



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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### INCLUSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: NEED FOR AN ACTIVE APPROACH.

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#### Manuscript Info

##### Key words:-

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#### Abstract

The area of disability has gone through a lot of changes over the years. From nomenclature to way Differently abled students (DAS) are treated, a big transformation has happened over the years. The lacuna in this development, is the approach in dealing with challenged persons is passive. When it comes to the arena of HEI, it is imperative for the stakeholders in this approach to be active. A disabled friendly environment has been created in physical structure of any institution but when it comes to attitudinal and psychological inclusion such level of acceptance is not seen. There is an inclusion lag when comparing the different aspects of inclusion. This lag has to be addressed to have inclusion in the real sense. It can be done through active engagement process of the different participants. The paper will focus on the need for such engagement practices, in specific to the students of HEI to make inclusion more authentic.

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#### Introduction:-

Students enroll themselves in Higher Education Institutions (HEI) with lot of expectations, plans and hopes to be. The goals of any student who steps into the gates of HEI are many and varied. When it comes to the focus of education alone in its enormity it is important that a student when (s)he leaves the halls of education into the world, needs to informed and responsible person, able to take a personally satisfying and socially useful career.

The different stakeholders of any HEI would agree to the idea that a student should have prepared minds by acquiring certain skills to be productive in the society through a career of their choice. All these remain the same whether the student is a mainstream student or a differently abled student. This goal attainment process through which a student goes through needs active support when it comes to differently abled students (DAS). The two main players here are the teachers and student.

To facilitate a smooth goal attainment process, two things are most needed. Regular *attendance* is pre-requisite for optimum *participation* in the teaching-learning environment.

Some of the factors that affect attendance of a DASs are

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- Health
- Access/transportation
- Finance
- Teacher-student relationships
- Teacher's competence in handling DAS
- Bullying/harassment
- Engagement and culture in HEI
- Peers
- Past performance
- Educational relevance
- Expectations – family, school, institution, peer, DAS

When the above said factors are reviewed many of them are tried to be addressed during admission of DAS into HEI. This is systematically done through a unit established in a HEI especially for DAS. The primary efforts where an inclusive environment is tried to be maintained are

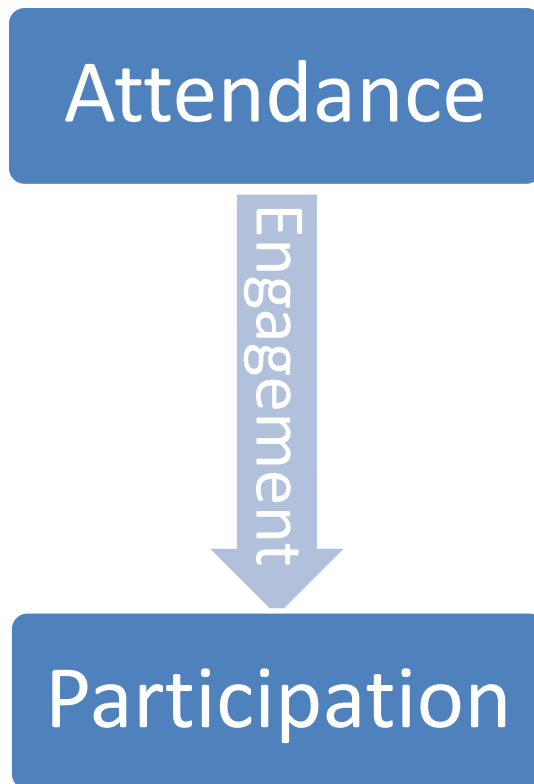
1. Facilitate and ensure admission of DAS in different courses
2. Make available guidance and counselling services to DAS
3. To offer counselling to DAS on the nature of courses they can study at HEI

Certain factors that affect attendance needs constant monitoring and follow-up to keep the consistency in a DAS's attendance. The mandatory relevant efforts towards maintaining a good attendance are

1. Create awareness about the necessities of DAS and other concerns regarding their learning
2. Assist differently-abled graduates to gain successful employment in the public as well as private sectors.
3. Inform and provide relevant information on fee concessions, examination processes and reservation policies for DAS.
4. To decide the types of assistive devices to be obtained for DAS.
5. To provide awareness programmes for teachers of HEI on different methodologies to teaching and evaluation for DAS.
6. Accessibility of DAS should be kept in mind in the different buildings available and future buildings of HEI. The architectural barriers should be reduced to zero by construction of ramps, rails and special toilets and other changes to suit the special needs of DAS. This is a mandatory requirement according to the Persons with Disabilities Act 1995 that is to create a disabled friendly environment.

