

Possibilities of Inclusive Education in Higher Education Institutions After the Introduction of Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act.

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Abstract :

The purpose of enactment of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 is to empower the disabled from all aspects, education being a fundamental one. The act promotes admission of children with special needs without discrimination, even permits the Government and Local Authorities to promote, protect and ensure participation of persons with disabilities in adult education and continuing education equally with others. As there is no presence of special colleges/universities, inclusion is mandatory to give effect to the law. This study aims to find the perception of teachers, principals, peers - the major stakeholders in providing education in the disabled students. The objectives of this study are to assess the perception of teachers and normal students towards disability and inclusion, presence of stigma, condition of the infrastructure, and funding available. The study delimits to Kolkata and South Bengal, making it an urban as well as a rural area analysis. The participants included ten colleges with principals, teachers, students. The study unfolds that the teachers have a vague idea towards disability and are reluctant towards inclusive education in colleges and refer it to be an extremely difficult process to achieve. Training for college teachers must be arranged as they lack basic teacher training even. Simultaneously, counseling sessions must be arranged for all college employees and students, so that they can embrace inclusion cheerfully.

Key Words : Attitude, Special Students, Colleges, RPWD Act, Teachers, Peers

Introduction :

The legal journey of people with disabilities has begun in the year 1995, when our government introduced the Persons with Disabilities Act. But the PWD Act only covered seven major disabilities naming blindness, low vision, hearing impairment, locomotor disabilities, mental retardation, mental illness, leprosy cured. Still, this was not sufficiently covering all categories of disabilities. So, it has been replaced with the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016, states, 'discrimination in relation to disability means, any distinction, exclusion, restriction on the basis of disability which is the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field and includes all forms of discrimination and denial of reasonable accommodation.'

It also states, 'admit them without discrimination and provide education and opportunities for sports and recreation activities equally towards others.'

This gives us an idea about the basic rights which the special students are supposed to get:

- Non-discrimination in educational institutions.
- Full and effective participation and inclusion in society.
- Entitlements of the Act that could be applied to Education.
- ❖ Disability has been defined based on an evolving concept and stresses on acceptance.
- ❖ The types of disabilities have been increased from 7 to 21.
- ❖ Reservation in higher education should be not less than 5% and government jobs not less than 4%

In 2004, the World Bank Conference on Disability and Justice, Dr. Amartya Sen has said, “It is extremely important to distinguish between two types of handicap the earning handicap and conversion handicap. A disabled person may find it harder to get a job or to retain it and may receive lower compensation for work. This earning handicap will be...that is not the only part of the problem. To do the same thing as an able-bodied person, the person with a physical disability may need more income than an able-bodied person...may need assistance... The conversion handicap refers to the disadvantage that a disabled person has in converting money into good living. It is not sufficient to be concerned with only handicaps but also conversion handicaps.” This RPWD Act 2016, therefore, attempts to overcome these problems by conferring upon them certain judicial support.

The term ‘inclusion’ is often used to refer to trials given to educate and train an increasing number of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in regular schools and fewer in special students’ schools. Some maintain steadfastly that special schools are oppressive, infringe equal opportunities, deny human rights and are immoral.

But on the other hand, Mary Warnock (2005) has given the blame that can be attached to certain politicians, ministers, and civil servants in lowering the esteem in which special schools are held in some quarters. She mentioned in her writings about examples of high quality of special schools which should not be seen as places of last resort. She has also argued that mainstream schools are the best provision for all learners but can be a setting in which a student can feel isolated, marginalized, unhappy and disaffected. (Farell, 2006)

Considering both the views, it can be said that till the 12th Grade the students with special needs have an option to choose between inclusive schools and special schools. Students possessing an at least average intelligence generally can continue higher education and such entitlement is bestowed upon them by the RPWD Act, RTE Act as well.

The problem occurs when there is an absence of different colleges or universities especially for people with diverse needs making inclusion mandatory and a single choice for the society.

