

**ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY IN
INDIA: A COUNTRY IN TRANSITION**

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ABSTRACT

Over the last two decades, a remarkable transformation has occurred in Indian higher education landscape. Higher education institutions are coming forward to ensure equal access to economically and socially disabled groups of people. In India, students with disabilities have long been a great reason of concern mainly in Higher Education. Considering the policies and programmes, it is found that not much has been done in the field of disability and higher education in India. There are number of groups working on the school education of children with disabilities. This has not transformed in the entry of students to higher education because of various reasons. Problems exist in many areas of curriculum, teaching and learning process, facilities, resources, as well as the educational and examination process and lack of support services are the areas, which hinder the entry of students with disabilities into higher education. Higher education institutes still have a long way to go to reduce the gap in social inclusion of students with disabilities and to adjust academic standards for their needs. This paper throws a light on the policies and provisions available for the students with disabilities in higher education particularly in India.

Keywords: Disability, Higher Education, Transition, Curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

‘Education for All’, which represents an international commitment to ensure that every child and adult receives basic education of good quality, is based both on a human rights perspective, and on the generally held belief that education is central to individual wellbeing and national development. However, disabled students have relatively becoming invisible to access higher education. The inclusion of students with disabilities is elementary but transition from secondary education to higher education is not automatically done. Elementary of 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 (Syed, 2011).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To discuss the policies and provisions available for the students with disabilities in higher education particularly in India.
2. To provide recommendations to strengthen the capacity of the government and other partners in the country to bring about policy reforms and promote programmes that support inclusive education.

UNDERSTANDING DISABILITY: THE CONTEXT

Countries around the world give their own definitions of disability. In India Disability 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

As per “**The Right of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016**” the government has increased the types of disabilities from the existing seven to 21.

The newly added types includes, Mental Illnesses, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Cerebral Palsy, Muscular Dystrophy, Chronic Neurological Conditions, Specific Learning Disabilities, Multiple Sclerosis, Speech and Language Disability, Thalassemia, Hemophilia, Sickle Cell Disease, Multiple Disabilities, including Deaf Blindness, Acid Attack Victims and Parkinsons Disease.

INCLUSION OF STUDENTS: A WAY FORWARD

India has one of the world's largest education systems, which includes 1.3 million schools, over 35,000 higher educational institutions including colleges and universities. Over the last decade, the education market, especially the higher education sector, has witnessed massive expansion in terms of growth and enrollment. The sector has also seen an increased scale of activities from investors especially from venture capitals and private equity firms.

The Govt. of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development Report on “All India Survey on Higher Education 2016-17” reported a total enrollment of 35.7 million students (53.2 % male and 46.8% female enrollments) in higher education institutions in India, of which Uttar Pradesh ranks first, followed by Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Karnataka and Rajasthan. It is interesting to note that these 6 States with highest student enrolment constitute nearly 53.8% of the total student enrolment in India. Rest of the 30 States (including UTs) have only 46.2% of the total student enrolment.

Looking at the State-wise distribution, it can be seen that Karnataka has the highest number of students coming from foreign countries which is 13050. Apart from Karnataka, Tamil Nadu (4889), Maharashtra (4619), Uttar Pradesh (3602), Telangana (3461), Punjab (3246), Delhi (2632) and Andhra Pradesh (2341) reflects more than 2,000 foreign students.

As per the response received in the survey total number of students awarded Ph.D. level degree during 2016 is 28,779 with 16,274 males and 12505 females. Tamil Nadu has maximum number (4,838) of Students who were awarded Ph.D. level degree followed by Karnataka (3,117) and Uttar Pradesh (2,536). 64.56 lakh Students have been graduated and 14.78 lakh students passed Post Graduation level during 2016.

National Centre for Promotion of Employment of Disabled People (NCPEDP) 2015, third survey on the Status of Disability in Higher Education found that only 0.56% students with disabilities enrollment are made in higher education, in spite of 3% reservation in public institutions, of this 74.08% is male and 22.70% female. The Government mandated a five per cent quota for the physically challenged in the higher education institutes in the country but currently only little over 0.5 percent differently-abled students are enrolled. A pan-India survey of higher education institutes including the IITs and IIMs shows that of the 15,21,438 students enrolled, only 8,449 were students with disabilities, which is just 0.56 percent of the total students in 2015 compared to 0.63 percent in 2014.

ENROLLMENT OF DISABLED STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

According to All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2016-17, total number of disabled students enrolled to higher education particularly in Post graduation is 292 of which 117 male and 175 Female is highlighted in table-1. Female disabled students constitute 60% of the total enrollment compared to 40% of male students. Out of the total number of students enrolled to higher education, only 148 students are out-turn due to lack of facilities, support, infrastructure, etc.

