

Role of Teachers and Parents in Facilitating Educational Opportunities and Accessibility to PWD Students

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Abstract

Education is fundamental for the overall development of society and nation. Every individual irrespective of their sex, caste, religion, or any form of disabilities deserves an equal right to attend formal education system and to learn together. Despite of various policies and programmes adopted by the government to enhance educational opportunities, the PWD students do not always get opportunity to learn in mainstream education due to ineffective implementation of policies and programmes. Hence, adequate involvement of teachers and parents is essential in addressing the various learning needs of the PWD students. The role of both teachers and parents cannot be ignored for facilitating the educational opportunities to the PWD students, to achieve their educational welfare and better learning outcomes in the long run. Thus, quality education helps to enable such students to gain proper learning experiences for their future livelihoods. The present paper aims to study the major roles of the teachers and the parents to increase proper educational accessibility of PWD students.

Keywords: PWD Students, Educational Opportunities and Accessibility, Role of Teachers, Role of Parents.

Introduction

The Government has adopted several laws, policies, and programmes for ensuring access to education, health, and other public amenities equally with other members of the society. Various laws have been passed by the government to protect the fundamental human rights of the PWDs. Despite of these positive policy interventions and measures, it has been observed that the educational attainment of the PWD students is not at the desired level. It has been noticed from various study reports that their rate of enrolment, retention and academic achievement are lying below the satisfactory level. More drop outs of the PWD students are being noticed that are taking place at different stages of education. The reasons behind such higher dropouts and lower enrolment include various factors that hinder the educational opportunities and accessibility to the PWD students. Therefore, to bring overall development and welfare of the PWD students, it is essential to impart equal and quality education to them. Hence, the roles of parents and teachers in facilitating such opportunities are very much significant in this regard.

Meaning of PWD students

‘PWD’ refers to the ‘Persons with Disabilities.’ PWD students are those who suffer from any long-term

physical or mental impairment that restricts them to fully participate in any life activities. The type of disabilities encompasses the individuals who are suffering from hearing impairment or deaf, speech impairment, locomotor disability, low vision or blindness, cerebral palsy, orthopaedically handicapped people, intellectual disability, specific learning disability and others.

The Persons with Disabilities (Equal opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995, came into effect on 7th February, 1996. The PWD Acts play an important role in providing both preventive and promotional measures for the rehabilitation of PWD students like Education, Employment and Vocational Training.

Status of their Educational Opportunities and Accessibility

For the benefit of the PWD students as recognised by **the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995** which is later replaced by the **RPWD (Rights of Persona with Disabilities) Act, 2016**, three important issues have been raised in the petition of Disabled Rights Group and Ors. Vs. union of India (UOI) and Ors. MANU/SC/1605/2017. The first issue has been raised due to the non-implementation of the reservation of seats (about 3%) for the PWD candidates in various educational institutions. The **Section 39 of the PWD Act, 1995** and **Section 32 of the RPWD Act, 2016** provide for 3% reservation of seats of the PWD category in educational institutions. The second important issue is related to the provision of proper educational opportunities and accessibilities to the PWD candidates especially for the orthopaedic disabled candidates in the educational institutions. The third issue is concerned to the pedagogy which involves the teaching methods and techniques, use of proper teaching-learning equipments for the PWD students according to their type of disabilities. All these three issues are very much critical to get resolved unless the different educational stakeholders involve actively in augmenting the educational services to the PWD category. **The RPWD Act, 2016** mentioned several guidelines in facilitating educational opportunities and accessibility to the PWD students. these guidelines include measures related to provision of adequate infrastructures, barrier-free campus, reasonable accommodation, proper access to classroom, libraries, laboratories, necessary modifications in the curriculum and examination system, provision for assistive devices and technologies, transportation facilities. All these measures are extremely beneficial for the PWD students to pursue their studies effectively.

According to the **census 2011**, only 13 percent of the disabled population attained secondary education and about 55 percent of the disabled population in India were literate. As per census 2011 report, about 62 percent of male disabled population were literate whereas only 45 percent of female disabled population were literate. Overall literacy level of the disabled in India has increased over time, i.e., from 50.7 per cent (2001) to 55.4 per cent (2011).

The report of the **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)** there are about **35 million** children with disabilities in India. It is estimated that less than one percent of children with disabilities have proper access to quality education (**Banquer & Sharma, 2006**).

A study of **World Bank (2007)** noted that children with disabilities are five times more likely to be out of school than children belonging to schedule caste or schedule tribe. Moreover, PWD students when do attend school, they rarely progress beyond the primary level, ultimately leading to lower employment chances and long-term income poverty.

As reported by the **NSS 58th round** (Jul.- Dec. 2008), only **25 percent** persons with disabilities completed the primary education level whereas about **11 percent received education** up to the middle level. Around

9 percent of persons with disabilities had nine or more years of schooling. Interestingly, enrolment ratios for those with disabilities aged 5 to 18 years in mainstream schools were higher in rural areas than in the urban areas.

