all	3	5.8	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
	b) B-university	i. There is effective co-ordination from all angles of the university	17	50.0	SwSNs see an increasing efforts to co-ordinate activities for their good
		ii. There is a little bit of co-ordination	10	29.4	
		iii. There is no co-ordination at all	7	20.6	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
	c) C-university	i. There is effective co-ordination from all angles of the university	7	20.6	SwSNs are not contented with co-ordination of activities for their benefit by the university
		ii. There is a little bit of co-ordination	10	29.4	
iii. There is no co-ordination at all		17	50.0		
<b>Total</b>		<b>34</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

Source: Primary Data (2018)

**Table 5 : University's ability to provide funds for SwSNs**

Theme	Response from a university on specific challenges	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Remarks
5. The extent o which the university provides funds for SwSNs	a) A-university	i. University provides all the needed funds to support SwSNs	19	55.9	In this university SwSNs enjoy getting financial support provided by their university
		ii. University is providing very limited funds to support SwSNs	10	29.4	
		iii. University is not providing any funds to support SwSNs	5	14.7	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
	b) B-university	i. University provides all the needed funds to support SwSNs	14	41.2	SwSNs report that their university is beginning to provide some significant funding to support their cause
		ii. University is providing very limited funds to support SwSNs	12	35.3	
		iii. University is not providing any funds to support SwSNs	8	23.5	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
	c) C-university	i. University provides all the needed funds to support SwSNs	1	2.9	SwSNs in this university are of the view that their university has negative attitude towards them
		ii. University is providing very limited funds to support SwSNs	2	5.9	
iii. University is not providing any funds to support SwSNs		31	91.2		
<b>Total</b>		<b>34</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

Source: Primary Data (2018)



**Responses from interview guides**

The responses revealed that SwSNs experienced a number of challenges such as lack of equipment and facilities available for SwSNs, lack of attention given to SwSNs, poor co-ordination of student activities, lack of Space for SwSNs, and no provision of funds for SwSNs. The following verbal quotes illustrate the above:

**Theme 1: Provision of Facilities and Equipment to Support SwSNs**

Participants had different views regarding the ways their universities provided equipment and facilities regarding their well being in the respective universities. In **A-university**, most SwSNs were contented with what they were provided. The participants had these to say:

I can't be a 100% satisfied with what the university is providing us, the students with disabilities, especially we students with visual impairment. But what I get so far can always enable me get on well with my studies here, and am certain I will complete my degree course successfully, (PA-un.1).

The SwSNs in **C-university** who were not receiving any preferential treatment lamented and had this to say:

It is a real burden for us, students with disabilities, to do things in this university. Everything is expensive and the university does not do much even to get us some equipment at subsidised prices. We have to rely on our relatives and at times NGOs, to get what we need to support our studies. It is a real struggle. Yes, it is, you see! (PC-un4)

Participants who faced less challenges in their universities, particularly those from **A-university** and **B-university** gave a list of equipment and facilities they said they were enjoying. The participants stated:

Our university has an assortment of facilities and equipment which comprise, among other things: Braille machines, Computers, Talking books and Audiometers, (PA-un2)

Having an important garget, such as Audiometers within our university is a big relief. Before I joined this university, we used to visit major hospitals in different parts of the country in search of audiometer service, whenever I needed to have my hearing aids and ear moulds repaired. But we now have this within the university and can enjoy such a service. Indeed, when I finish with my university course, I shall miss such a good service, (PA-un12).

**Theme 2: Accessibility to learning materials by SwNs in the University**

Participants were divided in responses, with respect to accessibility to learning materials in the three universities. While some participants accept the challenges they face, some indicate that the challenges are not serious. For **A-university**, SwSNs did not see much challenge, regarding accessibility to learning materials. In **B-university**, SwSNs noted that some categories of their colleagues with visual impairment were given more attention, compared to other categories of special needs. The concerned participants had this to say:

Our friends with visual impairment are given nearly everything they need, such as: Braille materials, papers, white cane for movement, and so on, while we, who are deaf, have to struggle even to get sign language interpreters. It is even worse that when the interpreters are employed to assist us, it takes long to pay them for the service they render to us. This makes them leave and go away, and we remain suffering with nobody to support us on our daily activities, (PC-un5).

Another participant from **C-university** had this to say:

while our sighted friends enjoy getting their examination results on time, each semester, we, who are blind have to be treated as second class citizens. Our brailled materials take time to be transcribed and marked. Sometimes these papers are misplaced, causing us to have missing results. It is really bad, we pray that our academic work is also given top priority like our sighted friends, (PA-un3)

In **A-university** and **B-university**, SwSNs raised a bitter complaint regarding the way their disability supporters were being treated. A participant had this to say:

If the university does not want to violate our human and constitutional rights, let it not continue mistreating our interpreters, by failing to pay for the good services they give us. These interpreters are paid just peanuts, something that should be done without such unnecessary delays. When they run away and abandon us who will support us with our academic work? (PB-un7)

Theme 3: Understanding and having respect for SwSNs by other students and staff in the University

In **B-university** and **C-university**, where SwSNs were not receiving adequate attention, recognition and respect from the university, they resorted to help one another. One participant stated, and quote:

Yes, I like helping those brothers and sisters of ours. Sometimes I push them on wheel chairs, sometimes I copy for them notes when lectures are going on, because I don't know how to use sign language with them. It is important for us to help one another because we are all human beings, (POC-un4)

Theme 4: Co-ordination of activities beneficial to SwSNs in the University

The study revealed that it was in **A-university** where there was somebody appointed to co-ordinate activities for the good of the students with special needs. That in **B-university**, there was a good attempt being made to put arrangement in place for co-ordinating activities for SwSNs. That for **C-university**, students were left to fend for themselves, working as a team, sharing ideas and initiating activities that were beneficial to them. Thus, SwSNs faced a formidable challenge in **C-university**.

