

# Disability and inclusion in South African higher education

## An *Ubuntu* philosophical perspective

*Oliver T. Gore*

### Introduction

Inclusion of students with disabilities is still a challenge in South African universities despite the far-reaching Bill of Rights in the Constitution of South Africa aimed at eliminating all forms of discrimination and inequality, including those based on disability (South Africa, 1996). This gives students with disabilities the right to access higher education institutions. However, up to 2018, there was no specific disability policy in higher education. This meant most universities struggled to address disability issues (Mutanga, 2020). The promulgation of the Strategic Policy Framework on Disability for the Post School Education and Training System (DHET, 2018) is meant to give government support and guidance to higher education institutions to implement changes and provide services that make it possible for students with disabilities to flourish in higher education. However, there are shortcomings in the implementation of the policy in universities, and students with disabilities cannot be said to be fully included in higher education (Mutanga, 2020). University administrators fail to implement the necessary interventions because of their lack of commitment, the confusion arising from conflicting policies that make it difficult to define who should be taking certain responsibilities, and certain structural barriers to inclusivity. The theories and models that guide or determine programmes and interventions on addressing disability are predominantly Western. They appear to have limitations in articulating the contextual factors affecting students with disabilities in universities. This chapter explores the implementation of some programmes and interventions aimed to address disability in higher education institutions in the interest of identifying alternative approaches that could better inform interventions.

The first section gives the context of the study followed by the problem statement, the methodology that was adopted in the study and the *Ubuntu* philosophical values. The discussion of the findings focuses on disability and intersectional disadvantage, disability and the *Ubuntu* philosophy. Finally, a conclusion and recommendations are presented.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003343684-3

*Disability and Inclusion in South African higher education* 31

### Policy reforms and approaches to disability in South African higher education

Although there are different understandings of disability, this chapter adopts the DHET's (2018) definition:

*loss or elimination of opportunities to take part in the life of the community, equitably with others, encountered by persons having physical, sensory, psychological, developmental, learning, neurological or other impairments, which may be permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, thereby causing activity limitations and participation restriction within mainstream society.*

The definition was adopted because of its comprehensiveness. It acknowledges impairment, the presence of personal and social factors that constrain full participation, and the limited opportunities a person with disabilities has in society.

To promote equal access, participation, and success of diverse students, South Africa instituted a series of policy reforms. Through the White Paper of 1997 (Department of Education, 1997) and the Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education – Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (Department of Education, 2001), higher education sought to promote the inclusion of diverse students in universities. This framework was later followed by the White Paper for Post School Education and Training (DHET, 2014) which also stressed the inclusion of students with disabilities. In 2021, the government instituted a specific disability policy to the sector, Strategic Policy Framework on Disability for the Post School Education and Training System (DHET, 2018), to assist higher education to provide sufficient support to students with disabilities and give higher education a common vision of the promotion of the inclusion of students with disabilities. The policy was a response to the absence of a specific policy to address disability in higher education, which limited the higher education institutions' capacities to implement changes that would offer more effective support for students and staff with disabilities. While helpful, the Strategic Policy Framework on Disability for the Post School Education and Training System (DHET, 2018) allows higher education institutions room to abdicate their responsibilities for a number of reasons. One is the financial cost of the alterations to adapt residences and lecture halls (Mutanga et al., 2018). It should be noted that the policy does not make provision for students and staff with disabilities to contribute their expertise (Mutanga et al., 2018).

The South African government adopted a human rights approach in its attempt to address disability in Section 9(3) of Chapter 2 (the Bill of Rights) of the Constitution (South Africa, 1996). Here, the Constitution promotes

### 32 *Oliver T. Gore*

equality by attempting to eliminate discrimination against individuals based on gender, race, place of origin, culture, and disability. In the same vein, the Strategic Policy Framework on Disability for the Post School Education and Training System is informed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The conventions and policies specifically outline that the state must preserve the rights and freedoms of people with disabilities and of all people. Although helpful, the weakness of this human rights approach is that it appears to operate at the level of empty rhetoric as it does not specify how the freedoms and rights are met (Osler & Skarra, 2021). Alongside that weakness, the human rights approach depends on people in authority's interpretation of law which leaves people with disabilities vulnerable (Broberg & Sano, 2018).

At present, disability is placed on the periphery as most universities tend to prioritise addressing access and success issues in faculties where there are many students (Ntombela & Mahlangu, 2019). Students with disabilities are still poorly represented in universities; only 3.8% of the 5.8% of people with disabilities in the country's population attend universities (DHET, 2021). Even after enrolment into higher education, students with disabilities face exclusion, as the interventions focusing on students with disabilities do not form part of the universities' broad diversity and inclusion priorities, but are

dealt with separately (Ntombela, 2022). What this implies is that students with disabilities, who are constrained by the structural disadvantages affecting the non-disabled students within the country's higher education institutions, are further marginalised. Most students in higher education, including students with disabilities, are disadvantaged through intersectionality of factors including inadequate finances for education, under-preparedness for higher education, gender inequality, and unconducive housing (Gore, 2021; Gore & Botha, 2022).

