

Inclusion in Higher Education: Exploring The Experiences of Nepalese College Students with Disabilities

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Abstract

The study aimed to explore the experiences and understandings of students with diverse disabilities and stakeholders about inclusion in the Nepalese higher education context. Questions raised in the research were about the understanding of inclusion, the practice of interaction, and the perceived influence of interaction on inclusion in university colleges. The research questions were based on the capability approach, the inclusive excellence model, and the critical aspects of these theories. The research approach used was a qualitative case study. Data were collected from a diverse group of participants from two Nepalese public colleges, including students with ($n = 24$) and without ($n = 12$) disabilities, college teachers ($n = 10$), and college administrators ($n = 10$), using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document reviews, from February to June of 2022. Mainly, inclusion in Nepalese higher education was found to emphasize individualistic concepts like learning resources for disabled students and a disability-positive mindset. Surprisingly, most participants described several critical capabilities, such as cooperation, social belonging, respect and dignity, learning engagement and self-efficacy, and professional accountability for inclusive excellence. Additionally, while most study participants' experiences indicated a positive attitude toward interacting with students with disabilities, interaction among college members was rarely practiced. Further, the perceived influence of interaction was found to positively expand the academic and social functioning of students with disabilities and other stakeholders. Finally, this study contends that inclusive excellence can be developed in Nepal's public college context and beyond through collective interaction, including basic capabilities.

Keywords: Capabilities, Disability Diversity, Inclusive Excellence, Interaction, Social and academic Functioning