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Welcoming Disability: An Investigation of Teachers' Views about Inclusion in Higher Education Institutions

Abstract

Students with special education needs (SEN) are less visible in higher education. This phenomenon seems rooted in the perspectives of teachers and the environment of higher education institutions for disability. Welcoming approach may accelerate enrolment and participations of students. The study investigates how teachers view and welcome disability in universities. One hundred and fourteen teachers were selected on available basis. The analyses disclose multifaceted barriers in pedagogy, curriculum and assessment cemented with other factors that keep students with special education needs (SEN) away from higher education institutions and make them less visible. Paradoxically, there are bright signs of teachers' readiness to get orientation and training to welcome students with SEN. The study suggests and stresses more on awareness and training programmes for university teachers to widen their thinking to accept the potential of such students with SEN. Further, the study concludes that support and changes are needed to create welcoming environment for SEN to make inclusion gradually possible in higher education institutions.

Keywords: Viability, teachers, students, higher education, inclusion

Introduction

Human rights approach focuses that to get education under the umbrella of equal opportunities is the basic right of each and every individual. In this regard, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and particularly article 24 gives new impetus to the human rights to support inclusion of all individual with special education needs (SEN). Clough (1998) explained that many pressures within the general education system exist that encourage the use of special educational procedures to exclude troublesome children. Artiles, Kozleski, Dorn & Christensen (2006) concluded that segregated education programs have not shown a positive effect on students with SEN. The literature reviewed in French and English offers discussion on issues and obstacles in inclusion. Ryndak & Alper (1996) concluded that isolation and exclusion due to disability is as injurious as it is due to race and gender. Ferguson (2007) has explained that children and youth with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities, could participate and learn in ordinary classrooms. For example, Plaisance (2006) has stressed that inclusion general institutions is often treated in a sentimental way. If we think of including students in ordinary schools from this point of view then the jingle like everybody being together would remain empty slogan. Although, the studies show that inclusion is beneficial for all students including students with disabilities but at the same time we should not understand this process in an emotional way. Possible ways of practicing in inclusive classes will have to explore, otherwise, fears of inclusion remain existing and consequently exclusion from inside will surface. The implementation of

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inclusion in emotional way will create exclusion from inside where students are physically present in general classes without being partakers. These counterproductive trends and planning are big challenges in including students with disabilities in general institutions. The American sociologist Goffman (1975) explained that some people in daily life are 'stigmatised' by the others due the characteristics that they have. For example, race, disability, behaviour, etc. are the characteristics which cause them to be labelled and consequently these people become the victims of disgrace and disapproval. Plaisance (2008) pointed out that institution which rebuffs students with SEN, fundamentally, has the similar accentuated reason of difference. In essence, it highlights negative perception of individual. It also reduces individual's overall identity without considering the potential s/he has. Although individual differences lead to individual limitations or impairments, but it does not mean that due to these impairments these individuals should be excluded. Here, community reconstruction becomes more significant as compared to treatment of individual. The problem exists in the environment. The disabled persons improve their lives on removing barriers like attitudinal, physical and institutional. If all these barriers are removed then there would not be disability. According to Mason (2008), barriers removal may prove to be more fruitful towards materializing inclusion. Not only people with disabilities are excluded from participation in the society but also all under-represented groups are excluded from participation. According to Naidoo (2009), analysis of barriers may lead towards understanding exclusion of under-privileged individuals in education.

Teachers' profession, mode and practices have been viewed from many different perspectives. It is important to explore the ways teachers welcome their students based on their experience and teaching in the institutions where they have been working. It is also important that one should understand the working conditions and the constraints which teachers are attempting to cope. To ask teachers to promote more inclusive educational practices cannot effectively be met if they themselves experience conflicting constraints and expectations, insecurity and a general lack of encouragement. Mason (2008) explained that inclusion embraces both the gifts and the needs of all its individuals without keeping them in segregation and marginalization. As teachers are the back bone of bringing changes in schools as well as in society at large hence their orientation and training is more important to gradually develop inclusive values, practices and culture.

