
Bridging Policy and Practice: Evaluating Government Initiatives for Equal Information Access for Students with Physical Disabilities in Kenyan Universities

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ABSTRACT

Equal access to information is essential for inclusive higher education and academic success among students with physical disabilities (SWPDs). In Kenya, comprehensive policies, legal frameworks, and funding mechanisms exist to promote accessibility; however, their practical effectiveness remains unclear. This study evaluated government-led initiatives, including policies, funding, digital accessibility standards, and monitoring mechanisms, and their impact on SWPDs' access to information in four universities representing public-private and urban-rural diversity: University of Nairobi, Alupe University, Mt. Kenya University, and Tangaza University. Guided by a pragmatist paradigm, a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was adopted. Quantitative data were collected from 105 SWPDs using structured questionnaires, while qualitative insights were obtained through in-depth interviews with 28 SWPDs and eight institutional staff (disability coordinators and registrars). Stratified random sampling was used for SWPDs, and purposive and census sampling for institutional staff. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, and qualitative data were thematically analyzed. Findings indicate moderate awareness of government initiatives (61.9%) but low perceived effectiveness (22.8%). Qualitative results revealed fragmented policy dissemination, underutilized funding, weak monitoring, inconsistent institutional implementation, and limited staff capacity, highlighting a persistent policy-practice gap. The study concludes that policies alone are insufficient to ensure equitable information access. Effective implementation requires targeted funding, strengthened institutional capacity, continuous staff training, and robust monitoring. Implications include the need for policymakers, university administrators, and disability advocates to coordinate strategies that translate legislative commitments into tangible improvements, ensuring meaningful academic participation for SWPDs.

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1. Introduction

According to Agbabiaka et al. (2024), equal access to information is a foundational pillar of inclusive university and a prerequisite for academic engagement and success among students with physical disabilities (SWPDs). In contemporary university environments, information accessibility encompasses access to digital learning platforms, electronic library resources, administrative information systems, assistive technologies, and physical infrastructures that support ergonomic interaction with academic materials (Kiambati et al., 2024; Kiruki & Mutula, 2023). As higher education systems globally continue to digitize teaching, learning, and administrative processes, disparities in access pose significant risks of exclusion for students with disabilities (Memon & Memon, 2025).

Internationally, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) obligates member states to ensure that higher education institutions adopt reasonable accommodations and accessible information systems (Beyene et al., 2023). Countries such as India, South Africa, Mexico, and Brazil have developed strong disability frameworks; yet, research consistently reveals a persistent gap between legislative commitments and practical realities. For instance, Arora (2023) found that despite robust policies in India, SWPDs still encounter inaccessible learning materials and insufficient assistive technologies. Similarly, Vincent and Chiwandire (2019) note that bureaucratic barriers and weak institutional monitoring hinder the effective implementation of inclusion initiatives in South Africa.

In Kenya, the government has enacted multiple legal and policy instruments intended to promote equal access to information for SWPDs, including the Persons with Disabilities Act, the National ICT Policy, the Universities Act, and disability mainstreaming guidelines (Wachira, 2021). Complementary initiatives, such as the Quality Assurance Standards, the National Digital Masterplan, and NCPWD funding programs, further underscore the state's commitment to inclusive higher education (Nyamweya et al., 2024). These measures aim to create environments where SWPDs can access information equitably, participate fully in academic life, and realize their educational aspirations.

However, despite the existence of these frameworks, empirical evidence suggests that SWPDs continue to face substantial barriers within Kenyan universities. Studies by Abuya & Githinji (2020), Malinovskiy et al. (2024), Luvalle (2022), Nyimbi & Kajiru (2024) and Maina et al. (2025) highlight persistent challenges, including inaccessible digital platforms, inadequate assistive technologies, underutilized funding opportunities, and limited awareness of national policies among both students and staff. These challenges reflect a broader policy-practice gap, where government initiatives are not consistently translated into actionable institutional strategies or tangible student outcomes.

