Chapter VII
Coping Strategies used by SWDs in managing their Higher Educational Experiences

In the preceding section, the researcher has given a description of barriers encountered by students with disabilities and support services available to them in their universities. An attempt has been made here to present some aspects of their academic life. Achieving success in higher education institutions for these students, not only require an ability to manage academic challenges but also challenges, faced due to their impairments. To manage the academic and social demands of higher education at the university level, students need to understand their disabilities, develop effective coping strategies to manage their condition, accept their strengths and limitations, have awareness about policies and support available, and have access to, and seek, support services, when needed on and off campus. The researcher found different strategies used by students with disabilities for balancing the demands of higher education and their impairments.

7.1. Understanding Disability from Students Perspectives

Disability is a broad term that is not consistently defined. The usage of the term varies according to societal norms, medical entities, and governmental agencies that address disability issues (Turner, 2001). There is very limited research on how students with disabilities understand the term disability and how it is actually constructed by them. In this study, one of the research questions was to explore how the term ‘disability’ is constructed by students with disabilities in higher education at the university level. Table 7.1 provides a brief description of the students understanding the term disability in their own perspective.
Table: 7.1 Understanding about Disability from Students’ Perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understanding Disability</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disability as a physical phenomenon</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is an impairment but not a disabling condition</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent of disability depends on the availability of support</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not responded</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above data indicates that all respondents had their own individual preferences about how they perceived their disability. While 72 per cent of the respondents were able to answer the question, a little more than a quarter (28 per cent) were unable to define the term disability in their own words. Based on their reporting, three broad categories emerged—disability as a physical phenomenon (45 per cent); it is an impairment, but not disability (15 per cent); and extent of disability depended on the availability of support services (12 per cent).

(a) Disability as a physical phenomenon

Forty five per cent of the respondents conceptualised the term disability as a physical phenomenon. They perceived disability as predominantly physical, long term, and something which affects all areas of life including education, social life and economic and living conditions. The responses of the respondents reflect the view of medical model of disability which is constructed to mean a biological limitation or deficiency. The following quotes represent how this group of the respondents perceived the term disability based on their impairments which has had been affecting their social and educational experiences and also day to day activities:

“I am a totally blind person. I cannot see anything, I cannot read by myself. I always need my friends’ help or some assistive devices for my academic activities. I could not do
all the activities which are considered as normal due to my visual impairment making me depend on others.”

“Both my legs were affected by polio during childhood. I am not able to go for lunch daily just because I have to come back again to classes. My hostel is very far away from the department. It is very risky for me to go or come without any assistance like transport facility or equipment.”

“I am a partially blind person. I can see most of the things as friends or normal people do. Since my disability is partial, it is not seen by others. But when I start reading or do work related to my academic activities, I have to face many problems because of my impairments. I cannot read a book unless I keep it very close to my eyes or the text should be with big characters.”

“I face so many problems such as spending time scanning, editing or asking friends for material and also recording material. All these problems are just because of my disability. Otherwise, I would have enjoyed my studies along with other extracurricular activities such as sports, and cultural programmes.”

“Due to my disability (orthopedically impaired student), I am not able to enjoy my social life. I miss many opportunities such as for example, I cannot go outside with my friends. I cannot even play cricket with them because I am a person with disability.”

(b) It is an impairment but not a disabling condition

Fifteen per cent of the respondents did not like to use the term disability. They stated “we are not disabled”. They believed that they are not less than anyone and can do as others are doing. These participants perceived the term disability from their own perspective.

“I have only mobility problem due to my impairments which is not a disability. If you think it is disability, at one or the other stage of human life, everyone will face disability.”

“I do not feel anything about my impairment. Moreover, I can do most of things my friends can do.”

“People used to call us disabled. However, I do not like it because I am not disabled I am a person with visual impairment.”
“Disability means he/she cannot do things or is incapable of doing things, which are considered as normal activities. However, I can do most of my things myself without depending on others except seeing things due to my visual impairment. Therefore, I am a person with visual impairment but I am not a disabled person”.

These statements show that, members of this group have a lot of confidence in themselves which was reflected in their participation in extra cultural activities and social life (see that in the next section). They believed that they were bestowed with multi-tasking skills and it was noticed that they had much control over their problems, which could be the reason for their logical thinking process. It shows that overall these group members had positive attitudes and understanding about the term disability and impairment.

(c) Extent of disability depends on the availability of support services

Twelve per cent of the respondents did not consider that disability critically dominated their overall identity. They perceived that everyone is a disabled person with range of variations in their abilities to perform normal functions. Furthermore, these respondents have began to understand that the term disability is not defined by solely personal and physical attributes, and that it was a complex construct including a person’s, physical environment and attitudes. Some of the respondents looked at disability in terms of psychological stress because they are different from their peer group. They don’t fit into educational institutions without physical, technical support services and thus these are perceived as problems imposed by existing practices.

These responses reflects the view of social model which forces one to turn one’s attention away from defining who is or is not disabled in identifying and addressing the barriers which in a given society restricts disabled people’s participation in ‘normal’ life (Turner, 2001). Similarly, some of them described that their extent of disability depended on the availability of support services and role played by the university, which affect their day-to-day educational experiences. The following quotes describe what this group said:
“My visual impairment is making me lag behind my friends in case of my studies or from the academic point of view. I am trying my level best to compete with them. But it is very hard to compete with them without sight. My severity of disability depends on role of the university management in providing support services and adjustments as per my needs which would enable me to access all educational facilities, thus helping me to do well.”

“Even though I don’t really see myself as a person with disability, people surrounding me see me as disabled. So I have to accept it. But I prefer they should not see me as disabled.”

“I have a mobility problem, which does not give any major problems to me. So I prefer to be without a label if I can.”

As seen from the Table, twenty eight percent of the respondents did not the answer the question. These respondents simply declined to answer the question and stated that disability means disability only. These students stated that they didn’t have any kind of problems because of their impairments. Some of them also stated that they never see themselves as persons with disability or impairment. Interestingly, majority of these respondents who did not define that term disability were having problem with slight mobility and partial eye sight.

