

A Study on Disability and Accessibility of the Children in English Indian Children's Higher Education

Abu Tahir

PhD Scholar, Department of English Language and Literature, Arunodaya University
Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh - 791110.

Abstract

Disability in higher education has different implications from that of school Education. Higher education increases the chance of employability, thus, affirming dignified life for the persons with disabilities. While going through the policies and programmes in India it is found that not much has been done in the field of disability and higher education. There are number of groups working on the school education of children with disabilities. This has not translated in the entry of students to higher education because of various reasons. Infrastructural facilities within institutions, attitudes towards persons with disabilities, transportation facilities, and lack of support services are a few areas, which hinder the entry of children with disabilities into higher education.

Keyword: Disability, accessibility, infrastructure, institutions, higher education.

The History of the Disabilities:-

The post Second World War period has witnessed various new changes in ideologies and outlooks. The civil rights movement gave impetus to such emancipation. The rise of the feminist movement and the movement against racial discrimination, also has connections with the Civil Rights Movement, which provided both strategies and a language to speak about justice. Rights of marginalized groups were recognized. The disability movement has a very recent history. During the early 1990s, Disability Acts started passing in most of the developed and developing nations. Disability is both a global and human rights issue that has no racial, gender, socio economic and political boundaries.

Elementary, Secondary and Higher Education:-

Education became the hope for emancipation and enlightenment of the marginalized. The inclusion of students with disabilities in elementary and secondary education has not automatically transferred to their inclusion in higher education. Elementary and secondary education and higher education are two quite separate entities in admission, curriculum, governance, finance and policy. The context of disability becomes different in the higher education system. India is a democratic nation; it has followed the tenets of justice and equal opportunities and has made certain efforts to formulate plans and programmes accordingly. India is signatory to almost all the conventions and declarations of United Nations. In the disability sector also India is trying to keep pace with the developed world and has introduced innovative policies and programmes for the education of students with disabilities.

An Overview of Disability:-

An attempt is made to get an overview of disability in the context of higher education particularly in India. The paper will discuss the policies and provisions being made available for the students with disabilities in higher education particularly in India. It also discusses the details of a study conducted to uncover the major issues of students with disabilities in higher education in India.

Understanding Disability: -

Disability is commonly misunderstood with that of handicap and impairment. "Disability is a condition caused by an accident, trauma, genetics or disease that may limit a person's mobility, hearing, vision, speech or mental function" (Reynolds and Janzen 2007 p.735). Disability exists as it is situated in the larger context, while impairment is a biological condition (Braddock and Parish 2001). Handicap is a physical and attitudinal constraint that is imposed upon a person regardless of whether the person has a disability. For example some people with disabilities use wheel chairs. Stairs, narrow doorways and curbs are handicaps imposed upon people with disabilities who use wheel chairs (Reynolds and Janzen 2007 p.735).

A Broad Definitions of Disability:-

Countries around the world give their own definitions of disability. In India Disability is mainly taken as is defined in the Persons with Disability Act (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) of India (1995) where Disability means –

- Blindness
- Hearing Impairment
- Low Vision
- Loco motor disability
- Leprosy-Cured
- Mental retardation
- Mental illness

(i) Blindness refers to a condition where a person suffers from any of the following conditions, namely:-

- total absence of sight; or
- visual acuity not exceeding 6/60 or 20/200 (Snellen) in the better eye with correcting lenses; or
- Limitation of the field of vision subtending an angle of 20 degree or worse.

(ii) Person with low vision means a person with impairment of visual functioning even after treatment or standard refractive correction but who uses or is potentially capable of using vision for the planning or execution of a task with appropriate assistive device.

(iii) Leprosy cured person" means any person who has been cured of leprosy but is suffering from -

- Loss of sensation in hands or feet as well as loss of sensation and paresis in the eye and eye-lid but with no manifest deformity.

