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The Learning Practices of the Students with Physical Disabilities

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Abstract

In this research article the current learning practices to the students with physical disabilities are discussed. It is a qualitative study. The main objective of the study is to analyze current learning practices used for students with physical disabilities in Kailali district. Interview schedule and classed observation were the major tools for the collection of data in the study. The researcher chose case study as a research design. In this study, the organization is a case where physically disabled students stay and study. Among eight teachers three teachers were selected through Purposive sampling method. The data were collected from teachers who were teaching physically disabled students in school teaching. The findings of the study showed that the practice of teaching physically disabled students seemed to be difficult and challenging. The foremost reason behind this is the lack of disability-assistive infrastructure, parental support, social stigma, teachers training and awareness. Moreover, the findings revealed that teachers' professionalism, engagement with students, planning for the lesson, inculcating the spirit of a creative and critical thinking and setting goals can prove instrumental to maximize students' outcomes. The implication of the study is that the teachers should enhance special skills to deal with physically disabled students for their better performance.

Keywords: Disabilities, Physical disabilities, Teaching, Learning, Practices

Introduction

Disability is a part of human condition. Almost everyone will be temporarily or permanently at some point of life experience increasing difficulties in functioning (World

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Health Organization, 2021). Response to disability has been changed since 1970s, and promoted largely by the self-organization of people with disabilities and by the growing tendency to see disabilities as human right issues. Historically, people with disabilities have largely been provided through solutions that segregate them such as residential institutions and special schools. In the context of Nepal Physical disability is the problem that arises in operation of physical parts, use and movement in a person due to problems in nerves, muscles and composition and operation activities of bones and joints (Government of Nepal, 2006).

American With Disabilities Act (ADA,1990) asserts about disability, “any physiological disorder, condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting one or more of the following body systems that substantially limits one or more major life function”. A physical disability is a physical condition that affects a person’s mobility, physical capacity, stamina, or dexterity. This can include brain or spinal cord injuries, multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, respiratory disorders, epilepsy, hearing and visual impairments and more (World Health Organization, 2001).

The researcher advocates this issue for equality and equity in education. Even the government seems to have least focus on it. Furthermore, teachers need to realize who the physically disabled students and how they can be taught as normal students. In this regard, the gap between theory about special needs education and practices needs to be bridged. People still do not have as open mind as they have for normal ones. Therefore, this research aims to explain the learning practices and attitudes of the teachers towards physically disabled students and practices they apply in teaching. However, teaching and learning activities for such students need rigorous and serious effort (Moore, Beazley & Maelzer, 1998). They need conducive environment to encourage the learners physically, psychologically and emotionally.

Despite the fact that the Government of Nepal has had a Special Education Program in place since 1964, the Plan of National Education System (1971), which was implemented in (1971), made a concrete effort to improve and expand special education. The Special Education Council (1973) was formed as a result of the stated plan (1973). Report on disability in Nepal (2016) states that in Nepal, disability is still seen as a result of a person’s wicked past behavior. While the Nepalese government has approved a number of laws and policies to safeguard the disabled, local attitudes and perceptions are yet to change. Cultural beliefs, a lack of information, and educational deficiencies in the area can all be blamed for this. As a result, the work that the Australian Himalayan Foundation is doing in Nepal with Rural Education and Environment Development is critical in ensuring that attitudes

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about The Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002-2007) aims to provide equal rights and a barrier-free environment for impaired individuals to grow. Its goals include empowering and involving disadvantaged persons in athletics, as well as providing prevention and rehabilitation facilities and educational opportunities for children from kindergarten through post-secondary school United Nation Children's Education Fund, 2003).

According to the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan, the net primary-school enrolment rate increased as a result of school orientation and scholarship programs (2013-2014) disabled in Nepal advance in a good and inclusive way. It is also found in Nepalese education system. However, the current situation is not fully favorable for the children and students with physical disabilities. Schools charge some extra fees like examinations, sports, tour and travel, transportation etc. This creates problem in learning activities of the students with physical disabilities. Based on the above-mentioned literature and further discussion, it can be said that while policy and plans have been documented, and institutions for physically disabled students have been established, there is a need to develop in-depth ground reality in terms of teacher practices when teaching children with physical disabilities.