In summary, the effect of understanding and labeling as a disabled person is likely to be responsible for altering their world, the way others perceive them to be, as well as how they perceive themselves. Overall, the understanding of the term disability varied among the students. For some participants, disability was based on their impairment which affects their social and educational experiences. For some respondents, the severity of disability depends on the support they receive from the university management. On the other hand, some of the respondents in this study did not like to be carrying the tags or labels or being considered as disabled. Therefore, we can conclude that the quotes in the first two themes reflect the perspective of a medical model which focused on individual perceived impairments, referring to functional norms of behaviours and performance (Turner 2001). In contrast, narratives in the third section reflect the social model, which
focuses on identifying and addressing the barriers which, in a given society, restrict disabled people’s participation in ‘normal’ life.

7.2. Motivation to Pursue Higher Education

Students were asked questions regarding their motivation and interest to pursue higher education at the university level despite being students with disabilities and their previous diverse educational experiences. The researcher found that out of the many reasons reported by the respondents, there were significant commonalities that emerged. Many of the students in the current study had aspirations to build an independent life, by getting a proper job. Many students pursued higher education because they either saw it as an economic necessity to have better living conditions or a place to prove their self-worth. From the data gathered here, present employability conditions influenced their decision to go in for higher education. The following quotes illustrate the reasons for pursuing higher education at university level:

“*I just wanted to have a better quality of life, but for that I need to have a good degree which would give me good job.***

“*If I do not have good qualifications it will not be possible to get anywhere in the present knowledge society.***

“*I want to become independent. I do not want to depend on others people’s sympathy for my survival. I want to take care of my parents and fulfill their dreams.***

“*I decided to get a doctorate when I passed tenth standard with good results. I am interested in not only making a difference in this world, but also wanting to make this world a better place.***

Some of the respondents stated that they did not want to go for work in clerical, or other fourth grade jobs. A few of them had already experienced bad working environment after completion of their degrees and realised that higher education would increases their chances for better employment opportunities and good working conditions. As the
following quotes illustrate, there were factors which influence students for pursuing higher education at the university level:

“My sister was keen that I pursue further my studies. My family generally has been very supportive, especially my sister – as a practical help. I would not have cleared my NET exam without her help. She helps me a lot in my studies.”

“My brother’s friend (person with visual impairment), has cleared IAS exams by overcoming all kinds of obstacles in his life. He inspired and gave me confidence that I can handle any problem in my life.”

“I want to become a good scientist.”

“I want to become a civil servant. I want to work for the society.”

“I want to start Human Resource consultancy. I want to show employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.”

The researcher also found, unsurprisingly, that some reasons reported by respondents were apparently disability related. Their entry into higher education was influenced by their parents. A few of them stated:

“Being a person with visual impairment, it was very difficult to get university degree. I am here just because my parents, sisters pressurised me to go for higher education.”

“My parents wanted me to get some university degree. I am attending the classes just for the sake of the parents; really I don’t have any interest in my studies”.

In summary, it is clear that all the respondents were influenced by some factors to pursue higher education. The researcher found that there were many reasons why respondents saw it as an economic necessity to have better living conditions, whereas some of them saw it as a place to prove their self-worth. They were influenced by their family members, friends or teachers. For some respondents, general support, encouragement and practical assistance, role models were most significant to go in for further studies. For some respondents, they indicated that attending higher education was something they always wanted to do to become independent.
7.3. Choice of University or Higher Education Institution

From the above text it was understood that the decision for entering into higher education at the university level was a relatively easy one for the respondents of the study. However, the decision regarding which university they should select seemed a little complicated for some respondents of the study due to several reasons. From the data gathered, the researcher has listed reasons for choosing the particular university for their studies. The reasons expressed by the respondents of the study have been arranged from top priority to least priority. These are:

1) Reputation of the university academically (64 per cent),
2) Proximity of university where they lives or nearby home/village/city (13 per cent),
3) Friends’ circle/advice/support (9 per cent),
4) Availability of support services for visually challenged students (6 per cent),
5) Availability of particular course and placements (5 per cent),
6) As per parents suggestions (3 per cent),

The above list clearly shows that majority of the respondents of the study reported that they had chosen based on reputation of their university academically. Overall, it is clear that, only six per cent respondents of the study have chosen the Central University based on support services available for students with disabilities. This is mainly due to the fact that majority of them were not aware that they were entitled to get additional support provided by the university management under the provisions of University Grants Commission schemes in higher education institutions.

7.4. Choice of the Course

Ninety four per cent of the respondents reported that they had chosen the course as per their wish, in consultation with their contemporaries, and were also influenced by factors such as friends’ preferences and love of the subject. Only six per cent of the students
could not choose the course in which they were originally interested after schooling/degree due to several reasons. Some of them stated that their visual impairment had affected their decision to go for courses other than Social Science and Humanities. Some of them discontinued their course and had wasted one year because they were unable to continue in their chosen course successfully. It was also observed that a few of them changed their course of study and had to shift from one course to another due to their impairment. The following quotes are representative of a few of the respondents’ views:

“I had plans in my childhood to go for higher education and do medicine; I did science subjects with that view I even qualified for an entrance test but during the interview, the panel suggested me to go for subject other than medicine. This is only because of my orthopedic impairment. With that discouragement, I changed my subject to economics.”

“Mass communication is something which has always fascinated me. So, I joined it. But within two months, I discontinued the course due to many practical problems because of my visual impairment. I couldn’t do any media production work at all. So finally I discounted the course and now I have chosen English as my subject, which is also interesting to me. Presently I am doing well along with my friends without having any major problems with the help of assistive technology.”

“I was originally interested in science subjects, but everyone suggested to me and I too felt that I could not do this subject just because of my nerves problem and physical impairment (Wheelchair user).”

“Due to my visual impairment, I changed my subject too. I was interested in Social Science courses such as Political Science, Sociology, and Economics. But I applied for Masters in Telugu Department because I am good at Telugu language; the more important thing is I do not need to spend much time for this subject. It’s an easy subject for me because this subject is all about stories, novels and grammar. So without facing much problem, I can study this subject.”
In summary, respondents in this study made decisions regarding their course based on their interest. Some of the students had difficulty sticking with a course and switched course before coming here due to their impairments. Therefore, it can be concluded that selection of major in their further studies was influenced in some way by the individuals’ impairment.