Together with the above policy imperatives, South African higher education adopted a social model to address disability. The social model views disability as caused mainly by the way society is organised and not individual impairments (Watermeyer et al., 2006). The social model is thus a response to the medical model that sees disability as primarily a result of individual impairments that need to be fixed so that people with disabilities can conform to society (DHET, 2018). Alongside that, is the medical model that led to the establishment of the special schools and classes that separate students with disabilities from non-disabled ones so they can flourish in an environment that offers specialised care (Nel et al., 2013). However, separating the students with disabilities in special schools tends to perpetuate stigmatisation and views students with disabilities as being unable to perform what is considered as normal ways in higher education (Mutanga, 2018). Equally important, the medical model fails to consider the socio-economic conditions and the history of the people with disabilities (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). This demonstrates the limitations of the medical model and why the South African

### *Disability and Inclusion in South African higher education* 33

government in the post-apartheid period adopted the social model in higher education.

The social model emphasises the effect that society, attitudes and forms of exclusion have on people with disability and the changes and improvements that are necessary (Watermeyer et al., 2006). It advocates social and academic support to students with disabilities, including changes to physical infrastructure, flexibility in time and the format of learning materials. While it is preferable to the medical model, the social model does not take sufficient account of the way impairments affect the lives of people with disabilities (Mitra, 2018). Furthermore, it assumes that by shifting responsibility to social arrangements, the needs of the students with disabilities are automatically met when social challenges are met.

### **Problem**

The South African government has instituted policies to address disability and access to higher education. However, the policies have not brought the desired changes in the lives of students with disabilities as higher education institutions are not yet offering them sufficient support (Ntombela, 2022). This is partly because of the university administrators' failure to act, confusion caused by having many policies which leave the university administrators uncertain of whose responsibility it is to carry out certain actions, the challenges students with disability face, and the low commitment from the university staff who do not see meeting the needs of students with disabilities as part of their brief (Mutanga, 2020). Equally significant is that the policies and the subsequent interventions aimed to address disability are largely derived from the social model and human rights approaches, largely Western-based theories. The drawbacks of using the Western theories within

the context of Africa is that such approaches do not fully take into account the contextual factors affecting people who stem from cultural mores and the history of the continent (Mbembe, 2016). This suggests the need to have alternative approaches that are sensitive to the context of South Africa for successful inclusion of students with disabilities.

The study presented in this chapter explores the implementation of programmes and interventions aimed to address disability in higher education institutions. It addresses the following questions: *What are the experiences of students with disabilities in South African universities? How can the Ubuntu philosophy better inform programmes and interventions aimed at addressing disability in South African universities?* The argument presented in this chapter is that the *Ubuntu* philosophy that foregrounds humanness, inclusion, and well-being of other people would be better able to inform programmes and interventions to address disability (Mertz, 2014). Well-being refers to the various aspects of students with disabilities' lives that enable them to function optimally (Robeyns, 2017). Adopting the *Ubuntu* philosophy would encourage universities to promote the inclusion of students with

34 *Oliver T. Gore*

disabilities through the creation of appropriate support services for the students to flourish.

### ***Ubuntu philosophical values***

*Ubuntu* is an African philosophy which emphasises the notion that people realise themselves through the relationships they have with others. *Ubuntu* refers to humanness and morality in Sub-Saharan Africa (Metz, 2014). It is a 'code of ethics,' a philosophy or way of thinking, and a behaviour that is embedded in the African continent. Metz (2020) explains that 'African' is used with reference to *Ubuntu* to mean the important values that are common in most of the African societies throughout history but less used in other parts of the world. Underpinning the *Ubuntu* philosophy are notions of establishing and maintaining constructive relationships, interdependence, and advancement of goodness (Nussbaum, 2003). The *Ubuntu* philosophy is unique to Africa although some of the values are found across the globe (Nussbaum, 2003; Ewuoso & Hall, 2019). The *Ubuntu* philosophy reminds us that we ought to be conscious about how we treat other humans. People relate to each other for the common good of the community while a person is only defined in the presence of his/her community (Nussbaum, 2003). In Letseka's (2012) view, *Ubuntu's* philosophical basis originates and is unique to the African socio-economic and historical order. This positions the *Ubuntu* philosophy as relevant to this study considering the legacy of segregation policies of the apartheid and the absence of shared moral values that prevented socio-economic development and social cohesion in South African society. Furthermore, *Ubuntu* has been adopted for this study for its focus on the well-being of other people and that of the community (Waghid, 2020; Ewuoso & Hall, 2019).

*Ubuntu's* pillar of humanness is found in most of the Bantu languages in Sub-Saharan Africa. For example, *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (in Nguni languages) which translates to 'a human being is a human being because of other human beings' (Letseka, 2012: 48). Humanness is present in the Zulu/Ndebele *umuntu* and Shona *munhu*, which means a person or human (Murove, 2014: 37). Underpinning *Ubuntu* are values such as 'altruism, kindness, generosity, compassion, benevolence, courtesy, and respect and

concern for others' (Letseka, 2012: 48). Furthermore, humanness implies the attitude to another person based on courtesy, caring, kindness, and respect (Murove, 2014). The values indicate that individuals in communities ought to treat others with fairness and justice, which is critical for students with disabilities. These *Ubuntu* philosophical values can be helpful in exploring whether universities and lecturers are inclusive by considering if support services aimed at the well-being of the students with disabilities are adequate.

