

Institutional Support and Accessibility of Higher Education Institutions towards Women with Disabilities – A Study

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Abstract

This research paper studied on institutional support accessibility of women with disabilities at Higher Education. Thus the main objective of this paper is to examine the accessibility of women with disabilities in various aspects during their study in higher education institutions. Since, there is a need for every instructor and educational institution to ensure the all students' academic needs are met appropriately. The research identifies three primary areas of accessibility challenges i.e. institutional support with reference to academic communication, infrastructure facilities, barrier free environment, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, and administrative support. Hence, the study observed pose of challenges experienced by women with disabilities in mobility and engagement in the academic community. Digital accessibility problems stem from inadequate web-based learning interface design and absence of equally effective educational media in the form of text, which limits students' interaction with curricular content. Students with disability also suffer from social and emotional problems that include stigma, discrimination, and inadequate mental support and health care. The research discussed the institutional responses to these challenges based on disability service and accommodation. It covers the kind of facilities provided and assesses the present service delivery system. Also, it provides information regarding the matters related to the access such as training programs for campus access audits. It is hereby important to note that the study reviews case studies of higher education institutions which are keen on promoting access for students with disabilities and demonstrates good practices as well as provides recommendations for other institutions. Though progress has been made, studies still lack focus that arises when disability intersects with other forms of diversity and the need for the study is still inadequately addressed. This paper ends by retracing the key lessons for policy and practice while calling on institutions not to overlook the importance of accessibility as a core responsibility. When higher education institutions encourage a culture of diversity and equality the opportunities available within college can improve learning outcomes and remove barriers to success for the students.

Keywords: Institutional support, accessibility, higher education, women with disabilities.

Introduction

In India, 2.68 billion people, or 2.21% of the 121 billion people, are classified as "disabled" according to the 2011 Census. 22% of disabled people in the 20-39 age range have a movement disability, and 18% have a hearing impairment. 15% are blind, 8% have speech impairments, and 6% have several impairments. According to Census 2011, over 55% (1.46 Cr.) of all disabled people are literate. Only 13% of the impaired population has matriculated or completed secondary school, and 5% have a degree or higher. Of all disabled people, 45% are illiterate (PIB, 2016). It is clear that such a large population cannot even be used after looking at the percentage of illiterates. It's a significant loss of human capital and a major cause for worry. Here, the question of why such a large percentage of people even chose not to attend the educational institution arises despite Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Right to Education. The number of students with disabilities enrolled in higher education, in particular, is quite low (Manasi Bera, 2023). The AISHE report estimates that 38.5 million people would be enrolled in higher education nationwide in 2020, up from 85,877 in 2019, when 92,831 students with disabilities were (AISHE, 2019-20). Hence, the number of women students with disabilities enrolled in and completed higher education, in particular, is alarming and highly shocking (Ratan Sarkar, 2023).

The higher education is imperative for job creation, political empowerment, and nationwide growth (Jameel, 2011). It produces talented manpower for national development. Moreover, it provides

marginalized communities with opportunities by equipping them with access to quality education (Azad, 2008). The policies at the higher education level must aim to focus on protecting the rights of persons with disabilities (Hardman & Dawson, 2008), with a special attention woman with disabilities. Higher education is essential for women with disabilities. Higher education equips women with disabilities with knowledge, skills, and qualifications enable them to become independent and self-reliant. It provides with the tools necessary to pursue their goals, make informed decisions, and actively participate in society (Mudzingwa, 2017).

Higher education opens up a wide range of career opportunities for women with disabilities. It enhances their employability and increases their chances of securing well-paying jobs. Higher education equips them with the necessary skills and knowledge to contribute to the workforce and achieve financial independence. It fosters personal growth and development. It helps women with disabilities build confidence, critical thinking abilities, and problem-solving skills (Komabu-Pomeyie, 2019). It provides them with opportunities for self-expression, creativity, and personal exploration. It empowers women with disabilities to become advocates and leaders in their communities (Taddei, 2019). It equips them with the knowledge and skills to challenge stereotypes, advocate for rights, and promote inclusivity and accessibility (Al-Zboon & Smadi, 2015). Higher education can provide them with a platform to raise awareness about disability issues and effect positive change (Mudzingwa, 2017).

Literature Review

According to Rohi, Jan (2025) the women with disabilities are the most disenfranchised and marginalized groups in the society and education sector. Maurya (2024) observed that women with disabilities in higher education face significant "double discrimination" from combined gender and impairment stigma, often leading to lower enrollment, higher dropout rates, and isolation. They encounter major barriers including inaccessible infrastructure, negative societal attitudes, and inadequate institutional support.

