Workshop on Inclusion in Education of Persons with Disabilities in Higher Education (INEDIS)

College of Education and Behavioral Studies, Addis Ababa University

Supported by the APPEAR Programme of the Austrian Development Cooperation on Inclusion in Education of Persons with Disabilities in Higher Education.

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Workshop Summary Report

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Workshop Summary Report

1. Background and Rationale

Recently the number of students with disabilities has shown steady increment in Addis Ababa University (AAU). However, high attrition and dropout rates and low academic achievement have been observed to be the common experiences of students with disabilities at the University. The traditional ways of teaching and learning, provision of services, lack of awareness and prevailing unfavorable attitudes towards students with disabilities (SWDs) seem to profoundly affect the success of students with disabilities in higher education institutions. A significant number of students with disabilities is struggling to cope with the challenges and demands of higher education institutions in Addis Ababa University.

Addis Ababa University has recently embarked on different disability related initiatives in order to help SWDs succeed in their education. Recognizing the seriousness of the matter, a team of researchers from the University, in consortium with researchers from two other universities in Ethiopia, has also secured a financial support from the APPEAR Programme of the Austrian Development Cooperation in order to enhance the inclusiveness of the teaching learning and services provision for students with disabilities in Addis Ababa University through research, training, and dissemination. As one of its core activities, the AAU team has conducted a baseline survey on the status of the inclusion of students with disabilities in the teaching, learning as well as services provision in six colleges of the University. Thus, this workshop was organized to share and deliberate on the findings of the baseline research conducted about the status of inclusion of SWDs in the six colleges of AAU. In order to make the workshop more comprehensive two other studies conducted by other researchers in AAU about SWDs and their experiences were invited and presented.

2. Workshop Objective

The workshop was organized mainly for two major purposes:

- to enhance the awareness of the participants about inclusion of students with disabilities in AAU;
- to present and deliberate on the findings of the survey to participants drawn from the six colleges that were included in the study;
- to get input on the inclusive education guideline developed by the INEDIS team.

3. Participants and workshop themes

A total of 46 participants (academic staff and key administrators), out of the expected 60, drawn from six colleges of AAU included in the survey (Colleges of Education and Behavioral Studies, Law and Governance Studies, Social Sciences, Languages and Humanities, Natural Sciences, Engineering) took part in the workshop. Three papers were presented in the workshop. Two of the papers were invited by the research group. The first one was focusing on system level barriers in the inclusion of students with disabilities in AAU and the other one was about the lived experiences of blind students in AAU. The third paper was the survey conducted by the INEDIS team of AAU. Four major points were the focus of the workshop; attitude towards students with disabilities and the perception of instructors of students with disabilities, teaching and learning practices, service provision, and accessibility. The workshop was held for three days from January 11th 2018 to January 14th 2018 at Adama town.

4. Workshop opening and introduction

Dr. Yirgashewa, the team leader of the AAU INEDIS project and facilitator of the event, has thanked the participants for coming and briefly introduced the workshop schedule. She also mentioned that the INEDIS project includes a consortium of three Ethiopian Universities and the University of Vienna. She also further described that the four Universities are supported by APPEAR (Austrian Partnership Programme in Higher Education and Research for Development).

Dr. Yirgashewa invited Dr. Tsegay Aregay, Dean of the College of Education and Behavioral Studies to deliver a welcoming speech. Dr. Tsegay on his speech warmly welcomed the participants and acknowledged the support from APPEAR and assistance of the University of Vienna that helps improving educational provision for students with disabilities and to promote inclusive education service in Addis Ababa University. Dr. Tsegaye, then invited Professor Zerihun Woldu, a Director for Research and Technology Transfer of Addis Ababa University to deliver an opening speech.

Dr. Yirgashewa Bekele introducing the workshop program and Dr. Tsegaye Aregay delivering a welcoming speech.

Professor Zerihun, in his opening speech, has touched the fact that AAU has a vision of becoming one of the best 10 research Universities in Africa by 2027. The realization of such a vision requires the admission and education of students with disabilities at Addis Ababa University. To this effect, the University has admitted and educated students with special needs for years now. He also mentioned that this workshop is timely and essential for it builds that capacity of AAU in responding to the needs of students with disabilities attending the University. Finally, he thanked the Austrian government and APPEAR for generously supporting the research and training in Ethiopia and he also mentioned that his University is committed to offer support to the same effect.