Structural and administrative constraints, including insufficient training among university personnel, weak enforcement mechanisms, inadequate monitoring, and inconsistent institutional prioritization, further contribute to fragmented accessibility efforts (Maina et al., 2025). Without systematic evaluation, it remains unclear whether government initiatives meaningfully improve information accessibility for SWPDs or exist largely as aspirational policy commitments. Addressing this uncertainty, the current study examines national policies, funding mechanisms, and mandated accessibility standards and evaluates their effectiveness in improving information access across four diverse Kenyan universities.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The Kenyan government has established comprehensive policies and legal frameworks to promote disability inclusion in higher education. Yet, the actual impact of these initiatives on information access for SWPDs remains poorly understood. While national policies emphasize accessibility, many universities continue to exhibit insufficient assistive technologies, inaccessible digital systems, limited staff capacity, and poorly coordinated support services. Government funding mechanisms are inconsistently allocated or underutilized, and monitoring structures for enforcing accessibility standards remain weak. Consequently, SWPDs face continued barriers in accessing learning materials, digital content, and administrative information. The misalignment between national commitments and institutional implementation signals a persistent policy–practice gap that requires systematic evaluation.

1.2 Research Objectives

To analyze national policies, legal frameworks, and ICT accessibility standards governing information access for SWPDs in Kenyan universities.

To evaluate the adequacy, utilization, and impact of government funding mechanisms aimed at enhancing information accessibility for SWPDs in Kenyan universities.

To assess the extent of institutional implementation and compliance with government-mandated accessibility requirements in selected Kenyan universities.

2. Literature Review

2.1 National Policies, Legal Frameworks, and ICT Accessibility Standards

Global evidence indicates that strong policies do not automatically translate into practical accessibility. Arora (2023) notes that disability legislation in India has limited impact due to inconsistent institutional adoption. Similarly, Polo and Díaz (2025) report that Mexican universities rely heavily on individual staff goodwill in the absence of structured institutional frameworks.

In Africa, research emphasizes the need for robust policy enforcement. Vincent and Chiwandire (2019) highlight the disconnect between national commitments and actual support for students with disabilities in South Africa, a gap exacerbated by bureaucratic and organizational limitations.

Kenya has developed multiple disability-related frameworks, including the Persons with Disabilities Act, the National ICT Policy, Disability Mainstreaming Guidelines, the Universities Act, and NCPWD Accessibility Guidelines, alongside the National Digital Masterplan (Nyamweya et al., 2024). These frameworks require universities to adopt universal design principles, provide reasonable accommodation, ensure accessible websites, and create ergonomic learning environments. Yet, studies by Abuya & Githinji (2020) and Nyimbi & Kajiru (2024) indicate limited awareness and operationalization of these policies, while Malinovskiy et al. (2024) observe a lack of structured mechanisms aligning internal university systems with national accessibility requirements. Overall, the literature

highlights a strong policy foundation but weak institutional readiness and enforcement.

2.2 Government Funding Mechanisms and Accessibility Investments

Adequate funding is essential for acquiring assistive technologies, establishing accessible digital systems, and training staff. Internationally, funding is consistently reported as a major barrier. For example, Nazim & Ali (2025) found that only 35.6% of Indian university libraries had appropriate assistive technologies, while Eneya & Adesina (2025) documented that African university libraries often lack adaptive technologies due to budgetary limitations.

In Kenya, funding exists through NCPWD grants, Ministry of Education allocations, government-sponsored SNE funds, and disability mainstreaming budget lines. Nevertheless, Luvalle (2022) notes that accessibility funding is often insufficient and inconsistently prioritized. Awareness of funding opportunities remains low among administrators (Malinovskiy et al., 2024), leading to underutilization. The literature emphasizes that while funding mechanisms exist, their scale, communication, and monitoring are inadequate, limiting their ability to drive meaningful improvements.