Caring for others is an aspect embedded in *Ubuntu*, with individuals not only being empathetic to each other but trusting and taking risks for the well-being of others (Waghid, 2020). This indicates that *Ubuntu* focuses not

### *Disability and Inclusion in South African higher education* 35

only on the well-being of a person but also on the well-being of others and the community. Through caring for others and sharing with them, a person is defined in the presence of his/her community (Nussbaum, 2003). Although *Ubuntu* is more communal rather than individual, it places a person as a participating agent in the community groups (Nussbaum, 2003). Participating in the well-being of the community is pivotal as a person is expected to become compassionate to members of the community and vice versa (Ewuoso & Hall, 2019).

Another thrust of *Ubuntu* is the interconnectedness of the person to others and the community. *Ubuntu* regards people as interconnected with each other (Waghid, 2020). People are therefore seen as co-belonging to the community in which each person contributes to. Thus, a person sees his achievements through others and the community. Moreover, embedded in *Ubuntu* is personhood that values such as compassion, caring, sharing, and hospitality (Mojola, 2019). Such values cannot be equated to profits and personal achievement as others are more important (Tutu, 2013). This implies that humanness is expressed through the interconnectedness of a person and others, and the personhood values of caring for the other.

Coupled with that is the interdependence of a person on others. Strong relationships are key to promoting interdependence, in that a person's life is meaningful when he/she contributes to the community and other persons (Murove, 2014). However, that does not mean that *Ubuntu* precludes promoting oneself (Mertz, 2020). The interdependence of people and others within the community serves to improve the lives and well-being of others. Interdependence is also manifested in the friendly relationships between people and the attitude that people give to life as well as others (Murove, 2014). Therefore, the emphasis on interdependence in *Ubuntu* places the community at the centre, seeing it as more important than the individual, thus individualism is equated with being selfish.

Some key aspects of the *Ubuntu* philosophy are that it focuses on the well-being of a person, the well-being of others, and that of the community. Well-being is thus achievable through the humanness, interconnectedness, and interdependence of a person with others and the community. In Letseka's view (2012: 54) the philosophy values these principles because of their aim of a flourishing life for all members of society. Its strong emphasis on collectivity and communalism fosters inclusivity (Sibanda, 2014). Although present in other theories, the *Ubuntu* philosophy's values of focusing on others to improve one's own well-being are not strongly featured in most Western theories.

## **Methodology**

The study took the form of a scoping review. I used secondary data sources from Social Sciences and Education databases, and Google Scholar. During the screening process I excluded sources that did not meet the following

### 36 *Oliver T. Gore*

criteria: published between 2000 and 2022 (exclude on date), in South African higher education (exclude on context), focus on disability or *Ubuntu* (exclude on setting), published in English (exclude on language), and the study being informed by some form of research (exclude on research design). There were 63 sources that were not excluded by the chosen criteria. I carefully read the selected documents and extracted the text that addressed the research questions. Although I followed the above procedures, I do not claim to have included all the relevant sources as the goal was to get a picture of the implementation of programmes and interventions aimed to promote inclusion of students with disabilities in South African higher education. A thematic analysis technique was used to analyse the data. I identified common categories of data from the extracted texts before combining them to build subthemes. These subthemes were subsequently merged to form main themes. The following themes emerged from the data: programmes and interventions to address disability, intersectional disability, and the *Ubuntu* philosophy in addressing disability (presented in the next section).

## **Findings**

The study explored the interventions implemented to promote inclusion of students with disabilities in South African higher education. The results indicate that while programmes and interventions to address disability are in place, they have not achieved the desired changes. These are improving access, participation, and the success of students with disabilities in higher education. Students with disabilities continue to experience multiple forms of disadvantage that have a cumulative effect on their lives. It seems that the values of the *Ubuntu* philosophy are helpful for promoting the implementation of programmes and interventions in higher education institutions including addressing intersectional disadvantage.

### ***Programmes and interventions to address disability***

The review shows that disability issues in South African higher education are addressed through dedicated units called Disability Units (DUs) at most institutions. These units manage disability separately from the university's transformation initiatives. By being managed through the faculties' departments, and sometimes counselling services or student affairs the DUs lack autonomy and are often marginalised by the faculties which focus on supporting the many non-disabled students in the faculties (FOTIM, 2011). Furthermore, the administration of DUs through the counselling services perpetuates the pathological perspective that disability is a medical condition (Lyner-Cleophas et al., 2014). Although they are helpful, the DU programmes separate the students with disabilities from the rest of the students, and thus encourage stereotyping and stigmatisation of students with disabilities (Bell Carl & Swart, 2016).

Within the DUs, the students are expected to receive specialised services for their educational well-being at the same time the DUs help to communicate

students with disabilities' needs to the departments and faculties. These support services include Braille, recordings, interpreters, sign language, flexible assessments, and assistive technology (Matshediso, 2010). While DUs are mandated to provide these services, students with disabilities lack access to learning materials, learning facilities, libraries, and information about campus events in most universities in South Africa (Mbuva, 2019; Zongozzi, 2022). They are also at a disadvantage when they need to seek medical attention or have check-ups since they have to use private transport as they cannot use public transport (Matshediso, 2010).