7.5. Social Life in Higher Education

Social life depends on the relations students with disabilities have among themselves within and outside the education institutions, including those with the family, peers without disabilities, teachers and staff. As Tinto (1975) stated, a web of interactions between the student and campus environment facilitates developmental changes that imply either successful or unsuccessful integration, adaptation or adjustment to the social and academic aspects of college life. These students also must actively tend to their own wellness by maintaining a good social life and relationships with friends and professionals, social support of family and peer group. In this section, the researcher attempted to understand the factors that contributed to a positive and negative social experience for these students in higher education. Keeping in mind the variety of social contexts, they were asked them about their (a) friendships and relationships with their peer group, (b) Social support of family (c) Participation of Students with Disabilities in Extra-curricular/Social activities. The respondents believed that these three factors influenced their social relationships and helped in their becoming socially integrated in higher education.

(a) Friendships and Relationships with their Peer Group

A person’s life revolves around his/her network of social relationships which provide the person opportunities to develop valued social roles as friends and companions (Frith and Rapley, 1990). Yet, the overriding concerns of services for people with disabilities - access, autonomy and the development of independence. Disability organisations and other activists have been concerned with the rights of persons with disabilities than with
friendships and relationships. As literature shows, active participation in community and functional support has become the intentions of contemporary services for people with disabilities (Bradley & Knoll, 1991, & Racino et al, 1993). This indicates a shift from the rehabilitation and independent model where the person is conceptualized as a patient, a consumer or a service user, to the support and empowerment model where the social roles of the person as a community member, a neighbour, a student and a friend are emphasised. Support is not an end in itself; it is a process to enable persons with disabilities to be included and to actively participate in their community life (O’Brien, 1993). In this study, the researcher made efforts in understanding social relations and friendships of students with disabilities which create interdependence among communities and mutual support for them.

For making new friends and developing new relations, students require the ability to share in a deeper level with others and should have a good intimacy with each other. In this study, respondents were able to make new friends. Sixty four per cent of them reported that they are able to make new friends and have become very close. They believed that their friends could provide good strength whenever they would need any kind of support. In contrast, 36 per cent of them find making and developing friendships as challenging, depending on the nature of their personality and disability. Social life and friendships for these students could be potentially very different from students without disabilities. As many of them were sensitive about others findings out about their disability and ridiculing them, sometimes these students were introvert and had difficulty making and maintaining friendships and other social relations. They expressed wide range of reasons affecting and making their new friendships and social life.

“I have good number of friends not only in my class as well as in hostel, but also on the entire campus. Especially, my roommates and friends are very understanding and supportive.”

“I am used to go outside with my friends. They do not treat me as different from others. The fact is that I will not give them a chance to think that I am a person with a disability.
We are used to go for shopping, cinemas and having dinner outside all together while returning.”

“Here, I am able to make new friends who are very cooperative. Today I am able to study well just because of their cooperation and help. During exam times, they read for me.”

“Deepika is my best and close friend. We are friends from childhood. Wherever we would be going out, we go together. Even though I have only a few friends, at no time do I feel lonely since I have my friend with me.”

“I enjoyed most of my social life and spent time only with my friends. They are very supportive and cooperative.”

The results reveal that the respondents shared many of the same concerns and priorities as the college students without disabilities. A study by Cosden and McNamara (1997) also indicates that students with disabilities do not have problems with their social skills or in their relationships. It is possible that students with disabilities who have stronger social relationships are more successful in education and are more likely to attend college. However, it is also possible that these results are associated with the students’ opportunities to develop social supports through campus programmes. Further, in the current study, it was apparent from the students’ comments that many friendships were based on mutuality and reciprocity. Respondents had the capacity to develop friendships where there are mutual exchanges concerning understanding their needs, emotional support and practical assistance.

Despite the positive aspects of making friendships and relationships, thirty six per cent of the students found developing and maintaining friendships to be more challenging. Some of them did not feel comfortable while interacting with new people. They had more difficulty making friends while also dealing with manifestations of their disability and tended to be more isolated. Some students with visual impairments lacked time to spend with friends or to make new relationships. Because just focusing on the academic activities at the university was somewhat overwhelming. They had little time to be participants in student organisations, cultural activities, socialise in the student groups
or attend several events at the university. They felt that they failed to get the overall university educational experience. Further, they believed that they need to put in more hard work to get good academic qualifications for good employment opportunities and also desire to be independent in their studies. The following statement is significant:

“Due to my visual impairment, I have to scan all material I get from my friends, teachers. If I want to be independent in my studies, I have to spend much time for scanning and editing the text. As a result, I have to lose most of the time. I am not able to spend time with my friends because I am not able to do things as they can do in case of studies. So I don’t spend time with friends. In simple words, I can say that I don’t have time to spend with my friends.”

Some of them are unable to maintain their friendship and are not happy with their social life due to their impairments. It was also found that attitudes of these students, as well as that of their peer group, also affect their social relations and friendships. They believed that after knowing their condition and impairment, their friends will not encourage these students to go with them outside. They also underlined the importance of accessibility and creating a friendly environment within the campus which could improve their social life much better. The students noted:

“I did not find any problem with making new friends, but I could not enjoy my friendship or social life with them. The best example is I got invitation a couple of times from my friends for going out or spending time in shopping complexes’ or canteens within the campus during the evenings. But my impairment doesn’t permit me to go and spend time with them. It is uncomfortable for me to go for shopping to purchase my basic requirements because I cannot access all places with my tricycle that time I have to go inside without any support on mud road or floor.”

“Most of the time, my friends avoid taking with them within the campus as well as outside campus due to my impairment because it takes so much time to walk and go with them. What I understood is that some of friends do not like to attend classes or going out with me.”
“I do not want to go out with my friends. Sometimes I go out with them if I feel they are aware of my problem and understand my condition. Only then I would like to go. I wouldn’t like to give any chance to my friends to think that they are getting late just because of me.”

For some of the students staying out side campus is a barrier for them to interact more with their friends. It was found that out of a hundred students, only thirteen (4 from Central, 9 from State University (a)) were day scholars. They noted:

“Every day as I go to the university I feel happy with the friends. Since I cannot stay with them, it makes it more difficult for me to attend social events or cultural programmes within the university.”

