

Provision for Students with Disabilities by Higher Education Institutions: Opportunities and Challenges

Kassie Shifere¹, Marew Alemu²,

Abstract

This study was intended to assess the provision for students with disabilities (SWDs) by higher education institutions. A descriptive survey design was used by mixing quantitative and qualitative methods in collecting and analyzing data. Questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions were employed to collect data from different sources. Available sampling was used to determine the target of the study. Hence, 109 SWDs and 42 teachers participated in this study. The findings showed that though teachers claimed they had a strong belief (mean = 4.14) and positive attitudes (mean = 4.09) towards teaching SWDs, they did not effectively demonstrate these in their actual instructional practice. The findings also revealed that, though there seemed to be opportunities for SWDs, these were not found to be enough to address their needs and overcome the various challenges they faced in pursuing their education in higher education institutions. Hence, based on the results, recommendations were made to improve the quality of academic and service provisions for SWDs in higher education institutions.

Keywords: Inclusive setting, attitude, belief, instructional practice, students with disabilities

Introduction

Background of the Study

Disability issues, along with inclusive education nowadays, have become a concern in many countries and attracted the attention of researchers. According to the available studies, there have been contributing factors that have brought the issue of disability to the forefront.

In connection with this, Klaus (1999) mentions the International Year of Disabled Persons as a turning point in Germany, helping to substantially improve the social perceptions and understanding of people with disabilities. Hurst (1999) also states that the anti-discrimination legislation adopted in the UK highlighted the inequalities facing SWDs in higher education. In another case, the adoption of the Americans with

¹ Bahir Dar University, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia; email: kassieshifere@yahoo.com

² Bahir Dar University, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

Disabilities Act in 1990 recognized the rights of the disabled to equal access to all aspects of economic and social life (Galiano, 1999). According to Van Acker (1999b), as cited in OECD (2003), the opening up of higher education to the disabled was linked with demands for flexibility in higher education institutions in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s.

In Ethiopia, disability issues have gained prominence in national policies and legislation. All international agreements, including the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993) and the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994) are integral parts of the law of Ethiopia with regard to the rights of people with disabilities.

The commonly used conceptual frameworks for understanding and responding to disability are the medical and social models of disability (Oliver, 1990). In the medical model, disability is conceptualized as an inability to perform an activity normally. The focus of this concept is on the physical and mental limitations of the person. In this case, disability and impairment are addressed within an individual rather than in society.

Conversely, social models suggest that disability is an unnecessary economic, social, and cultural oppression that occurs in addition to impairment (Union of the Physically Impaired against Segregation and Disability Alliance, 1976; Riddell, William, & Tinklin, 2002; Bolt, 2004). This implies, "If the environment is designed for a full range of human functioning and incorporates appropriate accommodation and support, then people with functional limitations would not be disabled" (Mont, 2000, p. 3).

In conceptualizing medical and social models, the above definitions capture aspects of both the individual factor and the environmental factor, respectively. In this case, The Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008) in the Preamble, Section e, p. 1, shows a paradigm shift in approaches to "recognizing that disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."

There is a great need to understand that a rights-based approach to education requires "an understanding of inclusion as an approach to education for all children that includes: (1) education policies and strategies to promote the right to access education; (2) the right to quality

education; and (3) respect for rights within the learning environment" (UNICEF, 2011, pp. 15–16).

Addressing the needs of students with disabilities (hereafter SWDs) in a higher education institutions is complex and raises many issues with regard to equality of access, understanding of disability, assessment, and identification, and availability of resources and expertise. A study by Tinklin and Hall (1999), cited in Kika Hadjidakou and Dimitra Hartas (2007, p. 7), found that "the quality of provision for SWDs in higher education depends on attitudes, experience, and awareness about disability among staff and students rather than institutional policies alone."

Higher education institutions are also expected to provide institutional resources that could make important contributions to improving the education of SWDs in an inclusive setting. However, since disability issues seem to receive little emphasis and since the provision and utilization of the services of many higher institutions are not accessible to the required level, the educational opportunities for students with disabilities in higher education institutions are still severely limited. Hence, only a small proportion of SWDs can successfully manage a career path to higher education. As commonly observed, Ethiopian higher education institutions also face challenges in providing appropriate instructional support and service delivery to ensure equal opportunity for SWDs.