2.3 Implementation and Compliance with Accessibility Requirements

Implementation determines the practical value of government initiatives. Globally, universities struggle to translate policy requirements into actionable strategies. In Mexico, Polo Martínez & Díaz Barriga (2025) report that accessibility structures remain largely ad hoc. Vincent and Chiwandire (2019) highlight insufficient institutional capacity as a key barrier in South Africa.

In Kenya, Abuya & Githinji (2020) and Nyimbi & Kajiru (2024) note that universities rarely prioritize digital accessibility or ergonomic adjustments. Compliance with basic accessibility principles, such as alternative formats, screen-reader compatibility, and accessible campus communication systems, remains limited. Even where policies exist, weak monitoring, limited staff capacity, and lack of strategic direction hinder practical implementation (Eneya, & Adesina, 2025). The literature concludes that government initiatives, although promising, have yet to fully materialize into equitable information access.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a pragmatic research philosophy, emphasizing practical solutions to real-world problems while remaining flexible in combining multiple research approaches. Pragmatism is particularly suited to investigations that require both measurement of outcomes and understanding of human experiences, such as evaluating the effectiveness of government initiatives in enhancing information access for SWPDs in Kenyan universities (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). By integrating quantitative and qualitative methods, the study sought to produce actionable insights that bridge the gap between policy and practice. The quantitative component provided measurable evidence of accessibility interventions, while the qualitative component captured SWPDs' lived experiences, highlighting personal barriers, contextual challenges, and perceptions of government support (Bidwell

& Báez, 2025).

3.1 Research Design

The study employed a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to evaluate government initiatives. Structured questionnaires were administered to SWPDs, disability coordinators, and university registrars to capture standardized information on institutional compliance, funding usage, and resource availability. Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to identify patterns, relationships, and gaps across universities and disability categories.

The qualitative component explored the experiences of SWPDs and institutional personnel through interviews. Thematic analysis identified recurring challenges, practical gaps, and perceptions of government support, complementing quantitative findings with contextual depth. Triangulating both methods enhanced reliability, validity, and the overall robustness of the study.

3.2 Research Approach

A sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach was adopted to allow for a robust and systematic examination of accessibility initiatives. The initial quantitative phase enabled the identification of prevailing patterns, trends, and measurable impacts of accessibility interventions across the study context. This was essential for establishing the extent and distribution of accessibility outcomes. The subsequent qualitative phase provided deeper explanatory insights by exploring participants' experiences, perceptions, and contextual factors underlying the quantitative results.

The choice of this approach was justified by the multifaceted nature of accessibility and inclusion, which encompasses both measurable outcomes and lived experiences. By integrating numerical evidence with qualitative explanations, the study enhances the validity, depth, and interpretability of findings. Furthermore, the approach aligns with a pragmatic research philosophy, which emphasizes methodological flexibility and the use of complementary methods to address complex real-world problems (Creswell, 2024; Bidwell & Báez, 2025).

3.3 Study Locations

The study was conducted across four universities selected purposively to capture institutional and contextual diversity relevant to the implementation of government-mandated accessibility initiatives. The University of Nairobi was included to represent a large, urban public institution with relatively advanced infrastructure and policy frameworks. Alupe University was selected as a newer rural public university, offering insight into accessibility implementation within resource-constrained and developing institutional environments. Mt. Kenya University was included as a large private university to examine how privately funded institutions operationalize accessibility requirements, while Tangaza University represented a smaller private institution, allowing assessment of implementation dynamics within more limited administrative and infrastructural settings.

The selection of these study locations enabled comparative analysis across public and private institutions, urban and rural contexts, and varying levels of institutional maturity. This diversity strengthened the transferability of findings by reflecting the range of structural, geographic, and

operational factors that influence the effectiveness of accessibility initiatives in higher education institutions.

3.4 Study Population

The study population was deliberately selected to capture both user-level experiences and institutional perspectives on the implementation of accessibility interventions. SWPDs constituted the core population, as they are the primary beneficiaries of accessibility initiatives and are directly affected by policies, technologies, and support mechanisms governing access to information. Their inclusion ensured that the study reflected lived experiences and practical challenges encountered in real academic settings.

