

# Participation of Students with Disabilities in Physical Activities: An Attitudes of University Students

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## Abstract

*Attitudes play a contributing role in inclusion. Negative attitude is a leading cause of exclusion of students with disability to participate them in physical activity. Objectives of this study were to assess the level of attitudes of college students towards participation of students with disabilities in physical activities and to analyze attitudes of sample students by gender, religion, caste, marital status, and previous contact with people with disabilities. The study was descriptive in nature. The study comprises a sample of 387 students from Tribhuvan University (TU), using convenience sampling technique. Data were collected by survey method including questionnaire including demographic variables and the scale to measure attitude. The study found that 99% respondents expressed negative attitudes towards participation of students with disabilities. The findings of study point to the need to modifying students' attitude or the need to create awareness program to facilitate social acceptance of individual differences in the society.*

**Keywords:** *Attitudes, disabilities, participation, physical activities, college students*

## Introduction

Participation in physical activities is an integral part of human life. The person who exercises regularly lives longer and maintains a healthy life. Physical activity is necessary for a healthy body. Nowadays, physical activity is a significant part of physical education and it plays a vital role in the overall development. Physical activities have numerous health benefits. (Pahlm et al., 2013). A study by Pahlm et al. among adolescents have found that participants expressed positive attitudes towards physical activity. Participation of individuals with disabilities in physical activity has a tradition of over 50 years (Hutzler,2003). World Health Organization 2020 guidelines recommend that physical activity is regarded as safe and helpful for those with disabilities who have not any complications (Bull et al.,2020). According to Roldan et al. (2021), the students without special education needs (SEN) gain the satisfaction from participating in interactive learning activities with peers with SEN in various ways. Students learn to respect and behave better, acknowledge differences, and their abilities, thereby fostering new friendships;

they gain the satisfaction in helping those with special education needs from participation in activities. Hwang and Evans (2011) conducted a study in which teachers believed that inclusion has social benefits for students with disabilities. The constitution of Nepal defines a person with a disability as a person who is mentally or physically incapable to lead a normal life (Thapaliya, 2016). People's attitudes towards people with disability may be either favorable (positive) or unfavorable (negative).

An attitude is not an inborn quality. It is everything in learning. An attitude is generally defined in diverse ways. So, there is a debate about precise definitions. An attitude can be defined as a positive or negative evaluation of people, objects, event, and activities, ideas or just anything in your environment. In the words of Early and Chaiken (1993), attitude is a "psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor" (p.1). "An attitude is an individual's viewpoint or disposition towards a particular object (a person, a thing, an idea; Gall et al., 1996, p. 273)". An attitude consists of cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. The cognitive component consists of knowledge and thoughts about the causes of the behavior in children with disabilities in an inclusive setting. The affective component comprises cognitive understanding of disability that can motivate people to get involved in working with those with disability, or produce feelings that could cause them to exclude those with a disability from typical activities. The behavioral component consists a tendency to behave or respond in a specific manner when in contact with children with disabilities (Leatherman & Niemeyer, 2005). Attitude has a great role in the concept of inclusion. Attitudinal barriers are one of the most significant barriers(Ahmad, 2012).Negative attitude and lack of knowledge are considered common barriers in participating of persons with disabilities in sport (Eminović, 2009).Multi-factorial set of barriers are the hindrances that influence the degree of involvement of people with disabilities in physical activity(Rimmer, 2004; Jaarsma et al.,2014).Students unsupportive attitudes toward student with special needs is a major barriers to inclusion (Amr et al., 2016).

## Literature Review

Many studies (such as Hwang & Evans,2011; Elhoweis & Alsheikh, 2004; McGreogor, 2003; Hutzler, 2003; Boyle et al., 2013; Al-zyoudi, 2006; Alghazo, 2002) have studied attitudes towards inclusion and the results vary. In the review below some of the studies referred to have used the word "participation", while others have used the phrase inclusion. In spite of using different terminology, they all seem to refer to a situation in which a class, a college, a school, or an educational process tries to attempt the needs of people with disabilities. The word participation is used in this study. People's attitude towards participation differs across the education field. Previous studies of attitudes towards inclusion have given contradictory results. Some researchers reported negative, while others are positive. Hwang and Evans (2011) showed that general education teachers expressed slightly more positive than negative attitudes towards

inclusion, where 41.37% were in support of the concept inclusion, while 34.47% perceived it negatively and one fourth were neutral. This study indicated that more than half of the teachers considered that inclusion brings social benefits. Similarly, Elhoweis and Alsheikh (2004), and Sharma (2019) showed that teachers expressed their positive attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classroom. Cayer (2019) examined high school teachers' attitudes towards inclusion were more positive than negative. Similarly, another research conducted by Alghazo (2002) that result showed that educators agreed to include students with learning disabilities but not for students with mental retardation. They in general, had less comfort including them. Amr et al., (2016) showed that teachers revealed unsupportive attitudes toward of students with special needs. Most of the studies showed that teachers' attitude regarding inclusion is positive. But gender differences appear in the studies, with female being more inclusive, compared to their male colleagues (Boyle et al., 2013; Al-Zyouidi, 2006). In contrast to Boyle et al., 2013 and Al-zyouidi ,2006; conducted that showed male teachers were slightly inclusive, compared to female ones (Sharma, 2019). Likewise, students' attitudes towards those with disabilities vary. Olalely et al.(2012) found that although all students were positive, the female students found to have higher positive attitudes than male students. McGreogor (2003) and Hutzler (2003) come up with the conclusion that attitudes of female students had higher positive than their male contemporaries towards inclusion. SwaimandMorgan (2001) revealed that students had the least favorable attitude towards peers. Voeltz(1980) in her study on children's attitudes toward handicapped peers, found that the students had accepting attitudes.

