



Odl Assure A Flexible and Appropriate Education of Children With Learning Disabilities

KEYWORDS

Open Distance Learning, Learning disabilities, Learning difficulties.

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ABSTRACT

Distance Education as an emerging concept of modern education is proving to be an effective alternative to formal education. Distance Education has been found to be a viable alternative to meet the growing number of education seekers; a boon for those deprived of the benefits of education. Distance Education has always held special appeal for people with Learning difficulties because of the freedom it offers in choosing when, where and how to study. Open Distance Learning Universities are considered to be an excellent institution for meeting the requirement of Children with Learning Disabilities.

The phrases 'Learning difficulties' and 'Learning disabilities' somehow differ because the term 'disability' carries a negative and pessimistic connotation; whereas 'difficulty' implies a problem with solutions. When a Learning difficulty becomes so severe as to interfere with the child's learning process, it is better to call it as "Learning disability". Children with Learning Disabilities and difficulties are found nearly in every class room. A person with Learning Difficulties is someone whom society identifies as having an impairment in cognitive functioning, but whose needs and interests are not well catered for by societal structures or by the interactions of other people; he or she is a survivor of struggle to overcome this disadvantage and may need help to continue to do so.

Children with disabilities are less likely to be in school, disabled adult are more likely to be unemployed, and families with a disabled member are often worse off than average. With better education and more access to jobs, people with Learning Disabilities can become an integral part of society, as well as help to generate Higher Economic growth that will benefit the country as a whole. This paper address issues pertaining to how Open Distance Learning help in increasing the enrolment percentage of differently abled students and their sustainability in Higher Education, and also suggest some Techniques and methods of Open Learning which are needed by people with Learning Disabilities for better integration in to society by overcoming stigma.

INTRODUCTION:

Education is a systematically organised form of self-study in which student counselling, the presentation of learning material and the securing and supervising of students success are carried out by a team of teachers each of whom has responsibilities. Distance Education system is very flexible which is not restricted by geographical or social boundaries, this mode alone bridges the gap that prevails between the haves and have not's where so ever the aspirant learner hails from, social barriers based on colour, caste, race, gender etc., can be pulverized at the grass root level is possible only through significant spread of distance education throughout the world.

The Basic Concept of Distance Education is known by various names in different continents and countries such as off-campus study and External System in Australia, Home study in Europe and North America, Tele-enseignement in France, Extra-mural in New Zealand and Fernunterricht in Germany.

Distance Education create scope of learning for the poor people living in remote rural areas, for the women whose life is still covered by the four walls of social systems and for those who cannot spare time for learning in lieu of their own earning schedule (Subimal kumar Chatterjee, 2009). To be more precise it is the only mechanism of learning which can satisfy need of disadvantaged and economically weaker sections of the society who reside in educationally backward and under developed regions. In addition, it can help the physically challenged groups and special groups at special places like hospitals, Central jails and such others.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

The Concept of Inclusive Education (Purnima Gupta & Durgesh Nandin, 2010) is accepted as an efficient means of realizing the dream of "Education for all". Inclusive Educa-

tion refers to the education of children with special needs along with normal peers in a regular room. This concept is based on the premise that all children should get equal opportunity to learn whether they are average, dull, bright, retarded, blind, deaf, crippled, delinquent, emotionally disturbed or otherwise deviant in their capacities to learn. Equal Opportunities should be provided to all children to learn at their own space in various ways. Education has to be Universal without excluding anybody. Inclusive Education is an attempt to provide education to exceptional children along with other normal children to fulfil the objectives of education in a democratic way.

Inclusive Education system (Rashmi Agrawal & BVLN Rao, 2007), views that if a child is not learning, the problem lies in the education system and not in the disabled child. The difficulties arise because of rigid methods and curriculum, in accessible environment, untrained teachers and poor quality of teaching, lack of proper attitudes on the part of the teachers, lack of support from public agencies etc., thus the focus shifts from making the disabled child responsible for his problem to making the education system responsible. The Salamanca Statement adopted at the world Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality in 1994 states that,

"Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover they provide an affective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire educational system".