Disability coordinators were included because they are responsible for the design, coordination, and day-to-day management of accessibility programs, making them key informants on institutional practices, resource allocation, and compliance with accessibility standards. Registrars were selected to provide strategic and administrative perspectives, particularly on policy formulation, institutional commitment, and integration of accessibility initiatives within broader academic governance structures.

The combination of these participant groups enabled triangulation of evidence across users, implementers, and decision-makers, thereby enhancing the credibility and completeness of the findings. Stratified random sampling was employed for SWPDs to ensure representation across gender, year of study, and disability type, strengthening the generalizability of quantitative results. Purposive and census sampling were used for disability coordinators and registrars due to their limited numbers and specialized roles. The final sample comprised 105 SWPDs for quantitative surveys, 28 SWPDs for qualitative interviews, and 8 institutional staff, providing adequate breadth and depth to address the study objectives.

3.5 Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using structured questionnaires, interview schedules, and semi-structured interviews. The structured questionnaires were selected to facilitate the systematic collection of quantitative data on accessibility measures, availability and use of assistive technologies, and levels of institutional compliance with accessibility standards. Their use enabled the generation of comparable and statistically analyzable data across institutions, supporting objective assessment of patterns and relationships.

Interview schedules guided the semi-structured interviews and ensured consistency across interview sessions while allowing flexibility to probe emerging issues. Interviews were particularly important for capturing in-depth insights into the lived experiences of SWPDs and for eliciting institutional perspectives from disability coordinators and registrars. This qualitative approach complemented the questionnaire data by explaining observed quantitative trends and uncovering contextual factors that could not be adequately captured through structured instruments alone.

The combined use of questionnaires and interviews enhanced methodological triangulation, thereby improving the validity and credibility of the findings. Each instrument addressed distinct but complementary dimensions of accessibility, ensuring both breadth and depth in data collection.

The instruments were piloted at Egerton University to assess clarity, reliability, and validity prior to the main study. Egerton University was selected for the pilot because it shares comparable institutional characteristics with the study universities in terms of student population size, accessibility structures, and regulatory environment, while not forming part of the final study sample. Conducting the pilot at this site minimized contamination of the main study while allowing refinement of the instruments to ensure contextual relevance, logical flow, and appropriateness of terminology.

3.6 Reliability and Validity

Reliability was ensured to guarantee consistency and dependability of the research instruments and findings. Standardized procedures were used in administering questionnaires and interviews across all study sites to minimize measurement error and enhance consistency. Internal consistency of the questionnaire items was further assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which provided a statistical indication of the extent to which the items measured the same underlying constructs, thereby increasing confidence in the stability of the quantitative results.

Validity was established to ensure that the instruments accurately measured the intended constructs related to accessibility and inclusion. Content and construct validity were enhanced through expert review, where specialists in disability studies and research methodology evaluated the instruments for relevance, clarity, and theoretical alignment. Alignment with established theoretical frameworks ensured that the instruments were grounded in existing scholarship and policy discourse on accessibility.

Methodological triangulation, achieved by integrating quantitative and qualitative data, strengthened validity by corroborating findings across multiple sources and methods. Additionally, member checking was employed during the qualitative phase to confirm the accuracy and interpretation of participants' responses, thereby enhancing credibility and reducing the risk of researcher bias.

3.7 Data Management and Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, employing descriptive and inferential statistics. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically using NVivo to identify recurring patterns and insights regarding policy implementation, funding utilization, and accessibility challenges. Triangulation integrated objective measures and experiential insights for a holistic evaluation of government initiatives.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were central to the design and implementation of this study. Ethical approval was obtained from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) prior to data collection, confirming compliance with national research ethics requirements. All participants were provided with clear and comprehensive information regarding the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before involvement in the study. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

Respect for participants' privacy and dignity was upheld throughout the research process. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured through the use of unique identifiers instead of personal

names, and no personally identifiable information was disclosed in reports or publications. Particular sensitivity was exercised when engaging SWPDs to ensure that data collection procedures were respectful, accessible, and non-discriminatory.