Universities that aspire to be socially inclusive are likely to share the principles of: high level of community engagement to address inclusion issues; collaborative approaches involving all stakeholders; strong focus on outcomes for students and the community; and strong commitment to strengths-based rather than deficit models (Cairnduff 2011). Universities should offer the following support services: admissions, academic counselling and support, disability-related counselling, assessment and evaluation, advocacy and liaison services, information and referral services (Wilson, Getzel, and Brown 2000). Adjustments that universities can make for students with disability include modifying the premises of the institution, changing or modifying course participation, delivery and assessment, and providing certain equipment and teaching aids (Squelch 2010).

Currently in Universities of Pakistan students with physical disabilities rarely show their visibility. The study is designed to investigate welcoming mode of students with special education needs in Universities. The study further seeks to explore how teachers respond on accepting these students in their classes and Universities? Whether they rebuff? What barriers exist in making Universities more welcoming towards students with special education needs? Is there any need to give orientation to University teachers?

Welcoming mode of teachers enhances inclusion. This process of inclusion is associated with gradual developments in educational institutions. Booth, Nes & Stromstad (2004) relate inclusion with teacher education institutions. Developments in institutions take place through addressing various individuals' requirements. Disability, as our society views, becomes the cause of segregation. Perceptions within deficit paradigm exclude students with disabilities from educational institutions and become a barrier in inclusion. We believe that participation of students with special education needs (SEN) can be increased by addressing their needs. Enabling universities to welcome all students including students with SEN should be the focus of the stakeholders. Ryndak and Alper (1996) elaborated the positive aspects and consequences of inclusion in USA. Students with SEN would be more possibly to live and work in integrated environment in the society and community as grown-up individuals as compared to the fellows without SEN. Further, Deng & Harris (2008) explained that general education teacher in China are able to use and apply and implement information subject to the support provided with regard to technique of special education. According to European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2005), inclusion in general institutions in Spain with support provided to students with SEN has a positive impact in terms of learning, self-esteem and self-concept, and in parallel, such students' relationship with their friends also improve. Engen (2004) described that it is challenging for teacher to design instruction to accelerate the participation of students with disabilities in curricular activities. Purdue, Gordon-Burns, Gunn, Madden & Surtees (2009) noted that courses for inclusive education for beginner teachers in New Zealand emphasize the need on how teaching to students with SEN be facilitated in general institutions.

The national report on the development of education (2008) indicates that the programme for inclusive development should be embedded within the general institutions system. The support should be provided by the professionals in Pakistan. Further in this regard, government has also taken some initiatives. At higher education, the visibility of students with disabilities can also be observed particularly students with physical disabilities and with visual impairments. Higher education institutions and universities are not appearing ready adequately to welcome even such disabilities which are albeit rarely showing their appearance in these institutions. Is awareness being given among the stakeholders of higher education institutions? Are teachers ready to welcome students with disabilities in higher education institutions? Our study addresses and explores these issues. The purpose of the study was to explore welcoming mode of students with special education needs by teachers of Universities. How teachers accept and include students with disabilities in higher education institution?

We conceptualize welcoming mode by including following components: Acceptance of students with special education needs by University teachers, Benefits that university teachers think of welcoming students with special education in university, Identify barriers coming in the way of welcoming such students, and readiness of teachers to get trained makes fourth part of their welcoming mode. Based on the above components of welcoming mode that we develop following hypotheses:

1. Teachers accept and include students with SEN in University.
2. Teachers think that accepting students with SEN in university is beneficial.
3. Teachers perceive that barriers exist for inclusive classes in their university.
4. Teachers are ready to get orientation and training to welcoming students with special education needs in their university.

5. There is significant difference in welcoming mode of students with special education needs by university teachers on the basis of their age-groups, experiences and other demographics.

Methodology

Quantitative approach was exploited in this study. To collect data, questionnaire technique was used. A total of 114 teachers working in University, Sargodha was conveniently chosen to participate in this study. Data collected through questionnaire were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). In a nutshell, this study comprising quantitative approach reflects upon why teachers accept and do not accept students with disabilities in Universities in Pakistan. What exclusionary barriers exist in the ways? What support and what changes needed for university teachers to burgeon welcoming environment in University. Quantitative analysis also examines whether significant difference exists or not in the responses of university teachers of different faculties of University. These teachers' responses are related to acceptance of students with SEN, advantages of accepting students with SEN, exclusionary barriers and need for their orientation to welcome students with SEN in University.