Hence, the findings and implications of such research relating to disability equality in higher education need to be seen within the context of the following factors: the conceptualization of disability, accommodation of resources and managerial policies, including instructional (academic) and motivational support, and challenges pertaining to responses to the needs of SWDs for higher education.

Statement of the Problem

Ethiopia has made enormous strides in education provision over the last decades. Along with such an increase, there has also been a substantial improvement in the enrollment of SWDs in higher education.

The Higher Education Proclamation (2009, p. 3) decreed by the government dealing with academic guidance and counseling states, "Every institution shall assist students (with disabilities) throughout the education of their courses of study by providing them with specialized academic advice and counseling relating to their studies."

Even though the enactment of various conventions on disability has contributed to the increasing enrollment of SWDs in higher educational institutions, access to higher education needs to go beyond just admitting more SWDs.

Moreover, the concept of the right of SWDs to request accommodation, adaptation, and assistive technology was new to many of them and the higher institutions at large. But currently, in Ethiopia, SWDs have been joining higher education institutions, whose number has increased from time to time since special consideration has been given to entrance requirements.

Although there have been attempts to improve access and opportunities for SWDs when entering higher education, many of them have very a small chance of choosing the field they want to study. Those admitted to higher education must meet specified academic and other standards set by respective departments to join any department they would like to study, but in many cases, many of those who meet the standards may not be admitted depending on their choices.

When SWDs meet all the requirements for admission to higher education, they still face certain barriers within higher education institutions. These barriers within the institutions may include rigid curriculum and examination systems, lack of appropriate teaching methodology, a feeling of inadequacy by teachers, content-based teaching and rote learning (Kochung, 2011). Generally speaking, education for SWDs is more demanding than for students without disabilities, and this makes existing inequalities between the abled and SWDs greater.

As far as the experience of Ethiopian higher institutions in addressing the needs of SWDs is concerned, very little is known about the prevalence of disability among university students and the situation of SWDs and their educational needs in attending higher institutions, as well as the support services provided to them

A study conducted by Yared (2008) entitled "Policy and Provision for Students with Disabilities in Higher Education" revealed that the admission of SWDs to departments was extremely low, and Ethiopian institutions do not have any explicit policy for SWDs. The available provision for SWDs is also negligible.

According to the assessment made by the Department of Special Needs Education at AAU (2014, pp. 5–6), students with disabilities who joined higher institutions "experienced various challenges ranging from academic to social... the absence of assistive technologies and devices,

rigid curricular issues, the absence of diversity management strategies, limitations of services, and unequal opportunities."

A similar case was also reported by Dawit (2014) aimed at exploring the major barriers SWDs faced during their education at AAU, indicating that negative attitudes, a lack of educational materials, physical inaccessibility, financial limitations, an inaccessible library, and inaccessible classroom buildings were the most observed challenges.

Another study was also conducted by Abay and Kidanemariam (2021) entitled "Assessing Opportunities and Challenges Faced by SWDs in Public Universities in Addis Ababa." Their findings mainly revealed that opportunities were scarce, but there were huge challenges dealing with infrastructure, disability affairs, counseling service and so on that needed to be addressed.

Generally, the findings of the local studies imply that higher education institutions are not disability-friendly, and the facilities within the institutions that they are expected to provide are also inaccessible or poorly rendered.

The magnitude of the problem is also increasing from time to time, along with the expansion of higher education institutions and the enrollment rate of SWDs. This demands to widen the scope of the research at regional level instead of restricted to AAU or around Addis Ababa.

The aim of this study was, therefore, to assess the current state of instructional and service provisions, including opportunities and challenges, in four Ethiopian universities (Bahir Dar University, University of Gondar, Woldya University, and Wollo University) in the Amhara National Regional State.

1. What are the views of SWDs about teachers' instructional practice?
2. What are teachers' instructional practices in addressing the needs of SWDs?
3. What are teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards teaching SWDs in an inclusive setting?
4. What opportunities (academic and accommodation) are in place to encourage SWDs to pursue their education?
5. What are the challenges SWDs and teachers face in higher education institutions?

Significance of the Study

The result of this study will have various contributions from various perspectives.

1. The study is intended to reveal the challenges and educational opportunities for students with disabilities in accordance with the policy and strategy of the country.
2. The study may also contribute to researchers, SNE experts, curriculum designers, policymakers, practitioners, educational administrators, and concerned organizations by producing empirical facts about the prevalence of SWDs and the level of accommodations accessible to address their needs.
3. SWDs will also be beneficiaries of the results of this study by creating awareness among the academic and non-academic staff, so they can get all the essential collaboration and support they need in their academic careers.

