Chapter 1
Assistive Technologies Transforming the Lives of Learners With Disabilities in Higher Education:
The South African University Context

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ABSTRACT

Learners with disabilities have a right to quality education. They have earned their place in higher education and should be treated fairly and with respect. This is often not the case in South Africa, where students with disabilities are often marginalized or treated like tokenistic entrances. During post-democracy, the higher education sector in South Africa has inherent problems stemming from the apartheid regime. Post-democracy, in South Africa, the first thing on the agenda for the government was to transform the higher education arena. Universities had to increase entrance to historically disadvantaged learners who were marginalized during apartheid. In the new democracy, more learners with disabilities have entered higher education, and racial integration was also made possible at the university level.

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INTRODUCTION

People with disabilities form part of the world's population, and their needs, especially in Higher education, needs to be addressed. Learners with disabilities need Higher education institutions to provide them with quality education. In South Africa, education is a right enshrined in the country's constitution. Apartheid segregated learners within Higher education along racial lines. At the school level, another unfortunate circumstance prevailing was that learners with disabilities were kept separate in classes run only for them. The reality that transpired was that the exclusion faced by learners with disabilities at the school, did not encourage their easy integration into university life. Within Higher education in South Africa, learners with disabilities continue to face obstacles and do not receive the same quality education as students with no disabilities within a university. The aim of this chapter is to explore learners with disabilities and their plight within universities. Further to this, the South African context will be explored.

The researcher believes that South Africa is a unique country with a reasonably new democracy and would start the discussion by providing a background and overview of apartheid and its' impact on the South African education system and how current policy has transformed the landscape of learners with disabilities.

BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW OF APARTHEID AND ITS' IMPACT ON THE SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM AND HOW RECENT POLICY IN DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA HAS TRANSFORMED THE LANDSCAPE FOR LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES

This researcher explores South African learners with disabilities, and it is essential to understand that South Africa is a contemporary democracy. Previously the country was under apartheid rule. Under apartheid only the White race, were given power. They were the privileged minority who were allowed to vote and occupy positions of power. Schools, hospitals, universities, parks, even suburbs and cities were designated along racial lines. Non-white members of South African society had no right to a vote. The quality of education and the universities provided for white university students were far superior to those offered to non-white learners. Universities were also designated along racial lines. Before 1994, it is essential to note that in South Africa during apartheid, learners with disabilities were also denied access to higher education opportunities. After a long political struggle, a new democracy was born in 1994. However, extensive work was needed by government and social activists to assist in country's transformation. Many new laws, statutes and a new constitution

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