All HEIs certainly have the commitment to edify DAS, but not all of them have the necessary funds, space or technology to reach out to different disabilities. As there is a level of customisation required to educate DAS, unrelenting efforts must be put into the cause.

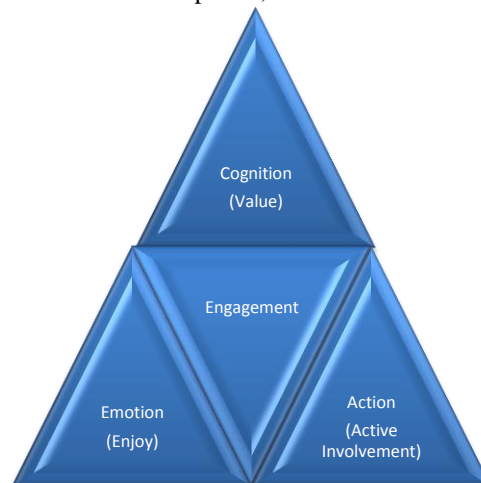
The attendance, a score, a number to be changed to a fruitful experience in which the DAS learns skills and participates actively, engagement aspects has to be taken into consideration.

**Student Engagement:-**

There are three important aspects for DAS to be actively engaged. They are

- Cognition – a thought that the process (s)he is going through is of value
- Emotion – (S)he should be able to the enjoy the teaching-learning environment
- Action – availability of different opportunities to get actively involved.

This involvement of a DAS becomes more meaningful when changes are made in the structure, policies, culture, social environment, accepted practices, provision of students to take up different roles in a HEI. This engagement process is predominantly based on certain assumptions, like



1. Respect to the value of a DAS as a human being as someone who willingly activates on his/her learning, his wisdom, intelligence, experience, attitudes and feelings.

2. DAS have the capability to contribute creative ideas to enrich the teaching-learning processes. They are endowed with skills and if treated as human beings and trust them to be capable of responsibility and contribution efficiency can be naturally permeated.
3. The DAS are the real experts on the intricacies and hidden potentials of their capabilities and needs. They can make suggestions on numerous issues that go wrong or are not optimally utilized and provided
4. The DAS have a need to participate in the problem solving process. If the natural urge to achieve excellence is properly directed and encouraged, every DAS can improve his performance.

DAS engagement can be seen as the way in which DAS invest time and energy in their own learning and how they are involved and empowered by institutions to shape their learning experiences.

#### **Sequence of Engagement (TEAAR):-**

- Talk & Listen - In this the DAS talks and listens to different concerns relating to the teaching-learning process. Through this process different perspectives and information can be collected.
- Endorse – The issues that need to be worked is identified, diagnosed and prioritized. The problems are also registered with a faculty coordinator.
- Authorize – The identified problems are analyzed for different causes and recommendations will be made by DAS.
- Act - Based on the best alternative chosen, action will be recommended and implemented.
- Reflect – Evaluation, modification and follow-up will be done based on the reflective exercise undertaken by DAS themselves.

By encouraging DAS to go through the TEAAR process, the students play active roles and these roles help them to engage actively in the environment provided by the HEI. The DAS consistently demonstrate the outcomes of the approach. The engagement process nurtures student/adult partnerships in action rather than an idea. Meaningful Student Involvement is conceptual and practical and this can lead to implementation of a lot of improvement strategies. So the DAS become

- \* Students as planners
- \* Students as researchers
- \* Students as decision makers
- \* Students as advocates
- \* Students as evaluators

#### **The students can actively engage in different aspects like:-**

- \* Curricular and co-curricular aspects
- \* Time spent inside and outside campus
- \* Schedule and nature of classes
- \* Teacher's quality and training
- \* Technology used in the institution