Similarly teaching and learning activities used for students with physical disabilities are not appropriate as per the need, interest, learning style and learning pace of the students. The curriculum is also not suitable for such students. There is lack of teacher training, teaching learning strategies, etc. Therefore, the present study aims to explore teaching learning practices of teachers who are involved in teaching student with physical disabilities. I believe that the findings of the study may be useful for the teachers, students with physical disabilities and policy makers to get insights into the issue of the disabled children and enhance the students learning in the class room.

Literature Review

The field's history may be traced back to the United Nations General Assembly's (1948), declaration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The United Nations published this report in 1948, every child's has right to education shall be free and teach them free in school education. In 1990, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reaffirmed it in the World Declaration on the most famous publication on the issue is UNESCO's Salamanca Statement and Framework on Special Needs Education, which was accepted in (1994). According to this literature, "schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other issues" (UNESCO, 1994). This agreement ensured that people with disabilities had access to their rights. It presented the principles of special education and inclusive schooling, defining special educational needs as "all those children and youth

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whose demands are based on disabilities or learning problems (Education for All, UNESCO, 1994).

According to Vygotsky theory of Socio-cultural Interaction (1978), the children learn better when they get maximum interactive environment among the people. This indicates that linguistic input given to pre-school children plays a significant role for the overall cognitive development of the children. In other sense, classroom environment created by the teacher can be an important platform for their overall development. Therefore this theory seems to be relevant to the present study where the researcher is interested in exploring the class room practices of the children with physical disabilities.

In 2003, UNICEF evaluated that the educational system in Nepal does not adequately meet the learning needs of diverse learners due to the existing school physical infrastructure, the teaching-learning practices, the shortage of trained and motivated human resources, and the lack of assistive devices and learning materials.

Research Methods

This study is based on qualitative method. The researcher has chosen case study as research design. Case study denotes in-depth study of a particular person or organization or an event. In this study the researcher studying case of the organization where physically disabled students stay and study. Case study is appropriate design for researcher. So, the researcher used concrete contextual and depth knowledge about teachers teaching physically disabled students.

In this study, the researcher used purposive sampling method to get information in the field of students with physical disabilities. Since qualitative research seeks for the least number of research participants, researcher collected data from the school and the sample size of the population was three teachers who were teaching students with physical disabilities. The researcher carried out this research in the Godavari Municipality-3 of Kailali district where there is one school in which students with physical disabilities are taught. The school is providing basic level education to the students with physical disabilities. The data was collected by using interview and observation as the data collection tools. The interview schedule and direct class observation were the main tools for collecting necessary information. The study was based on primary and secondary source of data.

Findings and Discussion

The paper thematically presents the results and discussion based on the objective of the study.

Present Learning Practices

Nepal has made significant progress in education sectors. The net enrollment rate of primary school is 94 percent (World Bank-2017). Effective teaching-learning practices can result better output for all individuals and the students with physical disabilities cannot remain aloof from it. For such students, special need education has been in practice. Now the concept has changed from 'disability as impurity' to disability as an opportunity and it indicates not anyone as disable rather everyone as differently able. And teaching-learning practices have been changed to address the needs of the learners. In this regard the researcher tried to find out the actual practice of teaching methods, teaching materials, assistive devices and evaluation procedure used in students with physical disabilities.

Teaching Methods

Different teaching methods are used in teaching learning practice. Effective teaching methods and strategies can only gear the learning up. Whatever the normal students or student with physical disabilities, they need treatment as per their needs. Teacher is the prime agent to address academic needs of the students having different types of disabilities. And for such students, special need education has been designed (Seelman, 2016). That is why teachers need to assume teaching as a series of events that occur between students and teachers. Good teaching methods can give you better thoughts, better solutions, better understanding, and selection of good teaching methods can result a good product.

Teaching methods have to be supportive for learners where the students with disabilities can feel the sense of teaching with positive reinforcement and that can help to ensure their learning. When I asked them about their practices, teacher A, B, and C mentioned that they used general teaching methods like lecture, group discussion, audio visual, demonstration because all the students have only physical problem so they can understand by general teaching methods. But sometimes they use need-based teaching methods depending on the severity level of the students. However, when I further inquired about it, they revealed that they often used general type of teaching method based on the need of students. In this context, one of the teachers said, "I use teaching method depending on the requirement of the student in my class". As he shared, there is no any fixed method that can be used for the students with physical disabilities. Methods are chosen on the need of the students. His experience with teaching students of special need education asserts that one must be flexible in using teaching techniques.