"Even though I have got hostel facility in my university, I cannot stay there. I have to live at home due to my disability (both hands lost at birth). Since I stay at home, I can’t always get back to my campus except for classes. I miss my friends as I am not able to spend considerable time with them. Even if I come to the campus for attending classes, I have to go my home by evening”.

It can be concluded from the narratives that majority of students were desirous to make new friends and maintain their relations and try to integrate socially in higher education institutions. However, it appears that some hindering factors, including their physical impairments, negative attitudes and lack of access and proper support for these students, create problems that are more significant and which affect their social experiences at higher education level.

(b) Social Support
The word social support has been defined by many theorists in different contexts in various ways. A definition given by Cobb (1976) consists of three components of social support: feeling valued or esteemed, feeling loved and belonging to a social network. In general, social support is one that is received from family, friends, and significant others in the individual’s life, in order to deal with the effects of a stressful event. Support can
be of three types: sharing the emotional burden by listening and accepting; actively participating in solving the problems and contributing additional resources (Ayalon, 1993).

In this study, respondents underlined the importance of support received from family members, friends, and the ones whom they were close to, could be seen as instrumental in helping the individual deal with the issues including both personal and education matters. Majority of them shared their experiences about how their parents helped and contributed to their success before and after coming to higher education. The respondents believed that they received unconditional support from their family members. For some of them, their parents expressed the importance of education and its success in their life. They always got encouragement, guidelines on how to succeed in education and other related aspects. Some of them also stated that when they failed to attain their targets, the family was there to help them move forward. The following narratives represent this group of respondents.

Kavitha stated that although she had multiple sources of support, her parents were an important source of support to her in daily life. “They have arranged a motor vehicle for me. Now I can go to class and come back to the hostel.” Jagan also had support from his father. He stated, “My dad really helped me in each and every step of my academic career. He always supports my studies and gives me good guidance. Moreover, I got full freedom to choose my career of interest. He was like a friend and mentor.” Deepthi had support from her parents in multiple ways. They admitted her in a six months computer course in Bengaluru. In addition, they also arranged a computer system with speech software’s and scanner. Raghu noted “My parents always gave me moral support and encouragement. They always stand by me and push me to reach my targets.” Shalini stated “I never thought I am a person with mobility impaired because my parents never allow me to think I cannot do anything. They always say that you can do whatever you dream of. They always say I should be independent and be of help to the other people in society.”
Similarly, the respondents also stressed the importance of support from peer group in their education. Support from classmates/roommates/other peers has been a form of encouragement to pursue higher education, physical assistance with carrying books, pushing wheelchair/tri-cycle, reading and recording material at the time of exams and getting books from the library. For example, Deepika stated that whenever she is with her friends, all her problems will get solved. She doesn’t think about the problems. They solve her problems and divert her from them. Rani, on the other hand, stated that her roommate is very helpful. She stated that when she approaches her for recording her material, she responds very positively. Similarly, Prathap indicated, “My friends always help me in pushing the wheelchair while coming and going from classroom to rest-rooms and vice-versa.” Santhi also stated that her friends are very helpful. Whenever she requires material for scanning, she approaches her friends for help for getting material. Whenever their friends find material from either the library or their own classmates they will collect and give it to her.

From the above narratives, it can be concluded that students received various types of support which includes: guidance, emotional support, encouragement, arranging support services, assistance with problem solving, financial and transportation assistance. It was also noticed that majority of female respondents of the study consciously sought support from either parents or friends. But most of the boys reported that they tried to solve the issues on their own and only if they failed, did they reach out to friends. These findings concurred with those of Ketoki (2010), which show that gender difference does not reflect adjustment or coping, just that males and females deals with issues in varied ways. Further, it is also obvious that those who received more social support from their parents and peer group were those with severe disabilities including persons with total visual impairment and wheel chair users or mobility impaired students. Thus, it can be interpreted that the importance of family and friends’ social support in their lives is held very high and helped them to continue their studies successfully. In fact, research has revealed findings that indicated the much needed significant supportive adult or
emotionally supportive parents act as buffers to vulnerable individuals (Rak and Peterson, 1996).

(c) Participation of Students with Disabilities in Extra-curricular activities

Extra-curricular activities are pursued by students that fall outside the dominion of the normal university curriculum. Extra-curricular activities, which include students’ cultural programmes, sports, student unions, and various clubs, are an important part of the educational experience of many students. A study conducted by Gilman (2001) indicates that students who participated in extra-curricular activities have a more successful development both socially and academically. The important point is that students who actively participate in various extra-curricular activities will have and develop higher social skills, as well as achieve more success in academics, than those not participating in these activities. Similarly, a study conducted by Dyson (2002) indicated that participation of students with disabilities in extra-curricular activities strengthens their integration. These students can acquire the basic skills necessary to participate partially in sports, student unions, and social events and other cultural programmes. These programmes give students with disabilities the opportunity to work with students without disabilities in a positive environment where everyone can actively contribute in one way or the other.

Another important benefit of extra-curricular activities is to provide these students with opportunities to begin to understand the diverse people’s attitudes, skills and talents and how to interact effectively with their peer group while working towards a common goal (Karnes and Bean, 1990). Extra-cultural activities provide an opportunity for the students to come closer to one another in college, irrespective of their social background. The active participation in extra-curricular activities can offer a sense of attachment and can influence identity, self-esteem and a feeling of belonging. Table 7.2 provides a brief description of the participation of students in extra-curricular activities by nature of impairment.
Table 7.2: Participation of Students in Extra-curricular activities by Gender, impairment and Type of the University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Participation of SWDs</th>
<th>Total (100)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes (19)</td>
<td>No (81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19 (29)</td>
<td>47 (71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>34 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of impairment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthopedic impairment</td>
<td>16 (22)</td>
<td>56 (78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual impairment</td>
<td>3 (11)</td>
<td>25 (89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of the university</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CU</td>
<td>11 (23)</td>
<td>37 (77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SU (a)</td>
<td>3 (12)</td>
<td>23 (88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SU (b)</td>
<td>5 (19)</td>
<td>21 (81)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note: The figures in the parenthesis are percentage of students with disabilities)

The above Table shows that 81 of the respondents had not actively participated in extra-curricular/social activities in their universities. This Table also shows that students who participated in extra-curricular activities were only male students. Further, when participation of students was compared with the nature of impairment, it showed that more number of students with orthopedically impairments participated when compared to students with visual impairments. Impairments, physical barriers, lack of social exposure, however, may hinder participation in some kinds of extra-curricular activities. Therefore, it can be concluded that participation in extra-curricular activities is not equally common for students across disability groups. Similarly, it was also found that more number of students with disabilities participated in extra-curricular activities were from Central University and State University (b), compared to State University (a).