Table-1: Enrollment of Disability Students in Higher Education

Disabled students	Post Graduate	
	Enrollment	Out-turn/Pass-out
Male	117	53
Female	175	95
Total	292	148

Source: All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2016-17, MHRD, Govt. of India

Total number of students awarded Ph.D degree during 2016 is 28,779 with 16,274 males and 12505 females. Tamil Nadu has maximum number (4,838) of Students who were awarded Ph.D. level degree followed by Karnataka (3,117). The study conducted by AISHE revealed that no disabled students are enrolled for Ph.D and M.Phil.

Table-2: Enrollment of PWD in India & Karnataka during last 5 years

Year	India			Karnataka		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
2012-13	45329	40904	86233	2082	1443	3525
2013-14	31374	20580	51954	2002	1067	3069
2014-15	34757	29541	64298	2121	1427	3548
2015-16	39718	34717	74435	2314	1856	4170
2016-17	40894	30073	70967	2304	1404	3708

Source: All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2016-17, MHRD, Govt. of India

The survey conducted by All India Survey of Higher Education 2016-17, highlighted that the total enrollment of disabled students to higher education is considerably varying during last 5 years along with gender-wise enrollment is depicted in table-2. About 70,967 persons with

disability enrolled in various courses across India during 2016-17, of which 58% are male and the rest female. Uttar Pradesh had the highest enrollments of people with disability (28%), followed by Maharashtra (10%). Enrollment of PWD in Karnataka consists of 3,708 students (5.2%) of which 62% male candidates enrolled compared to 38% female candidates is shown in table-2.

Table – 3: Top 8 State-wise/UTs enrollment of PWD in Higher Education

Sl.No	State / UTs	Persons with Disability		
		Male	Female	Total
1	Uttar Pradesh	8968	10874	19842
2.	Maharashtra	4298	2519	6817
3.	Tamil Nadu	3077	2279	5356
4.	Delhi	2799	1365	4164
5.	Karnataka	2304	1404	3708
6.	West Bengal	2229	1012	3241
6.	Madhya Pradesh	1757	1428	3185
7.	Telangana	1980	1101	3081
8.	Rajasthan	1943	983	2926

Source: All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2016-17, MHRD, Govt. of India

“All India Survey on Higher Education 2016-17” reported a total enrollment of 35.7 million students in higher education institutions of which only 0.2% of PWD is enrolled in India during 2016-17. Of the total enrolment of PWDs Uttar Pradesh (28%) ranks first, followed by Maharashtra (9.6%), Tamil Nadu (7.5%), Delhi (5.9%), Karnataka (5.2%), West Bengal (4.6%), Madhya Pradesh (4.5%), Telangana (4.3%) and Rajasthan (4.1%) is appended in table-3. It is interesting to note that, Uttar Pradesh stands first in the enrollment of highest number female PWD candidates (55%) compared to male candidates (45%).

DISABILITY AND HIGHER EDUCATION: 12th FIVE YEAR PLAN (2012-2017)

12th Five Year Plan came up with the provisions for students with disabilities in higher education through the scheme ‘*Inclusive and Qualitative Expansion of Higher Education*’ for differently-abled Students and students from socially deprived background. Schemes for providing appropriate infrastructure and other support facilities for differently-abled students has been strengthened and expanded during the 12th FYP. The UGC should provide support

to institutions/Research Centres for development of suitable technologies and textual material for differently-abled students. A special Inter-University Centre (IUC) may be set up to coordinate the development of such technologies and their dissemination.

The achievement of the goals for equity and inclusion would call for a strengthening of the disabled students of higher education during the 12th FYP is as follows;

- (a) Building of capacity and improvement of infrastructure which can attract and facilitate the retention of students from rural and backward areas as well as differently-abled and marginalised social groups.
- (b) Providing for pro-active measures through proper implementation of reservation policy for differently-abled students.
- (c) Increasing the incentives offered to differently-abled students as well as those from the marginalised sections so that they can participate in higher education.
- (d) Strengthening measures to increase the achievement capacity of differently-abled students so as to reduce drop-out and to improve performance.
- (e) Given that a part of the gap that is observed between social groups and gender at the level of higher education is due to lower numbers and quality of pass outs from the school system due to higher drop out and segmented quality, there is a need for improving the quality of schooling and retention of students from the marginalised sections through enhancing the performance of the schooling cycle. The task is to be addressed by the school system.
- (f) Monitoring of performance with respect to improving equity at the institutional level as well as higher (state and country) levels.

POLICIES AND PROVISIONS FOR DIFFERENTLY-ABLED STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

Following are the policies/provisions of the Right of Persons with Disability (RPWD) Act, 2016 for the differently-abled students in Higher Education is as under:

- 1. Higher Education for Persons with Special Needs (HEPSN)** – The scheme, implemented by UGC, has the following three components:
 - a. **Establishment of Enabling Units for PWDs.** Resource Units are established in colleges to facilitate admissions, provide guidance and counseling, to create awareness about the needs of differently-abled persons and to assist PWD graduates to get the employment.