Despite these challenges, higher education is critical for their empowerment, self-reliance, and social inclusion. Sneha Sharma and Rishika Gupta (2025) studied on sustainable development goals and education of individuals with disabilities with special focus on women with disabilities has grown to be a serious concern in academic circles across the World. Similar to this, the Incheon Declaration said that education goals should not be met until and until they are met by everyone. As a result, it is pledged that the marginalized, particularly those with disabilities including WwDs, must be the focus of all education policy (UNESCO, World Education Forum, 2015).

Rohi Jan, et al. (2024) noted in their study for treating students with disabilities equally in terms of facilities and opportunities, research studies have emphasized the necessity for inclusive education rather than differentiated education at all levels. Ratan Sarkar (2023) notice that people with impairments, specially the women with disabilities are recognized to be deserving of particular learning support both theoretically and practically. Anne and Jennae (2017) state in their study that to treat students with disabilities equally in terms of facilities and opportunities, research studies have emphasized the necessity for inclusive education rather than differentiated education.

Statement of the problem

Disabled women in higher education face significant intersectional barriers, combining gender inequality with disability-related stigma, leading to lower academic completion rates, higher dropout risks, and underrepresentation. They experience physical, attitudinal, and social barriers including inaccessible infrastructure, inadequate support services, and social isolation, which resulting in lower respect rates than non-disabled peers. Though the concept of accessibility and is gaining salience in higher education, it is both prospective as well as challenging for people with disabilities. Therefore, this paper aims to study the perceptions of women with disabilities on institutional support and accessibility in higher education with the following objectives.

Objectives

- To study the institutional support and accessibility of women with disabilities in promoting higher education.
- To distinguish the difference in institutional support and accessibility towards various demographic group women with disabilities.

Methodology

This study is descriptive in nature and adopted mixed method of approach in data collection and analysis. Since, the research design is blueprint of the research process, this implies the structure and strategy of

the research work. Therefore, this research paper employed independent variables (age, nature of impairment, type of aid, appliances, place of stay, distance travel, mode of transport, family income, major of study) and dependent variable Institutional support and accessibility are considered. In this purpose the researcher selected 4 districts across the state i.e. Visakhapatnam, Guntur, Chittoor and Tirupati, and the samples were consisted 400 women with disability within the age-group of 18 to 40 years from special hostels, colleges, Universities and homes.

After data was collected with the help of standardized questionnaires it was processed through SPSS software and analysed by frequency and percentages, and distinguished the differences in perceptual scores between and within the groups of various demographics ANOVA (f-test).

Data analysis

The demographic details of the respondents typically include age, nature of impairment, Type of Aids/ Appliance using, faculty of study, course of study, place of staying, distance between study institute and place of living, mode of transport, residential background, and family monthly income.

They can also encompass details like problems and prospects of women with disabilities during their study at higher education. Hence, the demographic profile of the sample was cross-tabulated by their study districts and presented in the following tables and analysed.

Table-1: Age-Group wise distribution of respondents by their Locality

Demographics	Age-Group (in years)	Locality				Total
		VSKP	Guntur	Tirupati	Chittoor	
Age-group (in years)	18-20	17(17.0)	30(30.0)	51(51.0)	17(17.0)	115(28.8)
	21-25	44(44.0)	48(48.0)	45(45.0)	45(45.0)	182(45.5)
	26-30	12(12.0)	19(19.0)	2(2.0)	30(30.0)	63(15.7)
	Above 30	27(27.0)	3(3.0)	2(2.0)	8(8.0)	40(10.0)
Impairment	Visual Impaired	39(39.0)	32(32.0)	35(35.0)	22(22.0)	128(32.0)
	Hearing Impaired	20(20.0)	40(40.0)	41(41.0)	55(55.0)	156(39.0)
	Orthopedic Handicapped	41(41.0)	28(28.0)	24(24.0)	23(23.0)	116(29.0)
Institute	Degree College	59(59.0)	51(51.0)	36(36.0)	37(37.0)	183(45.8)
	PG College	3(3.0)	9(9.0)	37(37.0)	20(20.0)	69(17.2)
	College of Education	6(6.0)	8(8.0)	10(10.0)	17(17.0)	41(10.2)
	College of Law	1(1.0)	1(1.0)	12(12.0)	2(2.0)	16(4.0)