Generally, differently abled is a wider term(Maqbool Ahmed & Aleem Basha,2011) which includes all those children who

suffer from deformities or deficiencies in one or another way and as such they are different in normal functioning. The Persons with disabilities are a heterogeneous group comprising a variety of disabilities and varying degree of disabilities in each. Person with disabilities can lead a better quality of life if they are provided equal opportunities and effective access to rehabilitation measures.

The Education of the children with disability is not a matter of pity, grace or sympathy but it is a right. It is the responsibility of the government and society to make the arrangements to facilitate the education of all disabled children without any discrimination. Isolating, children with disability may give them a sense of inferiority. The support services provided to the child with disability to optimise learning constitute the special education. There are over 70 million people in India today who suffer from some form of disability. For the country to grow in a balanced and inclusive way, it is imperative that these people become part of the mainstream (Perspective Issues that matter, 2013). They need to become independent and become capable of earning their livelihood. Many people with disabilities, as well as educators, businesses and government institutions are not aware of these accessible technologies and the role they can play in changing lives.

Role of Distance Education in Special Education:

Open Distance Learning Universities are considered as Excellent Institutions for meeting the requirements of differently abled students. Thus Open Universities can play a vital role by solving the needs of differently abled students. Students with special needs such as physical disabilities, developmental disorders, and challenges with learning are likely to benefit from additional educational services like the use of Technology, resource room and different approaches to teaching and learning through distance education (Vijaya Rani & Senthilnathan, 2011). Today distance education course makes use of Email, the web and video conferencing over broad band network connections for both wired physical location and wireless mobile learning which has the greater scope for special education. As the number of special teacher educators are less, compared with the regular course, it is significant that special education through distance education is a viable option for the special students to continue their studies.

Education for all is one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) that all countries should achieve for better livelihood by 2015. This goal caters for with disabilities. One of the modes of making education accessible is Distance Education. Persons with disabilities can lead a better quality of life if they are provided equal opportunities and effective access to rehabilitation measures.

Historical Perspective in Special Education: Global Scenario (Nishta Rana, 2013)

Special Education is the education of learners with special needs in a way that address the learner's individual differences and needs.

I. The Era of Exclusion: Extermination and Abandonment

- Treating disability is dominated by the philosophy of exclusion from the Society.
- Horrified left on hills to die, killing, burning, and abandoning the disabled persons.
- People treated the disabled as a burden on the society.

II. The Era of Acceptance: Subject of Amusement and Use

- Accepting the disabled not a normal human being but as a subject of amusement.
- Disabled persons were used as commodities for serving as beggars. Prostitutes, servants and slaves.

III. The Era of Prohibition: Legal Discrimination and Witchcraft

- Church as a religious institution led to play a new role in

the treatment and attitudes towards disabilities.

- Society labels disabilities as a whole as impurities, disqualifying their bearers from active participation.

IV. The Era of Sympathy and Asylum: Institutionalization

- Society regarded disabled children as poor souls who have been denied opportunities to lead the normal life.
- They were now a subject of sympathy rather than of amusement.
- Many Institutions and homes were established for the welfare of the disabled people.

V. The Era of settings: Special Schools

- Era of education, need for mass education
- Establishment of separate schools in this era.
- Special Education was accepted as branch of Education.

VI. The Era of Segregated settings: Special classes

- Education for disabled from the isolated settings of special classes within the normal schools.
- It was the result of a new wave of humanism.

VII. The Era of Inclusive settings: Regular classes

- Educating all types of children together in the regular classes.

The motto of this era "Children, who will learn together, learn to live together".

METHODOLOGY:

Being an empirical study, the research work involves interactions and feedback from core faculty and differently abled learners. The data is collected from primary source with the help of formulated questionnaire and open interviews and also from secondary sources.