Professor Zerihun Woldu providing opening speech

5. Presentations and Deliberations

Presentation I: System Level Barriers in Higher Education for the Inclusion of SWDs

The first presentation was by Tewodros Getachew (a PhD candidate at University of Vienna). The title of the presentation was "System level barriers in Higher Education" which is extracted from his dissertation research.

Using a grounded theory approach, Tewodros began his presentation with questions such as: What are barriers for learning? What are learning tasks? The participants reflected on the questions and started a discussion. Tewodros, on his side has described that learning tasks include reading, following lectures, participation in academic activities, etc. Tewodros, on his research stated that sources of learning barriers for students with disabilities emanated from:

● Traditional way of teaching and learning practices, test administration, assessment (the physical environment and locations and timing).

● Learning expectations: students are expected to look for readers, and other assistants on their own which also expose them to an extra burden.

● Provision of learning inputs: the inputs for leaning on the part of the institutions are far below their expectations and the requirement needed.

Presentation by Mr. Tewodros

Presentation II: Experiences of Students with Disabilities at Addis Ababa University: A Focus on Blind Students

The second presentation was by Biniam Amedebirahn, a person with visual impairment who has graduated from the Department of Special Needs Education of Addis Ababa University. The title of his presentation was "Experiences of Student's with Disabilities in Addis Ababa University" which was a research based content. According to Biniam, barriers to learning at AAU include:

- Restricted choice of stream (fields of studies),

  The environment is discouraging for students with disabilities to choose the fields that fit their interest which has implications for their future career,

  Unresponsive curriculum, barely adapted to their learning needs,

  Inadequacy on service delivery at various levels for students with disabilities and shortage of facilities, hence students with disabilities often search for departments that offer better resources.

- Shortage of readers and assistants

  He mentioned that additionally to the fact that the available readers are not good readers they hardly understand scientific jargon,

  Fees for readers are unaffordable,

  Readers are not ready to sit for longer hours during exams,

Exam venues: corridors and unconformable places,

Insufficient time allotment for examinations,

Poor building directory (not in Braille).

- Students coping mechanisms:

Accepting the challenges and pursuing their vision,

Biniam suggested some points:

- Revising the curriculum

- Awareness creation for the key stakeholders

- Making the students part of the solution

- Creating conducive educational settings

- Building their confidence by offering the required service

Biniam Amdebrehan's presentation

Presentation III: The current situation of students with disabilities in Addis Ababa University

The third presentation was by Dr. Alemayehu T/Mariam and the title of his presentation was, "The current situation of students with disabilities at Addis Ababa University." Dr Alemayehu presented the findings of the survey conducted by the INEDIS team of AAU.

He began his presentation by noting that inclusion is an overarching concept;

It is assumed that all human beings can learn despite their unique contexts, challenges, and individual differences. He stated that humans learn through senses and diversity is at stake when we talk about inclusive education.

He presented a detailed concept on inclusive education, laws, policy and international as well as national commitments. Dr. Alemayehu has further spoken about inclusion in higher education and the challenges on its implementation and the hindrance on the success of University students with disabilities. He stated the challenges in higher education:

- Wrong perceptions about students with disabilities
- Lack of reasonable accommodation
- Inaccessible physical and social environments
- Poor service delivery at various offices
- Negative perception about their learning potentials
- Some faculty members rarely allow audio taping, nor offer them soft copies or other mechanisms
- In the context where a sign language interpreter is unavailable, teaching involves presentations unsupported with verbal articulations.

He also presented the challenges at Department levels. The identification of learning needs is quite rare and there is little support from the departments.

In addition to the lack of accommodative communication systems, buildings and learning facilities are not accessible. What is more, these students enjoy less social interaction with other students. Additionally to the fact that accessibility through a ramp is not sufficient, they get less service at the libraries than other students.