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	University	31(31.0)	31(31.0)	5(5.0)	24(24.0)	91(22.8)
Couse studying	Degree	80(80.0)	72(72.0)	75(75.0)	77(77.0)	304(76.0)
	PG	10(10.0)	15(15.0)	11(11.0)	11(11.0)	47(11.8)
	B.Ed./M.Ed.	4(4.0)	5(5.0)	5(5.0)	4(4.0)	18(4.5)
	Law	2(2.0)	3(3.0)	2(2.0)	1(1.0)	8(2.0)
	Technical	4(4.0)	5(5.0)	7(7.0)	7(7.0)	23(5.7)
Family income levels (in rupees)	Below 10,000	35(35.0)	30(30.0)	24(24.0)	29(29.0)	118(29.5)
	10,000 - 20,000	24(24.0)	20(20.0)	25(25.0)	38(38.0)	107(26.7)
	20,000 - 30,000	1(1.0)	5(5.0)	8(8.0)	2(2.0)	16(4.0)
	30,000 - 50,000	9(9.0)	11(11.0)	11(11.0)	10(10.0)	41(10.3)
	Above 50,000	31(31.0)	34(34.0)	32(32.0)	21(21.0)	118(29.5)
	Total	100(100.0)	100(100.0)	100(100.0)	100(100.0)	400(100.0)

Source: Survey data; Figures in the brackets () are percentages to their column totals

Table-1 shows Age-Group vs Locality wise distribution analysis of sample respondents. This table shows the age-wise distribution of students with disabilities across four localities. Across all regions, the 21–25 age group forms the largest proportion (46.5%), indicating that most students with disabilities pursue higher education during early adulthood. Tirupati stands out with a very high proportion of students aged 18–20 years (51%), suggesting earlier entry into higher education.

Participation drops sharply after 30 years in all localities, especially in Guntur where no respondents are above 30. This indicates limited opportunities or motivation for continuing education at later ages.

Regarding nature of impairment and locality wise distribution analysis revealed that hearing impairment is the most prevalent overall (39%), particularly in Chittoor (55%). Visual impairment is more prominent in VSKP and Tirupati, while orthopedic impairment is relatively evenly distributed.

This variation indicates that institutions must adopt multi-disability inclusive infrastructure.

The distribution of sample disabled respondents by type of institute they are studying in various localities shows degree colleges are the primary institutions of higher education in all the selected 4 localities, which are dominating in Visakhapatnam district (59.0%) followed by Guntur (51.0%).

Universities are more common in VSKP and Guntur (31.0% each), while PG colleges dominate in Tirupati (37.0%), reflecting regional academic specialization.

About Course of Study wise distribution of disabled respondents infers that most of the respondents are enrolled in degree courses (76%) among which Visakhapatnam is dominating with 80.0 percent followed by Chittoor (77.0%), Tirupati (75.0%) and Guntur (72.0%).

Technical courses show slightly higher participation in Tirupati and Chittoor than Guntur and Visakhapatnam, indicating gradual diversification.

The family income and locality wise distribution of disabled students observed that most respondents belong to lower-income families, where more than half of the disabled students belong to the parents whose income is less than 20 thousand rupees per month.

Moreover, above 30.0% of the disabled students from Visakhapatnam, Guntur and Tirupati are from above 50 thousand rupees monthly income groups. This indicates underscoring dependency of disabled students on financial aid and scholarships.

Institutional Support and Accessibility

This domain examines students' satisfaction with institutional support systems, infrastructure, services, and awareness related to disability inclusion.

Here the respondents are requested to indicate their level of agreement with the statements related to institutional support and accessibility of disabled women students by selecting one option from the three-point rate scaling.

Hence, the following Table-2 represents the perceptions of disabled women students about Institutional Support and Accessibility they observed in their respective colleges / institutions.

Regarding Satisfaction with academic accommodations of the respondents a majority of respondents (68%) expressed neutrality, while only 5.8% agreed that they were satisfied with the accommodations provided.

A significant 27.3% disagreed, indicating dissatisfaction. This indicates that the overwhelming neutrality suggests that accommodations may exist but are insufficient, inconsistently implemented, or not tailored to individual needs.

The low agreement level points to a serious gap between policy and practice.

