Chapter X
Policy and Support services for Students with Disabilities in Higher Educational Institutions

10.1 Introduction

Internationally, provision for students with disability is gaining some ground. Although it is far from ideal, legislation has been in place for institutions to do whatever is ‘reasonable’ to respond to students’ diverse needs (Shevlin, et al, 2004). Paul (2000) states that students with disabilities face various barriers at higher education environment despite the fact that much progress has been made in terms of enactments of various disability laws, which has contributed to rise in the enrolment of these students in higher education institutions. Surprisingly, there has been little research to examine the nature of these barriers in the Indian context. This study attempts to examine the policies and support services provided by the higher education institutions to students with disabilities in Andhra Pradesh. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1) How far are institutions of higher education aware of the policies and schemes, which were introduced by Government of India and UGC for students with disabilities?
2) What are the provisions and support services provided by the institutions of higher education for supporting students with disabilities?
3) What are the factors which either facilitate or hinder universities from supporting and accommodating students with disabilities?

Selection and Description of Teachers
As mentioned in the Chapter on Methodology, the researcher sent questionnaires to the Registrars and Deans of Students’ Welfare of ten universities, which had been selected on the basis of inclusion and exclusion criterion, with a request that these be filled in by a senior member of management, with assistance from a specialist disability officer, if necessary. But the researcher got response from only two
universities. Therefore, the researcher himself went to the remaining universities and got response from another four universities (total six (2+4)).

Analysis of University Survey Findings
The analysis of survey with university administrators is presented on the basis of the differences and common traits among the respondents’ viewpoints towards provision of support services students with disabilities in their respective universities. This section is divided into two subsections. The first sub-section presents the profile of each university, its awareness about polices for students with disabilities in higher education institutions, and the level of implementation of reservations and provision of support services to these students. Subsection two analyses the factors which either facilitate or hinder universities from supporting and accommodating students with disabilities.

10.2. University Profiles
The profile of each university is given below. For the purpose of confidentiality, the names of the universities in this study have been concealed. The universities in this study are coded as University (1) to University (6).

University 1
University 1 is a post-graduate teaching and research institute in Hyderabad, the capital city of Andhra Pradesh. It was established as a Central University by an Act of the Parliament in 1974. Over three decades, it has distinguished itself as one of the best in the country as a centre for teaching, research and innovations. The university offers courses such as M.A, M.Sc, M.C.A, M.Tech, M.Phil and Ph.D in various disciplines. This university is aware of disability policies, Acts and has taken steps such as implementation of PWD Act, 1995. Further, the university has been implementing UGC schemes such as Higher Education for Persons with Special Needs (HEPSN) (See chapter on introduction). As a part of the UGC scheme, this university has formed a separate committee/unit/cell for students with disabilities. This committee has a disability coordinator, members of teaching staff and also students with disabilities. The disability coordinator has the responsibility of taking
care of the needs of these students including physical, learning, financial, and counseling support services.

As a part of the provisions, the university has approved three per cent reservation for these students in admission to all the courses of study offered by them. However, for the academic year 2008-09, the university had only 120 students (92 orthopedically and 28 visually impairments). In order to assist these students, the university management has taken the responsibility of creating disabled friendly environment in its campus. Most of the new buildings are now accessible after making necessary modifications and creating accessibility to old buildings and constructing ramps, wherever possible. But it was also found that these students do not have easy access to most of the academic and administrative buildings which included classrooms, library and computer centre. On the other hand, it was also found that the university arranged special transport facilities only for these students to reach from one destination to another within the campus. In addition, these students also have good academic support services.

Based on the findings of the study, academic support services have been categorized into two parts: assistive technology and adjustments made for visually impaired students as per UGC rules. Access to assistive technology and other types of learning support facilities are critical to the success of these students in higher education institutions. In fact, it has increasingly become apparent that use of new information technology and assistive devices improves the physical and learning capabilities of these students than the students without disabilities (Anderson-Inman, 1999; Burgstahler, 2002). This university has arranged a separate learning centre for students with visual impairments. The centre has all types of assistive devices, including, computers, scanners, printers, speech softwares, and voice recorders. At a time, five to eight students can work, edit, and scan their materials here. Other than in the learning centre, the students also have computers/assistive devices in the library as well as the computer centre. Similarly, the university has been arranging scribes as per the demand from students with visual impairments or giving choice to them to arrange scribes to write exams. In addition, these students also get extra time during both their internal (30 minutes) and external (45 minutes) exams as per the rules of
UGC. Moreover, these students are provided reader allowances/SCRIBE charges of Rs. 50/- for internal exams/term papers and Rs. 100/- for end-semester examinations. In addition, they are paid special stationary charges of Rs. 500/- per annum. With these charges, the visually impaired students are able to arrange readers or personal assistance or scribes to write their exams and assignments.