There must be balanced emphasis on different methods as per the need (Tomlinson and Imbeau, 2010). Along with the statement of Tomlinson and Imbeau, I feel that flexibility is not the matter of considering. Sometimes, rather it is the matter of giving space on the top

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of entire teaching-learning process. It creates a democratic and favorable environment for students and there is rare chance of monotonous classroom since pedagogical autonomy is always present there.

Lecturing integrated with writing key vocabulary and words and note taking by the students can enhance learning (Boach & Pialot, 2005). Such integration can be useful for listening practice as well. Further, information written on a board along with lecturing provides 'visual cues to students directing them towards important information and is more likely to be recorded in students' notes' (Locke, 1977).

When I observed the class I found the situation something different. In the interview they said they used lecture method, group discussion method, audio-visual method and demonstration method but in their real practice, they were found to be using only general or common teaching methods. This shows that there is discrepancy between what they said and did in real teaching learning practices.

In reference to my study, students were mainly having physical problems however they were mentally fit for learning. On the other hand, teachers are also unknown about the methods used for physically disabled. This may be the reason, the teachers in the study were found to be using general type of teaching methods.

Teaching Materials

Different teaching materials are used in teaching learning practices. As an educator, teacher and the school management are responsible to design materials and provide ample opportunities to learn. May it be audio-visual materials, may it be exit cards, may it be graphic organizers, may it be flash cards or may it be other useful materials, teacher must plan, prepare and present while teaching. Since students learn in a variety of ways they need additional teaching-learning resources (DFID, 2007), without which teaching-learning may remain abstract, dry and non-exciting. Considering the significance of teaching learning materials students with physical disabilities require the use of an assistive materials and devices for effective teaching and learning. In physical disability education teaching materials are different from general education. Materials are required to make the teaching learning more effective.

In my study when I asked the teacher about the teaching material that they used in their daily practices, the participants informed me that they often used: counting number chart and wall chart as the teaching materials in their classes. However, most of them revealed that they used daily use teaching materials in classroom. One of the teachers shared, sometimes *I use audio-visual but most of the time I rely on daily used teaching materials.*"

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Similarly, another teacher stated, “*I make use of playing materials and teach them through playing materials and game.*”

This shows that the special kinds of teaching materials are not primarily used by the teachers. Sharing from all the teachers clearly indicate that they do not use sufficient teaching materials which are needed to teach students with physical disabilities. However, teaching without materials cannot make learning easy, interesting and neither teachers can express the concept smoothly nor students can comprehend well i.e., students cannot significantly increase learners’ achievement.

Further, the case of the research site is all about physically disabled students their mental development is normal. In such situation, lack of teaching materials, or de-emphasis’ on the materials hinder the creativity of the students and learning remains passive. They may know what the cell is but they cannot learn how the cell is created. Information from the participants denotes that understanding on teaching materials. They do not seem to have awareness about the fact that even simple material like instructional chart can accelerate learning of the students. As Ibe-Bassey (2005) shared through instructional charts comparison, contrast, development, process, classification and organization can be taught in detail, teachers teaching physically disabled children lack the knowledge of these materials in deeper level.

When I observed the class teachers were using daily used teaching materials. Only one teacher used audio-visual material as a teaching material in the class. This condition clarifies that there is not correspondents between theory and practice regarding the use of teaching materials. They do not use curriculum differentiation. This shows that they do not have extreme severity cases in their school. Students are just having mild and moderate type of disability and teaching materials that are required for the students with physical disabilities are not sufficient. The special kind of teaching materials are not primarily used by the teachers. They are not properly making use of special teaching materials which should be used in the classes to make the teaching learning effective for the students with physical disabilities.