All the recent amendments in India’s legal system abstain from the higher education institutions to refuse admission of special students. Earlier IIT’s and other esteemed institutions have refused to give admission to such students, stating the lack of facilities as a reason for non-acceptance. (Ebela, Ei Shahar, April (12, 2019) Recently, Calcutta Medical College has done the same with a student having a mental illness. As mental illness is also a part of the RPWD Act, the student had filed a case in a local court against the college. The court approved the student’s plea and passed an order to admit the student. Moreover, the college will have to give compensation to the student for the damages caused.

This brings us to the problem of the study that whether the higher educational institutes are ready to provide education to students with disabilities. To study this the main stakeholders – principals, teachers, and regular students’ attitude are studied.

Objectives of the Study:

- To determine the principals’ awareness about the holistic concept of inclusion and disability.
- To determine the perception of college teachers towards inclusion and disability.
- To determine the standard of infrastructure in colleges.
- To determine the perception of regular students towards inclusion of disabled classmates.
- To determine the amount of funding available for special students.

Research Questions:

1. Whether the college principals are aware of the holistic concept of inclusion and disability?
2. Whether the college teachers have a positive outlook towards inclusion?
3. Whether the infrastructure of the colleges support inclusion?

4. Whether the regular students are supportive of inclusion?
5. Whether separate funds are available for disabled students?

Delimitation:

The study has been delimited to the following:

The study has been conducted in Kolkata and South Bengal of West Bengal.

The sample has been taken from 10 colleges.

Methodology:

Research Design:

Kerlinger Fred N (1964) has opined 'Research Design is the plan, structure and strategy of investigation conceived so as to obtain answer to Research Question. The plan is the overall scheme or program of research: includes an outline of everything the investigators do for writing a hypothesis and operational implication to find the analysis of data'

This study is based on survey research. A semi-structured interview schedule is used as a tool for data collection.

Sample:

This study has been conducted in Kolkata and South Bengal. It includes 10 colleges. This study aims to analyze the urban and rural areas.

The participants include 8 colleges providing general courses and 2 colleges providing professional courses. The first set of the samples include Principals and Deans of the colleges.

The second set of the samples include the teachers of these respective institutions. There are teachers of all age groups and with both genders.

The third set of the samples include the students of these institutions within the age range of 17 to 20 years.

Purposive sampling technique has been adopted to select the subjects of the study.

Distribution of Participants of the Study:

SI No.	Category	Number
1	Principals	10
2	Teachers	50
3	Regular Students	100
	Total	160

Finding and Analysis of the Data:

Research Questions:

1. Whether the college principals are aware of the holistic concept of inclusion and disability?

It has been found from the study that 65% of the college principals lack awareness about disability. Even if they have certain conception to them, disability means mostly 'handicapped' people or people with visual impairment, cerebral palsy, locomotor disorders. They do not have a vivid concept about the type and range of disability. None of them are cognizant about the Rights of People with Disability Act, 2016, therefore, it means that when a new law is passed in a nation, seldom it reaches the ears of the citizens, even though they are considered to be elites of society. In Kolkata, the principals are almost oblivious about the existence of students with disabilities; even have said that "...as hardly such students apply, we don't face such challenges, so the needs to make an inclusion friendly college is minimal." The Dean of a reputed film college in Kolkata has shared that all the students with disabilities are unemployed and the H.O.D.'s face a difficulty to allocate projects to them. Mostly, the extent to which help is provided to them includes to render a scribe, extra time during examinations, attendance relaxation, but the principals of both rural and urban Bengal faces difficulties while giving such facilities. The Principals guaranteed that they will try to help the students if they get enough financial and administrative support from the government bodies to reconstruct the education system. Much difference has not been observed between the rural and urban areas.

2. Whether college teachers have a positive perception of inclusion?

The most heartbreaking finding of the research has been complete incognizant about the RPWD Act, 2016 among the teachers from which the data has been collected. The male teachers relatively lack sympathy compared to female teachers. In rural Bengal, some teachers refused to be an interviewee and others have answered all questions reluctantly. It is uncertain whether the teachers truly support the idea of inclusion or not as at times people tend to speak positively about certain issues to show them progressive even though they are trying to cope with the issues mentally. The teachers hailing from urban Bengal are reluctant to attend teaching workshops as they have other official responsibilities to fulfill; only has agreed on the terms that on-duty leave should be provided by the college authority; on the contrary, the teachers in rural Bengal have shown interests to join workshops. The unfortunate part of the finding is that none of the teachers whether from rural or urban Bengal are much comfortable to bring adaptation in curriculum, examination, evaluation methods of the special students.