The establishment of DUs in some universities strengthens the view that students with disabilities need separate facilities because they have different learning needs from the non-disabled (Ntombela, 2022). This sees the lecturers as less qualified to support students with disabilities than the staff at the DUs who are regarded as experts. Ntombela and Mahlangu (2019) contest this. They argue that support of students with disabilities should be the responsibility of all staff members of the university including the academic staff. Although separating students with disabilities from the rest of the students through the DUs helps the university to provide specialised support, it also results in their having limited access to services which non-disabled students receive (Ntombela, 2022). In addition, despite the DUs serving the role of enhancing communication with the non-DUs academic staff, there is often a lack of communication between the two, which contributes to the lecturers' lack of knowledge about the needs of students with disabilities (Ntombela, 2022).

Although meant to assist them, the use of technology for teaching and learning excludes some students with disabilities in class. Online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic excluded some students with disabilities as they could not access learning material such as recordings of lectures, and interpreters, and were not offered flexible submission deadlines. A study by Ntombela (2022) on the situation during Covid-19 reported that students with disabilities did not have access to the support services they usually received before the pandemic. Coupled with that, the lack of opportunity to actively participate in their studies constrained disabled students from exercising their agency, which limited their epistemic access during online learning (Ndlovu, 2022). This highlights the shortcomings of having a separate support structure for students with disabilities at universities. At the time, the universities primarily focused on ensuring that teaching and learning occurred amidst the uncertainties related to the pandemic and the structural disadvantages resulting from the pandemic. It must be acknowledged, however, that online learning was advantageous for some students with disabilities who were able to work flexibly, for those who were spared the anxiety and panic attacks they experience in large and crowded classes, and for those with mobility challenges who did not have to access the lecture halls (Manase, 2021).

### 38 *Oliver T. Gore*

Students with disabilities are also negatively affected by ignorance about their needs and the attitude of some of the lecturers. Some administrators exclude the students with disabilities from academic programmes such as Engineering and Natural Sciences on the grounds that those students with disabilities are unable to cope with the practical demands of some of the modules (Mayat & Amosun, 2011). Although it also seems that some lecturers are willing to support students with disabilities, most lecturers lack the knowledge and expertise to do so (Mutanga & Walker, 2017). Whereas some

lecturers adjusted their teaching approaches to suit the students with disabilities, others did not employ inclusive teaching approaches such as offering tutorials and differentiation for the students with disabilities (Matshediso, 2010; Mbuva, 2019). A study by van Jaarsveldt and Ndeya-Ndereya (2015) indicates that some lecturers were unwilling to teach students with disabilities. Instead, they referred them to the DUs. This means that having a disability policy in place is not enough as personal commitment from lecturers is integral for inclusivity of students with disabilities.

Another way in which students with disabilities are excluded is through assessment and examination methods that are inappropriate for them. For example, some students with disabilities experience high levels of anxiety because of their impairments during examinations while others struggle to participate in group assignments (Mutanga, 2018). This highlights the need for universities to make provision for more appropriate formats for individual students with disabilities, rather than having a uniform approach for all students. Although it is easy to place the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of lecturers, this ignores the responsibility that universities have. They should offer lecturers the support they need to understand diversity and to develop the necessary strategies to address the needs of the students with disabilities.

Another factor the studies revealed is that the absence of an effective means of identifying students with disabilities means some students with disabilities are denied sufficient support (Bell Carl & Swart, 2016; Zongozzi, 2022). Lecturers and the DUs are unaware of which students require support and the kind of support services that they should be given (Mutanga & Walker, 2017). Bell et al. (2016) reveal that some students with hearing loss are unwilling to disclose their impairment to university staff. While the universities need to honour the non-disclosure practices of students with disabilities, they should create an environment that encourages the students to disclose their impairments so that they receive support.

Unlike the Historically Advantaged Universities (HAUs), the Historically Disadvantaged Universities (HDUs) continue to have poor or inadequate infrastructure and limited financial resources to cater to the needs of the students with disabilities (Mutanga, 2020). The HDUs are the previously black universities that were poorly resourced in the apartheid era while the HAUs are former white universities that were well-resourced (Reddy, 2004). Further disparities between the HDUs and HAUs are seen in the opportunities they

### *Disability and Inclusion in South African higher education 39*

offer students with disabilities to build social networks. Social networks are essential for academic support and directly affect the level of persistence students with disabilities can muster to complete their studies (Papasotiriou & Windle, 2012). Roux and Burnett's (2010) study of students with disabilities at the University of Johannesburg reveals that students with disabilities who participated in elite sports were able to build social networks unlike those from the rural HDUs. Although some differences were evident between the universities, structural hindrances prevented students with disabilities at the University of the Free State, a HAU, from gaining easy access to other residences and thus making friendships with their peers constrained (Mutanga, 2018). This means that HAUs also face challenges in offering opportunities for students with disabilities to create social networks. The researchers whose work is cited here worked within the medical and social models that are influenced by Western theories. The results suggest that these models

do not fully serve the needs for the inclusion of students with disabilities in South African universities.