RESULTS:

Measures to increase the enrolment percentage of differently abled students in Higher Education:

- Open Distance Learning Universities can plan and execute many programmes such as Vocational Training Life Skill Training, Social skill training etc., for the disabled, so that more number of differently abled students can be enrolled in Higher Educational Institutions.
- Fee exemption should be given to differently abled learners which enable them to pursue Higher Education.
- Career guidance centres can be opened particularly for the disabled by collaborating with National Institutes for disabled.
- Open Distance Learning Universities should develop special learning packages and special equipment's or devices to help differently abled students to enrol in ODL Universities.
- Reservations and employment share of disabled candidates should be implemented strictly. In all Higher Educational Institutions performance records of differently abled students should be maintained and campus placement should be done to encourage the differently abled students. In addition to this a special placement cell should be open in all Open Learning Universities.
- The share of the disabled against the total strength in actual terms is barely 0.44% as against their estimated population of 5-6%. In the private sector, the scenario is even worse. In a survey conducted by National Centre for Promotion of Employment for the Disabled People (NCPEDP) in India in top 100 companies in 1999, the rate of employment of the disabled was 0.28%. The figure of Multinational companies was a dismal 0.05% reservation for disabled must be extended to the private sector.
- Educational Institutions should frame balanced curriculum and Instructional material to differently abled students which can meet the need of all different kind of disabled students. All the disabled may not require same kind of teaching so separate classes should be organised

according to the need of the disabled.

- To enrol good number of students in Higher Educational Institutions, Open Universities should make a provisions for assisting students with respective disabilities like sensory disability, Learning cognitive and Language disabilities, Physical disabilities and Neurological disabilities. Each and every Open University should have provision to admit the particular type of disabled students so that no one can be left without Higher Education.
- Some of the basic needs of the disabled students like presence of ramps at lecture Halls, accessible toilets, wheel chair, Braille signage, wide doors etc., will facilitate to enrol more number of students in Higher Educational Institutions.
- To attract good number of students in Open Learning Universities attractive amount of scholarships should be extended to the disabled to meet out their requirements.
- For educating disabled students Open Universities can mobilize support from other departments such as health, industry, social welfare and voluntary organisations.

Suggested Technologies and Methods for disabled students:

The following are some of the technology oriented methods which can be used to teach differently abled learners at Higher Education level through distance education mode. Special educations teacher can identify the suitable method and implement it in the teaching –learning process.

- **You tube demonstration:** It is a popular demonstration method to present text with video and audio. There are plenty of websites with free you tube demonstrations in many subjects. The special education teacher can identify the suitable demonstration and use it in the teaching learning process.
- **Blog:** A blog or web blog is a form of on line journal, periodically updated and structured chronologically. It can be created according to their need and interest. Blogs related to special education courses can be created and utilized.
- **JAWAS:** Job Access with Speech is software exclusively designed for mobiles and smart phones. It converts the screen texts into a clear voice that enables the blind to operate their phones without difficulty. They can make call, receive calls, read emails; text messages and even access the internet with the help of text to speech technology, by this software thousands of disabled are benefited.
- **Learning Tools:** Now a day's several tools are available in the market that aid learning. These readers are useful for dyslexia where one can listen to audio version of text books while the text will be highlighted in the large LCD

screen.

Victor Reader Machine should be provided to Visually Impaired students for the purpose of easy reading of the normal text and more powerful Braille machine should be provided to the V.I students for taking notes.

- **FM System-Hearing aids:** Electronic hearing aids are used for picking up sound, magnifying its energy and delivering this louder sound to the user's ear and brain. The Frequency Modulated System is a wireless, portable, battery operated device that uses radio transmission to send auditory signals.

CONCLUSION:

Imparting teaching and learning for disabled children through distance mode of learning has numerous advantages such as inclusive education, improving quality of education, enhancing the lifelong learning process, availability of quality information, ability of the web environment to stimulate the interest of the students, the promotion of engagement and communication between students and the tutor, the recognition of value of web-learning and e-learning etc.,

Technology enhanced distance education offers a plethora of opportunities and advantages for those in Special Education-both teachers and learners with increasing effort for bridging the 'digital divide'. It is important that the teachers or learners should be made to adopt technology in the teaching and learning styles to provide pedagogical and educational gains to the learners. Empowering teachers and learners with ICT skills opens up a world of learning unavailable in the past and is crucial to achieving success in today's Global Knowledge economy.

"Technology is a great Social leveller. It puts two unequal human beings or two unequal societies on an equal footing" says Sam Pitroda Chairman, National Innovation Council.

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