- Manifest deformity and paresis but having sufficient mobility in their hands and feet to enable them to engage in normal economic activity;
 - Extreme physical deformity as well as advanced age which prevents him from undertaking any gainful occupation, and the expression "leprosy cured" shall be construed accordingly
- (iv) Hearing impairment means loss of sixty decibels or more in the better ear in the conversational range of frequencies.
- (v) Loco motor disability means disability of the bones, joints or muscles leading to substantial restriction of the movement of the limbs or any form of cerebral palsy.
- (vi) Mental retardation means a condition of arrested or incomplete development of mind of a person, which is specially characterized by sub normality of intelligence.
- (vii) Mental illness means any mental disorder other than mental retardation.

Autism in the Definitions:-

The National Trust for The Welfare of Persons with Autism Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999 Autism, and Cerebral Palsy are also included where

“Autism” means a condition of uneven skill development primarily affecting the communication and social abilities of a person, marked by repetitive and ritualistic behavior and Cerebral palsy” means a group of non-progressive conditions of a person characterized by abnormal motor control posture resulting from brain insult or injuries occurring in the Pre-natal, Peri-natal or infant period of development.”

Disability and Higher Education in Indian Context :-

Policy and provisions for students with disability take place within different contexts and different educational structures and systems. Action Plan for Inclusive Education of Children and Youth with

Disabilities (IECYD) 2005 deliberates with the issue of inclusive education for students with disabilities. This action plan gives equal emphasis on the higher education for students with disabilities. The major provisions in this regard are:

- Increase in number of young persons with disability accessing secondary education. Smooth transition for young persons with disability wishing and able to access secondary and higher education. Consistency in providing for disabled friendly examination facilities across states and boards.
- Resource support in the form of special educators and rehabilitation professionals across disabilities available in adequate numbers to assist mainstream teachers at all levels.
- Increased enrolment of young persons with disability in mainstream higher education and vocational courses.

Inclusive Education for the Disabilities:-

Building the bridge between school education the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of ‘Inclusive Education of the Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS) was brought out by MHRD in 2009. This scheme includes all the disabilities mentioned in the Persons with Disability (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995, and The National Trust for The Welfare of Persons With Autism Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999. It also says that the scheme may eventually cover (i) Speech impairment and (ii) Learning Disabilities, etc.

Various Schemes:-

The schemes like Teachers Preparation in Special Education (TEPSE) and Higher Education for Persons with Special Needs (Persons with disability) (HEPSN) 1999- 2000 have been implemented with an objective to develop courses for special teachers and counselors and also to provide facilities in various forms for the persons with disability. These schemes have not been fully implemented in all the higher educational institutions.

H.E.P.S.N. fared marginally better with eight Universities and Colleges being approved for funding in the same time frame. H.E.P.S.N. is an extremely comprehensive scheme to promote the cause of the disabled in higher education (N.C.P.E.D.P.2005). It has essentially three components:

The Three Components:-

1. Establishment of Enabling Units^[1] in colleges and Universities

Component number 1:-

The first was the establishment of Disability Units in various universities and colleges in the country, to facilitate admission of the disabled in these institutions and to provide guidance and counselling to them. These Units were also meant to assist disabled graduates seek gainful employment.

2. Providing Access to the students with disabilities

Component number 2:-

The second was to improve the accessibility of these institutions by making their infrastructure and architecture more disabled-friendly. Preference for these one-time grants of Rupees 10,00,000 per university was to be given to those institutions that had enrolled the maximum number of disabled students.

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3. Providing Special Equipment to increase Educational Services for Students with disabilities

Component number 3:-

^{1[1]}In order to develop awareness in the higher education system and also to provide necessary guidance and counseling to differently-abled persons, it is proposed to establish resource units in universities in the country, which will be called as Enabling Units (UGC 2008).

The third was the provision of special equipment to augment educational services for disabled students. The research findings and academic literature in the context of disability and higher education collected for this study is mostly from the developed countries.

