“We Are Just Accommodated but Not Included”: A Deleuzo-Guattarian Exploration of In/accessibility Involving Students with Disabilities in Higher Education in Zimbabwe.



A Thesis Submitted to the School of Social Work and Social Policy in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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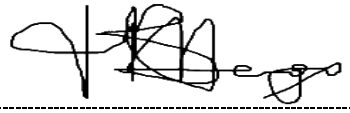
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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and it is entirely my own work. I confirm that the work has been completed in full compliance with relevant university policies, including the Academic Integrity policy, the Trinity Policy on Good Research Practice, and the guidance on AI and GenAI in Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research. I agree to deposit this thesis in the University's open access institutional repository or allow the library to do so on my behalf, subject to Irish Copyright Legislation and Trinity College Library conditions of use and acknowledgement.

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Signed



Vitalis Bengano

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my friends with disabilities: Lovemore Chitaka (2017), Tinashe Ganyaupfu (2022), and Brighton Ndebele (2023). May your souls rest in eternal peace. Dear Cdes, you are integral to the assemblage that co-produced this thesis. Our interactions, both in higher education and beyond, opened lines of flight to think differently about disability and impairments. You are the pulse beneath every page of this thesis.

> *"All materialities, whether 'biologically alive' or not, are 'bona fide agents' in the production of the social and natural world, rather than the 'recalcitrant objects' that philosophy and sociology have made of them."* (Burr and Fox, 2023:5).

Abstract

Legally binding international and national policy instruments, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), obligate state parties to protect and promote the rights of people with disabilities (PWDs), including access to education (Article 24) at all levels on the basis of equal opportunity. Formal education is regarded as a potential site for transformation, particularly for those living in chronic poverty. Although the number of students with disabilities (SWDs) entering higher education is rising globally, research suggests that SWDs continue to encounter accessibility challenges within higher education environments. Yet, accessibility is a precondition for independent living and full participation on an equal basis with everyone (UN, 2006). The problem of inaccessibility is considered to be exacerbated in resource-poor contexts due to their unique and complex socio-material conditions, particularly poverty. Inaccessible higher education environments compromise educational outcomes for SWDs, thereby heightening the chances of falling into the poverty trap. To contribute to the ongoing discussion at the intersection of disability and accessibility in higher education environments in the Global South, I experimented with Deleuze and Guattari's idea of assemblage analysis to explore how in/accessibility is reproduced within a higher education institution (HEI) in Zimbabwe. I aimed to move away from essentialist and binary conceptualisations of accessibility and inaccessibility, defined by essential and immutable characteristics. Without an iota of doubt about these being fictitious or to be abandoned, they arguably reflect a simplistic view of accessibility, which can be problematic in resource-poor contexts.

Data for the study were collected through an experimental Deleuzo-Guattarian informed qualitative inquiry, using multiple data collection methods: walking/go-along interviews, photovoice, focus group discussions and follow-up interviews with twenty-six purposively selected undergraduate students who self-identified as visually and physically impaired, studying at a HEI in Zimbabwe. The study embedded a reflexive approach through the use of vignettes as a reflective tool. Drawing on new materialist literature, data were analysed through an experimental process of 'assemblage component accounting'. This process produced four overlapping in/accessibility assemblages: place/space, teaching, learning and assessment, and digital and extracurricular activities (ECAs) assemblages. Each assemblage elucidates how in/accessibility is reproduced in that domain. Although the labels may read familiar and conventional, they emerged from data analysis rather than being imposed as categories. As depicted in Figure 1, the four assemblages ceaselessly overlap and intersect in a complex fashion.

Research findings indicate that in/accessibility within the HEI studied is ceaselessly reproduced along a continuum, mediated by dynamic and shifting socio-material components that continuously produce in/capacities for SWDs in

accessing, on an equal basis with everyone, premises, products, services and facilities open to the university community. Notwithstanding the socio-material relations that co-produced accessibility (both formal and informal), findings strongly suggest that SWDs endlessly engage in countless inaccessibility battles, constantly negotiating and renegotiating access as they navigate higher education. Inaccessibility produced both transient and potentially long-lasting effects, such as missing lectures, missing and incorrect grades, physical and emotional exhaustion, exclusion from university communal spaces and over-reliance on personal helpers for accessibility. SWDs also spent longer to navigate physical and digital spaces, among other challenges. Findings from this study contribute to advancing our understanding of how in/accessibility is reproduced in elusive and resource-poor complex contexts, typified by ever-shifting socio-material relations. The study provides a framework to rethink and respond to disability and in/accessibility, beyond premeditated, legislative adherence and tick-box approaches of accessibility audits toward more complex and fluid strategies that can transform higher education spaces and maximise equity of opportunity for all students. The study proposes a Relational Collaborative Model, which can serve as an analytical lens for relational, complex and nuanced explorations of the socio-material production of in/accessibility for SWDs in HEIs and beyond.

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List of Acronyms

BEAM	Basic Education Assistance Module
CAQDAS Software	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis
CHEST	Combined Higher Education Software Team
CHS	College of Health Sciences
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
DDA	Department of Disability Affairs
DFID	Department for International Development
DPA	Disabled Persons Act
DPO	Disabled People's Organisation
DRO	Disability Resource Office
DSS	Disability Support Services
ECA	Extra-curricular Activities
EDI	Equality Diversity and Inclusion
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes
FAO	Food Aid Organisation
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
ICDL	International Certificate of Digital Literacy
ICT	Information Communication and Technology
ID	Intellectual Disability
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
IMF	International Monitory Fund
IT	Information Technology
JAWS	Job Access with Speech
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals

MoPSLSD	Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Development
NDB	National Disability Board
NDP	National Disability Policy
NMQI	New Materialist Qualitative Inquiry
NVDA	Non-Visual Desktop Access
OPC	Office of the President and Cabinet
OPD	Organisation of People with Disabilities
PA	Personal Assistant
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PC	Personal Computer
PC	Physically challenged
PIL	Participant Information Literacy
PWD	Persons with Disabilities
PWLE	People with Lived Experience
RAG	Research Advisory Group
RCM	Relational Collaborative Model
RCZ	Reformed Church in Zimbabwe
REAMS	Research Ethics Application Management System
REC	Research Ethics Committee
SGD	Sustainable Development Goals
SMAE	Socio-Material-Affective-Embodied
SMS	Short Message Service
SRC	Student Representative Council
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Technology
SWD	Students with Disabilities
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TCD	Trinity College Dublin
TLA	Teaching Learning and Assessment
UCC	University College Cork
UD	Universal Design

UDL	Universal Design for Learning
UK	United Kingdom
UNCRPD with Disabilities	United Nations Convention on the Rights of People
UNDIS	United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy
UNESCO Organisation	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNPRPD with Disabilities	United Nations Partnership for the Rights of Persons
UPIAS Segregation	Union of the Physically Impaired against
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
VC	Vice Chancellor
VI	Visually Impaired
WHO	World Health Organisation
WPS	Writer, Presentation and Spreadsheet
ZANU PF	Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front
ZESA	Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority
ZITISU	Zimbabwe Tertiary Institutions Sports Union
ZUSA	Zimbabwe Universities Sports Association

CHAPTER 1

Introduction to the study

1.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the study. It begins by establishing the relevance of the study topic, followed by the rationale for the approach taken to address the identified issue. I will then present my personal motivation for pursuing this study, as well as the specific research questions I aimed to answer through this study. In an effort to make the study accessible, I will also explain some of the key terminology that is woven throughout this thesis. The chapter also discusses three disability models that frame the understanding of disability and impairment in Zimbabwe. It then proceeds to discuss disability interpretations, along with the disability situation in Zimbabwe. The, then chapter chronicles the nexus between disability, poverty and higher education, along with a justification why this nexus matters. The chapter closes with an outline of the thesis structure.

1.1 Relevance of the study topic

Accessibility is regarded as a precondition for PWDs to live independently and participate fully and equally in society (UN General Comment No. 2, 2014:1). It is established as a principle (Article 3) and further elaborated upon in Article 9 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Following the promulgation of the CRPD in 2006, there has been a growing corpus of theoretical and empirical data worldwide tackling the question of disability and accessibility, across various sectors of society, including education, health, employment, recreation, tourism etc. However, two decades after the adoption of the CRPD, several studies suggest that accessibility, remains a challenge for PWDs globally (Jackson, 2018:1; Tudzi, Bugri and Danso, 2017). The problem of inaccessibility is reported to be more severe in poorer countries (see Aldersey et al., 2018:25), primarily due to poverty conditions, which hinder the full implementation of the CRPD in those contexts, despite their status as member states. Ferri (2024) suggests that a thorough understanding of accessibility is necessary to fully implement the CRPD. Egard and colleagues (2022:2) noted that “the burning issues of accessibility today constitute a set of dynamic and elusive phenomena that demand to be studied through equally dynamic and inventive approaches.” Arguably, issues of accessibility for PWDs are more elusive in the Global South. Therefore, this study aimed to contribute to the understanding of disability and accessibility in higher education in a resource-poor context of Zimbabwe.

1.2 Rationale for the study

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimated that 16% or 1.3 billion people of the world’s population have a disability (WHO, 2023), with 80% of them

considered to be in the Global South, often living in conditions of intense and chronic poverty[1] (Grech, 2016:4). Regardless of geographical location, PWDs tend to constitute the largest, poorest, most marginalised and excluded minority group in every society (see Bannink Mbazzi et al., 2020; Groce, 2005; Meekosha and Soldatic, 2011). Several studies have reported on the bidirectional disability-poverty relationship, wherein poverty causes disability and vice versa (Eide and Ingstad, 2013; Trani and Loeb, 2012; Groce, Kett, Lang and Trani, 2011; Mitra, Posarac and Vick, 2013). Braunholtz (2007) acknowledged that exit routes from poverty are often hard to find for the chronically poor. Braunholtz (2007) identified two important routes out of poverty, particularly for those who have experienced long term poverty: high dependency on physical labour and formal education. The formal education route is especially important for PWDs, considering the nature of some impairments. Despite the reported increase in the number of PWDs accessing higher education globally, Abuya and Githinji (2021:1) noted that SWDs continue to face discrimination and other violations of their rights and freedoms within the institutions that admit them. One of the challenges faced by SWDs in HEIs is inaccessibility, which forecloses opportunities for equal participation. Inaccessible higher education environments compromises educational outcomes for SWDs, thereby jeopardising the promise of education as a vehicle for upward social mobility (see Singal, Lynch and Johansson, 2018:4). Precluding SWDs from advanced education dramatically increases their likelihood of experiencing poverty, and this exclusion compounds the vast challenges faced by PWDs and their communities in the Global South (Heymann, Stein and Moreno, 2014; Trani, Kett, Bakhshi and Bailey, 2011). Without robust empirical evidence regarding the situation of SWDs in HEIs, the challenges they encounter are likely to compound.

Without attempting to discredit the growing body of studies at the intersection of disability and accessibility, most of these studies tend to gravitate towards essentialist and binary approaches. Essentialism and binary thinking remain the dominant ways of interpreting the world around us. No wonder binaries such as nature/culture, human/non-human, normal/abnormal, Global North/Global South, and most relevant to this study, disabled/non-disabled, impaired/not impaired and accessible/inaccessible, are deeply ingrained in our everyday practices without questioning. Essentialism assumes that for any specific kind of entity, there exists a specific set of attributes or characteristics that any entity of that kind must possess (Feely, 2016). Germane to this study, accessible higher education environments are expected to adhere to the principles of universal design (UD) with ramps, wide entrances, smooth surfaces, elevators and

[1] The distinguishing feature of chronic poverty is extended duration in absolute poverty. Therefore, chronically poor people always, or usually, live below a poverty line, which is normally defined in terms of a money indicator (e.g., consumption, income, etc.), but could also be defined in terms of wider or subjective aspects of deprivation. This is different from the transitorily poor, who move in and out of poverty, or only occasionally fall below the poverty line (Braunholtz (2007).

automatic doors, among a whole range of accessibility features. While essentialism and binaries help us bring order to a complex and chaotic world, some critical voices have raised concerns against essentialism for causing significant suffering for millions of people labelled as having anomalous bodies or minds. For (Feely, 2016:864) essentialism functions to exclude these people from full human status and, at times, serves as a basis for justifying eugenic efforts to eliminate them.

Arguably, the CRPD suggests an essentialist and binary understanding of accessibility and disability. Article 9 requires State parties to "take appropriate measures, including the identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility" (UN, 2006:9). I fully support the idea of identifying and removing barriers to ensure full accessibility for PWDs to public places, products, services and facilities open to the public. However, the notion of identifying and eliminating barriers and obstacles suggests essentialist and binary thinking. From an essentialist and binary perspective, universally designed physical spaces, products, services and facilities are presumed to have premeditated, essentialised and immutable. In accessible places, products, services and facilities are presumed to have specific and features that can be eliminated to enhance accessibility. Consequently, State parties to the CRPD are required to identify and eliminate these barriers. Arguably, this suggests a simplistic and context-independent understanding of how accessibility is experienced in the everyday lives of PWDs, particularly in resource-poor contexts. Such conceptualisation may have contributed to the proliferation of studies exploring barriers and facilitators to accessibility. Some of the studies, inspired by the social model of disability, adopt a binary approach to the identification of these barriers, e.g., physical, attitudinal, legislative and economic, among others. Relevant as these studies are, essentialist and binary explorations of accessibility in resource-poor contexts run the risk of producing incomplete and partial accounts of the everyday accessibility experiences of PWDs in such contexts. Essentialist explorations ignore the elusive, dynamic and ever-shifting socio-material conditions that characterise those contexts. Writing in the UK context, Ferri (2024:14) noted that accessibility is "inherently and fundamentally complex." In the words of Grech (2015:11), the Global South is a 'complex and hybrid space' that should be understood 'in its own right'. Therefore, there is a need for equally radical and complex methodological approaches that go beyond the traditional nomenclature of identifying barriers and facilitators to accessibility.

St. Pierre (2025:164) recommended researchers to engage with philosophy to allow the intensity of philosophical concepts to reorient their thinking. Following this suggestion, I experimented with a strand in new materialism literature-Deleuze and Guattari's idea of assemblages, to explore how in/accessibility is produced in a HEI in Zimbabwe. Contrary to essentialist and binary theorisations, assemblage analysis supplies a, relational and context-dependent understanding of accessibility. In Deleuze's sense, bodies (both human and non-human) are

understood not by their essential attributes but by their contextual capacities. In this sense, an elevator/lift is seen as having the capacity to accomplish a multiplicity of functions, such as making the top floors of a storey building accessible. However, it can also trap people. Similar to a knife, we cannot truly ascertain its functions outside of its contextual relations. In a justice assemblage, a knife can be subject to forensic analysis for the commission of a crime. In a kitchen setting, the same knife can produce salad. Similarly, an ambulance siren can signify hope and relief within an ill-health assemblage. However, it can be disruptive when it enters an examination assemblage. These examples provide contextual understandings of phenomena rather than immutable features. Leveraging existing studies, I aim to go beyond seemingly stable barriers and facilitators waiting to be identified, to explore the contextual and relational reproduction of in/accessibility in specific situations within a HEI. Assemblage approach is particularly important in resource-poor contexts due to their socio-material dynamism, typified by currency devaluation, constant changes in currencies and inflationary environments (e.g., in Zimbabwe), electrical power and water cuts, climate change, public policy shifts and high internet costs, which singly or collectively restrict accessibility for SWDs.

Inspired by Deleuze and Guattari, I experimented with new materialist qualitative inquiry, in which I drew on traditional qualitative research methodology, new materialisms, and post-qualitative inquiry. In this approach, I read research methodologies with and through each other rather than against one another, leveraging the strengths of each. For example, qualitative research methods excel at providing humanistic accounts of in/accessibility, while new materialisms expand our analytical lens to engender a socio-material and entangled understanding of accessibility. Combining multiple traditions has the potential to produce a more complex and nuanced map of the production of in/accessibility (though always incomplete) than either approach in isolation. I do not suggest that insights from existing studies based on binary and essentialist approaches should be replaced by new materialist scholarship. Throughout this thesis, I am guided by Toohey's (2018:2) notion that new materialism (or posthumanism) does not necessarily offer the only way forward, nor does difference necessarily mean opposition. Therefore, the experimental methodological approach adopted in this study is by no means oppositional to traditional qualitative explorations of disability and accessibility; rather, it complements existing methodologies.

1.3 Motivation for the study

My motivation for adopting an anti-essentialist approach to in/accessibility for SWDs in higher education was born out of my personal experiences as a personal helper for SWDs in Zimbabwe (2013-2020). During that period, I had the opportunity to navigate some of the physical places/spaces, products, services and facilities on campus alongside SWDs. I also had the chance to hear numerous stories from SWDs regarding accessibility issues on campus. During

this period, I also travelled for sports events as a personal assistant for SWDs. What struck me most during that time was the multiplicity of methods used by SWDs to access various places, products and services, both on and off campus. In some instances, students who used wheelchairs were lifted into and out of particular buildings, while in other situations, they would wait outside of buildings e.g. libraries and ask colleagues, friends or random students to collect some items on their behalf from physically inaccessible places. Some students opted to miss lectures due to inaccessible venues and teaching methods. It was also during this time that I learned how SWDs, often seen merely as recipients of services, actively contributed towards fostering accessible HEIs environments, not only for fellow SWDs but also for non-disabled students. However, this is rarely acknowledged. Through my everyday interactions with students and academics with disabilities, I developed a relational understanding of disability. However, at that time, I was not aware of a formal theory beyond the social model of disability, which offers a balanced approach to document the interaction of SWDs with their environments.

When I started my PhD in 2021, I sought a theoretical framework that could elucidate the experiences of SWDs in contexts where poverty indiscriminately affects a significant proportion of the population, both disabled and non-disabled. Having attended higher education in Zimbabwe, I have personal lived experience as a non-disabled student of going through college from a poor background. I also bring first-hand experiences of crowding in certain open spaces on campus to access better Wi-Fi connectivity. Therefore, I bring to this study personal lived experience of poverty in the Global South. I embody the intersection of poverty and higher education in a Global South context. In this nexus, I share the view that higher education is a potential site for escaping chronic poverty. This belief resonates with me as someone who has escaped chronic poverty through the formal education route (see Braunholtz, 2007). Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, I was interested in understanding how socio-material relations within a higher education context assemble, disassemble and reassemble to produce in/accessibility. I aimed to address the overarching anti-essentialist and non-binary question: ‘How is in/accessibility reproduced within a HEI in a resource-poor context in the Global South?’ Below, I state the specific research questions and aims of the study.

1.4 Research questions and aim

My specific research questions were:

1. How is in/accessibility reproduced in a HEI in a resource-poor context in the Global South?
2. How is in/accessibility reproduced for SWDS?
3. How do the empirical findings advance the conceptualisation of in/accessibility in a HEI in a resource-poor context?

4. How can the socio-material relations within the HEI be reconfigured to enhance accessibility for SWDs?

In this study, I adopted a relational and anti-binary approach, moving beyond personal lived experiences of in/accessibility. I sought to explore how assemblages of both human and non-human matter co-produce in/accessibility for SWDs within the HEI. This approach should not be construed as undervaluing the voices and personal experiences of in/accessibility from SWDs. Instead, the relational approach locates personal accounts and students' voices within the broader HEI's socio-material assemblage, in which in/accessibility is ceaselessly co-produced rather than as a stable and binary state of either accessible or inaccessible, enhancing and restricting access to places/spaces, products, services and facilities open to the university community. In the section below, I discuss some of the key terminology used in this study.

1.5 A note on terminology

This study uses several terms, some of them drawn from new materialisms, particularly Deleuze and Guattari, as well as disability studies. In this section, I aim to explain some of the key terminology that frequently feature in this thesis. Specifically, I discuss: "assemblage", "affect" "disabled" along with persons with disabilities" (PWDs), "physically challenged" (PC), "Global North" along with "Global South," and "accessibility".

1.5.1 Assemblage

Assemblage thinking is a philosophical strand within the portfolio of ontological approaches collectively known as new materialisms. It is widely associated with the philosophical work of French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and his colleague, Félix Guattari. The concept has been interpreted, adopted and understood in various ways over the last two decades. Anderson and McFarlane (2011) noted that there is no simple 'correct' way to use the term. In assemblage thinking, all social production is perceived to emerge relationally as entities affect each other (Deleuze, 1988; Deleuze and Guattari, 1988) and from the consequent capacities and desires deriving from these relationships (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984). Assemblage thinking is uninterested in what bodies, things, ideas or social institutions 'are'; rather, it sees them as inherently relational and interactive (Deleuze, 1990; Gatens, 1996) in producing specific capacities for action and desire: 'what a body can do' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988:256). In this sense, researchers are not interested in the essential attributes of products, facilities and services, but rather how diverse elements relationally produce accessibility and inaccessibility.

This study is uninterested in essential accessibility features (what in/accessible places, products, services and facilities are), but is preoccupied with the relational interactions of bodies (human and non-human), including abstractions, within the

HEI, and how they co-produce in/accessibility for SWDs. Assemblage approach supplies conceptual tools for de-individualising disability and impairments, viewing them as relationally reproduced, rather than as essential attributes of particular individuals. For example, a chemical compound is pharmacologically significant in relation to a body tissue and whether it acts as a 'medicine' or a 'poison' depends upon how the tissue is affected and how these relations are interpreted by human observers. Therefore, a nuanced account of accessibility emerges from explorations that keep in sharp focus the entanglement between SWDs and their socio-material contexts.

In this study, I was not interested in the essential attributes of premises, services, products, and facilities; rather, I was interested in understanding their socio-material relations in specific events. This explains why in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 (Research Findings), I focused my analysis on mapping out socio-material components that assembled around particular events involving SWDs and explored the resultant in/capacities produced. It is of paramount importance to note that assemblages of relations develop in unpredictable ways around actions and events, 'in a kind of chaotic network of habitual and non-habitual connections, always in flux, always reassembling in different ways' (Potts, 2004). Another key concept in Deleuze's ontology of assemblage that features in this study is 'affect', and is explained below.

1.5.2 Affect

Affect, as used in this study, departs from conventional usage related to feelings and emotions. In the Deleuzean sense, an 'affect' means the *capacity to affect or be affected* (Deleuze, 1988). In this sense, the conventional conception of human agency is replaced in Deleuzian ontology. In Deleuze's ontology, both human and non-human, animate and inanimate entities, are understood by their capacity to affect and be affected. Burr and Fox (2023), in their study in a dissection room at a university in the UK, explored the affective capacities of dead human bodies/cadavers and identified multiple affects, which included emotional, financial and psychological. Within an assemblage, any relation or combination of relations may affect, or be affected by another element in the network (Buchanan, 1997). Because bodies in any assemblage are relational, one affect can produce further affects. Since one affect can produce more than one capacity, affects flow 'rhizomically' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988:7), branching, reversing flows, coalescing and rupturing. This view contrasts sharply with cause and effect theorisations. It is through this flow of affects within assemblages, such as HEIs, that societies and history unfold (Thrift, 2004). This understanding presents a valuable opportunity for to reimagine stable, essentialist and binary conceptions of accessibility and inaccessibility. Savage (2020:19) noted that scholars in various fields are utilising assemblage thinking to gain new insights into diverse and complex social formations, both theoretically and methodologically. In this study, I experimented with assemblage thinking,

both theoretically and methodologically. Leveraging the concept of affect, I went a step further than humanistic accounts, to pay equal attention to the affective capacities of non-human matter in each in/accessibility encounter to explore how it contributed in reproducing in/accessibility. I also drew on the concept to experiment with *affective reflexivity* (see Chapter 5).

1.5.3 Disabled people along with People with disabilities

This study does not delve into the contentious issue of disability terminology and the dichotomy between the terms 'disabled people' and 'persons with disabilities.' How people 'label' or identify themselves is deeply personal and deserves respect. Pearson et al. (2019) cautioned that a one-size-fits-all approach to disability terminology is not appropriate. The terminology used to describe disability has been a subject of debate, both in academia (see Dunn and Andrews, 2015; Lister et al., 2020; Taboas et al., 2023) and in other forums, such as disability activism and advocacy. Contemporary academic debates seem to resemble a tug-of-war between identity-first and person-first terminology, such as "disabled student" versus "student with a disability," respectively. Person-first language emphasises the person, then the disability (Flink, 2021), while identity-first language places the disability before the person (Flink, 2019:79). According to Gernsbacher (2017), person-first language, which places the person before the disability or identity, is currently in widespread use. Conversely, Lister et al. (2020) found that overall, there exists no strong inclination towards a single model of language, as different people have varying preferences that depend on context. A survey conducted in the U.S. (n=728) reported that 87% of autistic adults preferred to self-identify using identity-first language (Taboas et al., 2023:565). This study uses the person-first language "students with disabilities" and "people with disabilities" in alignment with the CRPD. In this sense, I emphasise the students rather than the impairment. Identity-first language was used when citing scholarly work to retain the authors' choice of terminology. It emerged during fieldwork in Zimbabwe that the terms "physically challenged" or "PC," and "visually impaired" or "VI," were commonly used by research participants at the HEI studied to refer to students with physical and visual impairments, respectively. These terms are also found on the HEI's website. This study uses "physically challenged" or "PC" in participants' quotes to retain their usage by participants.

1.5.4 Global North along with Global South

This study uses 'Global North' and 'Global South'. In general usage, these concepts are broadly synonymous with 'rich' and 'poor', 'developed' and 'developing', rather than mere geographical divides between countries (Singal, 2010:417). The Global South is largely constituted by former colonies and poorer countries. Singal (2010) notes that there is a fundamental economic inequality between the two blocs, resulting in inequalities in the standard of living, resources available and the dominance of the Northern bloc in international development.

These concepts widely feature in disability studies, often in a dichotomous fashion. This has manifested in disability debates framed around disability theories and practices developed in the Global North and imposed to interpret disability phenomena in the Global South (see Katsui and Swartz, 2021; Grech and Soldatic, 2016; Grech, 2011; Katsui, 2012). For Meekosha (2011:668), the wholesale transfer of methodologies from North to South runs the risk of 'scholarly colonialism'. Katsui and Swartz (2021: 204) argue that reliance on theories developed in the Global North may reinforce the epistemic vulnerability of disability studies in the Global South. Some critics of 'scholarly colonialism' have argued for a Southern theory of disability (see Nguyen, 2018).

While I fully acknowledge the prevalence of disability theories developed in the Global North and the need for decolonisation, I argue for hybridised theories of disability that privileges neither Northern nor Southern theories. In this sense, disability theories and practices should be read with and through each other, rather than against each other, i.e., North versus Southern theory. Instead of magnifying the binaries (Northern versus Southern disability theory), I argue for collapsing and blurring these distinctions, where disability theories inform one another. Arguably, the tendency to classify phenomena, such as North versus South, heightens the risk of categorising people i.e., disabled versus non-disabled, leading to differential treatment. Instead, I am interested in a non-essentialist question: 'What can disability theories (both North and South) do?', rather than: 'What is a Southern or Northern theory of disability?' The former question sets us on an endless journey to leverage the strengths of existing disability theories and explore new capacities to enhance our understanding of disability. In this study, I retain the concepts of 'Global North' and 'Global South.' However, in line with new materialism, I present them from a horizontal ontological perspective rather than a vertical and unidirectional one (North to South). They are conceived along a Global North/South continuum and understood through Spinoza's concept of affect-the capacity of Global North and South disability theories to affect disability knowledge production, rather than 'iron fettering' them in rigidly defined geographical contexts e.g., Northern versus Southern theory.

1.5.5 Accessibility

There exists no specific and agreed definition of accessibility. Ferri (2024) noted that the term is used in several ways and conveys different meanings in different contexts. For Broderick and Ferri (2019), accessibility refers to the possibility for PWDs to access goods, services, facilities, premises and the physical environment on an equal basis with others. It should be noted that accessibility spans beyond the essential features of a premise, good, and service, to encompass socio-material relations in specific contexts. The right to access has been established in various international human rights legal frameworks. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (article 5c) established the right of access as part of international human rights law. However, accessibility in these frameworks is generalised to all citizens. Article 25 (5) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights only refers to access in the context of public services. Similarly, Article 5(f), of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination only recognises physical access by all citizens to places or services open to the general public e.g., such as transport, hotels, restaurants, cafes, theatres and parks. However, access to information and communication technologies, particularly by PWDs is not mentioned. As recalled by Broderick (2020:396), although accessibility was mentioned in various soft law instruments predating the convention, 'the CRPD was the first binding human rights treaty to enshrine the accessibility norm'. The convention includes accessibility among its general principles (article 3) and elucidates it in Article 9. Article 9 stipulates:

> *"To enable PWDs to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, States parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to PWDs access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communication, including information and communication technologies and systems and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas".* (CRPD, 2006).

It is important to note that accessibility is defined neither in the CRPD nor in General Comment No. 2 of the CRPD (see Lawson, 2025:5). However, it is clearly stated that accessibility is a precondition for PWDs to live independently and participate fully and equally in society (General Comment No.2, 2014:1). Accordingly, accessibility is a precondition for SWDs to learn independently and participate fully and equally in HEIs. Despite the existence of legally binding instruments, accessibility remains a key challenge for PWDs globally (Jackson, 2018:1; Tudzi, Bugri and Danso, 2017). The problem of accessibility is considered to be more severe in the Global South, which warrants more research to inform the development of accessibility policies and standards. Having discussed the key terminology used in this thesis, I will now turn to discuss three key disability models, found to frame disability understanding in Zimbabwe i.e. The moral/religious model, medical model and the human rights-based approach.

1.6. Disability models and approaches

Our everyday formal and informal, covert and overt responses to PWDs reflect our internalised assumptions about disability and impairments. How disability and PWDs are viewed and treated is a spatio-temporal phenomenon. Disability and impairment have been understood through disability models. These models are closely linked to society's understanding of impairment and disability throughout

history (Barnes, 2003). Definitions and conceptualisations of disability presented in these models reflect the worldview of specific time periods and cultures (Drum, 2009). It is crucial to note that disability models are not theories in themselves, but rather simple representations of concepts that aid understanding and facilitate decision making (Garcia Iriarte, 2016:13). Evans et al. (2017:55) noted that most disability models are closer to paradigms than they are to theories in that they present a certain way of viewing disability based on people's perceptions, beliefs and experiences rather than research data. If the conceptualisation of impairment and disability varies across time and space, arguably disability is nothing short of a 'product' of a 'social engineering'-socially constructed and deconstructed from socio-material raw materials of historical periods. For Olkin (1999), disability is a social construction, the meaning of which shifts over time and place and is influenced by political ideology, economic conditions and cultural values. According to Olkin (1999:24), each disability model has a perspective on what 'the problem' of disability is, who holds the problem and avenues that best address the problem". Disability models supply the conceptual tools to interpret disability policy and practice. This is crucial given that interactions between PWDs and various societal institutions, including the family, community, workplace and educational system are dictated largely by the meaning that society attaches to disability during a specific time period (Evans et al., 2017:55). Assumptions regarding impairment and disability determine who gets what, across time and space. For example, while in some parts of the world, people with intellectual disabilities have access to higher education, information available on the HEI studied indicate that no student with an ID was enrolled in 2024. However, this could be a different story in the future. Expanding on Olkin (1999), disability models unravel the "what," "why," "when," "where," "who," and "how", or rather, the "6Ws1H" of disability. In this sense, disability models address the following questions:

1. What is the problem?
2. Why is it a problem?
3. When does the problem arise?
4. Where does the problem play out?
5. Who is affected?
6. How can we respond to the identified problem?

Spatio-temporal conceptualisations of impairment and disability have given rise to several disability models throughout human history. In this thesis, I discuss three common disability models reported in literature found to frame interpretations of disability in Zimbabwe: Moral/Religious Model, Medical Model and the Human Rights Based Approach. Disability models co-exist because older models do not disappear when new models emerge (Evans et al., 2017:55).

Typically, while the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) is the contemporary global framework, vestiges of the Moral Model still persist in Zimbabwe.

1.6.1 The Moral model of disability

The moral is also referred to as the religious model. Proponents of the moral model view "disability as a defect caused by moral lapse or sins" (Olkin, 1999:25). Olkin (1999:25) noted that during medieval times, when religious beliefs and practices dominated the thinking and actions of Western civilisation, people believed that disability was God's punishment for "sin, failure of faith, moral lapse, or evil" committed by individuals themselves or by members of their families. Because defects were seen as the result of the individual's moral misbehaviour, they brought shame on both the individual and the family. During the middle Ages, those who were viewed as defective were "shunned, condemned or used for entertainment purposes, e.g., as court jesters" (Drum, 2009:27). While the moral model is not the most prevalent view of disability today, vestiges of it are still evident in Zimbabwe. The parliamentary Thematic Committee on Gender report on the plight of PWDs in Zimbabwe (2018:7) reported that:

> *"…due to denial and stigma, families with disabled children tend to hide them, locking them in doors all the times... Officials at Jairos Jiri Centers in Kadoma and Gweru reported that their institutions were viewed as dumping places for children with disabilities. Some families were said to be unwilling to take their disabled children from Jairos Jiri Centers during school holidays."*

Although PWDs are full rights holders under the CRPD, their lived experiences in some cases in Zimbabwe speak otherwise. Although Zimbabwe is a state party to the CRPD, disability still carries negative and deficit connotations. The practice of locking down children with disabilities by families reveal the painful lives that children with disabilities have to endure at the hands of their own families in Zimbabwe. This significantly shrinks opportunities and life chances available to them, thereby setting them on a path to chronic poverty. In a HEI, SWDs can be perceived as moral deviants or their families having done immoral activities resulting in an impairment. Within such framings, the moral model serves to justify the avoidance of interactions with students labelled as impaired. Besides the moral model, the medical model was found to be prevalent in Zimbabwe.

1.6.2 The medical model of disability

Many factors converged during the mid-1800s that led to the emergence of the medical model, particularly the beginning of the scientific and medical fields during the late 1700s and their refinement throughout the 1800s (Castañeda, Hopkins and Peters, 2013). A second factor was the emergence of the concept of the "average man" whose characteristics and qualities were assumed to be "correct" or "normal" (Davis, 2006:6). Any deviation from the average was viewed as deviant, abnormal and in need of correction in order for a person to be

acceptable in society. Adherents of the medical model view disability as “a medical problem that resides in the individual, a defect in or failure of a bodily system and as such is inherently abnormal and pathological” (Olkin, 1999:26). If the person is to fully function as a human being, this defect must be “cured or eliminated” (Siebers, 2008:3). Under this model, medical professionals have dominion and control over PWDs and PWDs have to follow medical advice passively, without questioning. The medical model has been criticised for emphasising biological aspects and internalising disability while ignoring factors such as culture, environment, attitudes and prejudices that collectively shape the everyday lives of PWDs. A contemporary manifestation of the medical model in higher education is the requirement for SWDs for diagnostic information to avail of disability support services. In this study, one participant with a physical impairment recounted their struggles to avail of a scholarship fund on the grounds that their impairment was deemed minor. Viewing SWDs as unfit and sick, negatively impact on the range of opportunities that can be made available to them by HEIs, academic staff and non-disabled students. SWDs are less likely to be consulted or genuinely involved in decision making processes on matters that directly affect them such as curriculum designing. In this model, the expectation for SWDs is to adjust to the HEI’s normative practices, rather than vice-versa.

1.6.3 The Human Rights Based Approach

Decades of the global disability movement and the self-organisation of PWDs led to the negotiation and promulgation of the CRPD in 2006, which is framed around a human rights-based approach. Although I have discussed the human rights model under disability models, it is important to note that I have used ‘approach’ instead of ‘model’, being mindful of Lawson and Beckett’s (2021:364) argument that, the focus or subject of the human rights model of disability, is not the concept or idea of disability, but rather provide guidance on policy responses to disability. Following Lawson and Beckett’s (2021) argument regarding the human rights model as a model of disability policy, evidence of the impact of this model on the policy and legislative front is evident in Zimbabwe. The rights of PWDs in Zimbabwe are protected under several pieces of legislation, such as Sections 22 and 83 of the national constitution, Amendment No. 20 of 2013. In 2021, Zimbabwe adopted the National Disability Policy, framed around the CRPD, which recognises the rights of PWDs across diverse sectors of life, such as education, employment, health, recreation and tourism, to mention just a few. Relevant to this study, the government of Zimbabwe, in partnership with the UNPRPD, formulated guidelines in 2024 on how to provide reasonable accommodation and accessibility for PWDs within government ministries. However, the extent to which these guidelines have improved access to premises, products, facilities and services open to the public, remain to be known.

A HEI, guided by the human rights model, can develop institution-wide policies to ensure equitable access to premises, products, facilities and services for the university community. Despite the strengths of the human rights model, particularly regarding disability policy and legislation, this approach has faced significant criticism, especially concerning its full operationalisation in Global South contexts. Translating policy and legislative provisions from paper into practical benefits for PWDs in poverty- stricken areas, particularly in rural regions of the Global South, presents a considerable challenge. Within HEIs, Disability Resource Offices may be inclined to adopt a human rights model; however, financial resource shortages can hinder their ability to provide requested services, such as digital devices for SWDs in line with the provisions of the CRPD, which can be further complicated by unreliable internet connectivity. Having discussed the three key models that frames disability policy and practice in Zimbabwe, I will now turn to discuss how disability is interpreted and understood in Zimbabwe.

1.7 Interpretations of disability and impairment in Zimbabwe

Although Zimbabwe ratified the CRPD in 2013, deficit framings of disability still persist. An empirical study by Dube et al. (2021:14) covering five districts in Zimbabwe revealed that in most communities, the definitions and interpretations of disability reflected numerous myths, fears, suspicions and misconceptions. Dube et al. (2021:7) further reported that participants attributed mental retardation (sic) to witchcraft. The communities' understanding of disability predominantly reflects moral/religious and medical models. One participant stated that the birth of a child with a disability was seen as punishment from God for committing adultery, either by the husband or the wife. Almost two decades ago, Lang and Charowa (2007:14) found that disability was invariably perceived through a traditional/religious lens, leading to negative connotations. These findings were consistent with an earlier study by Marongwe and Mate (2007:25), which indicated that the causes of disability in Zimbabwe were frequently attributed to witchcraft and occultism. However, it was reported that parents and guardians with a family member with a disability attributed impairments to a variety of issues, including their mothers having suffered gender-based violence during pregnancy, substance and drug abuse by pregnant mothers, natural accidents during or after birth and diseases like polio (Dube et al., 2021:9). These findings indicate the continued prevalence of deficit framings regarding disability, despite Zimbabwe being a state party to the CRPD for more than a decade.

1.8 Disability situation in Zimbabwe

Empirical evidence indicate that PWDs in Zimbabwe experience discrimination across the social, political and economic spheres (Mtetwa, 2016). They are reported to face daily struggles with poverty and inequality, exacerbated by broader economic instability and inadequate government policies (Pillay,

Saruchera and Chivandire, 2023:19). Research revealed that children with disabilities can be denied basic rights by their own parents and guardians. For example, some parents are reported as not registering the births of their children with disabilities, making it difficult for them to access essential services such as social assistance and disability benefits (Khupe et al., 2022). Marongwe and Mate (2007) reported that child-rearing in Zimbabwe is perceived as a form of 'social insurance' that will enable children to look after their older family members. In the event of a disabled child, this prospect is often considered impossible. Consequently, families do not consider it economically viable to invest in the future of a disabled child (Lang and Charowa, 2007:18) given they perceive a disabled child as unproductive and incapable of securing meaningful employment. It is reported that when they are enrolled in school, children with disabilities are less likely to receive comprehensive support. Zimbabwe's Thematic Committee on Gender and Development (2019:7) reported that some parents of disabled children dump their disabled children under institutional care and are unwilling to take them for school holidays. This reveals vestiges of the tragic view of disability despite the latest global human rights-based approaches to disability.

Many children with disabilities are reported to be isolated from the outside world, which not only perpetuates the stigma associated with disability but also denies them the opportunity to interact and engage with society (Ndhlovu and Mudzingwa, 2022; Thematic Committee on Gender and Development, 2019:7). This situation is contrary to Article 19 of the CRPD (UN, 2006), for children with disabilities to live independently and being included in the community. In Zimbabwe, many PWDs are reported to survive on street begging as a means of livelihood and society continues to perceive them as dependent and hopeless (Chitiyo and Chitiyo, 2019). This reinforces charitable framings of disability and impairment. Table 1 below presents disability data by type and prevalence in Zimbabwe.

Table 1: Disability prevalence in Zimbabwe by type

Disability Category	Prevalence (%)
Physical	31
Visual	24
Multiple	13
Hearing	11
Intellectual	8
Mental	6

Source: National Disability Policy of Zimbabwe (2021:10)

Table 1 above, shows that physical disabilities (31%) and visual impairments (24%) are the most common types of disability in Zimbabwe, while intellectual (8%) and mental health (6%) disabilities are the least common. At the HEI's DSS's website where this study was collected, during the data collection period, it was reported that there was a total of 187 SWDs, of which 73 had a visual impairment, 69 had a physical impairment, 32 had albinism and 12 had a hearing impairment. Again, this data indicate that physical and visual impairments are the most common types in Zimbabwe. It is important to note that this study explores in/accessibility in the context of three complex and multi-dimensional aspects: disability, poverty and education. In the section below, I will attempt to explain how the three intersect.

1.9 The triple nexus: Disability, Poverty and Education

PWDs constitute the largest, poorest, most marginalised and excluded minority group in every society (Bannink Mbazzi et al., 2020; Groce, 2005; Meekosha and Soldatic, 2011). Several studies have reported on the bidirectional disability-poverty relationship, wherein poverty causes disability and vice versa (Eide and Ingstad, 2013; Trani and Loeb, 2012; Groce, Kett, Lang and Trani, 2011; Mitra, Posarac and Vick, 2013). The researcher concurs with Grech's (2016) critical approach regarding extant discussions on the disability-poverty relationship. Grech critiqued simplistic framings of the disability-poverty vicious cycle, calling for more critical approaches to this relationship. He argued for qualitative studies that equally highlight successful and everyday strategies employed by PWDs in poverty contexts to break this vicious cycle. Ironically and deleteriously, precluding SWDs from advanced education dramatically increases the likelihood of poverty for PWDs, further compounding the significant challenges that they and their communities face in the Global South (Heymann, Stein and Moreno, 2014; Trani, Kett, Bakhshi and Bailey, 2011). This study foregrounds the intersection of disability, poverty, and education, positioning education as a potential catalyst for transformation among persons with disabilities in contexts of poverty.

Research indicates that education provides a significant set of benefits (Colclough, 2012). The Global Monitoring Report (GMR, 2014:6) stated that 'formal education transforms lives.' The value of education includes an increased ability to gain employment and earn a better living in the future (UNICEF, 2013). In analysing twelve household surveys from various developing countries, Filmer (2008) found that each additional year of schooling for PWDs reduced the probability of being in the two poorest quintiles by two to five per cent. In their study on labour market in Nepal, Lamichhane and Okubo (2014) found that more years of schooling increased the probability of employment. Conducting their analysis across three impairment types (physical, hearing and visual), they determined that the level of education was the most crucial factor in determining participants' employment status as full-time or part-time workers, significantly

more so than their age or type of impairment. They further reported that more than fourteen years of schooling increased the likelihood of individuals being employed in professional, managerial or administrative roles, while those with fewer than ten years of schooling were either unemployed or engaged in manual labour. Drawing on their research in rural and urban areas in China, Liao and Zhao (2013), reported that for each additional year of schooling, there is a five to eight percent wage increase for PWDs. Singal et al. (2015), based on their work across three countries; India, Pakistan and Ghana, found that young people expressed increased independence, self-sufficiency, self-confidence and feelings of being more accepted and respected within their communities. In most cases, they demonstrated greater awareness of their rights and the state benefits available to them (Singal et al., 2015, 2012), thus becoming more engaged citizens. In light of the above evidence, nuanced explorations of the barriers and facilitators to accessing higher education among PWDs are critical for facilitating upward social mobility. Having discussed the nexus of disability, poverty and education, including the potential of higher education as a site for transformation for PWDs, the section below lays out the structure of the thesis.

1.10 Thesis structure

In this section, I outline the structure of the thesis. The thesis is organised into twelve interconnected chapters. Chapter One introduces the study, outlining its relevance, along with the rationale and motivation for conducting the study. The chapter also discusses the terminology used in the study, along with the research questions that guided this analysis. Additionally, the chapter examines the disability models that frame the understanding of disability and impairments in Zimbabwe, as well as the interpretations of disability in the country. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the nexus between disability, poverty, and higher education.

Chapter Two discusses disability policy and the legislative terrain from an international perspective. It also interrogates the Sustainable Development Goals in the context of access to education for SWDs. The chapter then narrows to examine the disability policy and institutional framework in Zimbabwe.

Chapter Three reviews empirical literature on accessibility in higher education environments, paying particular attention to the geographical spread of studies, along with the methodological approaches and limitations of the same. Chapter Four presents the study's theoretical framework, along with the concepts of 'news', 'turns', and 'posts'. Chapter Five chronicles the methodological underpinnings of the study, detailing the process through which empirical data was gathered, analysed, along with dissemination plans. The chapter begins by discussing the researcher's positionality and then proceeds to outline the ontological and epistemological foundations of the study. The chapter also discusses the concept and practice of reflexivity in this study, as well as

experimentation with ‘affective reflexivity’. It then discusses the research assemblage approach and participatory disability research, which undergirds the data collection process employed in the study. A description of the sampling methods, the sample of participants and the data analysis process is also presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations and dilemmas encountered.

Chapters Six, Seven, Eight and Nine reports on the empirical findings of the study, elucidating on the four assemblages: place/space, teaching, learning and assessment and digital and extra-curricular activities assemblages. Chapter Ten presents suggestions from research participants on how the higher education assemblage could be reconfigured to enhance accessibility. Chapter Eleven interprets and discusses empirical findings through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of assemblages. The chapter concludes by addressing the research questions. Chapter Twelve provides an (in)conclusion of the study, derived from synthesising insights gathered throughout the research. The virtual capacities of the body of research findings are also discussed. Additionally, the chapter offers some policy and practice recommendations. The study’s limitations are also discussed. The thesis closes with a discussion on the future research agenda, deriving from the study.

CHAPTER 2

Disability Policy Context

2.0 Introduction

This chapter discuss the context of disability policy, aiming to locate both historical and contemporary trajectories, with a particular focus on access to HE for PWDs. Specifically, I will begin by examining the international disability policy terrain, specifically the CRPD, as the contemporary and legally binding instrument informing disability policy and practice among member state parties. I will then move on to discuss the Sustainable Development Goals. Finally, I will narrow my focus to the disability policy and institutional infrastructure in Zimbabwe.

2.1 International disability policy context: Access to Higher Education for Persons with Disabilities

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN General Assembly, 1948) was created to make sure that everyone in the world is treated equally, regardless of their religion, language, place of residence, nationality, or disability. However, even with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, PWDs continue to be denied their rights. After more than 70 years since the declaration and despite a plethora of international landmark agreements that have followed with a specific focus on PWDs, such as the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons in 1982,[2] the Year of Disabled People,[3] the UN Decade of Disabled Persons[4] and the Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, PWDs continue to have their rights violated globally. This situation has been reported to be particularly exacerbated in the Global South (see Chounaird, 2018; Meekosha and Soldatic, 2011). However, not much research has been conducted to document how various disability rights violations are reproduced in the Global South.

In many countries around the world, disabled people and their allies have self-organised for decades to challenge the historical oppression and exclusion of disabled people (Driedger, 1989; Campbell and Oliver, 1996; Charlton, 1998). In 2006, the CRPD was adopted. The CRPD is the result of decades of activism by PWDs globally, who came together as equal partners in the drafting and negotiation of the Convention, which enshrines the goals of the disability community to live independently (Art. 19), participate in decisions that affect them

[2] United Nations General Assembly. *World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons*, Resolution 37/52, 3 December 1982.
[3] United Nations General Assembly. *International Year of Disabled Persons, 1981*. Proclaimed by UN General Assembly Resolution 31/123, 16 December 1976
[4] United Nations General Assembly. *United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons: Resolution A/RES/37/53*, proclaimed 3 December 1982.

(Art. 4.3), and access education (Article 24), among other rights (Sabatello, 2014). This means that children, adolescents and adults have the right to access education that is inclusive and of the same quality as that provided to people without disabilities. Education and lifelong learning opportunities equip PWDs with the necessary skills to fully participate in society on an equal basis with non-disabled people. The onset of the global human rights discourse has introduced new ways of thinking about PWDs (Lyner-Cleophas et al., 2014). The convention is regarded as the first international treaty to embrace a human rights model of disability that goes a step further than the social model of disability (Liasidou and Mavrou, 2017:143).

However, several researchers have raised concerns regarding the full implementation of the convention, particularly in Global South contexts (Lang; Harpur and Stein, 2022; Soldatić and Grech, 2014, 2022). The praxis of the convention faces multiple hurdles, most pronounced at the local level in the Global South, where disability and poverty intersect (Grech, 2009; Grech, Weber and Rule, 2023). Some criticisms aimed at international human rights frameworks and conventions include their often state-centric and top-down nature, as well as their failure to accommodate local values and cultural differences. Furthermore, they are described as “too technical or abstract and aspirational, rather than practical and close to the people” (Durmuş, 2020:36).

Additionally, the past two decades have witnessed the promulgation of several international agreements aimed at ensuring access to education for PWDs. For example, the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action was adopted as a “worldwide consensus on future directions for special needs education” (UNESCO, 1994: iv). The Salamanca Statement has had an impact not only on educational thought, policy and practice but also on culture (Ainscow, Slee and Best, 2019). Today, it continues to serve as an indispensable point of reference for all those involved in the struggle for inclusive education (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022:1). Furthermore, the UNESCO 2016 Education 2030 Framework for Action states that no education target should be considered met unless it is achieved by all.

2.1.1 Sustainable Development Goals and Higher Education

The CRPD has influenced the development of the SDGs, which include targeting access to technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university (Harpur and Stein, 2019). The SDGs were adopted by the UN in 2015 to provide a blueprint for achieving a better and more sustainable future for all (UN, 2015). They represent an improvement over the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Furthermore, the SDGs specifically mention disability, whereas the MDGs did not address it at all. The 17 SDGs pledge to leave no one behind and recognise disability as an issue that cuts across all SDGs. These goals cover a range of social, economic and environmental issues, such as poverty, education, gender equality, climate change and sustainable cities (Pulsiri et al., 2019).

Education is designated as Goal 4. SDG 4 seeks to “guarantee inclusive and equitable quality education and foster lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030. Germane to this study, SDG 4, Target 4(a), aims to “build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all”. SDG Target 4.5 aims to eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for people in vulnerable situations, including PWDs. Lack of education and illiteracy frequently restrict access to information and hinder individuals’ lives (Nassar et al., 2024). Education is a multidisciplinary field that impacts several domains (Tonegawa, 2023). HEIs, as engines and producers of knowledge, play a distinctive role in achieving the SDGs. Leal Filho et al. (2019:287) emphasise that educational learning is fundamental to the SDGs, and HEIs, through their teaching and learning approaches across subject areas, play a significant role in the accomplishment of the SDGs. Franco et al. (2018) state that HEIs are paramount in achieving the SDGs and have a “social responsibility” to teach students and communities sustainable development skills. According to Leal Filho et al. (2019), colleges have a “moral obligation to contribute to the society in which they flourish.” Given the distinctive role of HEIs in the achievement of the SDGs, enhancing the learning experiences for SWDs in higher education therefore becomes essential for achieving SDG 4. However, a study by Nassar et al. (2024:4911) noted that although several HEIs have enacted policies to enhance accessibility for SWDs, considerable obstacles persist in the domains of assistive technology integration, curricular adaptability and faculty development. Williams et al. (2018) reported that PWDs persistently encounter discriminatory obstacles in societal, educational and occupational contexts.

Higher education is perceived as a venue for challenging established knowledge and fostering the generation and dissemination of new ideas (Willetts, 2017). To achieve their full potential and contribute towards the realisation of the SDGs, accessibility of the physical environment, information and communication, services and facilities for SWDs becomes a key requirement. Accessibility is a precondition and linchpin for the realisation of the 17 SDGs among PWDs. By promoting accessible HEIs, inclusive spaces are fostered that equip SWDs with skills for lifelong learning. However, despite the SDGs’ ambition to leave no one behind, PWDs are often overlooked in the global development agenda (Panda and Kaur, 2024:16). According to the World Bank, barriers to full social and economic inclusion of PWDs include inaccessible physical environments and transportation, the unavailability of assistive devices and technologies, non-adapted means of communication, gaps in service delivery and discriminatory prejudice and stigma in society (World Bank, 2022). These accessibility challenges also have negative impacts on PWDs’ education and ultimately their employment prospects (Panda and Kaur, 2024:18). Without accessibility, disabled individuals face barriers that limit their access to resources,

opportunities and social and political participation (Panda and Kaur, 2024). Collectively, these barriers compromise the realisation of the SDGs for PWDs. Conversely, accessible physical spaces, services and facilities in HEIs create equal opportunities for SWDs to unleash their full potential. Accessible HEIs can unlock multiple capacities among SWDs, allowing them to fully participate in society.

Regarding the implementation of the SDGs in Zimbabwe, the Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC) plays an oversight role. The OPC assigned the mandate to coordinate the implementation of the SDGs at a technical level to the Ministry of Public Service, Labour, and Social Development (which houses the Department of Disability Affairs), which chairs the SDG Technical Committee. The latter is comprised of Permanent Secretaries from government ministries, representatives from UN agencies, the private sector and civil society organisations (CSOs), among other stakeholders. However, the CSA report found that despite having clear structures for the implementation of the SDGs, the country lacks concrete measures for including OPDs, such that by 2022, there was no official representation of OPDs in the SDG Implementation Committee (UNESCO, 2022). In the section below, I will now turn to discuss the disability policy context in Zimbabwe.

2.2 Disability policy and legislative framework in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has made commendable strides towards improving the welfare of PWDs through the adoption of disability-specific policies and legislation, as well as their inclusion in mainstream policy frameworks across key areas such as education, health, employment etc. The country also has an institutional framework for the delivery of disability services. Examples of disability-specific policies include the Disabled Persons Act of 1992 and the National Disability Policy of 2021. Disability is also featured in the country's mainstream policies and legislation, such as the national Constitution, Amendment No.20 of 2013. Furthermore, Zimbabwe is a state party to several international and regional treaties and conventions that protect the rights of PWDs, including the Optional Protocol, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to name a few. These elements constitute a robust policy and legislative infrastructure for the promotion and protection of the rights of PWDs in Zimbabwe. The section below examines the specific national disability policy and legislative frameworks, emphasising their strengths and opportunities regarding accessibility in higher education for SWDs.

2.2.1 The National Constitution

The rights of PWDs in Zimbabwe are protected under Section 22 and further elaborated in Section 83 of the national constitution, Amendment No.20 of 2013.

PWDs in Zimbabwe are entitled to state-funded education and training when needed, as stated in Section 83(f). Section 22(2) provides that:

> *"The State and all institutions and agencies of government at every level must, within the limits of the resources available to them, assist persons with physical or mental disabilities to achieve their full potential and to minimise the disadvantages suffered by them."*

Relevant to this study, the right to accessible physical environment among PWDs in Zimbabwe is a constitutional right, enshrined under Section 22(4):

> *"The State must take appropriate measures to ensure that buildings and amenities to which the public has access are accessible to persons with disabilities".*

Although the national constitution guarantees the right to accessible physical spaces to which members of the public are generally admitted, the everyday lived reality of physical accessibility for PWDs in Zimbabwe tells a different story. Shockingly, the CSA report on PWDs in Zimbabwe revealed that:

> *"Public buildings and infrastructure are inaccessible for PWDs. The most inaccessible places identified are government offices (92%), schools (83%), council offices, (76%) and entertainment, (63%). Elevators at most public buildings, including MoPSLSD (Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Development), and the Office of the Advisor on Disability in the President's Office are often not in working condition rendering these important offices inaccessible"*. (UNESCO, 2021:29).

The above quote paints a gloomy picture on the state of accessibility in HEIs in contexts where the state violates the same rights which they purport to protect. This suggests a severe accessibility policy-reality dissonance in the country. The above observations are excellently and aptly summed up by Meekosha stating:

> *"Nation-states have a duty to punish offenders, yet they are often responsible for both interpreting and violating human rights".* (Meekosha and Soldatic, 2011:1387).

In In this context, it raises Juvenal's earlier question in this chapter: *"Who will guard the guards themselves?"* In other words, who and how can we hold States Parties accountable to the CRPD, particularly in the Global South and ensure they walk the talk rather than merely talk the talk of protecting the rights of SWDs to accessible HE?

The CRPD Committee's General Comment No.2 (2014:5), paragraph 8, states that the obligation to implement accessibility is unconditional. In contrast, the national constitution of Zimbabwe, Section 22(2), imposes a condition on the

protection of the rights of SWDs to accessible HE environments. This resource conditionality exonerates institutions such as HEIs from ensuring equitable HE spaces.

2.2.2 The Disabled Persons Act

The rights of PWDs in Zimbabwe are protected in the Disabled Persons Act (Chapter 17:01) of 1992. Although predating the CRPD and despite some glaring weaknesses that contradict the CRPD (see Mandipa, 2013), the Disabled Persons Act (DPA) contains progressive clauses that promote the dignity and inherent worth of PWDs in Zimbabwe. For example, the act establishes a National Disability Board (NDB), which is empowered to issue adjustment orders to ensure access to premises to which members of the public are ordinarily admitted. Adjustment orders require the owner or provider concerned to undertake at their own expense such action as may be specified in order to secure reasonable access by PWDs to the premises, service or amenity concerned. Section 7(8) of the act criminalises failure to comply with adjustment orders (see Chimedza and Peters, 1999). However, Mandipa (2013:82), notes the criminalisation of failure to comply with adjustment orders is only a paper provision. Although the situation could have improved, Mandipa reported that as of 2013, there was no single prosecution that was based on the DPA. Kuper et al. (2022) further reported that by 2022, no adjustment order had resulted in a single prosecution. Yet, the DPA has been in place dating back to 1992. The most glaring flaw of the act, which negatively affects SWDs in HEI in Zimbabwe is section (7):

> *"…the board shall not serve an adjustment order upon any school or educational or training institution controlled or managed by the state or registered in terms of the Education Act (Chapter 25:04) except with the consent of the minister responsible for the administration of the institution or Act concerned."*

The section presents several issues. On one hand, it exonerates state HEIs from the watchful eye of the NDB, constituted by PWDs, who wield the greatest power to speak on issues that affect PWDs in Zimbabwe. Additionally, requiring the NDB to seek approval from the Minister of HE before issuing an adjustment order complicates and bureaucratises policy implementation. In Zimbabwe, ministerial positions are political appointments. Arguably, the responsible minister is likely to prioritise the interests of their party over those of PWDs. As the saying goes, *"Thou shalt not bite the hand that feedeth thee."*

On a very interesting note, and relevant to the global disability discourse, one of the widely cited criticisms levelled against the DPA in Zimbabwe, especially by PWDs, is the use of the term "Disabled Persons." Similarly, several researchers studying disability in Zimbabwe have consistently denounced the concept. The Act's use of the term "disabled person" has been deemed offensive and

derogatory (Chidemo, Chindimba and Matongo, 2018; Ndhlovu and Mudzingwa, 2022). Chengeta and Msipa (2013:13) opined that the title of "the Act" is offensive because it reveals a medical approach to disability, which fails to take into account the role played by the surrounding environment in disabling PWDs. While I do not necessarily concur with Chengeta and Msipa's argument, this highlights the complexity of the disability phenomenon. Although identity-first language emerged in the UK and aligns with the social model, it is seriously contested in other regions such as Zimbabwe. The CSA noted that the new Act is to be renamed the Persons with Disabilities Act, 2019, as the Amendment Bill was in the final stages of coming into effect (UNESCO, 2022:9). This calls for context-sensitive disability research practices. It is important to remember that how people identify themselves is very personal and must be respected, even if it contradicts established global conceptualisations. In addition to upholding global and contemporary frameworks, there is a constant need to be attentive to the everyday, mundane understandings of disability and impairments in diverse contexts, especially from the perspective of PWDs. In this sense, I argue for horizontal rather than hierarchical conceptualisations.

2.2.3 The National Disability Policy

The National Disability Policy (NDP), adopted in 2021, is the most recent national disability-specific policy in Zimbabwe. The promulgation of the NDP aligns with Article 4(1) (a) of the CRPD, which obligates states parties to adopt appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the convention. The policy builds on and articulates several rights for PWDs and warns against the discrimination and abuse of PWDs, as such actions can lead to prosecution (GoZ NDP, 2021). Unlike the DPA of 1992, the NDP adopts a human rights-based approach (HRBA) and provides for the protection and promotion of the rights of PWDs in Zimbabwe across all spheres of life-education, health, recreation, employment, social protection, independent living, transport, etc. Regarding accessibility, the NDP (2021:56) contains several provisions, including the provision of live assistance and intermediaries, guides and readers to facilitate accessibility to buildings and other facilities open to the public. Drawing from the content of the policy, I would argue that the NDP is a microcosm of the macrocosm-contains significant sections of verbatim text extracted from the CRPD. While this is a plausible move, the implementation of the policy remains a key challenge. A participant in a recent study conducted with 20 youth with disabilities in Zimbabwe noted:

> *"We have the National Disability Policy 2021; however, it is still to be implemented. It is just on paper; it is never implemented."* (in Mashanyare, Garutsa and Odhav, 2025:7).

At the heart of every policy cycle lies implementation, which ensures that policy provisions translate into tangible improvements in the lives of target groups, in

this case SWDs. Research suggests that poor implementation of disability policies in Zimbabwe hinders PWDs from fully benefiting from such policies (see Mashanyare, 2025). The inadequate implementation of the NDP can be attributed to the absence of a robust framework for implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The NDP, as part of its implementation strategy, set out to establish national disability guidelines on accessibility. In 2024, Zimbabwe published a 26-page document titled *Guidelines on How to Provide Reasonable Accommodation and Accessibility to Persons with Disabilities: A Tool for Government Ministries.* Therefore, there remains a gap in our understanding of the impact of these guidelines, and this study aims to explore the issue. In addition to a progressive disability policy and legislative framework, Zimbabwe also has a comprehensive institutional infrastructure, which is discussed below.

2.3 Disability institutional infrastructure

Several institutions are in place for the implementation of disability policy and legislation, as well as for project and programme coordination towards the realisation of the rights of PWDs in Zimbabwe. This study examines three institutions: the Department of Disabled Persons Affairs, the National Disability Board, and the Special Advisor to the President on Disability Issues.

2.3.1 National Disability Board

As highlighted above, the NDB exists under the Disabled Persons Act (Chapter 17:01). The NDB is composed of a maximum of twenty PWDs. Ten members are appointed by the Minister from a panel of names submitted by organisations or associations that the Minister considers representative of disabled persons. The remaining ten members are appointed by the Minister in consultation with various Ministers, such as those for health and education. The NDB acts primarily as a watchdog for disability issues in Zimbabwe, making recommendations to the Department of Disability Affairs for action.

Among its main functions, the board is responsible for formulating and developing measures and policies designed to achieve equal opportunities for PWDs. The board is also tasked with ensuring that PWDs participate fully in sporting, recreational and cultural activities and are afforded full access to community and social services. Additionally, it oversees the issuance of adjustment orders for inaccessible buildings, as previously discussed. Over the years, the NDB has achieved several successes, although there is still room for further advancements. Notably, the board successfully lobbied for the inclusion of PWDs in the 2013 Constitution (Mandipa, 2013), which resulted in the rights of PWDs being enshrined in Section 22 and further elaborated in Section 83. The NDB also successfully advocated for the inclusion of children with disabilities in the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) (see Mandipa, 2013:91). BEAM is

a state-funded scheme that enables children from disadvantaged backgrounds to access state-funded basic education.

However, Mandipa (2013) notes that the NDB remains largely invisible due to a lack of resources and operates under the financially struggling Department of Social Welfare (renamed the Department of Social Development). The CSA report found that the Board lacks funding for members to meet regularly and deliberate on issues affecting PWDs (UNESCO, 2022:10). Although the situation may have changed in recent years, as of 2013, Chitambara (2013) noted that the NDB had not had an official physical office to operate from since 1992. The financial challenges faced by the NDB can constrain its capacity to fulfil its mandate of championing disability rights in Zimbabwe.

2.3.2 Department of Disability Affairs

The administration of the disability sector is overseen by the Department of Disability Affairs (DDA) within the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Development (MoPSLSD). The DDA registers and coordinate programmes and activities of institutions, associations and organisations dedicated to the welfare and rehabilitation of PWDs in Zimbabwe (UNESCO, 2022). It serves as the primary point of contact for all government-related disability services and engagements. However, many government ministries and departments lack a dedicated disability desk for coordination, which negatively impacts the delivery of disability services within the government (UNESCO, 2022:8). DDA offices are situated across the country at both district and provincial levels. For example, the first point of contact for state disability services is the local DDA office at the district level. Issues are then escalated to the provincial office for further processing, and finally to the head office in Harare, the capital. The non-productive nature of the MoPSLSD, which houses the DDA, has resulted in significant underfunding from national budget allocations. Consequently, the DDA relies heavily on support from UN agencies for disability policy and programming. This is problematic, as it has tended to silence the legally established National Disability Board. Bengano, Mtetwa and Garcia Iriarte (upcoming) found that instead of playing an active role during the formulation of the National Disability Policy of 2021, the board played a supportive role, with UN agencies taking the lead.