Scope of the Study

This study involved only four universities in the Amhara National Regional State (ANRS), namely Bahir Dar University, Gondar University, Wollo University, and Woldya University. The targets of the study were also visually, physically, and hearing-impaired students. The involvement of SWDs in the research was also limited to 109 from a total of 361 SWDs currently enrolled in the four universities due to the inability of the researchers to include all while collecting data.

Research Methodology

Design of the Study

The design of the study was a mixed-methods research, which includes both quantitative and qualitative approaches, with the assumption that a combination of these two methods provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007).

Research Sites and Participants of the Study

Conducting research concerned with SWDs is a difficult task. In the first place, there is little well-organized current data about the situation of SWDs in an educational setting at all levels across the country. To overcome this problem, a preliminary survey was conducted to get the

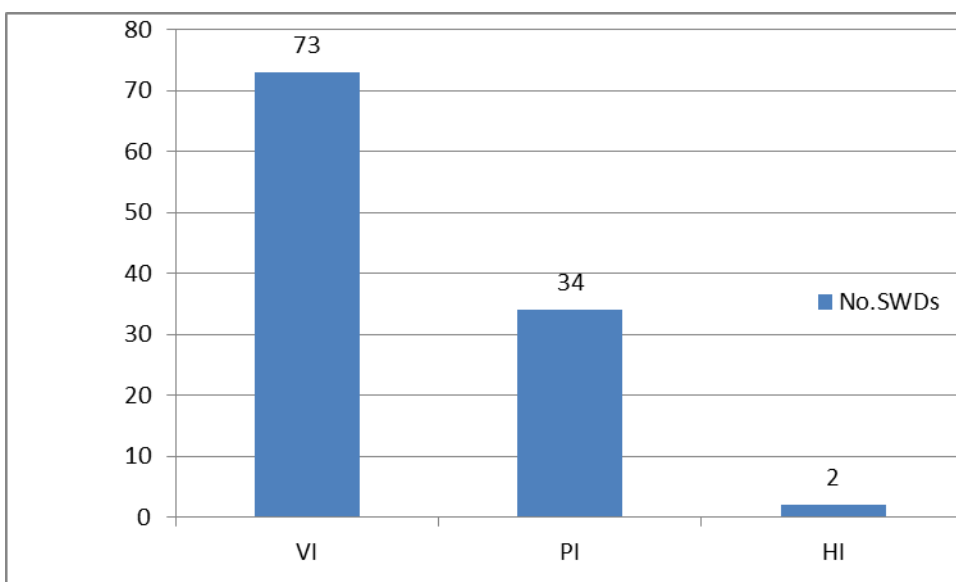
actual figures of SWDs in the universities currently operating in the Amhara National Regional State.

Based on these preliminary survey results, four universities (Bahir Dar University, the University of Gondar, Woldya University, and Wollo University) were selected as research sites considering the number of SWDs available.

The participants of this study were 109 SWDs who were currently pursuing their education at four universities and 42 teachers who were engaged in teaching SWDs in an inclusive setting during the 2017 academic year. Other concerned and volunteered individuals (2 librarians and 2 officers of the Gender Office) who were facilitating SWDs' cases were also participants in the study.

Sampling Technique

A comprehensive sampling technique was intended to be used in the research since the number of SWDs was limited, but researchers were obliged to use available sampling techniques, taking only 109 out of 361 SWDs involving visually impaired students, physically impaired students, and hearing impaired students, as presented below in the bar graph.



Population Characteristics of SWDs

As the bar graph above depicts, the prevalence of disability in the target institutions shows that visually impaired students (67%) were the highest in number, followed by physically impaired students (31%). Hearing-impaired students (2%) were the least in number, and this fact implies that the chance of joining higher education institutions for hearing-impaired people is problematic as compared to others with disabilities.

These respondents were also taken from ten departments (Amharic 21.1%, Civics 20.2%, and Sociology 11% from the top) and students from the four target institutions (BDU = 147, UoG = 121, Woldya U = 47, and Wollo U = 46 totaling 361).