4. Results

This section presents the findings in alignment with the study objectives. The results integrate both quantitative data from 105 SWPDs and qualitative data from 28 SWPDs and 8 institutional staff. Each subsection begins with an interpretation of overall trends, followed by quantitative and qualitative evidence.

4.1 Objective 1: National Policies, Legal Frameworks, and ICT Accessibility Standards

4.1.1 Quantitative Findings

The findings reveal that awareness of national policies and ICT accessibility standards among SWPDs is low, with less than half of respondents aware of relevant frameworks. Even when students are aware, functional access to accessible platforms and assistive technologies is limited. This indicates a significant policy–practice gap, where legislation exists but practical adoption within universities is weak.

Table 1. Awareness and Accessibility of Policies among SWPDs (N = 105)

Indicator	Yes (n)	No (n)
Aware of National ICT Policy	42(40%)	63(60%)
Aware of Disability Mainstreaming Guidelines	36(34%)	69(66%)
University digital platforms accessible	48(46%)	57(54%)
Assistive technologies integrated	35(36%)	70(67%)
Policies actively enforced by staff	28(27%)	77(73%)

The low percentages indicate that policy awareness and operationalization are limited, with the majority of SWPDs experiencing inadequate access to assistive technologies and digital platforms.

4.1.2 Qualitative Findings

Interviews revealed that low awareness stems from poor dissemination of policies and inadequate staff training. Even where policies exist, students and staff often lack clarity on their application, reducing practical accessibility.

Supporting Quotes:

“Even though the government has policies, most of us don’t know what they cover. Sometimes we discover information only when we request special help.” — SWPD, University of Nairobi.

“The ICT platforms are supposed to be accessible, but many screens and files are not compatible with screen readers. Policies exist, but enforcement is minimal.” — Disability Coordinator, Mt. Kenya University.

“We have guidelines from NCPWD, but the university doesn’t train staff on these. Staff are unaware, so support is inconsistent.” — SWPD, Tangaza University.

These insights confirm that policy awareness and enforcement gaps hinder effective accessibility for SWPDs.

4.2 Objective 2: Government Funding Mechanisms and Accessibility Investments

4.2.1 Quantitative Findings

While funding mechanisms exist through NCPWD, the Ministry of Education, and university allocations, their practical impact is limited. Less than 40% of SWPDs reported benefiting from these funds. Qualitative evidence shows delays, low prioritization, and insufficient communication reduce the effectiveness of funding in enhancing accessibility.

Table 2. Utilization and Adequacy of Government Funding (N = 105)

Funding Aspect	Adequate (n)	Inadequate/Not Used (n)
Received NCPWD grants	25(24%)	80(76%)
Ministry of Education allocations used	33(31%)	72(69%)
University SNE support	38(36%)	67(64%)
Staff trained using funded programs	30(29%)	75(71%)
Assistive technologies purchased/maintained	28(27%)	77(73%)

The data indicate that although funding channels exist, utilization is low, and support for accessibility infrastructure is inadequate.

4.2.2 Qualitative Findings

Interviews revealed that underutilization stems from low awareness among students and staff, bureaucratic delays, and inadequate prioritization of accessibility needs. Funding, even when available, does not consistently translate into functional improvements.

Supporting Quotes:

“The university sometimes receives grants, but we are not informed. Even when funds exist, it doesn’t translate into more accessible platforms or devices.” — SWPD, Alupe University.

“Funding is rarely prioritized for accessibility. Budgets are tight, and assistive technologies are considered extra, not essential.” — Registrar, University of Nairobi.

“We applied for NCPWD support, but the process is slow, and by the time it comes, the devices are outdated or insufficient.” — SWPD, Mt. Kenya University.