2.3.3 Disability Advisor to the President

In addition to the MoPSLSD, the DDA, and the NDB, there is a position for a Disability Advisor to the President. The Advisor reports directly to the President and provides guidance on disability issues in Zimbabwe. The establishment of this role is seen as a way to streamline the bureaucratic processes typically involved in addressing disability matters through the cabinet (UNESCO, 2022:10). Through this position, Zimbabwe now hosts the annual Disability Expo, a national event aimed at raising awareness of disability issues. The annual expo

aligns with Article 8 of the CRPD-Awareness Raising. Awareness raising is one of the preconditions for the effective implementation of the CRPD. Since accessibility is often viewed narrowly, focusing primarily on access to the built environment (which is significant, but only one aspect of access for persons with disabilities), States parties should strive systematically and continuously to raise awareness about accessibility among all relevant stakeholders (General Comment No. 2, 2014). The Disability Advisor's Office collaborates with all PWDs and organisations concerned with disability issues in the country. When asked about his views on the implementation of the CRPD, the former Disability Advisor, Mr. Malinga, noted that much work remains to be done, particularly regarding the domestication of the Convention (UNESCO, 2022:10). Beyond domestication, there is a need for localisation.

CHAPTER 3

A Review of Empirical Literature

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from a review of empirical literature on disability, accessibility and higher education (see Appendix 10, for the literature search strategy). The chapter proceeds as follows: in the first section, I present a global overview regarding accessibility among SWDs within HEI environments. I then discuss three common threads that emerged from the literature review: physical environment accessibility, and teaching, learning and assessment.

3.1 SWDs in Higher Education: A global overview

The past decades have witnessed significant achievements resulting from the self-organisation of PWDs globally pushing back against discriminatory laws and practices. Among the accomplishments of the global disability movement has been the promulgation of a myriad of progressive international, regional and national anti-discrimination legislative and policy frameworks that support access to all levels of education, including HE for PWDs on the basis of equal opportunity. Additionally, the discourse surrounding equality and independent living for PWDs has been increasingly adopted by national governments worldwide, albeit to varying degrees.

Access to HE for PWDs, based on equal opportunity, is a legally recognised right under the CRPD (Yssel et al., 2016). Empirical research indicates that the number of university SWDs is increasing in many countries (Seale, Geogerson, Mamas and Swain, 2015; Veitch, Strehlow and Boyd, 2018; Wilson et al., 2016). Consequently, there is a growing theoretical and empirical body of information documenting the experiences of SWDs in HEIs (Fuller et al., 2004; Hong, Haefner and Slekar, 2011; Hopkins, 2011; Moriña, López and Molina, 2015; Moswela and Mukhopadhyay, 2011; Mullins and Preyde, 2013; Shevlin, Kenny and Mcneela, 2004). However, the literature indicates that most of these studies are conducted in the ‘Global North’. For instance, a systematic review on access to HE among disabled people (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022:2) revealed that only 20 studies were published between 2011 and 2021, of which only two were conducted in Africa, specifically in South Africa. Another systematic review by Madaus et al. (2024), which included publications from 1952 to 2012, found that only 8.5% of articles were conducted outside the United States, Great Britain, or Canada. Additionally, a more recent systematic literature review by Dukes et al. (2025) on the proliferation of empirical studies examining HE and disability published between 2013 and 2022 reported that over three-quarters of the studies were published in North America (57.94%) and Europe (20.42%). The United States accounted for just over half of the articles (51.5%). Howell (2019:131) noted that fewer studies to date have explored systemic trends

regarding the participation of SWDs in South African universities. As a result, Dukes et al. (2025:13) recommended greater geographic diversity within the published literature, arguing that without all voices represented, valuable perspectives on how different regions successfully implement disability services are likely missing.

Research suggests that accessibility within HEIs remains a critical challenge for SWDs, particularly in the Global South. In a study conducted in Kenya with students with physical disabilities, Abuya and Githinji (2021:1) noted that while there are guarantees for full participation and equality for PWDs in policy, the situation on the ground remains precarious, as they continue to face discrimination and other violations of their rights and freedoms within the institutions that admit them. A recent empirical study by Harpur, Stafford and Ellis (2025:373) on Australian universities found the institutions to be unsafe and exclusionary for many PWDs due to entrenched attitudinal and cultural prejudices. It has also been reported that most states, from Australia to the United States and Uganda to South Africa, struggle to provide equal access for SWDs to state-based HE (Foundation of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis, 2011; Fontaine-Rainen, and Behling, 2015). Although these findings indicate that barriers to accessible HE are a global phenomenon, they are particularly pronounced in the Global South, exacerbated by extreme poverty, corruption, stigma, resource constraints and a lack of the rule of law, among other socio-material vicissitudes. Despite the growing number of empirical studies on accessibility in HE globally, there remains a significant gap in the literature documenting the everyday realities of SWDs in HE. Writing in the US context, Evans et al. (2017:241) suggest that more research is needed to understand how the campus environment affects various aspects of the lives of students with impairments. Global South contexts are worthy of study on the premise that they are a ‘complex and hybrid space’ that should be understood ‘in its own right’ (Grech, 2015:11).

Literature suggests that several barriers exist in HEIs for SWDs. In a systematic literature review, Fernández-Batanero et al. (2022:2) noted that the most common barriers for SWDs include architectural obstacles, lack of information, inaccessible technologies, regulations that are not applied and issues with teachers. The section below reports on findings from the literature review regarding accessibility for SWDs in HE across three domains: the physical environment, information and communication and teaching, learning and assessment. These three domains align with General Comment No. 2, which states that accessibility must be addressed in all its complexity, encompassing the physical environment, transportation, information and communication and services (CRPD, 2014).

3.1.1 Physical environment accessibility

Nearly two decades after the promulgation of the CRPD, the built environment remains inaccessible to disabled people globally (see Jackson, 2018:1; Tudzi, Bugri and Danso, 2017). This vindicates Meekosha and Soldatic's (2011:1386) assertion that many state parties do not support the full implementation of the CRPD despite having ratified it. Divergent and convergent explanations have emerged to account for the poor implementation of the CRPD, particularly in the Global South. Garcia Iriarte, McConkey and Gilligan (2016) attribute the failure of global models such as the CRPD to produce the intended results to contextual incompatibilities between 'Anglo-centred' disability models and local contexts, among other barriers. Chouinard (2018) described Global South contexts as lying in the 'global peripheries of law,' typified by an acute shortage of both financial and human resources to fully effectuate the CRPD.

Research identifies physical barriers as the primary obstacles for SWDs navigating higher education (HE) globally. Physical barriers include the lack of ramps and accessibility in facilities, which limits mobility and access to educational spaces (Nieminen et al., 2024; Nieminen; Moriña; Biagiotti, 2024). A study conducted at an Irish HE institution by Spassiani et al. (2017:17) found that most barriers for SWDs were physical, such as steps, doors and uneven surfaces. Similarly, Hong (2015) found that physical barriers contributed significantly to college stress. The literature reviewed suggests the entangled nature of physical access and learning and assessment. The physical environments of university campuses are argued to limit the ability of disabled students to engage fully with learning opportunities (Hannam-Swain, 2017; Vickerman and Blundell, 2010). Writing in the Spanish context, Moriña and Perera (2020:224) noted that accessibility to certain classrooms was hindered because the furniture was not adapted to the needs of SWDs (for example, desks and seating clamped with screws). It was further reported that the structure of the classrooms did not facilitate learning and the classroom equipment such as projectors, blackboards, and podiums, were not accessible for students with certain disabilities (Moriña and Perera, 2020). Interviewees with physical impairments at a UK HE institution disclosed that not every lecture theatre was fitted with wheelchair-accessible desks (Wertans and Burch, 2022:10). Wertans and Burch (2022:5) argued that ableism is intertwined with the culture and construction of HE, as the physicality of campuses and the normative expectations of student engagement often conflict with the needs of many SWDs. In this context, HE architecture suggests ableist assumptions. The use of projectors and blackboards implies that visual perception is the normative standard, which can discriminate against students with visual impairments.

It is a legal requirement that new objects, infrastructure, facilities, goods, products and services must be designed to be fully accessible for PWDs, in accordance with the principles of universal design (General Comment No. 2, 2014:7).

Creating barrier-free infrastructure is fundamental to fostering an enabling environment for students, faculty, and staff with disabilities (Lord, 2017:18). A barrier-free campus benefits not only SWDs but also diverse populations such as children and the elderly. To create barrier-free campuses, two elements are required: dismantling existing barriers in higher education institution (HEI) infrastructure and ensuring that new buildings and infrastructure projects are made accessible to PWDs (Lord and Stein, 2018:238). Consistent with the CRPD, these tasks must be conducted by governments in consultation with SWDs and their representative organisations. Such collaborations can result in the development of guidelines and plans for new infrastructure by efficaciously drawing on the knowledge and lived experiences of PWDs in accessing their environments (CRPD, 2006, arts. 4, 9). Engagement with local disability rights groups can serve to: (1) identify, prioritise, and effectively plan for barrier removal; (2) effectively train HEI personnel responsible for infrastructure and accessibility; and (3) support innovative pilots utilising HEI faculty and students, including SWDs, to integrate barrier removal into practical training and service learning under the aegis of relevant faculties, such as engineering and architecture (Lord and Stein, 2018:238). However, promising as these initiatives are, Jackson (2018:16) observes that in practice, the collaboration between disabled people and built environment shapers is historically considered an uncommon activity.

A study covering 28 HEIs in Egypt identified barriers related to physical infrastructure and transportation across all institutions examined (Lord, 2017:17). The research explored whether and how SWDs were reaching and benefitting from all the services offered, including lectures, library facilities, housing, sports and recreational events, and pathways across campus. It was found that physical barriers routinely prevented students with physical disabilities-especially wheelchair users, but also blind persons from attending lectures and activities (Lord, 2017). Students, particularly those who were blind and physically disabled, described the impact of multiple barriers on their ability to get to campus in the first place, as well as how such barriers restricted campus building entry and egress, limited participation in field trips, extra-curricular activities, and access to housing structures (Lord and Stein, 2018:235). Further, the results of accessibility audits revealed barriers to water and sanitation facilities, including inaccessible toilets, on all assessed campuses (Lord and Stein, 2018). Physically inaccessible campus environments exclude SWDs from a wide range of activities, both academic and extracurricular.

Several studies concur that physical barriers persist in HEIs for SWDs (Fuller et al., 2004; Moriña and Perera, 2020:217; Wertans and Burch, 2022). Wertans and Burch (2022) introduced the concept of “backdoor accessibility” in their study in the UK. Coined by an interviewee, “backdoor accessibility” was used to describe how accessibility and accessible provision are often an add-on to pre-existing,

inaccessible structures (Wertans and Burch, 2022:12). Participants described how their access to education regularly felt secondary to that of their non-disabled peers, requiring them to use side entrances and temporary accessibility aids, rather than being able to access all facilities freely and equally. Participants further noted that their services were typically more difficult to reach and less well-maintained, all of which had the potential to cause physical harm or drain energy in navigating such terrain. SWDs in HE are likely to expend a considerable amount of physical and emotional energy navigating campuses, which is particularly severe in HEIs in the Global South. Although several studies lament physical inaccessibility in HE, a study conducted at a HEI in Zimbabwe reported that the disability-friendliness of the physical infrastructure of the institution promoted the participation of SWDs in learning because it facilitated their ease of mobility (Majoko, 2018:14). Majoko (2018) further argued that this finding contradicts previous studies which demonstrate that SWDs confront environmental barriers in HEIs, citing Beauchamp-Pryor (2012), Chikwature et al. (2016), and Maruzani and Mapuranga (2016).

A study by Hong (2015) in the USA, involving 16 college students with various disabilities who kept a journal about their student experience for ten weeks, revealed that they described college as stressful. Similarly, in the UK study, due to backdoor entrances, hidden structures, and second-best provisions, participants described immense feelings of exclusion and a lack of belonging (Wertans and Burch, 2022). It is therefore imperative to explore how SWDs in HE currently navigate campuses in the Global South. It is essential to map out how inaccessibility is currently reproduced and, most importantly, to explore how the socio-material relations within campuses can be altered to improve accessibility.

3.1.2 Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) accessibility

Despite the significant improvements in ICTs in HEIs brought about by the digital revolution, literature suggests that SWDs, particularly in the Global South, still do not fully benefit from these advancements. A study by Sachs and Schreuer (2011) in Israel compared students with and without disabilities regarding academic achievement and experiences in higher education. They found a significant difference between SWDs who use computers often and those who do not. In all student experiences and in their evaluations of gains and satisfaction, computer users reported higher levels than non-users. It was further reported that while a high percentage of students had a computer at home, the degree of control and use of these computers was the key differentiating factor in the frequency of academic experiences. This underscores the importance of digital literacy beyond mere access to digital devices. Over the last two decades, computer literacy has been recognised by policymakers, education experts and researchers as a central factor in students' academic performance (Zeszotarski, 2001; Bretz and Johnson, 2000). Sachs and Schreuer (2011) described the

limited use of computers and information technology by SWDs as alarming and called for computer literacy training as a basic entry-level education. Making computer workstations accessible to SWDs is crucial, as assistive technology can help reduce and, in some cases, even eliminate the barriers they face in promoting equal opportunities in higher education and employment (Dorwick et al., 2005; Schreuer et al., 2006). Beyene (2023:29) argues that technology is an equaliser that levels the playing field for all learners. A study conducted in Ethiopia found that a lack of access to ICT makes learners with visual impairments dependent, decreases their chances of accessing up-to-date e-resources, and reduces their performance in their studies (Beyene, 2023). Dependency compromises the autonomy of SWDs, which contradicts the goal of the independent living movement. Without access to information and communication, enjoyment of freedom of thought and expression, along with many other basic rights and freedoms for PWDs, may be seriously undermined (General Comment No. 2, 2014:6). Arguably, limited access to information and the latest communication technologies can jeopardise the realisation of most, if not all, of the SDGs for SWDs.

Sachs and Schreuer (2011) suggest that HEIs should invest significantly more resources in accessible computers and in training students and faculty on the various uses of information technology. However, research indicates that there are limited resources available to ensure full access to ICT among SWDs in higher education. This issue is particularly severe in the Global South. For example, a study by Beyene (2023:27) at a HEI in Ethiopia revealed that the Centre for Students with Disabilities (CSD) had to interrupt ICT training sessions due to budget constraints. The CSD also reported purchasing refreshable braille keyboards and a braille printer, but could not have them installed because they could not find a technician qualified to work with these technologies. This finding highlights the lack of both financial and human resources needed to facilitate access to ICT for SWDs. Chouinard (2018:1) asserts that poorer nations of the Global South are particularly disadvantaged in terms of realising disabled people's human rights in practice due to very limited human and financial resources.

Beyene (2023:29) posits that poverty is the principal barrier to access to ICT. HEIs can mitigate this issue by providing shared access to ICT and launching ICT literacy programmes. Nevertheless, structural and budgetary challenges may create another layer of barriers, limiting the ability of universities to accommodate the needs of SWDs (Beyene et al., 2023). In Zimbabwe, Majoko (2013) found that limited resources in disability resource centres constituted a stumbling block to their provision of adequate support to SWDs. Lord and Stein (2018:237) acknowledged that achieving the change envisioned by the CRPD will be constrained in developing countries by the availability of resources, which limits inclusion in higher education for all students, disabled and non-disabled

alike. However, writing in the Irish context, Spassiani et al. (2017:2) note that while many of the challenges experienced by SWDs can be faced by all students, it may be more difficult for SWDs to cope with these challenges in addition to managing their disabilities. Arguably, these challenges are further exacerbated by chronic poverty in the Global South. In Ethiopia, it was found that not all computers at the CSD were functioning (Beyene, 2023:24). A participant revealed that students would go to the centre but miss the opportunity to sit by a functioning computer. Participants without computers or smartphones would ask their peers to check their grades for them (Beyene, 2023:24). This highlights the complex relationship between digital accessibility and multiple rights of SWDs, such as privacy and confidentiality. Requesting peers to access grades on one's behalf can heighten the fear of being misjudged.

3.1.3 Teaching, Learning and Assessment accessibility

It is legally mandated that modes and means of teaching at all levels of education must be accessible and conducted in accessible environments (General Comment No. 2, 2014:11). However, research indicates that, globally, SWDs in HE continues to encounter barriers related to teaching, learning and assessment procedures that often do not take their needs into account (see Bunbury, 2020). SWDs face serious difficulties concerning the teaching methods used, which fail to adapt to their specific needs and characteristics (Moriña and Perera, 2020:217). In this context, Liasidou (2014) argues that the ideal situation would involve a working methodology in the classroom that is participatory, flexible and based on universal design, specifically Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Gradel and Edson, 2010).

Difficulties in accessing course materials and curricula were widely cited across 28 Egyptian HEIs. A majority of students with visual impairments (72%) and hearing impairments (56%) reported barriers in obtaining course materials in an accessible format (Lord, 2017:19). Curriculum inaccessibility results in SWDs in HE spending more time completing academic activities compared to their non-disabled peers, due to the inaccessibility of learning materials. A recent study by Carrillo-Sierra et al. (2025:20) found that teaching and learning processes for SWDs in HEIs in north-eastern Colombia remain challenging, particularly in recognising specific educational support needs, providing tailored assistance and enhancing the capacity of academic staff to implement reasonable adjustments. Amnesti et al. (2023) add that the inclusivity of curricula remains inadequate, as many programmes do not yet incorporate flexible teaching methods or materials that cater to diverse learning needs.

In their study, Ekelman, Bazyk, and Bazyk (2013) interviewed ten university SWDs and found that students considered academic activities stressful and felt they spent most of their time doing college work. Similarly, Sachs and Schreuer (2011) found that SWDs needed to spend more time working to achieve the same results as students without disabilities. Furthermore, many disabled students

reported feeling as though they had to work harder than other students to manage their disability alongside their studies (Seale et al., 2015; Shpigelman et al., 2021). The additional time that disabled students were required to spend on their academic studies (Reed and Kennett, 2017; Timmerman and Mulvihill, 2015) can have financial consequences for some. For instance, these students often struggle to obtain paid employment to cover accommodation and other living costs. The financial difficulties experienced by students, along with their impact on well-being and academic attainment, are well documented (e.g., Bennett, 2003; Fiksenbaum et al., 2017). Spending more time on academic tasks presents several negative impacts for SWDs. For example, SWDs participated less in class activities and extracurricular activities, such as music and art, compared to students without disabilities (Sachs and Schreuer, 2011). Other researchers have reported that studying is perceived as stressful for SWDs (Clince, Nolan and Connolly, 2015; Ekelman, Bazyk and Bazyk, 2013; Spassianni et al., 2017). Despite the existence of the UK's Equality Act 2010, which places a legal obligation on HEIs to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students, disabled students are understood to have 'worse' outcomes than their non-disabled peers, such as being more likely to leave university, attain lower degree results, and subsequently hold lower employability rates (Hubble and Bolton, 2021). Similarly, data on the outcomes of disabled students in HE (Hubble and Bolton, 2021) suggests that feelings of frustration are valid and reflected in the overall poorer outcomes of disabled students. However, Sachs and Schreuer's (2011) comparative study between SWDs and non-disabled students in Israel revealed that the academic achievements of SWDs were almost as high as those of students without disabilities, and their overall experiences were similar. Madriaga (2007) asserts that for some SWDs, prior experiences of disablism within HEI hinders their confidence in further academic pursuits. Wertans and Burch (2022:13) add that the additional labour that disabled students are required to expend in order to navigate HE can cause the internalisation of oppression, whereby exclusion becomes an accepted reality. If not addressed, HE can inadvertently place SDGs beyond the reach of SWDs by extinguishing the desire for lifelong learning (see SDG 4) stemming from internalised disablism and ableism.

Barriers to accessing needed accommodations during examinations and assessments were major issues noted by many students in Israel (see Lord and Stein, 2018:235). SWDs experience challenges regarding the modes of assessment used in HEI (Hanafin, Shevlin, Kenny, and Neela, 2007; Mutasa et al., 2013). Some assessments, including examinations, are considered restrictive and constitute a barrier (Fuller, Bradley, and Healey, 2004), thus discriminatory. Lord and Stein (2018) noted that examples of desired accommodations by SWDs to achieve equal access to exams were diverse, yet HEIs were seemingly unaware that a core element of the duty to provide reasonable accommodations in education is individualising such accommodations (CRPD, 2006, Art. 2). A

study conducted by Majoko (2018) at a HE institution in Zimbabwe found that the lack of alternative assessment methods in assignments and examinations impeded the participation of SWDs in learning. The written format of assessments and examinations was reported to be incompatible with the capabilities of some SWDs. Several factors have been identified as contributing to inaccessible assessment methods. For example, Pavey et al. (2010) noted that, at times, academics may be unwilling or disinclined to provide alternative assessments to SWDs.

Several approaches have been suggested to improve the accessibility of teaching, learning and assessment in HEIs. For Sachs and Schreuer et al. (2006), social change in the attitudes of students and faculty towards PWDs is a prerequisite to social inclusion and equal opportunities for SWDs in HEI. Majoko (2018) suggests that the professional development of lecturers on inclusive education could equip them with the competence to meet the diverse needs of SWDs. Past studies indicate that lecturers require in-service training to be equipped with the positive attitudes, knowledge, skills, competencies and understanding necessary to meet the individual needs of SWDs in HEIs (Chiparaushe et al., 2016; Phiri, 2013). Carrillo-Sierra et al. (2025:20) recommend that educational institutions implement sustainable policies that ensure access, retention and academic success for SWDs. In this context, Majoko (2018) suggests that universities consider collaborating with individual stakeholders, organisations and institutions, including lecturers, students with and without disabilities, administrative staff, support staff, parents, and the government, to develop and enforce policies that mandate the inclusion of SWDs in all faculties and departments. Additionally, lecture handouts and notes could be provided to SWDs in advance of lectures to ensure that they participate in learning alongside their non-disabled peers. Ziegler and Sloan (2017) note that practical training for faculty on accessibility practices for PDFs, Power-Point presentations and other modes of in-class content delivery, along with support for the development and piloting of online courses in accessible formats, is imperative given the increasing reliance on such materials in HE institutions. Furthermore, university-wide policies on making examinations accessible for SWDs can serve to eliminate discretionary decision-making by individual faculty members (Lord, 2017). Haddon et al. (2005) further note that uniform and expedient disability-inclusive HEI policies must extend to procurement policies, especially concerning obtaining ICTs and equipment (e.g., software and computers), where the principle of user testing should be reflected in policy. Lord and Stein (2018:237) suggest that states can facilitate the implementation of international disability standards by strengthening their legal and regulatory frameworks in light of the CRPD and by ratifying the Marrakesh Treaty.[5] Above

[5] The Marrakesh Treaty was adopted on June 27, 2013 in Marrakesh, Morocco. The Treaty aims to facilitate

all, institutional adherence to universally designed HEIs is recommended (see Evans et al., 2025). Overall, studies demonstrate how reasonable adjustments to the curriculum to help students participate in the teaching and learning processes on an equal footing with their peers can contribute to the retention and success of SWDs (Bunbury, 2020; Moriña et al., 2020).

3.2 Public Higher Education in Zimbabwe: An overview

Before exploring how in/accessibility is reproduced for SWDs in HE in Zimbabwe, it is paramount to understand the overall state of public HE in Zimbabwe. The HE system in Zimbabwe was once regarded as a beacon of educational excellence in Africa (Tsverukayi and Poshai, 2024:1). At independence in 1980, Zimbabwe inherited an enclave education system, divided between schools for whites and blacks. To undo the exclusionary colonial education legacy, the government adopted a socialist ideology characterised by significant government expenditure across key sectors- education, health, agriculture etc. In the education sector, grants and student loans were introduced for students studying at public HEIs in the 1980s to bolster access to HE (Teferra, 2014). However, due to the Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAP) introduced by Bretton Woods institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), grants and student loans were scrapped off in the 1990s, culminating in the adoption of a neoliberal approach to education. However, Harvey (2005) noted that exposing public HEIs to market forces can be harmful to students from disadvantaged backgrounds as they cannot compete for the best universities in the open educational market. Consequently, HE became inaccessible for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In 2010, the government restored HE funding to redress the deepening plight of students and inaccessibility of HE, particularly among disadvantaged groups, through the introduction of a cadetship scheme (Chimhenga, Mafa and Mpofu, 2015). This was a financing policy aimed at broadening access to HE for financially incapable students (Teferra, 2014). The scheme was a contract between an undergraduate student and the state, whereby the state would pay a large portion of the student's tuition fees (Mpofu et al., 2013). This was a means-tested scheme. Funded students were required to work for the government (bonded) for the same number of years that they received cadetship funding. Upon completing their studies, bonded students were not given certificates as a precautionary measure to discourage breaches of the cadetship scheme contract (Mpofu et al., 2013), by securing employment in the private sector.

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access to published works for persons who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print disabled. The Treaty
entered into force, with respect to the Republic of Zimbabwe, on December 12, 2019.

The cadetship scheme was deemed discriminatory as it excluded postgraduate students and those enrolled in part-time programmes (Nhavira, 2019). Additionally, there were instances where the government delayed disbursing cadetship funds (Langa, 2017) to HEIs. In 2014, the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education confirmed that the government owed state universities US$34 million, dating back to 2010 (Langa, 2017). In 2017, the government discontinued the scheme after state universities refused to register students due to outstanding payments from the Treasury (Kadirire, 2017). Given the persistent economic instability and hyperinflation, HE has become unaffordable for many potential students. Access limitations are reflected in high dropout and deferment rates, as well as soaring student debt (Tsverukayi and Poshai, 2024). Many students are forced to drop out or defer their studies because universities do not allow them to sit for exams unless their tuition fees are settled (Garwe and Maganga, 2015). The volatile economic environment in Zimbabwe, characterised by persistent hyperinflation, has highlighted deep inequalities in access to education within the country's public HEIs (Tsverukayi and Poshai, 2024:1). Drawing on the bi-directional relationship between disability and poverty, it can be argued that HE remains disproportionately inaccessible to PWDs. In the section below, I locate SWDs in HE in Zimbabwe.

3.2.1 Students with Disabilities in Higher Education in Zimbabwe

A qualitative study involving 32 SWDs titled: *Disability, the Invisible Handcuff: Challenges Faced by Learners with Disabilities in Institutions of Higher Education in Zimbabwe*, conducted by Mandicheta, Mabvurira and Ndebele (2019), provides a nuanced overview of the challenges faced by SWDs across five HEIs in Zimbabwe. The researchers identified six key themes: mobility, social exclusion, spatial distribution of services on university/college campuses, work-related learning, limited facilities and coping with technology. The study revealed that mobility within the campus environment was the biggest challenge. Many public toilets were reported to lack accessible sections for wheelchair users and the visually impaired. Additionally, the findings indicated that SWDs found it difficult to navigate the university campuses alone because some of the roads on the campuses and in the surrounding community were filled with potholes and changes due to the construction of new buildings. Participants reported being dependent on their sighted helpers for assistance. Campus hostels were found to be unfriendly due to the presence of too many stairs and corners, which made it difficult for SWDs to navigate their way. Chikukwa and Chimbwanda (2013) also discovered a similar problem at Zimbabwe Open University.

It was reported that SWDs were socially excluded from some extracurricular activities or events taking place in HEIs. Some participants indicated that they were excluded from using gym facilities. For example, one participant noted:*"...those who do monitoring of students who use gym facilities denied us to enter in the gym hall basing their argument on the fact that we might get*

injured" (Mandicheta, Mabvurira and Ndebele, 2019:20). The study also found that long distances between locations within colleges/universities posed a significant barrier to students with physical disabilities. Many physically disabled students encountered difficulties moving from one point to another due to the considerable distances between buildings or between offices within a single building. Due to the nature of their disabilities, physically disabled students spent much more time walking compared to non-disabled students when seeking different services at the institutions. This can have far-reaching repercussions on their psychological, social and academic spheres, likely to affect academic performance.

Work-related learning is an important component of most professional degree programmes in Zimbabwe; yet, most SWDs face challenges in this aspect of their learning. Due to negative attitudes and poor law enforcement, companies and organisations are less likely to hire SWDs for placements. Victoria (2010) states that both men and women with disabilities are subject to discrimination, but women are at a further disadvantage due to discrimination based on both gender and disability. The shortage of Braille equipment and other necessary facilities is one of the major problems faced by SWDs in HE. Participants with visual impairments reported that most institutions did not provide enough Braille materials, such as Perkins Braille machines, styluses, Braille textbooks, slates and modern assistive devices like Braille note-takers and talking calculators (Mandicheta, Mabvurira and Ndebele, 2019), among other facilities. Furthermore, it was reported that SWDs in HE, especially those with visual impairments, were not well versed in operating computer software programmes, particularly for internet use and typing assignments. This could be attributed to a lack of opportunities to learn or insufficient training.

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature on various aspects, including the relationship between disability, poverty and education. It examined international disability policy and legislative frameworks within the context of HE. Processes influencing the localisation of the CRPD in the Global South were also explored. The Sustainable Development Goals and their relevance to HE and SWDs were discussed. Disability models were presented to illustrate how disability and impairment have been interpreted throughout different historical periods. Furthermore, the role of Disability Services and Universal Design in promoting equitable opportunities within HE environments for SWDs was also presented. The chapter examined the state of public HE and the situation of SWDs in Zimbabwe. Finally, it reviewed global literature on accessibility for SWDs in HEIs globally. The next chapter discusses the theoretical framework that informed the study.

CHAPTER 4

Theoretical framework

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the theoretical framework informing the study: Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblage analysis. Specifically, I will centre the discussion on the philosophical concepts of assemblage analysis: affects, relations and capacity. I aim to elucidate how the concept of assemblages provides a framework for conceptualising how in/accessibility is reproduced within a HEI.

4.1 Assemblage analysis

This study adopted Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblage analysis, a strand within the portfolio of philosophical perspectives collectively known as 'new materialisms.' The term 'new materialism' is used with caution, acknowledging MacLure's (2017:49) assertion that it is not necessarily the most appropriate term, despite its frequent usage. New materialism has faced criticism from scholars who argue that it embodies a colonial arrogance by labelling itself as 'new' without due respect to other traditions, such as feminist theories of the body and indigenous ontologies (see MacLure, 2017; Jones and Hoskins, 2016:79). Instead of 'new materialism,' MacLure prefers the term 'new empiricisms' or the various turns: material turn, ontological turn, posthuman turn, speculative turn, affective turn, etc. However, this study retains the concept alongside other social scientists, while equally problematising the 'new' surrounding the term. Despite the diverse approaches aggregated within the portfolio termed 'new materialist', several common themes have been identified to characterise the variations. Advocates of new materialism reject the boundary dispute between 'social' and 'natural' sciences, questioning the very separation of nature and culture (Braidotti, 2013; Latour, 2005:13). New materialism is often characterised as having a 'flat' or 'monist' ontology that cuts across a range of dualisms such as human/non-human, micro/macro, structure/agency, mind/matter, nature/nurture (Van der Tuin and Dolphijn, 2010:156) and of paramount importance to this study, disabled/non-disabled, impaired/not impaired, academic/student, etc. In this sense, perceived binaries within the HEI are collapsed and blurred, and approached as co-producing inaccessibility.

Assemblage (*'agencement'* in French) is associated with the philosophical work of Gilles Deleuze (*Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze, 1968; 1994) and his later collaboration with Felix Guattari (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1987). Deleuze (1988) established ethology in his exegesis of Spinoza's monist philosophy. In this monist or 'immanent' ontology (Connolly, 2010:178; Deleuze and Guattari, 1988:266), bodies, objects, thoughts, social formations and other materialities are not defined by form, substance, subjectivity, or fixed attributes, but simply by

their *affects* (Deleuze, 1988:124). An *affect* is simply a capacity to affect or be affected (Deleuze, 1988:101). In this ontology, traditionally separate orders of existence such as biology, climate, culture, economics and discourse are collapsed and entities combine and operate as a whole to form a specific understanding, activity, or entity (Feely, 2016:874), in this case, how in/accessibility is reproduced within a HEI. *Affects* are not inherent but emerge relationally when one body or thing assembles with other bodies, things, or abstractions-which Deleuze calls *relations* (Deleuze, 1988:126). His application of this ontology, most notably in collaboration with Guattari (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984, 1988), supplies a framework for thinking about social inquiry.

Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage approach treats human bodies and all other material, social and abstract entities as relational, having no ontological status or integrity other than that produced through their relationship to other similarly contingent and ephemeral bodies, things and ideas (Deleuze, 1988:123; Deleuze and Guattari, 1988:261). Relationally, the focus shifts from essential entities to assemblages of disparate materialities (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988:22). Deleuze and Guattari (1988:257) emphasised that we have no idea what a body can do until we know its affects in a specific assemblage. For example, we cannot guess if the human/knife assemblage produced suicide, sliced bread, or another outcome unless we know its relational assemblage (see Burr and Fox, 2023). Savage (2020:327) asserts that an assemblage approach requires a commitment to relational thinking, which prioritises understanding the relationships between components as a core feature of research. Bueger argued that a central aspect of an assemblage approach is a 'relationalist understanding of reality' (Bueger, 2014:62), which recognises that 'relations are not fixed and stable, but rather emergent and enacted.' Deleuze was uninterested in what bodies, things, ideas or social institutions 'are', seeing them instead as *relations* that interact (Deleuze, 1990; Gatens, 1996) to produce specific capacities for action and desire: 'what a body can do' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). For example, a 'chemical compound' is pharmacologically significant only in relation to a 'body-tissue', and whether it acts as a 'medicine' or a 'poison' depends both on how a tissue is affected and how that effect is judged by human observers. In this example, the relations between chemical, tissue and observer comprise an *assemblage* (Fox and Alldred, 2013). Accordingly, in this study, I was interested in exploring the assembled relations within in/accessibility encounters and analysing their relations and the resultant in/capacities for SWDs.

Assemblages comprise heterogeneous human/non-human bodies, organic/inorganic, and technical/natural entities (Anderson and McFarlane, 2011). However, the concept of heterogeneity in assemblage theory does not simply imply a random assortment of things (Savage, 2020:325) and bodies. This definition is considered too simplistic (Nail, 2017). Instead, an assemblage is a collection of multifarious elements, living and non-living, that come together temporarily and work in concert to produce something (Shildrick, 2015:18), in this

case, to produce in/accessibility. Ureta (2015) notes that assemblages arise from heterogeneous elements brought together in specific strategic relations with particular desired impacts. Li (2007:264) notes that forging an assemblage is the result of 'the hard work required to bring together heterogeneous elements, create connections between them and sustain these connections in the face of tension.'

However, it should be noted that assemblages also develop in unpredictable ways around actions and events (Bennett, 2005:445; Deleuze and Guattari, 1988:88), 'in a kind of chaotic network of habitual and non-habitual connections, always in flux, always reassembling in different ways' (Potts, 2004:19). They are drawn together by their capacities to affect or be affected (Deleuze, 1988:124). It is this affective flow, and this alone, that determines what a body or other thing can do (its *capacities*) within a particular context. Therefore, the range of material-discursive elements within the HEI assembled around SWDs based on their affective capacities in specific situations ultimately influences what SWDs could or could not do. In this study, the researcher was interested in mapping out the range of human and non-human bodies (including abstractions) that assembled around SWDs in particular encounters that affected their capacity to access particular places, products, services and facilities open to the university community on an equal basis with everyone else. By rejecting a distinction between the physical world and the social constructs of human thoughts, meanings and desires, new materialism opens up the possibility to explore how each affects the other and how things other than humans, such as tools, technologies, or buildings, can be social 'agents', making things happen (Fox and Alldred, 2022:626).

The conception of *affect* as the capacity to affect or be affected (Deleuze, 1988:101) means that both non-human matter and humans can be agentic. The assemblage approach does not prioritise one element of the assemblage over another, such as humans over non-humans or vice versa. In the HEI studied, both human and non-human matter were regarded as equally capable of co-producing in/accessibility. An affect may be physical, biological, psychological, social, political or emotional (Burr and Fox, 2023:60). Affect is a force that achieves some change of state or capabilities in human or non-human matter (Clough, 2004:15; Massumi, 1988: xvi). This change can be physical, psychological, emotional or social (Fox and Alldred, 2022:628). Affects produce further affects within assemblages because one affect can produce more than one capacity. Affects flow 'rhizomically' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988:7), branching, reversing flows, coalescing and rupturing, supplying a diachronic and dynamic understanding of production as an open-ended becoming (Goodley, 2007:147), without a distinct beginning or end (Cluley, 2020:288). According to Thrift (2004:61), the flow of affect within assemblages is the means by which lives, societies and history unfold, by 'adding capacities through interaction, in a world that is constantly becoming'. The capacity to affect applies to both

biologically alive and inert bodies. For example, in their study conducted in a dissection room at a university in the UK, the 'dissection-assemblage' revealed how interactions between living students, teachers, technicians, and dead bodies not only produce knowledge and understanding of human anatomy but also demonstrate how the dead body acquires new capacities to affect living bodies psychologically, emotionally and physiologically (Burr and Fox, 2023). Following these studies, I was attuned not only to human discourses but also paid equal attention to the affective capacities of non-human matter in the reproduction of in/accessibility. Flows of affect change the capacities of an entity (a body, a collectivity, or a thing) in one direction or another (Duff, 2010:625). Accordingly, inaccessibility encounters were explored as producing not only physical incapacities but also emotional and psychological effects. In the section below, I will clarify the concepts of 'news', 'posts', and the 'turns', which are other concepts that feature in this thesis.

4.2 The 'News', 'Posts' and the 'Turns'

In addition to drawing concepts from 'news'-new materialisms, as discussed above, I also drew concepts from related philosophical fields known as the 'turns': "the material turn," "the ontological turn," as well as the posts: "the post-human turn," "the speculative turn," "the affective turn," and "post-structuralism." For brevity, these are collectively referred to in this study as the 'news,' 'turns,' and 'posts.' According to St. Pierre (2019), advocates of the 'news,' 'turns,' and 'posts' all share the philosophy of *immanence*. The concepts of *immanence* and *transcendence* have a long history in philosophy (Hein, 2021). The term immanence is derived from the Latin term *immanere*, which can be translated as "to dwell within," contrasting with the philosophy of transcendence, which means "to move beyond." Within post-structuralism, immanence is understood as "being a part of," "being internal to," "belonging to," or "remaining within," whereas transcendence refers to "going beyond" or "standing outside of or above" (Hein, 2021). For example, in terms of philosophies of transcendence, God is generally conceived as a supreme, external being who is wholly above or beyond humanity and the world. Thus, God does not depend on anyone or anything for his existence. In a philosophy of absolute immanence is immanent only to itself, as found in Deleuze's philosophy. Fully immanent inquiry rejects all forms of methodological transcendence (Hein, 2021). As such, Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, Lyotard, and others rejected pre-existing, formalised, systematised, procedural methods and methodologies because they over-determine thought and practice, closing off what might be thought and done in favour of doing, thinking, finding, and representing what *is*, what exists (see St. Pierre, 2021:164). Fully immanent research would reject all forms of transcendence (i.e., all external perspectives); it would be entirely self-organising. However, the question is: Is it possible for any study to be immanent only to itself, to be independent of all external, established perspectives or authority (e.g., established writing

techniques or literary devices, linearity, narrative development)? (see Hein, 2021:516). Contrary to advocates of fully immanent approaches to inquiry, who reject pre-existing research methodologies (St. Pierre, 2018; St. Pierre, 2015; Taguchi and St. Pierre, 2017), I was inspired by the philosophy to adopt a fluid approach and experiment with pre-existing qualitative concepts, such as sample sizes, fieldwork and reflexivity.

CHAPTER 5

Research methodology

> *"We live in paradoxical situations that call for paradoxical ways of thinking. Paradoxical ways of thinking assume no principles of truth, causality or discursive norms; instead, we must grant both the poetic singularity of events and the radical uncertainty of events and stay enigmatic and ambivalent".* (Baudrillard, 2000:68).

5.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the process through which data for the study were collected, analysed and presented. Drawing on new materialism, particularly Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblages, the methodological approach employed in this study is inherently experimental. It does not sit neatly within any of the three conventional research methodologies-qualitative, quantitative or mixed methodology-described by St. Pierre (2021:163) as "the big three U.S. methodologies." I drew and experimented with concepts from several established methodological traditions, primarily qualitative methodologies, as well as the "news," the 'turns,' and the "posts." I drew upon these traditions to experiment with what I refer to as 'New Materialist Qualitative Inquiry' (NMQI). Contrary to reading conventional research methodologies against each other, e.g., 'qualitative' versus 'quantitative,' I experimented with an anti-binary and anti-essentialist stance, in which case, perceived methodological boundaries are traversed and methodologies are read with and through each other, leveraging the strengths of each. Through NMQI, the researcher was preoccupied with the anti-essentialist question: 'What can research methodologies do?' instead of focusing on the essential attributes of research methodologies. Specifically, the researcher experimented with reading new materialisms along with conventional qualitative research methodologies. However, the reader is reminded that experimenting with NMQI does not in any way signal a rejection of "the big three U.S. methodologies", but rather serve as a complimentary that can extend existing methodologies

This chapter begins by discussing positionality in qualitative research and locating the researcher's positionality in this study. The ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the study are then discussed. Next, reflexivity, along with the researcher's experiences that prompted an experimentation with affective reflexivity is presented. It is important to note that reflexivity is presented early in the chapter to acquaint the reader with the researcher's lived experiences that influenced and shaped key methodological decisions in this study, such as data analysis. The chapter proceeds to discuss participatory disability research, which underpins the study's data collection processes. Specifically, the section chronicles the data collection procedures, including participant recruitment, demographic profile and the specific data collection methods employed:

walking/go-along interviews, photovoice, focus group discussions and follow-up interviews. The penultimate section discusses the dissemination plan. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the ethical considerations and dilemmas encountered during the conduct of the study.

5.1 Researcher's positionality

In recent years, the status or positionality of researchers in qualitative studies has been subjected to scrutiny. Positionality entails an individual's view and the position they choose to adopt in relation to a research task (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013). Liamputtong (2019:1602) observes that the opinions, values, beliefs and social background of researchers influence them across the research process, shaping each methodological and analytical decision taken. These positions are often influenced by political allegiance, religious faith, gender, sexuality, geographical location, race, culture, ethnicity, social class, age, linguistic tradition and so on (Sikes, 2004). As such, "a researcher's knowledge is always partial because his or her positionality influences how the world is viewed and interpreted" (Mullings, 1999:337). However, it must be remembered that some aspects of positionality are fixed, such as gender and race, while others are subjective, such as personal experiences (Liamputtong, 2019). Positionality requires the researcher to acknowledge and locate their views, values and beliefs in relation to a research process. Therefore, self-reflection is a mandatory ongoing process in any research project, as it gives the researcher the ability to identify, construct and critique their position within the research process. Reflexivity provides an avenue for researchers to acknowledge and disclose their own selves in research processes and seek to understand their role in it (Cohen et al., 2011:225). Influenced by Deleuze and Guattari's ideas, the researcher adopted a fluid, rather than fixed and stable notions of researcher positionality, such as insider versus outsider. The section below unpacks the concept of fluid positionality, drawing on empirical findings from this study and literature.

5.1.1 Fluid research positionality

In this study, I occupied a fluid positionality status, neither a strictly insider nor an outsider. Although I graduated from a Zimbabwean HEI in 2019, fieldwork experiences revealed that this was insufficient to qualify me as an insider. Walking/go-along interviews with research participants during data collection revealed several spaces/places and aspects of accessibility that I had seen, and in some cases interacted with, but never understood how they affected students with disabilities, until they were revealed to me by participants. Fluid research positionality entails the complex interactions and entanglements of the researcher with not only human participants, but also a wide range of non-human matter, and how these shifting relations influence knowledge production. The

researcher brings multiple identities to this study: a male, black, Zimbabwean, Christian, African, non-disabled ally, Shona (native language), 34 years of age, etc. As a former personal assistant for SWDs in HE, I bring first-hand experiences of disability issues in an HEI in a Global South context. Widening the analytical lens beyond the above seemingly stable identity to explore for more than human matter that tangles with researchers has the potential to produce complex and rich positionality accounts, than can be produced by purely humanistic accounts. Braidotti (2013) and Barad (2007) argue that paying attention to the complex interaction of human and non-human matter in research processes enable researchers to produce more complex maps of knowing beyond positivist and constructionist understandings. In concurrence, Adjei and Chan (2025:713), argue that there is much to be gained in research positionalities if this line of inquiry were expanded to accommodate an awareness of the role played by materialities in interview encounters during fieldwork. An assemblage approach to researcher positionality provides a window into how a multiplicity of ever-shifting socio-material relations influence and are influenced by researchers, and how they impact research outcomes and outputs.

Assemblage thinking blurs perceived boundaries and distinctions between and across phenomena e.g., disabled and non-disabled people, focusing instead on how they relate. This approach aligns with Shildrick's (2012:36) assertion that the CRPD establishes, for the first time in a legally binding instrument, the importance of prioritising the voices, experiences and knowledge of PWDs over all others while avoiding "the categorical authority" that seeks to side-line precisely the experiences of those whose social and contextual standpoints as non-disabled are integral to addressing barriers. Following Shildrick's assertion, I have shared a personal story that ushered me into the disability space as a non-disabled person (see Autoethnographic Vignette No.1, Appendix 9), and how the relations produced an interest in disability studies. I also worked in the Department of Disability Affairs under the Ministry of Social Welfare between 2018 and 2020 where I was part of the steering committee that coordinated the formulation of the National Disability Policy of Zimbabwe of 2021. The researcher's interactions with disabled people in this space, further entrenched the researcher's capacities to engage with disability literature, including forging professional working relations with disabled activists.

5.2 Ontological and Epistemological philosophies

In this section, I discuss the ontological and epistemological foundations that underpin the study's methodology. In distinguishing between the two, Berryman (2019) provided an example of two cooks: a vegetarian and an omnivore. According to Berryman (2019), what is prepared depends greatly on who the cook is and what he or she considers to be "good" food. In other words, the two cooks will define the world of edible food quite differently. For example, a vegetarian believes that animals are not meant to be consumed by humans as

food, whereas an omnivore holds an opposing philosophical position. Consequently, each cook carefully chooses recipes, ingredients and cooking methods that align with his or her view of 'well prepared' food (Berryman, 2019:272). Their recipes are a manifestation of their philosophical orientations regarding food consumption.

Following Berryman's example, ontology covers what we believe exists. For Crotty (2003), ontology describes what can be known. For researchers, one can be either positivist or interpretivist (Guba and Lincoln, 2000). On the other hand, epistemology relates to ways of knowing, how we know what we know and who can be a knower (Sprague, 2010). Ontology and epistemology provide insight into what the researcher believes to be the nature of truth, the nature of the world, and ways of being in that world; together, they describe the researcher's worldview (Berryman, 2019). Ontological orientations influence the types of research questions that we generate. In Berryman's example, a vegetarian will never ask questions related to how to cook chicken. In research, a positivist believes that truth exists independently of the researcher. Ontological and epistemological positions penetrate deeply into the research process, influencing not only what questions a researcher will ask but also how the researcher will go about the process of finding "answers" to those research questions (Hathcoat, Meixner and Nicholas, 2019). Consequently, my research questions were informed by new materialism. New materialisms take a different approach regarding ontology and epistemology, as explained below.

5.2.1 New materialist ontology

By refusing the central binaries and hierarchies of Cartesian thinking (mind/body and thinking/feeling), new materialist thought holds that the being of everything is in relation to other things (Toohey, 2019:939). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) used the term 'agencement' in French, translated as assemblage in English, to refer to the entanglement of related entities and proposed an ontology of relation, in which things are as they are (while also constantly changing) because of their interrelations and their entanglements with other things (which are also in other assemblages that are constantly changing). According to Barad (2007: 35), if we view people, animals, objects, nature, discourses and so on as all material and proceeding together in relation to one another, we see the world as 'a dynamic and shifting entanglement of relations. Similarly, Pennycook (2016:5) argued that a posthuman perspective reveals that 'there is no longer a world "out there" separate from humans and represented in language, but rather a dynamic interrelationship between different materialities', both human and non-human. For Ingold (2018:24), agency is not prior to activity or held by any one entity in an assemblage but is 'forming and transforming from within the action itself, so we should talk about "agencing" or "becoming agent". For example, the agency of students with disabilities is relationally determined, rather than inherent. In this context, the notion of identity is troubled not only by a relational ontology but also

by the idea that agency is not an attribute of anything but is 'ever forming and transforming from within the action itself' (Toohey, 2019). Drawing on Deleuze, rather than focusing on self-contained SWDs, places, products, services and facilities, I was interested in exploring the entangled socio-material relations that co-produced in/accessibility experiences for SWDs. Accepting an ontology of becoming also disrupts our understanding of knowing and knowledge (epistemology).

5.2.2 New materialist epistemology

Making boundaries between humans, animals, objects, nature and viewing humans exclusively as producers of knowledge are part of shared Western assumptions about the world (Toohey, 2019). A relational ontology that perceives things in the world as having porous boundaries and being/becoming in myriad relations with other entities proposes a mode of knowing that differs from Cartesian understandings. This is a knowing that is, in itself, an entanglement that is mutating, indeterminate, and unpredictable. Greco (2005: 24) notes that, knowing the world in all its becomingness is an impossibility, 'not indexed to the limits of perception or to the development of technology but rather intrinsic to the complexity of objects or processes themselves'. New materialists claim that knowledge is embodied and that learning involves the body in significant ways. The concept of affect has been helpful to many as it references 'autonomic responses that are held to occur below the threshold of consciousness and cognition and to be rooted in the body' (Ley 2011: 443). Dahlberg and Moss (2005: xxiii) stated, 'When the logic of affect is activated it gives rise to collective experimenting, intensity and unpredictability. It functions like a sort of contagion that people get involved in, or rather "hooked on." These ideas significantly influenced how I conducted this study. For example, the affective Kinsella Hall encounter (see Vignette No. 2) reveals how I became 'hooked on' by an impersonal event. It produced an embodied research experience that further immersed the researcher in the data analysis process

Although some traditional qualitative labels, such as data collection, fieldwork, sampling etc., have been deemed incompatible-especially in post-qualitative research inquiries-by scholars like St. Pierre, I retain them. St. Pierre (2016:121) notes that typical social science research concepts are grounded in the humanist subject. As such, they underplay the role of the material world in social production. Following Koro-Ljungberg (2016:2), I am not willing to give up, surrender, or replace these concepts, but I will problematise some of them. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage thinking, I am interested in leveraging the humanistic subject, along with the material world in exploring how in/accessibility is produced. Having discussed the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the study, the section below discusses the concept and practice of affective reflexivity.

5.2.3 A new materialist reading of reflexivity

Instead of traditional reflexivity, this study experimented with affective reflexivity. Subjective reflexivity implies an epistemologically self-contained and conscious researcher, armed with self-reflexive powers to control biases in research. Varpio et al. (2021) acknowledge that reflexivity is anchored in an orientation that values subjectivity and requires researchers to explore their influence on research, as its meaning is actively constructed throughout the research process. Contrastingly, post-humanist scholars have questioned the position of the subjective and conscious researcher. MacLure (2017:49) argues that the desire to control difference is easily seen in conventional qualitative methods, with all their devices for reducing uncertainty and mining meaning from the ongoing flow of events. An exclusive focus on the researcher's own voice, intellect and feelings runs the risk of overlooking the complex socio-material relations that shape research processes. New materialists critique the supposedly self-contained, coherent human subject, equipped to subdue the world with an arsenal of discursive and intellectual weapons, rationality, consciousness, creativity, intentionality and language. Conventional reflexivity elevates the researcher's voice and agency while perceiving the multiplicity of non-human matter that becomes entangled in qualitative research encounters as inert. It must be bone in mind that, new materialists do not suggest that these elements are fictions to be abandoned. MacLure (2017) argues that they have traditionally been elevated to a status that occludes other capacities and connections, thereby diminishing the influence of matter and our human entanglements with it. MacLure (2017) further asserts that new materialist thought challenges the notion of the world as the stage for the Big Human Adventure and traces the many dire consequences of our chronic disregard for the agential and affective potential of matter. A Deleuze and Guattari informed reflexivity shifts from being a solely personal and subjective undertaking to becoming an impersonal endeavour, in which a researcher remains alert to forces that may exceed their intellect, intentionality and consciousness. In this study, the researcher encountered instances where emergent and unpredictable encounters sparked reflection on specific aspects of the research. During walking interviews, some assumptions that the researcher had taken for granted were revealed. Without these encounters during fieldwork, reflecting on certain aspects of the research would have been nearly impossible. This aligns with Deleuze's (1994:139) assertion that "something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental encounter," something that "makes it possible to think what was previously unthinkable" (Jensen and Rodje, 2013:10). In the Deleuzean sense, reflexivity is rhizomatic-lacking stable entry and exit points, ceaselessly emerging and subsiding in unpredictable ways. Arguably, rhizomatic reflective practices have the potential to open up research spaces for the unexpected, unusual and unknown.

Following MacLure (2017:56), reflexivity becomes a matter of "learning how to tap into the problematic structure of events so that we can learn to be less guided

by what we already think we know is important." In other words, we must remain vigilant to avoid being 'iron-fettered' by our assumptions about the proper way to conduct reflexivity in research, such as the highly systematic approaches, which adheres to a specific set of pre-defined reflective questions. Wilson (2021:907) argues that Deleuzo-Guattarian assemblage thinking can surface what might otherwise have remained hidden or taken for granted, forces and intensities that influence the researcher's decisions and interpretations. Taken together, the arguments put forward by new materialists and post-qualitative inquirers such as St. Pierre, Kenny and Gilmore and MacLure begs the question: does traditional reflexivity, as the hallmark of interpretive, intentional, conscious, critical and intellectual researchers, have a place in new materialist qualitative inquiries? If not, what should we do? Rather than jettisoning traditional reflexivity, I leveraged traditional reflexivity, combining it with the new materialist concept of 'affect' to experiment with '*affective reflexivity*.' The section below narrates an autoethnographic vignette of the researcher's encounter in Kinsella Hall at TCD that contributed to experimenting with affective reflexivity.

5.3 Autoethnographic vignette No. 2: The 'Kinsella Hall' encounter

It was a warm summer afternoon on July 10, 2025. My eyes were glued to the PC screen as I wrote the discussion chapter of my thesis in Kinsella Hall at Trinity College Dublin (TCD). I slowly lifted my head as I stretched myself and glanced through the library's glass wall and something unexpected caught my eye about 30 meters away. What I saw unfolding is something I had never anticipated at TCD. At first, I could hardly believe it. As I tried to make sense of the situation, a wave of emotions engulfed me-disbelief, shock, anger, etc. I saw a student holding a wheelchair in a tilted and precarious position as he carefully navigated backwards down a series of steps. The legs of the student in the wheelchair pointed upwards and he frowned rhythmically as the wheelchair dropped from one step to the next. The way the wheelchair was dropping reminded me of an account shared by a photovoice participant about missing lectures for a week due to a broken wheelchair (see figure 1 below). Meanwhile, a group of about five students at the nearby smoking shelter stared in disbelief as the student described above carefully descended the steps, about 15 of them. When they reached the base of the stairs, I thought the struggle was over, but little did I know I was wrong. The other student left the one in the wheelchair at the base of the steps, raced up the stairs to grab two bags lying at the top. He had a very brief chat with the staring students. I couldn't hear the conversation because of the distance and the glass wall. The student immediately raced back down, disappearing from my sight. While I was still processing what I had just witnessed, I remembered that there was an outdoor elevator just nearby the steps. A few days earlier, I had seen the same students using it. As I pondered why they had not used the elevator, I glanced at its location and saw a barricade tape and some barriers installed signalling that the elevator was out of service. At that moment,

a flood of thoughts and emotions raced through me. I stepped out of Kinsella Hall and took a photo of the elevator (see Figure 2 below). The numerous personal accounts of barriers to accessing the physical environment in the HE that I had reviewed came rushing back to me, intensified by this experience. Tears welled up in my eyes. Many of the physical accessibility assumptions I held since arriving in Ireland were challenged and crushed. I remembered sending a photo of an outdoor elevator to my cousin in Zimbabwe, and we were both impressed by how technology could transform physical accessibility. We even drew comparisons, suggesting how outdoor elevators could enhance accessibility in the HE that we attended together in Zimbabwe. This encounter further shifted my perspective on accessibility from a fixed and stable understanding to a contingent and unpredictable one. This also gave birth to one of the arguments in the thesis that universal design of places, products, services and facilities is essential but not a panacea. In/accessibility is a complex and infinite socio-material-abstract-embodied mediation. These ideas were made to 'glow' (Mac Lure, 2013*) by the new materialist theories I had been reading.*



Figure 1: Broken wheelchair

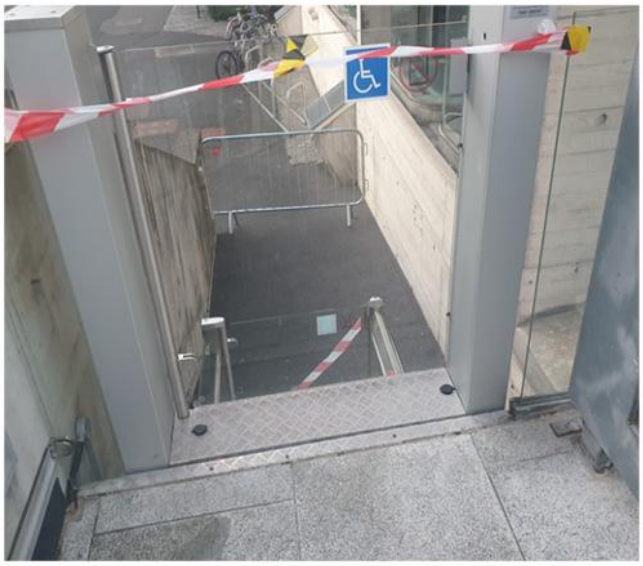


Figure 2: Broken elevator (Kinsella Hall encounter)

The image, in figure 1 above was submitted by a participant with a physical impairment during an in-depth follow-up interview. They recounted an experience of missing lectures for a week, stuck in their room and battling with the staff in the Department of Works to get their wheelchair repaired. The participant took the image a few months before the study on their mobile phone and volunteered to share it with the researcher. Emerging connections between the Kinsella Hall encounter and the broken wheelchair in Zimbabwe illustrate Deleuze and Guattari's concept of rhizomatic way of thinking:

> "We are tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots and radicles. They have made us suffer too much. *Thought is not arborescent and the brain is not a rooted or ramified matter".* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:15).

Deleuze and Guattari (1987:18) resisted the tree-like way of thinking, characterised by clear beginnings-roots, trunks and branches. They considered it odd how the tree structure has dominated Western reality and all of Western thought. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) assert that "the tree and root inspire a sad image of thought that is forever imitating the multiple on the basis of a centred or segmented higher unity." Instead, they argue for the rhizome, where anything can connect to anything, coalesce, reverse and branch off. Rather than discarding predefined and structured reflective practices, Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage approach equip researchers with analytical tools to navigate the messy nature of knowledge production.

MacLure (2017) argues that human intellectuation is not intrinsically ours but is socio-materially mediated. Influenced by Deleuze and Guattari, the researcher began to see how bodies (human and non-human) can intertwine to influence research processes. It became apparent that framing reflexivity solely around the

researcher's personal subjectivity and intentionality risks overlooking the multiplicity of impersonal forces that extend beyond the researcher's intentionality and consciousness. These forces can compel us to reflect on aspects of our research or segments of data in specific directions. Such forces can catch researchers by surprise, pull us down, tear us apart, transform us, shock us, excite us, and make us wonder, all while conducting research, leaving indelible marks on the findings, both consciously and unconsciously. Impersonal forces have the potential to either close down or open spaces for what ultimately features as research outcomes and outputs, such as theories, models, guidelines etc.

Kenny and Gilmore (2014:161) contest existing attempts at self-reflexivity, in which the researcher is assumed to be in an unshakeable position of power. It is argued that what is rarely acknowledged is the vulnerable, stressful and often difficult experience of being immersed in a social setting in which one is a stranger (Brannan, 2011; Kenny, 2008). Particular socio-material encounters during the data analysis process, coupled with the researcher's positionality, have the potential to make some segments of transcripts grab their hearts more powerfully than others, ultimately becoming research findings. I concur with MacLure's (2017:52) assertion that "as long as we remain intelligible to ourselves as the orchestrators of data's adventures, it will be difficult to escape the fetters of representation, humanism and anthropocentrism." Researchers must acknowledge that a complex web of material-discursive relations will always escape their conscious reflexive efforts, yet powerfully influence research outcomes and outputs. In response to critiques of subjective and researcher-led reflexivity, the researcher experimented with *affective reflexivity*.

5.3.1 Affective reflexivity

Experimenting with concepts from new materialisms, such as 'affect', can help researchers enrich reflexivity in qualitative research. The researcher contends with subjective reflexivity but argues for a more complex conception and practice that incorporates socio-material, abstract, and embodied entanglements in research. In this study, affect is understood from the Spinozist perspective (Deleuze 1988:101), which entails the capacity to affect or be affected. In an assemblage, there is no 'subject' and no 'object' (Anderson 2010:736). The binaries of researcher/participant, nature/culture, body/mind and data collection/analysis/writing are collapsed and blurred. The researcher is preoccupied with mapping out how the seemingly disparate elements, such as human/non-human and disabled/non-disabled, affect the knowledge production processes. Affective reflexivity reorients our attention away from personal and subjective framings to attuning to the socio-material and embodied entanglements in research processes.

'Affective reflexivity' emerged from the researcher's personal and impersonal encounters during fieldwork, data analysis, writing of the PhD thesis and new

materialist literature. Arguably, melding Deleuzo-Guattarian conceptual tools with humanistic reflexivity practices can open spaces to conceive and practice reflexivity differently. I contend with Chung's (2020) observation that an affective approach to reflexivity helps to recognise the field as an affect-laden (Bøhling, 2015) or a material-pervasive space "in which non-human forces are equally at play as constitutive factors" (Hultman and Lenz Taguchi, 2010:527) of research. However, it must be remembered that, no matter how nuanced reflexive accounts may be, they are infinitely incomplete. There is always more going on across the life-span of a research project than can be captured by the conscious, intentional and subjective researcher. Affective reflexivity aligns with Baudrillard's (2000) assertion that we live in paradoxical situations that call for paradoxical ways of thinking. Baudrillard further argues that paradoxical ways of thinking assume no principles of truth, causality, or discursive norms; instead, "we must grant both the poetic singularity of events and the radical uncertainty of events" and stay enigmatic and ambivalent (Baudrillard, 2000:68). The Kinsella Hall encounter sparked off the realisation that subjective and personal reflexivity was insufficient to illuminate the multiplicity and complex socio-material entanglements co-producing the research project. The section below reports on selected affective encounters which inspired the shift from subjective reflexivity to affective reflexivity.

5.3.2 Selected affective encounters

The researcher treated transcripts and images not as mute objects but as affective and agentic. Certain segments of transcripts glowed more than others, opening spaces to think about the data in particular directions and not others. Some segments of data and images evoked very powerful memories and emotions, transporting the researcher back into his past as a personal helper for SWDs. These memories were further coloured by disability literature as well as new materialisms that he had consumed since the start of the PhD in 2021. For example, a student with a physical impairment shared with the researcher that he was rehabilitated in a way that could enable him to use his room as a toilet. However, the HEI's accommodation officers insisted that he share a room with another student, as per the HEI's accommodation allocation policy. The student resisted and pushed back on this arrangement. It was not until he wrote a three-page letter explaining himself to the dean of students that his request to have a room alone was granted. This was a very emotional encounter for the researcher. The act of sending a letter compelled the researcher to reflect on several aspects, such as the heterogeneity across and within impairment types and the impacts of one-size-fits-all approaches to disability services. One-size-fits-all approaches run the risk of upholding particular rights whilst violating others. The researcher's prior reading of new materialisms enabled him to acknowledge the agentic and affective capacities of both human and non-human matter in co-producing disability experiences. This case reveals attitudes of service providers towards disabled students. The content of the letter contributed to challenging restrictive attitudes, thereby producing a capacity for single occupancy.

Additionally, during fieldwork in Zimbabwe, a participant who used a wheelchair answered a mobile call during a follow-up interview session. The call was on speakerphone. The caller was reaching out to arrange the pickup of the participant's hard copy essay for submission. The participant replied that a different student had already picked up the essay. Although unexpected, the phone call prompted a discussion that enriched the interview and the data collected. The participant revealed that the lecturer's office was located off-campus, on the third floor and accessible only by stairs. As a result, the participant found it pointless to submit their essay in person and instead relied on friends and colleagues to do it on their behalf. The hard copies made the researcher reflect on the state of education technology at the HEI and its potential to eliminate physical barriers faced by students who use wheelchairs. Although submitting essays through friends and colleagues addressed some accessibility issues on campus, it created some problems. One participant reported that their previous helper had copied their essay, resulting in penalties for both. The participant noted that, in such instances, SWDs were more likely to be accused of academic misconduct than their non-disabled peer. The unexpected phone call and the ensuing reflections from both the researcher and the participant on various issues led the researcher to think differently about sample sizes in research. In this encounter, a random caller suddenly appeared and disappeared from the interview assemblage, yet provided invaluable insights, which enriched the interview. Without the random call, the researcher might have missed the opportunity to reflect on the complex interplay between place/space and technology at the HEI, along with privacy and confidentiality in academic work, and the consequences of submitting assessment essays through informal networks such as friends and classmates.

Olmos-Vega et al. (2023:247) suggested that as we integrate strategies for reflexivity in our research, we must strive for robust reporting practices that enable the nuances of reflexivity to shine through, communicating the work's credibility through transparency around the researchers' perspectives and decisions. Olmos-Vega et al. (2023) expressed their disappointment with many instances where reflexivity is reported only in a brief paragraph labelled "researcher characteristics and reflexivity." They argue that reflexivity should not be relegated to a discrete paragraph or presented as an apology for the researcher's influence on the data. Instead, they suggested that effective reporting should embrace researchers' subjectivity and address the nuances of decisions made throughout the research process. They recommend using Walsh's typology to structure reflexive reporting practices woven throughout the manuscript, offering the reader an opportunity to journey through the practices and decision-making that shaped the study. Kenny and Gilmore (2014:176) observed that many researchers now add a short reflection at the end of their methods section. However, this can appear as a routine requirement instead of a genuine reflection. Resultantly, such 'self-reflection' usually gives little useful

insight into how the research was actually conducted and has become more like a checklist item in qualitative research. Contrary to a discrete reflexive paragraph, the researcher experimented with autoethnographic vignettes as a reflective tool. Autoethnographic vignettes are also known in other texts *as 'narratives of the self'* (Richardson, 1994), *'self-stories'* (Denzin, 1989) *and 'first-person accounts'* (Ellis, 1998). Selected researcher's personal micro-narratives are interwoven throughout the thesis, inviting the reader to relive the researcher's experiences through the writer's or performer's eyes (Denzin, 2000:905). In the section below, autoethnographic vignettes are discussed as a reflective tool, along with a justification for their use.