3. Whether the infrastructure of the colleges support inclusion?

In urban Bengal, only 20% of the colleges have ramp and lift, which is only to help orthopedically impaired students. Others lack this minimum facility even. No braille library or computer is present. The design of the buildings is also complex in nature. Just two colleges have a smart class, but not used regularly, which means that hearing-impaired students will seldom benefit from it. There is no medical room, the colleges have tie-ups with few clinics nearby to help them in an emergency. Occasionally, clinical psychologist visits the colleges. The infrastructural standards of rural colleges are much worse.

4. Whether the regular students are supportive of inclusion?

In urban Bengal, almost all students are ready to befriend a student with disability but the possibility of some students with disabilities getting violent frighten them. The definition of disability which has been given by them is bizarre and the same applies to the students of rural Bengal. Their sole source of knowledge about disability is from Indian commercial films, which mostly show distorted facts. Only a limited number of regular students show eagerness to assist a special student.

5. Whether special funds are present for special students?

All the Principals unanimously have said that they are unaware of any separate grants or scholarships available for special students. They have mentioned the scholarship schemes available for regular students which could also be provided to them. But in case of necessity, the principals are ready to help students with special needs, from college funds. If funds are required to make special seats, study materials, books, for the special students, the principals promised to try to accumulate funds to provide those.

Discussion:

▪ In our Indian society, one of the major parameters to judge a student is academics. The marks secured in a class determines the status of the learner in the institute. So any underperforming learner is generally looked down upon by not only teachers but class fellows as well. Sometimes, the laws of the land forcefully implement changes even though the people are not prepared for it. The news article, *The Conversation* (Nov 5,2018) states, "Research shows that only 34% of college students with disabilities complete a 4-year graduate program". This is also a statistic of the developed nations; so the situation of a developing country struggling to overcome various hindrances in the education system must make calculated measures before bringing inclusive education in colleges. People are only sympathetic towards visible disability but ignorant about invisible disability, that is, autistic spectrum disorders, dyslexia, specific learning disorders. "People should be taught to consider disability as kind of diversity", says Bialka (Nov 5,2018), a Diversity Awareness Professor in U.S. The principals and teachers even consider disabled students to less likely to get success in future and prefer skill development-oriented education for them. Only teachers and students those who have specially-abled member in their family or they struggled with learning issues in non-adjusting educational setup are enthusiastic about inclusive education.

Comparison of the attitude before and after RPWD Act:

The study of Nanda and Nanda (2007) has observed that the attitude of mainstream teachers might change in a positive direction if they are provided with proper sensitization training. Again Sujathamalini et. Al. (2013), has found that the age, gender, community, socio-economic status, educational qualifications of the trainee teachers do not have any effect in their attitude towards disabled children.

The attitude of the teachers and other major stakeholders have not changed much. As the findings have shown, the level of cognizance about the new law and its features is very low to nil. The higher education institutes should be aware that, as the support of the Indian legal system will be with the disabled section of the society and any kind of negative reservations for the disabled can cause trouble in the academic centre.

It is very unfortunate that in the present era also antipathetic approach is still visible in the society, in general, towards disabled; and the stakeholders of the academic institutions dwelling in this society are barely different. Though the major reason for this is the lack of facilities, budget etcetera.

The Government of India must see that whenever a new Act is passed and implemented in the country that has an impact upon the education system, the institutions are well informed about it and a regular vigilance is kept to ensure successful implementation of the law. Workshops should be arranged for the teachers and other employees of the institute to incorporate the inclusivity of disabled in the institutes. If possible, occasional counseling sessions should be kept to remove the stigmas present in the mind of the regular students. Hopefully, in the future, we will find a nation where disabled will be labelled as equally abled.

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