### ***Intersectional disadvantage***

Although some studies have reported disadvantages among students with disabilities because of race (Le Roux, 2014), it appears that class affects students with disabilities in universities more (Mutanga, 2018). Disadvantage is manifested in the socio-economic background of the students with disabilities. Students with disabilities receive disability-related funding from the government but those who fail to achieve a particular level of performance are excluded from the funding (Mutanga, 2018). Their exclusion does not consider that some students with disabilities perform poorly because they went to poorly resourced schools where they received poor-quality schooling (Mutanga, 2018). This means that the funding policy does not take diverse socio-economic backgrounds into account when assessing students' performance. Some students with disabilities from low-income backgrounds, therefore, experience an additional layer of exclusion because of their under-preparedness for university education. Although it appears that both female and male students with disabilities are similarly disadvantaged, some female students with disabilities experience an additional layer of exclusion through gender inequality arising from societal expectations. In his study, Mutanga (2020) reveals that some female students with disabilities have been socialised to see lower achievements as the norm. This means that gender inequality affects the choices students with disabilities make and constrains them from having equal opportunities to access certain degree programmes. Wolff et al. (2015) argue that when the different forms of exclusions intersect, they have an incremental compound effect on the well-being of individuals.

The literature explored above reveals that students with disabilities face many challenges in accessing, participating, and succeeding in universities. But few studies have explored the intersectionality of these disadvantages

### ***40 Oliver T. Gore***

(Mutanga, 2018, 2020; Ndlovu, 2022). Most of the studies presented in the preceding sections explain disadvantage in a monodirectional way or disadvantage as caused by two factors. What they fail to do is to disentangle the complex interaction of factors that affect students with disabilities. Students, including students with disabilities, experience multiple forms of exclusions associated with their biographies: class, schooling, gender, and geographical location intersect with university arrangements and policies (Gore, 2021). What is required for their effective inclusion in universities is an approach that takes account of the day-to-day lives of the students with disabilities, the lived experience of their biographies, and how these interact with the university arrangements in disadvantaging the students with disabilities.

### ***Ubuntu philosophy in addressing disability***

The *Ubuntu* philosophical value of humanness that stresses improving attitude and caring of others is crucial. Lecturers' attitudes could be improved, and their ignorance could give way to compassion and to commitment if they are given appropriate training on how to identify the needs of students with disabilities and effective ways of supporting them. The element of sufficient support is emphasised as the *Ubuntu* philosophy which asks us to see

ourselves through others (Nussbaum, 2003; Ngomane, 2020) and act for the good of others (Metz, 2014). The philosophy challenges community perceptions and lecturers' attitudes that exclude students with disabilities from accessing university and certain programmes. By consciously helping students with disabilities, the university is seen to be making the students with disabilities part of the university's diversity and transformational agendas stipulated in the White Paper 3 (Department of Education, 1997). This envisages the university as prioritising the resources to adapt the lecture halls and accommodation and to provide appropriate learning resources and materials for students with disabilities.

*Ubuntu* can emphasise the interdependence and interconnectedness of a person with others. The university's role is to promote social relations between students so that they support each other. When they have the opportunity to interact with others and to participate in university academic and social activities, students with disabilities experience co-belonging with their peers and university staff within the university community (Waghid, 2020). A sense of belonging is central to students' success and their retention in the system (Tinto, 2012). When *Ubuntu* values of respect and relations are embraced, people within the campuses relate to each other in respectful ways. Respecting one another is crucial for ensuring trust between students, teachers, and parents within educational environments (Mbigi, 1997). By encouraging people to relate to and respect each other, *Ubuntu* contributes to the transformation of the environment in the class into one where lecturers are approachable and students with disabilities are comfortable about

#### *Disability and Inclusion in South African higher education* 41

communicating their needs to their lecturers. This enables lecturers to offer students the individualised support all students need to succeed.

The value that *Ubuntu* accords participation means that students are regarded as active agents who can take part in the university's activities and contribute meaningfully to decisions affecting their lives (Nussbaum, 2003). The participation aspect of *Ubuntu* has pedagogical implications in that it highlights the way students with disabilities can take part in the construction of knowledge and contribute to the development of the curriculum (Ewuoso & Hall, 2019). When given the opportunity to participate, students with disabilities can contribute to what should be taught for their educational well-being.

The *Ubuntu* philosophy also requires us to assess whether the teaching approaches employed by lecturers are inclusive for students with disabilities. Again, through raising consciousness of humanness, universities encourage lecturers to employ inclusive teaching methods that promote effective learning among all the students including those with disabilities. For example, Berghs (2017) observes that much of the learning in Africa is observing and imitating others, practicing, and storytelling. By participating in games, students learn by guided participation to explore their social experiences as well as that of their communities (Berghs, 2017). What can be learnt from these learning practices is the huge potential participatory teaching approaches have to enhance learning in South African universities so that all students can succeed.

Most of the assessment practices employed in universities appear not to be integral parts of the teaching and learning activities, and contribute to distant relationships between lecturers and students (Mutanga, 2020). Summative summaries can be dehumanising to students with disabilities as these do not take into consideration the lived experiences of the students with disabilities.