5.4 Autoethnographic vignettes

The researcher incorporated autoethnographic vignettes into the research assemblage in the middle of the thesis writing process. The researcher is drawn to Reed-Danahay's (1997:9) definition of autoethnography as "a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context. It is both a method and a text, and can be done by either an anthropologist who is doing 'home' or 'native' ethnography or by a non-anthropologist/ethnographer." Having read Mirka Koro-Ljungberg's book, *Reconceptualising Qualitative Research: Methodologies without Methodology*, I adopted vignettes as a reflective tool. Koro-Ljungberg's (2016) notion of methodologies without methodology represents methodologies without strict boundaries or normative structures, but rather "methodologies that may begin anywhere, anytime, but by doing so can create a sense of uncertainty and loss (or mourning of stable, fixed, preconceptualised, or historical knowledge)." Intrigued by this idea, I incorporated autoethnographic vignettes in the middle of the PhD journey. At that point, I was reminded of Laurel Richardson's (2000) observation that writing is thinking and writing is inquiry.

Huber (2024:51) concluded that early-career researchers engaged in qualitative research would benefit from adopting autoethnographic vignettes when critically reflecting on their bodily research and analysis processes. Humphreys (2005:853) asserts that the use of autoethnographic vignettes in any qualitative research account enriches the story, ethnography or case study and enhances the reflexivity of the methodology. Accepting Louis's (1991:135) argument that "I am an instrument of my inquiry, and the inquiry is inseparable from who I am," the researcher aims to provide the reader access to some of the pleasure and pain points that influenced key methodological decisions. Vignettes also illustrate the researcher's entanglements with the inquiry, thereby dispelling any notion of the researcher as an independent and objective observer. Humphreys (2005:854) observed that all qualitative research accounts would benefit from the explicit and overt presence of the first-person "I" of the researcher. The researcher concurs with Jenks (2002:184) assertion that "Who I am affects what I observe, what I write and how others will react to what I say." By incorporating vignettes, the researcher hopes to invite the reader on a journey to discover the

what, why, who, when, which, and how that underpin the methodological decisions of this study.

The researcher adopted Mruck and Mey's (2019) concept of journaling and reflective writing. Throughout the research project, the researcher maintained a journal to document reflections and encounters. However, it was not until the Kinsella Hall encounter that the researcher began to reflect on key decisions that had influenced significant aspects of the study since the design stage. It dawned on the researcher that the participatory data collection design was deeply informed by prior personal interactions with SWDs. A total of five vignettes were produced and documented in the electronic affective journal in NVivo. Having discussed how the researcher leveraged traditional reflexivity practices and new materialist conceptual tools to experiment with *affective reflexivity*, the section below reports on Vignette No. 2: Blurring Methodological Binaries. The vignette aims to inform the reader on the researcher's personal encounters that underpin the methodological decisions adopted in this study.

5.5 Autoethnographic vignette No. 2: Blurring Methodological binaries.

I have always considered myself an average student in terms of mathematical computations. During the second year of my undergraduate studies in Zimbabwe, I quickly found refuge in qualitative methodology. For my final year undergraduate dissertation in 2017, I completed a qualitative dissertation. In 2019, I completed another qualitative dissertation for a master's programme. Again, in 2021, I completed another qualitative dissertation for a master's programme at University College Cork (UCC) in Ireland. In 2021, I completed the *PhD Qualitative Research Methods and Research Ethics* module. Alongside this module, I was developing my PhD research proposal from a qualitative methodology perspective. In 2023, I completed the PhD confirmation process. The PhD confirmation process requires candidates to prepare a confirmation report with a section on methodology that discusses the design, access and sampling, data collection tools, data analysis technique(s), as well as ethical considerations.

Alongside completing the *PhD Qualitative Research Methods and Research Ethics* module, I was starting to make some baby steps, reading Deleuze and Guattari's work. I had chosen assemblage thinking as the theoretical framework for my study, having been inspired by Michael Feely (co-supervisor). It was not until I started transcribing my interviews that I began to notice something interesting between traditional qualitative methodologies and assemblage theory. For example, Deleuze and Guattari's (1991/1994) concepts, such as the rhizome, are inherently anti-method. Deleuze (1962/1983) argued that "thought does not need a method, that method will, in fact, shut down thought, capture it, and consign it to the strata, to the normal, to whatever everyone knows, to the dogmatic image of thought" (Deleuze, 1968/1994), which prohibits

experimentation and creation. At first, I could not make sense of Deleuze's anti-method given that I was accustomed to qualitative research methodology designs. For a long time, I was not confident enough to engage with these emerging insights. I went ahead and coded half of my transcripts in NVivo, following Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2021) six stages of Reflexive Thematic Analysis. At that stage, I was geared towards generating themes from the data. However, after one supervision session, I paused the data analysis process to revisit Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage concepts. Although I initially felt frustrated for not fully grasping their ideas, I later realised that this experience was not unique to me. St. Pierre, reflecting on her own reading and study of poststructuralism as a doctoral student in 1991, revealed:

> *"…I was lost in language. Ordinary words did not mean what I thought they did: subject, time, human, power, rhizome, duration, real. New words refused an easy meaning: assemblage, bodies-without-organs, facility, prehension, différance."* (St. Pierre, 2024, 1603).

Similarly, in my case, several Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts, for example *'affect, molar, molecular, lines of flight etc'* did not mean what I am used to. St. Pierre further articulates:

> *"French continental scholars we have grouped together in spite of their differences and labelled "post-structural"-e.g., Baudrillard, Bergson, Deleuze, Deleuze with Guattari, Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, and others-were not easy to read. In fact, they were too hard for me to read, but I persisted, reading harder. I used familiar strategies including re-reading, co-reading, reading secondary sources, reading texts the texts cited, and reading with colleagues".* (St. Pierre, 2024).

As a non-native English speaker, I found Deleuze and Guattari's concepts even more complex to grasp. I did not have colleagues to read with, and I relied on re-reading and secondary sources that have operationalised Deleuze and Guattari's ideas. In all this difficult reading, I comforted myself with Lacan's (as cited in Ulmer, 1985) advice that "to read does not obligate one to understand." At this moment, I do not claim to fully grasp Deleuze and Guattari's concepts, nor do I expect to ever fully understand them. In fact, I have just embarked on a rhizomatic journey-one with no stable beginning and no stable destination. In Deleuze's terminology, I will forever remain in the middle. It was very difficult for me to fully merge Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblage with the traditional qualitative systematic approaches. I found myself in a deep state of confusion and felt stuck. I could not think of an alternative way to analyse the data. I could not envision qualitative research outside familiar traditional qualitative research concepts, thematic data analysis. During this period of soul-searching, I stumbled upon a paper by St. Pierre, in which she shared her experiences during her PhD in the 90s and the events that led her to invent post-qualitative inquiry (See Appendix 19).

Although I was gradually beginning to reconsider conventional qualitative methodologies, I found it difficult to question my qualitative research methods skills. I had fully embraced qualitative research methodology, welcoming it with open arms. My reluctance to reorient my thoughts regarding qualitative methodology is aptly captured below:

> *"If we continue to secure and perpetuate this methodology* (qualitative) *in the books and papers we write and the courses we teach, I fear most of our students will follow in our footsteps and, like us, find it difficult to escape their training. Might we, instead, encourage them to practice a critical ontology of themselves, to experiment with what is yet to come, to summon those still- missing people?"* (St. Pierre, 2014:15).

My reluctance to rethink qualitative methodology also reveals St. Pierre's (2021:164) observation that "too many PhD students drop down to methodology because they are taught too much methodology and not much philosophy." Like me, St. Pierre studied conventional qualitative methodologies alongside post-structural philosophers such as Foucault during her PhD studies in the early 90s. See Appendix 16 for a keynote lecture at the 15th International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry in Illinois in 2019 by St. Pierre.

It was not until I read about St. Pierre's experiences that I resolved to embrace Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of assemblage, allowing it to guide the data analysis process. This decision aligns with St. Pierre's (2025:164) recommendation for researchers to read philosophy and to allow the intensity of philosophical concepts to reorient thought. I realised that Deleuze and Guattari's concepts had reoriented my thinking regarding qualitative research. Transcendental empiricism insists that we study Deleuze's and Deleuze with Guattari's philosophy, demanding that we read and read and read until its concepts overtake us and help us lay out a plane that enables lines of flight to what we have not yet been able to think and live (St. Pierre, 2016:121). I do not claim to have read philosophy, nor am I anywhere close to being or intending to be a philosopher. However, as a new reader of Deleuze and Guattari, their ideas are starting to reorient my thought regarding social phenomena. Just like St. Pierre, I cannot overestimate Deleuze and Guattari's influence on my thought.

> *"I read Deleuze too soon, so early in my academic career that any pre-existing research methodology could not survive his ontology of immanence and his philosophical concepts like the fold and haecceity that destabilised whatever certainty methodology promised me."* (St. Pierre, 2017:5).

Similarly, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblage started to reorient my thoughts regarding highly structured approaches in qualitative research. St. Pierre (2016:111) noted that social science researchers often rush to application, to empirical method and methodology, before studying the history, philosophy

and politics of various empiricisms. In my case, I rushed and applied Deleuze and Guattari prematurely, before fully understanding their relationship to qualitative research methodology. For St. Pierre (2021), neither humanist qualitative nor quantitative nor mixed-methods social science research methodologies can accommodate the posts. This suggests that the 'posts' run parallel to the 'three US methodologies', in which post-structuralists and post-humanist conduct research differently, instead of critiquing traditional methodologies.

Unlike St. Pierre, who perceived the 'posts' as incompatible with the three US methodologies, I ultimately decided to draw from traditional qualitative research methods along with concepts from the 'news,' 'posts,' and the 'turns.' I realised that I could not completely disengage from traditional qualitative methods. As observed by MacLure, I kept on sliding back into established practices. Resultantly, I resolved to experiment with a new materialist-informed data analysis process, melding ideas of Deleuze and Guattari with contemporary social scientists who applied their concepts to explore diverse social phenomena, such as the transition to higher education (Taylor and Evans-Harris, 2016); young men and sexuality (Alldred and Fox, 2015); and the contribution of non-human matter to social inequality (Fox and Alldred, 2021), among others. I finally resolved to position my research methodology between traditional qualitative and post-qualitative inquiry. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari and St. Pierre's post-qualitative inquiry approach, I adopted the *research assemblage approach*. The idea of research as an assemblage stems from the Deleuzo-Guattarian view of assemblages as 'machines' that link elements together affectively to do something, to produce something (Fox and Alldred, 2017:155).

5.6 The research assemblage

Following Fox and Alldred (2015), this study conceptualises the research process as an assemblage. Assemblages refer to 'machines' that link elements together affectively to do something, to produce something (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988:4), in this case, knowledge about how in/accessibility is reproduced for SWDs in an HEI. Applying the concept of a 'machinic assemblage' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988:4), different stages in the research process, such as data collection, data analysis, sampling and dissemination, are treated as machines that work because of their affects. In general, the affects in a 'data collection machine' apprehend aspects of an event and act on these to produce an output called 'data' (Fox and Alldred, 2015:403). Similarly, a data analysis machine processes this data according to rules of logic, deduction or inference to produce 'findings' in the form of generalities or summaries (Jackson and Mazzei, 2013). A sampling machine selects elements or participants according to inclusion/exclusion criteria. A reporting machine takes the outputs of data analysis and creates knowledge products for dissemination: theory, policy, and practice implications, and so forth (Fox and Alldred, 2015). However, in practice,

as feminist critics have noted, research is often less linear (Ackerly and True, 2010:10). Data collection and analysis may be used iteratively, or data may only 'make sense' when it is written up. But even in these more complex or even 'rhizomic' assemblages, what the constituent machines do can still be understood in terms of the affects that make them work (Fox and Alldred, 2015).

According to Fox and Alldred (2015), relations in a research assemblage include the bodies, things, and abstractions that get caught up in a social inquiry, including: events to be researched, research tools such as questionnaires, interview schedules, recording and analysis technologies and computer software and hardware; theoretical frameworks and hypotheses; research literatures and findings from earlier studies; researchers, etc. (Fox and Alldred, 2015:404; Fox and Alldred, 2013; Coleman and Ringrose, 2013:17; Masny, 2013:340). In this study, the research assemblage is constituted by heterogeneous socio-material-abstract-embodied relations that include at least: the event studied (in/accessibility among SWDs in a HEI), tools (interview guides); models and theoretical frameworks (social model of disability, human rights-based approach); technologies (PCs, laptops, audio recorders, cameras); software programmes (NVivo, Microsoft Word, OneDrive...); the researcher, supervisors, PhD students, academic staff, friends and family members. To this list are added contextual elements such as the physical spaces and establishments where research takes place; the frameworks, philosophies, cultures and traditions that surround scientific inquiry; ethical principles and ethics committees; and the paraphernalia of academic research outputs: libraries, journals, editors, reviewers, and readers (Fox and Alldred, 2015:4). The materialist analysis of research processes supplies a critical understanding of what social inquiry does, how affects in the research assemblage interact with events, and the micropolitics of social inquiry (Fox and Alldred, 2015).

The objectives of materialist social inquiry are to reveal relations, affects and affect economies in assemblages; the capacities (and limits to capacities) produced in bodies, collectivities and social formations and the micropolitics of these capacities and limits (Fox and Alldred, 2015). Unlike 'spontaneous' assemblages in daily life, research assemblages are machines designed to do specific tasks and comprise relatively few relations and affects (Fox and Alldred, 2015). This makes them amenable to this kind of analysis, to assess how and why they work, and in what ways a change of methodology (for instance, from survey to ethnography) or of a data collection or analysis method alters the affective flow, and hence what kind of 'knowledge' they produce (Jackson and Mazzei, 2013:263). Micropolitically, the machine (e.g., the sampling machine) acts as a filter on the affect economies of study events, extracting only certain data and categorising it according to the affect economy of the instrument rather than of the event itself (Fox and Alldred, 2015). The micropolitics of qualitative interviewing reflect the interactions between the researcher, interviewees, and the events they describe. As such, this materialist analysis allows us to look within

the ‘black box’ of social inquiry and open to scrutiny the micropolitics of different research assemblages, such as who gains and who loses in the processes of research (Fox and Alldred, 2015:404). In this sense, disassembling research machines such as data analysis enables us to understand how various components are affecting each other, and these relations affect the nature of knowledge produced. Having summarised the research assemblage, as constituted by various machines intentionally assembled by the researcher to produce something, the section below discusses participatory disability research, along with a justification for its use in this study.

5.7 Participatory disability research

According to Charlton (1998), the disability rights movement emphasises that PWDs must have a voice and control over activities that directly affect them. In alignment with the principle, ‘Nothing about us, without us,’ which calls for the active participation and involvement of PWDs in all activities that relate to their interests (WHO and World Bank, 2011), empirical data for the study was produced through four qualitative data collection methods i.e. photovoice, walking/go-along interviews, focus group discussions and individual follow-up interviews. Data collection methods were chosen for their potential to actively engage SWDs in the data collection process. Participatory approaches are considered empowering for disabled people who are genuinely involved and included (Kuper et al., 2021:332) in research processes. The methods were also anticipated to allow research participants and the researcher to engender a shared and embodied understanding of access in real time. Before discussing how participatory methods were operationalised in this study, I will dedicate the next paragraphs to conceptualise participatory research.

Introducing a book chapter in *Reconceptualising Qualitative Research: Methodologies without Methodology*, Cheyney and Bowden (2016) posed the following questions: Who do we conduct research for? What would happen if social science researchers were to reconceptualise the reasons and ways in which they engage in research? What if there were an expectation and a norm for carrying out only the kind of social science research that is collaborative and participant-driven? What would happen if the form of research that students in the social sciences knew best were participant-driven? Although written in the context of social science research in general, the questions can assist us in fulfilling the global disability mantra, and also align with the Agenda 2030 mantra, “Leave no one behind.”

Many forms of qualitative inquiry call for collaboration with the people affected by the problem being studied, both within and outside academia. Without collaboration, it may be hard to study complex problems, generate meaningful inquiry questions and mobilise allies. According to Cheyney and Bowden (2016:175), no research project should serve only the scholars’ egocentric

purposes of recognition, vita building or studying topics that have little relevance to the public. Cheyney and Bowden (2016) argue for more public science-science that provokes and creates change outside academia. Even if the intention of a researcher is to create new knowledge and discourses or to bring to light phenomena, ideologies or policies that have served to create or sustain the marginalisation of people, unless we include participants in the research process in a purposeful way, there remains a meaningful risk that their experiences and perspectives will be lost under the more voluble influence of the researcher (Cheyney and Bowden, 2016). Kuper et al. (2021:428) corroborate this argument, noting that the development of policies and programmes on disability must be guided by the preferences and needs of PWDs themselves to ensure that they are relevant and appropriate. Accordingly, disability scholarship has embraced participatory research methods to support the collection of more relevant, ethical and potentially higher quality data (Kuper et al., 2021:328). Participatory approaches are perceived to transfer power from the researcher to the research subjects (sic), to varying degrees, so that PWDs are active partners in the research process (Kuper et al.,2021:328). Although participant-driven research methodologies are argued to belong to everyone and not bound to specific individuals, schools and community groups (Cheyney and Bowden, 2016:182), Kuper and colleagues (2021:329) argue that, in reality, participation in disability-related research is not undertaken extensively. Exclusion from research is more pronounced in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where resources for research are generally lower and the challenges of lack of funding, availability of trained disabled researchers and accessibility are potentially magnified, notwithstanding certain exceptions (Berghs, 2017; Wickenden and Elphik, 2016; Wickenden and Kembhavi, 2014; Kuper et al., 2021).

There are different ways of conceptualising participation (Danieli and Woodhams, 2005). The ladder of participation was originally developed to consider citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969). It can be relevant when considering participatory research, including disability-inclusive research, while acknowledging that it was intended as a rhetorical device, rather than a fixed hierarchy of participation (Holland et al., 2008). Data for the study was co-produced, in that the researcher and participants collaborated towards a common goal of collecting relevant data (see Hickey, 2018). Given the nature of the study as a PhD project, the researcher designed the study, including the data collection tools, and SWDs actively participated in collecting data relevant on how in/accessibility is reproduced for SWDs. The researcher also planned for participatory dissemination of findings, in which research participants would actively participate in disseminating them to the HEI community through a photo exhibition and public forum and, potentially, a braille and audio tour of campus, and, to promote new understandings of accessibility produced through the study.

Historically, PWDs have been excluded from research that affects them. Research has been done ‘on’ disability and ‘on’ PWDs, without considering what

they may have to say. Research WITH and BY youth with disabilities rather than ON (sic) youth with disabilities only is key to avoiding a tokenistic approach (Kuper et al., 2021; Njelesani et al., 2022). Cheyney and Bowden (2016:180) denounced one-directional flows of knowledge and power initiating from the researchers. Kuper and colleagues (2021:328) note that most of the relevant literature on participatory research focuses on high-income settings. Discussions on the challenges and opportunities in using these approaches in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are sparse (Kuper et al., 2021:328). Disability-inclusive youth research, involving youth with disabilities in the design, implementation, and dissemination of study data, is still limited in Africa (Mbazzi et al., 2024:1). Although the statistics might have improved by now, a review of studies using PhotoVoice conducted in 2017 to capture the experiences of people with physical disabilities identified 20 papers, only 3 of which included data from LMICs (Dassah, Aldersey and Norman, 2017).

It is argued that to understand the experiences of young people with disabilities and develop contextually appropriate and effective strategies to promote participation, youth with disabilities need to be included throughout the research process (Bailie et al., 2023; Kuper et al., 2014). This requires a shift in power from researchers from high-income countries to PWDs and researchers in low-income countries, as well as consideration of researcher-subject power dynamics (Njelesani et al., 2022), consideration of African research methods (Owusu-Ansah and Mji, 2013), and youth-friendly research processes (Njelesani et al., 2022). Participatory research with youth with disabilities in sub-Saharan Africa must be underpinned by respect, equitable partnerships, barrier removal, and the use of appropriate tools (Chappell et al., 2014; Kuper et al., 2021). Mbazzi and colleagues (2024:1) further stipulate that participatory research with youth with disabilities is feasible, enriching, and key to inclusive research that informs education and employment policy and practices. The section below discusses the data collection machine, along with the specific participatory data collection methods used in this study.

5.8 Data collection machine

Fox and Alldred (2015) suggest that new materialist data collection machines must be engineered to meet the objectives of identifying assemblages, affects and capacities, while encouraging reflexivity about how research is assembled. This approach radically shifts the focus of data collection away from the ‘humanistic’ objectives of researching experiences, beliefs and reflections, while also blurring the boundaries between the material and the cultural (matter and meaning) and the micro/macro scales of social production (Fox and Alldred, 2015). Cutting across matter/meaning and micro/macro dualisms suggests collecting data from a variety of sources and employing diverse methods (Fox and Alldred, 2015:409). Accordingly, participatory methods were combined with traditional methods to explore the ‘thick and affective materiality’ of

in/accessibility for SWDs, using walking/go-along interviews, photovoice, focus group discussions and follow-up in-depth interviews (see Figure 4 below). The autoethnographic vignettes in the middle illustrate the researcher's entanglement with the inquiry and served as a reflective tool. Photovoice was conducted with twelve students with physical impairments, while fourteen students with visual impairments participated in walking/go-along interviews. The multiplicity of methods aimed to foster a socio-material-abstract-embodied (SMAE) understanding of how in/accessibility is reproduced. Relations within the data collection machine were assembled by the researcher to identify and recruit participants, as discussed below.

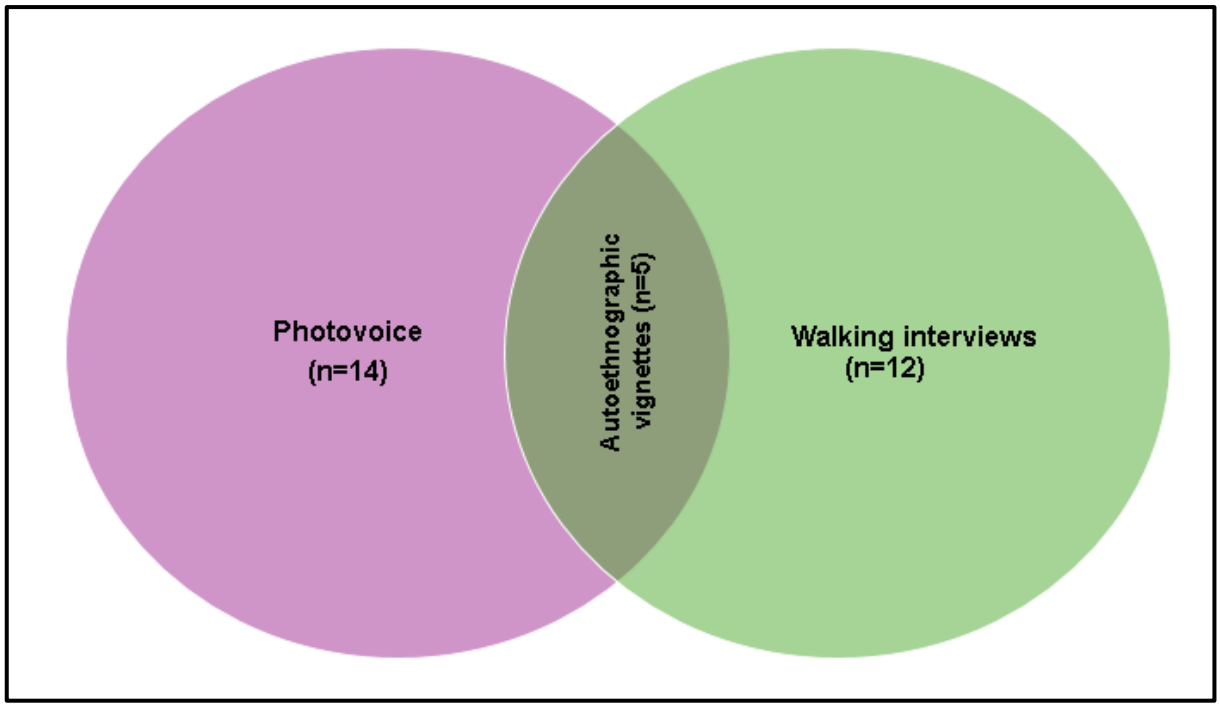


Figure 3: Data collection methods

5.8.1 Participants and recruitment process

Lim observed that ethical recruitment involves transparent communication about the purpose of the research, the nature of participation required, and the choice to opt out without any penalty. To address this, clear guidelines and protocols should be established for recruitment, ensuring that potential participants are approached respectfully and fully informed about the study's aims and processes (Lim, 2025). Accordingly, the researcher used a Participant Information Leaflet (PIL) which detailed the purpose of the study, time commitment, participant rights and nature of participation (see Appendices 1 and 3). The PIL was available in three formats: Braille, electronic and large print. The researcher was advised by the Research Advisory Group (RAG) members to replace 'disabled students' with 'students with disabilities' in the PIL (see the section below for more information).

Participant recruitment was facilitated by the Disability Support Services coordinator at the research site. After securing research approval from the HEI studied, the researcher conducted a 30-minute information session with prospective participants. This played a key role in facilitating rapport, with some students volunteering to participate in the study on the same day. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarifications. Hard copies of the PILs were distributed, which contained the researcher's contact details. The researcher was advised by the DSS coordinator to share information about the study on a WhatsApp group for all registered SWDs at the HEI, where key updates regarding academic and non-academic matters were shared. The researcher emailed the PIL to the DSS coordinator, and it was circulated on the WhatsApp platform.

Although the PILs were available in diverse formats, the existing WhatsApp platform emerged as the most effective channel for participant recruitment. However, some students might have missed the information regarding the study for various reasons, such as a lack of mobile data or not checking their mobile phones, among others. The HEI did not have official student emails; as such, information about the study could not be circulated via student emails. The successful recruitment of research participants through the WhatsApp platform aligns with assemblage theory's horizontal ontology, which blurs the boundaries between formal and informal relations. During the design stage, the researcher planned to recruit participants through student emails but ultimately relied on the pre-existing informal communication channel, WhatsApp. This means of communication confirmed that guidance from the Research Advisory Group members and gatekeepers on the most appropriate recruitment channels was effective. Recruiting through pre-existing channels can also reduce research expenses. In this case, although diverse formats had been prepared, the WhatsApp platform proved to be the most cost effective. After receiving the PILs, participants were allowed seven days before they could participate in the study. Participants contacted the researcher by mobile phone to make initial contact and express interest using the widely used mobile number **121** mobile number# Dial option in Zimbabwe, which allows mobile users to send a Call Me Back SMS to other mobile users (free of charge). The researcher would return the call each time he received a "Call Me Back" notification.

5.8.2 Data collection site

Data for the study was collected at a public Higher Education Institution (HEI) in Zimbabwe. Disability issues at the HEI are managed by the Disability Support Services (DSS) unit. This department is tasked with facilitating equal access to education and fostering a conducive living and learning environment for SWDs. The research site was purposively selected with the expectation that it would yield the highest possible number of participants. The research site was also

conveniently selected because the researcher had access to personnel (gatekeepers) who could facilitate participant recruitment.

5.8.3 Sampling machine

In this study, sampling is conceptualised as a machine, intentionally assembled by the researcher to produce the research sample (n=26). A sampling machine selects events (respondents, institutions, occurrences) for inclusion in or exclusion from a study, based upon two sequential affects (Fox and Alldred, 2015:6). In purposive sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012:206). This study employed generic purposive sampling (Bryman, 2012), in which the researcher establishes criteria concerning the kinds of cases needed to address the research questions, identifies appropriate cases and then samples from those cases that have been identified. In this study, SWDs in their second year and above, who self-identified as having a visual or physical impairment and were registered at the HEI were eligible to participate. Consequently, 26 participants were recruited (visually impaired = 14; physically impaired=12).

It is crucial to note the socio-material relations in this sampling assemblage machine, how mobile phones and the free 'Call me back' mobile service enabled the researcher's capacity to recruit participants, while also capacitating interested students to take part in the study. Removing mobile phones and the free service could deterritorialise or disrupt this participant recruitment assemblage. Having discussed how the study's participants were selected and recruited, the section below presents the demographic profile of participants.

5.8.4 Demographic profile

The website of the HEI where the study was conducted shows that there were a total of 20,399 registered students in 2024, of which 17,718 were undergraduate students and 2,681 were postgraduates. Each participant's demographic information was collected to ensure they met the study's inclusion criteria. Demographic data was entered into an Excel file and imported into NVivo (see Appendix 14). Table 2 below summarises the participants' demographic information gathered.

Table 2: Participants demographic information

Characteristic	Category	Number of participants
Gender	Male	14
	Female	12
	Other	0

Age Range	20-24	10
	25-29	16
Year of study	Two	19
	Three	5
	Four	2
Term Address	Campus	26
	Off-campus	0
	Other	0
Type of Impairment	Visually Impaired	14
	Physically Impaired	12
Method of Participation	Walking/go-along Interviews	14
	Photovoice	12
	In-depth follow-up interviews	6
	Photovoice and go-along interview	1
Source of college funding	Vice Chancellor's Scholarship	26
	Self-funded	0
	Other	0

A total of 26 students who self-identified as visually impaired (n=14) and physically impaired (n=12) participated in the study. Two disability types were included in the study, as these are the two dominant categories at the HEI studied, followed by albinism (see Figure 5 below).

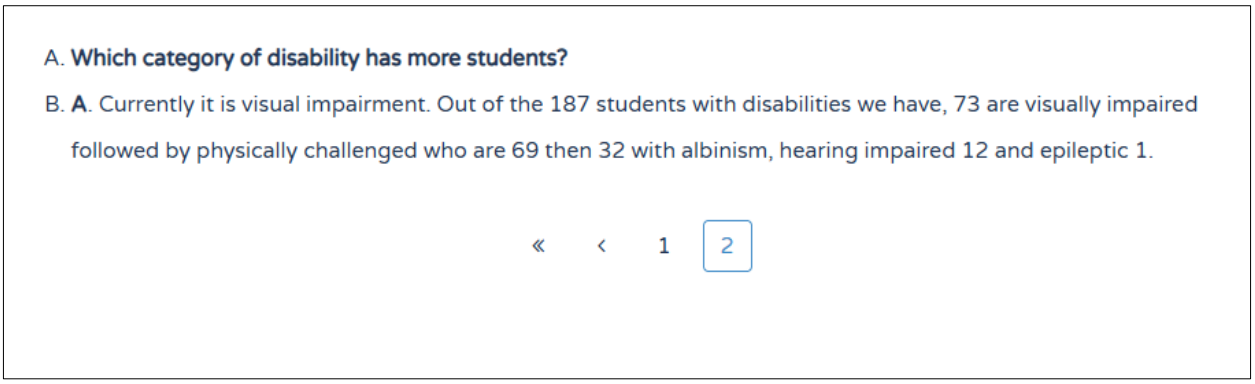


Figure 4: Profile of SWDs at the HEI studied
Source: HEI's DSS website

All participants were enrolled in full-time undergraduate degree programmes. There were slightly more male (n=14) than female (n=12) participants. The participants' ages ranged from 21 to 29 years, with a slightly higher number within the 25-29 category (n=16), than the younger age group, 20-24 (n=10) age range. The concentration of participants in the 25-29 age range may be symptomatic of the barriers that delay entry into HE among SWDs. All participants were funded under the Vice Chancellor's (VC) scholarship scheme, which provided a full tuition fee waiver, free campus accommodation and personal assistants/helpers. Beyond self-identifying as disabled, no data were collected regarding the cause, nature or degree of impairment.

Although the HEI is located in an urban setting and all participants were living on campus, they came from all ten provinces in Zimbabwe. As such, the sample included students from both rural and urban areas. Despite the open recruitment process, no postgraduate SWDs expressed interest or participated in this study. Data regarding study programmes suggest that the highest number of SWDs was in the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences (38%). This clustering prompts the question: 'Is this a matter of genuine choice driven by student interest, or does it reflect systemic barriers within other faculties?'

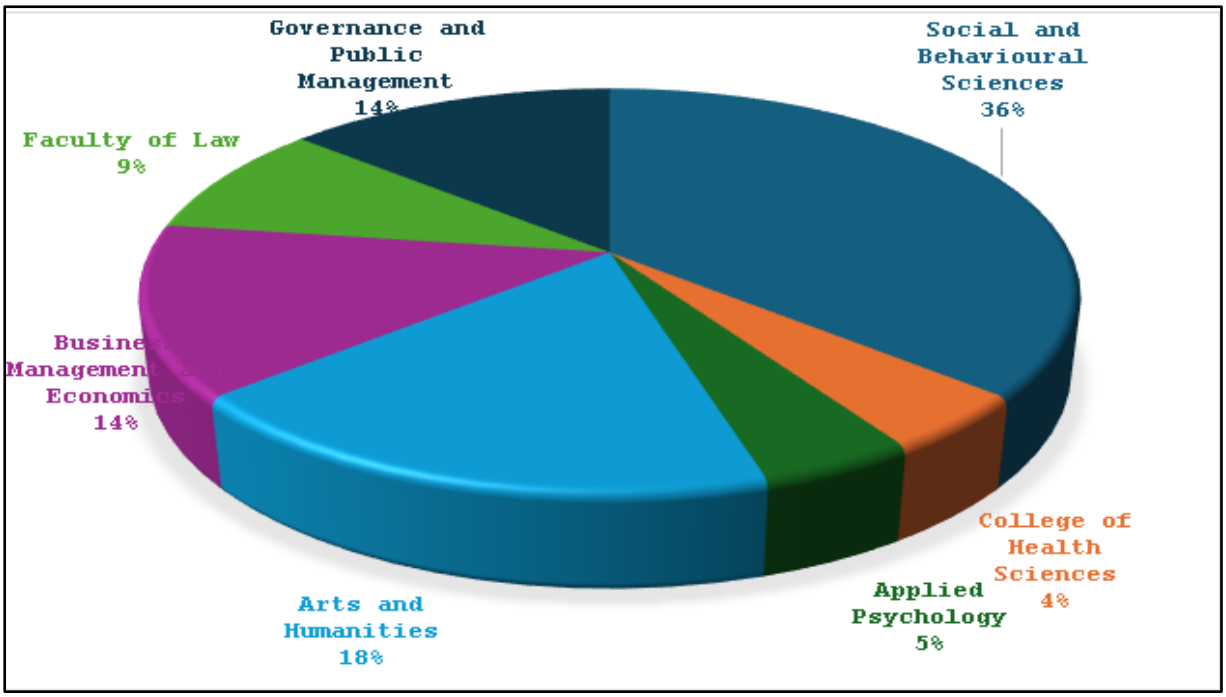


Figure 5: Distribution of SWDs across faculties at the HEI

The HEI had a total of eleven faculties. However, as presented in Figure 6 above, participants were drawn from seven faculties. No SWDs in the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment, Faculty of Veterinary Science, Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Agriculture, Environment and Food Systems participated in this study.

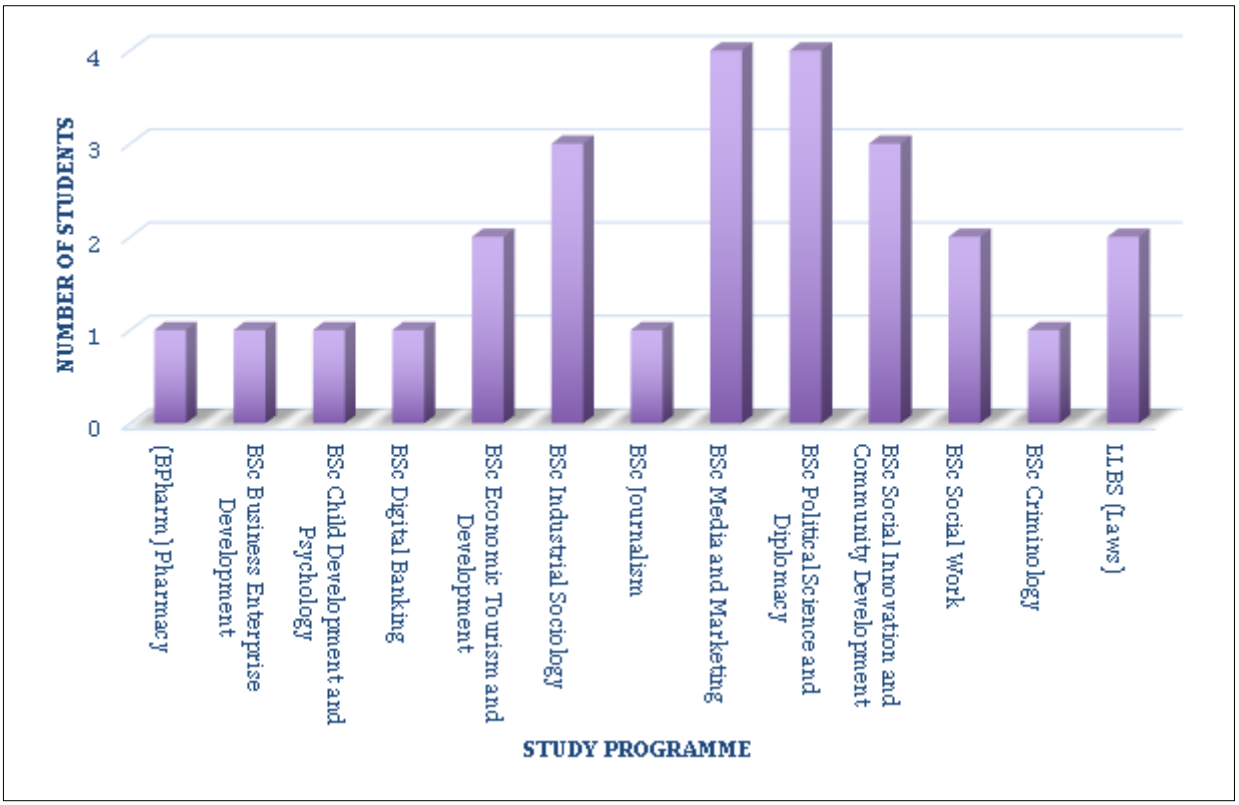


Figure 6: Distribution of SWDs across study programmes at the HEI

5.8.5 Photovoice with students with physical impairments

A paradigm shift, consistent with the "Nothing About Us Without Us" mantra, influences how disability research must be conducted (Charlton, 1998). It is proposed that PWDs should be actively involved in research and influence its direction (Minkler et al., 2002). One technique to support active participation in research is through photovoice (see Kuper et al., 2021:330). Photovoice is a visual method where research participants take photographs to document their experiences and the challenges they face (PhotoVoice, 2019). Photovoice is associated with Wang and Burris, who developed the method during a research project in rural China. According to Wang and Burris (1997:370), photovoice has three main goals: (1) to enable people to record and reflect on their community's strengths and concerns, (2) to promote critical dialogue about important community issues through large and small group discussions of photographs, and (3) to reach policymakers. The method has been used in different settings to allow PWDs to express the issues they face and the key impacts of disability in their lives (Dassah, Aldersey, and Norman, 2017; PhotoVoice, 2019; Barlett et al., 2023).

Photovoice involves placing cameras in the hands of participants as a tool to visually capture a topic (Mtuy et al., 2021:1). It is based on the assumption that participants are experts on the issues in their local context and should be involved in the production of knowledge about their setting (Wang and Burris, 1997). Driven principally by qualitative methods, photovoice combines photo-taking and interviews, and/or writings about the content of the images (Dassah et al.,

2017:1413). For example, participants might be requested to take pictures of experiences related to the specific topic of study. They are then invited to speak about the content of the pictures taken in interviews, focus groups and/or through writing. In this study, after taking photos, students with physical impairments were invited to discuss the content of the images in two separate focus group discussions.

Participants received group instructions on how to use the two digital cameras (see Figure 7 below). Each participant was lent a digital camera to collect at least four images depicting facilitators and four depicting barriers to accessing spaces, services and facilities at the HEI over a period of two days. They were also permitted to use their mobile phones to capture images. Students were considered best positioned to identify these factors, as they encounter barriers and facilitators to inclusion daily (see Newman, 2010). The researcher transferred the images from the cameras and uploaded them to One Drive before lending the camera to the next participant. Images were collected and collated over a month (February 2024), resulting in a total of 82 images. However, upon reviewing the images, it emerged that similar features were captured by several participants. In that case, duplicates were set aside. After removing duplicate images, 42 were coded and then analysed. All duplicates were kept by the researcher, which was explained to the participants. Participants convened in two separate focus group discussions (FGDs) (with six and five participants each) to discuss the images. Each FGD lasted approximately two hours. The SHOWeD method (see Appendix 7 for the Guide), was used to guide the analysis of images during FGDs (see Mckee, 2024:5). SHOWeD stands for:

1. What do you See here?
2. What's really Happening?
3. How does this relate to Our lives?
4. Why does the problem or strength exist?
5. What can we Do about this?



Figure 7: Research equipment and a Research Clearance Flat file prepared by the HEI in Zimbabwe as part of the application process for data collection.

Interviews were conducted in the local language (Shona), a mixture of English and Shona and in English, depending on the participants' preferences. Initially, the plan was to hold the FGDs in a venue equipped with a projector. However, the projector at the accessible venue broke a few days before the FGDs. One of the participants, a hostel committee member, facilitated an alternative accessible venue. Analysing images created a relaxed environment, allowing participants to express their views freely. The images helped keep the FGDs focused and served as points for discussion. As Freire has shown, visual images can stir a group to critically analyse many social relations and conditions within their own community (see Wang and Burris, 199:384). For example, in FGD 1, two participants felt that the HEI was gradually improving physical accessibility, citing recently constructed accessible lecture venues. However, four participants disagreed, pointing to newly constructed outdoor seating areas that were inaccessible. In-depth follow-up interviews were conducted with six students with physical impairments. The interviews took place in various locations on campus, such as open seating areas, restaurants, and sports fields, according to each participant's preferences. All participants provided written consent and signed the consent forms.

Out of the 12 participants, only five used the cameras provided by the researcher, while the rest opted to use their mobile phones. Similarly, despite the availability of a laptop loan facility at the Disability Support Services (DSS), some students chose not to avail themselves of the service, fearing that if they lost or damaged the laptops, their families could not afford to replace them. Photovoice

enhances consciousness about an issue, which can create a dilemma for the researcher. In this study, immediately after FGD 2, participants began planning to organise themselves and confront university administrators over accessibility issues at the HEI. For Freire (1973), photographs can fuel critical consciousness and collective action by making a political statement about the reality of people's lives. This posed a dilemma for the researcher, who had to adhere to the role of a researcher and avoid inciting confrontation that might get students into trouble. Although the researcher did not intervene in the students' actions, the research served the community by providing relevant data that they could draw on to address the situation. While photographs proved easy to gather, they were laborious to organise, code, analyse, edit for confidentiality (e.g., when they captured students' faces) and link to segments of transcripts.

5.8.6 Walking/go-along interviews

Barlett and colleagues (2023) suggest that walking/go-along interviews with PWDs can reveal insights for policymakers and create opportunities for PWDs to shape the research and policy agenda. Walking/go-along interviews were first introduced as a qualitative research method over 20 years ago (Kusenbach, 2003). This method is emerging as a distinct qualitative approach within the mobilities paradigm (Sheller and Urry, 2006) and is increasingly used to explore the connection between self and place (Evans and Jones, 2011) and to examine various phenomena, including the experience of disability (Barlett et al., 2023). Terms used to describe walking/go-along interviews in qualitative research are multiplying[6]. Despite the eclecticism of terminology, the method fundamentally involves a researcher walking or travelling alongside a participant in their local neighbourhood while asking questions (Barlett et al., 2023:1). According to Kinney (2017:1), a walking interview occurs when the researcher walks alongside the participant during an interview in a given location; in this study, an HEI.

A "walking interview," and many researchers use this term (e.g., Kinney, 2017), rather than walking/go-along interviews, takes for granted the ability to walk (Barlett, 2023:2). One researcher with a physical disability noted that walking is a valued human activity, and it is often assumed that everyone can walk; as this researcher states, the "conceptualisation of walking is based on the ideal of able-bodiedness" (Parent, 2016). For Barlett (2023:3), normative assumptions about walking can make it potentially exclusionary for PWDs. This study adopted the concept "walking/go-along interviews," bearing in mind the multiple forms of movement. Walking/go-along interviews were audio-recorded and recordings were moved to OneDrive immediately after each interview, deleted from the

[6] "narrative walking in real-time" (Miaux et al., 2010), "go-alongs" or "go-along interview" (Bell and Bush, 2021; Burns et al., 2020), "walking interview" (D'Errico and Hunt, 2019), "walking field-work approach," "qualitative mobile research methodology," "mobile methods," "wheeling interview" (Parent, 2016), "ride-alongs" (Harris, 2016), and "bimbling" (Adekoya and Guse, 2020).

recorder, and transcribed at a later stage. They took an average of 45 minutes to an hour to complete. After obtaining informed consent (see Appendix 4), participants were fitted with a Zoom F2-BT Field Recorder, a small, lightweight, high-quality audio recorder featuring a 32-Bit Float system. The small lavalier microphone was easy to conceal, thereby ensuring anonymity. According to Kinney (2017), cameras can also be used during the walk to capture data to be explored in subsequent face-to-face interviews. However, in this study, the researcher took photographs after the walking interview was completed, except for one go-along interview in which images were taken at the instruction of the participant. Taking images post-interviews was meant to minimise distractions and maintain the flow of the interview. Walking/go-along interviews are dependent on timing. Some spaces in the HEI were closed and could not be accessed, such as the gym and the swimming pool area. The go-along interview with a student who used a wheelchair took place at the university's hospital, which is located off campus, where the student lived. On the first day, we conducted only the pre-go-along interview. The participant needed time to plan as they were preparing for an examination. We adjourned, and the participant contacted the researcher a week later to reschedule the go-along interview, which was then completed.

It emerged that this method has both advantages and disadvantages. Being led by SWDs across the campus allowed the researcher to observe accessibility issues and take note of them as participants narrated them in real time. This aligns with Shareck et al. (2021) notion that walking interviews allow researchers to immerse themselves in the participant's world and access more subtle and complex meanings of the place, which may help them better understand some of the narratives shared. In this study, walking/go-along interviews also proved to trigger past memories, as participants recalled past experiences while passing through specific locations. For Kinney (2017), the act of walking allows participants to recall memories and/or experiences they may not have in a sedentary face-to-face interview. Direct observations from the walking/go-along interviews revealed aspects that another student could see without never knowing they existed, despite having interacted with them. It emerged that walking/go-along interviews created a relaxed atmosphere that fostered a bi-directional interview situation, producing thought-provoking questions and discussions. For instance, one participant with a visual impairment asked the researcher to share honestly how sighted people perceive and think about blind people.

Scholars acknowledge that walking/go-along interviews can present risks and challenges for both participants and researchers, making it essential to clarify the rationale for their use (Bartlett et al., 2023:1). In this study, weather conditions adversely affected the execution of some walking/go-along interviews. For example, the researcher had to reschedule two walking interviews due to high temperatures. Two participants with albinism (self-identified as visually impaired)

requested to postpone their interviews because sunlight negatively impacted their eyesight and skin. One participant mentioned that on extremely hot days, she missed lectures because, despite using sunscreen, it did not provide lasting and adequate protection.

High wind speeds compromised the quality of some of the audio recordings. A segment of one interview was barely audible and I could not retrieve that part. Some spaces, such as restaurants and hostel foyers, which we passed through were noisy, with students talking in the background, making it hard to transcribe. Additionally, passing traffic at pedestrian crossings was also disruptive. Kinney (2017:3) notes that whichever audio-recording method is used, it is likely that not all of the interview will be captured. Weather, traffic and other people talking can all impact the recording quality, so researchers need to be mindful that they may not hear all of the interview (Emmel and Clark, 2009). To address this, the researcher resorted to using two recorders; when one failed to capture sound, the other would perform better.

It is important to note that visibility of the second hand-held recording device attracted unwanted attention from passers-by. This was explained to participants during the pre- and post-walking interview segments. According to Barlett (2023:3), the visibility of this method might be off-putting for marginalised groups. This aligns with Kinney's (2017) suggestion that ensuring the participant knows they will be seen alongside the researcher is an important part of the informed consent process and should also be reiterated prior to the walking interview commencing. Conducting walking/go-along interviews in familiar locations can also present challenges. One participant, was frequently interrupted by students, prompting the researcher and the participant to abandon the walking interview and reschedule it. Duedahl and Stilling Blichfeldt (2020) observed that when a researcher is out and about with a participant, there are more 'unknowns' and 'unpredictable dimensions,' which add to the potential risks involved when using this method (walking interviews). Follow-up interviews were conducted with six students with physical impairments from the FGDs. They lasted between 30 to 45 minutes. Besides their accessibility experiences at the HEI in general, the researcher drafted follow-up questions on diverse views, which were debated during the focus groups, such as the role of central helpers.

5.8.7 Research Advisory Group

Data collection was supported by members (n=2) of a Research Advisory Group (RAG) who had visual impairments: an academic and a disability practitioner, one male and one female. Member 1 was purposively selected by the researcher, as he had a longstanding relationship with the researcher dating back to 2013, as his undergraduate and postgraduate lecturer. Member 1 was a senior lecturer at a HEI in Zimbabwe and an expert in disability policy. Member 2 was selected by Member 1. Member 2 was a Disability Inclusion Specialist at an umbrella disability organisation in Zimbabwe. She had significantly contributed to periodic

country situational reports published by the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD) on the implementation of the CRPD in Zimbabwe. The researcher maintained regular email communication with Member 1 prior to the fieldwork.

The RAG provided an advisory role regarding participant recruitment and data collection. Evidence shows that involving people with lived experience (PWLE) in research increases recruitment rates of participants and assists researchers in obtaining funding, developing study protocols, and selecting appropriate outcome measures (Domecq, 2014). Before fieldwork, the researcher shared the research proposal and participant recruitment materials with the RAG via email. The RAG reviewed these materials and met with the researcher at Member 1's house in Zimbabwe in September 2024, prior to starting data collection. They provided critical feedback on potential improvements and assessed the acceptability of the protocols for identifying participants for interviews. They advised the researcher against the use of email to recruit participants.

While the researcher faced delays in obtaining the necessary permissions for fieldwork in Zimbabwe, the RAG offered practical guidance by facilitating contact between the researcher and the relevant personnel to secure these permissions. The RAG members made both prescriptive recommendations (actions that must be taken) and suggestions for improvement. For the prescriptive recommendations, they advised the researcher to revise the participant recruitment material and the PIL by replacing "disabled students" with "students with disabilities," citing that the former terminology, although consistent with the social model of disability, was widely unacceptable among PWDs in Zimbabwe. Member 1 also suggested that the researcher gather data from Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) to broaden the study's scope. Whilst this was a great idea, the researcher could not take on the suggestion. The key limitation encountered while working with the RAG was communication. Besides the one in-person meeting to review the study materials, contact was maintained via WhatsApp. Having discussed how raw data was gathered, the section below chronicles the data analysis machine and how it was assembled to produce research findings reported in this study.

5.9 Data analysis machine

The data analysis machine was assembled with the aim of transforming raw data into research findings. The assemblage consisted of a range of socio-material, abstract, and embodied relations, which included supervisors, researchers, and the software programme (NVivo), specialist trainers, funding, friends, PCs, laptops, cloud-based storage, spaces (libraries), books, journals, YouTube, IT services and Zoom. NVivo 14 software was used to organise, manage, annotate and code the qualitative transcripts (see NVivo coding report in Appendix 6). Images were also coded in NVivo. The NVivo 14 software site licence used in

this study was funded by the Trinity Research in Social Sciences (TRiSS) at Trinity College Dublin (TCD). The use of NVivo at TCD was governed by the CHEST agreement terms and conditions.[7] For Bezeley (2007), NVivo ensures easy, effective and efficient coding, which makes retrieval easier. One of the benefits of using NVivo was the immediate availability of my electronic affective journal. According to Johnston (2006:387), the main benefit of keeping a research journal within a software programme such as NVivo is that it encourages the researcher to rapidly and openly record their thoughts, questions, reflections and emergent theoretical ideas in a central executive point in the programme. An electronic research journal can aid further interpretation and creativity because it gives the person time to reflect, think, ask further questions, and try to explain or theorise about the data in a flexible way, without the fear of losing track of their project (Johnston, 2006:387). Figure 8 below is a screenshot of the electronic affective journal in NVivo.

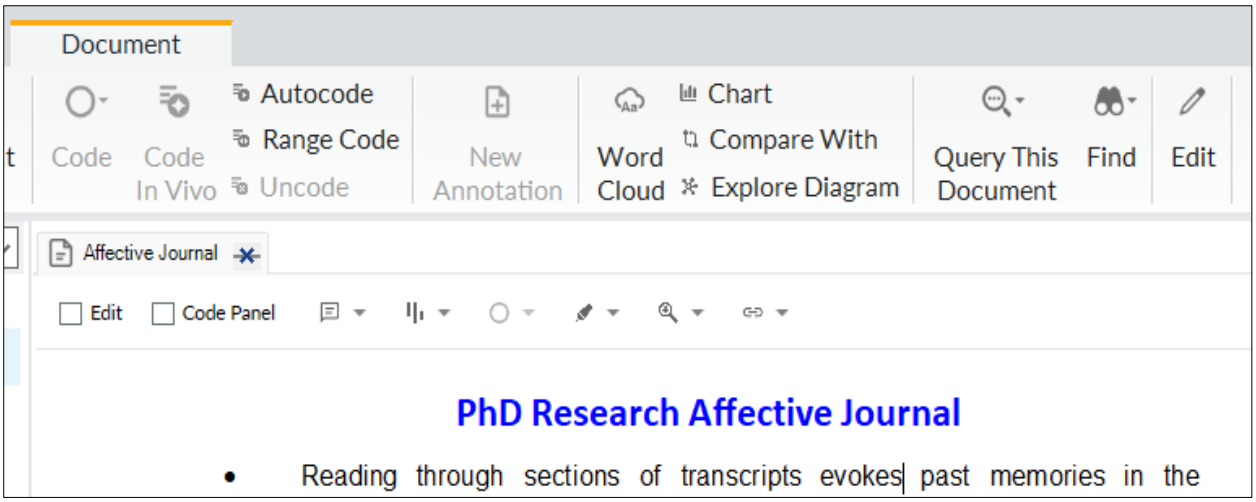


Figure 8: Electronic PhD Affective journal

I found NVivo to be a great tool for visualising my data. The software enabled me to generate tables, pie charts and graphs with just a few mouse clicks, which I then incorporated during the writing process. This process can be difficult and time-consuming in traditional paper-based data analyses. It is important to note that, unlike statistical software, the main function of CAQDAS is not to analyse data but rather to aid the analysis process, of which the researcher must always remain in control. As noted by Zamawe (2015:13), CAQDAS are essentially data management packages that support the researcher during analysis.

5.9.1 Data analysis strategy

[7] A licensing and software framework established by the Combined Higher Education Software Team (CHEST), an initiative by Jisc (originally for UK higher education), that provides the UK and Irish education and research communities with access to commercially available software.

Raw data was analysed through an experimental data analysis process- 'assemblage component accounting'.The method drew on various new materialist data analysis procedures experimented with by several contemporary social scientists such as Fox and Alldred (2022), Marn and Wolgemuth (2020), Taylor and Harris-Evans (2018), Benozzo et al. (2014) and post-qualitative inquiry scholar St. Pierre (2013; 2014; 2017; 2021). Assemblage component accounting approach transcend pure humanist data analysis process to map out a multiplicity of socio-material-abstract-embodied relations co-producing a phenomenon, in this case in/accessibility involving SWDs. Experimenting with assemblage component accounting should not be construed to mean a rejection and outright departure from traditional and established structured qualitative data analysis approaches, such as Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). Assemblage component accounting aligns with Renold and Ivinson (2014) suggestion that the analysis of data must step away from efforts to reveal the 'authenticity' of respondents' accounts, disclosing instead 'the thick and affective materiality' of the world, culture and people's lives.

Instead of outlining specific data analysis steps taken, I will discuss the logics of the data analysis process that are always becoming and resisting finality. These logics are found in data that "glows." MacLure (2010:282) describes glowing data as those bits of data (words, phrases, gestures, fragments) that start to "glimmer, gathering our attention." When we become aware of these incandescent pieces, time seems to "both slow down and speed up" (MacLure, 2010:282). Marn and Wolgemuth (2020: 2097) note that in moments when data glows, we can be transported out of time and back in to our entangled pasts: previous data analyses, times authors spent in coffee shops discussing materiality in transcripts influenced by our theoretical orientations. In light of the above, through the process or reading and re-reading interview transcripts, particular human and non-human relations glowed, grabbing the researcher's attention. According to Marn and Wolgemuth (2020), what glows in transcripts represents a performative entanglement among the researchers, theories, the materiality of the transcript and the production of that data and subsequent transcripts. Towards the end of the chapter, I explain how I ensured that theory and personal experiences did not overshadow participants in/accessibility accounts. The section below elaborates on the 'assemblage component accounting' data analysis along with a justification for experimentation in this study.

5.9.2 Assemblage component accounting.

Embedded in Deleuze and Guattari's idea of assemblages, assemblage component accounting foregrounds the mapping of both human and non-human matter within glowing in/accessibility encounters. This was followed by an exploration of how identified components influenced the capacities of SWDs to access physical spaces, facilities, products and services within the studied HEI. Contrary to privileging students' discursive and lived experiences (typical of

traditional qualitative methodology), assemblage component accounting remains attentive to the emergent, relational and contingent nature of in/accessibility ceaselessly and endlessly reproduced through the relational functioning of bodies (human and non-human), such as students, academic and non-academic staff, policies, technologies, institutional practices, architectural designs, among others.

The analytical process began by identifying key components that co-produced glowing in/accessibility encounters in the data. This was followed by examining the affective capacities of these components. Recurring components are summarised in this study as typologies. Identified components included, for example, disabled students, lecturers, administrative systems, assistive technologies and architectural designs (e.g., steps and stairs). Thinking with Deleuze and Guattari, each component was treated not as a fixed, stable, or closed-off entity but as dynamically and relationally situated within each assemblage, with particular attention paid to how specific configurations enhanced or restricted access for SWDs. In this sense, assemblage component accounting is not concerned with establishing stable relationships, rather, it is preoccupied with mapping out how the configurations of components produce specific in/capacities for SWDs. Assemblage component accounting enabled a rigorous and nuanced exploration by making explicit which specific components within the HEI were present or absent and how they co-function within specific assemblages to produce in/accessibility for SWDs. Put differently, assemblage component analysis provided a rigorous avenue for rendering visible complex entanglements of SWDs with a multiplicity of human and non-human matter within the HEI.

Assemblage component accounting is particularly valuable in resource-poor contexts, such as Zimbabwe. In such contexts, typified by ever-shifting socio-material conditions-chief among them poverty-accessibility can hardly be reduced to policy compliance but must be understood within the realm of socio-material complexity and unpredictability, indiscriminately affecting both disabled and non-disabled people. By experimenting with assemblage components accounting, this study provides an example of a contextually grounded exploration that transcends barrier removal and tick-box approaches to accessibility. While assemblage component accounting provides a rigorous foundation, this study suggests a Relational Collaborative Model of in/accessibility. The model offers an avenue for more fully elaborating the affective and relational dynamics and flows between and across elements and how they co-produce specific in/capacities for SWDs in higher education contexts. The researcher used NVIvo software programme to facilitate the coding of transcripts and images.

5.9.1 Coding

There has been a debate over whether coding has a place within the ‘news’, ‘posts’ and ‘turns’-informed research projects. Some of the critics of coding data

include, among others, MacLure (2010), Taylor and Evans-Harris (2018) and St. Pierre (1997). St. Pierre (1997) wrote that data always has the potential to transgress the boundaries of coding and representation, disrupting the entire research enterprise. Taylor and Evans-Harris (2018) jettisoned coding for two reasons. They perceived coding as a means of separating data into preformed categories and as being concerned with finding patterns of occurrence, thereby reducing the complexity of data. For MacLure (2013), coding reduces complexity by combining details under commonalities and regularities. As such, MacLure (2010) and Taylor and Evans-Harris (2018: 1257) employed a rhizomic data analysis approach, in which they attended to fragments, parts and bits of transcripts while refusing to impose themes, patterns or systems on these. However, some new materialists have reported coding their transcripts (see Fox and Powell, 2021:7; Burr and Fox, 2023). Fox and Alldred (2020:9) used NVivo software to code qualitative transcripts. However, from the material reviewed by the researcher, Fox and Alldred did not provide a justification for coding transcripts in their new materialist papers. Following Jackson and Mazzei's concept of '*Thinking with Theory*' (2012), the researcher conducted a traditional coding process while thinking with new materialism. Emerging assemblages were treated as interconnected rather than as closed-off and distinct categories. The researcher was attuned to more than just the discursive statements of participants, but equally focused on non-human components that co-produced specific in/accessibility encounters emerging from repeated readings of qualitative transcripts and images.

5.9.4 Writing research findings

For most new materialist researchers, writing serves as a form of inquiry. Laurel Richardson (1997: 87) stated long ago, "I write because I want to find something out, I write in order to learn something I did not know before I wrote it." The process of writing generated further thoughts, producing capacities in the researcher to make connections with extant literature on the barriers and facilitators to accessibility for SWDs in HEIs. Glowing in/accessibility encounters were explored to identify assembled socio-material relations including the resultant in/capacities produced in SWDs. This process was repeated for each emerging glowing encounter.

Following MacLure (2010), the researcher sought to tune into data 'hot spots', those moments of data which 'jumped out' or 'grabbed him'. MacLure (2010) speaks of data hot spots as data which seem to 'glow' and 'glimmer', lingering in the mind, touching the heart and sparking connections with other instances or concepts. Transcripts are not fixed, static representations of participants' and researchers' words (Warn and Wolgemuth, 2020). It turned out that each time I read the transcripts and reviewed the images, they felt new again, with sections connecting within and between transcripts in ways they had not before. This prompted the researcher to present the emerging encounters with a (+) to denote

the non-static nature of the encounters, which continued to shift throughout the coding and writing process. Data hot spots are never stable or fixed; they constantly glow and glimmer, depending on a range of socio-material-abstract-embodied relations that the researcher engages with across the lifespan of a research project.

According to Andersson (2020:8), assemblage analysis challenges methodological territorialisations of any kind and supports lines of flight that put an end to privileges of researchers' knowledge. As such, claims to objectivity in this study are jettisoned as the researcher became another component of the assemblage being analysed (Feely, 2016:878). Having discussed the writing process, the section below discusses how the researcher planned to disseminate the research findings.

5.10 Dissemination machine

The researcher assembled a dissemination machine with the hope that research findings reach a diverse audience beyond academia. Denzin and Giardina (2014) argue that scholars should not be innocent actors in academia but should communicate directly with the public, reaching beyond journals and traditional academic outlets as their primary means of dissemination. For example, instead of considering themselves private intellectuals, qualitative researchers should engage in disruptive public intellectualism (Denzin and Giardina, 2014). Mayan and Daum (2014) further assert that research that generates knowledge to solve everyday problems serves the dual purposes of knowledge generation and action. These arguments reinforce Cheyney and Bowden's (2016) call for more public science that provokes and creates change outside of academia.

In addition to disseminating findings in scientific academic journals, the researcher also considered participatory dissemination methods. These include co-producing a policy brief with research participants for submission to the HEI and organising a photo exhibition at the HEI. New materialist scholars argue that photo exhibitions can connect audiences to events by including photographs (Ringrose and Renold, 2012) or drawings (Masny and Waterhouse, 2011). Whitaker (2010:127) recommended a rhizomic engagement that melded academic outputs with art installations, ecology and therapeutic activities. A scoping review by Dassah et al. (2017:1417) found that public exhibitions and media publications of photo voice projects particularly had influence in the promulgation of accessibility-related legislation and universal environmental designs.

5.11 Ethical considerations

Written ethical approval for conducting this study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee (REC) at the School of Social Work and Social Policy at TCD, under Internal Reference ID No. 1102 and REAMS ID No. 2465

(see Appendix 12). The study also received research clearance from the Research Council of Zimbabwe, reference SC/9/48 (see Appendix 13). The Research and Innovation Directorate at the HEI where the data was collected provided written permission for data collection (see Appendix 14). This study is guided by a Two-Way Confidential Disclosure Agreement entered into between the HEI in Zimbabwe and Trinity College Dublin, which was facilitated by the Technology Transfer Office at TCD (see Appendix 15).

The researcher further engaged in journaling during and after fieldwork, as well as throughout the writing process. The researcher also utilised autoethnographic vignettes to remain attentive to how his value system consciously and unconsciously influenced the research process. Developing the vignettes allowed the researcher to remain attentive to how his personal experiences shaped what he perceived as 'data hot spots.' Writing vignettes also enabled the researcher to reflect on his privileged position as a researcher from an HEI in the Global North and how this could create potential power imbalances during the research process. The research process was underpinned by core ethical values, including respect for SWDs. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher respected participants' schedules. All participants received detailed information (PIL) detailing the purpose of the study, and they voluntarily consented to participate. Although thorough ethical preparation had been undertaken, several ethical dillemas were encountered, including privacy protection issues and respect for participants' requests and wishes.