Forty-three teachers who were engaged in teaching SWDs, including concerned individuals like two faculty and school deans, two librarians, and two officers of the Gender Office (who facilitated SWDs' cases), were also participants in the study.

Instruments

Questionnaire, interview and focus group discussion were employed to collect data from different sources pertinent to the aims of the study.

Questionnaire

Two types of questionnaires based on the related literature and practical issues were used to collect data from SWDs and teachers. A students' questionnaire was prepared involving demographic information and their views (12 items) concerning the actual teachers' instructional practice. These items were rated using an always-never continuum with a five-point rating scale. Other items dealing with resources and service provisions given by their respective institutions were also included in the questionnaire in the form of a checklist using available and not available options.

Items included in the teachers' questionnaire mainly focused on teachers' beliefs (10 items), attitudes (9 items), and practice (22 items). The items related to beliefs and attitudes were rated using a five-point Likert scale, i.e. the strongly disagree-strongly agree continuum, whereas items measuring teachers' practice were rated using the same scale with the always-never continuum.

The internal consistency of the items of the teachers' questionnaire was tested by conducting a pilot study at Debre Markos University. Based on the assessment made, particularly on the teachers' questionnaire dealing with the three variables – beliefs, attitudes, and practice – items were found to be reliable with Cronbach's alpha of .818, .846, .846, and .927,

respectively. SWDs' questionnaire items related to their views towards teachers' instructional practice were also found to be .616. In order to check the validity and appropriateness of instruments, comments were collected from two instructors at Bahir Dar University who had the required expertise, and based on their comments, modifications were made.

Interview

Interview questions were set for SWDs, teachers, and other respondents mentioned above to triangulate the data obtained using questionnaires and assess the overall academic process and service provisions like accommodation, counseling service, teaching modification, etc., including the challenges SWDs faced in the target institutions in the region. An interview guide was also prepared to have a coherent and systematic way of eliciting information.

Focus Group Discussion

A focus group discussion with SWDs was conducted as appropriate to the existing situation. Issues regarding the current state of provisions like concessions for exams and assignments, infrastructure, teaching modification, counseling services, financial support, ICT support, and issues of social inclusion, equality of opportunity, and entitlement to education were areas that this study tried to explore to meet its objectives.

Procedures for Data Collection

Before preparing the proposal, a preliminary study was conducted to identify and decide the site of the study and collect data based on the number of SWDs enrolled in each university. Prior to the implementation of the research project, a cooperation letter was distributed to each selected university to get permission for data collection. The sample students, academics, and administrative personnel were also informed of the purpose of the study and were made to give information using the instruments developed in line with the research questions.

Data Analysis

After the data were collected from the sample participants, questionnaire items were coded, tabulated, and computed using SPSS 16, and statistical percentages, mean scores, standard deviation, t-test, and one-way ANOVA were employed as appropriate to the research questions. Qualitative analysis, such as narrative descriptions, was also made for data generated through interviews and FGDs.

Results and Discussions

Results

In order to give a comprehensive analysis of the research, questions were posed, and different data collection instruments were employed depending on their relevance and appropriateness to the research outputs. On the basis of these, the following results could be presented under each research question.

Table 1: *Teachers' practice in addressing the needs of SWDs*

University	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
BDU	16	3.5028	.64035	.16009
UOG	16	3.6392	.71495	.17874
Wollo	3	2.9394	.78379	.45252
Woldya	7	2.7922	.66590	.25169
Total	42	3.3961	.73275	.11307

Table 1 discloses that there is variation in teachers' instructional practices in addressing the needs of SWDs. This was particularly seen at the two universities, namely Wollo University and Woldya University. This is also indicated to be true that there is a statistically significant difference, as the one-way ANOVA, $F(3, 38) = 3.081$; $P = .039$, shows that this difference was observed because of the two universities.

According to the interviews conducted with teachers concerning their experience of teaching and addressing the needs of SWDs in inclusive settings, teachers reflected contrasting views. On the one hand, some teachers appreciated the efforts made by SWDs in their respective classes. Just to quote, one of the interviewees said the following: "I have come across a female blind student who frequently consulted me, sharing her problem, considering me as a member of her family. She also had strong self-confidence and did her best, and finally, she became successful."