- b. **Providing Access to PWDs:** Under this component, accessibility is addressed by the college relating to issues as per the stipulations of RPWD Act, 2016.
- c. **Providing Special Equipment to augment Educational Services for PWDs:**
The colleges are provided one time grant upto Rs.1.5 lakh to procure devices to help PWD students enrolled for Higher Education.
2. **Teacher preparation in Special Education Scheme (TEPSE):** The scheme, implemented by UGC, provides financial assistance to offer B.Ed. and M.Ed. degree course with specialization in one of the disability areas.
 3. **Financial Assistance to Visually Challenged Teachers (FAVCT):** The objective of the scheme, implemented by UGC, is to provide facility to help visually challenged permanent teachers to achieve self-dependence by using various aids for teaching, learning and research.
 4. **National Eligibility Test (NET):** UGC also provide relaxations to PWDs in the National Eligibility Test.
 5. **Saksham Scholarship Scheme by All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE):** The objective of the scheme is to provide encouragement and support to 1000 differently-abled students to pursue technical education in a year, fulfilling the eligibility criteria mentioned in the scheme.
 6. **Facilitating PWD students under Centrally Sponsored Scheme for Integrating PWDs in the mainstream of Technical and Vocational Education:** The Ministry of HRD has issued instructions to the Heads of all polytechnics covered under the above Scheme that no fee of any kind should be charged from the PWD students. However, the Polytechnics, if required, may charge only examination fee from these students that too when the students get their Scholarship amount.
 7. **Facilitating PWD students with barrier free environment:** The Ministry has also directed all Centrally Funded Educational Institutions/Autonomous organizations/attached offices in Ministry to ensure providing barrier free environment in the buildings, which would include provisions of ramps, rails, lifts, adaption of toilets for wheel users, brail signages and auditory signals, tactile flooring etc. to PWDs.
 8. **Expert Committee constituted to identify the courses according to the categories of disabilities:** The HRD Ministry has also constituted an Expert Committee to identify the courses according to the categories of the disabilities as identified for the various technical posts and the recommendations of the committee have been circulated to all the

Centrally funded Institutes/Autonomous organization/attached offices for implementation.

RESERAVTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

The Right of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPWD), 2016 reserved seats for disabled category of students gets in higher educational institutions and in Government appointment. The details are as follows;

- All Government institutions of higher education and other higher education institutions receiving aid from the Government shall reserve not less than **five per cent** seats for persons with disabilities.
- The persons with benchmark disabilities shall be given an upper **age relaxation of five years** for admission in institutions of higher education.
- Every appropriate Government shall appoint in every Government establishment, not less than **four per cent** of the total number of vacancies in the cadre strength in each group of posts meant to be filled with persons with disabilities.

SUGGESTIONS FOR INCLUSION OF DISABLED STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

It is essential to develop policies that encourage a good transition to higher education and to employment if education more broadly is to meet the goals of efficiency and equity by delivering access, success and a promising future for all. Quality transition policies are needed to give equal opportunities and treatment for young adults with disabilities. They:

- Provide young adults with disabilities with the same knowledge and skills as other young adults to the full extent possible.
- Furnish them, on the same basis as other young adults, with qualifications recognised by higher education institutions and the labour market.
- Prevent them from being more exposed than other young adults to being neither in employment nor in education or training.
- Develop curriculum, teaching and learning process and examination process that suitable to students with disability.
- Provide trained teacher to meet the requirement of the educational needs of students with disabilities.

- Give them equal opportunities in terms of the length and quality of transition.
- Offer them the same chances of access to the same quality of employment as young adults without disabilities
- Funding bodies should provide funding for institutions which provide learning support for students with disabilities.
- Making flexible admission procedure for students with disabilities helps to enter higher education.
- Promote a legislative framework that prohibits all forms of discrimination and requires institutions to include transition in annual action plans for each young adult with disabilities.
- Supply them adequate information about the courses proposed by the higher education sector and the conditions of access to higher education.
- Endeavour to ensure that students with disabilities are capable of making the best possible use of the support provided and of taking charge of their future.

CONCLUSION

By creating more awareness on inclusive education, by universities, colleges, having the resources and the ability to re-structure their curriculum to cater to all types of students, by recruiting teachers who have the skills and proficiency to meet varying demands within the classroom and by having the support of family, access and transition to the higher education is possible for the aspirants of person with disabilities. 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 recommendations of 12th five year plan are a part of a long term plan to be drawn up to attain equity for all groups especially disabled by the year 2022 if being properly implemented. The government should also extend the support and scope of the disabled student allowances. It therefore seems possible that inclusive education for students

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