These quotes confirm that practical impact of government funding is limited by administrative and communication barriers, aligning with quantitative findings.

4.3 Objective 3: Institutional Implementation and Compliance

4.3.1 Quantitative Findings

Institutional compliance with accessibility standards is low, with less than 40% of SWPDs reporting full implementation of accessibility measures. Weak monitoring, insufficient staff training, and inconsistent application of standards undermine the translation of national policies into tangible support.

Table 3. Institutional Accessibility Implementation (N = 105)

Measure	Fully Implemented (n)	Partially/Not Implemented (n)
Alternative content formats	37(35%)	68(65%)
Ergonomic learning spaces	33(31%)	72(69%)
Digital platforms compatible	39(37%)	66(63%)
Staff trained in accessibility	28(27%)	77(73%)
Monitoring compliance	22(21%)	83(79%)

Low percentages across all measures demonstrate limited institutional adherence to accessibility standards.

4.3.2 Qualitative Findings

Interviews reveal that weak monitoring, inadequate staff capacity, and inconsistent implementation hinder effective accessibility. Universities often treat accessibility as a peripheral rather than a core institutional priority.

Supporting Quotes:

“We are aware of the guidelines, but the university rarely monitors compliance. Sometimes the systems work; other times they don’t.” — SWPD, Tangaza University.

“Even with accessible platforms, staff are not trained. If a student asks for help, they don’t know what to do.” — SWPD, Alupe University.

“Monitoring is supposed to happen, but it is mostly a formality. Accessibility is not a priority in university planning.” — Registrar, Mt. Kenya University.

The qualitative evidence corroborates the quantitative findings, showing that policy exists, but institutional implementation is weak.

5. Discussion

This section interprets the findings presented in Section 4, contextualizing them within the global and Kenyan literature and examining the implications of government initiatives for information access among SWPDs.

5.1 Objective 1: National Policies, Legal Frameworks, and ICT Accessibility Standards

The study revealed that although Kenya has established a robust legal and policy environment for disability inclusion, SWPDs' awareness of these frameworks remains limited. Less than half of the participants reported familiarity with key instruments such as the National ICT Policy and the Disability Mainstreaming Guidelines. This highlights a policy-practice gap, where legislative and regulatory provisions exist but fail to translate into tangible benefits at the institutional and student levels. These findings are consistent with Arora (2023), who observed that in India, progressive disability legislation has limited effect because students and staff are often unaware of its provisions. Similarly, Abuya and Githinji (2020) noted in the Kenyan context that poor dissemination and weak institutional communication hinder effective policy uptake. Malinovskiy et al. (2024) also argued that institutional unpreparedness and limited operational integration reduce the practical impact of national disability policies in universities. Contrastingly, Polo and Díaz (2025) argue that in Mexico, policy awareness is less of a challenge than institutional adoption, suggesting that awareness alone does not guarantee action. In this study, however, the evidence indicates that both awareness and operationalization are critical, and the lack of awareness exacerbates the disconnect between policy intentions and SWPDs' experiences.

While policy frameworks provide a formal commitment to inclusion, their efficacy is contingent upon structured communication, orientation programs for students and staff, and integration into daily academic practices. Without such mechanisms, policies risk remaining symbolic rather than transformative.

5.2 Objective 2: Government Funding Mechanisms and Accessibility Investments

Quantitative and qualitative results showed that government funding for SWPDs is available but underutilized. Less than 40% of participants reported benefiting from NCPWD grants or Ministry of Education allocations, and institutional allocation of these funds is often inconsistent. This limits universities' ability to acquire assistive technologies, maintain accessible digital platforms, and train staff to support SWPDs. The findings corroborate Luvalle (2022), who reported that although Kenya provides targeted disability funding, insufficient institutional prioritization and communication undermine its effectiveness. Eneya and Adesina (2025) similarly note that developing countries often face fragmented implementation of inclusive funding due to bureaucratic inefficiencies and lack of strategic planning. However, these findings partially contradict Nazim and Ali (2025), who observed in India that funding availability alone is a strong predictor of assistive technology uptake in libraries. In the Kenyan context, this study shows that funding potential is not fully realized due to administrative bottlenecks, lack of awareness among university managers, and competing institutional priorities.