A Specific Survey:-

National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP 2005) conducted a survey on a large scale where it had selected 119 Universities, where 52 universities were able to provide data on the total number of students enrolled with them. Only about 0.1% of the students were found to be those with different disabilities as per the data from 52 respondent universities. 3% seats are reserved for the students with disabilities, this shows that these students are not able to reach the higher levels of education.

The survey also gives the number of students with different disabilities that were enrolled in the universities. There were

- 1203 students with orthopedic impairment
- 311 students with visual impairment
- 38 students with hearing impairment
- 22 students with mental disability

A Gender Factor working:-

The gender factor keeps is a drawback for female students with disabilities, 76.3% of the disabled students were males, while 23.7% were females.

294 colleges were taken for the study purpose across the country; about 10 colleges from each state and 1 college from each union territory were contacted. Response was received from only 96 colleges. It was found that out of the 96 respondent colleges only 0.525 consisted of the students with disabilities. Surprisingly it was found that 3 colleges mentioned having sign language interpreters but none of these colleges had any student with hearing impairment.

Strategical, Attitudinal Differences:-

People with disabilities face barriers because they have to negotiate an environment which was not designed for them, and if they are to enjoy equality of access it is this deficit in environment which must be overcome (Tinklin and Hall, 1999). Attitudinal barriers are found to be the major obstacle when it comes to inclusion of students with disability in educational institutions. Some of colleges which have students with disabilities enrolled have used different terminology to address these students for example the document of Ramjas College says Physically Handicapped students. Deshbandhu College and Kirori Mal College writes handicap quota for the reserved quota. The Miranda House College addresses them as Physically Challenged; rest of the colleges addresses them as Persons with Disability in their official documents.

Economical and Financial Assistance:-

Resources become important for the proper functioning therefore identification of financing policies and Thirteen percent said that they receive half of their funding from their institutions and other half from private donors. Nine percent received funding from private donors. Four percent received from grants,

but it was not sure if the grants were internal or external. The other 4% of the respondents were not sure how it received its funding.

Two Types of Scholarship:-

There were mainly two types of scholarships available for the students with disabilities; one comes from the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and the other one comes from the V.C. fund. The amount of Scholarship from the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment ranges from Rs.5000-6000 per annum and the amount which comes from V.C. fund is Rs.1000-1300 per annum. The students receive scholarship only if they apply for it. Different scholarships are provided by some colleges for example Gargi College gives Yashoda charitable Trust Scholarship for physically disabled which is Rs.5000 per annum, like wise Miranda House receives some amount of scholarship from All India Blind Association.

Facilities for the Disabilities:-

Students with disabilities in several colleges are exempted from college fees if they do not get financial assistance from anywhere. One thing that the official staff at accounts department in most of the colleges revealed that visually challenged students receive most of the scholarship money.

Gender Imbalance:-

Women with disability not only have to settle themselves with social and cultural concerns but also have to deal with social structural inequalities at the practical level. They also have to take up the challenging job of theorization and representation, including how disabled people have been looked at within the mainstream of socioeconomic and cultural systems. The inclusion of women with disabilities into mainstream services, along with specialized interventions where necessary, would constitute a Rights Based approach to disability in all development activities. The census 2001 data shows that the literacy rates of females are abysmally low in all types of disabilities as compared to the males.

In the Co-Educational colleges the number of male students with disabilities are more in number than female students with disabilities.

Conclusions

The recent efforts by the ministry of Human Resource Development and University Grants Commission in India may become a shifting motive towards the mainstreaming of persons with disabilities in higher education in India. Representation of students with disabilities in the university forums and student union will lead to empowerment and emancipation. The recommendations in the 10th and 11th five plans if being properly implemented can make a big change happen. Further efforts are needed in terms of more researches and academic teaching of disability studies in the higher education. Most importantly there is need for opening up of equal opportunity cells in the universities so that there is a place in every university which becomes a platform for every student with disability to upgrade their skills and share their experiences.

The type of information collected implies that study of participation may need to be geared to the challenges being faced and practices and policies as these impact the students with disabilities. It also implies that reasons for fewer numbers of other disabilities will also need to be studied.

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