Sample and sampling

Teachers of a university located in urban area of Punjab make the population of the study. These teachers were selected from four faculties and 13 departments of the university in Sargodha, Pakistan. This population is selected because inclusion means to include students with disabilities in such departments where students without disabilities study. It is therefore decided to collect from the teachers who teach in these 13 different departments because ultimately these are the teachers who welcome students with disabilities in general classes. Convenient sampling technique was used for this study. A total of 114 teachers from these faculties and departments working under these faculties were selected on available basis from the same university.

Development of instrument and its reliability

On the basis of the theoretical framework and the situation existing in Pakistan regarding universities and teachers different hypotheses were developed. Keeping in view these hypotheses, a questionnaire was developed that consisted of six components. Questions in each component represent a unique factor. For example, questions related to acceptance of students with disabilities in Universities, Benefit of welcoming such students, barriers coming on their way, and orientation courses and readiness of universities teachers to do them. First component is related to demographic information. The statements from 14 to 19 are related to acceptance of students with disabilities in universities. The statements from 20 to 24 are concerned to its benefits. The statements from 25 to 30 are related to barriers coming on the way and from 31 to 36 related to orientation courses and readiness of university teachers. The Cronbach's Alpha is found to be 0.769 showing the instrument developed is reliable.

Table: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.769	20

Analysis

Teachers welcome students with disabilities in an odd ways. It means that most of the teachers do not accept these students.

The data analyzed in the following sections provide useful information about the teachers of University.

First section deals with demographics included in the study. Four faculties have been selected to collect data from the university. The faculty of arts and law, faculty of social and behavioral sciences, faculty of oriental languages, and faculty of business and commerce were selected on convenient basis. A total of 114 teachers have been selected on available basis from 13 departments in the faculties. Forty three teachers were selected from faculty of arts and law, 50 from faculty of social and behavioral sciences, four from faculty of oriental languages, and 17 from faculty of business and commerce. The teachers selected were disproportionate in numbers as researchers couldn't be able to collected data due to limitation existing in the readiness of teachers to fill in the questionnaires. Here, the data collected show that among total teachers selected from university, 106 were male teachers and only 8 were female teachers. Across different age groups, 42 teachers were between ages 23-35 year, 64 were between 36-50 year and only 4 teachers were between 51-65 year. The data show that 42 teachers have masters, 52 MPhil and 20 have PhD degrees. The total experiences that teachers have vary i.e., 80 teachers have experience between 1-10 year, 26 between 11-20 year, 4 between 21-30 year, and 4 teachers have experience between 31 year or above. Similarly, their research experience also varies. For example, 56 have 1-5 year of research experience, 32 have between 6-10 year, 5 between 11-15 year, and 4 have research experience of 16 year or above. Data collected show that teachers who have administrative experience in university also vary. Forty nine teachers have administrative experience between 1-5 year, 13 between 6-10 year, 4 between 11-15 year of administrative experience in their service. Similarly, 67 teachers have experience to teach students with disabilities in general classes and 47 don't have such experience.

Second section follows reflects teachers' mode of accepting students with disabilities in general classes conducted in university. The data analysis shows that 66% of university teachers are open in seeing students with physical disabilities only in classes where they can teach. Only 24% teachers think that hearing impaired students can be taught with students without hearing loss in higher education classes. Twenty seven percent teachers think that visual impaired students can be taught with students without visual impairment in higher education classes. Twenty seven percent teachers think that visual impaired students can be taught with students without visual impairment in higher education classes. Twenty percent teachers think that mentally retarded students can be taught with students without mental retardation in university. Twenty percent teachers think that mentally retarded students can be taught with students without mental retardation in university. The data show that 59% teachers think that students who cannot follow instruction can be taught with students who follow instructions in classes in university.