Further, the respondents of the study were asked “what kind of extracurricular activities have you been involved in other than academic activities since being enrolled in
higher education? Students with disabilities require more energy to engage in activities outside the classroom. However, the respondents involved in many of the extra cultural activities including involvement in student organizations, activities, cultural events may had a significant influence of their social experience at higher education. They are actively involved in campus student organization and enjoyed their responsibilities. They noted:

“Being a person with disability (both legs affected,) I contested for the chairmanship for my hostel committee and took the responsibility of handling problems encountered by students in the hostel. It included managing the dining hall, electing the mess leader and being accountable to the mess charges and also acting as a mediator between the hostel warden and the students. I enjoyed being the hostel chairman because I got to work with so many people. I also had to make decisions. Especially, on the hostel day, I received many compliments from both the management and the students. That was the happiest moment in my life as to be the chairman of the hostel.”

“My friends tell me that I am a good singer and they make me sing songs during some functions such as my seniors’ farewell and my juniors’ freshers’ party time.”

“We celebrated Louise’s birthday in my campus with the help of University management. I and my colleagues (Students with disabilities) participated in extracurricular activities in that programme.”

“I worked as a member in the student election commission. As a part of student election commission at the campus, I enjoyed and actively participated in the election commission. I took an important role as a member in election commission last year. It was a great experience.”

“I am working as the President of Disability Cell committee on behalf of students with disability for this academic year. As a part of this committee, I actively participated in several meetings with the disability coordinator, and university employees’ (Teaching and non-teaching persons with disabilities) and demanded our basic needs and rights.”

“I had actively participated in extra-curricular activities. I also participated several times in national level chess competitions. Last year, I played and got the fifth position in chess championship.”
A few of the respondents in this study were engaged in one or more extra-curricular activities. Several students joined as members of the committee so that they could be more involved with campus life and have opportunities that were more social. There were a majority of students with disabilities who did not participate in extra-curricular activities, but expressed an interest in participating in activities in the future. Further, it was also found that only 19 students who participated in extra-curricular activities were male students with disabilities. Many students expressed a concern about not being able to participate in extra-curricular activities. Overall, it is clear that those who participated were happy with their social life and the social experiences of learning in their universities helped them to make a good number of friends and actively participate in social and academic activities.

Similarly, a study conducted by Marsh and Kleitman (2002) revealed those students those who participated in extra-curricular activities were able to build and strengthen academic achievement. They also suggested that these activities should be well directed towards their development and should involve some physical and mental ability which is essential in their achievements. In this study, students’ narratives showed that some of them were actively involved in social activities with support from friends. It was observed that due to the severity of their impairments, specially students with visual impairments, cannot enjoy social life with their friends, and it was also found that they didn’t have much time to enjoy social activities due to their impairments since they need to spend extra time for studies, if they wanted to be independent or to achieve their goal in academics.

7.6. Self – Advocacy

Students with disabilities face various barriers in pursuing higher education. Research studies suggest that one of the fundamental factors to success is the ability to self-advocate (Lock and Layton, 2001; Lukose, 2000). The term ‘self-advocacy’ is defined in many ways, and institutions and researchers may disagree on the skills that should be
included in self-advocacy programmes. A study conducted by Brinckerhoff (1994) suggests that the main components of self-advocacy are students knowing what she/he wants and to what she/he is legally entitled, and the ability of students with special needs to effectively achieve their goals. Self-advocacy skills needed include: communication skills, self-determination, and independent decision-making. Brinckerhoff (1994) describes the most important aspects of self-advocacy training, which include how to negotiate and disclose their special needs to teachers, helping them to understand their disability and rights under current legal acts, and how to select and use these appropriately. Effective self-advocacy requires that students understand their rights and responsibilities as students with disabilities in higher education institutions. In other words, they must assume responsibility for their educational experiences and for their impairments, learn about any available support services discussing their needs and issues with concerned people including university authorities, teachers and non-teaching staff.

In this section, the researcher attempts to understand how far self-advocacy has contributed to a positive or negative social experience for students with disabilities within higher education institutions.

(a) Students’ Awareness about Disability Acts

Table 7.3 depicts the students’ awareness about ability acts by type of the university.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of the University</th>
<th>Central govt schemes and scholarships</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Disability Rights</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Existence of Disability Cell/Unit</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Disability Coordinator at university</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes (57)</td>
<td>No (43)</td>
<td>No idea</td>
<td>Yes (73)</td>
<td>No (27)</td>
<td>No idea</td>
<td>Yes (31)</td>
<td>No (42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central University</td>
<td>24 (50)</td>
<td>24 (50)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>48 (100)</td>
<td>36 (75)</td>
<td>12 (25)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>48 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State University (a)</td>
<td>14 (54)</td>
<td>12 (46)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>26 (100)</td>
<td>17 (65)</td>
<td>9 (35)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>26 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State University (b)</td>
<td>19 (73)</td>
<td>7 (27)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>26 (100)</td>
<td>20 (77)</td>
<td>6 (33)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>26 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note: The figures in the parenthesis are percentages)
Table 7.4: Students awareness by Nature of Impairment and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Central govt schemes</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Disability Rights</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Disability Cell/Unit</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Coordinator</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No idea</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No idea</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impairment</td>
<td>O I</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>(58)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>V I</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>(54)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>(56)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>(58)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note: The figures in the parenthesis are percentages)
It is clear from Table 7.3 that students had more awareness about the Central and State government policies, and disabilities rights, as compared with existent disability cell/unit and disability coordinator at all the three universities. Thus, it can also be concluded from these findings that Central University students had significantly more awareness about the disability rights, existence of disability cell and coordinator than those in both the state universities. As we discussed in the introduction of chapter four, both Central and State University (a) had a disability cell and a coordinator, whereas in case of State University (b), it had neither a disability cell/unit nor a coordinator. Due to this reason, these students responded that either they didn’t have or no idea about the existence of disability cell/unit, as well as coordinator, in their respective university.

