Abstract

This study attempts to understand social and educational experiences of students with disabilities in institutions of higher education and is exploratory in nature. To understand the educational experiences of these students, it is not enough to know only the availability of services and resources. It is also necessary to understand the students personally, and the circumstances in which they live. To answer the research questions posed in this study, the researcher has used mixed methods. The three respondent universities were selected through purposive sampling in so as to gain maximum diverse variation. For this study, data was collected from different stakeholders through (i) in-depth interviews with students with disabilities (sample 100), and teachers (50), (ii) six focus group discussions with students, and views of 6 University administrators in selected universities in Andhra Pradesh through a questionnaire. In this study, quantitative and qualitative data analyses were used and in most cases quotes of real text for each theme were maintained and used extensively. The findings of the study show that students with disabilities face various problems in pursuing higher education. However, they received support from various sources such as the university, family, friends and teachers. Some of the students were very categorical about their special needs in order to achieve their goals. A greater understanding has been gained regarding coping strategies adopted by them to manage their higher education needs. This study concludes that those who faced few favourable factors than the hindering factors had more negative experiences and vice-versa. Based on findings of the study the researcher has brought out the framework to understand the favourable and also the hindering factors which influence the creation of an inclusive environment in institutions of higher education. This framework will be helpful for improving the support services for students with disabilities to strengthen the existing laws, policies and practices in institutions of higher education.

Keywords: Students with disabilities, Higher education, disclosure, Challenges, Policies