

The Perception of Future Teachers in Handling Diverse Students

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Abstract

The contemporary world is characterized with different types of diversities. This is primarily due to the factors like globalisation and seeking of employment across borders. As a consequence, the developed countries have used affirmative action to ensure a diverse workforce. They do this in order to reap the benefits of these diverse workforces and utilize their innovativeness and creativity. Currently there is an effort to promote inclusive environment in different spheres of life including educational institutions. This study is looking at the differently abled students as a component of diversity. It attempts to find out the awareness in managing differently abled students and the legal provisions in the policy and the available teaching tools in imparting education to them amongst future teachers, who are presently studying and are in the verge of completing and starting a new teaching career. A qualitative study was adopted to explore the interpretations of the respondents in their awareness about differently abled learners. The respondents are mostly aware about the differently abled learners. The respondents felt that they were not having any subjects which teach them to handle an inclusive setup in schools. There is a wide gap in spite of the various initiatives taken by the government to create an inclusive environment. It requires more effort at the base so that the challenges of managing diverse students are met. The study found out that there is a need to develop the skills of future teachers in handling diverse students in classroom setting.

Key Words: Teacher Educators, Diverse students, Differently abled students

INTRODUCTION:

The contemporary world is characterized with different types of diversities. This is primarily due to the factors like globalisation and seeking of employment across borders. As a consequence, the developed countries have used affirmative action to ensure a diverse workforce. They do this in order to reap the benefits of these diverse workforces and utilize their innovativeness and creativity. These recent changes in policies on affirmative action are creating pressure on the organisations to devise new strategies and explore new areas to manage the issues related to diversity. Currently there is an effort to promote inclusive environment in different spheres of life including educational institutions. This study is looking at the differently abled students as a component of diversity. It attempts to find out the awareness in managing differently abled students and the legal provisions in the policy and the available teaching tools in imparting education

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to them amongst future teachers, who are presently studying and are in the verge of completing and starting a new teaching career.

Today, differently abled learners are not excluded and discriminated. They are able to access education with some early intervention in the initial years. This intervention allows them to participate in the main stream. In the Indian constitution, Article 45 deals with the provision of free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years. Based on this, the Constitution (86th Amendment) Act 2002 has been enacted by the parliament making education as a fundamental right of all children in the age group of 6-14 years. Under the RTE Act 2009 states that "all the children of the age group 6-14 years whether differently abled or not have the right for education". This has put pressure on educational institutions and government to regulate policies and other infrastructural facilities to improve and manage the inclusive environment setup effectively. Disability can be defined as a condition which limit a person's mobility, hearing, vision, speech or mental function, which is caused either by an accident, trauma, genetics or disease (Reynolds and Janzen 2007 p.735).

The training of teachers plays an important role in dealing with the issue of educating differently abled children. The teachers should develop necessary skills to manage diverse students and be equipped to work in an inclusive environment. The teachers should be able to identify children with disabilities. They must also utilize various techniques, provide appropriate material and adapt new teaching methods to incorporate and create a learning environment. The formal system of education is very rigid in terms of curriculum, evaluation and teaching-learning process. It is unable to accommodate and retain differently abled children in the learning process. In order to overcome this, it is necessary to look for alternative strategies and approaches which ensures access and quality.

LEGISLATION AND POLICY:

The Education Commission of 1966 (Kothari Commission) was the first to draw attention to the disabled children education. In 1974, integrated education was clearly emphasized under the scheme for Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC). The Government of India has enacted three legislation for persons with disabilities viz. (i) Persons with Disability (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995, which provides education, employment, creation of barrier free environment, social security, etc. to the disabled persons (ii) National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disability Act, 1999, which has provisions for legal guardianship of the four categories and creation of enabling environment for as much independent living as possible. (iii) Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992 deals with the development of manpower for providing rehabilitation services (Jameel 2011). The government made extensive action plans for inclusion of disabled children in the normal stream. Yet there is a wide disparity

in the policy and actually following them. The government sanctioned plans for the infrastructural facilities and other support system for the disabled children. The NCTE has revised its syllabus and curriculum to provide an insight to the students and to tackle the inclusive children from disabled and disadvantaged groups.

The government introduced two major initiatives for achieving the goals of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) such as the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in 1994 and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2002. The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) also caters to the disabled children by distance education. Despite the various efforts taken by the government and non-government organisations, many children with disabilities are still unable to access education.

The Rehabilitation Council of India has estimated that 30 million disabled children requires education and it aims to educate 10 per cent of all disabled children by 2020. It is important to look at the various plans of the government to create an inclusive climate and reduce discrimination. The universities reserve 3% of their seats for persons with disabilities in accordance with the disability act 1995. The disabled persons of the following categories such as blindness/low vision, hearing impairment and locomotor disability or cerebral palsy are able to get admissions in higher educational institutions.