5.11.1 Ethical dilemmas encountered

Although the researcher was committed to upholding the confidentiality and anonymity of research participants, maintaining privacy and confidentiality in practice was not a straightforward task. Anonymity and confidentiality practices are used to protect the privacy of human subjects participating in a study while collecting, analysing and reporting data associated with them (Hoft, 2021).

There is no single agreed-upon definition regarding the concept and practice of privacy in research. Adarmouch et al. (2020) noted that an immediate challenge to any study of privacy protection is the lack of consensus among lawyers, policymakers, health professionals and philosophers on the definition of privacy. Moreover, privacy does not refer to a single concept but rather to a cluster of concepts (Moore, 2008; DeCew, 2019). Despite the existence of several definitions, the concept remains in disarray (Gordon et al., 2019). The Declaration of Helsinki states: "Every precaution must be taken to protect the privacy of research subjects (sic) and the confidentiality of their personal information" (World Medical Association, 2013). Upholding participant privacy and confidentiality in practice is complex. During fieldwork, the researcher received a text message from one student that included the names, phone numbers, study programmes and impairments of three other students expressing interest to participate in the study. The researcher resolved to let the initiator of the text

message inform the other three students to contact the researcher individually to express their interest in participating in the study.

After completing a walking interview, a participant insisted on taking the researcher to his room, where a group of his friends was reported to be gathered. He wanted the researcher to inform his friends that he had completed an hour-long interview in English, which was exciting to him. This created a dilemma for the researcher: whether to respect the participant's wishes and desires while maintaining his privacy. The researcher explained that he would have liked to do so but could not, for ethical reasons. The researcher found that, in some instances, participants were willing to share more information about their lives. One participant insisted that the researcher accept a video of a television interview they had done previously. The participant urged the researcher to include it in their research or present it in other forums if they wished. This presented a dilemma due to the principle of data minimisation, as outlined in the GDPR. This was explained to the participant, and they understood.

At the end of FGD 2, with students with physical impairments, the participants agreed to organise themselves and confront the administrators at the HEI about accessibility issues raised during the FGD. They asked the researcher to facilitate this. Noble as the idea was, his presented a dilemma for the researcher, who had to balance the role of a researcher with engaging in social action, which could potentially affect the dissemination plan at the HEI. Ultimately, one participant suggested setting up a private WhatsApp group for SWDs, unknown to the Disability Services staff, where they could share various issues affecting them and how to support each other. The researcher supported the students in setting up the WhatsApp group and communicating the idea to other research participants. To ensure the WhatsApp group remained unknown to the DSS staff and HEI's authorities, one participant at the end of the focus group discussion exclaimed:

> *"If you snitch, we will deal with you."* (FGD 2 Participant).

The researcher also struggled to respect a participants' requests. One participant, shared accessibility challenges, undertaking practical lessons in a laboratory which was located on the fourth floor. Although the building had a lift, the participant revealed it was broken for over three years and never fixed. His classmates would lift his wheelchair up the stairs to access the laboratory. The participant revealed that he had previously approached the dean to request permission to seek potential donors to fix the lift, but the dean declined, stating that this move had the potential to tarnish the HEI's image. After the interview, the student asked if the researcher could accompany him to discuss the issue of the broken lift with the dean, which presented a dilemma for the researcher. This situation presented an ethical dilemma between addressing the participant's immediate needs and maintaining appropriate researcher boundaries. While the request to accompany the student to meet the dean was understandable,

agreeing to do so risked blurring the distinction between researcher and advocate. The researcher was hesitant to place the student in a confrontational situation with the chairperson. Therefore, the researcher discussed this with the participant and encouraged them to mobilise other students to raise the issue with the dean of students.

5.12 Limitations of the methodology

The experimental methodology adopted in this study is not without limitations. Jenks (2002:184) asserted that "Who I am affects what I observe, what I write, and how others will react to what I say." The concepts of 'data hotspots' and 'data that glows and glimmers' by MacLure (2010; 2017), which underpinned the data analysis approach used in this study, resonate with Jenks' assertions. Undeniably, a multiplicity of my positionalities influenced what I considered as glowing data across the transcripts and images. I could not have paid attention to the complex and affective relations across human and non-human matter in participants' accounts if I had not read Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblages. Once I encountered these concepts, I found it challenging to rid them off my mind. All I could see in the data were shifting and rhizomic socio-material-abstract in/accessibility entanglements, rather than a stable, fixed, and binary reproduction of accessibility versus inaccessibility. Recognising the inescapability of theory in research, I utilised autoethnographic vignettes and journaling to help minimise the impact of theory and my own lived experiences from overshadowing participants' accounts. I wrote five vignettes, beginning with the one that sparked my interest in disability studies and the events that led me to adopt participatory data collection methods. Secondly, the methodological approach is inherently experimental, which can make its wholesale application to explore other phenomena difficult. However, some elements of the methodology can serve as inspiration for experimental research methodologies. Thirdly, this study focused on assemblage component mapping that co-produced in/accessibility for SWDs. This study proposes a Relational Collaborative Model, as a vehicle for a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the complex interplay of human and non-human relations in the production of in/accessibility for SWDs in higher education in resource-poor context in Zimbabwe.

5.13 Conclusion

Drawing on new materialism scholarship, particularly Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblages, along with traditional qualitative methodology, this study experimented with a materialist informed qualitative methodology, leveraging the strength of each approach. Rather than reading methodological approaches against each other, e.g. qualitative versus new materialism, diverse methods were read through and with each other. In pursuit of a socio-material account of the production of in/accessibility and to ensure the active participation of SWDs, multiple data collection methods were employed. These included

fourteen walking/go-along interviews, photovoice, two focus group discussions and six follow-up interviews. The study also experimented with a new materialist informed data analysis process, by experimenting with MacLure's concept and process of attuning to 'data hot spots' or 'glowing data.' The method allowed for attuning and for exploring glowing encounters of in/accessibility to map out assemblages of socio-material-abstract relations, along with resultant in/capacities for SWDs. A new materialist informed research approach, acknowledges how researchers entangle with a wide range of both human and non-human matter, past and present, without priviledging the other, thereby inviting us to rethink and reconsider notions of a self-contained, ever-conscious and intellectualising researcher orchestrating the research process, from research design through to the dissemination of research findings.. However, adopting an experimental data analysis process in this study should not be perceived as counter to more structured data analysis processes, such as Braun and Clarke's RTA, but rather as complementary. The experimental methodology adopted in the study enabled the research to produce a detailed account of socio-material relations and how they co-produce in/accessibility experiences for SWDs. The study proposes a Relational Collaborative Model of accessibility. The model is envisaged to provide analytical lens towards a more complex and nuanced exploration of in/accessibility involving SWDs in resource poor context of the Global South. The model is further elaborated in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

Empirical findings

6.0 Introduction

This chapter reports on the empirical findings from the exploration of how in/accessibility is re/produced within a particular HEI in Zimbabwe. Through an experimental assemblage component accounting data analysis process, four relational in/accessibility assemblages emerged: *Place/spaces (PS+), Teaching, learning and assessment (TLA+), Digital (Di+) and the Extracurricular Activities* (ECAs+) assemblage. An assemblage entails a collection of 'multifarious elements-living and non-living that come together, temporarily' (Shildrick 2015:18) and work together to produce something; in this case, in/accessibility. The four assemblages reported on should be viewed as open and non-totalisable sum of human and non-human actants, co-producing in/accessibility within the HEI. In this sense, the researcher was interested in how multiplicity of relations co-produced in/accessibility, rather than their essential attributes. In other words, analytical attention was upon the 'relations between bodies, their configurations within specific assemblages and the dynamic of the interrelations of their intensive capacities' (Gatens, 1996:170).

The four assemblages presented in this thesis should not be approached as stable, fixed and distinct from one another. Instead, they are rhizomically interconnected through a complex and multiplicity of relations, affecting the capacity of SWDs to access places/spaces, products, services and facilities within the HEI. DeLanda (2006) asserts that assemblages should not be treated as seamless totalities or closed systems. The four assemblages are connected through the affective flow of human and non-human matter between and across components (see Figure 10 below). Feely (2016) notes that, ''nothing has existed forever or will exist forever: from a particular human body; to the human race; to the planet Earth and the Sun'', so are the four assemblages. The assemblages are open conglomerations, composed of a thousand, if not millions of socio-material relations within, whilst simultaneously connected to large scale assemblages beyond the HEI, depicted by the (+) symbol. ForFeely (2015), assemblages overlap, intersect, leak and bleed into each other.

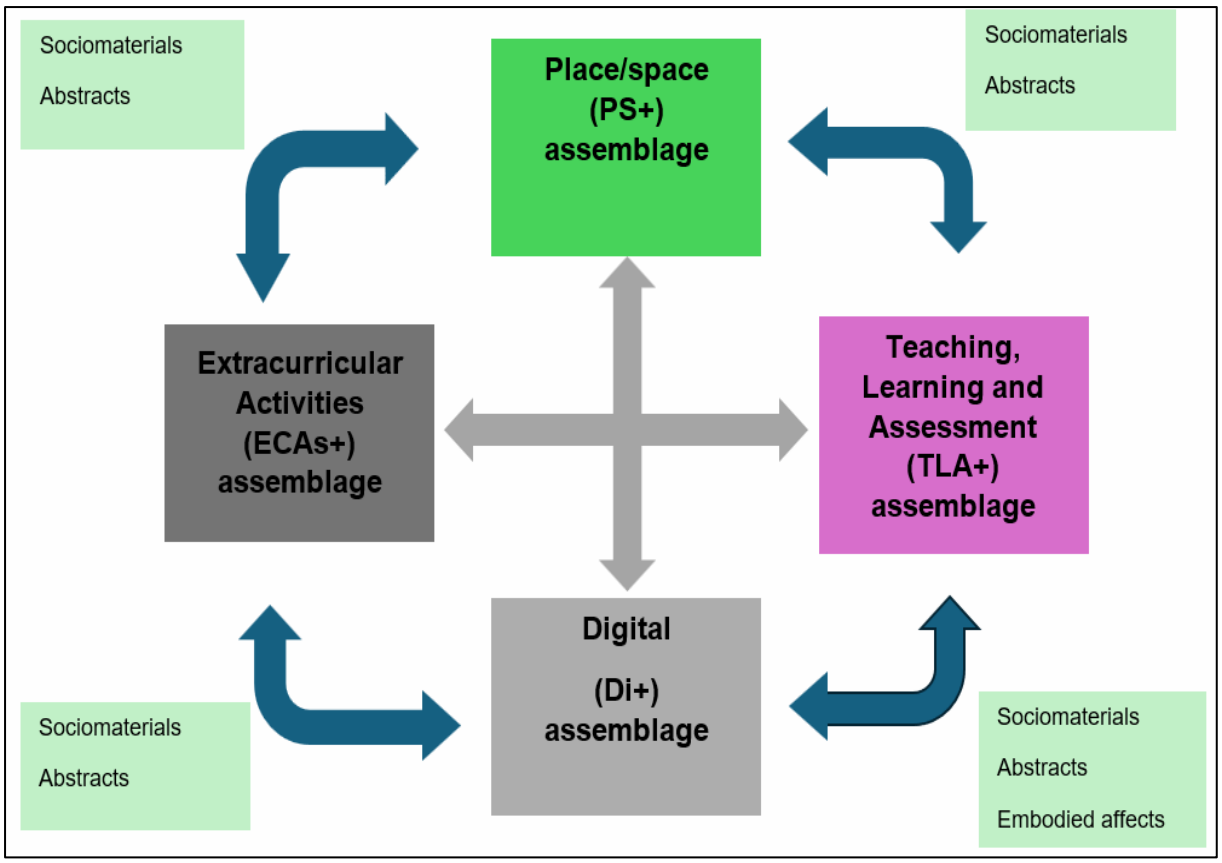


Figure 9: Summary of in/accessibility assemblages

Assemblage components accounting has the potential to broaden our analytical lens and blur the boundaries between seemingly disparate elements (e.g., economic, psychological, cultural, organic, climatological, political, embodiment, etc.) in our understanding of how in/accessibility emerges for SWDs. This approach ascribes agency to both human and non-human matter in the reproduction of in/accessibility. While the assemblage analysis can yield complex and in-depth analyses, Feely (2016:880) reminds us that these analyses will always be incomplete analyses. As such, the analysis reported in this thesis should be viewed as incomplete and amenable to further interpretations and new insights.

In the sections below, a typology of each assemblage is presented first before expatiating on each assemblage. This approach aims to summarise the socio-material-abstract-embodied relations co-producing each in/accessibility assemblage. Assemblages are interconnected through "relations of exteriority" (see DeLanda, 2006). In this sense, components can be detached from one assemblage and plugged into another, without losing their identity e.g., personal helpers. Consequently, some components, both human and non-human, recur across the four typologies. Recurring components includes among others; personal helpers, university-wide policies, Vice Chancellors' scholarship, lecturers, ideological assumptions. The components in each typology should be viewed as horizontally distributed, rhizomatically assembling (connecting),

disassembling (disconnecting) and reassembling (reconnecting) in a chaotic and unpredictable fashion, reproducing in/capacities for SWDs to access physical spaces, products, services and facilities on an equal basis with everyone. The components in each typology possess relational infinite capacity to co-produce in/capacities for SWDs to participate on the basis of equal opportunity. Research findings are reported through multiple methods: textually, tables and pictorially, followed by examples of the resultant in/capacities for SWDs. Effort was made to redact names through pseudonymisation to ensure the confidentiality of research participants and places. Participants are represented by the letter P, followed by a numerical value. Efforts were also made to edit photographs to protect the confidentiality of the research site. In the section below, the first assemblage: place/space assemblage is reported on.

6.1 The Place/space (PS+) in/accessibility assemblage

Data analysis revealed a complex interplay of socio-material-abstract-embodied components co-producing in/capacities for SWDs to access various places and spaces within the HEI. Table 3 below summarises the range of the components that co-produce place/space in/accessibility for SWDs at the HEI.

Table 3: A typology of Place/space (PS+) in/accessibility assemblage

Non-human matter	Human matter	Abstract and embodied affects
• Funding (Vice Chancellor's Scholarship) • Places/spaces (lecture venues, halls of residence/hostels, libraries, sports pavilion, dining hall, open spaces) • Curriculum • Braille papers • Styluses • Projectors • Colour • Lunch box • Architecture (steps and stairs) • Weather elements (sun) • Water supply	• Helpers/personal assistants • Central helpers • Students (disabled and non-disabled) • Lecturers • Ancillary staff (Estates and facilities, cooks, drivers, janitors, wardens). • Friends • Family (siblings, cousins, parents) • Church mates • Disability support staff • Librarians	• Memories • History • Attitudes • Feelings (pain, depressed) • Ideological assumptions (walknormativity)

• Software programmes (JAWS, NVDA) • PCs and laptops • Mobile phones • Electricity supply • Mobility aids (wheelchairs) • University policies • Time		

It emerged that certain architectural designs negatively affected both students with visual and physical impairments in navigating campus spaces. For example, the researcher was led to two separate locations (Figure 11) by two different students with visual photographs below were taken by the researcher after the completion of the walking interviews.



Figure 10: Unmarked edges of steps

Regarding Figure 12 (left) above, a student with a visual impairment, during a walking interview noted:

> *"You see, if they could paint a brightly coloured strip to mark the edges of each step, I, as a partially blind student, wouldn't need a personal assistant all the time. I could actually attend lectures on my own if the steps were marked. Without a coloured strip, I perceive the area as even*

and flat, and I don't see the steps. It becomes risky for me to navigate the campus alone." (P1).

Participants reported that the HEI was infested with steps, most of which were unmarked (see Figure 11). These steps were reported to restrict independent movement for both students with visual and physical impairments. This situation perpetuated an overdependence on personal helpers. While the handrail and light bulb depicted in Figure 11 (left) enhances physical accessibility, the absence of bright strips to delineate the steps (in both images) restricted accessibility for students with visual impairments. To further illustrate how the absence of coloured strips restricts mobility among students with visual impairments, P5, a student with a visual impairment noted:

> *"There is a set of steps along the newly constructed corridor of the King Alfred (pseudonym) lecture building. Somewhere in the middle, the steps are not marked. As I approach the area, I slow down and start dragging my feet to prepare for going down the steps. This poses a challenge that requires a personal assistant; however, during the first semester of your first year, you won't have a personal helper."*

Similarly, P2, a student with a visual impairment during a walking interview and referring to Figure 12 (right, noted:

> *"Personally, I no longer go to the main library. I visited it twice and haven't returned since. When I am going up the steps near the library, I can see them. However, when I am coming down, the area appears flat, making it difficult to distinguish where one step ends and the next begins. I have noticed that in other areas, coloured strips have been added to demarcate the steps. I suggest implementing a similar solution at the main library and throughout the university."*

Data indicates that inaccessible physical spaces reproduce multiple incapacities for students with visual impairments. Physical barriers restricts independent movement and limit library usage for students with visual impairments, constraining them from accessing academic resources on an equal basis with non-disabled students.

The steps around the newly constructed Jubilee Lecture Theatre (pseudonym) were considered as physically accessible and inclusive by students with visual impairments, with all the edges clearly marked by yellow strips (see Figure 12 below).



Figure 11: Marked edges of steps

However, during a walking interview, P5, a student with a visual impairment, and referring to Figure 12, noted that he preferred white-coloured strips over yellow. This highlights the complexity of achieving universal accessibility, arising from diverse user needs. In light of this, I argue for a fluid rather than rigid and stable framings of UD principles to accommodate emerging and rare impairments. This complexity led the researcher to adopt the concept of in/accessibility, indicating that accessibility and inaccessibility can coexist and are not necessarily distinct phenomena.

It emerged that a complex entanglement of material-discursive relations assembles around place/space in/accessibility encounters involving SWDs in the HEI. The extract below from P2, a female student with a visual impairment, during a walking interview revealed:

> *"…there is an issue that I discussed with my friends recently. I am visually impaired, so usually in the dining hall, I have memorised that at the food collection point, there are plates with either rice, sadza* (staple food in Zimbabwe) *or spaghetti arranged in this order, and at the next station, there will be chicken, chicken soup and then beef, again in the same sequence. So, the moment they change this sequence, I will end up collecting the wrong plate of food because I have already memorised this sequence. So, we tried to raise this issue with the Catering Services Department staff, requesting that they shouldn't change this sequencing. But unfortunately, they brushed aside this issue and up to now they keep on changing the sequence."*

The extract reveals a range of human and non-human components (staff, plates, food, students) co-producing an inaccessible encounter for P2. Random changes in the positioning of plates of food suggests ableist assumptions held by staff members in the dining hall space. There is an assumption that all students can see and swiftly adjust to spatial changes in the dining hall space. This also reflects the social model of disability, in which attitudinal barriers restricts equitable participation among students. The staff member's reluctance to address P2's and friends suggests an expectation for SWDs to adapt to societal ableist assumptions and practices, rather than vice-versa. Recurring and random changes in the positioning of food plate positions further suggest that place/space and accessibility are highly contingent phenomena that emerge from material-discursive relations, rather than stable physical attributes of the dining hall space. These relations temporarily assemble and disassemble, producing in/capacities for equal participation among disabled and non-disabled students.

A go-along interview with a student who uses a wheelchair (P13) further revealed that in/accessibility in outdoor spaces at the HEI can be a highly contingent and unpredictable phenomena. Consider Figures 13 and 14 below.



Figure 12: A blocked walkway way leading into the campus car park area



Figure 13: The researcher and a participant navigating past a blocked walkway

When we set off for the go-along interview with P13, we passed through the area without any physical obstructions. However, on our way back, approximately an hour later, we realised that a car had blocked the walkway. As we approached the blocked area, P13 noted that:

> *"There are no markings, whatsoever, for disabled car parking across the whole campus. Look over there, we have been blocked. This is what I have to deal with on a daily basis."*

A range of material-discursive relations can be identified in the above encounter. On one hand, the encounter reflects architectural gaps. Lack of markings for PWDs car park spaces reproduces physical inaccessibility for SWDs. The encounter also suggests a lack of awareness among motorists regarding the impacts of blocking walkways, particularly for people who use various mobility methods, such as wheelchairs. Physical barriers not only constrain mobility but also lead to physical exhaustion, emotional and psychological burdens. Taken together, these components negatively impacts academic outcomes among SWDs. Campus-wide car park laws enforcement, awareness raising (Article 8) and imposing penalties can help address physical inaccessibility problems at the HEI, ultimately enhancing physical accessibility and improved physical, emotional and academic outcomes for SWDs.

It was also found that place/space in/accessibility is both socio-materially mediated and highly contingent and unpredictable. Consider the three extracts below, A, B and C.

Extract A

"…there is the issue of changes to lecture venues. Here at the university, lecture locations are rarely fixed. You may find out just a few minutes before a lecture that the venue has been moved from the usual, familiar spot to another location." (Focus Group Discussion B).

Extract B

"…the other day, we were informed that the lecture would be held in the Jubilee Lecture Theatre (JLT, a pseudonym). However, upon arriving at JLT, we learned that the venue had been moved to the Phoenix Lecture Theatre (pseudonym). That was when I realised that there was no direct route from JLT to the Phoenix Lecture Theatre. We had to navigate through the Education Department and the Security Control Room before finally reaching Phoenix. Upon our arrival, we were informed once again that the lecture had been moved back to JLT. At that point, we decided to skip the lecture and returned to the hostel.[8] At that point, we decided to skip the lecture and return to the hostel, as the only option was to retrace the winding route we had taken earlier." (P13-physically impaired student-Focus Group Discussion).

Extract C

*"In our study programme, POSD, we do not have fixed venues; we constantly move between lecture theatres, which is not ideal. Sometimes we attend lectures in location X and sometimes in location Y. Some of these venues have steps and stairs." (*P14-visually impaired student-walking interview).

The researcher downloaded a copy of the google map of the research site, mapped out P13's route (from his narration) and presented it in Figure 15 below.

[8] Used by participants to refer to halls of residence, or campus accommodation where students live during the course of semester.

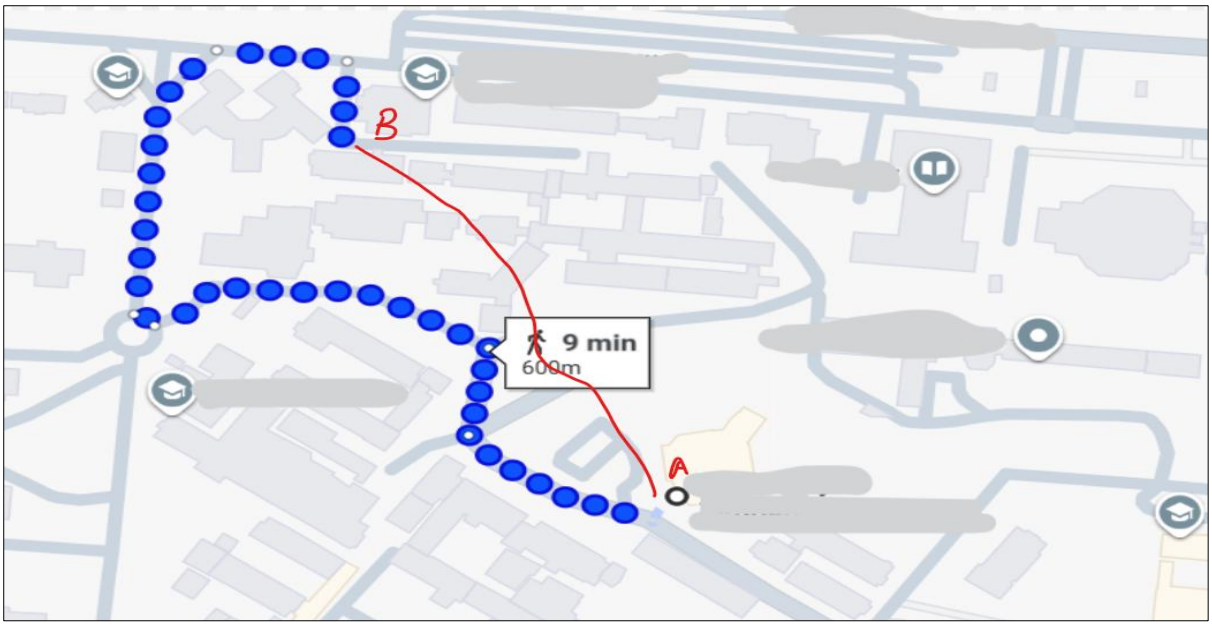


Figure 14: A physically accessible route between two points

Before analysing how the place/space assemblages in the extracts produce in/capacities for SWDs, I will first identify the range of material-discursive components that assembled around the reported encounters. From the three extracts, these include, but are not limited to (in no particular order of importance): places/spaces (lecture venues), distance (600 meters), lecturer decisions, architecture, helper/personal assistant, wheelchair and modules.

Extract A was obtained from Focus Group Discussion B, with seven students with physical impairments, to analyse photographs that participants had gathered. Extract B was obtained from an unstructured follow-up interview with a student who uses a wheelchair. Extract C is from a walking interview with a student with a visual impairment. The three extracts suggest that in/accessibility is not necessarily a stable phenomenon; rather, it can be highly contingent upon a range of material-discursive relations that unpredictably emerge, producing in/accessibility of physical spaces/places. Despite P13's intention to attend a lecture on a particular day, the lecturer's decisions, coupled with an inaccessible built environment, foreclosed the opportunity for P13 to attend the scheduled lecture alongside his peers. This constitutes discrimination (General Commentary No. 2, 2014). Arguably, physical in/accessibly spans beyond the physical attributes of places to incorporate a range of abstract and ideological assumptions held by people. The random lecture location changes depicted in the three extracts suggest ableist assumptions by lecturers, .in which all students are expected to traverse the campus' physical spaces with haste, at the shortest possible notice. However, this turns to be an oppressive, discriminatory and exclusionary practice for students who use different methods of movement, such as wheelchairs and multiple mobility aids.

In Figure 15 above, the blue line represents the main road and the wheelchair-accessible route used by P13 to travel from JLT to the Phoenix Lecture Theatre.

A Google Maps search by the researcher revealed that these two points are 600 meters apart, with an approximate walking time of 9 minutes, along the physically accessible route. The red continuous line illustrates the shortest route, which is steeped in stairs and steps, and is typically used by non-disabled students. During Focus Group Discussion A, one participant with a prosthetic leg shared that:

> *"…if my lecture is held in Lecture Theatre X, I have to go up the steps. If I want to visit the student services department, I have to go up the steps again. This university has a lot of steps; the campus is full of them. For example, the other day, I wanted to get to the student affairs department and ended up climbing two floors to reach my destination, which is very* tiring." (P3).

P3's sentiments reveals that the Student Services Department is physically inaccessible to students who use wheelchairs. Drawing on P13's experiences, students who use wheelchairs spend more time navigating the campus physical spaces. This produces both transient and lasting effects on SWDs. Short term effects include arriving late for lectures and experiencing physical and emotional exhaustion (see P3 above). Arriving late for lectures means SWDs miss out on module content, which negatively affect academic outcomes. Low grades endures beyond HE to affect employment outcomes. The extract below from a student with prosthetic legs reveals the negative effects of place/space inaccessibility.

> *"Sometimes I arrive for lectures 20 to 30 minutes late. If a lecture starts at 10 a.m., I need to start walking at around 9:30 a.m., but I still often arrive around 10:10 a.m. It takes me about 40 minutes to walk from my room to the lecture* venue." (P3).

Reading P3's accessibility experiences in juxtaposition with P13's experiences of lecture venue changes reveal how physical inaccessibility at the HEI restricts SWDs from attending and participating in lectures on an equal basis with their non-disabled peers. Physical inaccessibility also contributes to physical exhaustion among SWDs. In a follow-up interview, a participant who uses prosthetic legs revealed:

> *"In the main library, if you need something from the second floor, the only way to get there is by using the stairs. Relying on someone to keep fetching books for you from the upper floors is not a good idea. That person will eventually become frustrated, as they came to the library to study too. It doesn't make sense to ask them to collect books for you while they are trying to focus on their own work".*

It emerged that very few SWDs uses the main library due to physical inaccessibility. The library has three floors and students who use wheelchairs can only access the ground floor, and rely on non-disabled students to fetch

books on their behalf. The physical inaccessibility of the main library limits SWDs' opportunities to access information on an equal basis with non-disabled students, thereby compromising their access to quality education as outlined in SDG 4.

Students with physical impairments, particularly who use wheelchairs often take winding courses to access different locations across the campus due to physical obstacles (see Figure 16 below). Figure 16 below maps a route shared by P13, a student who uses a wheelchair:

> *"To collect a student ID card from the photographic unit, from the main library (A), you turn right onto the pathway used by everyone else (blue), but along that route, there are some steps and is inaccessible. If you are in a wheelchair, you need to first go to the cash office, then proceed along the administration block, and finally arrive at the photographic unit (B)".*

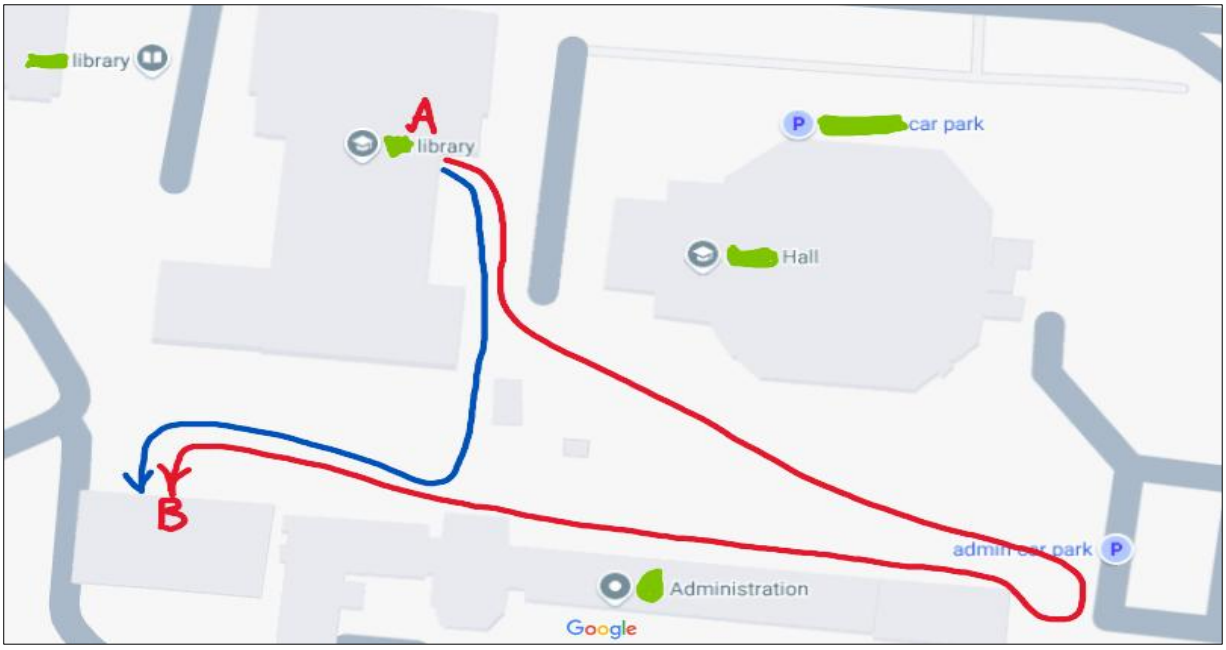


Figure 15: A participant's route between two points at the HEI

A Google Maps search of the distance between the two points, A and B in Figure 16 returned an average walking time of 9 minutes for an average able-bodied adult without impairments. This suggests that PWDs cannot use the application to plan their journeys across various campus locations. This reveals ableist assumptions, as the mobile application was designed with an average able-bodied person in mind and fails to account for the human diversity that exists in society. The ubiquity of steps and physical obstacles at the HEI suggests what I will refer to as 'walkanormativity' assumptions. This is an assumption that walking is the only mode of human movement. This marginalises people who use other modes of movement, such as wheelchairs, prosthetics, or other mobility aids in existence.

During a go-along interview with P13, a student who uses a wheelchair, I was taken to a pedestrian crossing point (see Figure 17 below). Although there is a curb cut on one side of the road, the absence of a curb cut on the opposite side of the crossing path further indicate ‘walk-normative’ assumptions.



Figure 16: Pedestrian crossing path at the HEI

Commenting on Figure 17, a participant who uses a wheelchair stated during Focus Group Discussion A that:

> *“I often bulldoze my way through such places because I cannot always take the longer routes.”*

Some participants felt that the HEI was gradually taking measures to address physical inaccessibility issues through initiatives, such as installing ramps in places that previously had only steps. Figure 18 below shows a recently added ramp. This action aligns with Article 9(1), which stipulates that States parties to the CRPD must take appropriate measures, including the identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility. Modifying inaccessible areas promotes equal access to campus spaces, and ultimately levelling the playing field for learning purposes.



Figure 17: A newly added ramp at the HEI in an area that had only steps for decades

While recently added ramps in some areas across the campus-built environment was applauded by SWDs, one participant with a physical impairment from focus group discussion A noted that:

> *"The ramp should not appear to be an afterthought. It must be designed so that visitors cannot perceive it as an added feature. However, at least there is a ramp now, which is the positive aspect."*

Add-on physical accessibility features (Figure 18), suggest that PWDs are a marginalised group whose needs are only addressed as an afterthought, than a priority. The quote in the title of this thesis, "We are just accommodated but not included," was coined by a participant with a visual impairment during a walking interview. The participant noted that the needs of SWDs at the HEI were addressed in a reactive and sporadic manner, lacking a clear agenda for equalising opportunities for all students.

During a follow-up interview with a student with a physical impairment, he recounted events that restricted him from attending lectures for four days:

> *"My wheelchair was broken twice. On the first occasion, I spent three days negotiating with the staff from the Department of Works to have it repaired. They kept making excuses, claiming they didn't have the welding rods necessary because my wheelchair was made of a special metal that required a specific type of welding rod. I explained that their superiors were aware of the presence of SWDs at the HEI. I then requested they write a requisition letter to their bosses for funds to purchase the specific welding rods. Eventually, they understood my request. On the fourth day, I received a phone call from the Department of Works. They asked me to send someone with the wheelchair to their workshop for repairs. However, I had already missed four days of lectures and was stuck in my room. I*

couldn't even go to the dining hall for meals, so I had to depend on friends to bring me food. At times, my friends would argue with the staff members in the dining hall because at times they would refuse to let them collect my meal." (P11).

Students living on campus are required to pay their accommodation fees in full at the beginning of each semester. This fee includes meals. Throughout the semester, students simply need to present their student IDs at the dining hall entrance, and proceed to collect their meal. However, this arrangement creates problems if disabled students send someone to collect a meal on their behalf. It was reported that at times, the catering staff would restrict students from taking food out of the dining hall.

A range of material-discursive elements can be identified in the above case. These include, at least-the student, friends, Department of Works staff, dining hall staff, funding, welding rods, a requisition letter and mobile phones. It is important to note how non-human matter (welding rods) both restricted and enhanced the capacities of the Department of Works staff to repair P11's wheelchair. This produced in P11 an incapacity to attend lectures on an equal basis with his peers. The encounter further highlights the entangled nature of place/space and the teaching and learning assemblages. Being stuck in the room for four days may have also prevented P11 from participating in extracurricular activities of his choice, and independent living (Article 19).

To prevent similar situations, the participant suggested that:

"I suggest that the DSS have wheelchairs on reserve in case a student's wheelchair is broken while they wait for it to be repaired or as they search for a replacement. Students shouldn't miss lectures when we have the DSS, which is mandated to look after the welfare of SWDs. The Department of Works should also have a section dedicated to the maintenance of wheelchairs. In my opinion, this is an essential service that should be available on campus."

It emerged that place and space accessibility was reproduced through both formal and informal material-discursive relations. Formal relations included the disability supports provided by the HEI. Informal relations, included social networks and products such as mobile phones. Informal relations significantly influenced in/accessibility among first-year students. This was because the common denominator across the four identified assemblages: personal helper service, was not available to first-year students until the second semester. Consequently, during the first semester, all first-year SWDs relied exclusively on informal social networks, which sometimes included former high school classmates, current course mates, church mates, random students and family members. These informal relationships contributed to equalising opportunities for participation among SWDs to engage in both academic and non-academic

activities. It was found that students from the largest school for SWDs in Zimbabwe had stronger support networks among themselves than SWDs who completed high school at mainstream schools.

Given that the admission and registration processes at the HEI must be completed in person, SWDs already studying at the HEI provided support to their incoming first year friends and colleagues. They assisted with submitting applications for admission and completing registration by accompanying them from one office to another across the campus. Beyond enrolment and registration, SWDs continued to support each other throughout the semesters. It was found that, students with low vision and those with physical impairments often assist 'blind' students navigate campus physical spaces/places. Visually impaired students assisted students who use wheelchair by pushing their wheelchairs. Additionally, visually impaired students shared writing equipment such as slates and styluses. During a walking interview, P19, a student with a visual impairment, shared how they navigated first year without a personal helper:

> *"…I have a friend who is totally blind. When we were first-year students, I would take him to and from his lectures because I have some sight. After his lecture, he would call me to pick him up. There were times when I was also in a lecture, and he would wait for about 20 to 30 minutes until I could arrive, and then we would go wherever we wanted."*

The extract above illustrates how various informal (human and non-human) relations co-produced the capacity of P19's friend to attend lectures. Informal relationships contributed infilling gaps in formal disability supports, particularly concerning the timing and allocation of personal helpers. The material-discursive relationships mentioned in the extract include, at a minimum, P19, his friend, mobile phone. In this assemblage mobile phones co-produced capacities for the two students to communicate. However, this relationship is not stable, but in always in flux. Shifts in mobile technology policies have the potential to disrupt communication patterns, either enhancing or restricting communication between students.

The extract further illustrates the dynamic and evolving nature of physical in/accessibility production at the HEI. There were times when P19's friend had to wait approximately 20 to 30 minutes in particular locations for him to arrive. The interactions between physically and visually impaired students and how they positively affect and are affected by each other reveals the multiple positive contributions of SWDs in the reproduction of accessibility at HEIs. This challenges the notion that SWDs are merely recipients of disability services. Instead, they play an active role in the reproducing of physical accessibility and fostering equal opportunities for participation among SWDs, thereby circumventing gaps in formal disability supports.

Both formal and informal supports fostered a multiplicity of capacities among SWDs, both within and beyond the HEI. A range of formal supports were found to enhance physical accessibility at the HEI. Consider the extracts below:

> *"One of the support services available to us is that the university provides personal helpers to assist with our academic and personal needs on* campus. (P14-student with visual impairment, walking interview).

> *"The university also provides personal helpers. In my case, I have a physical impairment that prevents me from hand-washing my clothes. I have a personal helper who I can ask to wash my clothes whenever they are dirty. When my blankets need washing, he comes over to wash those as well. These personal helpers also receive free campus accommodation and meals from the university. Having a personal helper readily available on campus is a great privilege".* (Focus Group Discussion B).

From the two extracts above, the formal relations include: personal helpers, funding (Vice Chancellors scholarship), SWDs, university policy (on the provision of helpers), food etc. The material-discursive relations identified in this formal support assemblage reproduce a myriad of capacities for SWDs, as reported below:

> *"Navigating this campus is so difficult that it becomes a barrier. Therefore, having helpers greatly assists us in moving from one place to another with ease."* (P10-student with a visual impairment, walking interview participant).

> > *"…let's say I want to attend a lecture. When I arrive at the venue and find that all the chairs are occupied, or when the lecture is conducted in a location with many steps, my helper assists me. In some cases, the lecture venues are difficult to access due to numerous stairs, making it challenging for me to navigate alone. Additionally, some stairs do not have handrails. Furthermore, when going to the city centre, attending workshops off-campus, or visiting unfamiliar places, my helper accompanies* me." (P17-walking interview participant).

> > *"My personal assistant helps me attend lectures and interpret diagrams. I need my assistant to explain the nature of diagrams on my mobile phone. Additionally, I require help with typing my assignments because I am still a bit slow, which is where my assistant comes in."* (P22-a student with a visual impairment).

For P10, a visually impaired student, a personal helper enhanced their capacity to access various locations on campus. For P17, a personal helper enhanced their capacity to find a seat when the lecture venue was full and helped navigate the campus. For P17, a personal helper enhanced their capacity to engage in off-

campus activities. For P22, a personal helper enhanced their capacity to comprehend diagrams, along with completing assignments. It is important to note how non-disabled students who served as personal helpers gain new capacities such as access to free campus accommodation and meals. In this context, SWDs and personal helpers affect each other in multiple, complex, predictable and unpredictable ways-physically, psychologically, economically, emotionally etc.

The formal disability supports assemblage also included central helpers. Central helpers are a pool of registered student assistants available to support SWDs as and when the need arise, particularly when individual personal helpers are unavailable on campus for various reasons. However, participants expressed uncertainty about how central helpers are selected and recruited. Many participants strongly disapproved of the central helpers, in favour of individual personal assistants instead. One participant from Focus Group Discussion A, with students with physical impairments noted that:

> *"Someone wanted to register as a central helper and was advised to approach the DSS Director, Mr. X, or Mrs. P to express their interest. To me, this indicates that a central helper is someone who feels the need to access free campus accommodation. To obtain these services, they act as if they want to assist us (SWDs). These students approach the DSS and register their interest in becoming a central helper. Ultimately, since they do not have a specific person to assist, they relax, having already secured the free campus accommodation they sought. In my opinion, central helpers are primarily students who register in this role solely to obtain free campus accommodation, with the easiest route being through the DSS."*

> *"Regarding the issue of central helpers, I believe that most of them do not come with a genuine intention to assist students with disabilities; rather, they are primarily motivated by the benefits of free campus accommodation or to enhance their CVs. I also suspect there is some degree of nepotism involved in the registration of central helpers at the DSS, which contributes to their lack of obligation or motivation to support us."*

Both central and personal helpers benefitted from free campus accommodation and free meals. Helpers assist with both academic and non-academic tasks, such as physical accessibility (lecture venues, dining halls, libraries, sports pavilions, chapels, etc.). They also assisted with non-academic tasks, including fetching water, personal care and laundry. Despite the lack of written policy guidelines regarding the duties and responsibilities within the student-helper relationships, relationships were highly fluid and mediated by a range of emerging material-discursive relations, producing multiple in/capacities among SWDs. Consider the extract below:

> *"We have personal helpers for all visually and 'physically challenged' (sic) students. Personally, I have a helper who usually accompanies me to the main library, even at night. Sometimes, he reads or explains images sent on the class WhatsApp group on my mobile phone. I can either forward the photo to him on WhatsApp, and he explains it to me through an audio recording, or he can come over and explain it to me in person. The provision of personal helpers is extremely beneficial to me."* (P14-walking interview with a visually impaired student).

Human and non-matter in the extract above include personal helpers, SWDs, images, mobile application (WhatsApp), mobile phones. Although not explicitly stated, it can be implied that there is an incorporation of university policies regarding the provision of personal helpers to SWDs. The presence of mobile phones and WhatsApp in this assemblage suggests the entangled nature of formal and informal relationships. For the visually impaired student, this assemblage produces access to academic material in the form of images and facilitates library access. The audio recording option on the mobile phone enhanced the capacity of P14's helper to explain the contents of images remotely. Mobile phones in this network belong to the global mobile tech company assemblage, which consists of mobile telecommunication policies, mobile phone manufacturers and more. This aligns with DeLanda's (2006) notion that in addition to encompassing smaller assemblages and being a component of larger ones, we can think of assemblages as having relationships of interiority (between component parts) and the potential for relationships of exteriority (with other assemblages). DeLanda (2006) further notes that assemblages should not be understood as seamless totalities or closed systems. Global telecommunication policy shifts or software upgrades have the potential to disrupt and redefine P14 and their helper's capacities, fostering the emergency of new in/capacities. Micropolitically, in/capacities produce opportunities and constraints on what a body can do (Fox and Powell, 2023:6), in this case what SWDs can do at the HEI.

Data suggests that the relationships between SWDs and their personal helpers are always in a state of flux and unpredictability, constantly assembling and disassembling, reproducing multiple in/capacities in SWDs. The extract below is from a walking interview with a female student who has a visual impairment. The interview was conducted a day before the last day of the semester in December 2023. The encounter reported below took place on the morning of the walking interview.

> *"My greatest wish is to have one personal assistant from my first year until my fourth year when I graduate. I'm not sure where the problem lies. This morning, I was surprised to see my personal assistant packing her belongings and saying she was going home. We live in different hostel corridors, and I had gone to her room looking for her so she could*

accompany me to collect my electric adapter from a room on the second floor of our hostel. She refused, saying she was running out of time. Additionally, I had informed her yesterday that I wanted to go home later tomorrow and asked if she could accompany me to the city centre. I didn't take any action; I just let her go. I believe communication is key, and she should have communicated better. Anyway, I have arranged with another lady who agreed to accompany me to the city centre tomorrow". (P15).

The extract highlights a mix of human and non-human elements (students, college calendar, time factor, spaces such as the second-floor location, a lady, etc.) that restrictedP15 from collecting her adapter from the second floor. By agreeing to accompany P15 get into the city centre, the lady enhanced P15's capacity to navigate physical accessibility. It is also important to consider the affective capacities of the college calendar, and how it disrupted P15's working relationship with their personal helper and prompted the emergence of a new temporary relationship with the lady. Within the new materialist ontology, assemblages are described as "a kind of chaotic network of habitual and non-habitual connections, always in flux, always reassembling in different ways" (Potts 2004: 19). Although not explicitly stated, P15's experiences with her helper could have triggered psychological and emotional effects. P15's helper unexpected behaviour exemplifies Fox and Alldred's (2011: 361) assertion that humans do not respond to stimuli like computers; instead, they react in complex and sometimes unpredictable ways, indicating an active, motivated engagement with living, the capacity to make choices and act upon the world around them.

Data analysis further revealed the non-deterministic nature of place/space in/accessibility for SWDs. Let's consider the two extracts below from Focus Group Discussion B, with students who had physical impairments.

"Another issue is the step leading to the shower area. That step is very dangerous. I have a case involving a first-year student who uses a wheelchair. He approached me two weeks after starting college and explained that, as a first-year student, he did not have a personal assistant. He told me he had not been able to take a bath since arriving on campus and had been drying himself with a wet towel instead. I took him to the hostel janitor that very same day to discuss his situation and requested that he be moved from Ambassador Hall (pseudonym). Fortunately, the following day, the student was moved from Ambassador Hall to Stanley Hall (pseudonym)." (Tom, Focus Group Discussion Participant).

Tom used a wheelchair. At the time of data collection, he was a hostel committee member and very popular among study participants for his advocacy skills for SWDs on campus. From the extract, disparate socio-material elements can be identified: students, architecture, wheelchair, university policies (specifically, the policy governing the allocation of helpers), janitor, etc. The architecture, including

the step shown in Figure 20 below, along with the university policy that restricts the allocation of personal helpers to first-year students, disabled Tom from taking a shower for two weeks. Tom's involvement produced a new relationship with the hostel janitor. The resultant assemblage produced the capacity to move hostel, ultimately producing the capacity to bath.



Figure 18: A wheelchair inaccessible shower area in Ambassador Hostel

Keeping Tom's account in mind, I will now turn to a similar account shared by a male student with a physical impairment regarding his experiences using the bathroom facilities in Senga Hall (Figure 20). The account was shared by a male student who used a wheelchair in a follow up in depth interview. He had moved from Senga Hostel to Thomas Hostel:

> *"Now, I am staying in Thomas Hall (pseudonym). The situation is different. Previously, in Senga Hall (pseudonym), the bathroom setup posed a challenge. As you approach the shower area, there is a step that prevented my wheelchair from passing. This meant I needed someone to lift me and place me on a small, movable chair in order to shower. It became a hassle when there was no one available to lift me up. That means I could not bath because my helper was a female. In my experience, females are more reliable than males".* (P23-Follow up interview).

P23's account reveals not only human elements but also non-human matter that constrained their capacity to access the shower area. These include at least: architecture, a wheelchair, random students, a personal helper and gender. Despite the inaccessibility of the shower area and the presence of a female personal helper, P23's capacity to access the shower area was produced by

unpredictable relationships that temporarily assembled-random students who could lift him up.



Figure 19: A wheelchair inaccessible shower space in Senga Hall

Although the shower facility in Senga Hall was installed with handrails, the physical barrier at the bottom impeded physical accessibility for students who use wheelchairs. The steps shown in Figures 20 and 21 further illustrate 'walknormative' assumptions. It is important to note the improvisation of using a movable chair by SWDs to enhance access to the shower space. However, the chair's movable nature increases the risk of injury, thereby creating a precarious higher education context. .

Data indicate how SWDs were excluded from various places/space e.g., lecture rooms, libraries, and dining halls, producing multiple disadvantages. For P13, a student who uses a wheelchair, the narrow door at the Thomas dining hall discriminated him from having meals with his peers. During a go-along interview, P13 noted that:

> *"I rarely go to Thomas Dining Hall. As you know, boys can be very mischievous. During peak hours, students stampede into the dining hall, making it difficult for the staff to manage the queue. As a result, the dining hall staff have resorted to opening a small side door, which is only big enough for one person to enter at a time. The double door is always locked. Whenever I decide to go there, my wheelchair is too wide to fit through the small door. Other students can enter through that door, but I cannot. This means the staff have to unlock the double door for me to enter. Each time I go, the process of unlocking the double door is cumbersome, as we first need to collect the keys. To avoid this hassle, I decided that since my helper also has meals in the same dining hall, I*

would stop going altogether. Now, my helper collects food for me in a lunch box, and I have my meals in my room."

The extract illustrates that P13 was affected, both positively and negatively, by a heterogeneous mix of human and non-human components. The components can be summarised as: spaces, students, helpers, behaviour (mischief), staff, doors, wheelchair, lunchbox, etc. To a passer-by, the locked double doors (see Figure 22 below) might appear inconsequential, but for P13, these doors are a manifestation of mischief among students, compelling staff to implement control measures. Unfortunately, this restrictedP13 from accessing the dining hall. This highlights the entanglements of disparate elements, collapsing dualisms such as visible/invisible e.g., discourse (mischief) among students affecting which door should be opened, ultimately producing a physically inaccessible dining hall area.



Figure 20: Wheelchair inaccessible but in use entrance at Thomas dining hall

Figure 22 above shows the narrow door that P13 pointed out to the researcher during a go-along interview. In addition to being too narrow for P13's wheelchair, a closer look at the image reveals a physical barrier-a step-at the bottom, which constrained P13's capacity to access the dining hall. This further restricted his independence and promotes dependence on other students to lift his wheelchair enter and egress from the dining hall. Figure 23 below depicts the wide, but permanently locked door to Thomas's dining hall. Furthermore, the presence of a ramp in Figure 23 renders the dinning accessible from this location, but the entrance it is locked. This indicates ableist assumptions among the dining hall staff.



Figure 21: Wheelchair accessible but locked entrance at Thomas dining hall

Drawing on Deleuze's concept of potential or virtual capacity, the inability to access the dining hall and having meals in isolation has the potential to deprive P13 the opportunity to socialise and meet new students during mealtimes, thereby hindering the growth of their social capital.

A participant with a physical impairment contribution during a focus group discussion suggests potential bodily in/capacities:

> *"I would like to express my gratitude to the Vice Chancellor for the scholarship provided to us. We receive free campus accommodation every semester and our tuition fees are fully covered. Just imagine a student who uses a wheelchair living in private rented accommodation off-campus, as far away as Glenview or Lakeview (pseudonyms for residential areas). This student would have to roll their wheelchair all the way to campus and at the end of the day, they would also need to prepare meals and manage other tasks, which is quite challenging. Given that disabled persons receive free campus accommodation and a proper place to sleep, along with sufficient food, I believe this is a great initiative. We really appreciate* it". (Focus Group Discussion A).

Beyond exploring how a particular assemblages functions in the present, along with how bodies may lose capacities due to changes in socio-material relations, broadens our analytical lens to explore creative ways to minimise the risk of potential incapacities. Hickey-Moody and Malins (2007:1) suggest that social and

political change “can be affirmed not only through corporeal forms of action, such as street protest but also through *rethinking* the social issues one hopes to change.” Assemblage analysis is not merely an academic endeavour to describe a phenomenon; it also serves as a form of activism that can open new ways of intervening in and changing the phenomenon positively (Feely, 2016:879). In Nail’s (2017: 37) words: we must understand how an assemblage works before we intervene “to direct or shape the assemblage toward increasingly revolutionary aims.” In light of the above observations, an in-depth understanding of how in/accessibility is produced and perpetuated, provides the step stone towards strategies for reconfiguring the higher education assemblage.

It is interesting to note how the introduction of a lunchbox into this assemblage reconfigured elements to enable P13 to access meals. (see Figure 24 below). This illustrates a fluid and relational understanding of accessibility, rather than a fixed one. Massey (2005:31) argues that this relationality challenges the notion that a space or place has inherent or essential attributes that transcend specific circumstances.



Figure 22: A participant’s packed lunch

I had a pre-go-along interview with P13 in his room on campus. During the interview, there was a knock at the door. John (pseudonym), P13’s helper, entered, picked up an empty lunchbox from the table, and left. About twenty minutes later, John returned with a packed lunchbox for P13. P13 had chosen to eat in his room to avoid the hassles of gaining access to the Thomas dining hall.

Responding to research questions 1 and 2, in/accessibility of place/spaces within the HEI ceaselessly emerged from a heterogeneous mix of socio-material-abstract-embodied relations that assemble around specific encounters, either enhancing or inhibiting physical accessibility. In/accessibility encounters

produced both transient and enduring in/capacities. Transient effects included, among others missing lectures, skipping meals and emotional distress. Enduring effects include internalised disablism. Additionally, place/space in/accessibility was produced through both formal and informal material-discursive relations. The formal assemblage includes provisions provided by the HEI through the DSS such as the allocation of personal helpers. Informal relations involve fellow SWDs, random non-disabled students, mobile phones etc., which infinitely emerges to either enhance or restrict accessibility for SWDs. Having reported on the place/space assemblage, along with the resultant in/capacities, the next chapterreports on the teaching, learning and assessment assemblage.

CHAPTER 7

The Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TLA+) assemblage

It emerged that teaching, learning and assessment at the HEI was reproduced from material-discursive relations that assembled, disassemble and reassemble, producing in/capacities for SWDs to engage in the learning and assessment processes on an equal basis with non-disabled students. This chapter reports on the affective relations, along with the resultant in/capacities produced for SWDs. First, I will summarise (in no particular order of importance) the diverse disparate material-discursive relations that co-produced the teaching, learning and assessment assemblage (Table 4), and proceed to expantiate on these in the subsequent sections.

Table 4: A typology of a Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TLA+) in/accessibility assemblage

Non-human matter	Human matter	Abstractions and embodied affects
• Funding (Vice Chancellor's Scholarship), • Places/spaces (lecture venues, halls of residence, libraries, sports pavilion, dining halls, open spaces) • Curriculum • Braille papers • Stylus • Projector • Colour • Architecture (steps and stairs) • Weather elements (sun) • Water supply • Softwares (JAWS, NVDA) • PCs and laptops	• Helpers/personal assistants (including central helpers). • Students (disabled and non-disabled) • Lecturers • Ancillary staff (Estates and facilities, cooks, drivers, janitors). • Electricity supply	• Memories • Feelings (pain, stress, depressed, uncertainty) • Attitudes • Ideological assumptions (ocular centrism, ableism)

• Mobile phones • Wheelchairs • University policies		

A walking interview with P11, a student with a visual impairment, revealed how an inaccessible teaching encounter was produced. The use of a projector during a Psychology lecture constrained P11's ability to engage with the lecture content. This, in turn, affected P11's attendance at lecturers. Missing lectures could potentially influence P11's learning and assessment outcomes. Projector usage has the potential to shape P11's attitudes regarding the inclusion of learners with visual impairments at the HEI.

> *"Regarding lectures, the use of projectors poses a challenge for those of us who are visually impaired. For example, we are currently studying topics like the biological basis of behaviour, focusing on the brain and the nervous system. The lecturer often teaches using the projector, saying things like, 'You see this part of the brain; this is the location of the cerebellum,' while pointing to the screen. Unfortunately, I cannot see the projector, which leaves me feeling lost. I don't see the benefit attend such lectures since the explanations are directed toward students who can see the nervous system displayed, making it very difficult for me to follow* along." (P11).

The extract highlights ableist teaching practices, based on a narrow assumption that all students possess the capacity for visual perception, thereby excluding those with visual impairments.

During a walking interview, P14 shared how the use of a projector negatively affected him. At the time of the interview, he was a fourth-year undergraduate student and had become visually impaired a couple of months earlier. P14 reported that:

> *"I am facing a challenge: I cannot take notes during lectures because I cannot read from the projector. Since I recently became visually impaired, I am unable to use braille and can no longer write with pen and paper. This has significantly hindered my learning* process." *(*P14-visually impaired student).

P14 shared with the researcher the financial challenges he faced in accessing high-quality medical care for his developing eye problems. He explained how the pain had significantly impacted his learning. His parents were divorced and his mother was not working, which meant the family could not afford advanced medical care. For P14, a mix of socio-material elements negatively affected his capacity to engage in the learning process alongside his course mates. These

elements included, but were not limited to, a projector, lecturer, and the onset of impairment and braille skills. Collectively, these components constrained P14 from engaging in the learning processes on an equal footing with his peers. .

P2's extract below further illustrates an assemblage that produced curriculum inaccessibility. P2, a visually impaired undergraduate student, was required to take Chinese language as a mandatory module to graduate. However, the design and delivery of this module restricted P2's engagement with the module.

> *"I can't see what's on the projector or the blackboard, even when I sit at the front desks. I used to complain about this a lot. I remember during the Chinese language module, the lecturer would write on the blackboard. My fellow visually impaired classmate, Jim (pseudonym), and I approached the lecturer to explain that we couldn't see what was being written. The lecturer told us to seek help from our respective assistants, suggesting that they should explain the content on the blackboard during the lecture. It feels unfair to constantly rely on our helpers for explanations while they also want to follow the lecture. The lecturer did not grasp the extent of our issue. Unless I stand directly in front of the blackboard, I cannot see anything from a few metres* away." (P2).

The teaching and learning assemblage described above constrained P2's engagement in the module. The account highlights the lecturer's inability to understand the students' concerns and her course mate, Jim. While not explicitly stated, the material relations in this assemblage-such as the lecturer's use of the blackboard-have the potential to influence attendance and shape P2 and Jim's attitudes towards the inclusion of students with visual impairments at the HEI.

The extract below further illustrates the affective relations between a PowerPoint presentation and students with visual impairments:

> *"The lecturers usually enter the lecture venue and begin flying through their slides, often saying, "As you can see." Recently, I was joking with other visually impaired ladies nicknaming one of the lecturers, "Now You See" because he frequently uses that phrase while presenting on a projector and quickly moves to the next slide, leaving us unable to see what is being displayed. At one point, we informed the lecturer that some of us cannot see the projected content, but typically, he does nothing to accommodate us. The only time he makes an effort to provide explanations is when the projector or computer malfunctions; otherwise, he continues to say, "Now you* see". (P4).

It is important to note how students sometimes used humour to cope with ableist practices. It emerged that SWDs, besides individual self-advocacy, often self-organised and collaborate to navigate ableist practices at the HEI. For example, students could self-organise and approach individual lecturers to request for accommodations in groups.

It is important to recognise how the above assemblage limits the learning capacities of SWDs. Non-human elements, such as the projector, can produce discursive statements, like nicknaming, illustrating the inseparability and entangled nature of the social and the material worlds. The repeated use of the phrase “now you see” by lecturers suggests ‘ocular centrism’ which undermines other senses, such as touch, which many students with visual impairments in this study relied on in navigating everyday learning activities (e.g., braille).

P1, a student with a visual impairment, shared her experiences with the mandatory Chinese language module during a walking interview:

> *“At one point, we had an argument with the lecturers because we were unable to see the Chinese characters they were writing on the blackboard. One lecturer told us that her duty was solely to teach, and that our inability to see what she was writing was none of her concern. We then approached the DSS (Disability Support Services) and presented our case. The DSS coordinator invited the lecturer and explained the challenges we face as learners with visual impairments. It was only then that it was suggested we study the Chinese language orally rather than in writing. Even during examinations, we are assessed orally.” (P1).*

It is important to note that Zimbabwe-China relations were developed and intensified during the colonial era. Between the 1960s and 1970s, Beijing assisted ZANU (PF) during the liberation war by providing arms, military strategies and training for former freedom fighters (Zindiye, 2015). Following Zimbabwe’s independence in 1980, the two countries quickly established formal diplomatic, economic, and political relations. Since then, there has been a significant influx of Chinese business people into Zimbabwe, particularly in infrastructure projects (Ojakorotu and Kamidza, 2018). Alongside these economic pursuits, Chinese socio-cultural practices are gradually strengthening in Zimbabwe. The establishment of Confucius Institutes at Zimbabwean universities is one example. This situation provides evidence for the argument that assemblages are open systems, connected with multiple external and historical assemblages, consciously and unconsciously affecting bodily capacities. In Grosz’s (1994, 116) words: “The body remains primarily as a text to be marked, traced, written upon by various regimes of institutional, discursive, and non-discursive power.” The mandatory teaching of Chinese in HE goes beyond the question of the curriculum to reveal deep seated and unfolding political ideas.

For P1, a complex interaction of heterogeneous socio-material components, including lecturers, students and Chinese characters produced an inaccessible Chinese language curriculum. The DSS coordinator intervened, disrupting how the assemblage works. The DSS coordinator disrupted the teaching and assessment assemblage, producing a shift from written to oral practices.

An extract from P4, a student with a visual impairment, highlights the capacity of the DSS director to positively affect the Chinese language teaching and learning assemblage:

> *"The DSS is very helpful because, while we might claim to be inclusive, I can say we haven't yet achieved full inclusion. There are times when I face challenges, and not every lecturer is equipped to address them. It's not that easy, but when I approach the DSS, it becomes a lot easier and my problems are promptly* addressed."

The extract illustrates the limited capacity of lecturers to address the needs of students with visual impairments. A Deleuzo-Guattarian inspired policy interventions invites us to creatively imagine and reimagine potential initiatives to enhance the capacities of lecturers and disability support services in addressing the issues faced by SWDs. For instance, the following extract reveals how a lecturer positively affected a law student with a physical impairment who used prosthetic legs:

> *"Some lecturers really understand us. At one point, I couldn't take my Legal Ethics examination because my legs were swollen. I called Mr. Jones (pseudonym) and explained my situation. He advised me to stay in my hostel until I felt better and then I could come to his office. I truly appreciate this* understanding." (P16-physically impaired student).

The extract illustrates how pain associated with certain impairments and can constrain the capacity of students to participate at the HEI on an equal basis with students without impairments. New materialism enables us to explore the effects of visceral experiences, such as pain, on bodies-an exploration not possible from the social model of disability perspective. For Vehmas and Watson's (2014:649) certain impairments, such as motor neuron disease and depression, are undesirable "not merely because of the cultural representations attached to them but also because these conditions cause suffering regardless of one's cultural environment."

Similarly, P20, during a follow-up interview, shared how visceral experiences affect them. The excerpt also reveals how informal human relationships, such as friendships, helped them circumvent limiting visceral (pain) affects:

> *"I miss lectures several times because I need to listen to my leg. If I don't, the pain worsens, so I have to take some time to rest until I feel better before I can resume attending lectures. I am grateful for my friends, who help me by coming to my room to update me on what they learned each day I miss. They also assist me in catching* up." (P20-student with a physical impairment).

Data analysis further revealed additional effects of an accessible curriculum on both disabled and non-disabled students. Let's consider the excerpts below from

P18 and P6, students with visual impairments, during their respective walking interviews with the researcher.

> *"Foreign languages are particularly challenging for us, students with visual impairments. We take oral examinations instead of written ones. This approach stems from instructors not knowing how to teach languages like French, Portuguese, or German in a way that accommodates braille users. The foreign language component was introduced without considering how to present these languages in braille and how to effectively teach learners with visual impairments. Consequently, we are required to complete the modules orally. As a result, our classmates often question whether we are being properly assessed or if we are simply receiving marks without merit. While the idea of learning a foreign language is commendable, the initiative was implemented without adequate consultation with learners with visual impairments".* (P18-visually impaired student).

> *"Then the other issue is about foreign languages. It is beneficial to learn a foreign language, but the challenge arises when instructors struggle to find time to teach students with visual impairments. The worst part, especially in my faculty, is that we are not given the option to choose a particular foreign language to study. Foreign language modules are study programme-based; for instance, students in the Social Innovation programme are required to study Chinese. However, I cannot write Chinese character in Braille, as I have never done it before. There are other foreign languages being taught at the university, such as German, Portuguese, and French. If I had the option to choose, I would select a language that is compatible with* Braille." (P7-visually impaired student).

The two extracts suggest an ableist curriculum design, where the foreign language curriculum is tailored exclusively for non-disabled students, thereby limiting the capacity of students with visual impairments to engage equally with their peers. It is crucial to recognises how the teaching, learning and assessment methods available to both disabled and non-disabled students can co-produce framings of academic competency among disabled students. The extracts indicate that disability is not an individual attribute but relationally reproduced. An assemblage approach opens up spaces to creatively think of alternative methods to enhance the capacities of students with visual impairments to access learning and assessment of foreign language modules beyond their traditional braille writing style.

Similarly, P9, during a walking interview shared how interactions with both human and non-human matter in the teaching and learning assemblage affect the time and effort they spent in learning.

> *"…it is challenging to reach out to the lecturer constantly to express that I didn't understand certain concepts. Consequently, the learning process*

remains a significant challenge for me. I must invest a substantial amount of effort to pass a module. I find that I have to read more than fully sighted students, as they can grasp many concepts during lectures by watching the lecture notes projected. In contrast, I have a terrible eyesight. After lectures, I return to my room and review each session with my face close to the laptop screen, trying to comprehend what the lecturer was saying." (P9-visually impaired student).