Beets and Le Grange (2005) argue that for assessments to form part of learning, they should incorporate the *Ubuntu* philosophy and consider cultural factors. The authors argue that both students and teachers should understand that the purpose of assessments is to measure achievement, always considering that students have different competencies (Beets & Le Grange, 2005). Hence, the assessment process should be inclusive, respectful, and flexible to meet the needs of the students with disabilities, e.g., giving them enough time to complete the assessment.

## Discussion

The findings have demonstrated the challenges universities face in implementing policies aimed at promoting inclusion of students with disabilities in South African higher education. They suggest that the *Ubuntu* philosophy is helpful in fostering ethical behaviour among the university staff and prioritising support for students with disabilities. It helps members of university administration and lecturers to regard themselves as existing through others

### 42 Oliver T. Gore

thereby prioritising support to students with disabilities. Poor implementation of policies is attributed to some university staff's perception that it is not their responsibility to meet the needs of students with disabilities. This can be changed if their attitudes are informed by the *Ubuntu* philosophy, leading to a sense of responsibility for and commitment to supporting students with disabilities. Another important finding is that interventions based on the medical and social models have done little to change the lives of students with disabilities. This can be ascribed to the shortcomings of these models. These made it difficult for universities to meet the structural challenges in the South African context. The *Ubuntu* philosophy, which is already known in South African society, could better inform interventions that would promote full inclusion of students with disabilities.

The *Ubuntu* philosophy can offer students with disabilities sufficient, appropriate support through its inclusiveness principles which is when all the students are given the attention their needs are addressed. Ntombela (2022) emphasises the importance of addressing and eliminating constraining factors in order to facilitate success for all students, including those with disabilities, thereby mitigating existing disadvantages. During online teaching and learning, students with disabilities can access learning materials and the support they need. Coupled with that, lecturers are positioned to acquire strategies and the knowledge to deal with students with disabilities. The findings also suggest that having *Ubuntu* values encourages open relationships between lecturers and students and the use of effective teaching approaches. Findings illustrate that students with disabilities are not always identified and find some approaches alienating. Kauffman and Di Nuovo (2015) advocate for lecturers to be attuned to the needs of students with disabilities, enabling them to adopt teaching approaches that cater not only to the general class but also accommodate the specific needs and abilities of students with disabilities. This is accompanied by differentiated support and assessments.

The above findings have implications for the kind of education students receive in universities. Through entrenching values of caring for others, *Ubuntu* encourages the whole university community to develop a consciousness of values such as caring for others, respect, and compassion. In contrast, most Western education philosophies are predominantly individualist, so they embrace competition, autonomy, self-esteem, self-development, and

individual virtues (Nussbaum, 2003). Nussbaum (2010) argues that only a few philosophers from the West focus on citizenship education that foregrounds the good of other people and the community. Likewise, the *Ubuntu* philosophy's main thrust is that university management and lecturers are part of the community and should view their success through the achievements of all the students (including the students with disabilities) and their communities (Metz, 2015). Over and above all, the *Ubuntu* philosophy values of caring for others, respect, and compassion are outlined in the White Paper 1997 as one of the objectives of higher education in South Africa – to develop individuals who take care of their communities (Department of

### *Disability and Inclusion in South African higher education* 43

Education, 1997). The *Ubuntu* philosophy therefore offers a worldview that embraces equality in higher education and the removal of intersectional disadvantage among all students including the disabled (Ngomane, 2020).

Its key advantage is that the *Ubuntu* philosophy allows us to address disadvantages through an intersectionality lens. The findings in this chapter show that students with disabilities experience multiple forms of disadvantage that have compound effects on their lives (Wolff et al 2015; Gore 2021). This contributes to the students with disabilities' failure to access the universities or dropping out after enrolment. The way to redress this is to introduce initiatives that could ensure greater success for students with disabilities as part of the broader universities' interventions. These include forms of disadvantages such as inadequate finances, poor schooling, gender inequality, and language issues (Ntombela & Mahlangu, 2019). If university administrators endorse the *Ubuntu* values of solidarity, respect, and caring of others, they are likely to view their responsibility for addressing the multiple layers of exclusions that students with disabilities' experience differently.

The main contribution of this study is the identification of the *Ubuntu* philosophy that centres on the well-being of other people and the community as an all-inclusive approach to promoting the inclusion of students with disabilities in South African universities. Through *Ubuntu* values, the university management and teaching staff take responsibility for and commit to giving effective services to the students with disabilities that are part of their community.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter has noted the current national policies to address disability and the challenges encountered during the implementation of interventions to address disability in South African higher education. It has been argued that the *Ubuntu* philosophy can better inform programmes aimed to promote inclusion of students with disabilities by imbuing the approach used by the university staff with values such as caring, respect, participation, and compassion. By foregrounding the *Ubuntu* philosophy in interventions, university administration and teaching staff can treat students with disabilities with humanness and dignity and simultaneously provide sufficient support to the students.