Similarly, it can be seen from Table 7.4, visually impaired students had more awareness than those orthopedically impaired about the disability rights, existence of a disability cell and a coordinator in their universities. This is perhaps due to the fact that the provisions of support services for visually impaired students are more as compared with orthopedically impaired students in higher education institutions as per UGC rules. Thus, they should have an idea about concerned authorities and also have to frequently meet them in order to get support services including reader and scriber allowances, fees refund, arranging scribes and also for other technical assistive devices. Similarly, when we looked at the students awareness by gender, it is also noticed that majority of female students had significantly more awareness about the government schemes and scholarships, existence of disability cell and coordinator in their respective universities, as compared with male students.

(b) Disclosing Disability
A study by Jourard (1971) noted that disclosure is a process where the individual determines the degree of intimacy he wants to achieve with other people. In the current study, disclosure as it means to the researcher, is the communication of information about disability by students with concerned authorities, staff and peer group in their university. The researcher found that disclosing students’ disabilities were a critical issue for respondents in this study. Table 7.5
Table: 7.5 Students disclosing Disability by Gender, Impairment and University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Disclosing Disability</th>
<th>Total (100)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes (%)</td>
<td>No (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>43 (65)</td>
<td>23 (35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21 (62)</td>
<td>13 (38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of impairment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OI</td>
<td>43 (60)</td>
<td>29 (40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>20 (71)</td>
<td>8 (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of the university</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CU</td>
<td>29 (60)</td>
<td>19 (40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SU (a)</td>
<td>15 (58)</td>
<td>11 (42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SU (b)</td>
<td>19 (73)</td>
<td>7 (27)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note: The figures in the parenthesis are percentages)

From Table 7.5, it can be understood that the majority (63) of students disclosed their disability during the admission process, while the rest 37 percent of them did not. Similarly, when the students’ educational aspirations were compared with gender, it is obvious between male and female students indicate no significant differences regarding disclosing their disability during the admission process time.

Similarly, when the students disclosing disability were looked at nature of impairment wise, it was found that 71 per cent of students with visually impairments disclosed their disability, whereas only 60 per cent of orthopaedically impaired students disclosed their disabilities. This data indicates that there more number of students with visual impairments’ disclosed their as compared with orthopedically impaired students. This is perhaps due to the fact that, as mentioned earlier, the problems and requirements of students with visual impairments’ are diverse. For instance at the time of university
entrance exam these students have to inform the higher authorities regarding their scribe arrangement, extra time during and for other support services. In order to complete the admission process these students have to disclose their disability at one or the other time.

Further, when the researcher compared students disclosing their disability type of the university-wise, it was found that more number (73 per cent) of respondents from the State University (b) disclosed their disabilities, followed by 60 per cent and 58 per cent of the respondents from the Central University and the State University (a) respectively. These data shows that more number of students from State University (b) disclosed their disability than those from Central and State University (a). The findings also reveal that, despite the variability in responses given, there was no much significant difference between students disclosing their disability and type of the universities. Further, the researcher identified two major factors which influenced their decision as to whether or not to disclose their disability. It was found that 68 per cent disclosed their disability for getting their rights and support services, while the 32 per cent did not disclose their disability to maintain normalcy and avoid stigma.

i) Getting their own Rights and Support services
A study by Corrigan & Matthews (2003) indicates that disclosure means different things to different people, especially among university students with disabilities, given that there are various costs and benefits associated with disability disclosure. In the current study, it has been observed that 68 per cent of the respondents reported that they disclosed their disability during the admission process in order to utilise support services, including reservations, rights and special provisions which are, provided by the Government of India under Persons with Disability Act 1995, through the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, and University Grants Commission. Disclosing disability helped them to get teaching and learning resources for their studies from teachers and university management. They perceived that they need to get these supports in order to achieve what they want to get. Without these supports, they would have found it difficult to reach their educational goals. The majority of them reported that they had disclosed their
disabilities to get reservations in their respective universities. The following quote depicts their thinking:

“If I want to utilise my three per cent reservations in university admissions, I have to disclose my disability. That is my right.”

“I disclosed my disability in the admission application; that is why now I am exempted from payment of tuition fee.”

“Initially, they provided me a hostel room on the second floor, but when I went and disclosed my disability and submitted a request letter, they allotted me a room on the ground floor.”

“I am a person with visual impairment. I have to depend on one or the other for my studies. Until and unless I disclose my disability, nobody will help me regarding my studies including friends, teachers and other staff members at university.”

“In my opinion, I think that there is nothing wrong in disclosing my disability. If you want to get some support, you should disclose your disability. The best example is that last year, I and my other colleagues in School of Social Sciences met the Dean and submitted a letter to him regarding the number of students with visual impairments in the School of Social Sciences, their needs and requirements, specifically the importance of assistive technology. So as result of disclosing disability now, we got a good learning centre with all kinds of assistive devices. Now, I am totally independent as far as my studies are concerned. So what I mean to say is that disclosing disability is my right to get my basic requirements.”

The positive side of having disclosed their disability was that this facilitated access to support services and reasonable adjustments to enable the students to succeed in their studies in higher education institutions. These findings support those of the study by Braithwaite (1991) in which participants made choices about disclosing their disability in a variety of settings, but the most common setting for disclosure was to get good support, access to various facilities and academic life which could enhance their learning experiences.
ii) Desire to maintain normalcy and avoid stigma

Thirty two percent of the respondents desired to maintain normalcy. Unlike other disabilities, particularly certain physical disabilities such as students with slight mobility impairments, students with partial visual impairment, and their impairments were not obvious to others. Here, the students could make choice about disclosing their disability and maintain some degree of control over its impact. Some of the respondents reported that disclosing their disability may make it seem like that they were soliciting pity or making an excuse for themselves. It also appears from the students’ narratives that they wanted to be treated as normal like any other student. They know that there were many benefits if they disclosed their disability, but they did not feel comfortable to do. That was why they had not disclosed their disability. However, respondents in this study faced some difficult situations about disclosure on a regular basis. Some of the views are as under:

“I didn’t disclose my disability in my application form when applying. I got admission here in open category only. I did not want to use any reservations to gain admission. I have belief in myself and that is why I didn’t disclose my disability.”