The university has also been providing financial support such as university fellowships, merit scholarships, State Welfare and Ministry of Social Justice Scholarships to all the students who are recognized as disabled and eligible along with other students. The disability coordinator stated that since their university is a Central University, they provide fellowships to all students including students with disabilities, which is Rs. 1000 for Masters, Rs. 3000 for M.Phil., and Rs. 5000 for Ph.D., scholars per month. In addition, the university provides special grants / aid to these students for their medical checkups and to buy motor vehicles and wheel chairs and other assistive devices along with State Welfare/Ministry of Social Justice Scholarships although students were supposed to avail of only one of them. The university is also providing counseling support services such as academic, psychological support, and career advice to these students along with other students. It was also observed that counseling services were focused mainly on career support. In case any problem arises, the students can directly meet the disability coordinator, discuss and solve their problems whether they are financial, academic, environmental barriers/issues. The disability coordinator also stated that he conducts meetings with all those who are included in the committee including the teaching staff and students with disabilities. He also stressed the importance of this kind of meetings which helps them to improve the provision of support services to these students.

University 2
This University was established by Government of India in 1958 in Hyderabad, the city of the Nizams, which is famous for its monuments and pearl market. Earlier it was a deemed University but it has been given the status of a Central University by an Act of Parliament on August 3, 2007. It is the only university in India which is completely devoted to the teaching or learning of foreign languages. English, Arabic, French, German, Japanese, Russian and Spanish, etc., are taught here as the main part
of academic programme. It offers Master programmes, M.Phil and Ph.D. in the areas which shape the disciplinary lines between Sociology, Film Studies, Anthropology, Literature etc. Like University 1, this university is also aware of the disability policies, Acts and is implementing three per cent reservation for students with disabilities in admission to all courses of study offered by them. However, for the academic year 2008-09, the university had only 12 (4 orthopedically and 8 visually impaired students) students which indicates that actual quota of seats are not filled. This perhaps is because the interest of these students in choosing English language courses is less as compared with other subjects. Further, it was also found that the university has formed separate committee/unit/cell for students with disabilities. The university’s assistant registrar is also the disability coordinator and he looks after the needs of these students, identifies and attempts to remove barriers which impede the students in pursuing higher education. One of the major findings of the study is that the university has not taken any initiatives to create a disabled friendly environment.

These students do not have easy access to most of the buildings, classrooms, and library and computer center. Since this university is small, it is does not provide any transport services to them within the campus. In contrast to this, the university provides good academic support services to students with visual impairments. It has a separate learning centre with all types of assistive devices, including computers, scanners, printers, speech softwares, and voice recorders. In addition, the university also conducts an orientation and computer training programme for students with visual impairments at the beginning of every academic year. Similarly, the university makes arrangements such as arranging scribes, giving extra time during exams. Since it is also a Central University, good academic, as well as financial, support services are provided, similar to those provided by university 1. Similarly, counseling support services are also available to students with disabilities.

University 3

University 3 was established on August 19, 1976. The Emergence of this University was in fact a historic event in the sense that it heralded a new era in the sphere of higher education catering to the needs of North Telangana. The University has now in its fold 321 colleges located in the Northern Telangana region in the districts of
Khammam, Adilabad, Karimnagar, and Warangal offering a number of professional, as well as non-professional, courses at the undergraduate, post-Graduate and research levels. This university is aware of disability policies, Acts and has taken steps such as the implementation of PWD Act 1995. The data gathered in this study shows that the university has been implementing three per cent reservation for these students in admission to all the courses of study. However, for the academic year 2008-09, the university had 100 students (83 orthopedically and 17 visually impaired). Further, data shows that the university is not aware of UGC schemes for these students at higher education. It has neither a separate committee/unit/cell nor a disability coordinator who looks after the needs of these students. The data also indicates that the university has started taking initiatives, since the last couple of years, to create a disabled friendly environment for these students. Most of the buildings in the campus have ramps, and new buildings have friendly access wherever possible.