Based on NSS data, the World Bank (2007:64) report categorically stated that educational attainment as well as attendance of the PWD students remained below the national average to a great extent. The following four legislation put significant influence on the both government and non-government organization to promote educational accessibility and opportunities to the PWD students. These include-

- **Rehabilitation Council of India Act (1992)** states that the children with special needs will be taught by a trained teacher.
- **Persons with Disabilities Act (1995)** emphasized upon the educational entitlement for all children with special needs up to the age of eighteen years in a favourable environment.
- **National Trust Act (1999)** aims to provide necessary services and support to severely disabled children.
- **The 86th Constitutional Amendment (2007)** emphasized upon free and compulsory education to the children with special needs till their fourteen years of age.

These legal mandates helped to shape the comprehensive National action plan for Inclusion in Education of the Children and Persons with Disabilities (MHRD, 2005) and the National Policy for Persons with disabilities in 2006 (an MSJE initiative).

Special initiatives adopted by the Government to enhance educational opportunities and accessibility

1. **National Education Policy (1986)** suggested measures to integrate both the children with special needs and children without special needs in mainstream education. The policy aims to adopt strategies that help the children with special needs to develop various life skills efficiently.
2. **Integrated Education of Disabled Children (1974)** is a programme started by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to foster integration of students with disabilities with normal students in regular schools. This enables the students with disabilities to learn the necessary social skills through proper interaction with their other peer groups.
3. **District Primary Education Programme and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan** are the two notable initiatives of the government for promoting inclusive education in the country without discriminating any students in respect to any disability background. These schemes aim to ensure quality education for the children with special needs and thereby to achieve universalization of elementary education for all in the country.
4. **Plan of Action (1992)** aims to enhance accessibility of all students including the students with special needs in educational institutions through necessary modifications the existing educational policy framework.
5. **Rehabilitation Council of India Act (1992)** aims to monitor the existing developmental schemes, training programmes, and various measures adopted for the welfare of the students with special needs across the country.
6. **Persons with Disabilities Act (1995)** aims to ensure the basic rights of the persons with disabilities so that they may enjoy those rights in every sphere of their life. It is approach that emphasizes upon different aspects such as prevention as well as early identification of any form of disabilities, the education opportunities of the persons with disabilities, and their equal employment opportunities.

7. **National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act (1999)** is an approach to address the varied problems of the persons with disabilities and thereby bring welfare for them. It focuses on measures like provisions for capacity building programmes, training of professionals etc.
8. **Right to Education Act (2009)** aims to provide free and compulsory elementary education to all children including the children with special needs up to their age of fourteen years.
9. **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016)** is a comprehensive legal framework that mandates the appropriate government to ensure barrier free access to quality education to the children suffering from any benchmark disabilities in any formal system of education of their choice.
10. **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** includes various development measures and provisions that are required for the betterment of the PWD students at large. The policy emphasizes upon the values of non-discrimination, equality, empathy, accessibility issues, appropriate accommodations and transportations, use of sign language and assistive devices, individualized care, and support in teaching-learning process. It has made some notable recommendation regarding gender identities, special needs of the socio-economically disadvantaged peoples, formation and implementation of flexible curriculum for all students.

Role of Teachers in facilitating educational opportunities and accessibility to PWD students

1. **Accepting students' diversity and avoiding stereotypes:** One of the most important duties of the teacher is to accept student's diversity to ensure them equal educational opportunities and accessibility. Teachers must not discriminate students on the grounds of disability issue or any other reasons since this hampers the notion of inclusion in education. The teachers must maintain open and acceptable attitude towards such students.
2. **Early identification of disability:** Teachers must play an active role in determining any difficulties of the PWD students at a very early stage with due consultation with the parents. Early identification of any form disability by the teachers is helpful for determining the correct resources, appropriate interventions, care and support needed by the PWD students in their teaching-learning process.
3. **Recognizing strengths and weakness of the PWD students:** Teachers are required to recognize the type of disabilities suffered by the students, their inherent potentialities and weakness. This enables them to adopt the necessary preventive measures and other remedial measures in the teaching-learning process so that the students may learn gradually.
4. **Providing personalized attention and special care:** The teachers must possess favourable attitude with the PWD students, establish congenial relationships with them, provide them more encouragement, appreciate and cooperate them in their activities. By providing individual care and attention to those students by the teachers, the students may develop enough confidence in their learning activities and like to attend school regularly.
5. **Individualized Education Plan:** The teachers must develop individualized education plan for the PWD students taking into consideration their type and form of disabilities and their capabilities. This enables the teachers to design any learning strategies according to the educational needs of those students effectively.
6. **Arranging proper accommodations and modifications:** The teachers may arrange necessary accommodations such as preferential seating, necessary breaks, assisting them in taking notes in the

class and modifications in the existing curriculum, class time schedule, examination pattern to better suit the learning requirements of the PWD students.