P9 was a visually impaired student. He was extremely passionate about his study programme. Throughout the walking interview, he incorporated intriguing concepts from his modules and suggested ways to reconfigure the HEI elements to improve accessibility for visually impaired students. He preferred to use Braille, but there were no textbooks available in braille. He shared how the inaccessibility of reading materials affected him:

"…because we do not have reading materials in accessible formats, it takes me longer to read a word like 'congratulations' in print. My eyesight is very poor. If it takes me, say, 19 hours to finish reading a book, that means I can only sleep for 5 hours that day. This negatively affects my health. Some students ask why I rarely sleep, as they see me awake most of the time studying. They don't understand that while they spend 5 minutes finishing a paragraph, I take much longer. The problem is that reading materials in Braille are rarely available, so I have to rely heavily on printed materials, which takes a significant amount of time compared to reading Braille. When I use Braille, I read quickly, but when I read printed books, I spend a lot of time grasping the concepts. Of course, I pass my modules, but that is simply due to my determination. My study method is incredibly tiresome and explaining this to others is very difficult. Even in my faculty, I have tried to share my challenges and highlight how disadvantaged we are, but they insist that we should persevere and soldier on. My question is: why are non-disabled students not putting in as much effort as we do? This is another manifestation of discrimination, where one student is overworked like a horse. The lecturer only sends us PDF documents and does not care to provide Braille copies. It's up to the students to figure it out." (P9).

From P9's account, a range of socio-material relations can be identified. These include students, lecturers, teaching and learning materials in both accessible and inaccessible formats (e.g., Braille and print). It is crucial to note the multiple effects within this assemblage, which range from physical sensations, such as feeling exhausted, to shaping his thoughts, such as experiences of discrimination. Some material relations enhance reading speed (e.g., Braille), whilst relations slow it down (e.g., print material).

P7's walking interview transcript illuminated how the past affected his present learning experiences. The inaccessibility of reading materials at the HEI allowed

her to compare and contrast the past and present, further colouring her capacities to enjoy higher education. Consequently, she occasionally felt degraded.

> *"During my high school years, it was very easy; the school ensured that whenever we received a new textbook, we got it in both print and braille formats. All students, both visually impaired and sighted, would read the same paragraph at the same time. The teachers would even let braille readers to read for the entire class while sighted students listened and vice versa. Sadly, here at the university, the process is unidirectional. Only sighted students (helpers) read for students with visual impairments. Just yesterday, during a presentation, the materials were in print form. I asked one of my group members to read for me while I explained. It's a significant challenge and feels degrading, but this situation is perpetuated by institutional* shortcomings." (P7).

The extract juxtaposes two teaching and learning assemblages: high school (past) and university (present). It illustrates how the socio-material relations in each assemblage affected students' capacity to engage with learning materials in both environments. This extract challenges us to think creatively about innovative approaches that do not elevate one reading style over another. This case reveals a horizontal, rather than a vertical, teaching and learning practices that privileges multiple ways of reading, that recognises diversity.

> *"I was presenting as part of a group for a faculty-wide module. I stood in front of the class, using my braille presentation. The lecturer approached me and began touching the braille cells while I was presenting. After I read just one line, the lecturer stopped me and confessed in front of the class that my reading style was amusing to him and that he felt like laughing, but I shouldn't take it the wrong way. He instructed me to stop presenting and take my seat, then ordered the rest of my group to wrap up the presentation. This left me feeling sad because I had been eager to present in front of my peers and demonstrate my knowledge, only to be interrupted, by the lecturer. I understand that my reading style might seem funny, but it can also be a significant disadvantage. I remember overhearing some classmates accusing my group members of allowing me to present. It felt as though I didn't know anything about the subject simply because the lecturer stopped me after I had only read the question and another student took* over." (P17).

P17's experience during the group presentation highlights how socio-material relations unpredictably emerged to exclude her. These encounter can produce both transient effects, such as exclusion from presenting and feelings of sadness, while simultaneously reinforcing and legitimising ableist practices. The lecturer's actions suggest a lack of awareness regarding the rights of SWDs.

Similarly, P11 below, during a walking interview shared:

> *"…some students have no clue about disability. I recall a specific lecture when one student said to me, 'For you, you just pass modules because you are awarded marks for free.' In response, I explained that this is not the case... After our conversation, the student began to understand we operate. One reason people with disabilities face challenges is that non-disabled people often lack insight into how those with disabilities* navigate life." (P11-visually impaired student).

The lack of knowledge about the capacities of diverse bodies, including those labelled 'impaired', presents significant implications, such as downplaying certain capacities perceived as 'deviant'. The extract below illustrates how assessment relations assembled to enhance the capacities of SWDs to participate in assessment processes can produce unintended consequences for both students with and without disabilities. At this HEI, SWDs take their examinations and in-class assessments in the DSS department, separate from mainstream venues.

> *"You know, a slate and a stylus make noise as I write. Because of this, I cannot take an examination in the same venue as non-disabled students using pens. Instead, we take our exams at the DSS Department library. However, some non-disabled students assume that we are given answers during exams at the DSS centre. They question why we cannot take our exams in mainstream venues spread across campus. When we pass exams with top grades, they assume we were assisted in writing exams. In reality, we prefer to avoid disturbing other students with the noise from our slates and styluses. The sounds they produce are actually necessary for us to know where one cell ends and another begins. Non-disabled students do not understand that we take exams at the same time, even if we are in separate venues. Sometimes, after an exam, some mainstream students ask if we had the same set of questions as them or if we were given easier* questions." (P4-visually impaired student).

The assessment assemblage can be represented by its constituent components, which include: students, braille writing materials (slates and styluses), spaces (venues), question papers, sound (from braille materials) and negative assumptions against SWDs. The sound produced by a slate and stylus when writing, whilst productive to a student with a visual impairment, enhancing their capacity to write, can be disruptive to a student using a pen and paper. The photos below were taken by the researcher after a walking interview.

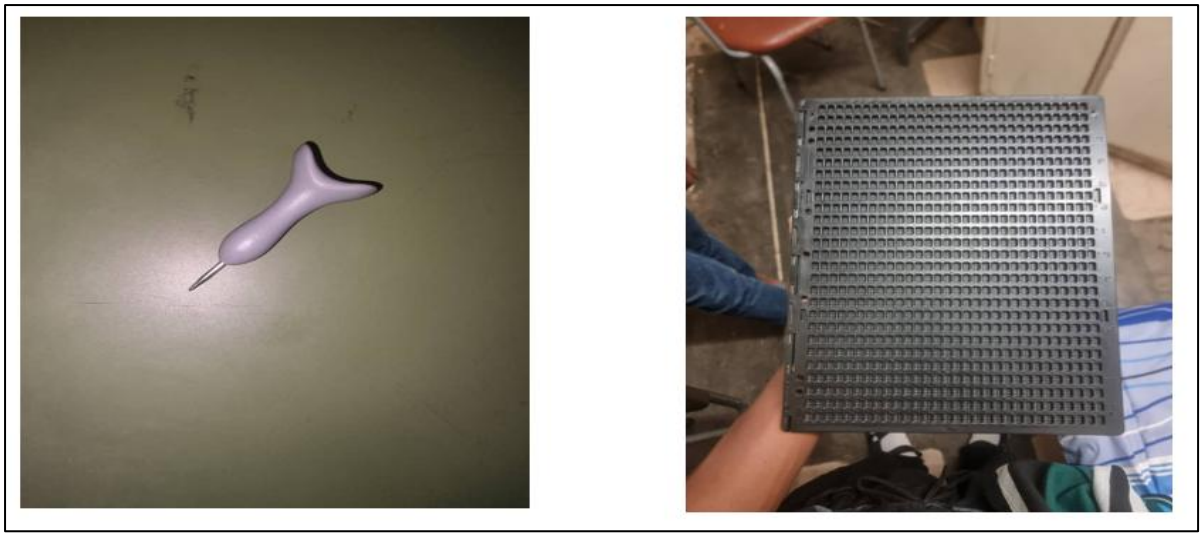


Figure 23: Slate and Stylus

Data analysis uncovered substantial evidence suggesting that, lecturers, can restrict learning capacities of learners with visual impairments.

> *"I once informed my lecturer that I was struggling in my Chinese module, and he suggested I seek assistance from my helper. I thought to myself, 'But my helper is also a student like me. What if he doesn't understand the concepts either?' By referring me to my helper, does that mean I am now being taught by him? It essentially does, yet it is the lecturer's responsibility to teach me and ensure that I grasp all the subject concepts. A helper is not my lecturer; my helper is there to assist with other tasks, not to teach me module* content." *(P3-visually impaired student, walking interview).*

It emerged that most lecturers did not fully understand the duties and responsibilities of personal helpers. Data analysis revealed how SWDs were differently affected when undertaking oral exams. During a go-along interview, P21 shared his experiences with oral French language exams.

> *"Taking an oral examination can be quite tricky. Once you provide an answer to a question, that's final. This differs from writing an exam, where you can simply cram, enter the exam venue, write your answers and leave. In an oral examination, you need to read, retain the information and verbalise it. If you cannot pronounce certain words correctly-despite knowing their correct spelling-you could fail based on that* alone". (P21-student with a visual impairment).

Walking interviews further revealed glaring inaccessibility encounters with the International Certification of Digital Literacy (ICDL) module. This inaccessibility was produced by a multiplicity of relational human and non-human components, which negatively affected students with visual impairments. P8, a student with a visual impairment, noted:

> *“Hmmmm, regarding the ICDL module, we are just clueless because as we speak, we have not been taught anything, yet the ICDL exam is scheduled for Thursday, next week. We have no clue about what we will be writing in that examination, especially since we were informed that it will be taken online, and we have no clue about how to navigate that. Mainstream students received instruction during weekends, but attending those lectures proved pointless for me. Each time I attend, all I heard was, ‘Then you select, now you see...’ I gained nothing from those sessions, so I felt there was no reason to continue attending. We approached Mrs. Phoenix (pseudonym), the module lecturer and expressed our concerns. She advised us to form a group as students with visual impairments so she could teach us. We did that and submitted our email addresses to her, but nothing has materialised since that day and the exam is fast approaching. I still don’t know what I am supposed to write in that exam.”* (P8-student with a visual impairment).

A focus group discussant shared her experiences that closely relates to P8:

> *“Briefly, the lecturer acts as if they understood your concerns and promises to assist us. Meanwhile, mainstream students have practiced the ICDL module several times, but we are still clueless. We have to continuously pursue her and reintroduce ourselves, yet she acts as if she is meeting us for the first* time.” (Focus Group Discussion A).

The extracts above reveal complex socio-material relations. These include the ICDL module, the lecturer, students and the virtual space. P8 perceived the lecturer’s use of a virtual space to deliver the module as detrimental, leading her to see no value in attending weekend lectures. This produced uncertainty regarding the upcoming ICDL examination. P8 also expressed concerns that failing the module and having to repeat it presents economic implications, as the VC scholarship does not cater for repeat modules. P6 and P4 equally echoed P8’s sentiments regarding the ICDL module:

> *“Regarding lectures, one aspect that disappointed me the most during my first year was the ICDL module, which focuses on computer literacy. The lecturer used a projector for all demonstrations, making the learning process very difficult for me as a student with a visual impairment.”* (P6-visually impaired student).

> *“…this really affected me because whenever I had to complete assignments, such as creating a database or a PowerPoint presentation, I struggled to follow along. When the lecturer used a mouse during the lecture, I couldn’t see the clicks he was making. I could only remember the descriptions of the steps, but once I was on my own, I had no idea which clicks to make on my laptop. As a result, I was at a significant* disadvantage.” (P4-visually impaired student).

The extracts reveal the negative socio-material effects on the teaching and learning of the ICDL module among students with visual impairments. Challenges encountered by P4, such as creating a database or a Power Point presentation, can produce low grades. During a walking interview, P7 and P11, both students with visual impairments, shared their experiences regarding the teaching and learning of the ICDL module:

> *"…during the ICDL module lectures, we will be present but just sitting idly. At one point, the lecturer advised us to seek assistance at the DSS library, but when we arrived, Mrs. Jones (pseudonym, library), told us that she was not responsible for teaching the module. She referred us to Mr. Jaws (pseudonym), a braillist in the DSS department), who then directed us back to Mrs. Jones. In the end, we found ourselves caught in a loop (laughing). For this module, we must complete a practical component. For example, next Thursday, the 7th, we will be taking the ICDL exam. We feel completely lost because, at one point, we approached the lecturer for guidance, explaining that other students were progressing while we were not. However, the lecturer admitted he had no idea how to teach us…. so, yeah it's a challenge…"* (P7-student with a visual impairment).

> *"There is only one staff member at the university, Mr. Jaws, based at DSS (Mr Jaws) who is proficient in using assistive technologies for students with visual impairments. However, he can only assist you according to his schedule, not ours, as he often states that he is not part of the library team. This leads to some confusion. The librarian always refers us to Mr. Jaws, but when we approach him, he directs us back to the DSS librarians".* (P11-visually impaired student).

By way of context, at the time of writing, Mr. Jaws was a senior braillist based at the DSS and had a visual impairment. It emerged that he was the only staff member across the university with advanced skills and knowledge about assistive technologies, and capable of teaching students with visual impairments. Although Mr. Jaws was a non-academic staff member, he occasionally volunteered to assist students with their ICT issues. However, participants reported that this led to clashes with staff members in the DSS library, as Mr. Jaws insisted it was not his duty to teach students and that he was not paid to do so. The extracts illustrate the poor prioritisation of students with disabilities' ICT learning requirements, which compromises access to quality education.

A reading of the extracts from P7 and P11 reveals a range of socio-material components: the ICDL module, students, the module lecturer, DSS library staff (Mrs. Jones and Mr. Jaws), technologies and software and university policies. This assemblage illustrates how the capacities of students with visual impairments are constrained. Mrs. Jones lack the capacity (skills) to instruct students with visual impairments, ultimately restricting the capacity of students

with visual impairments from engaging in the module on the basis of equal opportunity with non-disabled students

However, some students with visual impairments reported positive relations with academics that produced accessible module experiences. P14, a student with a visual impairment, during a walking interview shared:

> *"Some of my lecturers call me for additional help, and I consider myself very lucky. They explain what they taught in a particular lecture. If they are unable to teach me in person, they send me an audio recording or some notes. This is how I learn most of the lecture material."*
>
> *"Of course, some lecturers understand our needs, while others do not. For instance, Dr. Tom (pseudonym), who is totally blind and Ma'am Casey (pseudonym) are both aware of the services offered at the DSS. They understand that there are no lecturers at the DSS centre to teach us module content. Some lecturers, particularly those from the Education department, are more attuned to our needs. This is so, probably because that department has the highest number of SWDs."* (P17-student with a visual impairment).

The extracts suggest that individual lecturers exercise personal discretion in fostering equitable access to education for SWDs, rather than adhering to institutional-wide anti-discrimination policies. Such discretionary approaches create gaps in the realisation of rights for SWDs.

Empirical data from the study suggests that teaching, learning and assessment in/accessibility for SWDs at the HEI was socio-materially reproduced. A range of emergent heterogeneous human and non-human matter entangled with SWDs in specific contexts, either facilitating or constraining their capacity to engage with teaching, learning and assessment processes on an equal basis with non-disabled students. Consequently, in/accessibility encounters produced a, multiplicity of incapacities for SWDs, both transient and enduring, such as skipping/missing lectures, feeling lost, confused and uncertainty. Data indicated that the HEI lacked institutional-wide academic arrangements for the teaching and learning of the ICDL and Chinese modules for SWDs. However, it emerged that isolated personal discretion by individual academics facilitated curriculum accessibility for some students with visual impairments. Having reported on the teaching, learning and assessment assemblage, the next chapter, reports on the third assemblage, the digital in/accessibility assemblage.

CHAPTER 8

The Digital (Di+) in/accessibility assemblage

Data analysis revealed a range of material-discursive encounters involving SWDs and information and communication technologies within the HEI studied. The interaction of SWDs with a range of socio-material components both enhanced and constrained their capacity to engage on an equal basis with their non-disabled peers. Digital accessibility in education contexts relates to "ensuring access to devices (computers, notebooks, tablets, etc.), quality internet and digital skills, through providing training and technical support in the area of information technology, for actors involved in education (students and teachers), in the digital environment, online, synchronously or asynchronously" (Prado, Gobbo Junior and Bezerra, 2023:2). Broadly, digital accessibility means that PWDs should be able to access, navigate, perceive and interact with content (Chadli, Gretete and Moumen, 2021:8). Digital accessibility is a vast field, such that some authors have taken a targeted approach to study and research specific components instead of looking for digital accessibility as a whole (Chadli, Gretete and Moumen, 2021:8). This study explored digital accessibility as a whole, but, focused specifically on socio-material components that assembled around digital encounters involving SWDs and the resultant in/capacities produced. Firstly, I will summarise the range of socio-material relations that produced digital in/accessibility at the HEI. I will then proceed to report on the affects that connect these relations and, finally, analyse the resultant in/capacities produced in SWDs.

Table 5: A typology of the Digital (Di+) in/accessibility assemblage

Non-human matter	Human matter	Abstract and embodied affects
• Funding (Vice Chancellor's Scholarship) • Wi-Fi • Broadband • Projectors • Software programmes (JAWS, NVDA) • PCs and laptops • Mobile phones	• Helpers/personal assistants (including central helpers). • Students (disabled and non-disabled) • Lecturers • Friends • Family (siblings, cousins, parents) • Administrators • Librarians • Disability support staff (Brailists)	• Memories • Feelings (pain, depressed, uncertainty) • Attitudes • Ideological assumptions (ableism)

• University policies (laptop loan facility) • Income • Electricity supply • Physical places/spaces (rooms) • Virtual spaces		

P25, a 2nd year law student with a visual impairment, during a walking interview noted that:

> *"On a positive note, the DSS library offers a facility where we can have certain sections of physical books scanned for free into PDF copies, allowing us to read them on our devices. However, to get a book scanned, you have to sweat first, because I need to first take the physical copy out of the faculty library, which requires going through copyright law issues. In some cases, I may also be asked to secure an approval letter from the departmental chairperson stating the reasons for scanning the book. Despite this hassle, the ability to have physical copies scanned for free is crucial for facilitating access to reading materials for learners with visual impairments. Nevertheless, I sometimes feel uncomfortable repeatedly returning to the DSS to request book* scans." (P25).

The extract reveals an assemblage of human and non-human matter, along with abstractions and embodied affects that influenced P25's ability to access reading materials. This assemblage includes at least the following components: spaces (DSS and law libraries), physical books, electronic devices (laptops and mobile phones), a chairperson, and scanning equipment. The provision that allows students with visual impairments to scan physical books into digital formats for free enhanced P25's capacity to access reading materials on an equal basis with his non-disabled classmates.

It is important to note how P25's quest for reading material in accessible formats was complexified by copyright law. P25 shared instances where he was denied permission to take a particular textbook out of the library for scanning until he produced an approval letter from the Departmental Chairperson, who was often out of the office. In this case, P25's encounters are intertwined with copyright law, which belongs to a broader framework and assemblage involving intellectual property laws and intellectual property practitioners.

It emerged that digital in/accessibility is not only an unstable phenomenon but also unpredictably emerges and disappears from the complex interplay of socio-material relations within the HEI. Data indicates that internet connectivity within the HEI is a highly contingent phenomenon. For example, a student with a physical impairment from focus group discussion B shared insights regarding the unpredictability of internet connectivity within the institution:

> *"In terms of internet accessibility, the connectivity in the DSS library is very poor. At times, the internet connection is available, but often it is not. This inconsistency poses a significant barrier to conducting research and completing assignments."* (Focus Group Discussion B).

> *"…considering that for the past two to three days, the entire campus has been without electricity, and everyone has been studying in the main library."* (Focus Group B participant)

The above extracts suggest that digital in/accessibility emerged from heterogeneous elements, which ultimately constrained SWDs ability to complete assignments. Poor internet connectivity within the HEI implies poor internet infrastructure which could be linked to insufficient investment in digital infrastructure, lack of funding or the absence of an institutional-wide policy regarding digitalisation. Internet availability was also significantly constrained by erratic electricity supply at the HEI. Power supply issues within the HEI reflects the country's overall power generation challenges. Low electrical power generation in Zimbabwe is attributed to several forces, including climate change, resulting in dwindling water reserves at Zimbabwe's largest power generation plant at Kariba Dam for hydro-electric power generation. This situation illustrates the new materialist anti-dualist philosophy that collapses dualisms. The case reveals the inseparability of climatology and digitalisation. Revealing these seemingly disparate connections enables public policy makers to creatively consider alternative forms of energy that can reconfigure the climate-digitalisation relationship that can propel the country's digitalisation agenda. This can involve adopting alternative energy sources, such as solar power among others.

While one might argue that electric power outages on campus negatively affects both disabled and non-disabled students, simultaneously, it emerged that SWDs were disproportionately impacted, particularly visually impaired students who rely on mobile phones to communicate with personal assistants and friends to navigate the campus. Unscheduled electrical power outages were reported to result in a lack of running water across the campus. Consequently, SWDs struggled to fetch water from outside the hostels using buckets, which heightened their dependency on non-disabled students and helpers. The unavailability of reading materials in accessible formats meant that visually impaired students' access to course materials in digital forms was negatively affected. A three-day power outage occurred during fieldwork, which prevented the researcher from

scheduling and conducting interviews, due to loss of mobile communication with participants.

P4, a student with a visual impairment, described how the unpredictability of Wi-Fi at the HEI's computer centre affected her during the application for admission process:

> *"…the application for admission process was challenging. We were required to apply online, but I consistently failed to submit my application, so I had to go to campus. Since it was my first time there, I didn't have anyone to guide me around. I was directed to the Computer Centre for assistance with my application, but I had no idea where it was located. I had to find a random person to accompany me. When we arrived, we were informed that the Wi-Fi was down, so we couldn't get help. We were turned away and had to return the next day. Unfortunately, I faced the same problem again. I was sent to different places across campus. It was quite difficult."* (P4-student with a visual impairment).

The encounter described involves a mix of socio-material relations, including virtual spaces, physical places/spaces (Computer centre), Wi-Fi, human (random student). This assemblage highlights the unpredictable nature of Wi-Fi at the HEI and the resultant incapacities on P4. The lack of Wi-Fi at the computer centre restricted P4 from submitting her application for admission. Having to return the following day indicates that P4 faced an additional financial burden, as she had to pay for bus fare to travel to and from campus. P4's inability to submit her admission application online suggest a lack of computer skills, as noted by a visually impaired student, during a walking interview below:

> *"…I prefer my mobile phone to a laptop because I can operate it confidently. It reads very well so I can understand better."* (P15).

Data analysis revealed a strong relationship between the Place/Space (PS+) and Digital (Di+) assemblages. It was found that Wi-Fi connectivity was only available in particular spaces within the HEI, and not in others. This relationship negatively affected SWDs:

> *"The main reason I go to the law library is the availability of strong Wi-Fi connection. Otherwise, the PCs and books in the Law library are not accessible to visually impaired* students." (P18-student with a visual impairment).

The availability of strong Wi-Fi connectivity in certain spaces disproportionately affected SWDs. First-year students were particularly impacted, as they could not be assigned personal helpers until the second semester, as per the university policy. This practice significantly impacted their ability to navigate from the halls of residence to various specific areas within the HEI with strong Wi-Fi coverage.

For example, a student with a physical impairment, during a follow-up interview, revealed that:

> *"…we face the problem of Wi-Fi connectivity in the residence halls. Our rooms are located far from the Wi-Fi hotspots. In my corridor, we do not have any Wi-Fi coverage at all because the router was vandalised and has never been replaced. As a result, I have to go to the corridor in the other wing of our hostel to access Wi-Fi. The corridor is very narrow, and I often bump into other students standing along the hallway trying to access Wi-Fi as well. If I stand there for too long, I end up feeling pain in my legs. Therefore, I suggest that they allocate us rooms with Wi-Fi coverage or simply replace the Wi-Fi routers. This would significantly improve our experience."* (P21).

Although Wi-Fi connectivity problem affected the entire student population, disabled students are arguably disproportionately affected.P21 described the difficulty of navigating around other students standing along the hostel corridor. P21 also reported experiencing pain in the leg, related to impairment when standing for long in the hallway to access Wi-Fi. This highlights the complex entanglement across seemingly disparate components making up the Wi-Fi access assemblage: spaces, Wi-Fi connectivity, and embodied experiences (such as pain). As noted by P21, modifying one component of this assemblage, for example replacing the vandalised routers, could alleviate physical pain associated with standing for extended periods to access Wi-Fi.

Similarly, a student with a visual impairment shared during a walking interview how the lack of Wi-Fi connectivity in his room negatively affected him. On the day of the interview, the researcher to P13 over the phone an hour earlier to arrange picking him up from his room for the walking interview, but at that time, P13 was not in his room.

> *"…some rooms do not have Wi-Fi coverage. For example, in my current room, there is no Wi-Fi coverage at all. I think, you remember I mentioned over the phone that I was not in my room; I was in the hallway near room G163, while my room is G107. I had to walk all the way from my room just to connect to the Wi-Fi."* (P13).

The impact of the unavailability of Wi-Fi at the computer centre-a place expected to be the hub of computing on campus has the potential to permeate the four assemblages reported in this study, such as teaching, learning and assessment. The inaccessibility of online learning resources significantly impacted visually impaired students.

The extract below illustrates how a digital accessibility assemblage morphed into a disabling assemblage, highlighting the emergent and contingent nature of digital accessibility at the HEI:

> *"…disabled students can borrow laptops from the DSS library. Students who wish to complete their dissertations, conduct independent research, or to complete assignments, we can borrow laptops from the DSS library. Previously, we were allowed to borrow laptops for up to two weeks. However, some students did not return the laptops they borrowed. As a result, this loan facility has been temporarily discontinued while the issues are being addressed. Currently, we can only use the desktops in the DSS library, which presents a challenge. Hopefully, we will be able to borrow laptops again in the near* future." (P14-student with a physical impairment, follow-up interview).

P11, a student with a visual impairment, criticised the suspension of the laptop loan facility, during a walking interview:

> *"But if you look at it now, it reveals double standards held against SWDs. Books and items are occasionally lost in the mainstream library, but they never impose a blanket restriction on all students when one student loses a book. Of course, we are not suggesting that someone who breaks the rules should be exempt from penalties; rather, that student should be addressed individually, instead of punishing all SWDs for one student's mistakes."*

P17, a student with a visual impairment, shared during a walking interview the reason for the temporary suspension of the laptop loan facility for SWDs:

> *"… an issue was raised regarding some disabled students who did not return laptops to the DSS department. Following these cases, it was resolved that the loan facility should be temporarily suspended. The case is still pending, and I am uncertain about the outcome. As a result, I chose to borrow a laptop from my friend instead of approaching the DSS department."* (P17-visually impaired student).

P11, a student with a physical impairment, during a follow-up interview shared:

> ***Interviewer:*** *Do you have a personal laptop?*
>
> ***P11:*** *I don't have.*
>
> ***Interviewer:*** *So, how are you managing without a laptop?*
>
> ***P11****: Normally, I borrow a laptop from my helper, that's how I cope.*

The behaviour of a few SWDs who did not return borrowed laptops, in violation of university policy, prompted the discontinuation of the laptop loan facility, which negatively affected other students. Borrowing a laptop from a friend (P17) or a personal helper (P11), illustrates the contribution of informal socio-material relations within the HEI, towards the production of accessibility, enhancing the capacities of SWDs to access complete academic tasks following the discontinuation of formal support facility i.e., laptop loan facility.

It was also found that the DSS laptop loan facility was restricted to first-year students only.

> *"…we were working on a module that required us to use laptops, the ICDDL module. We went to the DSS to borrow some laptops, but our request was denied. We were informed that the DSS loan facility is only available to first-year students."*

Study participants reported that the DSS library was the only location with accessible PCs, equipped with JAWS and NVDA for use by students with visual impairments. However, they also mentioned some challenges associated with the PCs in the DSS library:

> *"I know of a student who took their examination at the DSS library and encountered some challenges. After completing the exam, the laptop froze. Fortunately, the student had saved their document earlier. They had to remove the battery to force the PC to shut down and restart it. Just imagine if the PC had frozen in the middle of the exam! Additionally, there is no backup power at the DSS, so if you are taking an exam on a PC and there is an unexpected power cut, you could be in trouble."* (P16-student with a visual impairment).

This encounter could suggest poor maintenance practices of the digital devices at the DSS library. Such unexpected incidents have the potential to trigger distress among SWDs under examination conditions, which can negatively impact assessment outcomes.

A walking interview with a student with a visual impairment (P18) uncovered a multiplicity of components (both human and non-human), including, at least: PCs, places/spaces (DSS), computer viruses, skills, students, modules, lecturers and DSS staff.

> *"The PCs at the DSS library are mostly very old, making it difficult to use many of them. Some are even infested with computer viruses and malware. Digital accessibility also raises the question of whether SWDs have the knowledge and skills to operate a PC. This is particularly challenging for students with visual impairments, as there are no designated academics at the university to assist students with visual impairments who are computer illiterate. Many of us struggle to operate a PC. The core issue is that we have a mandatory faculty-wide module for first-year students called the Information and Digital Skills module. Lecturers direct us to the DSS for instruction. However, the DSS department lacks specialist ICT personnel to deliver this module to students with visual impairments. Additionally, the staff at the DSS are not aware of what the module lecturer is teaching to mainstream students because they do not have access to the course descriptor. Consequently, they are unable to connect their instruction to the module's expected*

learning outcomes. This creates a significant problem. When we go to the DSS, we receive only limited instruction that is not even aligned with the content being covered by the lecturer for mainstream and non-disabled students. (P18).

The extract above highlights a range of heterogeneous components which affected the capacity of P18 to engage with the Information and Digital Literacy module on an equal basis with non-disabled students. The lecturer's lack of knowledge regarding assistive technologies further constrained P18's capacity to engage in the module. The incorporation of computer viruses underscores the unpredictability of digital accessibility at the HEI. It was found that most participants did not own personal laptops. Instead, they relied on mobile smartphones and borrowing laptops from friends and personal assistants to access learning materials and complete assignments. Two participants possessed neither a laptop nor a smartphone.

Interviewer: *Do you have a personal laptop?*

P18: *I used to have one, but it's broken now. At the moment, I don't have one.*

Interviewer*: How does this affect you?*

P18: *Now, I have become much more dependent on my helper, than I used to be when I had a personal laptop. Unfortunately, mine is broken.*

Participants also reported relying on the DSS laptop loan facility.

P19, a student with a visual impairment, during a walking interview consolidated P18's account:

"I would suggest that the university offer a course on digital literacy, especially for students with visual impairments. Most of us grew up using Braille and were taught in Braille. The problem is that when we come here, the lack of access to and prior knowledge about PCs makes it very difficult for us to use them. Unlike sighted students, who can practice on PCs in the main library or borrow from friends if they don't own one, I face a different challenge. If I approach you to use your PC, the only way you can assist me is by following my instructions, as I cannot interact with your PC myself. I will be just telling you what to do. The Information and Digital Literacy module is delivered with the assumption that all students understand the basic functions of a PC. As such, the focus is on teaching advanced operations, such as literature searches and accessing e-resources. The issue is that students with visual impairments often lack prior access and knowledge of how to operate a PC. Currently, Mr. Jaws (pseudonym) is the only person in the university who can teach PC skills to students with visual impairments. Unfortunately, he gets overwhelmed. As a visually impaired person, he understands our challenges, making it

easy for him to connect with us. However, assisting us is not part of his official duties; it is more of a voluntary activity." (P19).

A close reading of the extract from P19 offer insights into the socio-material relations that constrained digital accessibility, along with the resultant in/capacities for SWDs and Mr. Jaws. This assemblage reveals a collision of relations between the past (braille experience) and the present (digital skills). This dynamic negatively affected the capacity of students with visual impairments, (competent in braille), to fully engage in the digital space on an equal footing with their sighted peers.

Although the world is experiencing an unprecedented speed of digital revolution, evidence from this study indicate that it has not yet taken off among students with visual impairments. More than half of the participants did not own a personal laptop and the majority indicated they could not operate a PC due to a lack of digital skills. While the HEI offered a laptop loan facility for SWDs, those with visual impairments often relied on personal helpers to read or type for them while they listened. Most participants reported using mobile smartphones to access learning materials and, in some cases, to type assignments. However, using a mobile smartphone for learning purposes presented some negative effects. For example, P21, a third-year student, shared his experiences as a first-year student.

> *"During my first year, I relied on my mobile phone. I downloaded the WPS (*Writer, Presentation and Spreadsheet) *mobile app to type my assignments, but it had some limitations. After typing, I would seek someone with a laptop or I would go and use the library PCs to edit my essays. For example, I realised that certain features, such as font size and font type (like Times New Roman), were not available on mobile smartphones. As a result, I had to find a laptop, transfer my document and make all the necessary edits, including adjusting the font size, font type and formatting elements* like bold headings and italics." (P21-student with a physical impairment, follow-up interview).

This extract reveals how features of the mobile phone enhanced P21's capacities to complete his assignments. It also highlights the importance of informal relationships at the HEI, such as those with colleagues, from whom P21 could borrow laptops to edit his work. The extract also shows how family members (cousin) contributed in the production of digital accessibility by passing down a laptop to P21. Similarly, P17 shared her experience of using a mobile phone for learning purposes:

> *"…a mobile phone receives a lot of non-academic material, such as personal relationships and church-related messages. While listening to academic content, you might unexpectedly receive a notification reminding you about a scheduled church service. Immediately after that,*

another message from your boyfriend pops up, accusing you of not responding to their chat. All of this happens on my mobile phone. Sometimes, someone might start discussing a scheduled workshop, piquing your interest and leading you to abandon your studies to focus on these distractions. So, yes, a mobile smartphone is full of disturbances. I use it simply because it's my only option, but it's very difficult to study on it. In contrast, when I am studying from my Braille papers, there are no distractions". (P17, student with a visual impairment).

The extract illustrates both the positive and negative effects of using a mobile smartphone for learning purposes. It enhanced P17's capacity to interact with students beyond her immediate environment, such as church mates. The assemblage affected P17 from multiple angles: intellectually, emotionally, psychologically, financially etc. The distractions associated with mobile smartphone usage for learning purposes can negatively affect learning outcomes, by impacting grades that can last a lifetime.

A visually impaired student when asked on any suggestion to improve the acquisition of digital skills by students with visual impairments at the HEI, during a walking interview shared that:

"There should be a specialist lecturer to teach the Information and Digital Skills module for visually impaired students. This lecturer must bring their laptop to the DSS library, where accessible laptops equipped with NVDA and JAWS are available. They should guide us through the module while we follow along and press the keyboard keys as they demonstrate. This approach could enhance our understanding of the module, especially since it is compulsory. If I do not grasp the concepts, I risk failing and having to repeat the module, with no guarantee that I would be able to learn the required knowledge and skills." (P6-visually impaired student).

The suggestions made by P19 for a course/module on digital skills training and a dedicated lecturer (P6) capable of teaching students with visual impairments the Digital and Information Skills module, have the potential to enhance the accessibility of the module for SWDs. Students with visual impairments have the capacity to acquire digital skills if their socio-material relations are reconfigured to unlock this potential. For example, introducing a specialist lecturer into this assemblage and providing accessible PCs could facilitate the acquisition of digital skills.

Empirical evidence indicate that digital in/accessibility at the HEI studied was produced from a complex web of material-discursive components and relations. Data indicate that the relations were emergent and highly contingent, such as Wi-Fi connectivity, which was influenced by the availability of electrical power supply at the institution. Instances of computer viruses in the DSS library also contributed to the unpredictability of digital accessibility. Although the HEI had a

laptop loan facility for SWDs, the random discontinuation of the service suggests that it was not provided based on a HRBA, but rather on a discretionary basis. It emerged that digital accessibility for SWDs, particularly those with visual impairments, was mainly facilitated through the use of mobile smartphones. However, smartphones were reported to present several challenges. Participants recommended the introduction of a digital skills module and a specialist lecturer to enhance digital literacy at the HEI, especially for students with visual impairments. Having reported on how digital in/accessibility was experienced at the HEI, the next chapter reports on the fourth assemblage i.e., the extracurricular activities (ECAs+) assemblage.

CHAPTER 9

The Extracurricular Activities (ECAs+) in/accessibility assemblage

The data revealed how everyday socio-material relations within the HEI affected the capacities of SWDs to access extracurricular activities (ECAs) on an equal basis with their non-disabled peers. In this study, ECAs refer to activities and services available to the HEI community that members can choose to participate in, but which are not part of the HEI's curriculum and therefore are not graded. ECAs are reported to be essential to a college student's life. According to Evans et al. (2017:281), a significant part of the college experience occurs outside the lecture rooms. It is further suggested that, to experience well-rounded and fulfilling lives, students must have opportunities to engage in co-curricular activities, clubs and organisations, and, if they desire and the campus offers it, residence living (Evans et al., 2017). This chapter reports on the socio-material encounters at the HEI involving SWDs and how these encounters enhanced or constrained access to ECAs. Before delving into the ECAs assemblage, I will first provide a typology of the ECAs identified in the data (see Table 4 below), summarising the heterogeneous socio-material relations that tangled with SWDs in their quest to access ECAs. I will then explore the affective economy that connects these relations, including the resultant in/capacities produced in SWDs.

Table 6: A typology of the Extracurricular Activities (ECAs+) in/accessibility assemblage

Non-human matter	Human matter	Abstract and embodied affects
• Funding and allowances • University policies • Buses • Physical places/spaces (chapel, gym, common room, hotels) • Balls • University sports calendar • Medals • Grades • Pool tables	• Helpers/personal assistants • Students (disabled and non-disabled) • Friends • Family (siblings, cousins, parents) • Administrators • Chaplain • Football coach •	• Religious beliefs • Memories • Attitudes • Ideological assumptions (ableism)

• Foosball tables		

The data indicate that some socio-material relations enhanced, whilst others constrained the capacities of SWDs to access ECAs. A participant with a physical impairment, during Focus Group Discussion B noted:

> *"Yes, we usually participate in various sports events, including the ZUSA and ZITISU. For example, two weeks ago, we attended the ZUSA Paralympic Games at X University. Four weeks ago, we took part in the Y Paralympic Games. The university provides us with transportation and food allowances to attend these events. If we need to travel far from campus and require an overnight stay, the university also arranges hotel accommodation in various towns for us. Thus, I can confidently say that the university supports us. Each time the ZUSA games for mainstream students conclude, the ZUSA Paralympic Games for students with disabilities follow shortly afterward."*

ZUSA and ZITISU stand for the Zimbabwe Universities Sports Association and the Zimbabwe Tertiary Institutions Sports Union, respectively. ZUSA was established in 1999 to promote sporting competitions among universities and to nurture top student-athletes (International University Sports Federation, 2020). ZITISU serves as an umbrella organisation that includes all universities, polytechnic institutions and teachers' colleges across Zimbabwe. The annual ZUSA and ZITISU games unite students from HEIs throughout the country. Germane to this study are the ZUSA and ZITISU annual Paralympic games, which bring together SWDs studying in HEIs, polytechnic institutions and teachers' colleges across Zimbabwe. Participants reported positive experiences from their involvement in the ZUSA and ZITISU annual Paralympic games. These two events are regarded as significant milestones in a student's life in HE in Zimbabwe. The then-president of ZUSA stated that:

> *"If you haven't participated in the ZUSA games you haven't gone through university!" (*Tsitsi Mazuva, 2020)

Tsitsi Mazuva further stated, "The most exciting thing about them is the coming together of students from all walks of life, where they meet to compete, share, mingle and most of all, have fun!" This perspective was corroborated by P2, who shared her experiences at the recently concluded ZUSA Paralympic Games:

> *"During this semester, we travelled to X University to compete against other universities, including Y, Z and many more. The atmosphere was exciting and we fostered a spirit of inclusivity, treating one another as equals and as SWDs. It's clear that the university actively supports sports for SWDs." (P2-Student with a physical impairment, follow-up interview).*

Having provided context, I will now identify the socio-material components that reproduced the ECAs assemblage mentioned above. These include, at least: transportation (buses), food, funding, university policy and the sports calendar. Collectively, these relations, such as hotel accommodations, food allowances and the sports calendar co-produced access to ECAs for SWDs at the HEI. The removal of any one component from this assemblage, such as transportation (buses), had the potential to restrict ECAs accessibility for SWDs.

Although not explicitly stated in this particular extract, elsewhere in the data, personal helpers played a key role in enhancing access to ECAs for SWDs at the HEI, both on and off campus. Among other tasks, they guided athletes with visual impairments, thereby facilitating access to sporting activities. P12, a student with a visual impairment, noted during a walking interview that:

> *"We also have the opportunity to train with the assistance of our helpers who escort us from the halls of residence to the sports fields for various sporting activities as we prepare to compete in the Paralympic* Games."

Participants reported multiple capacities that emerged from their engagement in the ZUSA Paralympic Games. Consider the extract below from a follow-up in-depth interview with P21, a student with a physical impairment.

> ***Interviewer:*** *This sounds great. Before we started, you mentioned that you recently won some medals. Can you tell me more about them, please?*
>
> ***P21:*** *Yeah, I came in second in the 200m athletics, third in shot put, and also third in javelin.*
>
> ***Interviewer:*** *Very well done, that's really impressive!*
>
> ***P21:*** *Thank you! I really worked hard; it was very competitive. These are my first medals in my life.*
>
> ***Interviewer:*** *Fantastic. So, how do you feel about such great achievements?*
>
> ***P21****: I'm actually planning to design a frame to display all my medals.*

Drawing from P21's extract, access to ECAs, such as the ZUSA Paralympic Games, enhanced the capacity to win medals, fostering a sense of achievement. Although personal helpers were reported to enhance access to ECAs for SWDs, several problems were also identified that restricted access. Fox and Alldred (2011:361) assert that humans do not respond like computers to stimuli; rather, they respond in complex and sometimes unpredictable ways that reflect active, motivated engagement with living, the capacity to make choices and act on the world around them. In line with this assertion, one participant in focus group discussion A reported negative encounters with central helpers.

> *"I am not sure what criteria are used to recruit central helpers. At times, I've encountered some who are quite rude, which makes things challenging. For instance, during a recent sports event, we faced issues with some of the central helpers, who were reluctant to assist us."*

All university buses were reported to be inaccessible to students who use wheelchairs. Consequently, personal helpers had to lift these students in and out of the buses whenever they travelled for sporting events. P10, a student who uses a wheelchair, had previously taken the university bus at least twice a week from the main campus to the university hospital, which is about five km away, for his practical classes. However, he had since stopped using the college bus and shared his experiences with the university buses:

> *"I no longer use the university buses. Some students had to lift me onto the bus since the university buses are not wheelchair accessible, which poses a significant challenge for transport accessibility. Even among SWDs registered under the Disability Support Services (DSS), many do not speak up just for the sake of attending sporting activities. I suggested that the university should acquire at least one accessible bus that can perform all other university errands but that bus should transport SWDs to the Paralympic* Games." (Follow up interview).

Participants reported that university buses were free for all registered students and staff once they had paid their tuition, which included a mandatory transport fee. For P10, the vice chancellor's scholarship covered his transport fee, enabling him to use university buses on an equal basis as non-disabled students. Elsewhere in the transcript, P10 narrated his struggles each time he travelled on the university buses, which prompted him to arrange personal transportation to the university hospital. The challenge of transport inaccessibility at the HEI had the potential to restrict access to ECAs among some SWDs, in the same manner P10 had resolved to stop using the university buses, despite his transport fare being covered under the Vice Chancellor's Scholarship. Findings indicate that SWDs engaged in a countless accessibility battles at the HEI in their quest to access ECAs, including inaccessible buses, issues with central helpers and late disbursement of food allowances. One participant reported that, at one point, they only received their food allowances after returning to campus following the conclusion of the Paralympic Games. In the words of Goodley et al. (2025:121), "the university is an ableist institution". As such, disabled and neurodivergent academics and researchers contest everyday forms of ableism and disablism in academia (see Gill 2009; Shah 2018; Olsen et al. 2020).

A participant in Focus Group Discussion A shared the experiences of students who used wheelchairs when using university buses:

> *"…the university buses are not accessible for students who use wheelchairs. Currently, the wheelchair is placed in the bus's boot while the student is physically lifted onto the bus."*

Lifting students with physical impairments undermines their dignity and self-worth, potentially limiting their engagement in ECAs and contradicting the purpose of the CRPD (UN, 2006).

One participant described how the lack of a personal helper constrained their ability to participate in ECAs on campus. P4, who became visually impaired during the middle of their fourth year, explained that campus accommodation was full, which prevented them from registering a personal helper.

> *"I have never been to the sports field alone since becoming visually impaired. I currently do not have a personal helper to accompany me for leisure activities. In fact, I am struggling to find someone to assist me in getting to my lectures. It's nearly impossible."*

On the day of the walking interview, I picked up P4 from the lecture venue since he had no one to accompany him back to his room. P4 shared his struggles in accessing high-quality eye care for his deteriorating vision. He revealed that his parents were divorced and that he lived with his mother, who was not working and could not afford the expensive medical bills. This account sheds light on how impairments can be exacerbated in the context of poverty. In this case, P4's vision deteriorated, but due to financial constraints, he and his family could not afford the necessary eye specialist services to address the problem. Additionally, P4 described his struggle with painful eyes, which negatively affected his learning. His account highlights how the absence of a personal helper limited his capacity to access ECAs. As a result, he was forced to forgo ECAs and focus solely on curricular activities, which potentially jeopardizes his full development.

Access to ECAs at the HEI for SWDs was further constrained by architectural barriers. During a go-along interview with P13, the researcher was taken to various locations that excluded SWDs, particularly those who used wheelchairs, from accessing ECAs on an equal basis with non-disabled peers. The photos below were taken by the researcher during the go-along interview at the participant's request.



Figure 24: A wheelchair inaccessible common room

P13 took the researcher to a physically inaccessible common room and noted:

> *"This is the common room where students living in Thomas (pseudonym) hostel gather to watch the English Premier Soccer League, mostly on weekends. It's a significant event on campus. However, look, it is inaccessible to students who use wheelchairs. I am not sure about the situation in other common rooms; I'm only familiar with this one." (P13).*

We also passed through wheelchair inaccessible foosball and pool tables and P13 noted that:

> *"This is entertainment for boys.* (Background noises of students playing snooker). *I play snooker myself and I love it, but look, the area is wheelchair inaccessible."*



Figure 25: Wheelchair inaccessible pool and foosball tables

The place assemblages shown in Figures 26 and 27 comprise at least the following elements: a wheelchair, gravel soil, snooker and foosball tables, students and an inaccessible area. The common room in Figure 26 is the oldest at the HEI, constructed around the 1940s and it was only accessible by steps. However, P13 mentioned that he could access the common room (Figure 26) at times to watch his favourite soccer teams, Manchester United and Barcelona, whenever they played. His helper, along with some other students, lifted his wheelchair into the common room. As depicted in Figure 27, most parts of the campus were unpaved and covered with gravel. This made it nearly impossible for students who used wheelchairs to navigate the campus independently. As reported earlier, one participant revealed that his wheelchair was broken twice in a semester. Towards the end of the go-along interview, I asked P13 about the meaning of the message on the back of his t-shirt, and he stated that:

> *"This is a custom message to acknowledge all the people who have played an important role in my life, including friends, relatives and even random people I meet along the way."*

Findings indicate that informal socio-material relations equally contributed in the production of accessibility within HEI. These relations included informal networks with non-disabled students and other SWDs. Informal networks enhanced accessibility across the four assemblages, and were particularly significant for first-year students, prior to the allocation of personal helpers.

The fact that P13 could sometimes enter the common room (Figure 27) with the help of friends and colleagues suggests that in/accessibility is not a stable attribute of the common room. Instead, it emerges from dynamic assemblages of human and non-human relations that temporarily assemble to produce access to the common room for P13. These assemblages disassemble immediately afterward, only to reassemble again for egress from the space.

Participants noted that the university was constructed during the colonial era and was not designed with SWDs in mind. As a result, most, if not all, of the oldest infrastructure at the HEI were not accessible to people who used wheelchairs. During the Focus Group Discussions, some participants acknowledged that the university was then considering persons with disabilities (PWDs) in its design of the built environment. Some participants in Focus Group Discussion A took photographs of the newly constructed Legacy (pseudonym) Lecture Theatre, describing it as a testament to the growing recognition by university authorities of the need for inclusive physical learning spaces. However, this observation was challenged by a group of students during the discussion, who argued that some of the recently constructed outdoor areas and spaces continued to exclude PWDs, especially those with physical impairments. Figures 28, 29 and 30 below were described as excluding PWDs.



Figure 26: A wheelchair inaccessible walkway leading to an outdoor seating area



Figure 27: A wheelchair inaccessible walkway leading to an outdoor seating area



Figure 28: A wheelchair inaccessible outdoor seating area

Figure 28 was submitted by P11, a student with a physical impairment. It depicts a narrow walkway, leading to an outdoor seating area that was reportedly constructed no more than five years ago. The walkway was described as not wheelchair accessible, suggesting that the rights of PWDs to accessible physical spaces at the HEI were still not fully recognised. The image in Figure 29 was taken by the researcher during a go-along interview, at the instruction of P13, a student who used a wheelchair.

> *"Look at this walkway; it has been designed without considering people with disabilities. My wheelchair cannot even fit here. However, we should not be quick to blame the architects. Often, this lack of accessibility stems from a lack of knowledge. It is our duty as persons with disabilities to educate them". (P13)*

The image in Figure 30 was collected by P9, a student with a physical impairment. It depicts an outdoor area on a raised platform that is not wheelchair accessible. Outdoor seating areas across the HEI were reported to have been constructed no more than five years before this study was conducted.

It was further revealed that architectural barriers within the HEI limited the capacities of SWDs to access ECAs. During a walking interview, P19, a student with a visual impairment stated:

> *"I usually attend lectures and then return to my room. I am very interested in football and a strong supporter of the university team on campus. The university has a soccer league and I am good friends with the coach. However, I face challenges when going to the football pitch. There are two open drains along the route to the sports fields. For example, if a match is*

scheduled to end at 7pm during winter, it gets dark early, making it difficult for me, as a visually impaired student, to notice and avoid these drains." (P19).

P19 was in the third year of a BSc in Social Innovation. During the walking interview, he spoke passionately about his love for football, mentioning that as a young boy, his dream was to become the first visually impaired football commentator. At the university, P19 enjoyed sitting on the side-lines of football matches with the team coach, discussing international football developments as the students played. Reading this extract from a new materialist perspective challenge us to creatively and innovatively explore ways for visually impaired people to pursue their dreams and exercise their wills and preferences on an equal basis with everyone in society. P19 took the researcher to the open drain below. After the walking interview concluded, the researcher returned to take the photo below.



Figure 29: An open drain along the way to the HEI's sports fields

P11, a student with a visual impairment, shared his experiences with the open drains at the HEI during a walking interview:

"While walking around campus, you may notice certain areas with uncovered drains. For example, if you head toward the sports field, you will come across some of these drains. One day, as I was walking alone, I fell into one of them; fortunately, I wasn't hurt. I think, in such places, those drains should be covered, whether with slabs or metal mesh."

P22 was a second-year student pursuing a BSc in Media and Marketing. He used a wheelchair. During a follow-up interview, he shared how access to ECAs on campus positively impacted him:

"I am a passionate sports enthusiast who consistently engages with mainstream sporting activities, regardless of the sport being played. Even during practice sessions, I observe from the side-lines and familiarise myself with the game rules. This has significantly enhanced my interactions and contributed to my popularity on campus, as I actively participate in various social events on campus. I am always available to motivate and boost morale among the players, which has helped me expand my social circle".

Despite the physical inaccessibility of the university gym, human relations in the gym enhanced the capacity for SWDs to access and engage with the gym equipment and activities. The gym space also had positive mental effects and provided opportunities for interaction and learning among students.

"...around 4-6pm, I go to the gym for my workout. The gym actually helps me mentally. Just imagine spending the entire day stuck in your room; it takes a toll on you. Additionally, you lack exposure and miss out on interacting with other students. Engaging with peers makes you stronger and allows you to learn a lot from them." (P16-Physically impaired student, follow-up interview).

P16 went further to share his encounters in the campus gym facility.

"One thing I appreciate most about the students at this university is that when you properly address your issues, non-disabled students do really understand. In the gym, I can approach someone and say, 'Hey, my guy, I want to lift this weight, but I have a limitation. I can't lift it the same way you do-like one-two, one-two. I prefer to go onnnnnne-twooooo-onnnnnne-twooooo, slowly, because I have a limitation with my arm.' When I explain my situation, they become aware that they have a gym partner like me and always consider me in their workout sets. They even cheer me on during the sessions. The gym members here truly feel like family."

The extract reveals how material-discursive relations temporarily assembled in the gym space to enhance access to gym equipment and activities and disassemble afterwards.

However, other participants reported negative encounters regarding the campus gym. For example, P14, a student who had recently become visually impaired and had not yet been allocated a personal helper, stated that:

> *"I really want to go to the gym but considering the heavy weights in the gym, I cannot use it because I don't have anyone to accompany me and guide me through the training sessions and various activities."*

Similarly, a student with a physical impairment reported negative experiences at the campus gym:

> *"The other issue is that some buildings have accessible entrances, but they are permanently locked to control unruly students. I remember the other day when I decided to check out the gym. I requested that the accessible side door be opened for me, but they refused and insisted on lifting my wheelchair into the gym. While lifting is easier for them and takes less than 30 seconds, the real concern is not about enabling participation in extracurricular activities. The key point is that next time I come to the gym alone, it should be accessible for wheelchair* users." (Focus Group Discussion B).

The extract highlights the entanglements of human and non-human matter within the gym space. The permanently locked doors represent more than a physical barrier; they manifest invisible human behaviours that negatively affected students' ability to access the gym facility. This situation not only violated the right to access public spaces on an equal basis with other students but also demonstrates how inaccessible places/spaces could restrict independent living, choice and control, thereby perpetuating dependency.

The extract below illustrates how some students resist ableist and walk-normative practices at the HEI. P17, a student who used a wheelchair, shared during a follow-up interview how he dealt with the issue of inaccessible venues.

> ***P17**: If they don't want to change the venue, the examination will not proceed.*
>
> ***Interviewer:** Do you remember a time when an inaccessible venue had to be changed?*
>
> ***P17:** Yeah, the exam was scheduled to take place in the Legacy (pseudonym) hall. When I arrived, the lecturer requested that some students lift my wheelchair up the stairs into the venue, but I refused. I asked the lecturer, "What if the students fall while carrying me? What will you do then? How will you explain this situation?" I insisted that the venue be changed; otherwise, I would file a report with the Vice Chancellor, noting that my lecturer was aware of my disability but failed to arrange for an accessible venue. Even during lectures, if an inaccessible venue is chosen, I won't attend that particular session. I either wait outside or leave.*

I have never asked any student to lift my wheelchair into a venue-what if we fall?

P17 was one of the three participants in the study who criticised the idea of SWDs taking their examinations in the DSS department, away from their classmates, stating that the practice perpetuated negative attitudes and assumptions toward disabled students. However, all visually impaired students supported the idea of taking examinations in the DSS, arguing that it benefitted non-disabled students because the equipment they use, such as braille and Perkins equipment, could be disruptive. During Focus Group Discussion A, P17 encouraged other students to self-advocate and challenge any exclusionary practices at the university. P17 further stated his refusal of the disability label stating that:

"The only time I will accept having a disability is if it is considered a requirement to receive free money. Otherwise, if you have no intention of giving me money, I am not disabled-just leave me alone. This is the level of self-confidence I have."

P17's argument highlights the complexity of defining disability and reveals its subjective nature, making an internationally agreed-upon definition of disability difficult, if not impossible.

No significant and sustained instances of challenging exclusionary and discriminatory practices at the HEI were reported, despite widespread inaccessibility. Data suggests that SWDs tended to endure discrimination in silence. Data suggests that most of the participants considered the Vice Chancellor's scholarship and free campus accommodation as privileges and expressed their gratitude. For example, P15, a student with a visual impairment, noted during a walking interview:

"Although we are facing serious accessibility problems here, I think we are better off, as compared to some non-disabled students. Life is very hard as a non-resident student. To be able to access free campus accommodation is a huge privilege".

The extract above illustrates the complexity of realising the rights of SWDs in HEIs, particularly in contexts where poverty indiscriminately affects the majority of students. This situation may diminish the likelihood of SWDs contesting ableist practices in HEIs, especially when they perceive themselves as better off than their non-disabled peers. As a result, SWDs are more likely to endure their circumstances and adopt sporadic, ad hoc and piecemeal measures to navigate HE, rather than mobilise themselves to confront ableist practices, as they fear losing their perceived privileges.

The excerpt below illustrates how both human and non-human matter worked to exclude P23 from pursuing his idea of establishing a club on campus. P23 was a student with a physical impairment who used a wheelchair:

"I remember a time when I wanted to register a society on campus. I prepared and submitted some letters to the Vice Chancellor's (VC) office. After three weeks without any response, I approached the VC's secretary. She informed me that the VC had deemed the proposed club not worth pursuing, along with several other comments. I thought to myself that perhaps he didn't understand the concept, so I asked if I could meet with him in person to present my idea. After several attempts requesting a meeting with the VC, I later discovered that my application had never been submitted to the VC. It was still sitting on the secretary's desk, gathering dust. She apologised profusely. I took the letter and the secretary almost cried as she expressed her regret for what had happened".

The secretary's actions mentioned above may be interpreted as suggesting deficit thinking held against SWDs at the HEI, which foreclosed opportunities for SWDs to create and innovate on an equal basis with non-disabled students.

Findings indicate that participants visited the campus chapel more frequently than the main library. Some participants had never set foot in the main library since starting their studies. Most of the participants completed their high school education at a particular Reformed Church high school for SWDs and they all regularly attended Reformed Church services on campus. Both male and female students were active church members. P2, a student with a visual impairment, noted:

Interviewer: You mentioned about going to church, how often do you visit the campus chapel?

P2: Like at RCZ (Reformed Church in Zimbabwe) we have a lot of church services going on every week. But some of them, I don't attend. Like here on campus, there are early morning prayers from 5-6 am. I rarely attend those ones; I will be still in bed. And then, we have the main church service that is held on Tuesdays. I attend that main service. Then we also have the courtship service that is held on Fridays, I also attend that one. Then, we also have what they call 'kidron' prayers, which happens each day from 5-6 pm, I usually attend. Then on Sunday, we go off campus to Mt Pleasant High School and I rarely miss Sunday church service.

Participants shared positive experiences attending church services on campus. They described church members as welcoming and inclusive towards SWDs. In another part of the transcript, P2 reported having regular prayer sessions with her friends.

"Well, I have heard others say that to progress as a student, you must strike a balance between your studies and attending church. Personally, church really helps me. For example, when I am struggling with my modules, I find that each time I go to church and sing with others (by the way, I am quite good at singing) and dance together, I return to my room

feeling stress-free. Afterward, I can concentrate on my studies because when I am stressed, I cannot concentrate".

The extract suggests that church members at the HE exhibited attitudinal accessibility for SWDs, which enabled P2 to engage in church-related activities and ultimately had a positive impact on her academic progress.

This chapter reported on the webby socio-material relations that co-produced both accessibility and inaccessibility of ECAs for SWDs at the HEI. It was found that a range of formal and informal socio-material relations co-produced accessibility of ECAs. The HEI had implemented measures to ensure that SWDs could access ECAs, such as the ZUSA and ZITISU annual games, on an equal basis with non-disabled students. This support included a variety of material provisions, such as transportation to and from events, food allowances, hotel accommodation and the provision of personal helpers (paid by the HEI) to facilitate participation in sporting activities. Additionally, the university calendar, which accommodated the Paralympic games, further enhanced access to ECAs. However, access to ECAs was constrained by various socio-material relations, such as inaccessible university buses, central helpers who were sometimes reluctant to assist during sporting events and delayed disbursements of food allowances. It also emerged that access to ECAs was inextricably intertwined with the architectural designs of the HEI. For instance, some historical spaces, such as common rooms, were not accessible to students who used wheelchairs, thereby discriminating against SWDs. Furthermore, aspects of the physical environment, such as open drains, hindered students with visual impairments from navigating the campus to access ECAs. Access to ECAs for SWDs fostered several benefits, including stress relief, opportunities to meet new peers and valuable learning experiences from one another. The next chapter addresses Question 4: How can the socio-material relations within the HEI be reconfigured to enhance accessibility for SWDs?

CHAPTER 10

Reconfiguring the Higher Education to Enhance Accessibility

The preceding chapters-6, 7, 8 and 9 explored the workings of the HEI and how in/accessibility is reproduced at the HEI, and how it affects the capacity of SWDs to participate. Analysing how a problematic social assemblage, in this case a HEI, works in the present can also help us consider ways to alter the assemblage and make it function differently (Feely, 2020:190). Accordingly, the focus of this chapter is to answer research question 4: How can the HE assemblage be reconfigured to enhance accessibility for SWDs? Reconfigurations are discussed under each of the four identified assemblages. Additionally, cross-cutting reconfigurations that span the four assemblages are also discussed. It is important to note that the reconfigurations discussed in this chapter were suggested by the research participants.

10.1 Place/space assemblage reconfiguration

Regarding inaccessible spaces across the HEI, which are not wheelchair accessible, a student with a physical impairment, during a focus group discussion suggested that:

> *"If a disabled student cannot access a particular office, the security personnel at the entrances must call the staff inside to come outside and hear my case. Typically, the security personnel advise me to find someone to send in to represent my case, but during busy periods, it can be challenging to locate a random student willing to help."*

It emerged that participants contested the idea of sending representatives to present issues on their behalf. Regarding access to the physical environment in the HEI, a student with a visual impairment noted that the solution would be an inclusive university-built environment:

> *"The ultimate solution is to design an inclusive university-built environment that allows SWDs to navigate the campus independently. I look forward to the day when I can wake up in the morning and attend my lectures without relying on anyone else."*

The quote primarily addresses UD principles. Universally designed physical spaces in the HEI have the potential to foster independence among learners with disabilities and ensure access to places/spaces, facilities, services and products open to the university community on the basis of equal opportunity. UD principles shift attention away from individual impairments and bespoke accommodations, toward designing environments, products or learning experiences that are usable by as many people as possible from the onset.

Regarding the issue of random and last-minute lecture venue changes, some participants suggested:

"I wish they would simply state that, for example, students in the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences have designated lecture venues that do not change. This would be helpful, especially if a visually impaired student has not yet been assigned a helper, or if my helper is busy with something else, as I would then be able to find my way to the lecture venue independently."

"My advice to SWDs to consider becoming a class representative alongside a non-disabled class representative. This way, when class decisions are made, you can advocate for choices that benefit yourself and your fellow disabled colleagues. It is essential to involve SWDs in decision-making processes, including the selection of lecture venues."

The study overwhelming evidence of leadership experiences among SWDs. Some were holding various leadership positions at the HEI, and reported positive experiences leading non-disabled students. Additionally, several SWDs had held leadership positions, in high school. Two students with physical impairments were current class representatives in their respective programmes of study. One male student who used a wheelchair was a current member of the hostel committee. A female student who also used a wheelchair had previously served as a junior parliamentarian during high school. [9] During a focus group discussion, one participant encouraged others to consider taking on the roles of class representatives alongside a non-disabled student representative. Interactions arising from these roles have the potential to raise awareness, challenge and dispel negative assumptions held against SWDs, in line with Article 8 of the CRPD.

Regarding campus accommodation allocation, a participant with a visual impairment during a walking interview, suggested:

"…maybe they should consider giving SWDs a preference in choosing hostels, as the current system randomly allocates rooms during the vacation period. This is problematic because I may feel more comfortable in a room closer to the toilet, or I may not. During our last meeting, we suggested that it would be better to inform the accommodation office of our preferred hostel and room number for the upcoming semester. For example, if I select Room B4, it should remain my permanent room, unlike the current practice where we are moved to different rooms and hostels every semester."

[9] The Junior Parliament of Zimbabwe is a recognised structure within government and mirrors the structure of the senior parliament with each Constituency having a youth parliamentarian representative. It was established in 1991 as a move by the Government to effectively engage children in policy processes. https://www.infomin.org.zw/official-opening-of-the-31st-junior-parliament-of-zimbabwe/

It was found that random room allocation and constant changes of rooms posed challenges for SWDs. It was reported that, at times, students would be moved to a room without a bed or a chair, and they would struggle to find and carry these items to the newly allocated room at the beginning of each semester.

Participants criticised the current set up in the main library. It was reported that only a small section was reserved for SWDs. A student with a visual impairment during a walking interview noted:

> *"The main library has various sections and stake rooms, allowing non-disabled students to choose where they want to study, such as the basement, second floor, or third floor. There should also be an additional accessible section for students with* disabilities."

It was reported that the main library had three floors. However, students who used wheelchairs could only access the ground floor. The basement and the upper floors could only be reached by stairs. This situation constituted discrimination and disablism, creating unequal opportunities for accessing the main library. One participant with a visual impairment shared during a walking interview how their independence was constrained in the main library:

> *"The main library is challenging to navigate. I often struggle to determine my exact location. If the Wi-Fi is weak in the spot where my helper would have left me, I cannot explore other spots on my own because I have no idea how to navigate the library spaces."* (P18).

10.1.1 Teaching, Learning and Assessment assemblage reconfigurations

Lecturers were identified as a key barrier to accessible teaching, learning and assessment processes in the HEI for SWDs. Accordingly, participants offered several suggestions to address this issue. During walking interviews, a student with visual impairment noted:

> *"Most of them (lecturers) do not understand us at all. I think there is a need to gather all lecturers from each department and educate them about the various disability categories that may be present at the university, as well as the possible accommodations which may be required. Personally, I dislike having to explain that I am visually impaired. I suggest that lecturers should be equipped with knowledge about disabilities from the outset. For example, one of my current lecturers is visually impaired. On the very first day, he made it a point to check if there were SWDs in the lecture. I think every lecturer should adopt the same approach."* (P2).