Table-2: Perceptions of disabled women students about Institutional Support and Accessibility they observed in their respective colleges

S.No	Statement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Total
1	I am satisfied with the accommodations provided for my disability in the academic environment.	23 (5.8)	268 (68.0)	109 (27.3)	400 (100.0)
2	I am satisfied with the infrastructural facilities at my institution.	120 (30.0)	193 (48.3)	87 (21.8)	400 (100.0)
3	I am satisfied with the availability of a barrier-free environment in the institution.	127 (31.8)	176 (44.0)	97 (24.3)	400 (100.0)
4	I am satisfied with the assistive technology devices provided by the college.	142 (35.5)	172 (43.0)	86 (21.5)	400 (100.0)
5	I am satisfied with the curricular activities offered by the institution.	177 (44.3)	139 (34.7)	84 (21.0)	400 (100.0)
6	I have adequate access to extracurricular activities meant for students with disabilities	165 (41.3)	94 (23.5)	141 (35.3)	400 (100.0)
7	I am satisfied with the mental health services available at my institution.	185 (46.3)	163 (40.8)	52 (13.0)	400 (100.0)

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8	I am satisfied with the administrative support I receive from the institution.	174 (43.5)	127 (31.8)	99 (24.8)	400 (100.0)
9	I am satisfied with the mentorship services available to students.	150 (37.5)	151 (37.8)	88 (24.8)	400 (100.0)
10	I am satisfied with the training and awareness programmes on disability-related issues.	87 (21.8)	153 (38.2)	160 (40.0)	400 (100.0)

Source: Survey data

The satisfaction levels of respondents with infrastructural facilities in their respective colleges shows that nearly half of the respondents (48.3%) remained neutral, while 30% agreed and 21.8% disagreed. Regarding availability of a barrier-free environment in the colleges only 31.8% agreed, whereas 44% were neutral and 24.3% disagreed. With reference to assistive technology devices it is found that about 35.5% of the disabled women students agreed, while 43% were neutral and 21.5% disagreed. The satisfaction levels of disabled women students with curricular activities in their respective colleges observed that a comparatively higher 44.3% agreed, though 34.7% were neutral and 21% disagreed. Regarding access of the respondents to extracurricular activities the data revealed that only 41.3% agreed, while a substantial 35.3% disagreed. With reference to mental health services a strong 46.3% of the disabled women students agreed and only 13% disagreed. Whereas, the administrative support of the colleges towards disabled women students shows while 43.5% agreed and nearly 25% disagreed, mentorship services at colleges observed 37.5% agreement and 37.8% neutrality are almost equal. Hence, the perceptions of the disabled women students regarding training and awareness programs in higher education institutions indicate that a concerning 40% respondents disagreed, while only 21.8% agreed.

Table-3: Difference among various demographic-group disabled women students in institutional support and accessibility in higher education

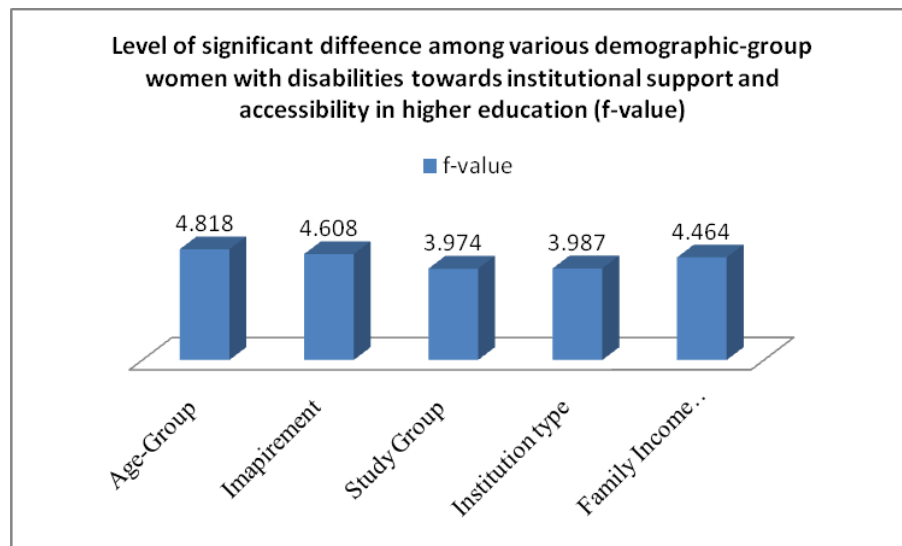
Sl. No.	Demographics	Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	f-value	p-value
1	Age-group	18-20	115	24.26	4.313	.402	4.818	0.003**
		21-25	182	23.23	4.351	.319		
		26-30	63	23.67	3.663	.462		
		Above 30	40	25.94	3.430	.572		
2	Impairment	Visual Impaired	128	23.63	4.363	.386	4.608	0.004*
		Hearing Impaired	156	23.29	3.660	.293		
		Orthopedically Impaired	116	24.81	4.627	.430		
3	Study Group	Degree	304	23.68	4.209	.241	3.974	0.004**
		PG	47	25.57	4.447	.649		
		B.Ed. / M.Ed.	18	21.44	4.148	.978		
		Law	8	22.88	2.997	1.060		
		Technical	23	24.65	3.084	.643		
4	Institution type	Degree College	183	24.51	4.177	.302	3.987	0.003**
		PG College	69	22.67	4.361	.525		
		College of Education	10	22.24	4.338	.755		
		College of Law	16	24.63	3.096	.774		
		University	91	23.76	4.064	.426		