But it was also found that there is still much that needs to be done because students do not have easy access to any of the buildings. It has also not being providing any transport services to them on the campus. A study conducted by Moisey (2004) shows that academic support services are a very important source of support which helps these students to succeed academically by ensuring that the students recognize their strength and compensate for their weaknesses. But in this university it was found that except for allowing scribes to write exams for students with visual impairments, no other type of academic support services such as assistive devices, scribe and reader allowances are being provided. It was also found that other than scholarships of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, these students do not have any other financial assistance. This university has been providing only counseling support services to these students along with other students. In case any problem crops up, these students do not have any people such as a disability coordinator or a committee which can specifically deal with their problems. Thus they have to go and talk to the dean of the students’ welfare or head of their department or registrar as like any other student in the campus.
University 4

University 4 is one of the oldest educational institutions in the country. The people of the State have an emotional attachment to the institution since it came into being after a prolonged and collective struggle of the Telugu leaders for a University in the educationally backward northern Circars and the ceded districts of the erstwhile Madras Presidency. This university was constituted and established by the Madras Act of 1926. The university presently offers various courses in the streams of Arts, Commerce, Management, Science and Technology, Engineering, Law, Pharmacy and Education. It has been catering to the educational needs of the five green districts of Andhra Pradesh, namely, Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, West Godavari, Vizinagaram and Srikakulam. This university is also aware of disability policies, Acts and has been implementing the three per cent reservation for students with disabilities in admission to all the courses of study offered by them. But the enrollment of these students is very low (3 orthopedically and 1 hearing impaired students) as per the academic year 2008-09. Further, it was also found that, although the university is aware of UGC schemes for these students, it has neither a separate committee/unit/cell nor a disability coordinator to look after the needs of these students.

Like university 1, 2 and 3, this university too has taken initiatives to create a friendly environment by making new buildings with friendly access and constructing ramps, wherever possible. But it does not provide any transport services to them on campus. In case of academic support services, the university registrar stated that the university does not provide any kind of academic support services to these students since the enrolment of students with diverse disabilities is less. In addition, he also stated: ‘so far, we did not get any kind of demands or concerns or issues raised by these students regarding provision of services. In case we get these kinds of demands, we could have tried to solve their problems as per our financial limitations’. It was also found from the data that other than scholarships of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, these students do not have any other financial assistance at this university. Similarly, the university does not provide any kind of counseling support services such as academic, psychological support, and career advice, to them. It can be concluded from these results that, although the university management is aware of
the UGC schemes such as HEPSN, it cannot do much or provide basic support services unless there is a good number of enrolment of students with special needs in their campus.

University 5

University 5 is a women's university located in Tirupati. It was established as a state university by the Andhra Pradesh Legislature in 1983. The University was established with the objective of promoting professional education to women so as to empower them economically and socially. It has 6 departments, 5 postgraduate diplomas, 4 undergraduate, 16 postgraduate, 14 M.Phil., and 14 Ph.D. programmes. The university satisfies the mission of providing professional education to the women of Andhra Pradesh so as to make them self reliant. The practice of extending remedial teaching to the academically weaker students and the organisation of pre-examination coaching to backward community students are undertaken by the University to promote equity. This university also stated that it is aware of the disability policies, Acts and have been implementing the three per cent reservation for students with disabilities in admission to all the courses of study offered by them. However, for the academic year 2008-09, the university had only 3 students (orthopedic impairment).

Further, it was also found from the data that, like University 4, University 5 is also not aware of UGC schemes for these students at higher education level. Consequently, it has neither formed a separate committee/unit/cell nor has a disability coordinator to look after the needs of these students. The data gathered from the study shows that like any other University in this study, this University has also taken initiatives to create a friendly environment for students with disabilities. But, at the same time, it also stated that most of the buildings do not have proper accessibility, and transport services are also not available to these students on campus. Similarly, the University does not provide any kind of academic support services such as assistive devices, scribe and reader allowances since it does not have students with visual impairments in the university. Since it is a State University, it does not provide any financial assistance other than Ministry of Social Justice and Social Welfare Scholarship. In contrast, like any other university in this study, this University also provides counseling support services such academic, psychological support, and
career advice to students with disabilities along with other students. It can be concluded from these findings that, other than lack of more number of students with diverse needs, the type of university and awareness of the university plays an important role in the provision of support services to these students.