Third section follows reflects teachers' welcoming mode in connection with benefits of including students with disabilities in University. Students with and without disability can develop friendship in the same class? Seventy nine percent teachers think that yes it could be beneficial for both. Students with disability do not affect performance of students without disability in the same class? Fifty percent teachers think that yes there would not be any difference in the performance of students without disability due to the present of students with disability. Can students with disability also equally perform well with students without disability? Only 36% teachers think that students with disability also equally perform well with

students without disability. Students with disability can be protected from stigma by delivering moral lessons in class? Sixty seven percent teachers think that yes they can be protected from stigma in this way.

Fourth section follows deals with the barriers that teachers will be facing in adopting welcoming mode for students with disabilities in the university. Only 15% teachers think there are not enough facilities available to teach students with and without disability. Similarly, 42% teachers think that current curriculum does not facilitate in arranging activities for students with and without SEN. Moreover, 72% teachers think that at present assessment does not facilitate in judging performance of students with SEN.

The data analyzed show that 68% teachers think that teachers, parents and societal' attitude multiply the situation in developing obstacles for students with SEN.

Fifth section follows is relevant to orientation courses and readiness of university teachers to welcome students with disabilities in university. Eighty nine percent teachers of university are willing to attend training courses to teach students with & without disability in same class. Ninety three percent university teachers are willing to learn relevant methods to teach students with disability. Eighty nine percent university teachers are willing to learn relevant methods to assess students with disability in the same class with their counterpart without disability. Eighty nine percent university teachers will consult special educators to discuss problems of students with disability in my class if environment of inclusion exists. Ninety seven percent teachers are willing to cooperate with colleagues & administrators to facilitate students with disability in their department at university.

Further analyses by applying ANOVA show that there is significant difference in the welcoming mode of students with special education needs on the basis of teachers' age (F = 11.051, Sig. = .000). Post hoc multiple comparison shows that on accepting students with SEN, significant difference exists in the welcoming mode of students with special education needs (SEN) by teachers of university whose age-group falls between 23-35 years and between 36-50 year (Mean Diff. = -4.84226*, Sig. = .000). Similarly, significant difference exists in the welcoming mode of students with special education needs by teachers of university whose age-group falls between 23-35 year and between 51-55 year (Mean Diff. = 6.09524*, Sig. = .030).

No difference found significant in the welcoming mode of teachers based on their length of experience in university. Similarly, no difference found significant in the welcoming mode of teachers based on their relevant departmental faculty.

Findings
1. Do teachers accept students with SEN in University? Teachers' mode of welcoming students with disabilities in general classes conducted in university is disappointing. It is found that teachers are not open enough to welcome them. For example, a minority think that hearing impaired students can be taught with students without hearing loss in higher education classes in university. Similarly a minority think that visual impaired students can be taught with students without visual impairment in higher education classes.
2. Teachers think that accepting students with SEN is beneficial for all students? It is found that a minority of teachers are positive towards welcoming them by thinking students with disabilities can also equally perform well with students without disability and these students can be protected from stigma.
3. Do teachers perceive that barriers exist for inclusive classes in their university ? It is found that teachers will be facing barriers in pedagogy, curriculum and assessment while adopting welcoming mode for students with disabilities in the university. For

example, a majority thinks that current assessment system does not facilitate to evaluate performance of students with SEN.

4. Are university teachers ready to get orientation and training to welcoming students with SEN in university? The question gets amazing response. It is found that majority teachers of university are willing to attend training courses to teach students with & without disability in their general classes. Moreover, teachers agree to cooperate with colleagues & administrators to facilitate students with disability in their department at university.

5. It is found that there is significant difference in welcoming mode of students with special education needs by university teachers on the basis of various age-groups.

Conclusion and suggestion

The study concludes that teachers' mode of welcoming students with SEN in university is also derisory. University teachers are not open enough to welcome students with disabilities along with their counterpart without disabilities. In pros and cons way, tteachers opined that welcoming all students with and without disabilities in university may equally beneficial. When thinking about welcoming all students teachers perceive manifold barriers coming in the way of doing so, for example, in pedagogy, curriculum and assessment. On contrary, there are bright signs of readiness to get orientation and training to say them welcoming in university. The study suggest that there should be awareness and training programme for university teachers to widen their way of thinking towards students' with SEN potential as well as support and changes are needed to create welcoming environment in Universities.

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