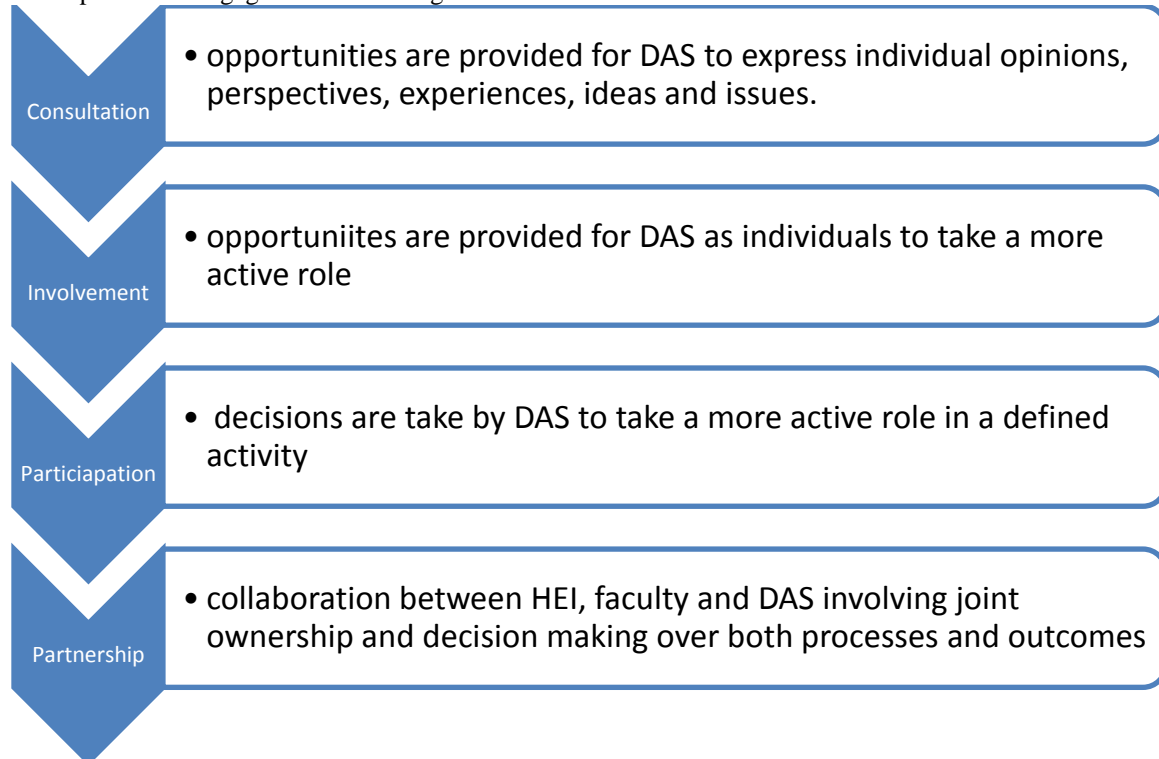
#### **Movement from passive to active engagement:-**

There is a subtle difference between a HEI that 'listens' to DAS and a HEI that gives DAS the prospects to discover areas that they consider to be important and also to recommend solutions to see in reality the essential changes. The idea of 'listening to the student voice' – implicitly if not deliberately – supports the perspective of student as 'consumer', whereas 'students as change agents' explicitly ropes in the view of the student as 'active collaborator' and 'co-producer', with the potential for transformation. One of the crucial motives for evolving a partnership approach is a belief that DAS should be active contributors in the learning process, rather than passive recipients of knowledge.

When focus changes from active to passive engagement, involvement and participation of DAS increases steadily. So automatically the perspective of DAS changes and goes through a movement from

- DAS as decorations
- DAS as tokens
- DAS - Faculty equality
- DAS led issues
- DAS - Faculty equity

So the process of engagement also changes



#### **Engagement through partnership:-**

Partnership comes from a sense of belonging, to feel a part of the mainstream. Partnership is the key to develop participation among DAS. Through engagement strategies a partnership relationship is nurtured and cultivated with the DAS who cannot identify with the mainstream. So engagement strategies should not be merely mainstream focussed but those that involve the DAS also. Embedding sustainable partnership and initiatives requires creating this element of partnership with active involvement of DAS a part of the culture and ethos of HEI. Partnership is more likely to be sustained where there is a strong sense of community among staff and students, which includes the DAS too. The strategy to achieve this is the development of partnership is to ensure certain features are part of a HEI culture. They are

- Shared values
- Teaching and learning environment that support partnership
- Attitudes and behaviours exhibited by all stakeholders should exhibit partnership in practice.