> *"Every lecturer must check during the first lecture if there are SWDs in the class, so they can determine the best ways to accommodate everyone and ensure that we all feel a sense of belonging."* (P9).

"The use of the phrase "Now you see" during lectures needs to be addressed. Lecturers themselves must receive training on different types of impairments. It seems that they are unaware of the diversity within the student body. They deliver lectures without considering the varying learning needs of students. So far, it has been us, SWDs who come together to present our case. We constantly have to remind the lecturers of these issues (accommodations)". (P17).

To make the mandatory foreign language module accessible for students with visual impairments, a student with a visual impairment, during a walking interview suggested:

"...visually impaired students should have the opportunity to select a foreign language of their choice. Currently, at the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, students are required to study Chinese, which is prescribed faculty-wide. This leaves us without any options. While I am studying Chinese, I am unable to represent the Chinese characters in Braille. Allowing students to choose a foreign language, such as German, could motivate us to engage more deeply with foreign language studies, even at the postgraduate level, unlike the current approach". (P14).

Regarding the issue of exam answer sheets going missing, a participant with a physical impairment, during a go along interview suggested:

"It is best if the DSS keeps our answer sheets. After each examination, a dedicated person should collect all the scripts from the DSS and deliver them to the respective departments for the secretaries to sign. This will make it easier to track any missing exam script. It will be easier for the department secretary to communicate with the lecturer. The current practice is that each lecturer retrieves their scripts from the DSS, which poses a problem, especially for those based off-campus at the University Hospital (pseudonym), located about five km away, they can forget." (P13).

10.1.2 Digital assemblage reconfigurations

Pertaining digital accessibility, students with physical impairments, during a focus group discussion, suggested:

"…if possible, they would allow students to borrow laptops and return them at the end of the semester. If a laptop is damaged while in their possession, those students may be penalised and must pay a fine".

"…the university must purchase more laptops to ensure that students without personal laptops can access them. This is one of the main reasons why disabled students often lag behind in acquiring digital skills. If every disabled student has access to a laptop, it will make a significant difference."

"If possible, during the orientation period, those SWDs who have never had access to computers and want to learn basic computer skills should start earlier. This way, by the time the Digital and Information Literacy module begins, they will have a stronger foundation."

"…the university must provide a lecturer capable of teaching visually impaired students the Digital and Information Literacy module. Without this, we will continue to struggle." (P5-student with a visual impairment).

Pertaining to the PCs at the DSS library, one participant suggested:

"The PCs in the DSS library are running outdated operating systems, which affects their functionality. It seems that no one is maintaining them, and I'm unsure whose responsibility it is. For example, some of the keys, such as @, are stuck. I suggest that the operating systems of the PCs be updated regularly."

10.1.3 Extracurricular in/accessibility assemblage reconfigurations

Pertaining to ECAs, a participant with a physical impairment, during a focus group discussion suggested:

"…the university community should be informed about sports developments concerning disabled students, particularly success stories. The current approach creates 'silos' and contradicts the inclusion agenda. All students, both disabled and non-disabled, must be kept updated on developments in both groups. Currently, sports for disabled and non-disabled students are running parallel to each other."

10.1.4 Cross-cutting reconfigurations

Participants reported that there exists no direct communication between SWDs and key decision makers at the HEI. Students had to navigate a bureaucratic system, usually through the DSS secretary, who would present student issues to the relevant key decision makers. Participants also noted that the Disability Services Director had no direct access to the Vice Chancellor (VC) of the HEI.

"There is no student with direct access to the VC. To reach the VC, the DSS Director must go through the Dean of Students. Essentially, the DSS Director, who may not have a disability, takes the matter to their superior, who also may not have a disability. By the time the issue reaches the VC, it may not carry the same gravity as when it first arose. In my opinion, if SWDs had direct access to the VC, our issues could receive immediate attention." (P10).

"That's the reason I got into a trouble with the secretary to the Undergraduate Chairperson in my department. She told me that I should channel my issues through the faculty or class representative. I declined

because no one can effectively present my concerns with the same gravity as I do". (P9).

"We would really love to meet the VC; we don't want to spend four years without having met him. It's important for us to share our concerns directly. If we present our case to his secretary, she might feel uncomfortable submitting our concerns or may not consider our issues valid." (P11).

All state universities in Zimbabwe are led by Vice Chancellors, with the country's sitting president automatically serving as the Chancellor. The position of Vice Chancellor is protected and neither students nor lecturers have direct access to it, except through a bureaucratic system. Participants suggested SWDs to have direct access and opportunity to share their experiences and concerns with the HEI's key decision makers. Participants suggested:

"The challenge is that we usually hold meetings at the DSS, but we never have any top leadership representatives in attendance. It's only us SWDs and our DSS Director, Mr. Perkins (pseudonym). The university's top leadership must participate in our meetings. None of them are disabled, but regular interaction with us as SWDs would provide them the opportunity to hear directly from us about our experiences, because a 10cm high step is a barrier for me, but someone without a disability might not perceive it as such. Recently, we faced a challenge: the exams office was uncomfortable with the concept of providing additional time for SWDs. They viewed it as an in-house arrangement, despite it being an international practice. We had to fight until the exams office agreed to grant us an additional 30 minutes [accommodation] for every hour. This reflects a clear lack of awareness among the key decision-makers. Mr. Perkins, the Director, had to conduct research and compile data on how other HEI in the region handle additional time for SWDs. Only then did the Exams Office finally accept our request. There is a pressing need for awareness-raising initiatives targeting top leadership." (P13).

"I recommend mandatory training for all staff members on disability issues and effective ways to support disabled students at all levels." (P9).

Participants underscored the need for the active involvement and consultation with them on matters of the university that directly affect them. This aligns with Article 4(3) of the CRPD. During a focus group discussion, a participant suggested:

"I suggest that administrators, before they come up with any policy, guidelines, or any decision that affects us, should adopt a bottom-up approach. They need to invite us in for consultations because, as students experiencing specific challenges, we are best positioned to suggest effective solutions. For instance, at the DSS, there is an issue with audio recorders. The administrators might think they have provided us with

adequate resources, but as visually impaired students, these recorders are often unusable because many of them are broken or have dead batteries. They may mistakenly assume that we are failing modules because we are lazy but the truth is that it's not our fault; the resources are simply dysfunctional".

Participants called for representation by students and staff with disabilities in key positions, from the faculty to the university administrative positions, where they are able to enhance understanding of current needs and to advice on areas requiring change:

"I know that among the university administrators, there are many advisors to the VC, but I have never heard of a professor with a disability among the VC's advisors. If they could establish even one office, it would be of great assistance to us."

The importance of representation by PWDs in key positions was further echoed by another participant noting that:

"Even if we lack the necessary resources on campus, but if we have leaders or representatives with disabilities in key positions, I think it makes things much better." (P23).

Actively listening to the experiences of disabled students is vital to being able to guide meaningful change and importantly, to converting previously disabling spaces into more empowering spaces (Pritchard, 2021; Shaw, 2021).

Regarding awareness raising, a participant with a visual impairment, during a walking interview emphasised the need for SWDs to take a leading role in disability-awareness raising:

"It is our duty and responsibility to educate our non-disabled counterparts. One thing I am certain of is that non-disabled people cannot educate themselves about disability issues; that is impossible. Blaming them for using the wrong terminology is very unfair. Instead, we need to educate them on the appropriate language to use when referring to PWDs. The quality of our interactions largely depends on how well we educate them. I don't blame them at all". (P2).

Participants also suggested for university-wide awareness regarding disability issues. This aligns with Article 8, of the CRPD:

"There is a need for educational awareness campaigns to educate the university community about SWDs. This can help change negative attitudes towards SWDs and foster acceptance among non-disabled students, contributing to a more inclusive university environment. Non-disabled students will gain a better understanding of us." (P14).

Participants suggested the need for individualised supports, as opposed to one-size fits all approach. A student who uses a wheelchair, during a focus group discussion shared:

> *"…when I went to the Student Affairs office, the lady who attended to me asked why I was complaining, given that many students had lived in Thomas Hall (pseudonym) before who use wheelchairs. That's when I began to explain to her that while there may be 10 wheelchair users, each one has a different condition."*

Participants suggested that the HEI must reconsider and allow first year SWDs to avail of the personal helper initiative during the first semester. A participant with a physical impairment during a focus group discussion suggested:

> *"I would suggest that we are allowed to register personal helpers as soon as we start college. This is a very big institution, allocating a helper/personal assistant to a visually impaired student during the second semester can make such students to fail one or more of their first semester modules, which can make them to repeat their first year."*

All participants reported negative experiences with central helpers. They indicated that they had not received help from central helpers. However, participants had mixed suggestions regarding central helpers. A student with a visual impairment, during a walking interview noted:

> *"In my view, why can't they just get rid of the so-called central helpers? The fact that each student has got their personal helper, I don't see their value. During my first days, at one point I missed a lecture because I could not find someone to accompany me to the lecture but the central helpers are there."* (P9).

However, the suggestion to get rid of central helpers was contested in Focus Group Discussion (FGD) A, with a student with a physical impairment stating:

> *"I think there is need for central helpers but they should not be too many. At times, my personal helper might fall sick, in that case, I might need one, because it is not easy to pick a random student to help you, it's difficult."*

To address the issue of central helpers, a participant, during a focus group discussion, suggested:

> *"The university usually have all the statistics regarding newly admitted first-year students with disabilities. This figure can be used to determine the number of central helpers that can be recruited. At the beginning of every semester, every central helper can be allocated a fixed and known number of students with impairments to assist. In the event that they fail to deliver their duties as expected, they can be deregistered from the list of central helpers."*

Regarding the recruitment and composition of central helpers, a participants added:

> *"There is once again the issue of gender dimension in the recruitment of central helpers. I am aware of very few central helpers, and the majority of them are female. This semester, I do not know of any male central helpers. I recommend that the DSS strive for a balanced gender distribution during the recruitment process. Additionally, central helpers should be proportionately assigned to hostels based on the number of disabled students residing in each one. As it stands, the semester is nearly over, and I am still unaware of any male central helpers."* (P14).

> *"Central helpers must be proportionally distributed across faculties. It is unrealistic to expect a central helper based in the College of Health Sciences (CHS) to assist a student in the Faculty of Law due to differences in timetables and the distance between these two faculties."* (P8).

Despite negative encounters with helpers, SWDs were empathetic towards personal helpers and take full responsibility of the helping relationship. During a focus group discussion, a participants shared tips on how to manage conflicts with personal helpers:

> *"Guys, if we treat our helpers as though helping us is their primary purpose for being in college, we will always encounter problems. Remember, our helpers have their own academic and personal lives to manage. Let us normalise discussing our concerns with them, including our preferences, and clearly communicate which aspects we need the most help with. Sometimes, we assume that our helpers will automatically figure our needs. If they fail to meet our expectations, we may feel let down. We must not make assumptions."*

> *"We might blame helpers for not discharging their duties appropriately, yet they often lack the knowledge of how to assist us. I suggest that the DSS train registered helpers on how to support SWDs. This would align us more effectively with our helpers."*

Finally, pparticipants suggested the need for continuous monitoring and evaluation of disability supports:

> *"What is needed is periodic monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the disability support services are fulfilling their intended purpose. It is not enough to simply provide these services to students with disabilities; there must be a focus on ensuring that the services are effective. I have never seen the university authorities monitor or evaluate the range of disability supports available to SWDs at the university."* (P9).

In summary, this chapter presented several suggestions from SWDs on the possible strategies to reconfigure the socio-material relations within the HEI, to

enhance equitable access to the physical environment, products, services and facilities open to the university community. These suggestions include low-cost awareness-raising approaches, such as appointing SWDs as co-class representatives alongside non-disabled representatives, providing training for academics on disability and impairments, offering structured digital literacy training specifically for students with visual impairments, actively consulting and involving SWDs in decision-making on matters that directly affect them, such as curriculum design and implementing structured training for personal helpers. The next chapter discusses and interprets the research findings reported in Chapters 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10.

CHAPTER 11

Discussion of Empirical Findings

11.0 Introduction

The research aimed to explore how in/accessibility is reproduced within a HEI in Zimbabwe. The study sought to answer four research questions, stated below:

1. How is in/accessibility reproduced in a HEI in a resource-poor context in the Global South?
2. How is in/accessibility reproduced for SWDS?
3. How do the empirical findings advance the conceptualisation of in/accessibility in higher education in a resource-poor context?
4. How can the socio-material relations within the HEI be reconfigured to enhance accessibility for SWDs?

This chapter interprets and discusses empirical findings through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical concepts of assemblages, affects, relations and capacities. The discussion incorporates existing peer-reviewed literature on the experiences of accessibility involving SWDs in HEIs globally. The four identified assemblages, which emerged from the data analysis process are discussed in the following order: 1) place/space, 2) teaching, learning and assessment, 3) digital and 4) extracurricular assemblages. The chapter will conclude by providing specific responses to each research question.

Empirical findings from this study contributes, to the vast and growing corpus of information documenting the experiences of SWDs navigating higher education globally. Extant empirical research has identified several barriers and facilitators to accessibility for SWDs in higher education contexts. Findings from this study indicate that SWDs encounter in/accessibility across four interconnected assemblages: place/space, teaching, learning and assessment, digital and extracurricular activities. Emerging in/accessibility encounters in the data were explored through a Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of assemblages to map out the socio-material, abstract, and embodied components that co-produced in/accessibility experiences, along with resultant in/capacities for SWDs. Findings indicated that in/accessibility assemblages are reproduced from a multiplicity of socio-material relations that either enhance or constrain the capacity of SWDs to access places/spaces, products, facilities and services open to all students within the HEI. States parties to the CRPD are obligated to ensure SWDs access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, transportation, information and communications-including information and communications technologies and systems-and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public (UN, 2006). Accessibility is a precondition for PWDs to live independently and participate fully in society on an equal basis with

everyone (CRPD General Comment No.2, 2014). Inaccessibility encounters reported in this study indicate widespread discrimination of SWDs within the HEI studied. The section below interprets and discusses empirical findings in detail, beginning with the place/space assemblage.

11.1 The Place/space (PS+) in/accessibility assemblage

Accessibility of places/spaces within the HEI for SWDs was reproduced from heterogeneous and complex socio-material components that assembled and disassembled in specific contexts. Participants reported how random and last-minute lecture venue changes restricted SWDs, particularly those who use wheelchairs, from attending lectures on an equal basis with non-disabled students. In this context, material and discursive elements, including but not limited to architectural designs and ableist assumptions about all students being able to navigate the campus swiftly co-produced the exclusion of SWDs. Place/space inaccessibility produced a ripple effect of disadvantages, both transient (e.g., missing lectures) and enduring (e.g., low grades and poor skill and knowledge acquisition). Low grades resulting from unequal access to lectures can have a lasting, if not permanent, imprint on SWDs, spanning beyond the HE to affect future employment prospects. Fox and Powell (2021:13) aptly put it that, ‘place-related affects and their impacts may not be dramatic in themselves, but when spaces or places are sustained elements in the events that make up a life, there is a drip, drip, drip affectivity that over days, months, years or a lifetime may have a profound impact on what a person can do-their capacities’.. In concurrence, Madriaga (2007) notes that prior experiences of disablism within education hinder the confidence of SWDs in pursuing further academic opportunities. The emergent encounters of inaccessibility reported in this study, such as cars blocking walkways and unscheduled power cuts, illustrate Massey’s (2005:29) and Thrift’s (2008:19) assertion that places and spaces are neither a mere ‘backcloth’ for human practices nor are they in some way prior and determining. Instead, places and spaces are assemblages of multiple material and social elements and analyses of their effects on humans and social positions are highly contingent (Fox and Powell, 2023:228).

Consistent with several previous studies (Lord, 2017; Whitburn and Riffo-Salgado, 2024; Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022; Wertans and Burch, 2022; Lord and Stein, 2018), this study found that the HEI was rife with physical barriers to accessing various places/spaces for SWDs. The physical environments of university campuses are reported to limit the ability of disabled students to engage fully with learning opportunities (Hannam-Swain, 2017; Vickerman and Blundell, 2010). For examples, a study conducted by García-González et al. (2021) involving two focus group discussions and sixteen interviews with university SWDs at a HEI in Spain found architectural barriers to be constant throughout the physical spaces. The university’s architectural design was

reported to present difficulties and lacked adaptations in its infrastructure, transport facilities and furniture, which visibly limited SWDs.

In this study, numerous buildings across the HEI restricted equitable place/space accessibility. The main campus, did not have a single elevator installed, despite some buildings having up to four floors. All upper floors were only accessed by steps and stairs. This indicates ableist assumptions that underpins the construction and design of the institution's physical spaces/places. The HEI's architectural design illustrates 'walkanormative' assumptions, an ideological assumption that walking is the only mode of human movement. This marginalises and excludes people who use other modes of movement such as wheelchairs and prosthetics, among other means. This study found historical buildings to exclude SWDs. The negative impact of aged buildings as a barrier to physical accessibility was also reported by García-González et al (2021:589).

Empirical evidence globally indicates that the physical environment remains inaccessible to PWDs (Lord, 2017; Moriña, 2017; Jackson, 2018; Fuller et al., 2004). Physical spaces are designed based on homogeneity and their design does not consider the social model of disability (Oliver, 1990), which advocates for the use of universal design (Watchorn, Larkin, Ang and Hitch, 2013). Universal design is an approach that recognises the diversity of people's needs and aims to create products and environments that can be used by the majority of the population without requiring any adaptation for members of minority groups (CRPD General Comment No.2, 2014). In a study by Spassiani et al. (2017:14) conducted in a HEI in the Republic of Ireland, participants discussed how it would be beneficial if all doors on campus were automatic, particularly because some doors lacked handles, making them difficult for PWDs to open. This research found that the HEI studied did not have a single automatic door, highlighting the extent of physical inaccessibility within the institution.

Physical places/spaces in the HEI studied were reported to be inherently inaccessible to SWDs. The fact that the built environment remains inaccessible in the 21st century is staggering (Jackson, 2021). Lord and Stein (2018:231) noted that the barrier-dismantling directive of the CRPD entails assessing the entirety of the educational experience and environment to identify and remove barriers for SWDs. This approach has the potential to enhance the capacity of SWDs to access places/spaces within the HEI on an equal footing with non-disabled students. However, findings from this study indicate that barrier-dismantling strategies suggested by the CRPD, are inadequate in the face of the fluid and contingent nature of in/accessibility.

This study found that SWDs expend a lot of physical energy and time navigating inaccessible campus places and spaces. A study conducted in a UK HEI, revealed additional planning and labour required from many SWDs to navigate the structures and physical spaces of HE (Wertans and Burch, 2022:15). Many disabled students reported feeling like they have to work harder than other

students in order to manage their disability and studies together (Seale et al, 2015; Shpigelman et al, 2021). Discussing her own experiences, a disabled PhD student, Hannam-Swain (2017) equated examples of additional labour to 'an extra workload that is equivalent to a part-time job'. Lalu (2019) posed the question: who does the university serve? In a UK study by Wertans and Burch (2022:15), many examples of 'backdoor accessibility' [10] among SWDs meant an increased risk of burnout and the feeling that university is not for 'them'.

In this study, the plotted navigation routes, informed by accounts from students with physical impairments during two focus group discussions and the researcher's observations during walking/go-along interviews, indicate that students navigated campus spaces using the longest and winding paths. As a result, participants reported feeling exhausted for most of the time. This produced multiple negative impacts on their university experiences, including physical, emotional and academic, leading to issues such as missing lectures and lateness. Participants reported feeling physically and emotionally drained, which detracted them from engaging with their academic work. Inaccessible places/spaces can spark a ripple effect of human rights violations for SWDs. Some students who used wheelchairs reported failing to meet basic daily human needs, such as taking a bath or having meals, due to inaccessible shower facilities and broken wheelchairs, respectively. Similarly, García-González et al. (2021:587) reported that the main barrier for students with physical disabilities and impairments of body/trunk and upper limbs was the enormous effort they must exert at the muscular level to reach their desired locations. These findings suggest that SWDs in both the Global North and South contexts expend significant amount of energy to navigate their campuses.

Students with visual and physical impairments reported on the bureaucratic system they had to navigate, both physically and emotionally, to complete module registration, campus accommodation applications and rectifications of incorrectly assigned grades. This study found that missing examination scripts was intertwined with physical inaccessibility. It is important to note that the processes for amending grades was completed manually, requiring students to move from one office to another spanning several days, which was a cumbersome undertaking for SWDs. Furthermore, the Examinations Office, was reported to be located in the basement and accessible only by stairs. This created an additional burden for students who use wheelchairs. Participants also reported on the psychological strain of continually asking for assistance from helpers and colleagues. Illustrating the additional emotional labour that 'backdoor accessibility' burdens disabled students with, interviewees described having to undertake large amounts of planning, effort and organisation, expending both

[10] Coined by an interviewee to describe how accessibility and accessible provision is often an add-on to pre-existing, inaccessible structures (see Wertans and Burch (2022).

actual and emotional energy in navigating the temporary or add-on spaces that have been afforded to them, whether in person or online. In the UK, as a result of relying on backdoor entrances, hidden structures and second-best provisions, interviewees described immense feelings of exclusion and a lack of belonging (Wertans and Burch, 2022:12). Valentine (2020) observed that physical accessibility barriers often go disregarded, unappreciated and unreciprocated, which increases the emotional, cognitive and physical labour of the disabled person and their assistants, who work hard to "identify inaccessible environments". Similar findings were reported by Brewer and colleagues in a study analysing Reddit posts. They noted that higher education (HE) placed substantial demands on SWDs. In particular, disabled students were aware that they needed to work harder than non-disabled students and were often underestimated or dismissed (Brewer et al., 2025:113).

Having to expend significant energy navigating inaccessible course materials and physical environments, SWDs were deprived of the equal opportunity to engage in extracurricular activities (ECAs), such as clubs, which are key for the full development of their potential. The social model of disability provides that society, and in this case the HEI, generates the barriers that hinder the inclusion of SWDs, arguing that the practices, attitudes and policies of the social context create the barriers and/or supports that influence access and participation. According to the social model, disability is not a personal tragedy or an abnormality, and there is no need to cure the 'disease' (Oliver, 1990). Findings suggest that the socio-material relations within the HEI must be reconfigured to enhance access to places/spaces for SWDs on the basis of equal opportunities.

The strict application of Universal Design (UD) to all new goods, products, facilities, technologies and services should ensure full, equal and unrestricted access for all potential consumers, including PWDs, in a way that fully respects their inherent dignity and diversity. It should contribute to the creation of an unrestricted chain of movement for an individual from one space to another, including movement inside particular spaces, with no barriers (CRPD, General Comment No. 2, 2014:5). This study fully concurs with the concept of Universal Design. However, this study argues that UD is an essential but insufficient approach to ensure full accessibility for SWDs. Experiencing access is a highly complex phenomenon (see Ferri, 2024). It spans beyond the physical attributes of places/spaces, products, services and facilities to incorporate a range of emergent socio-material factors (including abstractions and embodied affects) that temporarily assemble to enhance or restrict access in particular situations. A more fluid and rhizomatic[11] conceptualisation of UD is therefore proposed, rather than stable one. From a new materialist perspective, universal design (UD)

[11] A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:25)

ceases to be a destination to be reached, but instead becomes a never-ending undertaking. The concept of making a clean slate, starting or beginning again from ground zero and seeking a beginning or foundation all imply a false conception of voyage and movement (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:25). In this context, UD becomes an infinite undertaking, always open to further improvements and adjustments to meet evolving human accessibility needs. This aligns with Zola's (1989:410) assertion that if society perceives the needs and abilities of people as constantly changing, it may alter its attitudes toward the built environment from one of "permanence" and "maintenance" to one of "flexibility" and "adaptation." In the words of Ferri (2024), different layers (or additions) are required to render something accessible, making accessibility inherently and fundamentally complex. With constant experimentation coupled with architectural advancements, it is possible to replace concrete ramps with electronic ramps, which can be adjusted to different gradients to meet individual specific needs. The argument for a fluid, understanding of accessibility is further developed later.

The absence of steps or the presence of a ramp, an elevator, or a wide entrance/door on a building does not guarantee automatic physical access. Accessibility is a rhizomatic and emergent phenomenon, with no definite origin or endpoint, but involves multiple entry and exit points. A rhizomatic understanding of universal design blurs the boundaries between producers and consumers, designers and users, lecturers and students and disabled and non-disabled students. Binaries are collapsed and the duty to ensure accessibility ceases to reside solely with particular individuals and entities, such as civil engineers, architects, builders, product and service designers, public policy makers, human rights commissions and PWDs on the other. Ensuring accessibility ceases to have a stable beginning, but remains in the middle. Deleuze and Guattari (1987:25) noted that "the middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed." Drawing on the data and new materialism scholarship, a *Relational Collaborative Model* (RCM) of accessibility is proposed. In this model, accessibility assumes a relational, collaborative, fluid and infinite outlook. The RCM suggests that the duty and responsibility to ensure accessibility emerges horizontally, rather than hierarchically. The relational and collaborative nature of accessibility aligns with the idea that disability is part of the human condition (World Report on Disability, 2011:3), rather than that of a minority; hence, everyone has a duty and responsibility to ensure accessibility. Instead of isolating responsibility in specific roles and offices, the model recognises that meaningful accessibility emerges from the relational capacities of societal-material components.

A rhizomatic and fluid understanding of UD principles is particularly crucial in Global South contexts, punctuated by poverty and resource (financial and human) constraints. During the data collection process in Zimbabwe, the HE institution under exploration experienced three consecutive days of unscheduled electrical power outage. In such a context, universally designed places/spaces

with elevators to provide full and equitable physical access for students can be rendered inaccessible. To illustrate the emergent nature of accessibility in the Global South, Lord and Stein (2018) in their study on accessibility among SWDs in Egypt, found that eighteen out of twenty-eight HEIs identified resource limitations as the major obstacle to ensuring physical access, especially in old buildings. However, the appearance of a disabled parliamentarian is reported to have resulted in the construction of a wooden ramp at the HEI. In this study, some participants refused to be lifted into inaccessible examination venues, which could result in instant venue changes, suggesting that in/accessibility is a complex and socio-materially mediated phenomenon that emerges relationally through ceaseless negotiation and renegotiation.

Due to architectural barriers, SWDs reported that they depended on personal helpers to navigate the physical places/spaces of the campus. However, relying on the goodwill of other students presented several problems for SWDs. For example, they lost invaluable time waiting for personal helpers, friends, or random students to access or egress particular spaces/places across the campus, thereby compromising their right to individual autonomy, choice, and independent living. SWDs lost control of time, which negatively affected the amount of time to engage in academic tasks or ECAs.

First-year students depended entirely on informal socio-material relations to navigate the campus places/spaces. Several researchers (Lord and Stein, 2017:235; Fuller et al., 2004; Leyser et al., 2000; Moriña and Perera, 2020:225) have also reported the phenomenon of relying on other students in HEIs. A study by Moriña and Perera (2020) in a Spanish HEI found that students perceived goodwill as something positive, as it translates into a change of mentality and awareness towards those with disabilities. However, Moriña and Perera (2020) remind us that help must not derive exclusively from goodwill but rather from the rights and responsibilities codified in regulations.

It emerged that overdependence on helpers heightened the chances of SWDs missing lectures or arriving late. This compromises the realisation of SDG 4 for PWDs-quality education. This finding resonates with Lord (2017), who found that physical barriers limited SWDs' regular attendance at lectures and, in turn, their access to education. This suggests the propensity of place/space inaccessibility to spark a ripple effect of human rights violations among SWDs. Lord and Stein (2018:235) further reported how physical barriers impacted students with visual impairments getting to campus in the first place and then restricted campus building entry and egress, as well as limited participation in field trips, ECAs and access to housing structures.

Some participants reported that the HEI was slowly making strides to address the problem of place/space inaccessibility by modifying some areas, for example, by adding ramps in places that previously had steps only. Some students with physical impairments took photographs of the newly installed ramps at the HEI.

This development aligns with Article 9(1) of the CRPD, which obligates state parties to take measures, including the identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility. The modification of previously inaccessible places/spaces suggests the fluid nature of in/accessibility. However, recently added ramps were perceived by some students with physical impairments as an afterthought and not considered in mainstream development initiatives. This interpretation is aptly captured by Choruma (2007) in a survey report titled *"The Forgotten Tribe,"* documenting the lives of PWDs in Zimbabwe. Despite the installation of ramps on campus, the learning spaces largely remained inaccessible to SWDs. Some participants took photographs of recently constructed but inaccessible outdoor seating areas. A study conducted by Whitburn and Rifo-Salgado (2024:1135) at a HEI in the UK found that a relatively new and important building lacked Braille indicating toilet locations and likewise in its many elevators, with large, echoing spaces replete with hard, noise-provoking surfaces.

The gap between policy provisions and the lived realities of SWDs at the HEI studied aligns with the suggestion that "the words on the pages of the CRPD represent intentions, but the harsh reality is that intentions are not always honoured; they do not always translate into actions" (Garcia Iriarte, McConkey and Gilligan, 2016:1). The problem of place/space inaccessibility at the HEI is a manifestation of policy and legislative gaps in Zimbabwe. For example, Section 22 of the National Constitution of Zimbabwe places a resource conditionality on the realisation of the rights of PWDs, providing that the state and all institutions must act within the limits of their resources. This is contrary to the CRPD Committee's General Comment No.2 (2014:5), which states that the obligation to implement accessibility is unconditional.

Place/space inaccessibility at the HEI presents a manifestation of several policy gaps. The Disabled Persons Act (DPA) of 1992 of Zimbabwe contains several flaws, which negatively affect accessibility for PWDs. The act establishes a National Disability Board (NDB),[12] empowered to issue and serve adjustment orders to ensure access to premises to which members of the public are ordinarily admitted. It states that 'where the board considers that any premises, services or amenities are inaccessible to disabled persons by reason of any structural, physical, administrative or other impediment to such access, the board may serve upon the owner of the premises or the provider of the service or amenity concerned an adjustment order'[13]. An adjustment order requires the owner or provider concerned to undertake at his own expense such action as may be specified in order to secure reasonable access by disabled persons to the

[12] National Disability Board is established under Section 4 of the Disabled Persons Act of 1992.

[13] Section 4 of the Disabled Persons Act, 1992.

premises, service or amenity concerned.[14] Further, Section 7(8) of the DPA makes it a criminal offence to fail to comply with an adjustment order. Accordingly, adjustment orders have the potential to ensure access to public amenities for PWDs and enabling them to participate fully in society and live independently. However, according to Mandipa (2013:82), the criminalisation of failure to comply with adjustment orders under section 7(8) of the DPA is merely a paper provision. Mandipa (2013) noted that by 2013, there had been no prosecutions based on the DPA. The Act lacks a clear enforcement mechanism. The most significant flaw of the Disabled Persons Act, which negatively affects SWDs at the HEI studied, is Section 7, which restricts the NDB from serving adjustment orders upon state-controlled institutions such as public HEIs.

In the same vein, section 7 of the DPA is laden with restrictive conditions, which, when combined with the resource conditionality (Section 22 of the Constitution), weigh heavily on SWDs in state HEIs. Some countries committed to ratification have encountered significant obstacles posed by long-established practices reflected in national legislation that are fundamentally inconsistent with specific CRPD articles (Mitler, 2016). Section 7 of the DPA illustrates a selective application of the law in Zimbabwe. Given that the HEI studied is a public university controlled by the state, the clause exonerates the HEI from the automatic issuance of adjustment orders, except with the approval of the responsible minister, usually the Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education. This is problematic, as ministerial positions are political appointments, hence the responsible minister is arguably not independent. Inaction (not issuing adjustment orders for state universities) negatively affects SWDs in state HEIs. In Zimbabwe, many public buildings are considered inaccessible to PWDs (UNESCO, 2022). This has resulted in extreme difficulties for PWDs when accessing public services (Mandipa, 2013:83).

Findings indicate that accessing places/spaces is not merely a matter of being physically present within a particular physical location. Physical accessibility raises fundamental questions regarding human dignity. It must preserve the inherent dignity, respect and independence of SWDs. This study reported encounters in which students who used wheelchairs refused to be lifted into inaccessible spaces by random students. This finding resonates with a study on the accessibility of public buildings in the United States among PWDs, in which a participant declined to have their wheelchair lifted into a building (Burns, Mendonca and Smith, 2024:2995). This suggests that SWDs engage in individual, everyday battles against ableism at the HEI. Place/space accessibility spans beyond visible physicality to encompass a multiplicity of invisible and subjective dimensions, such as human dignity, freedom and autonomy.

[14] Section 4 of the Disabled Persons Act, 1992.

It emerged that the mere presence of accessible places/spaces with wide entrances does not automatically guarantee render those places/space accessible. This study identified instances where accessible entrances and doors were permanently locked as a means to control mischievous behaviours by students. This created an additional layer of complexity for students who used wheelchairs, who needed to obtain keys to unlock these entrances. Consequently, some students chose to remain in their rooms during typically social activities, such as having lunch, which they had to obtain from their personal helpers. This finding strongly resonates with a study conducted in the UK. Chipchase (2023:2829) conducted a research on the experiences of university life among disabled undergraduate students in the UK and found that the unavailability of elevators at night prevented students from accessing a nightclub on campus.

Findings from this study strongly resonate with previous research conducted in the UK and USA, indicating that the reproduction of in/accessibility among SWDs in HEIs is a highly contingent phenomenon. While the universal design of places, products, goods, services and facilities is essential, it is not a panacea for achieving a full and infinite physical accessibility. Universally designed products and services do not guarantee uninterrupted accessibility. Experiencing access is a non-linear and complex phenomenon that is highly unpredictable. In the words of Ferri (2024:14), accessibility is “inherently and fundamentally complex.” Accessibility is extremely complex and unpredictable in contexts with poor human rights practices that fail to ensure strict adherence to international standards and conventions. Such countries are aptly described by Chouinard (2018:2) as lying in the ‘peripheries of law’,-where there exist severe disjuncture between what people aspire to achieve through law and what is actually realised in practice. Peripheries of law are further sustained by ‘shadow citizens’, lack the means (e.g., financial resources, insufficient access to legal expertise, mobility aids, and other support) to claim those rights in practice (Chouinard, 2018:2).

Access to campus places and spaces among SWDs is endlessly re/produced through both formal and informal socio-material relations. Through the vice-chancellor’s scholarship, SWDs can avail themselves of personal helpers or assistants. Personal helpers assist with both academic and non-academic tasks, such as accessing various places/spaces at the HEI. Personal helpers also assist with non-academic tasks such as fetching water, personal care and laundry. Helpers also read academic material that exists only in print form, interpret diagrams and collect and return books to the main library, among other tasks. The task of interpreting diagrams for students with visual impairments was recommended by Lord, who stated that HEIs must train faculty and staff on strategies for delivering content accessibly or for modifications to provide better access to students; for example, allowing students with hearing disabilities to sit at the front or describing images for students with visual disabilities (Lord, 2017:19-20). The provision of personal helpers aligns with Article 9(2)(e) of the

CRPD, which obligates member states to take appropriate measures to provide forms of live assistance, guides, intermediaries, etc. to facilitate access to buildings and facilities open to the public (UN,2006).

The National Disability Policy (2021:56) of Zimbabwe recognises the provision of live assistance and intermediaries, including guides and readers, to facilitate accessibility to buildings and other facilities open to the public. Research participants reported both positive and negative interactions with personal helpers. On a positive note, personal helpers facilitated physical accessibility on campus. However, Fox and Alldred (2011:361) noted that humans do not respond like computers to stimuli, but in complex and sometimes unpredictable ways that indicate an active, motivated engagement with living, as well as the capacity to make choices and act on the world around them. It was found that all participants had changed their personal helper at least once, with one student having changed their helper four times in three years. In a study conducted in Ethiopia, Beyen et al. (2023:20) reported that the university facilitated disabled students' access to readers-persons who are hired to read text to blind students. However, they also reported problems encountered with reading assistants, ranging from the reader's English language proficiency to their suitability for reading long texts. Some readers were reported to skip terms they were unfamiliar with or mispronounce them. One participant in their study noted that the nature of her discipline (law) required reading voluminous texts, which made the use of human readers impractical. In this study, participants reported instances when their personal helpers failed to show up or arrived late to pick them up. It emerged that it was the sole responsibility of the SWD to identify a personal helper and manage the working relationship between them. A study conducted at a HEI in Spain by Moriña and Perera (2020) found that among the assistance provided by the Disability Support office, the student collaborator, was the most appreciated yet also the most criticised. This study found that personal helpers were sometimes criticised for accepting the role merely to access free campus accommodation. Similarly, in Spain, collaborators were criticised for accepting a scholarship to earn credits, which are later recognised by the faculty secretary and through economic aid provided by the office (Moriña and Perera, 2020).

Focus group discussants overwhelmingly agreed on the need for formal training for personal helpers and the development of clear guidelines outlining the duties and responsibilities of both the SWD and their personal helper. Participants suggested that this could minimise conflicts and misunderstandings. The practice at the time data were collected involved students and their helpers figuring things out between them. While this approach recognises the right of SWDs to exercise autonomy and make choices regarding who they want as their helper, the lack of formal training and guidelines posed a barrier to the working relationship, producing a high turnover of personal helpers

First-year SWDs could not avail of the personal helper provision until the second semester, on the pretext that needed to build rapport with potential helpers before formally registering them. Participants overwhelmingly acknowledged several accessibility challenges encountered during the first semester, such as missing lectures and struggling to locate lecture venues. Transitioning to post-secondary education is a period when vulnerabilities are more readily revealed, which can lead to students dropping out of university (Moriña 2015:8). This stage is considered difficult for many students, but it may be especially challenging for those with disabilities due to academic and social adjustment issues (Jacklin et al., 2007; Fuller et al., 2009; Fordyce et al., 2013; Hong 2015). The transition process influences the beginning of students' experiences within higher education and sets a tone for involvement that often continues until graduation (Moriña 2015:8). The main source of difficulty in the transition lies in the need for students to adapt to new organisational, educational and social contexts (Thomas 2008). Many students are unaware of which support services are available or what legal rights they possess (Moriña, 2015:9). Kochhar-Bryant, Bassett and Webb (2009) refer to the transition from secondary to post-secondary settings as a "*transition cliff*" for PWDs, during which many may feel disconnected from the university community. This study reported a case of a student who went for two weeks without taking a bath due to an inaccessible shower area. A successful transition during the first year appears to be critical to a student's ultimate retention and success (Goodman and Pascarella, 2006). Tinto (1988) found that the first six weeks are particularly crucial as it is the period when students are most susceptible to feelings of marginalisation. Wessel et al. (2009) also found that the dropout rate was highest for SWDs during the first weeks of the semester.

According to Fox (2011:362), assemblages are elaborated from disparate elements that can be material, psychic, social or abstract/philosophical. The attributes of places and spaces are not fixed; rather, their capacity to attract or repel students is highly dependent on a multiplicity of socio-material relations. The Deleuzean ontology of assemblage invites us to focus on how a body is currently actualised, or what Deleuze calls actual capacities ('What can a body do?') as well as its potential, or what Deleuze refers to as virtual capacities ('What else could a body do?') (see Feely, 2016:870). This illustrates the notion that place/space accessibility is neither a stable nor fixed attribute but is defined by their relations rather than eternal features. Massey (2005:31) asserts that this relationality counters any sense that a space or place may possess inherent or essential attributes that transcend specific circumstances.

In their study in Egypt, Lord and Stein (2018:234) reported that, too often, even in the absence of written policies, informal practices and "general understandings" worked to disadvantage SWDs. This study found that some informal practices and general understandings facilitated place/space accessibility. SWDs at the HEI were not required to join queues across all

campus locations (dining halls, the banking hall, cashier's office, computer centre, etc.). Participants reported that it was generally acceptable to proceed to the front of queues with their helpers. Specific encounters were reported in the dining hall when staff members would invite SWDs to proceed to the front of the queue for priority serving. Although participants noted that there was no policy regarding this practice, participants applauded the practice as facilitating physical accessibility. However, one participant with a physical impairment remarked that they had never skipped the queue, stating that they could stand for an extended period without any problem. This underscores the importance of choice and individualised approach to disability accommodations, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. Participants, however, noted that the practice seemed to benefit students with visible disabilities only and could be problematic for those with invisible disabilities.

11.2 The Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TLA+) in/accessibility assemblage

Findings indicate that a range of socio-material relations affected the capacity of SWDs to access teaching, learning and assessment processes on an equal basis with non-disabled students. Research data indicate that students with visual impairments were disproportionately discriminated against within this assemblage compared to students with physical impairments. Students with visual impairments described the use of projectors by lecturers as discriminatory. The use of projectors resulted in students with visual impairments missing some lectures, as they perceived no reason or benefit to attend such lectures. This constitutes a direct violation of the provisions of the CRPD, which holds that PWDs must have access to communication technologies to allow them to participate fully in society on an equal basis with their non-disabled peers. This is also antithetical to SDG 4 on quality education. Several studies show how reasonable adjustments to the curriculum (flexible timing and methodological strategies) to help students participate in the teaching and learning processes on an equal footing with their peers can contribute to the retention and success of SWDs (Bunbury, 2020; Moriña et al.,2020).

Participants reported that some lecturers posed as a barrier to accessible teaching, learning and assessment processes. This was attributed to their failure, slowness or lack of understanding regarding the learning needs of SWDs. This finding resonates with findings from previous empirical studies, which reported on lecturers acting as a barrier to teaching and learning among SWDs in HEIs (Sharma et al., 2017; Alesech and Nayar, 2019). A study conducted by Hewett et al. (2017) identified teachers as the main obstacle to inclusion, as their attitudes towards PWDs were considered essential to facilitate student learning. A study in a HEI in Israel found that most (82%) of the students indicated that faculty members needed to learn more about disabilities (Kraska, 2003). Fuller et al. (2004) reported that one of the most worrisome problems was the total

unawareness that academics had about the rules that regulate the rights of SWDs. The lack of teaching staff awareness of the different needs of SWDs was reported as a barrier to participation in HEIs (Majoko, 2013). Attitudinal barriers relate to the beliefs and attitudes that teachers may have about educational services for SWDs, including curricular adjustments, interactions with students and participation in institutional and community activities (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022:2). Barriers related to academics may include methodological issues, limited use of new technologies, negative attitudes towards disability, or absence of training in the field of disability (Moriña and Perera, 2020:217). This study found instances where SWDs requested accommodations that sometimes took long or were never granted. SWDs in HEIs continuously request reasonable adjustments, including slides or lecture notes prior to the lecture (Chataika, 2008; Hopkins, 2011), or permission to record lectures. However, Mortimore (2013) notes that this kind of support is not usually provided.

Although academics are often criticised for restricting access to teaching, learning and assessment processes for SWDs, findings from this study suggest that the delays or inability of academics to provide accommodations for SWDs extend beyond mere lack of knowledge and negative attitudes towards SWDs, as widely reported in previous studies. This study found that the HEI was grappling with substantial survival needs, which can divert academics' attention away from providing accommodations to SWDs. Participants reported that the HEI was experiencing regular shortages of running water. Violations of disability rights in Zimbabwe stem not only from negative attitudes held by academics but a manifestation of broader socio-economic challenges that disproportionately affect citizens, including lecturers, such as clean water shortages. However, these issues weigh heavily on SWDs. I concur with Chouinard's (2018:1) assertion that poorer nations of the Global South are particularly disadvantaged in terms of realising disabled people's human rights in practice. This is attributed to their location at the 'global peripheries of law,' where very limited human and financial resources are available to practically realise disability human rights. Chouinard (2018) further argued that living the law in principle and in practice are often fundamentally at odds at the peripheries of law. Arguably, Zimbabwe can be characterised as located on the peripheries of the law, where, despite the existence of several pieces of legislation protecting the rights of PWDs to equitable access to places, products and services, the teaching, learning and assessment processes at the HEI studied remained inherently inaccessible to SWDs.

It emerged that there was no institution-wide policy regarding the provision of accommodations for SWDs at the HEI. This prompted discretionary provisions. For example, participants reported an instance in which the DSS coordinator had to conduct research and compile accommodations practices across HEIs in South African universities regarding the provision of additional time for examinations, and only then did the HEI studied agreed to allow SWDs additional

time. A study conducted in a Spanish HEI reported that one of the most worrisome problems, as indicated by Mukhopadhyay (2011), was the total unawareness that academics have about the rules that regulate the rights of SWDs.

A myriad of substantive issues, particularly poverty and social injustice, needs to be addressed to create a near-level playing field for achieving full accessibility for SWDs. It emerged that the HEI was battling with the problem of electrical power shortages. Participants shared that the institution could experience unscheduled power outages lasting up to three consecutive days. Findings indicate that students with visual impairments relied on mobile smartphones for accessing learning materials. Electric power outages restricted SWDs from accessing learning materials on an equal basis with their non-disabled peers. Lang (2009:266) reminded us that, notwithstanding the CRPD's acknowledged seminal importance, other deep-seated, endemic policy-oriented challenges will need to be addressed for this ideal to become a reality, in this case energy challenges. Global human rights conventions and development frameworks, such as the SDGs, are less likely to bring about real change for SWDs if substantive and contextual issues affecting HEIs remain unresolved, such as electric power shortages. Swarts and Marchetti-Mercer (2018:485) note that we need to know more about how, in conditions of poverty, maximal inclusion can be achieved. Lang (2009) concedes, arguing that if poverty is indeed the primary root cause of the systematic social exclusion and the marginalisation of disabled people, then it is imperative that a more nuanced and in-depth analysis of the poverty/disability nexus is developed. Accordingly, Ghosh et al. (2016) and Grech (2015; 2025), among others, have already started exploring the disability-poverty nexus in the Global South. Lang (2009) cautioned that, unless this is achieved, in many developing countries, the principles and tenets of the convention, for all intents and purposes, stand little chance of being implemented. Chouinard (2018:5) went a step further, arguing that an exclusive focus on human rights can encourage exaggerated confidence in the power of law alone to improve disabled people's lives since it fails to explicitly critique the uneven geography of access to the resources needed to realise such rights.

Some students with visual impairments reported delays or total absence of examination question papers in large font, despite having requested them ahead of time. This is despite the existence of several pieces of national legislation guiding institutions in ensuring accessibility for PWDs in Zimbabwe, including the *National Disability Guidelines on how to provide reasonable accommodation and accessibility to persons with disabilities* of 2024. Prior to the guidelines, Zimbabwe adopted the National Disability Policy (NDP) in 2021, modelled on the CRPD, but, nothing in the NDP was considered to have been implemented by 2025 (see Mashanyare, Garutsa and Odhav, 2025:7). It was found that the HEI was still inherently inaccessible to SWDs. This aligns with Chouinard's (2018) characterisation of 'global peripheries of law' as places that experience severe

disjuncture between what people aspire to achieve through law and what is actually obtained in reality. According to Bickenbach (2003), for many segments of the global disability rights movement, the promise of human rights signifies a potential social, moral and political means to redress socio-structural processes of disablement, where social attitudes and state policy regimes have been identified as the primary barriers to disabled people's participation, representation and inclusion. This argument collides with Meekosha and Soldatic's (2011:1385) assertion that by concentrating on human rights, the problems faced by disabled people may be further exacerbated rather than solved. Drawing on the study's findings, I concur that inaccessibility within the HEI for SWDs unfolds in a context of robust and progressive disability policies and legislative frameworks modelled around the CRPD. I concur with Kennedy's (2002) notion that human rights may be a drop of liberation in an ocean of oppression or a fig leaf of legitimation over an evil collapsing under its own weight. It was recommended in 2019 that the MoPSLD (Zimbabwe) should urgently ensure the enforcement and compliance with policy on accessibility, in public buildings, infrastructure and the public transport system, through establishment of ramps and other mechanisms.[15]

The onset of visual impairment during the course of studies presented a significant shift in a participants' capacity to access teaching, learning and assessment materials. Lord, in a study on HEIs in Egypt, reported an incident involving a student who acquired a visual impairment during the course of their studies. The impairment forced the student to be moved to another faculty to continue their education, ultimately resulting in their dropout from college (see Lord, 2017:11-12). The onset of impairment in these studies sheds light on the state of healthcare delivery in in Zimbabwe and Egypt. In this study, the participant shared his daily struggles with physical pain and how it impacted his studies. The participant explained that he was then limited in terms of going out with his friends. This suggests that a late onset of impairment can significantly impact access to learning processes at HEIs.

The onset of a visual impairment in this study invites us to reconsider everyday practices of categorising bodies into 'impaired/not impaired' and 'disabled/non-disabled.' A Deleuzo-Guattarian understanding of bodies blurs dichotomous boundaries and shifts our focus away from concentrating on the essential attributes of bodies to instead emphasising their relational capacities. Bodies (both human and non-human) do not possess inherent attributes but rather inherent capacities, gained and lost as they enter into relations with other ephemeral bodies. Everything in the Deleuzian universe is considered to be in motion, continually becoming at different rates of speed. Feely (2016) notes that

[15] Thematic Committee Report on Gender and Development on the Plight of People with Disabilities and the Challenges faced by Women and Girls with Disabilities in Zimbabwe, parliament of Zimbabwe, 2019, Parliament of Zimbabwe.

in a universe where everything is continually becoming, it is impossible to speak of the essence of any entity. Even dead human bodies assume new capacities to affect living bodies (see Burr and Fox, 2023) Cluley, Fox and Radnors (2023:10) suggested that assemblages of human and non-human components continually and fluidly reassemble as their constituent elements evolve. Therefore, the categorisation of human bodies as 'impaired' or 'disabled/non-disabled' is a fallacy and merely a product of a 'social engineering project',-discursively reproduced. This study employs the terms 'disabled students' and 'students with disabilities,' while simultaneously problematising these concepts. The 'label' is used solely for scholarly communication, devoid of a signifier-signified relationship. Bodies (human and non-human) are abled or disabled through socio-material relations rather than their essential attributes. The notion that bodies are defined by fixed "essential attributes" and constrained to binary categories yields a fallacious and reductive view of existence. For example, if the student's socio-material relations had been reconfigured, such as by providing access to specialist eye services, their eyesight could have been restored. Findings indicate that there exists neither a unidirectional nor bidirectional movement across human categories, but rather a rhizomatic and chaotic relationship, in which bodies are ceaselessly abled and disabled.

Interactions between students with visual impairments and non-human matter, such as the Chinese and Information and Digital Literacy modules-produced discrimination. SWDs reported spending a significant amount of time completing their academic work. Amnesti et al. (2023) noted that the inclusivity of curricula remains inadequate, as many programmes do not yet incorporate flexible teaching methods or materials that cater to diverse learning needs. A study conducted by Ekelman, Bazyk and Bazyk (2013) found that students considered academic activities stressful and felt they spent most of their time on college work. A study conducted in Israel found that SWDs needed to spend more time working to achieve the same results as students without disabilities (Sachs and Schreuer, 2011). This aligns with earlier findings that disabled students invest more time and effort than their non-disabled peers in coping with challenges (Berggren, Rowan, Bergbäck and Blomberg, 2016; Goode, 2007).

A study conducted at a HEI in Zimbabwe found that the inaccessibility of the curriculum for SWDs was due to the incompetence of lecturers in inclusive education, which hindered their participation in learning (Majoko, 2018:1). Moriña and Perera (2020:216) noted that meeting the needs of SWDs poses a challenge for universities, not only in terms of eliminating architectural barriers but also regarding broader access to the curriculum, teaching, learning and evaluation. SWDs also encounter significant difficulties related to teaching methods, which fail to adapt to their specific needs and characteristics (Moriña and Perera, 2020:217). Liasidou (2014) argues that the ideal situation would be for the working methodology in the classroom to be participatory, flexible and based on universal design for learning (Gradel and Edson, 2010).

Participants reported that they were not consulted regarding module design. A failure to consult with students about their specific needs and, crucially, their suggested solutions, is likely to result in wasted resources (Lord and Stein, 2018). Ensuring equal access to examinations for SWDs indicates not only the need for clear policies on equal access to examinations but also specific guidance and clear directives on accessibility for faculty, alongside good practice with illustrative accommodations for students with different disabilities (Lord and Stein, 2018:238). This should include training for faculty and HEI administration on the duty to make examinations accessible. Regarding the Chinese module, students had to negotiate to be assessed orally. Several studies suggest that lecturers are typically not trained and do not incorporate universal design for learning into their instruction (Davies, Schelly and Spooner, 2013; Black, Weinberg and Brodwin, 2014; Hitch, Macfarlane and Nihill, 2015). Redpath et al. (2013:338) recommend that, wherever possible, assessments should "be designed from the start with the requirements of disabled people in mind." In contrast, in this study, students with visual impairments had to negotiate for assessment accommodations.

It was found that there are no clear policies or guidelines regarding the teaching, learning and assessment of the Information and Digital Literacy module for students with visual impairments. This, combined with the unavailability of specialist lecturers to teach digital literacy skills to visually impaired students, restricts SWDs from accessing the module content on an equal basis with non-disabled students. The denial of access to module information and content, which is available to other students, suggests acts of disability-based discrimination. Arguably, the Information and Digital Literacy skills module is 'leaving every student with a visual impairment behind', contrary to Agenda 2030. The practical nature of the module constrained participation, which was exacerbated by the lack of digital literacy skills among SWDs. Students with visual impairments found themselves caught in a cycle, as the module lecturer referred them to the DSS and the DSS referred them back to the lecturer, who insisted that SWDs seek help from their assistants. This generated feelings of uncertainty and hopelessness among SWDs, particularly those with visual impairments. Inclusive education for SWDs requires access to course curricula, materials and examinations and therefore necessitates their provision in accessible formats (CRPD, 2006, Art. 24). Accordingly, HEIs must implement a system for the timely distribution of accessible formats of materials to SWDs to prevent delayed access that compromises quality inclusive education (CRPD, General Comment No.2, 2014).

Participants who completed high school education at a school for SWDs shared stories of inclusive teaching and learning practices. These memories allowed them to compare accessibility in high school with that in the HEI. They described their high school learning experience as more inclusive and accessible than their current higher education experiences. One participant noted that it was

uncommon for visually impaired students to be late for classes in high school, as they did not need to wait for anyone to guide them to and from classes; the school was accessible and navigable for students with visual impairments. In contrast, the participants observed that it was typical for visually impaired students to be late for lectures at the HEI, because they always had to wait for helpers to accompany them to and from lecture venues. Another participant mentioned that it was common for visually impaired students to read set books in braille during class while sighted students listened, and vice versa. This practice fostered a mutual understanding between the two groups of students regarding different reading methods. However, a participant with a visual impairment described her reading experiences in the HE as unidirectional, where only helpers could read material for them due to the absence of textbooks in braille format.

The practice of SWDs taking examinations in a different venue from their non-disabled peers has produced mixed interpretations among non-disabled students. Liasidou (2014) highlights the issue of disabled students being segregated from their non-disabled peers during exams, concluding that this is a stigmatising form of provision that identifies SWDs as being “different” from their non-disabled peers. Findings from this study indicate positive impacts of isolated venues for SWDs at the HEI. This finding concurs with an earlier study by Kendall (2016), in which participants considered alternative room provision a positive means of support. The DSS venue was regarded as having accessible bathrooms and individual examination cubicles, allowing students to take their examinations without disruptions. These observations are supported by Majoko (2018), who states that special examination arrangements for SWDs, including extra time and separate examination venues, promoted their participation in learning since their individual needs were met. However, this practice was viewed by some students with physical impairments as generating negative assumptions and attitudes about SWDs. This study found that non-disabled students perceived SWDs taking examinations at the DSS as being given an unfair advantage, aided by lecturers and tackling a different and easier set of examination questions. In this study, SWDs, particularly those with visual impairments, were empathetic towards non-disabled students and embraced the idea of taking examinations at the DSS, as they felt that braille accessories (slates and styluses) could be disruptive to non-disabled students. However, three students with physical impairments resisted this idea, arguing that it was self-discriminatory and chose to take their exams alongside their non-disabled peers. According to Riddell (1999), HEIs must address the causes of disability stigma and discrimination among faculty and staff, including misperceptions about disability accommodations as conferring an unfair advantage. HEIs can use the awareness-raising mandate of CRPD Article 8 to break down stigma and foster positive imagery regarding accommodations for SWDs (CRPD, 2006, art. 8). This could involve training for students, faculty, staff, and administrators, particularly according to active learning principles that expose the fallacy of

common stereotypes through dialogue between persons with disabilities and targeted participants (UNCRPD, 2014). A precondition for understanding the duty to provide reasonable accommodations is imparting the sense that accommodations are equalising measures and do not convey extra advantage (CRPD, General Comment No.2, 2014). Lord (2017:24) recommends that SWDs should be empowered to understand their rights and self-advocate, recognising that cultural mores create internalised stigma and support the myth of accommodations being a “favour” rather than a required duty. The above suggests the complexity and unintended consequences of accommodations within HEIs, which, despite their legal and moral soundness, can produce negative emotional and psychological effects on SWDs.

In addition to raising awareness and promoting a positive image regarding accommodations, the decision about where to take the exam must not be dictated to SWDs. SWDs must be allowed to exercise choice and autonomy over whether to make use of available accommodations, as long as these decisions lie within the acceptable examination rules of the HEI. Article 24 of the CRPD (UN, 2006) states that the provision of accommodations should not fundamentally alter the nature of the academic programme. Choice is key, given that some participants in this study expressed disapproval of taking examinations away from their non-disabled peers. Participants were against the idea of lecturers insisting that they should take examinations at the DSS. Choice aligns with Article 24, which recognises effective individualised support measures in environments that maximise academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.

Participants expressed deep concern regarding their examination answer scripts going missing and ultimately receiving missing grades as a result of taking exams at the DSS. Findings suggest that SWDs bear the brunt of institutional failures to properly handle and coordinate the collection of exam answer scripts from the DSS to the respective lecturers for marking. Consequently, SWDs spent a considerable amount of time navigating a physically inaccessible campus as they moved from one office to another to amend grades, a process described as cumbersome.

It is important to note that the process to amend the grade was completed in person, requiring the visually impaired student to take the letter from one office to another. This process took approximately three weeks to complete. This finding aligns with Moriña and Perera’s (2020:223) observation that one of the most commonly identified barriers that students encounter is accessing bureaucracy to present their registration and/or official changes, request scholarships and seek help relative to their needs. One kind of obstacle encountered by SWDs at university is institutional barriers, such as the lack of information about and attention to disability, along with excessive and cumbersome bureaucratic procedures (Moriña and Perera, 2020:217). This

study found that SWDs endlessly engaged in a thousand tiny battles (academic, emotional, financial, physical, etc.) as they navigated HE. Similarly, in a British university, beyond the physical exclusions, students shared negative experiences with university staff when seeking additional support, describing this process as a 'battle' (Wertans and Burch, 2022:15). Findings from this study suggest that these battles have little to do with impairments but rather with the socio-material relations that SWDs interact with on a daily basis in the HEI.

In this study, participants emphasised the need for awareness-raising and training among academics on disability-related issues at the HEI. Similarly, Moriña (2017:10) identified the necessity for faculty training and sensitisation towards disability. Several studies have focused on training university professors in the field of disability (Debrand and Salzberg 2005; Hockings, Brett, and Terentjevs, 2012; Lovet et al. 2015; Moriña, Cortés-Vega, and Molina 2015). Training faculty to respond more appropriately and effectively to the needs of SWDs is considered critical for higher education (Lovet et al., 2015). Some universities have already taken on this challenge, designing awareness training programmes and preparing their academic staff for this undertaking. Noteworthy examples include the Teachability (2002) proposal in Scotland (University of Strathclyde), the materials developed by Healey and colleagues (Healey et al. 2001) in England (University of Gloucestershire), and Debrand and Salzberg's (2005) proposal in the United States (Utah State University). Some studies conclude that the attitudes of faculty members improved after they received training and gained more experience in responding to the needs of SWDs (Lombardi and Murray, 2011; Murray, Lombardi and Wren, 2011; Hong, 2015).

SWDs reported positive experiences with the DSS centre at the HEI studied. They felt that their issues were more effectively addressed at the DSS than by their lecturers, with only a few exceptions. Other studies have reached similar conclusions (Hadjikakou and Hartas, 2008; Riddell and Weedon, 2014; Moriña and Perera, 2020:224; Kendall, 2016). A study in a Spanish HEI found that, regarding the office for SWDs, participants expressed satisfaction with the work performed and the staff attending to their needs (Moriña and Perera, 2020:224). Within the limits of their capabilities, the service was understood to efficiently solve their problems and address the needs of these students. Moreover, the excellent work performed by those in charge of the office was greatly appreciated (Moriña and Perera, 2020:224). Similarly, participants in this study expressed gratitude towards the DSS staff. In another study, participants viewed the support service as a positive resource, highlighting the efficiency of the service in organising specialist equipment, arranging writing support tutors and regularly contacting individuals to check on their well-being while generally providing information (Kendall, 2016).

It emerged from this study that the DSS at the HEI was not fully equipped and lacked sufficient resources to meet the needs of SWDs. This finding is consistent

with that of UNESCO (2023:16), which states that DROs are often underfunded and resourced only to provide minimal, reactive accommodations, making it challenging to ensure that necessary accommodations are implemented effectively. A study conducted at a Spanish HEI reported limited resources to guarantee quality support for SWDs (Moriña and Perera, 2020:224). Some of the accessible PCs at the DSS were reported to be infested with computer viruses, while others had stuck keyboard keys, and some were running on outdated operating systems. The findings indicated that insufficient reading and learning materials in accessible formats, such as Braille, heightened dependence on helpers, thereby compromising the right to independent living and autonomy for SWDs. Moriña and Perera (2020) suggest that disability services should be equipped with both human and material resources, as this lack of resources hinders the effectiveness and responsiveness of such services. However, evidence from this study suggests that fully equipping disability resource offices is not a straightforward process. Participants reported systemic socio-economic challenges that affected the HEI indiscriminately, such as water and power shortages. These challenges have the potential to displace the needs of SWDs from the HEI's agenda. Ultimately, these material conditions weigh heavily on SWDs, compromising equitable and high-quality education (see SDG 4).

Research findings suggest that a range of socio-material relations affected the capacity of SWDs, particularly those with visual impairments, to access teaching, learning and assessment processes at the studied HEI. These factors include, among others, inaccessible teaching methods, negative attitudes, non-use of UD principles for learning, lack of resources at the DSS, and inaccessible formats. The section below now discusses the digital in/accessibility assemblage.

11.3 The Digital (Di+) in/accessibility assemblage

Research findings suggest that the accessibility of digital information and communication technologies within the HEI is socio-materially reproduced. Broadly, digital accessibility means that people with disabilities should be able to access, navigate, perceive and interact with content (Chadli, Gretete and Moumen, 2021:8). Digital accessibility is considered a vast field and some authors have adopted a targeted approach to study and research specific components rather than examining digital accessibility in all its aspects (Chadli, Gretete and Moumen, 2021:8). The study findings reveal a complex range of relations that affect the capacity of SWDs to access information, communication, and technologies on the basis of equal opportunity at the HEI. These relations include digital devices, internet access, digital skills, training and technical support for SWDs and staff, as well as non-disabled students and family members.

The study found that SWDs can have specific sections of physical books scanned for free at the DSS. This enhances equitable access to information for SWDs and

aligns with the provisions of the Marrakesh Treaty, which Zimbabwe ratified on the 12th of September 2019.[16] The conversion of physical copies into electronic versions to enhance access to information also aligns with the provisions of Articles 9 (accessibility) and 24 (education) of the CRPD, which obligates state parties to take appropriate measures to ensure access to information in accessible formats for students with visual impairments. Accessible formats promote independent and lifelong learning among SWDs. It also opens up opportunities to realise a range of other human rights. Additionally, SWDs could have information in soft copies embossed into braille. However, it was reported that the DSS imposed a limit on the number of pages that could be brailed per student. This restriction limited access to information in accessible formats for students who wished to have large amounts of information brailed, which resulted from resource constraints faced by some disability offices in HEIs in the Global South.

A study conducted by Majoko on barriers and facilitators to inclusive education in Zimbabwe revealed that disclosure of a disability led to the needs of SWDs being met by the university. Majoko (2018) notes that a total of 14 participants who disclosed their disabilities upon admission and registration were provided with supportive resources that facilitated their participation in learning. In contrast, in this study, all participants had disclosed their disabilities, which was a prerequisite to accessing the Vice Chancellor's scholarship. However, disclosure did not translate into supportive resources from the HEI to facilitate accessibility on an equal basis with non-disabled students. Beyond disclosing a disability, participants encountered a thousand tiny battles to access support services. They reported insufficient braille paper, broken Dictaphones, malfunctioning PCs, and an indefinite suspension of the laptop loan facility at the DSS. These emerging factors constrained SWDs' access to learning materials and information. Although students were entitled to scan sections of physical books, the process was fraught with obstacles. Participants reported that they had to navigate a bureaucratic system to address copyright issues before they could have a book scanned, and they recommended a more streamlined process to facilitate access.

Digital technology is considered to have the potential to transform what is possible, particularly for PWDs, for whom technologies like the Web offer unprecedented access and empowerment (Horton, 2002). In a study conducted in the UK by Thefanos and Redish (2003), the internet opened up a whole new

[16] The Marrakesh Treaty was adopted on June 27, 2013 in Marrakesh, Morocco. The Treaty aims to facilitate access to published works for persons who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print disabled. The Treaty entered into force, with respect to the Republic of Zimbabwe, on December 12, 2019.

world for PWDs, providing them with a sense of freedom. In the technological field, the virtualisation of education at certain universities is seen to have allowed considerable progress in the inclusion of PWDs within higher education (Morina, Perera, and Melero, 2014), but it has also introduced barriers to computer and web accessibility. Findings from this study suggest that SWDs were discriminated against due to the use of digital technologies within the HEI. Students with visual impairments were particularly discriminated in teaching and learning processes. Although the HEI had a laptop loan facility for SWDs, participants reported that they lacked the digital skills necessary to operate the laptops. Even when they borrowed the laptops, they were operated by their personal assistants to type assignments for them.