Various provisions on disability in Five Year plans:

The various plans of the government for the differently abled children /persons are given below:

First Five-Year Plan (1951-1956): Launch of training center for adults with visual impairments by the Ministry of Education in 1947.

Second Five-Year Plan (1956-1961): National Advisory Council for the Physically Challenged was set up to advice the central government on issues concerning education, training and employment of the disabled under the Ministry of Education.

Third Five-Year Plan (1961-1966): The government formulated policies to facilitate the training and rehabilitation of the physically challenged in rural areas.

Fourth Five-Year Plan (1969-1974): National centres for the physically challenged were formed. Nine employment exchanges were set up. A school for cerebral palsied children was started and pilot schemes for integrated education of the blind, the partially blind and partially deaf was initiated.

Fifth Five Year Pan (1974-1979): Provision of scholarships in central sector was initiated.

Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980-1985): National policies were made around the issues of integrative education, vocational training and economic rehabilitation so as the persons with disabilities are entered in to the mainstream. Scholarships at both centre and state

for students pursuing educational and vocational pursuits, 1% reservation for blind, deaf and orthopedically handicapped in group 'C' and 'D' posts in central sector was started.

Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-1990): A new scheme 'Assistance to Disabled persons for Purchase/fitting of Aids and Appliances' was launched. There was provision of aids and appliances and improving the functioning of employment exchanges in the seventh five year plan.

Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-1997): Reservation was increased from 1% to 3% in central government and public sector undertaking. The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Integrated Education of the Disabled (IED) were initiated.

Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002): Education of disabled children was a legal obligation up to age 18. 3 % reservation of vacancies for the blind, deaf and orthopedically disabled in Group 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' posts in Central Services and in the Public Sector Undertakings was implemented and monitored.

Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007): There were provisions for students with disabilities in higher education. Incentives and scholarships for both domestic and overseas students were recommended.

Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012): Developmental steps in the field of higher education and disability- to promote greater accessibility and a barrier-free environment to the disabled were taken. Setting up of National Institute of Universal Design, disability units and an 'Equal Opportunity Office' in all universities were recommended. Centrally Sponsored Scheme of 'Inclusive Education of the Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS) was brought out by MHRD.

Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-2017): Improving infrastructural facilities by creating disabled friendly environment, curriculum development and provision of aids and appliances was recommended.

METHODOLOGY:

Objective:

The main aim of this research was to find out the perception of students who are future teachers about their awareness on differently abled learners.

Sample of study:

A qualitative study was adopted to explore the interpretations of the respondents in their awareness about differently abled learners. A qualitative approach was adopted as it involves "an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998;3). This is a case study of Jamia Millia Islamia. It is an old institute established in 1938. The faculty of education has two departments (i) Department of teacher training and non- formal education and ii) Department of educational studies.

It has more than 500 students enrolled in various programmes. A sample of 36 respondents was randomly selected from different programmes to know their views about differently abled learners.

Data collection techniques:

The main method for data collection involved a semi structured questionnaire which was given to respondents. The questionnaire was guided by a set of questions, which focused their views on their awareness on differently abled learners, their legal provisions and various teaching aids and tools used to impart teaching for differently abled learners. It also involves two scenarios where the respondents have to read and comment on it. These situations were developed by the author as an aid to the questionnaire to understand better and help the respondents to share and discuss their views in handling the differently abled learners. This study reports and document an analysis of responses from students studying in faculty of education from Jamia Millia Islamia regarding their awareness about differently abled learners. The period of data collection was from January 2015 to February 2015.

Analysis:

The answers of the respondents were coded into three criteria such as aware, somewhat aware and not at all aware. The results of the various questions are shown in Figure 1.