Dr. Alemayehu described that with all the barriers he underlined that there are opportunities to be used in providing inclusive education in higher education. He said, in spite the innumerable challenges for students with disabilities, there are ample opportunities as well. These include:

- Policy and legal provisions

- ESDPs(I-IV) (Education Sector Development Programs)

- Growth and Transformation Program TP1 and GTP2

- Ethiopian Special Needs Professional Association initiated job description for SNE professionals

- Higher Education proclamation 650/2009

- Master Plan of Inclusive Education (2016)

After the presentations, there was a discussion session where various issues were raised by the participants. Questions and answers session; major points raised included;

- Tewodros' presentation focuses on classroom situations, but what about institutional barriers?

- Is it a responsibility or generosity to help students with disabilities?

- There is no obligation on the part of faculty members to support students with disabilities. Even those who want to support, they lack the skills to support these students.

- It is an outstanding issue that inclusive education and awareness creation be provided at all levels and should include people outside the university.

- I have a positive attitude towards persons with disabilities but I really do not know how to support them.

- It is a good idea to empower the students' service of AAU so that it can function fully and help addressing the needs of students with disabilities.

- It is a good idea to encourage the idea of volunteerism so the support can be easily offered.

- Instructional strategies needs to be befitting, but how?

- The studies could have included the views of faculty members for balanced presentation of evidences.

Dr. Yekoyealem Desie facilitating the discussion

Participant's suggestions at the end of the discussion of the session:

- Sitting arrangement for the deaf students should be reconsidered in such a way that these students can benefit from the instructors' body language.
- In the absence of professional translators, it is advisable to assign some note takers so that it can be duplicated and shared with the students.
- New teachers should be offered orientation about deaf students.

Presentation IV: Framework of the Guideline for Inclusive Education at AAU

The second day focused on the details of issues of disabilities and education for students with visual impairment, hearing impairment, behavioral difficulties and physical disabilities. The draft guideline was presented for discussion and comments.

Dr. Alemayehu Tekelemariam on his presentation has noted that:

- Disability is an evolving concept.
- Impairment refers to functional limitation.
- The environment is a more disabling factor.

The assumption of the manual is to push forward so that the university environment accommodates their needs but we cannot argue that people adapt themselves to the environment.

The objectives of the manual include:

- Creating awareness
- Promoting positive attitudes
- Adapting polices

The manual has also included the outcomes related to the objectives. In this connection, some challenges to implement policies and laws have been identified in the manual.

Addressing their needs:

- Access to physical facilities
- Curriculum adaptation
- Ecological adaptation

Reflections on Dr. Alemayehu's presentation

● It has been stated that faculty members have negative attitudes towards disabilities. But this claim rarely holds true as some faculty members feel rather they have not enough skills to support these students.

● How does your Department work with the different associations? Have you piloted this draft with students?

● It is also recommended that every faculty member makes some reflections so that the curriculum can be improved from time to time.

● It is also advisable to learn from the experiences of secondary schools that have been educating person with disabilities.

● It is advisable that faculty members refrain from undermining or exaggerating the academic potentials of these students.

● In terms of the provision of resources, ICT and computer related facilities are preferred in the future.

● Students with disabilities need to acquire cyber literacy from primary school onwards.

● Streaming students into different fields of studies should be reconsidered, provided with the required resources and technologies.

● The study result should be disseminated to other stakeholders, particularly, university leadership.

● It is also a good idea to see the issue of disability as it intersects with culture and hence sensitizing the community through workshops could help.

● There needs to be a guideline that allows students to audio tape lectures with due guarantee that it can only be used for academic purposes.

● The center of disability at AAU needs to be strengthened.

● The manual needs to offer disability specific guidance.

● Inclusive education has been viewed as a challenge for education institutions and most education leaders are reluctant to launch its activities.

● Higher education institutions are not ready to fully accommodate students with disabilities.

● Some welcome students with disabilities regardless of the poor provisions they have.

● Students with disabilities are facing many challenges in Ethiopian higher education institutions.

● Among these challenges are the unfriendly instructors' approaches.

● Wrong perceptions of students with disabilities.

● Lack of reasonable accommodation.

● Inaccessible physical and social environments.