In the last two decades, computer literacy has become recognised by policy makers, education experts, and researchers as a central factor in students' academic performance and successful admission (Zeszotarski, 2001; Bretz and Johnson, 2000). The lesser use of computers and information technology by SWDs is alarming and calls for computer-literacy training as a basic entry level to education. Several recommendations to ensure digital accessibility were made about 20 years ago. These include making computer workstations accessible to SWDs, as assistive technology can help reduce, and in some cases, even eliminate the barriers they face in promoting equal opportunities in higher education and employment (Dorwick et al., 2005; Schreuer et al., 2006). HEIs were also urged to invest more resources in accessible computers and in training students and faculty in the various uses of information technology (Sachs and Schreuer et al., 2006).

This study found that some students with visual impairments could not operate a PC, and some could not send an email, suggesting very low use of computers at the HEI. This aligns with an earlier study, which found that SWDs in an HEI in Israel used computers and information technology less than non-disabled students. Conversely, a study conducted in an HEI in the Republic of Ireland found that participants enjoyed discussing technology, working on computers, fixing computers, looking up information, studying on computers, emailing friends, playing games, using YouTube, listening to music, learning new things in life, and checking homework via email (Spassiani et al., 2017:10). The opportunity to use technology in college was perceived as beneficial for learning and other aspects of students' personal lives (Spassiani et al., 2017). In this study, students with visual impairments relied on mobile smartphones to type assignments, and three participants reported not having smartphones. Participants indicated that reading academic material on mobile phones was disruptive due to social media applications. Katseva (2004) asserts that technology is a double-edged sword: it can either empower or disable, which aligns with the experiences of students with visual impairments using mobile smartphones for learning purposes.

In this study, students with visual impairments described the use of projectors and the practically based Digital Literacy Skills module as inherently inaccessible. This led visually impaired students to opt to miss lectures, as they perceived them as non-beneficial. E-learning (including assistive technologies) can liberate, but it can also confine. It confines and hinders freedom when barriers to equity and accessibility are not addressed but ignored (Schmetzke, 2001; McInnery et al., 2003; Banks et al., 2003). Findings from this study confirm Schmetzke's (2001) argument that the very technology that has opened doors to unprecedented access is now at risk of closing them again. Arguably, in the HEI under study, unless technology-driven teaching and learning is matched by digital skills training and access to the internet and devices for SWDs, the HEI risks producing digitally illiterate graduates with disabilities, on a path to further exclusion in the labour market, marked by unprecedented technological advancements. Regarding the transition to employability for university SWDs, Vickerman and Blundell (2010) observed the need to offer students adequate training to navigate work recruitment processes. This suggests the development of personalised tutorials on facing academic insertion and the transition to working life (Morillas, Alvarez and Castro, 2008).

In this study, no participants reported seeking information on the HEI's website. Findings suggest that barriers to digital inaccessibility at the HEI extend beyond gaps in institutional digital infrastructure to reflect macroeconomic challenges. Participants indicated that the HEI could experience unscheduled power cuts lasting up to three days. According to Akpan, Kumba and Olanrewaju (2024:2), the Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority (ZESA), the state-owned national power utility company, has failed to meet electricity demand due to ageing coal-fired power plants that frequently break down and operate inefficiently. This suggests that violations of disability rights within the studied HEI are manifestations of macroeconomic processes, such as power generation. Erratic power supply at the HEI has the potential to disrupt universally designed learning processes, thereby rendering a stable conception of UD problematic, in the Global South, characterised by human and economic resource shortages.

It was found that students with visual impairments at the HEI did not have specialist staff to teach them the Digital Literacy Skills module. They relied on the goodwill of one staff member (Mr Jaws), a braillist with a visual impairment, in the DSS centre. In an Ethiopian university, a lack of funds was reported as a problem. The Centre for Students with Disabilities (CSD) was said to have interrupted ICT training due to budget constraints. The CSD was also reported to have purchased refreshable braille keyboards and a braille printer but was unable to have them fitted because they could not find a technician to operate the technologies (Beyen, 2023).

According to Prado, Gobbo Junior, and Bezerra (2023:2), digital accessibility includes access to quality internet. In this study, participants reported that internet

access was problematic at the HEI. One lecturer, quoted in a televised report produced by a South African television channel, eNCA, during a strike at a HEI in Zimbabwe, stated that internet coverage at that institution was very poor.[17] Findings from this study suggest that the institution had poor internet connectivity, with only isolated areas having stable Wi-Fi coverage. Participants reported that the DSS library had poor Wi-Fi coverage. They also indicated a lack of Wi-Fi coverage in the halls of residence, with some Wi-Fi routers reportedly being vandalised and never replaced. Zimbabwe was ranked in 2025 as the country with the most expensive internet globally, averaging USD $43.75 per 1GB, ahead of the Falkland Islands (USD$40.58).[18] It is unfathomable that while lecturers in Zimbabwe were earning USD 230 per month, 1GB of data cost USD 43.75. One might argue that high internet costs affect all students at the HEI. However, when considering the widely documented disability-poverty relationship, particularly in the Global South, the high cost of mobile data can place internet access beyond the reach of many SWDs. This aligns with Spassiani et al. (2017:4), who assert that although many of the challenges experienced by SWDs can also be faced by all students, it may be more difficult for SWDs to cope with these challenges while also managing their disabilities. This constitutes discrimination and constrains opportunities for SWDs to participate in the digital space. The case of Zimbabwe presents a paradox: one of the world's poorest groups-PWDs-reside in a context with the highest internet costs globally. In this context, high internet costs serve as a barrier to the realisation of Article 9 of the CRPD. This argument dovetails with several studies that contend that despite the political imperative to redress social injustice and exclusion and the development of appropriate policies and legislation to guarantee non-discrimination in HE, SWDs continue to confront barriers to learning (Black, Weinberg and Brodwin, 2015; Couzens et al., 2015; Hopkins, 2011; Morina Diez, Lopez and Molina, 2015; Mutswanga and Mapuranga, 2014; Smith, 2010)-in this case, high internet costs. A study in Israel found that SWDs used computers less for their work and participated less in activities during courses (Sachs and Schreuer, 2011).

Rapid advances in information and communication technology increasingly empower ordinary citizens to make their voices heard and to join with others in speaking against discrimination and oppression by society and its institutions (Mitler, 2016). However, the existence of relevant legislation does not necessarily guarantee that PWDs will benefit (Mittler, 2016). Policy implementation is mediated by a range of complex socio-material relations, which can emerge unpredictably and alter policy implementation trajectories, such as those seen during the Covid-19 pandemic. Feely (2016) noted that assemblages are composed of several other assemblages. Accordingly, findings suggest that a

[17] eNCA, 25 April 2025

[18] BestBroadbandDeals.co.uk

network of informal socio-material relations within the HEI also contributes to the reproduction of inaccessibility.

11.4 The role of informal peer relationships

Findings Findings revealed very strong positive peer relationships among SWDs. Peer relationships appeared to be strongest among a group of students who attended the largest high school for SWDs in Zimbabwe. Participants revealed that students already studying at the HEI were the greatest source of information for those completing their high school and preparing to join the HEI. They provided information regarding application procedures, admissions, registration and course selection through informal contacts such as WhatsApp. Participants noted that students studying at the HEI and familiar with the campus accompanied newcomers to complete application and registration processes as well as to look for accommodation. Throughout the semester, SWDs maintained very strong networks with fellow SWDs. A participant with a visual impairment revealed that, along with other visually impaired classmates, they had nicknamed one of the lecturers *'Now you can see'* for repeatedly using the phrase while presenting on a projector during lectures. This aligns with past studies that similarly indicate that SWDs need to support each other to circumvent individual and systemic barriers to their participation in learning in higher education (Choruma, 2007; Maruzani and Mapuranga, 2016).

Although participants reported isolated negative encounters with non-disabled students, those who had attended mainstream primary and secondary schools described positive experiences with non-disabled students compared to their earlier school experiences. These findings align with Suria (2011) who found that university students have more favourable attitudes than secondary education students; additionally, they are more sensitised if they have previously interacted with peers with disabilities. Similarly, students generally show favourable attitudes, especially in higher courses and in social careers, such as Social Work, Sociology or Teaching (Suria, Bueno and Rosser, 2011). However, there are mixed findings regarding the attitudes of non-disabled students in HE towards disabled students (Quick et al., 2003; Kowalsky and Fresko, 2002; Brewer et al., 2025). A study conducted by Brewer et al. (2025), which analysed posts by SWDs on Reddit, revealed negative attitudes held by non-disabled students towards disabled students, described by Brewer as reflecting avoidance and othering (i.e., not responding, talking, rolling their eyes, or ignoring them). According to Seale (2006:15), the negative responses from non-disabled peers may be explained by the fact that, for many, they have had little contact with disabled students in their primary and secondary schools. The diversity of the student population at the HEI, with students coming from mainstream schools, some from schools for students with disabilities, and even mixed schools, will always produce a thousand in/accessibility encounters for SWDs. Findings suggest that, aside from isolated negative encounters, peer relationships with non-disabled students

significantly enhance the capacities of SWDs to navigate physical spaces and access learning materials. Participants reported random encounters with non-disabled students at crossroads, printing areas and gym floors, resulting in students exchanging phone numbers, with some non-disabled students becoming registered helpers for SWDs.

11.5 The Extracurricular Activities (ECAs+) in/accessibility assemblage

Findings suggest that the HE policies enabled SWDs to access ECAs on an equal basis with their non-disabled peers. Similarly, a study in a HEI in the Republic of Ireland found that SWDs reported several benefits from access to ECAs. These included getting healthier, meeting personal goals such as fitness and opportunities for competition and volunteering (Spassiani et al., 2017:10). ECAs contributed to the full development of SWDs, in line with the provisions of the CRPD.

To make extracurricular activities accessible to visually impaired students, participants applauded the HEI for providing personal helpers to act as guides for athletes in the T11 and T12 classifications during Paralympic games as they competed with other universities. The HEI provided free hotel accommodation and daily allowances to both athletes and their guides whenever they travelled to compete in the annual ZUSA and ZITISU Paralympic games. Although participants reported occasional delays in the payment of daily living allowances, they perceived the university as promoting access to extracurricular activities among SWDs. Participants also reported challenges with central helpers; despite having their hotel accommodation paid for, these helpers were reluctant to assist athletes during events. However, participants criticised the imposition of a cap on the number of SWDs and helpers who could attend and participate in the annual Paralympic games. This suggests that budgetary constraints can affect the capacity of SWDs access to ECAs in HEIs.

The findings suggest a strong connection between the place/space and the extracurricular assemblages. Inaccessible places/spaces restricted access to both indoor and outdoor extracurricular activities. Participants reported that the location of the Student Services negatively impacted the capacity of students who used wheelchairs and prosthetic legs to access it. The Student Services department was located on the second floor and was only reachable via stairs. This finding aligns with a study conducted in the UK by Chipchase et al. (2023:2826), which involved twenty undergraduate SWDs and found that barriers were experienced in accessing university careers services, social activities, societies and sports. In their study, participants reported mobility issues that hindered their access to the on-campus nightclub, as the lift was out of service during certain hours, forcing them to navigate the stairs. Furthermore, in this study, participants reported incidents of falling into open drains on their way to the sports field. They also noted inaccessible sports facilities, such as the

university gym and the wheelchair-inaccessible basketball court. It was also reported that some common rooms, where students gathered to watch international football matches such as Bundesliga, LaLiga, and the English Premier League, were inaccessible to wheelchair users. These present barriers for SWDs in accessing and experiencing ECAs on an equal basis with their non-disabled peers.

In this study, students who used wheelchairs reported problems accessing the campus gym facility. Accessible entrances to the gym were locked, and gym staff insisted on lifting students who used wheelchairs into the gym, which some students refused. Similarly, a participant in a study conducted in the UK coined the term “backdoor accessibility” to describe how accessibility measures were often an add-on to pre-existing inaccessible structures (Wertans and Burch, 2022:12). In the UK study, participants described feeling held back from fully engaging in university life and unable to partake in wider activities for wellbeing, enjoyment and bond-building that their able-bodied peers enjoyed. Some disabled students noted the absence of provisions, including accessible sporting and exercise facilities (Wertans and Burch, 2022:12). These corresponding findings from Zimbabwe and the UK regarding physically inaccessible sports and exercise facilities available to the HEI community suggest that the inaccessibility of ECAs for SWDs is a widespread issue in HEIs, along the Global North/South continuum.

The study findings suggest that some SWDs, especially first-year students, had to sacrifice certain rights in order to access others. Some students had to choose between participating in ECAs and completing academic tasks. A study by Sachs and Schreuer (2011) compared how HE students with various disabilities (n=170) performed academically and engaged in college life compared to students without disabilities (n=156). They found that SWDs needed to spend more time working to achieve the same results as students without disabilities. SWDs were reported to participate in class activities and extracurricular activities like music and art less than students without disabilities (Sachs and Schreuer, 2011).

Findings from this study suggest that access to ECAs is co-produced by a range of socio-material relations that either facilitate or constrain accessibility. The HEI studied had various formal material-discursive provisions to enhance access to ECAs, both within and beyond the HEI. The HEI facilitated access to the annual ZUSA and ZITISU Paralympic Games, which are equivalent to the mainstream annual ZUSA and ZITISU games, illustrating equal opportunity as enshrined in the CRPD. The annual Paralympic Games were formally recognised under the HEI’s sports calendar. Additionally, the HEI provided hotel accommodations, daily living allowances and transportation (buses) to and from sports events held outside the institution. Furthermore, the HEI supplied athletes with disabilities with guides to ensure their access to and participation in various sports disciplines, such as athletics for students with visual impairments, goalball, and

shot put. However, several obstacles were reported that constrained access to ECAs, such as inaccessible buses, delayed disbursements of daily living allowances, and issues with personal helpers who were unwilling to assist athletes during sporting events, despite the HEI covering their hotel accommodations and daily living allowances.

Having discussed how in/accessibility is reproduced within the HEI and how it affected the capacities of SWDs to participate on an equal basis with others, empirical findings suggest the potential for a Relational Collaborative Model to explore accessibility in resource-poor contexts. Drawing from the findings, I will now discuss two possible implications of the research findings (Research Question 3). Firstly, I suggest that the research findings have the potential to advance our understanding of how accessibility can be produced differently in contexts of dynamic and ever-shifting socio-material relations in the Global South. In this sense, I propose an equally malleable and fluid model, the Relational Collaborative Model of Accessibility. Secondly, it is suggested that the empirical findings have the potential to enable us to rethink the principles of Universal Design (UD) in resource-poor contexts.

11.6 The Relational Collaborative Model (RCM) of accessibility

Research findings have the potential to orient our thoughts towards a relational conception of accessibility and inaccessibility within HEIs, through the *Relational Collaborative Model (RCM)* of accessibility. The RCM is informed by multiple sources, primarily the empirical findings of this study. It is also inspired by the seminal philosophical work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and several contemporary social scientists who have experimented with their concepts (see Feely, 2016; Fox and Alldred, 2013; 2015; 2022; DeLanda, 2006; Potts, 2004; Goodley, 2007). The model also incorporates Irving Zola's (1989:1) argument for more universal policies that recognise that the entire population is "at risk" of the concomitants of chronic illness and disability. Furthermore, it draws on Ferri's (2024) notion of "accessibility as collaboration and care."

The Relational Collaborative Model (RCM) of accessibility is based on four philosophical assumptions drawn from Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Firstly, accessibility in the HEI emerges from *assemblages* of heterogeneous socio-material relations that assembled around SWDs in specific contexts. Secondly, SWDs and all other material, social and abstract entities are *relational*; they have no ontological status or integrity other than that produced through their relationships with other similarly ephemeral bodies, things and ideas (Deleuze, 1988:123; Deleuze and Guattari, 1988:261). Thirdly, assemblages develop in unpredictable ways around actions and events (Bennett, 2005:445; Deleuze and Guattari, 1988:88), 'in a kind of chaotic network of habitual and non-habitual connections, always in flux, always reassembling in different ways' (Potts, 2004:19), drawn together by their *capacities* to affect or be affected (Deleuze, 1988:124). Finally, these capacities are not inherent but emerge relationally when

one body or thing assembles with other bodies, things, or abstractions-which Deleuze calls *relations* (Deleuze, 1988:126). Any entity's capacities will change as they enter into and out of relations with other entities (Feely, 2020:178). Accordingly, the in/capacity to access places/spaces, products, services and facilities within the HEI is neither an inherent characteristic of SWDs nor of places, products and services, but emerges from relations with non-disabled students, lecturers, ancillary staff and a complex range of material, social and abstract entities.

Deleuze and Guattari's ontology of assemblages has been described as 'flat' or 'monist' (rather than 'dualist'), rejecting differences between 'natural' and 'cultural' realms, human and non-human, structure/agency, reason/emotion, animate/inanimate and-perhaps most significantly-between mind and matter (Van der Tuin and Dolphijn, 2010). A monist ontology also marks a refocusing of attention away from hierarchies, systems, or structures beyond or beneath the surface of everyday activities and interactions (Fox and Alldred, 2022:626). Spaces, including university campuses, are organised in hierarchical and categorical ways that shape the extent to which SWDs can access, participate and succeed within HEIs (Wertans and Burch, 2022:15). Accordingly, binaries and hierarchies are collapsed and accessibility ceases to be the duty of particular individuals and entities, such as civil engineers, architects, builders, product and service designers, public policy makers, human rights and equality commissions, lecturers, EDI offices, DPOs, activists, etc., on one hand and SWDs on the other. In the RCM, meaningful accessibility is understood to cut across dualisms and emerge from relational, fluid, and infinite socio-material relations. Accessibility is understood as horizontally, rather than hierarchically, reproduced. All entities and bodies (human and non-human) in the HEI, such as a non-disabled student sitting next to a SWD have a relational capacity to enhance or restrict accessibility. By rejecting dualisms, the RCM "opens up the possibility to explore how things other than humans can be social 'agents', making things happen" (Fox and Alldred, 2022:626)By collapsing dualisms and suggesting a horizontal approach , the RCM does not seek to exonerate key entities, such as UN agencies, or HEIs, from decisively championing and addressing the socio-material conditions that produces inaccessibility for SWDs. Rather, the model recognises the crucial role played by official structures but equally acknowledges that in/accessibility is reproduced from everyday mundane socio-material relations that usually go unnoticed by formal structures such as EDI officers, human rights commissioners, disability activists and universal designers. By blurring dualisms, the RCM frees the duty to ensure accessibility from formally established structures, making accessibility a citizen responsibility, recognising that the entire population is "at risk" of the concomitants of chronic illness and disability (see Zola, 1989:1).

Following Zola's (1989:421) argument that a universal policy toward disability is not only a concern but in the interests of an entire society, the RCM proposes

that in/accessibility is not only a question for SWDs, lecturers and Disability Support Centres, but is in the best interest of the entire HEI. What such a HEI establishment might look like was examined by the Swedish Secretariat for Future Studies (1982) in a document aptly called *A Caring Society*. This report, while recognising each person's uniqueness, acknowledged their interdependence and promulgated a concept of special needs, which is not based on breaking the rules of order for the few but on designing a flexible world for the many (Lifchez, 1987; Orleans and Orleans 1985). The model is further scaffolded on the notion that disability is part of the human condition (World Report on Disability, 2011:3), hence requiring a relational and collaborative approach. The RCM assumes that meaningful accessibility emerges from the collective socio-material relations within HEIs

The RCM is also anchored in Ferri's (2024:14) notion of "*accessibility as collaborative and iterative*." Ferri (2024) noted that a collaborative and iterative approach to accessibility arises from a partnership with PWDs and involves an attitude of care towards anyone using or engaging with a particular good, service or environment. Accordingly, this RCM suggests that everyone must exercise care, empathy and compassion towards SWDs, facilitating equitable access to goods, products, services, and facilities that are open or provided to all students in a manner that ensures respect for dignity. Zola (1989:422) reminds us that "what is done in the name of disability today will have meaning for all of society's tomorrows." Without a collaborative and iterative approach (Ferri, 2024), we risk further "creating and perpetuating a segregated, separate but unequal society, a society inappropriate to a larger and older 'changing needs' population" (Zola, 1989:401). A relational and collaborative model also aligns with the assertion that:

> *"Disability is part of the human condition. Almost everyone will be temporarily or permanently impaired at some point in life, and those who survive to old age will experience increasing difficulties in functioning"* (World Report on Disability, 2011:3)

The RCM is particularly important in resource-contexts. State parties to the CRPD in the Global South are often perceived as lacking the human and financial resources to fully implement the CRPD. Findings from this study indicate that there are significant shortages of financial resources at the DSS, which compromise dignified and equitable accessibility. However, the study also found compelling evidence of informal socio-material relationships that co-produce accessibility. The findings suggest that with a strong awareness drive, there is great potential for informal networks to produce accessibility in a context where poverty indiscriminately affects a significant proportion of the university environment, including non-disabled students and staff. Furthermore, the RCM holds potential in the Global South, where corruption and weak human rights institutions struggle to enforce compliance with non-discrimination laws, such as

the DPA in Zimbabwe. The RCM can facilitate horizontal interactions between students with and without disabilities, helping to raise awareness about disability and impairments in HEIs. However, one limitation of the RCM is its dependence on disability awareness initiatives within HEIs. The model also presupposes fully functioning institutions, such as Human Rights and Equality Commissions.

11.7 A fluid conceptualisation of Universal Design (UD) approach

Study findings indicate that universally designed places/spaces, products, services and facilities did not guarantee automatic accessibility for SWDs. Participants reported instances of wide and accessible entrances to the dining halls and campus gym, which were permanently locked. This suggests a socio-material entanglement of the physical world and abstractions, co-producing inaccessibility. In other words, while universal design is essential, it is not a panacea for achieving full, consistent and uninterrupted accessibility in HEIs. What a universally designed place, product, service, or facility can achieve is relationally and contextually determined. Findings indicate that there are no stable beginnings and exit points in achieving accessibility. Instead there are rhizomatic, relational connections, disconnections and reconnections, co-producing in/accessibility. The findings have the potential to support a fluid and non-static conception of universally designed places/spaces, products, services and facilities.

An in-depth arts-based research study by Ferri (2024) employed qualitative methods focusing on the creative process through disabled people's experiences of arts participation. It was reported that accessibility implies an adaptation, and to a certain extent a re-shaping, of a good, service or environment to meet a range of different needs, and it entails respect for those diverse needs and for diversity more generally. Ferri (2024) further argued that different layers (or additions) are required to render something accessible, thereby making accessibility inherently and fundamentally complex. Ferri (2024) found that accessibility can imply a change inherent to the actual performance (and, more broadly, to any good or service), sometimes to something as fundamental as the dancing style. I concur with Ferri's (2024:14) assertion that accessibility is an iterative layered process. It entailed several added elements to the actual performance (dancing), which needed to be carried out iteratively from the beginning, becoming part of the overall artistic experience, but that could (at least in principle) be disentangled from it. They focused on 'layering' as key to making the performance accessible and indicated that they added and embedded '...the extra layers... into the creative process.' One participant in their focus group mentioned that accessibility was reached through a 'compromise in flex and stretch' (Ferri, 2024:13). I argue that universally designed places/spaces, products, services, facilities and activities must be conceived as fluid and amenable to infinite adjustment, readjustment and layering to meet the evolving needs and diversity of society. Conceiving universally designed products and

services as fixed and closed totalities can stifle creativity and innovation amid evolving human diversity and is prone to exclude emerging and rare impairments. Therefore, places/spaces, products, services, and facilities open to all at the HEI must be conceived not as closed totalities but as amenable to continuous improvement and refinement as more information becomes available, particularly from user feedback and co-production with SWDs, non-disabled students, academics and DROs. Having discussed the potential of empirical findings towards the reconceptualisation of in/accessibility and UD principles within resource-poor contexts in the Global South (Research Question 3), I will now address Research Questions 1, 2, and 4 in the sections below.

11.8 Answering research questions

In this section, I provide direct answers to the study's research questions.

1. How is in/accessibility reproduced in a HEI in a resource-poor context in the Global South?

The research question aimed to map out how in/accessibility is reproduced within a higher education assemblage in a resource-poor context in the Global South. I was interested in mapping out the range of socio-material relations that co-produced in/accessibility within the HEI. Mapping the components that co-produce a particular phenomenon aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'agencement' or assemblage. Deleuzian ontology is uninterested in what bodies, things, ideas, or social institutions 'are'; instead, it sees them as relations that interact (Deleuze, 1990) to produce capacities for action and desire: 'what a body can do', in this case, what inhabitants of the HEI can do. I was not interested in individual student's experiences, but in how assemblage components relationally co-produced in/accessibility for SWDs

Through an iterative process of reading and rereading interview transcripts and images, particular in/accessibility encounters started to glow (see Mac Lure, 2017), and were coded, and in some cases uncoded, as the data analysis process intensified. Each in/accessibility event was explored to map out the assembled socio-material components. The data analysis process of 'assemblage component accounting' enabled the researcher to pay equal attention to both human and non-human matter and how they enhanced or constrained accessibility for SWDs. It was found that in/accessibility was an unstable phenomenon, reproduced from dynamic and ever-shifting socio-material relations across four overlapping domains or assemblages: place/space, teaching, learning, and assessment, digital and ECAs. The range of socio-material relations co-producing in/accessibility in each assemblage is presented in this thesis as typologies. Socio-material components in each typology had equal capacities to produce in/accessibility. Shifting socio-material relations within the HEI included unscheduled power cuts, sometimes lasting for three days. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1988:400), affects within assemblages

are ‘projectiles, just like weapons’ that produce further affects within assemblages, producing the capacities of bodies to do, desire, and feel, which in turn produces subsequent affective flows. Because one affect can produce more than one capacity, affects flow ‘rhizomically’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988:7), branching, reversing flows, coalescing and rupturing. Accordingly, electrical power cuts produced multiple incapacities at the HEI. They led to water shortages on campus and restricted access to electronic information, thereby negatively affecting teaching and learning processes. Discourse regarding mischief among students also contributed to the inaccessibility of various campus spaces, such as the gym, dining hall and common rooms. In/accessibility also emerged from both formal and informal socio-material relations, including friends, classmates, course mates and random students. It is important to note that neither human nor non-human matter, formal nor informal, were more significant than the other in the production of in/accessibility.

2. How is in/accessibility reproduced for SWDS?

This question aimed to explore how in/accessibility is reproduced for SWDs within the HEI. A range of socio-material relations, along with formal and informal relations, co-produced in/accessibility encounters for SWDs. Regarding the former, the HEI, through the scholarship scheme, enhanced access to HE, providing free campus accommodation and free meals for SWDs. Additionally, the HEI offered registered SWDs personal student helpers, should they require them, as well as central helpers. It was noted that personal student helpers played a role in co-producing in/accessibility across the four assemblages. However, instances were reported where both personal and central helpers facilitated and restricted access to places/spaces, learning and ECAs. This finding calls into question essentialist and binary approaches that frame accessibility along barrier-facilitator binaries. The HEI’s policy regarding the allocation of personal helpers for SWDs contributed to the ‘formal production’ of inaccessibility. It was found that students could not avail themselves of the personal helper service until the second semester of their first year. This meant that during the first semester, students had to rely entirely on the goodwill of friends, classmates and random students to access places, facilities and services. During that period, it was reported that students could miss lectures and meals. One first-year student mentioned in a FGD that they knew a particular 1st year undergraduate student who had spent two weeks without taking a bath due to the inaccessibility of the shower facility. It emerged that some reasonable accommodations at the HEI, such as taking exams at the DSS centre, led to the widespread missing of examination scripts and the resultant missing and incorrect grades. This was reported to be a result of a lack of a proper system for the collection and submission of students’ scripts from the DSS to the respective centres. The loss of scripts and missing marks created an additional layer of barriers for students, who had to navigate the inaccessible campus spaces to track and amend their grades. This process could only be completed manually

and in-person. Although SWDs were eligible to borrow laptops under the DSS loan facility, it was reported that at the time of data collection in 2024, the loan facility had been discontinued for a period of two weeks due to some students not returning borrowed laptops. This was described by a participant as a discriminatory move and homogeneous treatment of SWDs. This illustrates the socio-material entanglements and unpredictability in the production of digital in/accessibility at the HEI. Some modules, particularly the Chinese and Digital Skills and Literacy modules, were reported to be inaccessible for students with visual impairments. This foreclosed opportunities for equal participation in education, as enshrined in the CRPD. This is also an antithesis to the Agenda 2030 mantra: “Leaving no one behind.”

3. How do the empirical findings advance the conceptualisation of in/accessibility in a HEI in a resource-poor context?

This question was addressed through the suggestion of the Relational Collaborative Model (RCM) of accessibility presented above. Drawing on the research findings, along with Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of assemblage, Ferri (2024) and Irving Zola (1989) propose that the RCM provides a fluid approach to accessibility, particularly in the contexts of the Global South, characterised by ever-shifting socio-material conditions. The empirical findings form the basis for rethinking Universal Design (UD) within the contexts of the Global South.

4. How can the socio-material relations within the HEI be reconfigured to improve accessibility for SWDs?

This question was addressed in Chapter 10. The chapter presented suggestions for reconfiguring the HEI’s socio-material assemblage components based on participants’ suggestions. These suggestions are further elucidated in the next chapter, under the section on policy and practice recommendations.

CHAPTER 12

(In)conclusion

> *"Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for? These are totally useless questions. Making a clean slate, starting or beginning again from ground zero, seeking a beginning or a foundation-all imply a false conception of voyage and movement (a conception that is methodical, pedagogical, initiatory, symbolic...)".* (Deleuze an Guattari, 1987:25).

12.0 Introduction

In this thesis, I experimented with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblage analysis to explore how in/accessibility is reproduced in a HEI. Empirical data for the study was gathered through an experimental new materialist informed methodological inquiry. Following MacLure's (2010, 2017) concept and approach to data analysis of tuning into 'data hotspots' or 'data that glows', I experimented with 'assemblage component accounting', as the analytical lens. In this case, 'data hotspots' emerging from the iterative reading of interview transcripts and images were dredged to map out assembled socio-material components, along with the resultant in/capacities produced on SWDs. The iterative reading of interview of transcripts and images produced four overlapping in/accessibility assemblages: place/space, teaching, learning and assessment, digital and ECAs assemblages. Study findings revealed that in/accessibility was ceaselessly co-produced from complex assemblages of seemingly discrete and stable yet ever-shifting socio-material and dynamic components that either enhanced or restricted equitable access to spaces/places, products, services and facilities open to everyone at the HEI.. Additionally, findings indicate that in/accessibility was co-produced from both formal and informal socio-material components. In some instances, informal socio-material relations were powerful and could overshadow formally established components, such as student helpers in the production of accessibility. In such cases, some SWDs could lead independent lives, without their formally registered helper. Findings also indicate a non-binary production of accessibility and inaccessibility. Accessibility and inaccessibility were not necessarily produced from fixed or stable features of specific spaces, products, services and facilities. For example, some visibly accessible places/spaces, could be rendered both accessible and inaccessible depending on the assembled socio-material components within particular contexts, such as cars blocking walkways. In the digital assemblage, the laptop loan facility was reported discontinued, thereby producing digital inaccessibility for SWDs. Additionally, unscheduled regular electrical power cuts and water shortages co-produced place/space inaccessibility. Although water shortages affected everyone at the HEI, data suggest that it disproportionately affected students who use wheelchairs, as they were forced to navigate inaccessible physical spaces

in search of clean water. Even after finding clean water, some shower spaces were found to be inaccessible. Overwhelming evidence indicate issues with examination scripts of SWDs going missing which resulted in missing grades due to taking examinations at a separate venue. This produced unequal and unfair access to grades each time results were released, which created additional work for SWDs to follow up and rectify grades while traversing a physically inaccessible HEI environment and a lengthy bureaucratic examination system. It was found that the examination office was in the basement and could only be accessed by stairs, illustrating how the place/space and the teaching, learning and assessment assemblages overlap, intersect, leak and bleed into one another (see Feely, 2015).

In this chapter, I hesitate to provide a conclusion of the thesis, bearing in mind Deleuze and Guattari's rejection of neat beginnings and neat endings. For Deleuze and Guattari, they imply a false conception of movement. Instead, they suggested a different way of travelling and moving, of coming and going, rather than starting and finishing. I also draw upon Feely's (2016) notion that meanwhile, the Deleuzo-Guattarian methodology of assemblage analysis potentially allows disability scholars to create ever more complex and in-depth, but always incomplete analyses of disability-related issues. In light of the above arguments, I present an (in)conclusion of the thesis, suggesting that this thesis always remain in an infinite state of flux, never to be defined by essential and immutable features, but rather by its capacities. As such, I will pause at this stage by discussing, instead the potential capacities of the research findings presented, along with some practical and policy recommendations for improving access for SWDs in HEI in resource poor contexts. I will end by discussing some limitations of the study, along with potential areas for future research.

Drawing on Deleuze's terminology of 'actual capacities', I argue that the 'body' of research findings presented in this thesis provides an insight into how in/accessibility is reproduced in HEI in resource poor contexts. This is something that the 'body' of research findings presented so far can do at present (actual capacities). Besides actual capacities, we can also talk of what Deleuze terms virtual/potential capacities ('What else could a body do?'). Following this idea, in the sections below, I discuss four virtual/potential capacities of the 'body' of research findings from this study. Before delving into the four potential capacities, the concept of virtual/potential capacities is discussed.

12.1 Virtual/potential capacities of a 'body' of research findings

In Deleuze's sense, a body's capacities (What it can do) are infinitely ongoing. In this study, I conceive the research findings as a 'body' of knowledge generated from a social inquiry. Accordingly, what a 'body' of empirical research findings can do is socio-materially determined hence dynamic and infinite. For example, a body of empirical research findings, can support the development of new

theories or models, can be drawn upon to dispute/contest or improve existing theories/models, build new concepts, clarify existing concepts, inform policy, improve service provision, support activism, support academic promotion etc. Empirical research findings can be used to accomplish an infinite list of tasks, some of which can last beyond the lives of researchers. It is therefore difficult to pinpoint all the potential capacities of research findings presented in this study. In addition to the Relational Collaborative model proposed in this study, I will discuss two further virtual/potential capacities that glow at this point. Findings from this study have the potential to reorient our thoughts away from fixed and stable, towards a fluid and non-static conception of universally designed places/spaces, products, goods, services and facilities in HEIs. Findings also have the potential to shape future scholarly debates and activism around the severe accessibility policy-practice dissonance between article 9 (accessibility) of the CRPD and everyday lived realities of SWDs in HEIs in resource-poor contexts, such as Zimbabwe. I would like to reiterate that these are just speculative ideas, and subject to emerging socio-material conditions of the day. The three capacities are further elaborated in the section below.

12.1.2 In/accessibility as a highly contingent and socio-materially co-produced phenomena

The study findings have the potential to reorient thought towards the conception of in/accessibility for SWDs in HEIs as highly contingent, non-linear and an emergent phenomenon. Findings indicate that in/accessibility emerges from heterogeneous and emergent socio-material components that assemble, disassemble and reassemble around SWDs, in particular contexts to either enhance or restrict access to places/spaces, products, services and facilities open to all members within the HEI. Scholars recognise that accessibility is complex (see Ferri, 2024), not only legally, but also practically (e.g., Lawson 2018). Kendall (2016:3) noted that supporting all students is a complex issue for all universities and requires further research to understand the students' needs. In/accessibility is particularly complex and emergent in Global South contexts, particularly in Zimbabwe, which is typified by constant unscheduled electrical power cuts, unreliable internet, enduring negative attitudes towards disabled people, high mobile data costs, poverty etc. Findings illustrate that achieving comprehensive accessibility is therefore extremely complex and contingent in contexts with poor human rights enforcement practices, resulting in unmet accessibility standards. This gives rise to ad-hoc, sporadic and reactive accessibility practices.

12.1.2 Severe accessibility policy-reality dissonance

Insights from this study have the potential to contribute to and inform future scholarly debates and disability activism particularly regarding the CRPD-Global South nexus. Findings indicate a severe accessibility policy-reality dissonance. Notwithstanding progressive institutional provisions to enhance accessibility for

SWDs at the HEI, participants reported a series of inaccessibility encounters across campus places/spaces, teaching, learning and assessment, digital and ECAs.

Several studies have reported on the disability policy practice gap. Garcia Iriarte, Mc Conkey and Gilligan (2016:1) noted that the words on the pages of the CRPD represent intentions and they do not always translate into actions. Some studies concluded that when it comes to the inclusion of PWDs, it appears on paper, but in practice, it is rarely applied (Moswela and Mukhopadhyay, 2011; Riddell et al., 2005). Countries where policy provisions do not always translate into practice are amply analysed by Chouinard (2018:2) and described as lying in the 'peripheries of law'. These are contexts where there exist severe disjunctures between what people aspire to achieve through law and what is actually achieved in practice. Such countries are considered to lack financial and human resources to translate human rights laws into practice. Peripheries of law are considered to be sustained by 'shadow citizens' who lack the means (e.g., financial, insufficient access to legal expertise and to mobility and other aids) to claim those rights in practice (Chouinard, 2018:2).

Findings indicate that deep-seated systemic socio-material conditions, particularly poverty and the broader human rights context indiscriminately affect citizens in Zimbabwe. However, empirical findings indicate that these conditions weigh heavily on PWDs. Moswela and Mukhopadhyay (2011) stated that SWDs faces additional barriers and more challenges than the rest of the student body. They are backed by a society that although it promotes legislation favouring the inclusion of SWDs, in practice, does not follow through these principles. PWDs and their families consistently report higher rates of income poverty than other families (Ewan, 1999; Baron and Ncube, 2010; Emmerson and Hatton, 2009; Fujiura and Yamaki, 2000). These families also report less income, saving assets and possessions compared to households that do not include PWDs (Eide and Loeb, 2006; Parish, Rose and Swaine, 2010). In this study, inaccessible shower facilities coupled with no running water across campus presented an extra layer of barriers for SWDs. SWDs had to consistently seek for guides to fetch water from outside of the hostel using water buckets. First year students were severely impacted as they had to rely exclusively on the good will of students with and without disabilities to access basic facilities and services, such as shower facilities and toilets. Relying on random students to access shower facilities has the potential to compromise the right to privacy by SWDs. This illustrates the relational nature of social production, revealing connections across disparate components, in this case, the unavailability of running water and the breach of privacy. These relations violate the right to lead dignified lives among SWDs.

In addition to ratifying the CRPD in 2013, Zimbabwe adopted the National Disability Policy of 2021. The policy has very clear provisions on accessibility in respect of transport, information, education and public buildings and

infrastructure. It also calls for the development of accessibility standards and a national accessibility, along with some benchmarks, budgets and timeframes. Through the policy, the country envisages full accessibility by 2030. However, everyday accessibility encounters of SWDs at the HEI speak otherwise. Access to university for PWDs is a legally recognised right (Yssel et al, 2016). However, there are still legal gaps in its implementation, contributing to the argument that the path of these institutions towards full inclusion is increasingly long (Alcain and Medina, 2017). Findings from a UK study, found that in spite of relevant legislation, SWDs are still experiencing barriers to participation and inclusion (Kendall, 2017). A study by Kendall (2016) in the UK found that despite relevant legislation and widening participation, very little has changed for SWDs. If very little has changed in UK HEIs, arguably very little has changed in resource poor contexts such as Zimbabwe.

In addition to regular clean running water shortage across the campus, it was found that the HEI experienced regular unscheduled electric power cuts. Findings indicate that SWDs at the HEI were preoccupied with everyday survival and substantive needs such as access to electrical power and clean water. Any discussion on the implementation of the CRPD in Zimbabwe devoid of everyday substantive needs within HEIs such as water and electricity run the risk of missing the opportunity to engage with the nuances of disability and impairment in HEIs. I concur with Swarts and Maria's (2018) assertion that we need to know more about how, in conditions of poverty, maximal inclusion can be achieved. Although Zimbabwe is making remarkable progress adopting and amending existing laws that constitute discrimination against PWDs, arguably, the human rights agenda to disability remains largely an empty rhetoric and SWDs are yet to experience HE on an equal basis with their non-disabled peers. Most key informants in the CSA report described accessibility laws in Zimbabwe as mainly cosmetic since they are not prescriptive (UNESCO, 2022:28).

The human rights agenda rhetoric in Zimbabwe continues to be driven by influential UN agencies, who are considered to exclude disabled people from disability policy making process, contrary to Article 4 (3) of the CRPD (Bengano, Mtetwa, Garcia Iriarte, forthcoming). As if this is not enough, the Comprehensive Situational Analysis study reported that the physical infrastructure at some UN agency buildings were not accessible to PWDs. Further, inaccessibility was also found in the websites and IEC materials produced by UN Agencies (UNESCO, 2022:59). This constitutes UN-driven discrimination against PWDs. Since the UN is taking the lead in respect of disability inclusion, the UN through its United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS) must lead from the front by walking the talk and become a best practice example for other organisations (UNESCO, 2022:59).

Notwithstanding socio-material components, both formal and informal, such as helpers reproducing accessibility in the HEI, the overall experiences of SWDs in

the HEI studied were aptly captured by a visually impaired student, during a walking interview, noting that: *"We Are Just Accommodated but Not Included."* (P9). Similarly, a participant in a study conducted at a HEI in UK by Wertans and Burch (2022:12) noted that HE experiences constantly reminded them that HE was not built for them. These findings indicate that the physical presence of SWDs in HEIs does not necessarily equate to inclusion. This is particularly important in light of the growing corpus of information acknowledging the rising numbers of SWDs in HEIs in many countries (Seale, Geogerson, Mamas and Swain, 2015; Veitch, Strehlow and Boyd, 2018; Wilson et al., 2016; Wolman, Suarez, Figueroa, and Harris-Looby, 2004; Rath; Spassian et al., 2017:2). While the number of disabled students entering HE continues to increase, Wertans and Burch's (2022:15) findings highlight that being granted access to HE is not enough. This experience can be characterised by the need to actively navigate and negotiate the spaces of HE as opposed to non-disabled students who are often granted the privilege to simply be a university student (Wertans and Burch, 2022:15).

In 2024, the government of Zimbabwe, in collaboration with the UNPRPD, published the *"National Disability Guidelines on how to provide reasonable accommodation and accessibility to persons with disabilities: A tool for government ministries".* Whilst this is a progressive move, the lack of enforcement mechanisms, suggests that the implementation of the guidelines is highly sporadic, ad-hoc and discretionary, devoid of a clear, sustained and systematic policy implementation trajectory.

University experiences, for both students with and without disabilities, present opportunities for empowerment by enhancing knowledge, developing social skills, while at the same time maximising opportunities for employment and independent living (Fuller et al., 2004; Hadjikakou and Hartas, 2008). However, despite some reported excellent accessibility practices such as the allocation of helpers, findings from this study indicate that the HEI studied remains fundamentally inaccessible for SWDs. SWDs at the HEI engage in a thousand tiny accessibility battles as they navigate places/spaces, products, services and facilities on a daily basis. These battles produced both transient and enduring effects, with the latter having the potential to span beyond their university lives. This aligns with the observation that through routine exclusion and marginalisation in an environment meant for growth and discovery can limit disabled students in shaping their identities and what they become following university (Wertans and Burch, 2022:15). Konur (2006) concluded that universities are among the most discriminating institutions, both in terms of access for SWDs and in supporting their continuity in HE, often leading them to abandon their educational pursuits before earning a degree. Goodley et al (2025) shared the same view arguing that higher education is a disablist institution. Arguably, higher education practices are framed around an idealised student,

which effectively excludes students who do not present pre-determined characteristics of an ideal student.

12.2 Practice and policy recommendations

Building upon strategies suggested by SWDs presented in Chapter 8, several recommendations are suggested to reconfigure the socio-material components within the HEI to enhance accessibility. Participants recommended a cost-effective approach to raising awareness about disability in HE by allowing SWDs to serve as class representatives alongside a non-disabled class representative in their respective classes. This initiative has the potential to ensure that SWDs have access to key decisions and updates that directly affect them, such as the choice and location of lecture venues and potential venue changes. This information is usually communicated by lecturers through class representatives. It can also enhance interaction, contributing to blurring the perceived disabled-non-disabled binary. Secondly, it is recommended that academics receive training and awareness on diversity in HE, including supports for students for SWDs. This approach has the potential to promote proactive teaching and learning practices, such as providing information in accessible information formats ahead of time to ensure equitable access to learning materials for all students. Additionally, training for academics can help shift attitudes from deficit-based views of disability supports to equity-focused perspectives.

Furthermore, digital literacy training is recommended, especially for students with visual impairments. A study conducted in an Ethiopian HEI, found that lack of access to ICT made learners with visual impairment dependent, decreased their chance of getting up-to-date e-resources and reduced their performance in their studies. Poverty was also found to be the principal barrier for access to ICT (Beyen et al., 2020:12). This study found that, despite the availability of a laptop loan facility for SWDs at the HEI, some students with visual impairments could borrow laptops for their personal helpers to type assignments for them. An institutional digital literacy training initiative aimed at students with visual impairments has the potential to ensure equitable access to information for all learners. Digital literacy skills have the potential to enhance the capacity of students with visual impairments to access particular modules, such as the Information and Digital skills. It is also recommended that the digital literacy training be delivered by specialists skilled in assistive technologies, to maximise engagement by students with visual impairment.

Research participants recommended for the establishment of a formal procedure for collecting and delivering examination answer scripts from the DSS department to the respective lecturers. This has the potential to minimise or eliminate the problem of missing and incorrectly assigned grades. Such a procedure would also ensure equal access to grades for all students upon their

publication, which can help reduce emotional burden among SWDs and foster a sense of belonging among all students.

The study findings indicate several issues arising between SWDs and their university-provided personal helpers. SWDs were sometimes let-down by their helpers, which negatively affected access to various places/spaces, services and facilities at the HEI. Therefore, formal training for personal helpers is recommended. This training can help to clarify the duties and responsibilities of both parties, ultimately enhancing accessibility.

Furthermore, active consultation with SWDs on matters that directly affect them, such as curriculum design, campus accommodation, place/space designing etc. is recommended, in line with Article 4(3) of the CRPD. It was found that some students with visual impairments were required to take the Chinese module, despite lacking the knowledge and equipment to produce Chinese characters in Braille, a scenario which rendered the module inaccessible. This indicates a lack of consultation with SWDs and the DSS department. The practice also reflects ableist assumptions in the module design process.

Zimbabwe has ratified several international anti-discrimination treaties and conventions, and has enacted a raft of national anti-discrimination laws and policies, including the National Constitution of 2013 and the National Disability Policy of 2021. However, there is currently no specific national policy on access to HE for PWDs with Zimbabwe. This is problematic as it leads to discretionary protection of the right to HE and the protections of the rights of SWDs, along with support services within HEIs by individual HEIs. A national policy or legislative framework is therefore suggested. This should be accompanied by an implementation framework and a clear funding mechanism to translate policy provisions into reality.

This study recommends implementing a university-wide policy adherence to Universal Design (UD) principles. UD promotes the production of universally designed places/spaces, products, services and facilities, which supports equitable access. However, this study argues for a fluid conception of UD, particularly in the Global South, due to their unique and complex socio-material conditions. For example, the frequent unscheduled electrical power cuts reported at the HEI require a more elastic conception of UDL that is amenable to respond to the ever-shifting socio-material conditions unique to those contexts. Stable conceptions of UD, arguably, are primarily applicable to Global North contexts with relatively stable socio-material conditions. To achieve a nuanced, comprehensive, fluid and relational understanding of accessibility in higher education in the global south, this study proposes the Relational Collaborative Model of accessibility. This model supplies an analytical lens to produce complex accounts of how a multiplicity of shifting socio-material conditions, co-produce in/accessibility for SWDs. However, this does not signify a rejection of the UD approach. Rather, in line with the theoretical framework of this study, which

focuses on collapsing and merging binaries, I argue for thinking differently about UD in the Global South. A static and stable conception of UD in such context has the potential to support tick box and accessibility standard adherence approach to accessibility. It can also stifle innovation and limit opportunities for students with emerging or rare impairments. In line with this fluid conception, universally designed places/spaces, products and services must be co-produced with SWDs, as new information becomes available.

12.3 Thesis conclusion

This study contributes to the growing body of research exploring the experiences of SWDs in higher education contexts globally. However, existing literature indicates that most studies adopt a barrier mapping approach, in which the unit of analysis is the identification of a range of barriers and facilitators (attitudinal, physical, social, economic, etc.) affecting the inclusion and exclusion of SWDs in different aspects of higher education. The identification and elimination of barriers to accessibility aligns with Article 9 of the CRPD. While acknowledging the important contribution of these studies, this study argues that barrier mapping approaches offer a one-dimensional understanding of how in/accessibility is produced and experienced in the day to day lives of SWDs in higher education. This approach can be particularly problematic in Global South contexts, where complex socio-material conditions, especially poverty, prevail. These conditions can render barrier mapping and accessibility standards adherence approaches insufficient to understanding how SWDs navigate accessibility. Building on barrier mapping studies and incorporating Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblages, this study argues for a more nuanced and complex approach the study of disability and accessibility in higher education in the Global South environments. Drawing on the empirical e findings of this study, a number of policy and practical implications regarding disability and accessibility in HEIs are evident. From a practice perspective, this study goes beyond a tick-box approaches to accessibility practices, typified by accessibility audits, providing an analytical lens for more sophisticated, fluid and complex methods of conducting accessibility audits that keep in sharp focus the emergent and contingent nature of achieving accessibility in the everyday lives of SWDs in HEI in resource-poor contexts characterised by poverty. This approach has the potential to transform higher education practices by promoting more fluid and engaged responses to accessibility requirements that go beyond mere compliance with predetermined standards and legislative frameworks. To achieve this, the Relational Collaborative Model of accessibility is proposed. The model supplies an analytical lens that go beyond the identification of socio-material components co-producing in/accessibility to bring to the fore the affective relations across assembled matter, and how they enhance or restrict accessibility for SWDs in specific contexts. While recognising the important role of key institutions, such as the UN and EDI offices in HEIs in promoting

accessibility, the RCM advocates for a more horizontal and relational approach, , where the responsibility for ensuring accessibility becomes a citizen's responsibility. This argument is grounded in the universal understanding of disability, as an integral part of the human condition rather than a question of a selected few. A relational understanding of accessibility has the potential to transform higher education spaces into inclusive spaces where diversity is celebrated and all learners can realise their full potential on the basis of equal opportunity.

12.4 Limitations of the study

Although the experimental assemblage component accounting provided an analytical lens to explore how in/accessibility is reproduced in a HEI for SWDs in Zimbabwe, several limitations of the study are acknowledged. First, the sample is limited to students with visual and physical impairments, omitting other impairment types, such as hearing, which means certain assemblage dynamics were not explored. Second, the study is confined to a single HEI, however, institutional cultures, policies, infrastructure, resources, histories and social norms vary widely across Zimbabwe. This means that much still remains to be uncovered regarding how in/accessibility is reproduced in HEIs. Some interviews were conducted in Shona, translated and transcribed by the researcher. That means, some meaning could have been lost during the process. It is important to note that the analytical approach adopted in this study focused on assemblage component accounting but did not go a step further to explore the affective relations between and across components. Therefore, I propose the Relational Collaborative Model of in/accessibility as a vehicle for more nuanced and effective explorations of in/accessibility involving SWDs in HEIs and beyond.

12.5 Future research agenda

This study was conducted with a group of SWDs. It is suggested that incorporating key informants at the HEI, such as academics, librarians, DSS staff and ancillary staff (accommodation office) can produce a more nuanced and complex map of how in/accessibility is reproduced at the HEI. Although the study was open to both undergraduate and postgraduate SWDs, no postgraduate student expressed interest or participated in this study. A study exploring access and experiences of postgraduate SWDs in HE in Zimbabwe will be a worthwhile project. The information available on the HEI's DSS website suggests that at the time of data collection, no students with intellectual disabilities (ID) were enrolled. Therefore, a future study exploring access to HE by people with ID in Zimbabwe is recommended. This study found compelling evidence suggesting that the HEI studied was grappling with water and power challenges, which indiscriminately affected the entire university community. Due to the economic doldrums in Zimbabwe, some SWDs expressed that by having access to free campus accommodation and meals, they were better off compared to some of their non-

disabled peers who commuted daily to and from college. More research is needed to explore how disability rights can be fully realised in HEI environments where poverty indiscriminately affects everyone, both students with and without disabilities, academics, DSS staff etc. The study found compelling evidence of the inaccessibility of ICT, particularly among students with visual impairments. A comprehensive exploration of digital accessibility within the HEI, covering access to digital devices, as well as skills and training, could provide a more complex map of the phenomena. Finally, relational explorations of complex socio-material relations at the intersection of disability and accessibility are suggested in higher education in global south contexts as a vehicle to move beyond barrier mapping and accessibility audits.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Participant Information Leaflet for students with visual impairments



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET (PIL) FOR PHYSICALLY IMPAIRED STUDENTS

Title of study: An exploration of the experiences of disabled students in accessing the built environment in higher education in Zimbabwe.

Introduction

Good morning/afternoon. My name is Vitalis Bengano. I am in the third year of my PhD in the School of Social Work and Social Policy at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. I am researching the experiences of disabled students in accessing the built environment in higher education settings in Zimbabwe. I'm originally from Zimbabwe and a graduate of the University of Zimbabwe (UZ). As a student, I volunteered as a Central Helper for disabled students under the Disability Support Services Unit at UZ for seven years, from 2013 to 2020, and I became interested in disability issues in higher education, which is the focus of my PhD thesis.

I invite you to participate in a study to share your experiences accessing your university's indoor and outdoor spaces and places. Please note that participation is voluntary. Before you decide if you want to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what taking part involves. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask me if anything needs clarification or if you want more information about the research.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study aims to explore the experiences of university students who self-identify as physically impaired in accessing the university-built environment (man-made structures and facilities in which students live and learn) and how it affects their university experiences. Physically impaired students are considered to face significant challenges navigating the built environment globally. I hope that research findings can inform the elimination of existing barriers and exclusionary practices, making university indoor and outdoor spaces more accessible and inclusive to physically impaired students.

Why have I been chosen to participate?

I am interested in exploring the experiences of students who self-identify as physically impaired in accessing the built environment in higher education settings in Zimbabwe.

You are invited because you are considered to possess lived experience about accessing indoor and outdoor campus spaces and places as a student with a physical impairment in a higher education setting in Zimbabwe.

I hope to recruit a minimum of 15 participants for the study who self-identify as physically impaired. Participants should be enrolled in an undergraduate or postgraduate programme at a higher education institution in Zimbabwe.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you do choose to participate, you will be given this information leaflet to keep and asked to sign a consent form.

If you decide to participate, you are free to change your mind and withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. You also have the right to request erasure or to object to any further processing of the information I hold about you. However, you will have up to one month after data collection to request the erasure of your data. Beyond that point, requesting erasure will be impossible given that transcripts would have been anonymised and difficult to link them back to you.

Please note that this study is independent of the operations of the Disability Support Services Unit at your university. Therefore, whether you choose to take part or not, you will still continue to receive the same level of education and disability supports from your university.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you choose to participate, you will be given a Monitech 4K Digital Camera (after receiving some training and instructions) and asked to take 5-10 photographs over 2 days. The photos should depict barriers and facilitators to accessing different indoor and outdoor campus spaces and places of your choice. Participants will be assigned to two focus groups of 7-8 participants each to share their experiences in photographed spaces and places. The Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) will be audio-recorded, with your permission, and will take

approximately 1-1.5 hours to complete. Participants are expected not to disclose the other FGD participants' identity or the FGD's details to third parties.

A sample of 5-7 participants from the FGDs will be invited to share individual experiences in semi-structured interviews with the researcher. The semi-structured interviews will be audio-recorded with participants' permission.

All personal data collected (audio recordings, photographs (containing personal data), impairment type, emails, and phone numbers) will be treated confidentially and will not be shared with third parties. In case of a data breach or suspected incident involving the loss or inadvertent disclosure of your personal data, I will contact the Data Protection Officer and the Head of the School of Social Work and Social Policy at TCD without delay. Trinity College Dublin is required by law to inform you without delay if the data breach is likely to result in a high risk to your privacy.

All your personal data will be securely kept until the PhD viva is passed and will be destroyed in August 2025. Only anonymised transcripts will be kept for a further five years. After 5 years, the anonymised dataset will be deposited in Trinity's Access to Research Archive (TARA), an open-access repository for further analysis. Personal data will not physically leave Ireland.

What are the benefits of taking part?

There will be no direct benefits to participants in this research. However, I hope this research will allow physically impaired students to collectively voice out their daily realities accessing campus indoor and outdoor spaces and places. You may benefit indirectly by developing a collective awareness of barriers to accessing the campus-built environment and collectively suggesting solutions to identified barriers and practices. I plan to disseminate research findings through a Co-Produced Policy Brief (to be submitted to your university authorities), and you will be invited to include your name. However, this is optional, so you may choose not to have your name included. I hope the research findings will inform the elimination or modification of existing barriers and practices, making indoor and outdoor spaces more accessible and inclusive to students with physical impairments.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

You are required to collect between 5-10 photographs over 2 days. The FGD is estimated to take between 1-1.5 hours to complete. Semi-structured follow-up interviews will take approximately 1 hour to complete. Therefore, you are expected to commit approximately 2 days and 2.5 hours of your time to this research. However, you are free to change your mind and withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. There is a small risk of your personal data being breached and the inadvertent disclosure of your identity. The researcher has taken precautionary measures by completing the TCD Data Protection Training to ensure the secure, safe and confidential storage and processing of your personal data. The researcher will alert the Student's Clinic and the security at your university Security Control Room, available 24/7, in case of any accidents or emergencies during the course of the FGD or in-depth interviews.

Please note that by law, I am obliged to report any inadvertent discovery relating to illicit activities such as physical, emotional or sexual abuse, concerns for child protection, rape, self-harm, suicidal intent or criminal activity through this study. In this case, I will contact the relevant authorities after informing you first.

Will my participation in this study be kept confidential?

Your privacy is of utmost importance to me. All your personal data will be securely stored on Microsoft OneDrive (a computer software controlled by IT Services at Trinity College Dublin) until the PhD viva is passed and will be destroyed in August 2025. Only anonymised data will be kept for a further five years. Any information that leaves Trinity College Dublin will have your name removed to keep your identity confidential. I will **not** share your audio recordings with any third parties.

What will happen to the results of this research?

Information from this research will be submitted to fulfil the requirements for the award of a PhD qualification from Trinity College Dublin. Some information may be published in scientific journals and book chapters and presented at academic conferences. If this is the case, your identity will remain confidential through pseudonyms, and no one is anticipated to know you participated in the study. An abridged version of research results (Co-Produced Policy Brief), including selected photographs, will be submitted to your university management. With your consent, selected photos will be exhibited at a Project Closure Lecture to be held at your university in August 2025.

What do I do if I have any further questions?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your participation in the research, please contact me by email on benganov@tcd.ie or Phone: +263779 986 604/+353 83 023 1824. You can also contact my supervisors below. They will be very happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Dr. Edurne García Iriarte (PhD Supervisor)
Assistant Professor
Director of Research and Chair of Ethics, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin
Dublin, Ireland
Phone: +353(0) 18962200
Email: iriartee@tcd.ie

Dr. Michael Feely (PhD Co-Supervisor)
Assistant Professor
Course Director, BSc Social Studies, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin
Dublin, Ireland
Phone: +353(0) 18964101
Email: mfeely@tcd.ie

What is the lawful basis to use my personal data?

Information will only be used for this research study, which aims to improve understanding of the experiences of disabled students in accessing the built environment in higher education settings in Zimbabwe. The legal basis for processing your personal data is Article 6(1) (e) of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The legal basis for processing your sensitive personal data, such as sexual orientation, is Article 9(2) (j) GDPR.

What are my rights in relation to your use of my personal data?

You are entitled to request any of the rights below unless it would make it impossible or very difficult to carry out the research study:

- The right to access to your personal data;
- The right to receive a copy of your personal data;
- The right to ask me to restrict my use of your personal data;
- The right to ask me to correct inaccurate information about you; or
- The right to ask me to delete your personal data.

You are entitled to object to any further processing of the information I hold about you (except where it is de-identified).

You can exercise these rights or learn more about data protection in relation to this study by contacting me at benganov@tcd.ie or the Trinity College Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@tcd.ie.

Please note that these rights relate to data which could identify you (personal data). If your data has been anonymised, I will not be able to access or delete it as I will have no way of being able to link the data to you.

If you are unhappy with how I have used your personal data, you can raise a concern with the Data Protection Commission via their online form https://forms.dataprotection.ie/contact- or contact the Commission at:

Data Protection Commission
21 Fitzwilliam Square South
Dublin 2
D02 RD28
Ireland
https://www.dataprotection.ie

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Data Protection Information

Data Controller	Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin
Data Protection Officer	Data Protection Officer Secretary's Office Trinity College Dublin Dublin 2 Ireland Email: dataprotection@tcd.ie Website: www.tcd.ie/privacy

APPENDIX 2: Go-along interview schedule with students with visual impairments



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

GO ALONG/WALKING INTERVIEW SCHEDULE WITH VISUALLY IMPAIRED STUDENTS

An exploration of the experiences of disabled students in accessing the built environment in higher education in Zimbabwe. A New Materialist Perspective.

Introduction

Good morning/afternoon X, and welcome to this walking interview. Thank you for agreeing to participate in today's interview. My name is Vitalis Bengano. I am in the third year of my PhD in the School of Social Work and Social Policy at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. I'm originally from Zimbabwe and a graduate of the University of Zimbabwe. As a student, I volunteered as a Central Helper for students with disabilities under the Disability Resource Centre (DRC) (before renamed) for seven years, from 2013 to 2020, and I became interested in disability rights, which is now the focus of my PhD thesis.

What is the purpose of this interview?

In today's interview, I invite you to walk me around different campus spaces (indoor and outdoor) of your choice that you usually visit on a typical day. As we walk, I will ask you questions about people, objects and technologies found in those places and spaces and how it affects your university experiences.

Go along/Walking Interview Guidelines

1. The walking interview is estimated to last for 1 hour.
2. If you need any support to walk around the campus, please let me know, I will be happy to facilitate this, to make you feel more comfortable with the walking.
3. If you need to take a break along the way, please let me know, I will be happy to take a break until you are ready to proceed with the walking.
4. There are no right or wrong answers in this interview.
5. Our conversation will be audio-recorded not to miss any of your comments. Do you agree? If you agree, can I ask you to wear this microphone?
6. I will not share the audio file with anyone except my supervisors, only when necessary.
7. I will not use your real name in any published material or reports (only Pseudonyms will be used).
8. You can use any most comfortable language for you (English, Shona or other).
9. Please remember that participation is completely voluntary, and you can stop participating in the interview at any time along the way.

Before we begin, can I confirm if you consent to participate in this study and have our conversation recorded? (consent audio-recorded)

Any questions before we start?

In the absence of any, can we get started?

Walking interview guiding questions

PRE-WALKING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Could you please tell me about your university experiences so far? Which year are you in? What are you studying? How are you finding it?
2. Can you identify the principal spaces and places in the university you usually spent your time in? Can you explain why?
3. Could you please take me to spaces and places in the university that you would go to on a typical day, from when you wake up until you go to bed?

WALKING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do you get into this place/space (alone, with friends, assistive device or other)? How does each method make you feel? How do you feel in this place/space? **(to be asked in each space/place visited**).
2. Can you describe the barriers and facilitators to access this space and place? and how they affect your learning and the progression of your studies? (To examine specific barriers/facilitators present) **(to be asked in each space/place visited**).
3. What change(s) would you suggest to make this place or space more accessible and inclusive to visually impaired students? **(to be asked in each space/place visited**).
4. Can you identify spaces and places within the university that you rarely or never used (why? How do you feel about it? If you have ever visited or used those spaces, can you tell me more about your experiences in those spaces and places?
5. How does access to the built environment affect your overall university experiences?
6. Can you describe the nature of services/support from the Disability Support Services Unit in your learning and overall university experience?

CLOSING QUESTION AND DEBRIEFING

7. Do you have anything you want us to discuss?

THANK YOU

APPENDIX 3: Participant Information Leaflet for students with physical impairments

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET (PIL) FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED/BLIND STUDENTS

Title of study: An exploration of the experiences of disabled students in accessing the built environment in higher education in Zimbabwe.

Introduction

Good morning/afternoon. My name is Vitalis Bengano. I am in the third year of my PhD in the School of Social Work and Social Policy at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. I'm originally from Zimbabwe and a graduate of the University of Zimbabwe (UZ). As a student, I volunteered as a Central Helper for students with disabilities under the Disability Support Services Unit at UZ for seven years, from 2013 to 2020, and I became interested in disability rights in higher education, which is the focus of my PhD thesis.

I invite you to participate in a study to share your experiences accessing indoor and outdoor spaces and places at your university. Please note that participation is voluntary. Before you decide if you want to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what taking part involves. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask me if anything needs clarification or if you want more information about the research.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study aims to explore the experiences of university students who self-identify as visually impaired/blind in accessing the university-built environment (man-made structures and facilities in which students live and learn in) and how it affects their university experiences. Visually impaired/blind students are considered to face significant challenges navigating the physical environment globally. I hope that research findings can inform the elimination of existing barriers and exclusionary practices, making university indoor and outdoor spaces more accessible and inclusive to visually impaired/blind students.

Why have I been chosen to participate?

I am interested in exploring the experiences of students who self-identify as visually impaired/blind in accessing the built environment in higher education settings in Zimbabwe.