7. **Providing proper guidance and monitoring progress:** The teachers must always keep a track about the academic progress of the PWD students and convey those to their parents. Therefore, teachers are required to provide adequate guidance and support to those students so that they may perform better in any educational activities.
8. **Removal of barriers and addressing their problems:** another significant role of the teachers is to identify the barriers hampering the PWD students' educational opportunities. Hence, necessary measure must be adopted by the teachers in consultation with the school authorities and the guardians of the students for addressing their current problems in a viable manner.
9. **Sensitization, training, practicing inclusive educational strategies:** The teachers may sensitize the society about the inclusion of the PWD students in mainstream formal system of education through several awareness programmes.
10. **Participation in capacity building programmes:** Teachers must equip themselves with the necessary skills to teach the PWD students efficiently, to understand their present problems and identify their appropriate learning requirements. Hence, participation in capacity building programmes may benefit the teachers to acquire those skills and competencies.
11. **Provision for special education, collaborative learning, and remedial teaching:** The teachers first identify the unique learning needs of the PWD students and then help them to learn at their own pace by providing them special education, arranging collaborative learning as well as remedial teaching at a regular interval. The teachers may consult with the special educators about the adoption of teaching methods and teaching-learning materials required for those students.
12. **Giving positive reinforcements and timely feedback:** The teachers are required to more interact with the PWD students, engage in more discussion with them, help them to develop interest in learning, motivate them in any activities, provide feedback in time and reinforce them for their small progress and achievements. This may foster self-awareness among them and help to gain freedom in any learning activities.

Role of Parents in facilitating educational opportunities and accessibility to PWD students

The parental involvement in facilitating proper educational opportunities and accessibility to the PWD students is very much noteworthy. From the early stage of education, the parents of the PWD students may help them to receive quality education. It is the general consciousness of the parents about the educational needs, strengths and weakness of their children which help them to acquire proper education in time. The role of the parents is discussed below:

1. **Development of proper interaction:** Early identification of the disabilities is needed for imparting necessary and quality education to the PWD students. Parents may help the teachers and other educational stakeholders in this regard through regular interaction and collaboration.
2. **Assessment of needs:** One of the most important duties of the parents is to **assess the educational requirements** of their children with special needs. Such parents are required to nurture effectively the proper interest of those PWD students.
3. **Adequate encouragement:** The parents must support and encourage their children to attend school regularly and **observe the learning process** of the PWD students.

4. **Monitoring progress:** The parents must **monitor the academic progress** of the PWD students and provide adequate support and care to cope emotional challenges faced by the PWD students.
5. **Help to acquire life skills:** Parents must help their disabled children to acquire the basic social skills and **adjust with their peer groups** in formal system of education. They must encourage their children to develop healthy relationships with their friends.
6. **Involvement in Individualized Education Programme:** Parents must play a significant role in **planning and implementation in IEP** and therefore must involve themselves in various activities such as assisting the school teachers regarding the learning needs of the children with special needs, providing meaning suggestions regarding curriculum modification, adoption of suitable teaching aids and learning materials, teaching methods according to the student's strength and weakness.
7. **Cooperating in educational activities: Involving** in child's **curricular and co-curricular activities** and help the child to access proper learning resources, treatments, and other assistive devices available for them.
8. **Establishing adequate linkages:** Another major role of the parents of the disabled children is to establish proper and **adequate linkages** with schools and teachers, **actively participate** in any decision-making process for the overall development of their children. Hence, developing **mutual trust** with teachers by the parents is highly appreciable. Parents may cooperate in different development aspects and encourage the concerned school authorities to admit children with disabilities without any discrimination.
9. **Selection of school and educational services:** Parents must play an important role in **selecting proper school type** and right educational facilities for their children with disabilities. Hence, they must **remain conscious** about the **existing laws** and policy-programmes about inclusive education that aims to ensure equal educational opportunities and accessibilities to those children.
10. **Organizing Campaigns: Being aware** about the educational needs of the child, the parents may organize campaigns to address those needs and play an important role in monitoring, supervising and timely reporting their children's academic progress and needs to the teachers. They also may take part in **home-based education** that aims to foster their children need-based education to some extent.

Conclusion

The role of teachers and parents are very crucial in determining the learning needs and problems of the children with disabilities. Both the parents and teachers may help them to achieve their full potential and act as a facilitator towards inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education. Inaccessibility due to the teachers' unfavorable attitude to teach, irrelevant pedagogy followed and improper curriculum followed resulted in more drop out of the PWD children and their shifting to a special school. Hence, teachers must try to motivate parents for admitting children with disabilities in regular programmes. The parents themselves may work as agents for fostering value of non-discrimination in the case of disabled individual.

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