A partnership environment is built with certain vital issues like inclusivity, proper handling of power relationships, in place reward and recognitions system and scope for transition and sustainability. Such a partnership culture promotes critical reflection on existing relationships, processes and structures which can potentially lead to the transformation of learning experiences. With a perspective of this partnership relationship is both a working and learning relationship, where faculty and students along with DAS involve in learning and analysis together. So the DAS becomes co-producers along with the mainstream and the relationship becomes more collaborative and reciprocal. Partnership teaching learning process is being open to and creation of prospects for discovering and learning something that cannot be known earlier.

#### **Inclusion through collaborations – the need of the hour:-**

Collaboration in the task of teaching and learning need a proper understanding and framework before going into it. The collaborative relationship should be built on certain values •

- Authenticity – stakeholders have a meaningful rationale for participating in partnership and are honest about their level of contribution and the constraints of collaboration.
- Inclusivity – collaboration includes the diverse aptitudes, perceptions and skills that all stakeholders bring and involvement is not curtailed at any level.

- Reciprocity – stakeholders have an interest and benefit from collaboration
- Empowerment – power is distributed suitably and all stakeholders are encouraged to productively challenge an approach which may bring in inequality.
- Trust – stakeholders participate in open and truthful conversations and strongly believe to be treated with respect and equality
- Challenge – stakeholders to come up with constructive criticism and challenge practices, structures and methodologies that can put a risk to this collaborative relationship.
- Community – stakeholders feel a sense of belonging and feel respected for the impact they make
- Responsibility – stakeholders take collective and individual responsibility to reach the objectives of this collaborative relationship

This aspect of collaboration can be classified and viewed based on the activity it happens and its outcome into

- Collaboration in past practices
- Collaboration in improving present
- Collaboration in affecting the future

#### **Collaboration in past practices:-**

There are set of practices and methodologies a HEI has on learning, teaching and assessment. It is important for students to co-operate and involve themselves in the already available framework. The students along with DAS should go through the available procedures wherein they are able to observe and reflect later for further improvement. DAS can also be involve in curriculum design and direction based on their capacities.

#### **Collaboration in improving present:-**

The student can participate and bring significant changes in the delivery of content and the projects they are involved in. DAS can be engaged in inquiry-based learning, there is much evidence of the efficacy of this style in encouraging deep and engaged learning. Such projects where DAS students taken with faculty can teach autonomy and independence as they negotiate as partners. DAS along with the mainstream students can play significant role to maintaining quality in teaching, feedback and assessment practices. Active quality circles can also be formed.

#### **Collaboration in affecting the future:-**

The continuous and enduring collaboration helps DAS to be future decision makers. So a shared governance is seen involving the stakeholders. This certainly brings a huge change in the culture of HEI from inclusion as top-down strategies to inclusion as a collaborative strategy.

#### **Challenges in collaboration:-**

Collaborative partnership makes the stakeholders mindful of conflicting concerns and tensions and it increases challenges to present expectations and customs about higher education. Partnership promotes potentials for thinking and acting differently and bringing in a change in higher education. DAS, faculty and students may have different impetuses for engaging in partnership and the positions conferred in an organisation gives rise to variances in power, reward and recognition of participation and responsibility for partnership engagements. This collaboration which is called for is not natural and thus can bring in challenges to prevailing ways of being, doing and thinking.

#### **Ways to combat the challenges for collaboration:-**

- Develop together partnership and collaborative values among stakeholders keeping in mind how behaviour and attitudes symbolise these values
- Understand the degree of partnership and collaborative initiative ways to bring down barriers to participation especially when considering DAS.
- Recognise areas where partnership and collaboration is not suitable
- Explore avenues for co- development of faculty and students
- Consider and develop a reward and recognition framework

#### **Conclusion:-**

A partnership and collaborative approach may not be right for everyone nor is it viable in every situation. That does not deny the fact that there is much to be gained by engaging in partnership and collaboration in learning in teaching in higher education. This can certainly lead to significant developments in student learning and success. Most

partnership work seen today in different areas of learning and inquiry only engages relatively few students. It is essential for the future of higher education to be critical about existing ways of working and to endeavour to make partnership and collaboration along with its benefits accessible to all. At its origins partnership and collaboration is to capitalise on DAS with the power to co-create not just knowledge but the HEI itself.

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