Funding mechanisms are necessary but not sufficient. Their effectiveness depends on proactive institutional planning, transparency in allocation, and continuous monitoring to ensure resources translate into meaningful accessibility for SWPDs.

5.3 Objective 3: Institutional Implementation and Compliance

The results indicate that institutional implementation of government directives is fragmented and inconsistent. While all universities have some form of disability support office, their effectiveness is limited by staffing constraints, lack of operational autonomy, and underfunding. The study also observed uneven attention to physical versus digital accessibility, with digital resources often neglected despite policy mandates. These findings align with Vincent and Chiwandire (2019), who highlighted that insufficient institutional capacity in South African universities limits the translation of inclusive policies into practice. Similarly, Abuya and Githinji (2020) and Malinovskiy et al. (2024) reported that Kenyan universities rarely integrate accessibility requirements systematically, leading to ad hoc or superficial implementation. In contrast, Amponsah and Bekele (2023) found in Ghana that institutional commitment and dedicated disability units significantly improved compliance with accessibility standards. This suggests that institutional leadership and prioritization are key determinants of policy translation.

Implementation depends on internal university systems, leadership commitment, and resource allocation. Merely having policies or offices in place does not ensure effective support; structural and operational investments are required to make accessibility standards functional.

6. Conclusion

This study evaluated the effectiveness of government initiatives designed to enhance information access for SWPDs in Kenyan universities. The findings indicate that while Kenya has developed robust policies, legal frameworks, and funding mechanisms to support disability inclusion, these measures have not consistently translated into practical improvements for SWPDs. Barriers persist, including limited awareness of policies among both students and staff, underutilization of available funding, uneven institutional implementation, and weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

The results demonstrate that the mere existence of policies does not guarantee inclusion. Without effective dissemination, operationalization, and accountability, SWPDs continue to encounter obstacles in accessing academic information. Although some universities have implemented physical and digital accessibility measures, these interventions remain fragmented and inconsistent, reflecting a systemic gap between government intent and institutional practice.

The study contributes to theoretical understanding by highlighting the intersection between policy frameworks and educational theories. Specifically, it shows that access to information is influenced not only by the availability of resources but also by institutional culture, planning, and responsiveness to students' needs. By integrating insights from constructivist learning theory, the social model of disability, and universal design principles, the study underscores that truly inclusive higher education requires alignment between national directives and on-the-ground institutional practices.

In conclusion, bridging the gap between government policy and university practice requires coordinated strategies that link legislation, funding, institutional systems, and monitoring frameworks. Without this integration, the potential benefits of inclusive policies remain largely unrealized, leaving SWPDs to navigate systemic barriers largely on their own.

7. Recommendations

Based on the study findings, several recommendations emerge, spanning theoretical, practical, and policy dimensions.

From a theoretical perspective, it is important that future research and institutional planning integrate learning and disability frameworks, such as constructivist learning theory, the social model of disability, and universal design principles. By doing so ensures that accessibility interventions are proactively embedded in the design of academic systems rather than applied reactively. Furthermore, evidence-based frameworks should be developed to link national policy directives with operational strategies at the institutional level, thereby clarifying pathways for improving information access. Research should also explore how awareness of policies among students and staff influences the practical utilization of resources, contributing to a deeper theoretical understanding of the policy-practice gap in higher education.