“I wouldn’t like to disclose my disability because I will be perceived as doing this to get some leverage.”

“I don’t want to be labeled as a special case. I don’t want to have any special help; I just want to be treated as normal as my friends.”

Some of them reported that they did not disclose their disability; as they were not sure about what other people would think of them and how they will perceive them. However, some of the respondents accepted that people might hold different opinions about information sharing and that these might relate to personal factors or to feelings of stigma.

“I don’t want to disclose my disability to anyone. It is very hard for me to disclose and talk about my disability. If I disclose that, they will see me differently.”
“I don’t feel free to discuss my disability with any of my friends. Actually, my disability is invisible so until and unless I tell them, they will not be able to identify my disability.”

From the above descriptions, it can be concluded that students with disabilities, at selected higher education institutions, minimise or downplay their own disability status which they perceive devalues or stigmatises them. These findings have been supported by the study of Barnard (2010) which indicates that students with disabilities prefer not to disclose their disability status to minimise their disability in order to pass as able-bodied. Similarly, Olney and Brockelman (2003) also indicate that disclosing disability identity is not transient; one is disabled according to his/her situation, not as a constant state of being. Overall, it was clear that the most predominant factor influencing students with disabilities to make decisions whether to disclose their disabilities or not was the concept of rights (utilising, fighting for rights and benefits), followed by the desire to maintain normalcy (Don’t want to be treated as different from others) and stigma (relates to how one perceives oneself in relation to the disability and fear about how others may perceive them). It is also understood that disclosing their disability seems to revolve around their own perceptions, about how others would treat them. It is also obvious that disclosing disability depends on the severity of students’ impairment and their diverse needs.

c) Students Informing Concerned Authority and Teachers

Research studies have found that most of the higher education institutions have formulated disability policies and established disabled support services for students with disabilities. But results of the study shows that still there is a larger gap between policy and practice (Riddell, Tinklin and Wilson, 2005; Howell’s, 2005; Hall’s, 1998; UNSECO, 1999; and Riddell, Tinklin and Wilson, 2005). It also shows that students with disabilities are struggling to receive ad hoc support in higher education institutions. In this context, the researcher was interested to find out whether students with disabilities informed the concerned authorities and the teachers about their needs and problems.
From the collected data, it was understood that respondents were very different in the approaches they take to discussing their needs and requirements with their class teachers and university authorities. Some of them were proactive. They know that they were entitled to get additional support services at their universities because they had received some kind of provision at the school level. Some of them feared that they would be treated differently if they asked for anything or disclosed their disability and needs. Some of them knew they could get support but they wanted to be treated the same as other students in the class. That is why they didn’t choose to disclose and inform their course teachers and concerned authorities about their needs and problems in their universities. Some of them perceived that if they discussed their needs in the class room they may still feel uncomfortable about discussing their needs and problems, especially, if it will affect the whole class. In order to understand the significant differences in informing concerned authorities and course teachers about their problems and needs in their universities; the researcher used cross tabulation based on gender, nature of impairment and type of the university. Table 7.6, depicts the responses of the respondents’ on this issue.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Informing course Authority</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Informing course Teacher</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes (15)</td>
<td>No (85)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
<td>Yes (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of Impairment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthopedic impairments</td>
<td>4 (6)</td>
<td>68 (94)</td>
<td>72 (100)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual impairments</td>
<td>11 (39)</td>
<td>17 (61)</td>
<td>28 (100)</td>
<td>16 (57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9 (14)</td>
<td>57 (86)</td>
<td>66 (100)</td>
<td>10 (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6 (18)</td>
<td>28 (82)</td>
<td>34 (100)</td>
<td>6 (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of the University</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central University</td>
<td>14 (29)</td>
<td>34 (71)</td>
<td>48 (100)</td>
<td>12 (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State University</td>
<td>1 (4)</td>
<td>25 (96)</td>
<td>26 (100)</td>
<td>1 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State University</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>26 (100)</td>
<td>26 (100)</td>
<td>3 (12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note: The figures in the parenthesis are percentages)
It can be seen from Table 7.6, that only 15 per cent of students informed the concerned authority and 16 per cent of them informed their course teacher about their problems and needs in their respective universities. Similarly, when we looked at students informing the concerned authorities by the nature of impairments, it was clear that more number of students with visually impairments informed the concerned authorities compared to orthopedically impaired students. Similarly, it was also found that only students with visual impairments informed the course teacher about their problems and needs at their universities. It can be concluded from the Table that significantly more visually impaired students informed the course teachers regarding their problems and needs in the classroom. This is perhaps due to the fact that needs of students with visual impairments are entirely different than these of orthopedically impaired students. Thus, they required more support services as compared to orthopedically impaired students in higher education institutions. They have unique educational needs. In order to meet their unique needs, these students must have specialised equipment and technology and services, books and materials in Braille to assure equal access to the curriculum and to enable them to participate equally along with their peer groups in higher education. Thus these students have to meet the concerned higher authorities, teachers frequently and discuss their requirements including study material, extra time during exams time, reader and scribe allowances, fees refund, arranging scribes and also for technical assistive devices. Similarly, when students informed the concerned authorities and teachers, it was found that female students were more informed about their needs compared to their male counterparts.