Assistive Devices

Assistive devices are the tools that make their life easy in movement. Absence of assistive devices may cause imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read and write. With the proper instruction and assistive tools, such learners can improve and attain their potential, (Raskind, 2000). Coping with the children with physical disability is always challenging for parents as well as for school. For the physically disabled students such devices are more important not only for making their learning easy but also for making their livelihood

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comfortable. Generally wheel chair, audio device, walker walking step are often utilized by physically disabled people. Such tools should be provided to access and standard tools, to complete educational tasks, to participate on an equal basis.

These tools can be like tape recorder, Television, magnifier (Quenneville, 2002) that benefit in enhancing learning of different subjects. The gadgets that ease their movement are known as assistive devices. Such tools are more crucial for physically handicapped children because they not only facilitate learning but also improve their quality of life. People who are physically challenged typically use wheelchairs, audio devices, walkers, and steps when they are out and about. The majority of the students in my study area had physical mobility issues when moving from one place to another. As a result, I discovered that their primary means of assistance for an easy and comfortable living was a standard wheel chair. With the aid of the wheel chair, they traveled from their room to the classes. When I inquired on the type of assistive devices the teachers opined that the majority of our students are mentally strong, but only a few have mobility issues. In order to get from their room to class, they must therefore use an assisted wheel chair. In addition, only a small number of kids have severe disabilities.

One of the teachers stated that, "I use some audio-visual devices that help to make their teaching learning effective". I found that the majority of the students are intellectually fit, but only a few of them have mobility issues. In order to get from their room to class, they must therefore use an assisted wheel chair. In addition, only a small number of kids have moderate disabilities. Therefore, the wheelchair also requires an additional caregiver. Additionally, they were witnessed utilizing several audio-visual tools that improve the effectiveness of their teaching and learning. I observed them going around in their wheelchair when I went to monitor their school or lessons.

I portrayed them as being extremely thrilled when they could independently navigate their wheelchairs from one location to another, particularly from their living room to classes and to the field. This shows that the wheelchair has improved their quality of life and learning by acting as assistive equipments. To improve their learning, I sensed the need for page turners, books, and note-taking gadgets after observing the environment around the school. Additionally, I discovered that the wheelchairs were highly antiquated and out of date, which made it difficult for them to move because they required more physical effort. When I went to observe their school or classes I found them moving around on their wheel chair. I saw them very happy when they were able to move from one place to another especially from their room to class and field on their own in their wheel chairs.

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This indicates that the wheel chair as an assistive device has made their life and learning easier and more comfortable. However, when I observed the situation around the school, I felt the requirement of page turner, book and note book holding devices to make their learning even better. Likewise, I found the wheel chairs were very old fashioned and outdated which has made them a bit difficulty in their movement because they need to use extra physical power to move them ahead.

Evaluation Procedure

Evaluation is one of the most important and useful tools that is used to make a judgment about to measure the achievement and academic performance of the students. It is through the evaluation the teacher can understand not only the performance of the student but also the success of the academic plan and programs at large. It is an important component of teaching learning process. It is through the evaluation the teacher and learner can improve. It is a continuous process.

Assessment is necessary to determine what the students have learned. It involves more than just receiving an answer in discrete “yes” or “no” pieces. The evaluation process is one of the methods used to assess students’ academic performance and level of attainment. The teacher’s understanding of both the student’s performance and the overall success of the academic plan and programs comes from the evaluation. It is a crucial part of the teaching and learning process. Both the teacher and the students can get better through evaluation. It is a never-ending process. It indicates that evaluation is not solely based on summative tests, which are frequently used as final exams.

There are different models which are used to measure the academic performance of the students with physical disabilities. They are general and specific. Under general evaluation procedure they can use continuous Assessment System (CAS) (KC, 2011), Formative and Summative. Similarly, under specific evaluation system, they can use some special evaluation systems like Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Harte, 2013), Response to Intervention (RTI) (Greenwood et.al. 2011), and Individual Educational Plan (IEP) (Bateman, 2017).

In context of my study, the teachers informed me that they relied on the continuous process of evaluation in different forms and formats. For example, one of the teachers stated,

“I conduct not only final exam to measure their success however I also rely on the assessment of their overall performance throughout the year, likewise I use oral test, interview and their performance test in the class as part of evaluation process”.