Contrary to this, some teachers reflected that they had come across SWDs who abused their impairments and expected unfair support from teachers. Because of this, they never did activities or assignments at all or on time. They also showed dependency. Their dependency is highly

observed during exams, as reflected by teachers with regard to visually impaired students. When they took mid-term and final exams for English common courses, visually impaired students commonly brought those students who had a better command of the language. This was taken as their great concern during the interviews. Based on this complaint, the researchers came to realize how SWDs took exams at BDU. Out of 36 SWDs who were taking the Basic English Writing course midterm exam, 21 (58.3%) of them were visually impaired students and these were supported by medicine students. This situation may create an unfair assessment if SWDs continue to do exams using students who read the questions of the exams for them. This implies that there must be a clear guideline on how to administer exams involving SWDs in general and VISs in particular.

Irrespective of this, other teachers were of the opinion that SWDs, who had genuine reasons, especially those whose results were lower, should get teachers' support in and out of class. On the basis of this, they suggested that teachers allow students to sit in front and facilitate the way they get support from peers in class; read while they are writing on the board; give extra time depending on the nature of the test or assignment though this was not commonly practiced;

borrow their own materials; and report the case of SWDs when they are assigned to classrooms on the first floor or above and request university administrators to change the classroom to ground floor.

Irrespective of these, according to the responses gained from teachers using the questionnaire, teachers admitted that they had less practice in considering the needs of SWDs when they prepared a lesson (mean = 2.64), allotting time to support SWDs (mean = 2.64), adapting teaching materials to accommodate SWDs' needs (mean = 2.55), and making assistive technologies accessible to SWDs (mean = 2.64).

Students' responses in the interview and FGDs also depicted that teachers' instructional practice in addressing the needs of SWDs was not proven to be true. In connection with this, many instances were cited by SWDs.

The findings from SWDs' questionnaire showed that they never got extra time during exams (mean=2.77). In connection with this, one of the respondents in the interview made the following complaint: "I remember a teacher who refused to take my assignment, saying that I didn't submit it on time." He also mentioned, "Since the teacher allotted a similar time

without considering my visual impairment, I was forced to submit my exam paper without answering three questions."

In another case, the results also showed that they never got any explanation from teachers when they were writing on the board (mean = 2.85). They were not also encouraged by their teachers to participate in the lesson (mean = 2.62), though teachers claimed that they encouraged SWDs in their classes (3.82).

On the other hand, it was found that SWDs had their own limitations since they never asked their classmates for help in and out of class (mean = 1.92). This may be a serious problem for them that needs to be improved. In this case, it would be possible to say that teachers' instructional practice was not up to the level of addressing the needs of SWDs.

Teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward teaching SWDs in an inclusive setting

The question of teachers' beliefs and attitudes does have its own impact on teachers' practice. With regard to this, Table 2 depicts the following:

Table 2: Teachers' beliefs about teaching SWDs in an inclusive setting

University	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
BDU	16	4.1312	.67104	.16776
UOG	16	4.2938	.38724	.09681
Wollo	3	3.7000	.51962	.30000
Woldya	7	3.9714	.57941	.21900
Total	42	4.1357	.55692	.08593

As indicated above, all respondents from the four universities had strong beliefs about the issue of disability and inclusive education. This implies that there was no significant difference in their beliefs, as the statistical evidence shows using one-way ANOVA, i.e., $F(3, 38) = 1.270$; $P = .299$.

Irrespective of this, the data from the questionnaire particularly showed that teachers did not strongly believe in the importance of SWDs to other students in a higher educational setting (2.8).

Teachers' attitudes towards teaching SWDs were also another concern in this study. In this case, Table 3 summarizes the results with regard to teachers' attitudes towards teaching SWDs in an inclusive setting.

Table 3: Teachers' attitudes towards teaching SWDs in an inclusive setting

University	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
BDU	16	4.0278	.70682	.17670
UOG	16	4.3264	.49768	.12442
Wollo	3	3.7778	.44444	.25660
Woldya	7	3.8730	.67412	.25479
Total	42	4.0979	.62286	.09611

The above table shows that teachers had positive attitudes towards teaching SWDs, and there is no statistically significant difference among them, as illustrated by a one-way ANOVA of $F(3, 38) = 1.392$. $P = .260$.

As illustrated above, since teachers had strong beliefs and positive attitudes, this may be a good opportunity for SWDs to get appropriate instructional support from teachers, which could facilitate their learning in an inclusive setting. However, students' responses in the interviews, questionnaire, and focus group discussion, as mentioned above, could not match most teachers' claims.