The chapter recommends that university management ought to foreground *Ubuntu* values in the implementation of programmes and interventions to ensure commitment of staff. Through embedding these values in their interventions, universities can prioritise disability in their allocation of funds for changes in infrastructure so that lecture halls and accommodation become friendly to students with disabilities. It is vital that appropri-

ate study materials and equipment should also be provided to the students with disabilities. Providing the necessary sensitisation and training to lecturers will make them aware of the needs of students with disabilities and

#### 44 Oliver T. Gore

the kind of support that they should give. Training also helps the lecturers to develop personhood values underpinning *Ubuntu* so that they take the responsibility to recognise, care for, and respect the students with disabilities. Equally important, lecturers should employ teaching approaches that engage students with disabilities in class and help them to learn more effectively. Individualised attention, promoting open relationships, and communication with lecturers will help students with disabilities to open up towards the lecturers. This will also enable lecturers to offer individualised support to the students with disabilities requiring help. While students with disabilities should meet the same standards as non-students with disabilities, more flexible assessment methods should be implemented for them. This includes flexible writing time, individual invigilation, providing assessment papers in appropriate and accessible formats, conducive seating arrangements, and sign language interpretation.

These changes should be implemented as an integral part of the universities' broader diversity and transformative interventions to address inter-sectional disadvantage. These include interventions that meet the challenges of student under-preparedness, inadequate finances, gender inequality, and difficulty in adjusting to the universities' environment and language issues. Like other first-year students, students with disabilities require orientation to help them familiarise themselves with the university environment and to raise their awareness of the available services.

## References

- Beets, P., & Le Grange, L. (2005). 'Africanising' assessment practices: Does the notion of *Ubuntu* hold any promise? *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 19, 1197–1207.
- Bell, D., Carl, A., & Swart, E. (2016). Students with hearing impairment at a South African university: Self-identity and disclosure. *African Journal of Disability*, 5(1), 1–9. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ajod.v5i1.229>
- Berghs, M. (2017). Practices and discourses of Ubuntu: Implications for an African model of disability? *African Journal of Disability*, 6, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ajod.v6.292>
- Broberg, M., & Sano, H. O. (2018). Strengths and weaknesses in a human rights-based approach to international development – An analysis of a rights-based approach to development assistance based on practical experiences. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 22(5), 664–680. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2017.1408591>
- Department of Education. (1997). *Education white paper 3: A programme for the transformation of higher education*. Pretoria: Government Gazette.
- Department of Education. (2001). *Education white paper 6: Special needs education—Building an inclusive education and training system*. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- Department of Higher Education and Training. (2014). *White paper for post-school education and training: Building on expanded, effective and integrated post-school*. Pretoria: Higher Education and Training.

- Department of Higher Education and Training. (2018). *Strategic policy framework on disability for the post school education and training system*. Pretoria: Department of Higher Education and Training.
- Department of Higher Education and Training. (2021). *Post education and training monitor: Micro indicator trends*. Pretoria: Department of Higher Education and Training.
- Ewuoso, C., & Hall, S. (2019). Core aspects of Ubuntu: A systematic review. *South African Journal Bioethics Law*, 12(2), 93–103. <https://doi.org/10.7196/SAJBL.2019.v12i2.679>
- FOTIM. (2011). *Disability in higher education project report*. Johannesburg: Foundation of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis.
- Gore, O., & Botha J. (2022). *Exploring inequality in South African higher education institutions (HEIs) through vignettes, towards the next epoch of education BCES conference 20* (pp. 237–244). Sofia: Bulgarian Comparative Education Society.
- Gore, O. T. (2021). Gender inequality and intersectional disadvantage among students in South Africa universities. *The Journal of Gender Information and Development in Africa*, 10(1), 147–172. <https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-3622/v10n1a7>
- Kauffman, J. M., & Di Nuovo, S. (2015). Inclusive education in Italy: Description and reflections on full inclusion. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 30(4), 429–443.
- Le Roux, A. (2014). ‘We were not part of apartheid’: Rationalisations used by four white pre-service teachers to make sense of race and their own racial identities. *South African Journal of Education*, 34(2), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.15700/201412071137>
- Letseka, M. (2012). In defence of Ubuntu. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 31, 47–60. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-011-9267-2>
- Lyner-Cleophas, M., Swart, E., Chataika, T., & Bell, D. (2014). Increasing access into higher education: Insights from the 2011 African network on evidence-to-action on disability symposium. *African Journal of Disability*, 3(2), 78–80.
- Manase, N. (2021). Disguised blessings amid Covid-19: Opportunities and challenges for South African university students with learning disabilities. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 9(1), 107–118. <https://doi.org/10.24085/jsaa.v9i1.1431>
- Matshediso, K. R. (2010). Experiences of students with disabilities in South Africa: Extending the thinking behind disability support. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 24(5), 730–744.
- Mayat, N., & Amosun, S. L. (2011). Perceptions of academic staff towards accommodating students with disabilities in a civil engineering undergraduate program in a university in South Africa. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 24(1), 53–59.
- Mbembe, A. J. (2016). De-colonizing the university: New directions. *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education*, 15(1), 29–45.
- Mbigi, L. (1997). *Ubuntu: The African dream in management*. Randburg: Knowledge Resources.
- Mbuvha, T. (2019). Kinds of support offered by the disability unit to students with disabilities at institutions of higher learning in South Africa: A case study of the university of Venda. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 7(2), 57–73.
- Metz, T. (2014). Just the beginning for Ubuntu: Reply to Matolino and Kwindigwi. *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 33(1), 65–72. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2014.892680>