The following is the direct quotes from such participant:

In this world of disability, nothing without us, is for us. So, we have to mobilise ourselves, speak with one voice, do things as a united group and show to the university community, that we are capable of organising and mobilising ourselves before we call for a support from other people within the university, (PB-un8)

Some participants, especially from **A-university** were found to be satisfied with the entire environment in their university, while others expressed disappointment, especially those from **B-university**, pointing out that the environments of their university was disability unfriendly. They said:

The management of our university has made a very good effort to modify the entire environment, for, we are able to carry out most of our activities with ease and without serious challenges. The modified space includes: modified walk ways, ramps, modified new buildings, suitable toilets for female and students with motor impairment, special vehicles for transporting SwSNs within the campus, especially when they travel to and fro lectures, (PA-un8).

One participant from **A-university** stated and quote:

Much as we are blind, we love sports. We miss taking part in different games and sports to compete in international games, such as the world para-olympic games and become champions. But we are denied this. Games and sports would always be an attractive magnet for some blind students to join certain universities! (PC-un4)

Theme 5 University Ability to Provide Funds for SwSNs

The study revealed that one of the three universities, i.e: **A-university** was ahead of the other two in providing some funds that supported SwSNs. Other universities were reported to be doing too little to make SwSNs happy. Participants from **A-university** stated, and quote:

Our university has some budget for supporting our needs and we must appreciate that spirit. Among other things, to be proud of in our university is that there is a university policy on

disability. Through these all-service providers for us, SwSNs, are paid some allowance, we, the students are provided learning materials, the same way our ordinary peers are given, (PA-un7).

A participant from **C-university**, on the contrary had this to say:

If it wasn't for a sponsorship by sympathetic international donor, I would not have studied in this university even for one semester. I am very thankful, and I know I shall complete my first degree, and God willing, my sponsors will still continue to support me for a master's degree course after here, (PC-un2)

Another SwSNs facing a similar bitter challenge in **C-university** stated and quote:

My continuation with studies at this university has been due to the massive support I have been getting from my relatives. They have provided my tuitions fees and made all forms of contributions to meet the costs of my education from primary school to the university. I am greatly indebted to their support, (PC-un1).

### **Discussion**

The purpose of the study was to provide answers to questions concerning challenges faced by university students with special needs (SwSNs) in Uganda and the implications the challenges had on such students' retention. One of the findings concerned the challenges students faced with respect to financially related issues. This finding resonates with Saenz, and Marcoulides (1999) who demonstrated financial concerns were related to drop out rates for college students, lack of statistical significance of other financial aid variables of students in general cannot be discounted in theory of college retention. Some of the key findings of the study are that universities that have reasonable provisions for equipment and facilities, have modified space, as well as giving adequate attention to students with special needs are the universities that have more retention of students. These findings tend to agree with Tinto (2006) who expressed the need to build a sense of belonging within a university social structure as a way to help students successfully complete their degree. It is evident that this is also true for the population of students with special needs. A university can influence whether minority students will persist to a degree or not. For example, Bazanye (2017), demonstrates that lack of structural diversity and diversity emphasis in an institution is significantly related to stop out of an institution of higher learning, minority status and socioeconomic status is also related to dropping out of an institution of higher learning. The literature here, indeed confirms the afore mentioned findings of this study.

Some of the students with special needs have challenges in meeting the needs in class, for example requirements. They end up performing poorly in universities and eventually drop out. In the findings, there are some students who have mentioned that they have remained on their studies because of the support they get from their relatives and benefactors despite the challenges they face in their university where cannot get any form of support. The strongest and most consistent predictor of retention is shown to be university grades. Braxton, Milem, and Sullivan (2017) have demonstrated high school achievement as being a strong predictor of stop out, drop out and transferring to another institution. This finding was supported in this analysis as a strong relationship between high school grade point average (GPA) with persistence to completion for both students with disabilities and the ordinary students. Although this may not be as a result of direct influence, by implication, some of the challenges revealed in the study findings, by and large, have indirect impact on the SwSNs' retention in the university.

### **Conclusion**

The findings reveal that the numerous challenges faced by the universities have a direct bearing on whether SwSNs' retention can successfully be upheld, or not. Given the way the three universities selected in this study have dealt with the specific challenges, the overall nature of retention of SwSNs is not as low to cause concern. Provision of equipment and facilities, giving due attention, assisting students to mobilise and network amongst themselves, providing ample space and providing basic funding are all crucial ingredients for students with special needs' retention in the university. It was not possible to determine from the data the proportion of students from each category of special needs who indicated they required

services. The findings suggest a possible mismatch between services required and services received, and a subsequent negative impact on retention. As might be expected, some universities were less well equipped to provide sufficient support services to meet the needs of reported increasing numbers of students with disabilities. Nearly all the respondents interviewed identified this as an area for further development within their universities.

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