Finally, it is clear from Table 7.6 that Central University students were significantly more in informing the concerned authorities and teachers about their problems and needs than State University students. It also shows that none of the students from State University (b) informed the concerned authority about their needs and problems at their university. The fact is that students from State University (b) neither had a disability cell/unit nor disability coordinator to discuss their issues at their university. Therefore, it can be concluded that students who had a disability cell/unit and a coordinator, have an opportunity to discuss their needs in order to get support services to enable them to pursue their studies successfully. It can also be concluded that more number of students from Central University informed the
concerned authorities and teachers about their special needs and problems. Similarly, it is obvious that students with visual impairments were more in frequent contact with the administrative authorities and teachers to discuss their unique needs and most of them were female students. Similarly, research study conducted by Braithwaite (1991) also points out that students disclosed their disabilities to the teachers in order to receive necessary facilities in the classroom such as getting extra time during examination, teaching aids, and learning resources. But all these factors are based on the assumptions that the disclosure is purely voluntary in nature for them.

Authority Response to Students

Table 7.7 displays the results of authority response to students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Not Positive</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authority Response</td>
<td>2 (13)</td>
<td>5 (33)</td>
<td>8 (54)</td>
<td>15 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers response</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6 (38)</td>
<td>10 (62)</td>
<td>16 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen from Table 7.7 that 54 per cent and 62 per cent of students those who informed concerned authority and teachers respectively received a positive response. It also shows that none of the students received any kind of negative experience from their teachers at all the three universities. This data indicates that these students got a more positive response from the higher authorities as well as teachers whey they disclosed their special needs. These students also perceived that informing their course teacher helped them to improve their teaching and learning experience.

In the following analysis, the respondents has looked at the teaching experiences of students with visual impairments are illustrated with direct narratives from those who participated in the interviews.

Teaching Experiences of Students with Visual Impairments

Respondents were asked to reflect on their teaching experiences. Keeping in mind the variety of teaching contexts, they had been asked about learning in lectures and
support from the teachers. In this study majority of the respondents emphasised that there were no difference in teaching strategies. They followed usual teaching strategies, treated them the same way as the rest of the students and that they had the same demands from them. It also appeared from the students’ comments that they also never expected that their teacher should treat them differently in their class. Interestingly, it was found that 57 per cent of students informed the course teachers about their impairments and also disclosed their requirements such as teaching material, adjustments in exam timing, arranging scribes. But none of them requested their concerned teachers regarding changes in teaching strategies, including asking teacher to read whatever she/he wrote on black board. They also stated that they never had any major problem with class room discussion, attending and participating in classroom seminars and presentations. All the three universities had set up procedures for granting alternative exam arrangements to students who need them. Most of the respondents had no problem in getting appropriate arrangements made for their exams time, and separate rooms for writing exams. Almost all the respondents stated that whenever they approached their teachers regarding arrangement of scribes and allotting extra time during examinations, they received it. Some of them noted:

“I get extra time during the exams time. It depends on the type of exam. If it is an external exam, I get half an hour and for internal exams, I get fifteen minutes extra time.”

“Before the exam day, I go to my teacher and get permission to take the help of a scribe for exams. They are always positive. Once I get it signed from my teacher, I submit that letter in the academic section. Later I get the scribe allowance to pay the person who helps me in writing exams.”

“I got extra time during the exams. It helped me to cover all questions.”

Some of the students expressed their concern about arranging for the scribes and qualification of that scribe. Since everyone is busy with their schedules, these students have problems in getting scribes on time. They had opinioned that each department should take the responsibility to arrange scribe for them during the exams time. Some of them noted that even though their respective departments have been arranging, these students are face problem with the scribes. One student noted:
“Last time my Head of the department asked a non-teaching staff to write the exam for me. At that time, I didn’t have any other option so I agreed and started writing. The scribe who agreed to write exam, had done under graduation fifteen years back. He went on asking me spelling of each and every word and was also slow in writing. As a result, I could not finish my exam even after taking extra time.”

As per UGC rules, university management should arrange for qualified candidates as scribes. Otherwise it would be a problem for both the student as well as the scribes. The researcher also found that students with visual impairments from the Central University were getting extra benefit than those from State universities including scribe, reader and stationery allowance because of more funding facilities as a Central University. In addition, Central University has disability cell/unit and coordinator who were looking after the needs of these students by implementing policies as per UGC guidelines and Persons with Disabilities Act 1995.

Some of the respondents were proactive about negotiating their needs and problems in the class. They were very clear about their needs and have no hesitation in asking for it. They stay back in the class rooms or personally meet the teachers in their cabins, after the lecture in each course and have a word with the teacher. They believed that informing the course teacher about their needs helped them to get some of the material, soft copies and follow their studies better in time as other students in their class. Some of the teachers were also identified as being particularly approachable and helpful to students who had missed some classes or who would like to need special classes to clear doubts. Some of them considered their teachers to be very helpful. They noted:

“Our teachers’ call us to his/her office, suggest the reading material and give whatever material he/she is having with him/her.”
“My teacher tries to give most of the material to all the students.”
“My teacher is very friendly to all of us. If I need to clarify some doubts I go and ask him. He gives the reading list and suggests the source from where I would get the material for the entire syllabus.”
“I informed my entire course teachers and requested them to allow me to use voice recorder in their class. They didn’t object to it.”
Other than getting learning resources, respondents also received support from higher education teachers in their respective universities. This support has been in the form of guidance regarding selecting their optional or major courses, advice regarding specific course material, assistance with problem-solving, guidance regarding deciding which university is best to attend for further studies. In contrast, some of the respondents expressed concerns about lack of learning resource including non-availability of soft copies, lack of technological development in regional languages.

**Conclusion**

The data from this study provided greater understanding of barriers experienced by students with disabilities in the context of higher education. Specifically, the findings provided the support these students received at their respective universities to pursue higher education successfully. A greater understanding has been gained regarding coping strategies adopted by them to manage their higher education experiences. Similarly, those students who informed/or disclosed their disabilities and special needs to their teachers and higher authorities, benefited more by getting their requirements fulfilled such as reservations, rights and special provisions, support services, extra time during exams time, reader and scribe allowances, and also various support services. The important point is that students who actively participated in various extra-curricular activities developed higher social skills as well as achieved more success in academics than those who did not. Their active participation in sports, student unions, social events and other cultural programmes has significant by influenced their social experience in higher education and strengthened their integration. Overall, the respondents in this study faced various problems in pursuit and participation in higher education. However, they received support from various sources such as university, family, friends, teachers and some of them were persistent in their special needs in order to meet actively participate and achieve their goals.