**University 6**

University 6 was inaugurated on September 11, 1976 by the then President of India, Shri Fakruddin Ali Ahmed, in Mangalagiri. The University has over 450 affiliated colleges offering various courses in Krishna, Guntur and Prakasam Districts. Like the first five universities, this university has also stated that it is aware of the disability policies, Acts and has been implementing three percent reservations. An important finding of this study is that the university did not maintain a database for the number of students with disabilities (SWD) enrolled for the academic year 2008-09. Further, like university (1) and (2), it has formed separate committee/unit/cell as well as has a disability coordinator who looks after the needs of these students. The university has not taken many initiatives to create a friendly environment for these students. Consequently, these students do not have easy access to most of the buildings, classrooms, and library. But this university has arranged special transport services for them on the campus along with ladies and senior citizens. But university does not provide any kind of academic support services to students with visual impairments. The disability coordinator stated, ‘we requested UGC for financial assistance to arrange basic assistive devices for students with visual impairment but so far we didn’t get any response. Right now, as per their needs, we are making arrangements like arranging scribes, giving extra time during exams. Further, like the first two universities, this university has also been providing financial assistance other than Social Welfare and Ministry of Social Justice scholarships to these students. The disability coordinator, that “since last year, the university Vice-chancellor announced special grants or assistance for these students. The class toppers among these students would be awarded Rs. 10,000 as a special incentive or reward at the end of every year, from both the social sciences as well as science groups (one boy and one girl respectively). This university has also being providing counselling support services to them along with other students. Here, it can be concludes that, although this university is aware of UGC schemes and been implementing them, it is very far
behind in case of the provision of support services as compared to University 1 and 2. This is perhaps due to the fact that, since it is a state university, there might be variation in funding allocation and provision of resources.

10.3. Facilitating and Hindering Factors Effecting Universities to Support SWD

Students with disabilities (SWD) are a rapidly growing minority in higher education institutions. In this study, the respondent institutions have made attempts to accommodate diverse needs of these students. Addressing the challenges of increasing access and participation of students with disabilities is essentially about responding effectively to issues of the students’ diversity (Howell, and Lazarus, 2003). All the respondent institutions in this study were asked to report the facilitating and hindering factors which have affected them to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities.

i) Facilitating factors
Based on findings of the study, the researcher categorised the facilitating factors in four areas.

a) Policy Interventions
Policy intervention was seen as a positive factor which has enabled all respondent universities to provide better accessible environment and learning experiences for students with disabilities by fulfilling their needs. The UGC, on its part, is committed to implement higher education related guidelines and schemes as per the provisions of the PWD Act and has been assisting the universities to support these students. Our research study findings also show that all respondent universities are implementing 3 per cent reservation in all courses and three of the universities also reported that they are getting support from the UGC under the HEPEN (Higher Education for Persons with Special Needs) scheme. Moreover, it is clearly understood that with all the policy interventions and support services providing the Government of India, the University Grants Commission, and Higher Education Institutions, the aim has been to provide equal educational opportunities to these students and ensuring their full participation. Similarly, a survey conducted by UNSECO (1999) sought to present
information on provision for students with disabilities in universities in the different UNSECO regions. The study found that some existing higher education institutions were already providing support services for a range of students with disabilities; others were looking into ways of creating more supportive learning environment within their institutions. Universities also varied in terms of their financial and human resources to respond to this challenge.

b) Role of the Disability Coordinators

As seen in the profile of each university, three universities have disability coordinator each to look after the needs of these students. All these positions were supported by the funding under the HEPSN scheme. The person in this role is expected to assist students from time to time by offering information about the available services, facilities, guidance, support and advocacy wherever necessary, and work with them throughout their course period. They are also engaged in raising awareness about the needs of these students at their respective campuses, contributing to the development of policy and support services and monitoring provision. In contrast, it was also found that in some of the universities (Universities 3, 4, and 5), which reported that they had no disability coordinator, the responsibility for providing provisions and taking care of the needs of students with disabilities, fell within the domain of the Dean of Students’ Welfare or Affairs and Registrar’s responsibilities. Since these three universities do not implement the UGC schemes, they do not get sufficient funds/support to meet the needs of these students.

Having a disability coordinator in University 1, 2 and 6, has had a positive influence on the institutions’ support services for students with disabilities. In two of these universities (University 1, and 6), the disability coordinators were full time teaching faculty, whereas in one university (University 2) the disability coordinator was an Assistant Registrar. In all these three universities, the disability coordinators provided a focal point for disability issues. One of the tasks of the disability coordinator was to spread knowledge, expertise and commitment to disability issues more widely throughout their institutions. These findings are supported by the qualitative research conducted by Halls (1998) which explored the experiences of students with disabilities at a variety of Scottish universities and colleges. The results
indicate that ways in which policy implementation was monitored varied greatly between institutions. Various forms of advice, guidance and support are now available to students with disabilities but more could be done to make people aware of this. Students’ academic experience varied greatly between institutions and departments based on existence of support system in their respective universities and colleges.