● Poor services delivery of university's various offices such as students' services, departments, library and registration offices at the college and at the center.

Dr. Alemayehu 's presentation

Group Activities

Following these reflections, workshop participants were put into three groups to discuss and come up with reflections and suggestions that improve the provision of inclusive education at Addis Ababa University:

1. Group one discussed on the teaching learning practice at Addis Ababa University, good experiences, challenges and on what to be done to improve education services for University students with visual impairment attending Addis Ababa University.

2. Group two discussed on the teaching learning practice at Addis Ababa University, good experiences, challenges and on what to be done to improve education services for University students with hearing impairment attending Addis Ababa University.

3. Group three discussed on the teaching learning practice at Addis Ababa University, good experiences, challenges and on what to be done to improve education services for University students with physical impairment and behavioral challenge attending Addis Ababa University.

Discussion points

- How do instructors perceive students with disabilities?

- Does the teaching learning accommodate students with disabilities?

- Do departments provide supportive services for students with disabilities?

- Does the students' service and administration support students with disabilities?

- Do the libraries accommodate services for students with disabilities?

- Does the registration accommodate services for students with disabilities?

- Is the physical environment accessible to students with disabilities?

- What considerations are vital to improve the educational environment?

The participants were informed to select a group chairman for each group and report their discussion points, points of concerns and suggestions.

Group discussion

Group task presentation, discussion and finalizing the workshop

The group working on visual impairment issues has identified that although students with visual impairment have positive attitudes towards their learning, faculty members and other staff members usually do not properly consider them in planning, creating conducive learning environments, and these students are often neglected in the statistics and data of the University. As the way forward, the group suggested identifying the pronouncing barriers in the University that impede the success on education of students with visual impairment, adapting the curriculum including teaching and assessment, service provision both materials and social

service and above all awareness raising training for all stakeholders and faculty members at large was recommended.

Group work presentations

Secondly, the group that worked on education provision for students with hearing impairment described the gap on the University system that includes barriers related to admission; placement and offering tailored support which are rarely adapted to the needs of these students. Some fields of studies are not open to students with hearing impairment as there is little offer in terms of support and service in the University. As a way forward, it has been suggested that it is high time to adapt the curriculum specially by designing teaching and assessment systems that is befitting for students with hearing impairment in addition to offering the required support by University which also includes access to sign language interpreters in the classroom and administration services.

The third group brainstormed over the issues of students with mobility challenges and behavioral problems. The group has presented the physical barrier in accessing classrooms, registration and other service buildings. The group also identified issues related to students with behavior challenges, e.g. that there is a widespread lack of knowledge about the needs of these students and the students are misjudged most of the time. In response to these challenges of attitudes and commitment, it has been suggested that curriculum adaptation needs to include disability responsive pedagogy, varied learning assessment techniques, need-based services, and above all raising the awareness of all stakeholders at large were suggested as a way forward.

Major issues pointed out during presentations:

- Striving towards inclusive education is a universally accepted goal
- A person cannot be excluded from the education system on the basis of disability
- The goal needs to be providing good quality education for all….
- ...maximizing academic and social participation and success
- ...where support required facilitating effective education which is given within the general education system
- Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity
- Equality of opportunity
- Accessibility
- Equality between men and women
- Respect for the evolving capacities of students with disabilities and
- Respect for the right of students with disabilities to preserve their identities
- Adequate access to classrooms must be provided:
  - Ramps and lifts
  - Adapted toilets
  - Adequate space for wheelchairs to be maneuvered
- Why Are Adaptations Necessary?
- Students with varying levels of abilities cannot, and should not, be instructed in the same manner.
- Without adaptations, some students would never be challenged, while others may never experience success.

6. Way forward

The participants appreciate the provision of the awareness raising workshop and they disclosed that they got answers which were not clear for them during the previous experience they had on provision of education for students with disabilities at University level. The participants suggested that such kind of awareness raising workshops need to reach all academic staff so that even a single student with disability should not be neglected in the classroom. The participants also underlined the importance of the inclusive education guideline to be finalized and disseminated across all Colleges of the University so that the academic staff gets the opportunity to read and teach or work accordingly.

Some of the participants of the workshop