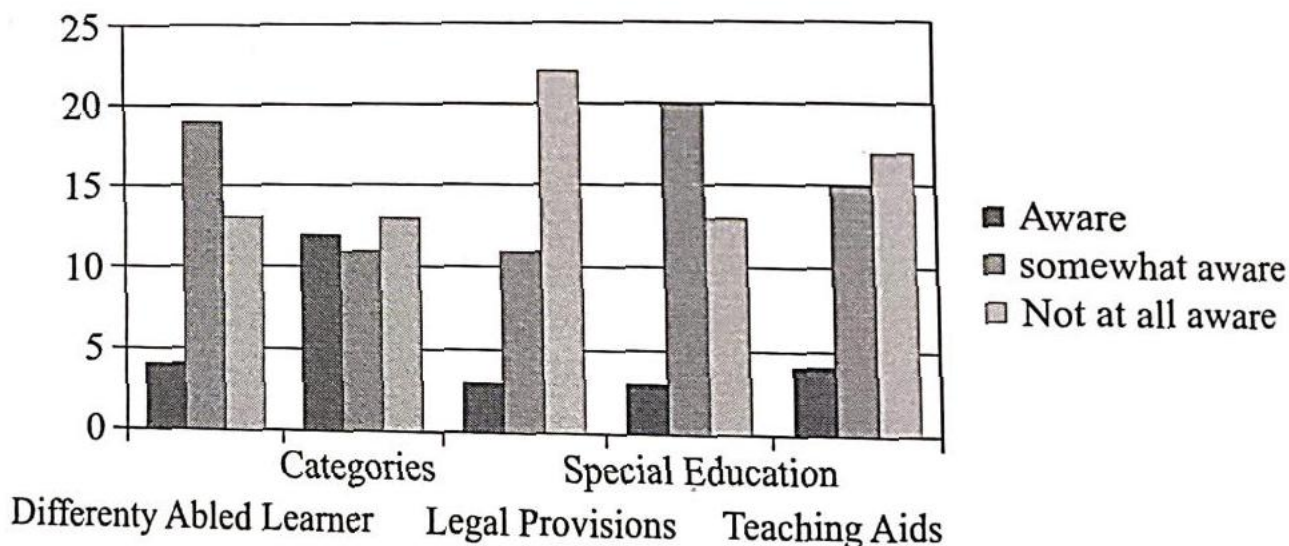


Figure 1: Responses of respondents

From the first question of the questionnaire which was about who are differently abled learners, majority of the respondents were somewhat aware about differently abled learners. Around 36% of the respondents were not aware exactly about differently abled learners. The respondents were unable to recognize the term differently abled learners for disability. Later, the researcher explained to the respondents that both the terms are same.

The second question was regarding the categories of differently abled learners. In this approximately all the three criteria were roughly the same. But 36% of the respondents were not at all aware about the various categories of the differently abled learners.

The third question was about the legal provisions provided by the government or educational institutions. In this 61% of the respondents were not aware of the legal provisions given by the government. The respondents were asked about special education. The majority of the respondents, around 56% of them were somewhat aware of special education. The fifth question was about the various teaching aids used for teaching differently abled learners. Around 42% of the respondents were somewhat aware of the teaching aids. But the majority of the respondents of about 47% were not aware of the various teaching aids used in teaching the differently abled learners. The respondents were asked about their view on inclusive education. All the respondents replied in affirmative and everyone wanted an inclusive environment where there is no discrimination and exclusion and all the children must be treated equally.

The respondents overall awareness about the differently abled children are limited. The respondents were not aware of the various teaching methods involved in teaching differently abled children. Most of the respondents had the opinion that handling special children is of the special educators.

Scenario 1: The respondents were eager to work in an inclusive setup. Most of the respondents wanted to motivate differently abled learners and disadvantaged groups by providing special attention to them and involve them in various activities which will help them to achieve their goals. One of the respondents said

“I will encourage them to give their best. I will use the best teaching aids to make it more effective and make them capable to learn and understand the concepts.”

And another respondent said

“I shall make my teaching tools and lesson plans according to their abilities. I will also teach other students to respect them and treat them properly.”

Scenario 2: The respondents wanted to use different activities depending upon the capability of the child. Most of the respondents felt that they will first understand their capacities and create interest and encourage them to do activities. One of the respondents said

“I will motivate by bringing their skills out. All the hidden qualities of the students will be brought out and admired.”

CONCLUSION:

The respondents are mostly aware about the differently abled learners. But they felt that differently abled persons are only dealt by special educators as they require special

training to handle them. They felt that they were not having any subjects which teach them to handle an inclusive setup in schools. The government has introduced policies but failed to implement it in full swing. There is a wide disparity in spite of the various initiatives taken by the government to create an inclusive environment. The majority of the future teachers were not aware of the legal provisions given to differently abled learners by the government. It is important to include subjects which help them to identify differently abled learners and to teach them. The role of special educators is to prepare the child to enter in the normal stream. The government and the teacher educating institutions are developing their curriculum, other teaching methods and the duration of the course so that the future teachers are capable in handling diverse students in an inclusive environment. It requires more effort at the base so that the challenges of managing diverse students are met.

Future directions and limitations:

This study has several limitations. First, the study was conducted limits the extent to which findings may be generalised because it was based only on one teacher training institute in Delhi. Second, the considerably lower size of sample taken may not have adequate representation of participants' perceptions. This study was done before the two year Bed programme was introduced in Jamia Millia Islamia. Comparative time series studies can be done to know the awareness of present students with past students. This study was done to analyse the awareness of future teachers about differently abled learners as they will be handling an inclusive environment. Although this study attempted to examine differently abled learners, future studies should explore the nexus of other dimensions of diversity. The future studies could examine other dimensions like gender and disadvantaged groups. The teacher training institutions are working for strategies to tackle the situations and develop modules which will help in handling diverse students in a school environment. In addition, other institutions can be included in the survey to know the exact position of future teachers in handling diverse students. It will provide useful information as to whether the teacher training institutions are providing training to handle an inclusive setup in school. However, this study points out that there is a need to create awareness among teachers to handle an inclusive setup to make it a success.

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