You are invited because you are considered to possess lived experience about accessing indoor and outdoor campus spaces as a student with a visual impairment in a higher education setting in Zimbabwe.

I hope to recruit a minimum of 15 participants for the study who self-identify as visually impaired/blind. Participants should be enrolled in an undergraduate or postgraduate programme at a higher education institution in Zimbabwe.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to participate in this study. If you do choose to participate, you will be given this information leaflet to keep and asked to sign a consent form.

If you decide to participate, you are free to change your mind and withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. You also have the right to request erasure or to object to any further processing of the information I hold about you. However, you will have up to one month after data collection to request the erasure of your data. Beyond that point, requesting erasure will be impossible given that transcripts would have been anonymised and difficult to link them back to you.

Please note that this study is independent of the operations of the Disability Support Services Unit at your university. Therefore, whether you choose to take part or not, you will still continue to receive the same level of education and disability supports from your university.

What will happen to me if I take part?

Should you choose to take part, I will ask you to participate in a **'walking interview'** in which I will request you to walk me around campus spaces and places of your choice while responding to questions regarding your experiences accessing those spaces. The walking interview will be audio-recorded, with your permission, and is expected to last for 1 hour.

All personal data collected (audio recordings, gender orientation, photographs (containing personal data), impairment type, emails, and phone numbers) will be treated confidentially and will not be shared with third parties. In case of a data breach or suspected incident involving the loss or inadvertent disclosure of your personal data, I will contact the Data Protection Officer and the Head of the School of Social Work and Social Policy at TCD without delay. Trinity College Dublin is obliged by law to inform you without delay if the data breach is likely to result in a high risk to your privacy.

All your personal data will be securely kept until the PhD viva is passed and will be destroyed in August 2025. Only anonymised transcripts will be kept for a further five years. After 5 years, the anonymised dataset will be deposited in Trinity's Access to Research Archive (TARA), an open-access repository for further analysis.

What are the benefits of taking part?

There will be no direct benefits to participants in this research. However, I hope this research will allow visually impaired/blind students to collectively voice out their daily realities accessing campus indoor and outdoor spaces and places. You may benefit indirectly by developing a collective awareness of barriers to accessing the campus-built environment and collectively suggesting solutions to identified barriers. I plan to disseminate research findings through a Co-Produced Policy Brief (to be submitted to your university authorities), and you will be invited to include your name. However, this is entirely optional, so you may choose not to have your name included. I hope that the research findings will inform the elimination or modification of existing barriers and exclusionary practices, making indoor and outdoor spaces more accessible and inclusive to disabled students.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

The walking interview is expected to take approximately 1 hour to complete. There is a small risk of your personal data being breached and the inadvertent disclosure of your identity. The researcher has taken precautionary measures by completing the TCD Data Protection Training to ensure the secure, safe and confidential storage and processing of your personal data. Please note that walking can cause physical harm to you. The researcher will alert the Student's Clinic and the security at your university Security Control Room, available 24/7, in case of any accidents or emergencies during the walking interview.

Please note that by law, I am obliged to report any inadvertent discovery relating to illicit activities such as physical, emotional or sexual abuse, concerns for child protection, rape, self-harm, suicidal intent or criminal activity through this study. In this case, I will contact the relevant authorities after informing you first.

Will my participation in this study be kept confidential?

Your privacy is of utmost importance to me. All your personal data (audio recordings, impairment type, emails, and phone numbers) will be stored on Microsoft OneDrive (a computer software controlled by IT Services at Trinity College Dublin) until the PhD viva is

passed and will be destroyed in August 2025. Only anonymised data will be kept for five years. Any information that leaves Trinity College Dublin will have your name removed to keep your identity confidential. I commit not share your personal data with any third parties.

What will happen to the results of this research?

Information from this study will be submitted to fulfil the requirements for the award of a PhD qualification from Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. Information may be published in scientific journals and book chapters and presented at academic conferences. If this is the case, your identity will remain confidential through pseudonyms, and no one is anticipated to know you participated in the study. An abridged version of research results (Co-Produced Policy Brief), including selected photographs, will be submitted to your university authorities. With your consent, selected photos will be exhibited at a Project Closure Lecture to be held at your university in August 2025.

What do I do if I have any further questions?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your participation in this research, please contact me by email on benganov@tcd.ie or Phone: +263779 986 604/+353 83 023 1824. You can also contact my supervisors below. They will be very happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Dr. Edurne García Iriarte (PhD Supervisor)
Assistant Professor
Director of Research and Chair of Ethics, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin
Dublin, Ireland
Phone: +353(0) 18962200
Email: iriartee@tcd.ie

Dr. Michael Feely (PhD Co-Supervisor)
Assistant Professor
Course Director, BSc Social Studies, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin
Dublin, Ireland
Phone: +353(0) 18964101
Email: mfeely@tcd.ie

What is the lawful basis to use my personal data?

Information will only be used for this research study, which aims to improve understanding of the experiences of disabled students in accessing the built environment in higher education settings in Zimbabwe. The legal basis for processing your personal data is Article 6(1) (e) of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The legal basis for processing your sensitive personal data, such as sexual orientation, is Article 9(2) (j) GDPR.

What are my rights in relation to your use of my personal data?

You are entitled to request any of the rights below unless it would make it impossible or very difficult to carry out the research study:

- The right to access to your personal data;
- The right to receive a copy of your personal data;
- The right to ask me to restrict my use of your personal data;
- The right to ask me to correct inaccurate information about you; or
- The right to ask me to delete your personal data.

You are entitled to object to any further processing of the information I hold about you (except where it is de-identified).

You can exercise these rights or learn more about data protection in relation to this study by contacting me at benganov@tcd.ie or the Trinity College Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@tcd.ie.

Please note that these rights relate to data which could identify you (personal data). If your data has been anonymised, I will not be able to access or delete it as I will have no way of being able to link the data to you.

If you are unhappy with how I have used your personal data, you can raise a concern with the Data Protection Commission via their online form https://forms.dataprotection.ie/contact- or contact the Commission at:

Data Protection Commission
21 Fitzwilliam Square South
Dublin 2
D02 RD28
Ireland
https://www.dataprotection.ie

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Data Protection Information

Data Controller	Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin
Data Protection Officer	Data Protection Officer Secretary's Office Trinity College Dublin Dublin 2 Ireland Email: dataprotection@tcd.ie Website: www.tcd.ie/privacy

APPENDIX 4: Participant Informed Consent

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

An exploration of the experiences of disabled students in accessing the built environment in higher education in Zimbabwe. A New Materialist Perspective. **Recruitment Site: University of Zimbabwe Main Campus (Mt Pleasant, Harare)**
There are 2 sections in this form. Each section has a statement and asks you to tick the box if you agree. The end of this form is for the researcher to complete. **Please ask <u>any</u> questions you may have when reading each of the statements.** **Please select either 'yes' or 'no' to indicate your choice.** **Thank you for participating in this research.**

General	**Tick box**
I confirm I have read and understood the **Information Leaflet** for the above study. The information has been fully explained to me and I have been able to ask questions, all of which have been answered to my satisfaction.	**Yes No** ☐ ☐
I understand that this study **is entirely voluntary, and if I decide that I do not want to take part, I can stop taking part in this study at any time without giving a reason**. I understand that deciding not to take part will not affect my future access to education and disability support services.	**Yes No** ☐ ☐
I understand that I **will not be paid for taking part in this study**.	**Yes No** ☐ ☐
I agree to take part in this research study having been fully informed of the **risks, benefits and alternatives** which are set out in full in the information leaflet which I have been provided with.	**Yes No** ☐ ☐
I know how to contact the researcher if I need to.	**Yes No** ☐ ☐
I agree to being contacted by the researcher by email/phone as part of this research study.	**Yes No** ☐ ☐

I agree to take part in an audio recorded individual interview/Focus Group Discussion as part of this research study.	**Yes No** ☐ ☐
I agree to take part in an audio recorded focus group interview as part of this research study.	**Yes No** ☐ ☐
Data	**Tick box**
I understand that any identifiable information about me (personal data), (including the transfer of this personal information about me outside of the EU), will be protected in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation **(GDPR).**	**Yes No** ☐ ☐
I understand that anonymous information from this study may be shared with third party academics worldwide for research and learning purposes.	**Yes No** ☐ ☐
I understand that the audio recording of participants' interviews will be retained by Trinity College Dublin until viva and will be destroyed in August 2025. Only anonymised data set will be kept for a further five years and then submitted to Trinity College Dublin library for further analysis.	**Yes No** ☐ ☐

……

Participant Name (Block Capitals) **Participant Signature** **Date**

To be completed by the Principal Investigator or nominee.

I, the undersigned, have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant, the nature and purpose of this study in a way that they could understand. I have explained the risks and possible benefits involved. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

I have given a copy of the information leaflet and consent form to the participant with contacts of the study team.

Researcher name:……

Title and qualifications: ……

Signature:……

Date:……

APPENDIX 5: Gatekeeper Information Leaflet

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

GATEKEEPER INFORMATION LEAFLET

Title of study: An exploration of the experiences of disabled students in accessing the built environment in higher education in Zimbabwe.

Introduction

Good morning/afternoon. My name is Vitalis Bengano. I am in the third year of my PhD in the School of Social Work and Social Policy at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. I am researching the experiences of disabled students in accessing the built environment in higher education settings in Zimbabwe. I'm originally from Zimbabwe and a graduate of the University of Zimbabwe (UZ). As a student, I volunteered as a Helper for disabled students under the Disability Support Services Unit at UZ for seven years, from 2013 to 2020, and I became interested in disability issues in higher education, which is the focus of my PhD thesis.

I kindly request your assistance in recruiting 30 disabled students for my research.

Before you decide whether or not you wish to assist me with the study, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what taking part for you and for the participants involves.

Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask me if anything needs clarification or if you would like more information about the study. Take time to decide whether or not to facilitate this research.

Research Team

Vitalis Bengano, PhD Candidate
30 Anglesea Street
Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin
Dublin 2, Ireland
Email: benganov@tcd.ie
Phone: +263 779 986 604/+353 023 1824

Dr. Edurne García Iriarte (Principal Supervisor)
Director of Research and Chair of Ethics, School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin
Dublin 2, Ireland
Phone: +353(0) 18962200
Email: iriartee@tcd.ie

Dr. Michael Feely (Co-Supervisor)
Assistant Professor
Course Director, BSc Social Studies, School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin
Dublin 2, Ireland
Phone: +353(0) 18964101
Email: mfeely@tcd.ie

Background information to the study

This study explores the experiences of physically and visually impaired/blind students in accessing the university-built environment (man-made structures and facilities in which students live and learn) and how it affects their university experiences. Physically and visually impaired/blind students are considered to face significant challenges navigating the built environment. I hope research findings can inform the elimination of existing barriers and practices, making university indoor and outdoor spaces more accessible and inclusive to physically and visually impaired/blind students.

I will collect personal information such as participant names, contact information (email addresses and phone numbers), audio recordings, gender orientation, type of impairment, programme, and year of study to administer the study.

I kindly request you to assist in this research because, as the Manager of the Disability Support Services Unit, you can facilitate the recruitment of research participants for the study. **You will be required to circulate information about the study and distribute Participant Information Leaflets (PIL) to potential participants.** Participants will then contact me directly for more information about the research and if they are interested in participating.

What are the benefits of taking part?

There will be no direct benefits to participants in this research. However, I hope this research will allow disabled students to collectively voice out their daily realities accessing campus indoor and outdoor spaces and places. Participants may benefit indirectly by developing a collective awareness of barriers to accessing the campus-built environment and collectively proposing solutions to addressing identified barriers and practices.

I plan to disseminate research findings through a **Co-Produced Policy Brief** (to be submitted to the university management), and you will be invited to have your name included. However, this is optional, so you may choose not to have your name included in the report. I hope the research findings will inform the elimination or modification of existing barriers and practices, making indoor and outdoor spaces more accessible and inclusive to disabled students.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Fifteen physically impaired students will be asked to collect 5-10 photographs over 2 days as individuals and asked to participate in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) of 7 and 8 participants each. The FGD is estimated to take between 1-1.5 hours to complete. A sample of 5-7 participants from the FGD will be invited to participate in in-depth follow-up interviews, estimated to last 1 hour. Therefore, participants are expected to commit to approximately 2 days and 2.5 hours to complete the study, which can be inconvenient to some students. However, participants are free to change their minds and withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. There is a small risk of your personal data being breached and the inadvertent disclosure of your identity. The researcher has taken precautionary measures by completing the TCD Data Protection Training to ensure your personal data's safe, secure, and confidential storage and processing. The researcher will alert the Student's Clinic and the security at your university Security Control Room, available 24/7, in case of any accidents or emergencies during the course of research on campus.

Please note that by law, I am obliged to report any inadvertent discovery relating to illicit activities such as physical, emotional or sexual abuse, concerns for child protection, rape, self-harm, suicidal intent or criminal activity through this study. In this case, I will contact the relevant authorities after informing you first.

Do I have to take part?

Whether you would like to assist with the study is entirely your choice. You do not have to give a reason if you do not wish to assist. If you decide to assist, you can change your mind anytime. Participants also have a choice about participating. If they do not wish to participate, they do not have to give a reason and can change their minds anytime. If participants decide not to be part of or withdraw from the research, there will be no penalty. If participants wish to withdraw from the study at any time, they should contact me at +263779 986 604/+353 83 023 1824 or by email: benganov@tcd.ie.

What I need your assistance with?

I request your assistance in recruiting at least 30 participants for the study who meet the following three criteria:

1. Students who self-identify as visually impaired/blind (n=15) or physically impaired (n=15).
2. Students must have at least one year of experience navigating the university-built environment to have developed an in-depth understanding and awareness of indoor and outdoor spaces across the campus.
3. 3. Participants can be registered in your university's undergraduate or postgraduate programme.

Your role in this research will be circulating information about the study and distributing Participant Information Leaflets (PIL) to potential participants in accessible formats such as Braille and Large Print. Participants will then contact me directly for more information about the research and if they are interested in participating. I would also require your help with Braille printing services and guidance on crafting Screen reader-compatible emails for visually impaired/blind participants.

What taking part in the study involves for study participants?

Taking part in the research will involve **two** different sets of activities between physically (n=15) and visually impaired/blind students.

Visually Impaired/blind students

Visually Impaired/blind students (n=15) will be asked to walk the researcher around the campus-built environment, in both indoor and outdoor spaces and places of their choice.

During the tour, participants will be asked questions potentially related to the following:

1. Methods/devices/practices they use to get around the campus-built environment.
2. Their experiences in diverse indoor and outdoor spaces and places across the campus-built environment.
3. Proposed changes that could improve the accessibility of visited spaces and places and student's overall university experiences.

Physically impaired students

Fifteen physically impaired students will be asked to collect 5-10 photographs using a researcher-provided digital camera over 2 days as individuals and asked to participate in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) of 7 and 8 participants each to share their experiences in each space and place captured. The FGD is estimated to take between 1-1.5 hours to complete and will be audio-recorded. A sample of 5-7 participants from the FGD will be invited to participate in in-depth follow-up interviews, estimated to last 1 hour. The Focus Group Discussion topics will potentially be centred around:

1. Identification and description of various barriers, objects and materials found in different spaces across the university.
2. Methods/devices/practices physically impaired students use to access captured spaces and places.
3. Student's experiences in each space and place.
4. Proposed changes in captured spaces and places that could improve accessibility and students' overall university experiences?

Will study records remain confidential?

Participant's privacy is of utmost importance to me. Participants' personal data will be stored securely on Microsoft OneDrive, controlled by IT Services at Trinity College Dublin and destroyed after viva is passed, potentially in August 2025. Anonymised data will be stored for a further 5 years, and then submitted to the TCD library for deposition in Trinity's Access to Research Archive (TARA). Any information that leaves Trinity College Dublin will have participants' names removed to keep their identities confidential. I will not share participants' audio recordings with any third parties. Fully anonymised data may be shared with the scientific community.

Participants will be made aware of the risk of inadvertent discovery of illicit activities such as physical, emotional or sexual abuse, concerns for child protection, rape, self-harm, suicidal intent or criminal activity through this study. If participants tell the researcher that serious risk is posed to oneself or another, then by law, I am obliged to report any inadvertent discovery relating to crime or risk to participants after informing them.

What will happen to the results of this research?

Information from this research will be submitted to fulfil the requirements for the award of a PhD qualification from Trinity College Dublin. Some information may be published in scientific journals and book chapters and presented at academic conferences. If this is the case, your identity will remain confidential through pseudonyms, and no one is anticipated to know you participated in the research. An abridged version of research results (Co-Produced Policy Brief), including selected photographs, will be submitted to the university management. With participants, selected photos will be exhibited at a Project Closure Lecture to be held at their university in August 2025.

What do I do if I have any further questions?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your participation in the research, please contact me by email on benganov@tcd.ie or **Phone:** +263779 986 604/+353 83 023 1824. You can also contact my supervisors below. They will be very happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Dr. Edurne García Iriarte (PhD Supervisor)
Assistant Professor
Director of Research and Chair of Ethics, School of Social Work and Social Policy
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Dr. Michael Feely (PhD Co-Supervisor)
Assistant Professor
Course Director, BSc Social Studies, School of Social Work and Social Policy
Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin
Dublin, Ireland
Phone: +353(0) 18964101
Email: mfeely@tcd.ie

What is the lawful basis to use my personal data?

Information will only be used for this research, which aims to improve understanding of the experiences of disabled students in accessing the built environment in higher education

settings in Zimbabwe. The legal basis for processing your personal data is Article 6(1) (e) of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The legal basis for processing your sensitive personal data, such as sexual orientation, is Article 9(2) (j) GDPR.

What are my rights in relation to your use of my personal data?

You are entitled to request any of the rights below unless it would make it impossible or very difficult to carry out the research study:

- The right to access to your personal data;
- The right to receive a copy of your personal data;
- The right to ask me to restrict my use of your personal data;
- The right to ask me to correct inaccurate information about you; or
- The right to ask me to delete your personal data.

You are entitled to object to any further processing of the information I hold about you (except where it is de-identified).

You can exercise these rights or learn more about data protection in relation to this study by contacting me at benganov@tcd.ie or the Trinity College Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@tcd.ie.

Please note that these rights relate to data which could identify you (personal data). If your data has been anonymised, I will not be able to access or delete it as I will have no way of being able to link the data to you.

If you are unhappy with how I have used your personal data, you can raise a concern with the Data Protection Commission via their online form https://forms.dataprotection.ie/contact- or contact the Commission at:

Data Protection Commission
21 Fitzwilliam Square South
Dublin 2
D02 RD28
Ireland
https://www.dataprotection.ie

Data Protection Information

Data Controller	Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin
Data Protection Officer	Data Protection Officer Secretary's Office Trinity College Dublin Dublin 2 Ireland Email: dataprotection@tcd.ie Website: www.tcd.ie/privacy

GATEKEEPER CONSENT FORM TO FACILITATE RESEARCH

An exploration of the experiences of disabled students in accessing the built environment in higher education in Zimbabwe. A New Materialist Perspective.

There are two sections in this form. Each section has a statement and asks you to tick the box if you agree. The end of this form is for the researchers to complete.

Please ask <u>any</u> questions you may have when reading each of the statements.

Please leave the box blank if you do not agree.

Thank you for assisting me with this study.

General	**Tick box**
I confirm I have read and understood the **Information Leaflet** for the above study. The information has been fully explained to me and I have been able to ask questions, all of which have been answered to my satisfaction.	
I understand that this study **is entirely voluntary, and if I decide that I do not want to assist with the study, I can stop assisting with this study at any time without giving a reason**.	
I understand that I **will not be paid for assisting with this study**.	
I voluntarily agree to assist with this research study having been fully informed of the **risks, benefits and alternatives** which are set out in full in the information leaflet which I have been provided with.	
I understand that I will assist the researcher by circulating information about the research and distributing participant recruitment information sheets to potential participants in accessible formats, such as Braille and Large Print. I will also provide information regarding Braille Printing and Transcription services on campus and guidance on crafting screen reader-compatible information for visually impaired/blind participants.	
I know how to contact the researcher if I need to.	

Data	Tick box
I understand that any identifiable information about me and the participants, including the transfer of this personal information about me/participants outside of the EU, will be protected per the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).	
I understand that fully anonymous information from this study may be shared with third-party academics worldwide for research and learning purposes.	
I understand that the audio recording of participants' interviews will be retained by Trinity College Dublin for five years for use solely by Trinity College Dublin and then destroyed.	

_____

Gatekeeper Name (Block Capitals) **Signature** **Date**

To be completed by the Principal Investigator or nominee.

I, the undersigned, have taken the time to fully explain to the above gatekeeper, the nature and purpose of this study in a way that they could understand. I have explained the risks and possible benefits involved. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

I have given a copy of the information leaflet and consent form to the gatekeeper with the contacts of the research team.

Researcher name: _____

Title and qualifications: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Two copies are to be made: 1 for the gatekeeper, 1 for the PI

1(

APPENDIX 6: Coding summary, NVivo 14

30/09/2025 19:55

Code Structure

In/accessibility in Higher Education in Zimbabwe

30/09/2025 19:55

Hierarchical Name	Nickname	Aggregate	User Assigned Color
Code			
Codes			
Codes\\Assemblages		Yes	None
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 1_Extra_curricular in_accessibility assemblage		Yes	None
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 1_Extra_curricular in_accessibility assemblage\Human relations		Yes	None
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 1_Extra_curricular in_accessibility assemblage\Non-human relations		Yes	None
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 1_Extra_curricular in_accessibility assemblage\Places-spaces		Yes	None
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility		Yes	None
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Abstract relations		Yes	None
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Historical factors		Yes	None
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Human relations		Yes	None
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Memories		Yes	None
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Non-human relations		Yes	None
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Places-spaces		Yes	None
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage		Yes	None
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage\Abstract relations		Yes	None
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage\Curriculum		Yes	None
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage\Human relations		Yes	None
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage\Non-human relations		Yes	None
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage\Places-spaces		Yes	None
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and assessment		Yes	None
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and assessment\Abstract relations		Yes	None
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and assessment\Curriculum		Yes	None
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and assessment\Human relations		Yes	None
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and assessment\Memories		Yes	None
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and assessment\Non-human relations		Yes	None
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and assessment\Places-spaces		Yes	None

Codes\\In-capacities	Yes	None
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 1_Extracurricular activities in_accessibility assemblage	Yes	None
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 1_Extracurricular activities in_accessibility assemblage\Consequences	Yes	None
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 1_Extracurricular activities in_accessibility assemblage\Physical in_capacities	Yes	None

30/09/2025 19:55

Hierarchical Name	Nickname	Aggregate	User Assigned Color
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility		Yes	None
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Academic effects		Yes	None
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Consequences		Yes	None
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Control		Yes	None
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Economic effects		Yes	None
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Physical effects		Yes	None
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Psychological-emotional effects		Yes	None
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Time Management		Yes	None
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage		Yes	None
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage\Academic effects		Yes	None
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage\Consequences		Yes	None
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage\Psychological-emotional effects		Yes	None
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage\Time Management		Yes	None
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and Assessment		Yes	None
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and Assessment\Academic effects		Yes	None
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and Assessment\Consequences		Yes	None
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and Assessment\Physical effects		Yes	None
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and Assessment\Psychological-emotional effects		Yes	None
Codes\\Other findings		Yes	None
Codes\\Other findings\Admission process		Yes	None
Codes\\Other findings\Assemblage 1_Transport in_accessibility assemblage		Yes	None
Codes\\Other findings\Assemblage 1_Transport in_accessibility assemblage\Leadership		Yes	None
Codes\\Other findings\Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility		Yes	None
Codes\\Other findings\Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Leadership		Yes	None
Codes\\Other findings\Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Vice Chancellors Scholarship		Yes	None
Codes\\Other findings\Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage		Yes	None
Codes\\Other findings\Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage\Leadership		Yes	None
Codes\\Other findings\Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage\Terminology		Yes	None
Codes\\Other findings\Assemblage 4_Teaching and Learning		Yes	None

Codes\\Other findings\Assemblage 4_Teaching and Learning\Leadership	Yes	None
Codes\\Other findings\Assemblage 4_Teaching and Learning\Terminology	Yes	None
Codes\\Other findings\Assemblage 4_Teaching and Learning\Vice Chancellors Scholarship	Yes	None
Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations	Yes	None
Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations\Assemblage 1_Extracurricular in_accessibility assemblage	Yes	None
Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations\Assemblage 1_Extracurricular in_accessibility assemblage\Human relations	Yes	None
Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations\Assemblage 1_Extracurricular in_accessibility assemblage\Non-human relations	Yes	None
Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations\Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility	Yes	None
Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations\Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Non-human relations reconfigurations	Yes	None

Hierarchical Name	Nickname	Aggregate	User Assigned Color
Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations\Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Place-space reconfigurations		Yes	None
Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations\Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage		Yes	None
Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations\Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage\Human relations reconfigurations		Yes	None
Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations\Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage\Non-human relations reconfigurations		Yes	None
Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations\Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and Assessment		Yes	None
Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations\Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and Assessment\Human relations reconfigurations		Yes	None
Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations\Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and Assessment\Non-human relations		Yes	None

Codes\\Literature Review

Codes\\Literature Review\\Findings	No	None
Codes\\Literature Review\\Findings\Barriers	Yes	None
Codes\\Literature Review\\Findings\Facilitators	Yes	None
Codes\\Literature Review\\Findings\Proposed strategies	Yes	None
Codes\\Literature Review\\Literature	No	None
Codes\\Literature Review\\Literature\Definitions	Yes	None
Codes\\Literature Review\\Literature\International Policy	Yes	None
Codes\\Literature Review\\Methodology	No	None
Codes\\Literature Review\\Methodology\Literature Review	Yes	None
Codes\\Literature Review\\Methodology\Mixed	Yes	None
Codes\\Literature Review\\Methodology\Qualitative	Yes	None
Codes\\Literature Review\\Methodology\Quanti	Yes	None

APPENDIX 7: Focus Group Discussion Schedule



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

PHOTOVOICE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION SCHEDULE WITH PHYSICALLY IMPAIRED STUDENTS

An exploration of the experiences of disabled students in accessing the built environment in higher education in Zimbabwe. A New Materialist Perspective.

Introduction and background information to the study

Good morning/afternoon, everyone and welcome to our Photovoice Focus Group Discussion session. Thank you for taking the time to join us and share your experiences about accessing the university-built environment. My name is Vitalis Bengano. I am in the second year of my PhD in the School of Social Work and Social Policy at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. For my PhD, I am exploring barriers and facilitators to accessing the university-built environment and how it affects you. You were invited because you are considered to have lived experiences and knowledge about accessing both indoor and outdoor campus spaces as a student with a physical impairment. Research findings can support evidence-based elimination or modification of existing barriers and practices, making indoor and outdoor campus spaces more accessible and inclusive to disabled students.

Focus Group Discussion Guidelines/Rules

1. No right or wrong answers, only differing points of view.
2. You should be respectful of each other's views and experiences.
3. Participants can use any language of their choice (English, Shona etc.)
4. The Focus Group Discussion session will be audio-recorded-Not to miss any of your comments.
5. I will not share these audio files with anyone except my supervisors, only when necessary.
6. One person to speak at a time.
7. Complete confidentiality-We won't use any of your names in any published material or reports (only Pseudonyms will be used).
8. I ask that you put your phones on silent. If you cannot, and if you must respond to a call, please do so as quietly as possible and re-join us quickly as you can.

Before we begin, I need to ensure that each of you has signed an informed consent form? Please remember that participation is completely voluntary, and you can stop participating in the session at any time. We want this to be an excellent experience for everyone and are happy to make changes to make you feel more comfortable with the session. This session should last

for approximately an hour.

Any questions before we start?

In the absence of any, let's begin. There are name cards on the table in front of you to help us remember each other's names. Let's learn more about each other by going around the table. Please tell us your name, programme and year of study.

Questions

The researcher will use the **SHOWeD** technique to guide the analysis process. The SHOWeD method will be applied to analyse each image.

S	What do we **See** here?
H	What is really **Happening** here?
O	How does this relate to **Our** lives?
We	**Why** does this situation, concern, strength **exists**?
D	What can we **Do** about it?

Closing statement

If you have experienced any distress or discomfort as a result of taking part in this FGD, please contact me by email at benganov@tcd.ie or Phone at +263779 986 604/+353 83 023 1824, and I will assist you in getting the necessary help that you may require. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact my supervisors; they will gladly answer your questions.

Note: A sample of 5-7 participants from the Focus Group Discussion will be invited to share individual experiences in follow-up semi-structured interviews.

Thank you

APPENDIX 8: Summary of Coding Report

The Production of In/accessibility in Higher Education in Zimbabwe
24/09/2025 14:14

Hierarchical Name	Item Type	Created By Username	Created On	Modified By Username	Modified On
C:\Users\benganov\Downloads					
A PhD Project Exploring How In/accessibility is Reproduced in a Higher Education Institution in Zimbabwe.					
Created By:					
Created On:					
Last Modified					
By: Vitalis					
Case Classifications					
	Node Classification	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	06/06/2025 14:21
	Node Classification	benganov	06/06/2025 14:21	benganov	20/06/2025 20:54
Cases					
Cases\\P1	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:32
Cases\\P10	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40
Cases\\P11	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:33
Cases\\P12	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:33
Cases\\P13	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	18/07/2025 20:36
Cases\\P14	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:33
Cases\\P15	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:34
Cases\\P16	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:34
Cases\\P17	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:34
Cases\\P18	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:34
Cases\\P19	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:35
Cases\\P2	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:35
Cases\\P20	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:35
Cases\\P21	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:36
Cases\\P22	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:37
Cases\\P23	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:37

Cases\\P24	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:30
Cases\\P25	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:30
Cases\\P3	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:37

Hierarchical Name	Item Type	Created By Username	Created On	Modified By Username	Modified On
Cases\\P4	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:37
Cases\\P5	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:37
Cases\\P6	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:38
Cases\\P7	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:38
Cases\\P8	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:32
Cases\\P9	Case	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40

Codes

Codes\\Assemblages	Code	benganov	10/06/2025 11:29	benganov	23/07/2025 22:11
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 1_Extra_curricular in_accessibility assemblage	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:12	benganov	04/07/2025 19:24
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 1_Extra_curricular in_accessibility	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:41	benganov	18/07/2025 20:36
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 1_Extra_curricular in_accessibility	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:42	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 1_Extra_curricular in_accessibility	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:44	benganov	18/07/2025 20:36
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 2_Place_space in-	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:11	benganov	17/07/2025 14:33
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Abstract relations	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:40	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Historical factors	Code	benganov	13/06/2025 13:00	benganov	17/07/2025 14:30
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Human relations	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:41	benganov	18/07/2025 20:36
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Memories	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:38	benganov	17/07/2025 14:38
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Non-human	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:42	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Places-spaces	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:44	benganov	18/07/2025 20:36
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:14	benganov	23/06/2025 15:45

Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage\Abstract relations	Code	benganov	10/06/2025 13:40	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage\Curriculum	Code	benganov	16/06/2025 17:56	benganov	17/07/2025 14:38
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage\Human relations	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:41	benganov	18/07/2025 20:36
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage\Non-human	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:42	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage\Places-spaces	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:44	benganov	18/07/2025 20:36

Hierarchical Name	Item Type	Created By Username	Created On	Modified By Username	Modified On
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:23	benganov	18/07/2025 11:47
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and assessment\Abstract relations	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:40	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and assessment\Curriculum	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:39	benganov	17/07/2025 14:38
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and assessment\Human relations	Code	benganov	10/06/2025 11:50	benganov	18/07/2025 20:36
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and assessment\Memories	Code	benganov	13/06/2025 16:07	benganov	17/07/2025 14:38
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and assessment\Non-human	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:42	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40
Codes\\Assemblages\Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and assessment\Places-spaces	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:44	benganov	18/07/2025 20:36
Codes\\In-capacities	Code	benganov	10/06/2025 11:32	benganov	23/07/2025 21:57
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 1_Extracurricular activities in_accessibility	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:25	benganov	18/07/2025 11:49
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 1_Extracurricular activities in_accessibility assemblage\Consequences	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 17:20	benganov	17/07/2025 14:38
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 1_Extracurricular activities in_accessibility assemblage\Physical	Code	benganov	10/06/2025 12:31	benganov	23/07/2025 21:58
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 2_Place_space in-	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:26	benganov	23/06/2025 20:43
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibilty\Academic effects	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 17:22	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Consequences	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 17:20	benganov	17/07/2025 14:38

Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 2_Place_space in-	Code	benganov	13/06/2025 13:19	benganov	17/07/2025 14:30
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Economic effects	Code	benganov	10/06/2025 12:31	benganov	17/07/2025 14:34
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Physical effects	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 17:22	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Psychological-emotional effects	Code	benganov	10/06/2025 12:31	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 2_Place_space in-accessibility\Time Management	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 17:21	benganov	17/07/2025 14:37
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 3_Digital	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:26	benganov	23/06/2025 20:43
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 17:22	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 17:20	benganov	17/07/2025 14:38

Hierarchical Name	Item Type	Created By Username	Created On	Modified By Username	Modified On
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage\Psychological-	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 17:21	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 17:21	benganov	17/07/2025 14:37
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 4_Teaching,	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:27	benganov	18/07/2025 11:50
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and	Code	benganov	12/06/2025 11:36	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and	Code	benganov	13/06/2025 14:11	benganov	17/07/2025 14:38
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 17:22	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40
Codes\\In-capacities \Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and Assessment\Psychological-	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 17:21	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40
Codes\\Other findings	Code	benganov	12/06/2025 11:43	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40
Codes\\Other findings\Admission process	Code	benganov	16/06/2025 17:24	benganov	17/07/2025 14:36
Codes\\Other findings\Assemblage 1_Transport in_accessibility	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:28	benganov	23/06/2025 15:28
Codes\\Other findings\Assemblage 1_Transport in_accessibility	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 20:40	benganov	17/07/2025 14:36

Codes\\Other findings\Assemblage	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:29	benganov	23/06/2025 15:29
Codes\\Other findings\Assemblage 2_Place_space in-	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 20:40	benganov	17/07/2025 14:36
Codes\\Other findings\Assemblage 2_Place_space in-	Code	benganov	16/06/2025 17:23	benganov	17/07/2025 14:36
Codes\\Other findings\Assemblage 3_Digital	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:29	benganov	23/06/2025 15:29
Codes\\Other findings\Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 20:40	benganov	17/07/2025 14:36
Codes\\Other findings\Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 20:41	benganov	17/07/2025 14:34
Codes\\Other findings\Assemblage	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:29	benganov	17/07/2025 14:30
Codes\\Other findings\Assemblage	Code	benganov	16/06/2025 17:31	benganov	17/07/2025 14:36
Codes\\Other findings\Assemblage	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 20:41	benganov	17/07/2025 14:34
Codes\\Other findings\Assemblage 4_Teaching and Learning\Vice	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 20:41	benganov	17/07/2025 14:36
Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations	Code	benganov	10/06/2025 11:39	benganov	10/06/2025 11:39
Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations\Assemblage 1_Extracurricular in_accessibility	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:24	benganov	18/07/2025 11:48

Hierarchical Name	Item Type	Created By Username	Created On	Modified By Username	Modified On
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Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations\Assemblage 1_Extracurricular in_accessibility assemblage\Non-human	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:49	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40
Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations\Assemblage	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:24	benganov	23/06/2025 15:50
Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations\Assemblage 2_Place_space in-	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:49	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40
Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations\Assemblage 2_Place_space in-	Code	benganov	13/06/2025 13:08	benganov	17/07/2025 14:38
Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations\Assemblage 3_Digital	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:25	benganov	23/06/2025 15:50

Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations\Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage\Human relations	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:48	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40
Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations\Assemblage 3_Digital in_accessibility assemblage\Non-human	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:49	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40
Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations\Assemblage	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:25	benganov	18/07/2025 11:49
Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations\Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and Assessment\Human relations	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:48	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40
Codes\\Reconfiguration of socio-material relations\Assemblage 4_Teaching, Learning and Assessment\Non-human	Code	benganov	23/06/2025 15:49	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40

Codes\\Literature Review

Codes\\Literature Review\\Findings	Code	benganov	16/07/2025 14:08	benganov	16/07/2025 14:24
Codes\\Literature Review\\Findings\Barriers	Code	benganov	16/07/2025 14:24	benganov	16/07/2025 14:39
Codes\\Literature Review\\Findings\Facilitators	Code	benganov	16/07/2025 14:39	benganov	16/07/2025 14:43
Codes\\Literature Review\\Findings\Proposed	Code	benganov	16/07/2025 14:26	benganov	16/07/2025 14:26
Codes\\Literature Review\\Literature	Code	benganov	16/07/2025 14:28	benganov	16/07/2025 14:45
Codes\\Literature Review\\Literature\Definitions	Code	benganov	16/07/2025 14:36	benganov	16/07/2025 14:42
Codes\\Literature Review\\Literature\Internationa	Code	benganov	16/07/2025 14:32	benganov	16/07/2025 14:47

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Codes\\Literature Review\\Methodology\Mixed	Code	benganov	16/07/2025 14:22	benganov	16/07/2025 14:22
Codes\\Literature Review\\Methodology\Qualitati	Code	benganov	16/07/2025 14:22	benganov	16/07/2025 14:22
Codes\\Literature Review\\Methodology\Quanti	Code	benganov	16/07/2025 14:22	benganov	16/07/2025 14:22

Coding Matrices

Dynamic Sets

Dynamic Sets\\All Codes	Dynamic Set	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23
Dynamic Sets\\All Files, Externals and Memos	Dynamic Set	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23
Dynamic Sets\\All Media Files Not Embedded	Dynamic Set	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23

Externals

File Classifications

Files

Files\\Focus Group Discussions

Files\\Focus Group Discussions\\FGD A	Document	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:30
Files\\Focus Group Discussions\\FGD B	Document	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:30

Files\\Images

Files\\Images\\IM1	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	18/06/2025 21:16
Files\\Images\\IM10	Picture	benganov	15/07/2025 20:42	benganov	15/07/2025 20:46
Files\\Images\\IM11	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	18/06/2025 20:59
Files\\Images\\IM11A	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	18/06/2025 21:33
Files\\Images\\IM13	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	19/06/2025 13:15
Files\\Images\\IM13A	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	18/06/2025 21:43

Hierarchical Name	Item Type	Created By Username	Created On	Modified By Username	Modified On
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Files\\Images\\IM13C	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 19:38	benganov	18/06/2025 20:30
Files\\Images\\IM13D	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	18/07/2025 20:36
Files\\Images\\IM13E	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	24/06/2025 20:22
Files\\Images\\IM13G	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	19/06/2025 14:10

Files\\Images\\IM13H	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 22:10	benganov	18/06/2025 22:13
Files\\Images\\IM13I	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	19/06/2025 13:32
Files\\Images\\IM13J	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	19/06/2025 13:52
Files\\Images\\IM13K	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	19/06/2025 13:21
Files\\Images\\IM13L	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	18/06/2025 19:05
Files\\Images\\IM13M	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	19/06/2025 14:31
Files\\Images\\IM19	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	19/06/2025 12:46
Files\\Images\\IM23	Picture	benganov	19/06/2025 15:49	benganov	19/06/2025 15:53
Files\\Images\\IM23A	Picture	benganov	16/06/2025 13:00	benganov	19/06/2025 18:26
Files\\Images\\IM23B	Picture	benganov	25/07/2025 12:04	benganov	25/07/2025 12:05
Files\\Images\\IM24A	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	19/06/2025 14:54
Files\\Images\\IM24C	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	19/06/2025 13:57
Files\\Images\\IM24D	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	19/06/2025 14:48
Files\\Images\\IM24E	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	19/06/2025 14:58
Files\\Images\\IM24F	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	19/06/2025 15:34
Files\\Images\\IM24G	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	19/06/2025 15:16
Files\\Images\\IM25A	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	19/06/2025 14:36
Files\\Images\\IM25C	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	19/06/2025 14:42
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Files\\Images\\IM29	Picture	benganov	27/06/2025 19:32	benganov	27/06/2025 19:36
Files\\Images\\IM7	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	19/06/2025 11:34
Files\\Images\\IM7A	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	19/06/2025 14:24
Files\\Images\\IM8	Picture	benganov	18/06/2025 16:38	benganov	19/06/2025 13:06
Files\\Images\\Screenshot 2025-07-15 211654	Picture	benganov	15/07/2025 21:45	benganov	17/07/2025 14:25

Files\\Interview transcripts

Files\\Interview transcripts\\P1	Document	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:33
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Files\\Interview	Document	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:34
Files\\Interview	Document	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:34
Files\\Interview	Document	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:34
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Hierarchical Name	Item Type	Created By Username	Created On	Modified By Username	Modified On

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Files\\Interview transcripts\\P19	Document	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:36
Files\\Interview transcripts\\P2	Document	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:36
Files\\Interview transcripts\\P20	Document	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:36
Files\\Interview transcripts\\P21	Document	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:36
Files\\Interview transcripts\\P22	Document	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:38
Files\\Interview transcripts\\P23	Document	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:38
Files\\Interview transcripts\\P3	Document	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:38
Files\\Interview transcripts\\P4	Document	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:38
Files\\Interview transcripts\\P5	Document	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:38
Files\\Interview transcripts\\P6	Document	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:38
Files\\Interview transcripts\\P7	Document	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:39
Files\\Interview transcripts\\P8	Document	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:33
Files\\Interview transcripts\\P9	Document	benganov	06/06/2025 13:28	benganov	17/07/2025 14:40

Files\\Literature review

Files\\Literature review\\670-3754-1-PB (2)	PDF	benganov	17/07/2025 19:30	benganov	17/07/2025 19:30
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Files\\Literature review\\Barriers in higher education perceptions and discourse analysis of students	PDF	benganov	22/07/2025 17:16	benganov	22/07/2025 17:16
Files\\Literature review\\Bentley (2025)	PDF	benganov	17/07/2025 22:41	benganov	21/07/2025 21:07
Files\\Literature review\\Beyene et al (2023)	PDF	benganov	17/07/2025 15:22	benganov	21/07/2025 21:05
Files\\Literature review\\Brewer et al (2025)	PDF	benganov	17/07/2025 16:52	benganov	21/07/2025 21:03
Files\\Literature review\\Chipchase et al (2024)	PDF	benganov	16/07/2025 11:29	benganov	21/07/2025 21:04
Files\\Literature review\\Cluley et (2023)	PDF	benganov	04/07/2025 16:47	benganov	04/07/2025 19:34
Files\\Literature review\\Disabled student experiences of Higher Education	PDF	benganov	21/07/2025 20:56	benganov	21/07/2025 20:56
Files\\Literature review\\Fatima Ezzahra Chadli et al (2021)	PDF	benganov	07/07/2025 16:33	benganov	07/07/2025 16:33
Files\\Literature review\\Feely (2016)	PDF	benganov	04/07/2025 16:47	benganov	04/07/2025 19:35
Files\\Literature review\\feely-2019-assemblage-analysis-an-experimental-new-materialist-method-for-analysing-narrative-	PDF	benganov	19/06/2025 18:41	benganov	19/06/2025 18:42
Files\\Literature review\\feely-2019-assemblage-analysis-an-experimental-new-materialist-method-for-analysing-narrative-	PDF	benganov	04/07/2025 16:47	benganov	04/07/2025 16:47
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Files\\Literature review\\Filippou (2024)	PDF	benganov	17/07/2025 15:29	benganov	21/07/2025 21:06

Hierarchical Name	Item Type	Created By Username	Created On	Modified By Username	Modified On
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Files\\Literature review\\Fox and Powell_2023	PDF	benganov	04/07/2025 16:47	benganov	04/07/2025 19:33
Files\\Literature review\\fox-powell-2021-place-health-and-dis-advantage-a-sociomaterial-	PDF	benganov	04/07/2025 16:47	benganov	04/07/2025 16:47
Files\\Literature review\\Harpur et al (2025)	PDF	benganov	17/07/2025 16:51	benganov	21/07/2025 21:02
Files\\Literature review\\IMG-20240719-WA0001	Picture	benganov	25/07/2025 12:04	benganov	25/07/2025 12:04
Files\\Literature review\\Inclusive education in higher education_challenges	PDF	benganov	22/07/2025 17:15	benganov	22/07/2025 17:15
Files\\Literature review\\Juan Manuel García-González-students with disabilities in	PDF	benganov	21/07/2025 20:56	benganov	21/07/2025 20:56
Files\\Literature review\\Katsui and Laitinen	PDF	benganov	04/07/2025 16:47	benganov	04/07/2025 19:36
Files\\Literature review\\Krzystof (2025) Higher_education_accessibility_information_in_prac	PDF	benganov	04/07/2025 16:47	benganov	04/07/2025 19:37
Files\\Literature review\\Krzysztof Krejtz (2025)	PDF	benganov	04/07/2025 16:47	benganov	21/07/2025 21:04
Files\\Literature review\\Lord, J. E and Stein (2018). Pursuing Inclusive Higher Education in Egypt and Beyond through the Convention on the Rights of	PDF	benganov	22/07/2025 22:26	benganov	22/07/2025 22:45
Files\\Literature review\\Majoko (2018)	PDF	benganov	18/07/2025 23:12	benganov	21/07/2025 21:06
Files\\Literature review\\Mandipa (2013)	PDF	benganov	25/07/2025 11:14	benganov	25/07/2025 11:14
Files\\Literature review\\morina-perera-2018-inclusive-higher-education-in-spain-students-with-disabilities-	PDF	benganov	17/07/2025 19:29	benganov	17/07/2025 19:29
Files\\Literature review\\morina-perera-2018-inclusive-higher-education-in-spain-students-with-disabilities-	PDF	benganov	17/07/2025 19:30	benganov	17/07/2025 19:30
Files\\Literature review\\Mwapaura (2024)-Key-considerations-when-doing-research-involving-people-with-	PDF	benganov	25/07/2025 10:48	benganov	25/07/2025 10:49
Files\\Literature review\\Olsen et al (2020)	PDF	benganov	17/07/2025 19:29	benganov	21/07/2025 21:00
Files\\Literature review\\Participation in higher education_Voices of students	PDF	benganov	21/07/2025 20:58	benganov	21/07/2025 20:58

Files\\Literature review\\Participation in higher education_Voices of students	PDF	benganov	21/07/2025 20:57	benganov	21/07/2025 20:57
Files\\Literature review\\Participationinhighereducationexperiencesofstudentswithdisabilities2011	PDF	benganov	16/07/2025 11:33	benganov	16/07/2025 11:33
Files\\Literature review\\Singal (2019)	PDF	benganov	21/07/2025 20:58	benganov	21/07/2025 21:03
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Hierarchical Name	Item Type	Created By Username	Created On	Modified By Username	Modified On
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Files\\Literature review\\Wertans and Burch	PDF	benganov	18/07/2025 23:16	benganov	21/07/2025 21:00

Files\\Project Affective journal

Files\\Project Affective journal\\Affective Journal	Document	benganov	18/06/2025 22:29	benganov	25/07/2025 10:31

Formatted Reports

Formatted Reports\\Case Classification Summary	Formatted Report	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23
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Formatted Reports\\Coding Structure Formatted Report	Formatted Report	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23
Formatted Reports\\Coding Summary by Code Formatted	Formatted Report	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23
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Framework Matrices

Hierarchical Name	Item Type	Created By Username	Created On	Modified By Username	Modified On
Relationship Types					
Relationship Types\\Associated	Relationship Type	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23
Relationships					
Static Sets					
Summaries					
Text Reports					
Text Reports\\Case Classification Summary Text	Text Report	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23
Text Reports\\Code Summary Text Report	Text Report	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23
Text Reports\\Coding Structure Text Report	Text Report	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23
Text Reports\\Coding Summary by Code Text Report	Text Report	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23
Text Reports\\Coding Summary by File Text Report	Text Report	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23
Text Reports\\File Classification Summary Text Report	Text Report	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23
Text Reports\\File Summary Text Report	Text Report	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23
Text Reports\\Project Summary Text Report	Text Report	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23	benganov	06/06/2025 13:23

APPENDIX 9: Autoethnographic Vignette No. 1: A Personal Story

I was born and raised in rural Eastern Zimbabwe, where I lived for 22 years before moving to Harare, the capital, in 2013 to begin my undergraduate studies. I remember when I was in second grade, our school had a Resource Unit for pupils with 'special needs'. During break times, we would gather around them and make fun of them and they would chase us around. Many negative narratives circulated about these pupils. Fast forward to high school: there was a boy in our village who used sign language. As far as I can remember, I never saw him at school. Sometimes, we would meet him on our way home, and we often felt afraid of him because it was rumoured that he would randomly beat people up. Again, many negative narratives surrounded this boy.

In 2013, during the first week of my undergraduate studies, I met a student with a physical impairment as we were exiting the lecture venue. He lived on campus, while I stayed off-campus, about an hour's travel. He would invite me to his room for a chat. I didn't have a laptop, so he let me use the one he had borrowed from the DSS to type my assignments. One day, he asked me if I was interested in becoming a personal helper for his friend with a visual impairment, who was having difficulty finding a personal helper. He explained to me that I could access free campus accommodation if I accepted this role. At first, I hesitated due to the negative narratives I grew up hearing in the village about PWDs. Eventually, I accepted mainly because I wanted the free accommodation, as I was struggling to afford the daily public transport fare to and from campus. This marked the beginning of my journey into disability studies. I started meeting and spending most of my time with many SWDs through the student I was assisting. Between 2013 and 2019, I gained first-hand experiences with SWDs, especially in their engagements across various sectors-education, employment, health, recreation, sports, technology etc. I also had the opportunity to discuss personal and 'uncomfortable' topics, including dating, family dynamics and marriage etc, with both female and male SWDs.

What struck me most during this time was that, although I was a registered helper for SWDs, in reality, I was receiving more help from them than I was giving. I did not have a personal laptop throughout my entire undergraduate and postgraduate studies and depended on SWDs for laptops (borrowed from DSS) and toiletries. Sometimes, I would return from the weekend to find my dirty clothes washed and ironed by my visually impaired roommate. In 2019, as I was completing my postgraduate dissertation, my visually impaired lecturer invited me to his house for a week and allowed me to use his children's laptop to finish my dissertation. Throughout my entire HE in Zimbabwe, I was dependent on SWDs.

Although I was awarded the Most Diligent Helper for SWDs in 2018, the award revealed to me the unrecognised role of students and academics with disabilities in enhancing access to HE for non-disabled students like myself. This often

occurs behind closed doors and remains unrecognised, under the assumption that SWDs are merely recipients of assistance. To date, I have over 20 contacts of professionals with disabilities whom I befriended in HE-legal practitioners, social workers, academics, activists, teachers, immigration officers, and more. I continue to rely on this network for various needs.

These encounters have significantly reoriented my views regarding impairments and disability, which is why I utilised a participatory research design in this study. Over the years, I have been challenged, questioned, advised and mentored by students and academics with disabilities. I bring a strength-based perspective to my work. I view PWDs as experts in their own lives and personal experiences.

When I started my PhD, I was interested in a disability model that allows for paying adequate attention to the complex dynamic relations between students and academics with disabilities and non-disabled students in HEIs. While the Social Model is popular, it primarily emphasizes barriers created by society and advocates for their dismantling. However, it does not adequately articulate the role of PWDs in dismantling barriers to access HE for non-disabled people like myself. To date, I have professional friends with disabilities who are working to ensure access to HE for their non-disabled siblings, yet these contributions are often concealed under the disability-poverty bidirectional relationship narrative. Discussions about the disability-poverty relationship perpetuate a one-sided narrative. They overlook the role of PWDs in breaking the poverty cycle for non-disabled people, like myself. Similarly, the concept of ‘dependence’ has been unfairly associated with PWDs, depending on non-disabled people, and rarely vice-versa. Yet, I found myself dependent on students and lecturers with disabilities in HE. Today, in the Global South, where formal social protection systems are limited to non-existent, children are culturally obliged to care for their younger siblings and elderly parents. In this context, several non-disabled family members depend on their disabled, professionally employed members for healthcare, education, food, and other necessities. This situation highlights the need for critical research to reconsider the concept of ‘dependence.’ I was excited when I was introduced to new materialism, particularly the concept of affect-capacity to affect and be affected. Assemblage thinking provides conceptual tools to produce complex, fair and inevitably incomplete narratives of disability, equally recognising how students and academics with disabilities drive access to HE for non-disabled students like myself. In this study, I aimed to contribute empirically in articulating how in/accessibility is reproduced for SWDs in HE in Zimbabwe. In/accessibility largely manifests in everyday mundane encounters that go unnoticed by established formal accessibility personnel and structures. After establishing my positionality and personal motivations, I will now discuss the rationale for the study.

APPENDIX 10. Literature search strategy

The literature search for the study covered the period from 2021 to 2025 (inclusive). The aim was to capture recent empirical and theoretical work, particularly that which engages with inclusion/exclusion, accessibility, and New Materialism, specifically the theories of Deleuze and Guattari in relation to Higher Education. The majority of the literature search was conducted at Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin Library, in November and December 2021, and June and July 2022, using the search terms outlined in Table 7 below. The literature search was conducted through Web of Science, EBSCOhost, and Scopus, with Google Scholar also utilised for a broader reach. The search also sought grey literature, particularly on disability in the context of HE in Zimbabwe. This included unpublished works in Higher Education Institutions' repositories. However, the researcher faced challenges with some Higher Education Institutions' websites, which were down most of the time. The search was restricted to English-language publications. The search strategy aimed to collect scholarly publications (articles, book chapters) that centred on accessibility within Higher Education environments.

Table 1: Search Terms

Research Area	Key Terms
Assemblage theory	Deleuzian theory: "assemblage", "agencement", "Deleuze", "Guattari", "Deleuze and Guattari", "becoming", "rhizome", "materiality", "affect", "capacity", "new materialism"
Disability	"disabled", "impaired", "people with disabilities", "disabled students", "students with disabilities", "visually impaired", "physically impaired", "visual "impairment", "physical impairment", "handicapped", "physically challenged", "blind", "blindness", "VI", "PC"
Higher education	"higher education", "university", "college", "Zimbabwe", "Southern Africa"

Accessibility	“access”, “inclusion”, “accessibility”, “inaccessibility”, “inclusive education”, “accommodation”, “marginalisation”, “physical accessibility”, “information and communication accessibility”, “digital accessibility, “transport accessibility”.
Region	“Global South”, “developing countries”, “third world”, “less-developing countries”, “low-and-middle-income countries”
Data collection	“Qualitative methodology”, “participatory methods”, “walking interviews”, walking/go-along interviews”, “photovoice”, “focus group discussions”, “camera”

Peer-reviewed qualitative and/or participatory studies on SWDs and accessibility within HEIs were prioritised. Informed by Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of a rhizome, a traditional literature review was conducted instead of a systematic one. A total of 532 articles (before deduplication) were identified as relevant to the study. After deduplication, 350-450 articles remained. However, after reviewing the abstracts, 102-120 articles were saved in EndNote. The researcher also used Google Scholar alerts to receive notifications for newly published journals on accessibility in HE and students with disabilities. Through Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of rhizomes, which involves reversing and branching off, a large number of additional articles were collected from the reference lists of the original collection of 102 articles. The researcher also received journal article recommendations and books from supervisors and thesis committee members. As a result, approximately 330-400 articles were reviewed.

APPENDIX 11: Services offered by the Disability Support Services at the HEI studied

Service	Brief Description
Research	• Constant researching on matters of disability
Enrolment	• Assisting students with disabilities in registration process and accessing accommodation on campus.
Personal helpers	• Assisting students with disabilities to find suitable students helpers for them during their life at university X (anonymised).
Training	• Training new visually impaired students in mobility, orientation and navigation of the university environment. • Training sign language for students with hearing impairment to facilitate effective communication.
Personal	• Offering inclusive support to all students with disabilities during their university lives. • Developing positive self-image in students with disabilities. • Identifying and support to meet individual needs of students with disabilities.
Barrier removal	• Removing all barriers to learning and increasing physical and curriculum access to all students with disabilities.
Awareness raising	• Raising disability awareness so that the university community has a clear understanding of disabilities to enable them to work with all students with disabilities.
Curriculum	• Providing curriculum support to students with disabilities.

Digital	• Providing suitable technology including hardware and software to students with diverse disabilities. • Maximising use of ICT to ensure success for transition of students with disabilities to reach their potential and become flourishing citizens who make successful transition to adulthood.
Information	• Providing learning and other materials into braille for use by visually impaired students. • Transcribing or converting brailed material by students into print for lecturers and other stakeholders to enable them to read the material.

Source: HEI's DSS website

APPENDIX 12: Research Ethics Approval, School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Research Ethics Committee
School of Social Work and Social Policy
Trinity College Dublin, The University of Dublin
https://www.tcd.ie/swsp/research/ethics.php
swsp.ethics@tcd.ie

Dublin, November 2023

Internal Reference: ID No 1102

REAMS ID No: 2465

Dear Vitalis Bengano

Thank you for your recent application to the Research Ethics Committee (REC) for the study ***"An Exploration of the Experiences of Disabled Students in Accessing the Built Environment in Higher Education in Zimbabwe: A New Materialist Perspective".***

The application has been reviewed by the School of Social Work and Social Policy REC and *approval has been granted subject to recommendations being considered and approved between yourself and your supervisor.*

Please note that you are not required to re-submit this application to the REC. The application has also been reviewed by the Trinity College Data Protection Office and the decision to approve has been granted.

On behalf of the committee, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to read this application and I wish you the very best with your research project.

Yours sincerely,

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Research Ethics Committee
School of Social Work and Social Policy
Trinity College Dublin, The University of Dublin
https://www.tcd.ie/swsp/research/ethics.php
swsp.ethics@tcd.ie

Comments:

The REC recommends/remarked:

1. Note that Sharepoint has now replaced OneDrive as TCD approved storage point for Data so please use former for all data storage.
2. To the question 'Do your participants require support to give consent' – the answer is no. Consider this in light of how visually impaired/ blind students indicate their consent? The participants' signature of the consent form indicates to the researcher that participants have read or listened and understood the information provided on the PIL and have made an informed decision and agree to participate in the research. The PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM provides a signature line. If it is the case that visually impaired/blind students require assistance to sign the consent form – what assistance has been put in place?
3. Will participants be given the opportunity to 'member - check' i.e have access to their transcripts for review before data anonymisation. Clarify that visually impaired/blind students will be provided with a braille copy if required.
4. Re the Consent Form - 'To be completed by the Principal Investigator or nominee' for this research, 'or nominee' could be removed to provide clarity for the participant that all interviews are conducted by one researcher (the applicant). Consent Form for visually impaired/ blind students should be provided. The statement ' I confirm I have read' could be adjusted to include 'listened to' to reflect the ways that some visually impaired/blind students may choose to engage with the information provided. No focus group participation is required by Vi/B students, so consent is not required to be listed on the Consent form. As previously stated, - signature requirements may be adjusted to accommodate vi/b students.
5. In the sampling section it states: 'Visually impaired/blind students will be invited to participate in an information session for 30 minutes'. Please clarify re the information session for visually impaired students - are participants given 7 days after the information session to consider their participation in the research as per ethical

APPENDIX 13: Research Council of Zimbabwe, Clearance Letter

RESEARCH COUNCIL OF ZIMBABWE

Leadership, Innovation and Development

Cabinet Office
No 11 Stafford Road
Mt Pleasant, Harare
P.O. Box CY2M, Causeway
Harare, Zimbabwe
Tel: 263-242-304793, 304797, 304881
Fax: 263-242-304896
Email: secretary@rcz.ac.zw
Website: www.rcz.ac.zw

REF SC/9 148

29 November 2023

Mr Vitalis Bengano
Trinity College Dublin

Dear Sir,

Research Clearance: An Exploration of the experiences of students with disabilities in Accessing the built environment in Higher Education in Zimbabwe: A New Materialist Perspective

The Research Council of Zimbabwe (RCZ) is in receipt of a communication dated 28 November 2023 on the above subject matter.

RCZ has duly noted that you are a Zimbabwean student currently enrolled at Trinity College Dublin. Your intention to conduct research within Zimbabwe aligns with your PhD studies in Social Work and Social Policy. The data collection period, as indicated, is scheduled to occur from December 2023 to March 2024. During this time, you will serve as a visiting student collaborating with the Department of Social Work at the [redacted].

After careful consideration of the submitted documents, you are authorized to proceed with data collection during the specified period. However, this authorization does not preclude you from acquiring approvals from any authorities or organizations relevant to your research.

Furthermore, it is imperative that the final research report be shared with RCZ and uploaded to the National Research Database of Zimbabwe. This step ensures that your findings are widely accessible and contribute significantly to the advancement of knowledge within Zimbabwe.

Yours sincerely,

For the Acting Executive Director

APPENDIX 14: Application letter for Permission to Conduct Fieldwork

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

The Executive Director
Research and Innovation Directorate

Harare, Zimbabwe

17 September 2023

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Request for permission to conduct research at the Campus premises, Disability Support Services Unit

I write to request permission to conduct research at the Campus. I am in the third year of my PhD in the School of Social Work and Social Policy at Trinity College Dublin (TCD), Ireland. The research aims to document the experiences of students with disabilities in accessing the built environment in higher education settings in Zimbabwe.

I kindly request permission to access and recruit at least 30 students with disabilities under the Disability Support Services Unit. Data collection is scheduled to take place between 10 October and 20 December 2023. During that period, I will work as a visiting PhD Student with Dr. Witness Chikoko, Chairperson of the Department of Social Work at the

Data from the study will be strictly used for academic purposes. An abridged version of research findings **(Co-Produced Policy Brief)** backed by photographs will be submitted to the . I hope that findings from the study can inform any future policy developments at the and the modification of barriers, if pertinent. Also, existing accessibility practices proven to work well for students with disabilities would be brought to the university's attention. With the support of my two supervisors, I, as the PhD researcher, plan to deliver a Public Lecture at in 2025 on Creative and Innovative Methodologies in disability research, bringing together people with disabilities, students, policy makers and researchers from TCD and to exchange research knowledge. If successful, this could be rolled out as an annual event.

Data collection will only proceed after obtaining written ethical approval from the School of Social Work and Social Policy Research Ethics Committee (REC) at Trinity College Dublin. The ethical approval letter from the REC will follow in due course.

Please find attached the research proposal as it pertains to the research methodology. If you have any questions, please contact my supervisor, co-signed below. Thank you.

Yours faithfully

Vitalis Bengano

Dr. Edume Garcia Iriarte
iriartee@tcd.ie

Edume Garcia Iriarte

Supervisor

Research and Innovation Directorate
19 DEC 2023
RECEIVED

APPENDIX 15: Front Cover of the Two-Way Confidentiality Agreement form

(1) The Provost, Fellows, Foundation Scholars, and the other members of Board, of the College of the Holy and Undivided Trinity of Queen Elizabeth near Dublin

and

(2)

TWO-WAY CONFIDENTIAL DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT

APPENDIX 16: Section of fieldwork clearance application form, Zimbabwe

PROPOSAL REVIEW FORM

NOTE The Form should be processed with help of the Faculty Research and Innovation Manager who together with the Faculty Representative must facilitate the presentation to and approval by the Faculty and University Research and Innovation Committees

All fields are **mandatory.**

1. **Faculty/Institute/Center:** Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences
2. **Name of Department/Unit/Institute/Center:** Department of Social Work
3. **Name of Research Group:** Social Protection
4. **Name of Project:** An exploration of the experiences of students with disabilities in accessing the built environment in higher education in Zimbabwe: A New Materialist Perspective.
5. **Project Period: Start**.....Dec...2023.....**End**.....March...2024.....
6. **Name and Contact of Lead Person/ Principal Investigator**
   i. **Name:** Vitalis Bengano
   ii. **Email:** benganov@tcd.ie
   vitalisbenganohsw17@gmail.com
   iii. **Telephone:**
7. **Grant Cluster** (e.g. Vice Chancellor's Challenge Research Fund; Research and Innovation Programme etc.):

APPENDIX 17: Keynote lecture at the 15th International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry in Illinois in 2019 by St. Pierre.

"When I was a doctoral student in the early 1990s, I studied conventional, humanist qualitative research methodology on one hand, and, on the other, I studied postmodernism and poststructuralism. It didn't occur to me that the two might not work together, that they are, in fact, incommensurable. From the beginning of my doctoral research, my methodology training in qualitative research trumped my theoretical training in poststructuralism, which I confined to the literature review chapter of my dissertation, and I automatically leaped to methodology and implemented the qualitative research process. In other words, I began with methodology and not poststructuralism. It didn't occur to me that methodology might not be thinkable in poststructuralism. It didn't occur to me there might be a way to inquire without using a pre-existing social science research methodology. But my choices seemed to be either qualitative or quantitative methodology. I certainly didn't want to do a quantitative study and mixed methods had yet to be invented".

APPENDIX 18: St. Pierre advice:

> *"My advice to students and junior scholars is: do not be afraid. Don't shut yourself down before you even begin. After all, we invented the big three social science research methodologies in the last century and they have roots in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. Today's pressing, horrifying difference that haunts me every minute is that even the planet is not the same as it has been for centuries because we've destroyed it. At some point, what "cannot be thought and yet must be thought" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 60) is no longer optional but an ethical obligation. If those of you who are students and junior scholars need permission to do something different, I and many others here today can give you that permission and support your work*". (St. Pierre, 2021).

APPENDIX 19: Personal reflections by St. Pierre

> *"It seems pretty clear that post-structural scholars refused pre-existing methods and methodologies. But it took me some time to really understand that because of my training as a qualitative methodologist. One of the lessons I have learned is how very hard it is to escape our training. We academics come to the university for our doctoral studies at a particular time in our lives and learn the truth about this or that from the professors who happen to be there at the time. If you study with a pragmatist, you'll likely be a pragmatist. But if you come to the university the year after the pragmatist professor retires, you might study with a Marxist, and you'll likely be a Marxist. If you learn quantitative methodology, you'll likely use that methodology in your research and teach it to your students. We learn what we're taught, and then we teach what we know".* (St. Pierre, 2021:4).