From a practical standpoint, universities should prioritize awareness and capacity building. Structured orientation programs for SWPDs and staff can enhance knowledge of rights, available resources, and institutional procedures, empowering students to leverage existing support and enabling staff to implement accommodations effectively. Institutions should also develop clear operational plans for implementing accessibility policies, including defined responsibilities, resource allocations, timelines, and measurable outcomes. Resource mobilization is critical: dedicated budgets should ensure the availability, maintenance, and updating of assistive technologies, alternative formats, and digital learning platforms. Additionally, continuous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, including audits and feedback loops, are essential to assess the effectiveness of interventions and identify areas for improvement. Capacity building for academic and library staff is also recommended to ensure that assistive technologies and inclusive pedagogical practices are effectively integrated into teaching and learning processes.

In terms of policy implications, government agencies should strengthen oversight mechanisms to ensure compliance with national directives and effective utilization of funding. Funding guidelines should be clearly communicated, monitored, and aligned with institutional needs to reduce under-utilization and inequitable distribution of resources. Policy dissemination must be continuous and inclusive, ensuring that both students and staff are aware of their rights and entitlements through workshops, policy briefs, and digital communication platforms. Incentives for institutional compliance, such as recognition programs or awards for universities demonstrating excellence in accessibility, could motivate institutions to go beyond minimum requirements. Finally, alignment between university-level strategies and national frameworks, including the National Digital Masterplan, ICT policies, and NCPWD guidelines, is essential for creating cohesive and sustainable accessibility practices.

By implementing these recommendations, Kenyan universities can move beyond symbolic compliance toward tangible improvements in information access for SWPDs, enhancing inclusion, participation, and academic success. These interventions will also establish a foundation for continuous improvement, ensuring that future strategies are evidence-based, resource-supported, and theoretically informed, ultimately bridging the longstanding gap between policy intent and practical outcomes.

7.1 Limitations

The study has several limitations. First, it focused on only four universities, which, while diverse in context, may not fully represent all Kenyan higher education institutions, limiting generalizability. Second, data relied on self-reported surveys and interviews, which may be influenced by respondent bias. Third, the cross-sectional design captured information at a single point in time, preventing assessment of the long-term impacts of government initiatives. Fourth, although document analysis and interviews were conducted, direct observation of institutional practices was limited, which may have constrained insight into everyday implementation. Finally, the study focused exclusively on students with physical disabilities, excluding other disability categories, and thus does not capture the broader spectrum of accessibility challenges in higher education.

7.2 Implications

The study offers practical, policy, and theoretical insights. In practice, universities must improve awareness among students and staff of policies, funding opportunities, and accessibility standards. Structured operational plans, dedicated budgets, and targeted capacity-building programs are essential to ensure effective implementation of accessibility initiatives. Continuous monitoring and evaluation, including feedback mechanisms, are critical to assess impact and guide improvement.

From a policy perspective, government agencies should strengthen the dissemination of disability policies and funding guidelines, establish oversight mechanisms, and provide incentives to motivate institutional compliance. Alignment between national directives, such as NCPWD guidelines and the National Digital Masterplan, and university-level strategies is essential to ensure coherent and sustainable accessibility practices.

Theoretically, the findings contribute to understanding the policy–practice gap in higher education, demonstrating that access is influenced not only by the availability of resources but also by institutional culture, planning, and responsiveness to students’ needs. Integrating constructivist learning theory, the social model of disability, and universal design principles highlights that inclusive higher education requires alignment between policy frameworks and operational practices to translate legislative commitments into tangible improvements for SWPDs.

Statements and Declarations

Author Contributions: Dr. Stephen Maina conceived the study, conducted data collection and analysis, and prepared the initial draft of the manuscript. Dr. Johnson Masinde provided conceptual and methodological guidance and contributed to manuscript revisions. Dr. James Mwikya offered theoretical insights, validated the findings, and reviewed the manuscript. Dr. Stephen Maina served as the corresponding author and coordinated the submission process. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: This study adhered to the ethical standards for academic research as guided by the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI). Formal ethical review was not required because the research involved minimal risk and utilized non-invasive data collection methods, including interviews and document analysis, in accordance with institutional research guidelines.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study.

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