Opportunities (accommodations) Available to Help SWDS Pursue Their Education

To answer this question, a questionnaire in the form of a checklist that focused on facilities, material adaptation (modification), training services, and assistive devices, was prepared, and an interview was conducted with SWDs and responsible bodies to assess the prevailing situations.

The overall results indicated that there was a difference in the actual delivery of services, supports, and accommodations given by the four

universities to SWDs. This implies that though SWDs had a great demand to have access to various assistive technologies and friendly environmental conditions to pursue their education, all target universities were not in a similar position to satisfy these demands. But there seems to be an attempt to work on certain provisions, like giving counseling services in the cases of UOG (56%) and BDU (12.9%) and access to an interpreter. There was also relatively good practice of assigning exam readers at BDU (51.6%) as compared to other universities.

Giving training to SWDs was also another concern, though this was not done uniformly. In such practice, UOG (56%, 64%) relatively performed better in giving training in study skills and disability rights and advocacy, respectively, whereas BDU's focus was on giving computer training (32.3%).

In the case of providing assistive technologies, in many cases, there were no opportunities at the universities to provide SWDs with the required technology except at BDU, which had relatively better access to computers (40.3%). According to the data obtained, particularly visually impaired students had better opportunities to use the computer room and an audio-visual center was arranged for them, though these rooms were not large enough to accommodate all. Speech synthesizers (16%), recording devices (62.9%), printers (12.9%), Dictaphones (29%), and white canes (51.6%) were also provided to SWDs depending on their disability type in BDU, whereas UOG provided wheelchairs (40%), Braille printers (24%), large print materials, and white canes (32%). In this respect, Wollo University and Woldya University seem to lag behind except in trying to provide Dictaphones (36.4% and 45.5%, respectively). Generally, BDU and UOG had better practices in facilitating, supporting, and providing assistive equipment than Woldya University and Wollo University.

According to the interviews or focus group discussions, there is no uniformity in getting financial assistance. There is a variation from university to university. Respondents in the interviews commonly reflected that 200 birr was given to students who were physically incapable of washing their clothes. In BDU, there was better access to getting funds (2400 Birr per year) to buy different materials they needed, but this was not released timely, as the students disclosed. There was also another practice that helped especially visually impaired students prepare Braille notes (convert materials) for freshman students and get 700 birr on a part-time basis.

Challenges SWDs face pursuing higher education

Although there have been some moves towards improving conditions for SWDS attending higher education, according to the responses gained from student respondents through interview/focus group discussions, the following points were commonly reflected as challenges that directly or indirectly inhibited the overall academic performance and living conditions of SWDs.

1. Lack of resources, such as lack of technology and assistive devices, reading rooms and facilities (modified printed materials, Braille texts), and enough financial support;
2. Lack of awareness and attitudinal problems such as lack of awareness of disability issues, wrong judgment and lack of concern, rigid mode of course delivery and assessment, inaccessible physical setting like classroom environments, offices, service places, dormitories, exam rooms; and
3. Lack of an established system or policy that protects the rights of SWDs by keeping the minimum standard of accommodations to pursue their education in higher education institutions.

Discussion

As stated in the introduction, addressing the needs of SWDs in an educational setting is a complex process that requires not only a legal framework and national policies but also a well-established system designed to implement these in higher education institutions. In this case, an attempt was made to assess the provision for SWDs by higher education institutions, with a special focus on instructional practices and the provision of accommodations.

In order to assess teachers' instructional practices in inclusive settings, special attention was given to two factors, such as teachers' beliefs and attitudes, which undoubtedly influence the implementation of inclusion, particularly the way teachers behave and address the needs of learners from various perspectives while delivering a course.

In this regard, the result of the study revealed that teachers have strong beliefs in having a clear insight into the rights of SWDs to be involved in HE and that their needs should be addressed in the teaching and learning process by using inclusive pedagogies or different methods of teaching. This was statistically justified with a mean score of 4.1357, as indicated in Table 2.

Teachers' attitudes also play a pivotal role in predicting the success of inclusive practice. In this case, the data indicated that teachers in the target institutions were willing to teach and support SWDs, and this was supported by the quantitative data (4.0979) (see Table 3). Having this positive attitude could be taken as a favorable environment for creating better opportunities for the participation of SWDs.