5	Family income levels	Below 10,000	118	23.86	4.271	.393	4.464	0.002**
		10,000 - 20,000	107	23.40	4.150	.401		
		20,000 - 30,000	16	26.75	3.022	.756		
		30,000 - 50,000	41	25.49	3.828	.598		
		Above 50,000	118	23.25	4.263	.392		

** Significant @ 1% level; * Significant @ 5% level

The difference among various demographic-group women with disabilities towards institutional support and accessibility of facilities in the higher education institution, this Table-3 compares using One-way ANOVA (f-tests) across accessibility dimension of institutional support towards women with disabilities in promotion of higher education. In the institutional support towards different age-group disabled women students it is found significant differences were observed ($p < 0.01$), where the students of above 30 years reported the highest institutional support towards women with disabilities. This may be because of possibly due to maturity, awareness, or assertiveness in seeking accommodations. As it is found in the institutional support towards various disability types of women students indicate significant differences ($p < 0.05$) infers orthopedically impaired students receive better institutional support than visually impaired and hearing impaired women students.

Regarding institutional support towards women disabled students it is found highly significant ($p < 0.01$) among respondents of various institutions, where disabled students of Degree colleges and Law colleges scored higher than other institutions. This indicates that stronger support mechanisms found in the Degree and Law colleges than PG colleges, education colleges and universities. Whereas, with reference to institutional support and accessibility among women disabled students there is a significant difference found ($F = 4.464$, $p = 0.002$) between and with the groups, where students from the Rs.20,000–Rs.30,000 income group reported the highest accessibility (Mean = 26.75). This suggests that moderate-income groups may be optimally positioned to utilize institutional support systems, balancing economic stability with eligibility for institutional aid.



Hence, the overall interpretative summary of ANOVA analysis across the data clearly demonstrate that institutional type, living status, distance from campus, and income level significantly influence specific dimensions of accessibility among disabled women students. Among these, living status and institutional infrastructure emerge as the strongest determinants, while source of travel has minimal impact. Thus these findings underscore the need for holistic, multi-dimensional accessibility policies that address not only academic accommodations but also residential, infrastructural, and socio-economic factors in higher education. Therefore, the overall conclusion of the study clearly demonstrates that institutional, demographic, economic, and living-related variables significantly influence accessibility experiences of disabled women students. However, teaching–learning accessibility remains relatively consistent,

indicating progress toward inclusive pedagogy, while infrastructure and institutional support require targeted policy intervention.

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Conclusion

This research paper studied on accessibility of women with disabilities at Higher Education. Thus the main objective of this paper is to assess the access of women with disabilities in various aspects during their study in higher education institutions. Since, there is a need for every instructor and educational institution to ensure the all students' academic needs are met appropriately. The research identifies three primary areas of accessibility challenges i.e. institutional support, teaching, learning, evaluation, social opportunity, participation in activities of co-curricular and extra-curricular and peer-interaction. Hence, the study observed pose of challenges experienced by women with disabilities in mobility and engagement in the academic community. Digital accessibility problems stem from inadequate web-based learning interface design and absence of equally effective educational media in the form of text, which limits students' interaction with curricular content. Students with disability also suffer from social and emotional problems that include stigma, discrimination, and inadequate mental support and health care. The research discussed the institutional responses to these challenges based on disability service and accommodation. It covers the kind of facilities provided and assesses the present service delivery system. Also, it provides information regarding the matters related to the access such as training programs for campus access audits. It is hereby important to note that the study reviews case studies of higher education institutions which are keen on promoting access for students with disabilities and demonstrates good practices as well as provides recommendations for other institutions. Though progress has been made, studies still lack focus that arises when disability intersects with other forms of diversity and the need for the study is still inadequately addressed. This paper ends by retracing the key lessons for policy and practice while calling on institutions not to overlook the importance of accessibility as a core responsibility. When higher education institutions encourage a culture of diversity and equality the the opportunities available within college can improve learning outcomes and remove barriers to success for the students.

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