#### 46 Oliver T. Gore

- Metz, T. (2015). How the west was one: The western as individualist, the African as communitarian. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 47(11), 1175–1184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2014.991502>
- Metz, T. (2020). African theories of meaning in life: A critical assessment. *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 39(2), 113–126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2020.1770429>
- Mitra, S. (2018). *Disability, health and human development*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Mojola, A. O. (2019). Ubuntu in the Christian Theology and Praxis of Archbishop Desmond Tutu and its implications for global justice and human rights. In J. Ogude (Ed.), *Ubuntu and the reconstitution of community* (pp. 21–39). Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Murove, M. F. (2014). Ubuntu. *Diogenes*, 59(3–4), 36–47. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0392192113493737>
- Mutanga, O. (2018). Inclusion of students with disabilities in South African higher education. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 65(2), 229–242. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2017.1368460>
- Mutanga, O. (2020). *Students with disabilities and the transition to work: A capabilities approach*. London: Routledge.
- Mutanga, O., Manyonga, B., & Ngubane-Mokiwa, S. (2018). South Africa's new higher education disability policy is important, but flawed. *The Conversation*, July 23. <https://theconversation.com/south-africas-new-higher-education-disability-policy-is-important-but-flawed-99703>
- Mutanga, O., & Walker, M. (2017). Exploration of the academic lives of students with disabilities at South African universities: Lecturers' perspectives. *African Journal of Disability*, 6, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ajod.v6i0.316>
- Ndlovu, S. (2022). The pedagogic domain and epistemic access in South African higher education: The challenges for students with disabilities during the Covid-19 pandemic. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 36(4), 205–224. <https://dx.doi.org/10.20853/36-4-5194>
- Nel, M., Engelbrecht, P., Nel, N., & Tlale, D. (2013). South African teachers' views of collaboration within an inclusive education system. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 18, 903–917. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2013.858779>
- Ngomane, M. (2020). *Everyday Ubuntu: Living better together, the African way*. London: Harper Collins.
- Ntombela, S. (2022). Reimagining South African higher education in response to Covid-19 and ongoing exclusion of students with disabilities. *Disability and Society*, 37(3), 534–539. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2021.2004880>
- Ntombela, S., & Mahlangu, V. P. (2019). The inclusion and support of students with disabilities in the South African higher education system: Supporting students with disabilities. In R. Jeffries (Ed.), *Diversity, equity, and inclusivity in contemporary higher education* (pp. 195–210). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- Nussbaum, B. (2003). African culture and Ubuntu reflections of a South African in America. *World Business Academy Rekindling the Human Spirit in Business: Perspectives*, 17(1), 1–16.
- Nussbaum, M. (2010). *Not for profit: Why democracy needs humanities*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Disability and Inclusion in South African higher education 47*
- Osler, A., & Skarra, J. A. (2021). The rhetoric and reality of human rights education: Policy frameworks and teacher perspectives. *Multicultural Education Review*, 13(3), 191–210. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2005615X.2021.1964265>
- Papasotiriou, M., & Windle, J. (2012). The social experience of physically disabled Australian university students. *Disability and Society*, 27(7), 935–947. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2012.692027>
- Reddy, T. (2004). *Higher education and social transformation South African case study*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.
- Robeyns, I. (2017). *Wellbeing, freedom and social justice: The capability approach re-examined*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers.
- Roux, C. J., & Burnett, C. (2010). The extent to which students with disabilities are included in elite sports at Higher Education Institutions. *African Journal for Physical, Health Education, Recreation and Dance*, 120–131. <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC19675>
- Sibanda, P. (2014). The dimensions of “hunhu/Ubuntu” (humanism in the African sense): The Zimbabwean conception. *IOSR Journal of Engineering*, 4(1), 26–29. <https://doi.org/10.7833/109-0-126>
- South Africa. (1996). *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, South Africa*.

- Swart, E., & Pettipher, R. (2011). Perspectives on inclusive education. In E. Landsberg (Ed.), *Addressing barriers to learning in South Africa* (pp. 1–27). Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Tinto, V. (2012). *Completing college: Rethinking institutional action*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tutu, D. (2013). *God is not a Christian: Speaking truth in times of crisis*. London: Rider.
- Van Jaarsveldt, D. E., & Ndeya-Ndereya, C. N. (2015). 'It's not my problem': Exploring lecturers' distancing behaviour towards students with disabilities. *Disability and Society*, 30(2), 199–212. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2014.994701>
- Waghid, Y. (2020). Towards an Ubuntu philosophy of higher education in Africa. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 39(3), 299–308. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-020-09709-w>
- Watermeyer, B., Swartz, L., Lorenzo, T., Schneider, H., Priestley, M., & Schneider, M. (2006). *Disability and social change: A South African agenda*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Wolff, J., Lamb, E., & Zur-Szpiro, E. (2015). *A philosophical review of poverty*. London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Zongozzi, J. N. (2022). Accessible quality higher education for students with disabilities in a South African open distance and e-learning institution: Challenges. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 69(5), 1645–1657. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2020.1822518>