Concerning teachers' actual instructional practice, a significant difference was observed as far as the domain of inclusive teaching in addressing the needs of SWDs is concerned. Though teachers in the four universities showed strong beliefs and positive attitudes, their instructional practice showed a significant difference, especially between teachers of Bahir Dar University and the University of Gondar, and teachers of Woldya and Wollo universities. This implies that the former had better practices as compared to the latter ones.

This was also true of the reflections of SWDs in the interviews and FGDs conducted, as reflected in the qualitative data analyses. On the basis of these, both teachers and SWDs had their own concerns, like access to learning materials, mode of delivery and assessment.

Concerning the views of SWDs, they have ascertained the confidence they have and rely on themselves to pursue higher education, even though they face a lot of constraints. Accordingly, they were of the opinion that disability couldn't be a factor that limits their fate; it could be managed if supportive environments are created. This was highly emphasized in the interviews and FGDs conducted.

From the overall data obtained from respondents concerning the opportunities available and the challenges SWDs faced, it was found that the target universities were not in a similar position in creating opportunities with regard to academic and social aspects. In this case, Bahir Dar University and Gondar University have shown relatively better concern for providing certain facilities like assistive technologies, computers, audiovisual centers, and counseling services. Concerning financial support, the target institutions commonly provide 200 birr to students who are physically incapable of washing their clothes.

Though SWDs have had such opportunities to a lesser extent, it was found from the overall study that they have faced enormous challenges that have direct and indirect implications for their education. These challenges mainly involve lack of resources, rigid curricular and instructional practices, lack of awareness and attitudinal problems, inaccessible physical settings, and lack of an established system in the institutions. Though these challenges were previously reported by different researchers (Dawit, 2014; Department of SNE, 2014), there seems to be no difference in improving the quality of instructional practice and service provision in accordance with the increased rate of enrollment of students.

Generally, it could be possible to realize that the provision of higher education to SWDs depends not only on the presence of a legal framework and policies but also on their implementation by higher education institutions. In this case, instructional practices along with teachers' beliefs and attitudes were assessed, involving students' views with some positive and negative reflections. Hence, these results could provide insight into creating a framework for addressing specific issues that affect the inclusion of SWDs in higher education institutions. The results also indicated the opportunities and challenges that positively and negatively affect the overall practice of educating SWDs in the target higher education institutions.

The provision of higher education in an inclusive setting involving SWDs makes demands on the institutions to discharge their duties and responsibilities. Realizing this, an attempt was made to assess whether the target universities in the ANRS are in a position to meet the demands of SWDs by raising pertinent questions. Based on the responses gained, the following conclusions could be drawn:

- Though the target universities have put in place a range of facilities and accommodations, these couldn't be at the level that learners with disabilities demand. Because of this, it is high time to work aggressively on this provision, like institutional policy, resource centers, and financial support, with the substantial increase in enrolment of SWDs from time to time.
- Relatively, there seems to be a concern from teachers about having positive beliefs and attitudes towards the involvement of students with disabilities, but their instructional practices, like mode of delivery and assessment, in addressing the needs of SWDs do not conform as they used to. This could have adverse

effects on SWDs' overall academic performance and livelihood in the future.

- There are no specific mandates in universities regarding the kinds of accommodations they should provide or the minimum standards of support provision.

Recommendations

In order to promote the teaching and learning process in higher education institutions by addressing the needs of SWDs, the following are recommended:

- Though SWDs have enormous needs in order to pursue their education in higher institutions of learning, there must be at least a minimum standard that institutions should fulfill when admitting students. Hence, universities should make preparations before they admit SWDs.
- Institutions should prepare reference materials depending on the types of disabilities and the field of study and make these accessible in the library. Assign classrooms found on the ground floor for SWDs to facilitate their own reading and studying.
- Institutions should give due attention to setting a policy and clear guidelines, to the extent that situations and resources permit, to create better opportunities for the involvement of SWDs in higher education.
- Give special orientation to SWDs when they join the institution.
- Give special training to teachers who are involved in teaching SWDs in an inclusive setting and orientation on SNE and related pedagogical issues to increase their efficiency in teaching.
- Provide an institutional resource that could assist in improving the education of SWDs, depending on the type of disability.
- Building designs, campus physical settings, and other infrastructure should be convenient for SWDs.

- Establish partnerships across and between service providers, NGOs, and administrative staff to facilitate the provision of higher education involving SWDs.

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