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The school actually operates under the authority of the government of Nepal, which is directed by the country's educational policy. The curriculum development centers recommended the system of evaluation must therefore be adopted by them. This forces them to rely on terminal exams, half-yearly exams, annual exams, and practical exams even if they would want to employ continuous assessment system (CAS) for upper classes. One of the participants stated *"I employ oral and written assessment processes to measure the students' progress, which depends on the severity level of the students"*. This demonstrates that the prescribed system of evaluation cannot adequately support the real evaluation of the students with physical disabilities which proves the necessity for them to have a system of evaluation that takes into account their overall performance over the course of the academic session they were enrolled in.

Therefore it is necessary for them to avoid by the system of evaluation prescribed by the curriculum development center. Due to this reason, even if they wanted to use continuous assessment system(CAS) for upper classes however they have to rely on terminal exam, half yearly and annually including practical exam as well. One of the teachers asserted that, *"I use oral and written assessment process to measure the students progress which is depend on the severity level of the students."* Regarding the evaluation process, another teacher stated that,

I use oral and written assessment process to measure the student's progress which the severity level of the students. I use oral evaluation process for the students having the problem of speech and written test for the students those who have problem in holding the paper, note book and pen.

This indicates that, more evaluation process is employed by the teachers for evaluation procedure of the students with physical disabilities. He seems to know, 'the function of assessment is more than just auditing' (Wiggins, 1993). His practice in evaluation indicates that demonstrating what students learn and what they can do after understanding can be called evaluation. It can include thinking critically and creatively about what they learned and the application of the learned information and skill.

For Tomlinson and Imbeau, (2010), it is giving students various ways to demonstrate what they learned and how they can apply and extend it. This demonstration of learning can be in written form, oral form, through drama, group work, pair work and so forth. However, as Tomlinson and Edison, (2003) argued culminating product should vary according to student readiness, interest and learner profile. In the context of my study area all the teachers have similarity in terms of evaluation except one of the teacher. They relied on the ongoing process of evaluation in various forms and formats in the context of my study.

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This shows that the real evaluation of the physically disabled students cannot be assisted on the basis of the prescribed system of evaluation that means they need to have a kind of assessment system of their overall performance system throughout the academic session which they were lacking. For example they should have been using special evaluation procedure like Individual Educational Plan (IFP), Universal design For Learning (UDL), Response to Intervention (RTI). Maybe it is because they are not known about this or they have not got any special training on it from the side of the government, district education office and other concerned institutions.

Conclusion

In the context of Nepal, unlike in the European nations, the practice of teaching student with physical disabilities seems to be difficult and challenging. The foremost reason behind this seems to be the lack of Disability-assistive infrastructure. To this end, building the “baggage literature, using local resources, asking for assistance for the authority can help minimize the hurdles and maximize the learning.

Despite the fact that the teachers are not accustomed to the systems supporting physical disability-based schools, it becomes the ethics and duty of the teacher to assess the needs and interests of the learners before delivering the content and prepare the plan accordingly. Likewise, teachers’ professionalism, engagement with students, planning for the lesson, inculcating the spirit of a creative and critical thinking and setting goals can prove instrumental to maximize students’ outcomes. Teaching may not be a big deal for those who do not care about students’ learning outcomes, and even a layman can teach in day-to-day life. However, a genuine teacher always takes student learning at the core and in this respect, making learners learn meaningfully is what matters most. The teachers in the present study were found to have similar understanding of physically disabled children, and they wanted to use this in their real practices.

When asking the question the way teachers’ practice teaching children with physical disabilities, the participants had different stories and from those stories different themes were generated such as teaching methods and teaching materials. It was found that they employed the lecture approach, the group discussion method, the audio-visual method, and the demonstration method, but in their actual teaching, they were only found employing the standard or common methods. This demonstrates the disconnection and discrepancy between what they say and how they actually conduct teaching and learning processes. During observation, it was found that the class teachers utilizing regular teaching materials. Only one of the instructors used audio-visual aids to teach the class. This condition makes it clear that there is no correspondence between theory and practice when it comes to the usage of

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instructional materials. This study might be useful for the teachers those who are involved in the field of special needs education. Likewise this study could be equally useful for the researchers who are interested in conducting the research in the area of physical disabilities.

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