c) Influential Key Figures
In some of the respondent universities, there were key members of staff, as members of the disability committee, other than a disability coordinator, who influenced provision of support services to these students in a positive way. Some of them were those who had an impairment or had in-depth knowledge about the needs of students or commitment to disability issues because of their personal interest or circumstances. In this study, the respondents listed out some of the persons who assist the disability coordinator or committee in providing support services to students with disabilities. They were the University Vice-Chancellors, teachers who have had been affected with impairments, and also student representatives from within the group of students with disabilities. They mainly tended to influence the provision of support services but might also have a wider influence depending on the level of seniority.

d) Committees monitoring and Feed back
Some of the universities (Universities 1, 2 & 6) which have disability unit have set up committees with representatives from administration, teachers and students with disabilities. These committees play an active role as an advisory group, probing the students’ needs, getting them involved in decision making and development of policy. Universities 1 & 2 reported that they had procedures for monitoring the support services provided to students with disabilities. University 1 also reported that they collected the feedback from the students with disabilities by arranging meetings one or two times in each semester to discuss the problems and announcement of special services available to them. The results of the monitoring process provide important inputs to the further development of policy and support services (Universities UK, 2002). Similarly, research studies by Howell (2005), and Dodgson and Bolam (2002) suggest that time, resources and careful reflection are required for the analysis of the specific policies and the establishment of adequate monitoring systems with a view to
evaluate impact and to better understand existing practices, including in this process, the voices of students with disabilities themselves. Consequently, effective monitoring of support services leads to more pro-active support.

ii) Hindering factors
The respondents of the study were also asked to report the barriers faced by the university management preventing them from providing provisional support services to these students. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher categorized the hindering factors in three areas. They are as follows

a) Low Enrolment of Students with Disabilities and Lack of Awareness about the Support Services
Two of the universities (Universities 4 & 5) reported that since the enrolment of students with disabilities in their respective universities was very low, they could not provide any support services for few students including special assistive devices/learning centre, transport facilities. University (5) also reported that due to the very negligible enrolment of student with disabilities, they could not see and identify the specific needs of these students and were totally unaware of their problems. The authority in University (3) also stated, “since I am working as Registrar of this university, and I am busy with so many activities, we were not aware of the needs of these students as well as about special support services available to them at higher education institutions as per UGC schemes”. In contrast, University (3) had more number of students but still the implementation of UGC schemes and provision of support services in this university were not up to the mark. This was because, as we have seen in profile of the university, the university administration was neither aware of the UGC schemes nor the special needs of these students. Secondly, the type of the university, for instance, Central or State University, also has impacts the funding allocation to provide support services.

b) Lack of Financial Support
Four of the universities (Universities 3, 4, 5 & 6) reported that they had financial problems which prevented them from meeting the diverse needs of these students. University (6), which has a disability unit, was also facing financial problems to meet
the needs of visually challenged students such as learning resources, assistive devices and other equipments. But both the Central Universities 1 & 2 reported that they did not have any financial problems in providing support services to their students. Regardless of the capacity of the respondent higher educations institutions in this study to provide support, type of university, low enrollment of students with disabilities, financial constrains, and lack of awareness about the UGC schemes and needs of students with disabilities also continue to be an issue. Research shows that the following barriers also hinder university management of disability-related services: (1) uncoordinated mechanisms of eligibility determination, information sharing, and communication among agencies and target population, and (2) fragmentation of services among different agencies with mutually exclusive missions resulting in lack of resource mapping and coordination (Hart, Zimbrich, & Ghiloni, 2001; Whelley, Hart, and Zaft, 2002).

c) Reluctance of Students with Disabilities:
Reluctance of these students to demand support services was also found as one of the hindering factors for the respondent universities in this study. University (5) reported that whatever support services it was providing was just because of its own interest or because as it was mandatory to provide affirmative action as per the PWD Act 1995, and not because of any requests or demands from the students. This may be perhaps because students with disabilities did not want to ask for any special assistance due to stigma attached to such assistance.

10.4. Conclusion
The main findings of the study show that there was much variance in the provision of support services, mainly due to lack of awareness about the availability of UGC schemes and lack of common procedures with regard to identifying these students and their needs effectively. It was also observed that support services provided to these students by the three Universities (3, 4, & 5) were not up to the mark and they were completely lagging behind in the implementation of UGC schemes and in providing support services to them as compared to the Universities 1, 2 & 6. Here, we need to recognize the fact that Universities 1, 2, & 6 had a disability cell/committee for students with disabilities in their respective universities, and University 1 & 2 were
central universities. Therefore, the researcher concludes that the factors like type of the university, enrollment number of students with disabilities, existence of disability support cell/committee play an important role in identifying the special needs and problems and making an attempt to remove the existing barriers for them.