### ***Research Gap***

Participation in physical activities is essential part for education. Everyone has right to participation in physical activity program. It is necessary for a healthy body, mind, spiritual, moral and social development. It is not only people without disabilities who benefits from participation but also people those with disabilities. It is platform where people with and without disabilities can share their emotions, and feelings. It is the way of social inclusion. Students learn to respect and behave better, acknowledge differences, and their abilities, thereby fostering new friendships; they gain the satisfaction in helping those with special education needs from participation in activities (Molina et al., 2021).

The attitudes towards participation of students with disabilities vary from individual to individual. An attitude regarding the person with disability is a major area for research. Several studies such as Alghazo (2002), Olalely et al. (2012), Swami and Morgan (2001), andVoeltz (1980) have been conducted to examine attitudes towards people with disabilities. Some of the studies were done previously but they all were not focused on college students' attitudes towards participation of students with disabilities in physical activities. Even in the context of our country Nepal, there is a lack of research on the students' attitudes towards participation in physical activities of students with disabilities in physical activities.

Most of the previous studies have concentrated on the attitudes of teachers rather than college students. This research aim is investigating college students' attitudes towards participation of students with disabilities in physical activities.

### ***Research Objectives***

The general objective of this study was to assess the attitudes of college students towards participation of students with disabilities in physical activities; the specific objectives of the study were as follows:

- To determine the level of attitudes of college students towards participation of students with disabilities in physical activities.
- To analyze the attitudes of sample of students by gender, religion, caste, marital status, and previous contact with people with disabilities.

### **Methods**

#### ***Research Design***

The study was descriptive in nature. It was quantitative and based on paradigm of positivism.

#### ***Population and Sample***

The populations of this study were the university/ college students who are currently running in Master of Arts degree. The study comprises a sample of 387 students from T.U. constituent campus / colleges located in Kathmandu Valley made by convenient method.

#### ***Sources of Data***

Primary data were collected to meet the objectives of this study. The primary data were collected from running master degree students under Tribhuvan University.

#### ***Tools***

An adapted version of the attitude scale developed and used in Spain by Vaillo et al (2016) was used in data collection. It consists of 17 items which are grouped into two subscales: cognitive perception (7 items) and behavioral readiness (10 items). This tool was in English and hence was translated into Nepali language by experts with the help of two folded methods, namely (i) word by word translation, and (ii) free translation. This standardized tool was chosen because it was designed especially for people with disabilities.

#### ***Procedures***

Permission to contact the students was initially obtained from the department head/coordinator of the respective colleges or campuses. The researcher visited the selected campuses and explicitly described the purpose of the visit and made a request for essential support in collecting data.

Before data was collected from each respondent on the basis of information and explanation given by them, researcher explained about ethical consideration.

## Results and Discussion

The profile of participants is given in the table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Demographic Profile of Participants*

| Variables   | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| <b>Sex</b>  |           |            |
| Male  | 125       | 32.3       |
| Female  | 262       | 67.7       |
| <b>Religion</b>                                       |           |            |
| Hindu   | 313       | 80.9       |
| Buddhist  | 41        | 10.6       |
| Christian   | 24        | 6.2        |
| Kirat   | 9         | 2.3        |
| <b>Caste</b>  |           |            |
| Khash (Brahman, Chhettri)                             | 235       | 60.7       |
| Janajati  | 144       | 37.3       |
| Dalit   | 4         | 1.0        |
| Madhesi   | 4         | 1.0        |
| <b>Marital Status</b>                                 |           |            |
| Married   | 123       | 31.8       |
| Unmarried   | 264       | 68.2       |
| <b>Major Subject</b>                                  |           |            |
| Sociology   | 223       | 57.6       |
| Psychology  | 105       | 27.2       |
| Rural Development                                     | 59        | 15.2       |
| <b>Previous Contact with People with Disabilities</b> |           |            |
| Yes   | 272       | 70.3       |
| No  | 115       | 29.7       |

From the profile of participant in Table 1, it can be deduced that most of the respondents were female i.e., 262 (67.7%) of the total respondents which is the highest percentage, while male respondents were 125 i.e., 32.3%. The variables in Table 1.0 show that 80.9% of the total respondents were Hindu, 10.6% were Buddhists, 6.2% were Christian, and 2.3% were Kirat.

It can be deduced therefore that the majority of the respondents were Hindu. The responses in Table 1 show that a majority of the respondents were Brahmin/Chettri which holds 60.7%, 37.3% of the respondents were Janajati, 1.0% were Madhesi, and 1.0% were Kirati.

Table 1 show that 68.2% of the total respondents were unmarried, 31.8% were married. It can be deduced therefore that the majority of the respondents were unmarried. Table 1 show that major subject of the total respondents was Sociology constitute 57.6%, 27.2% were Psychology and 15.2% were Rural development. The responses in Table 1 show that they had contact with people with disabilities i.e., 70.3%, while 29.7% respondents did not have their contact with people with disabilities.

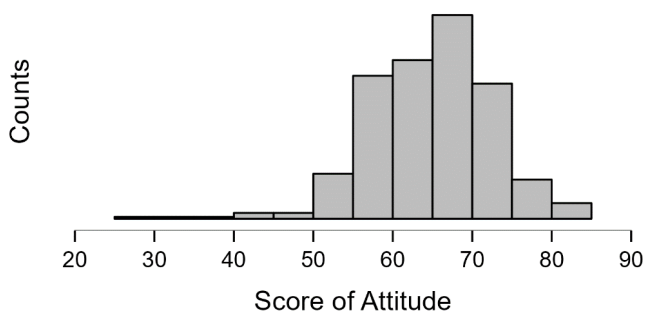
The scale had the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .772. So, the scale can be said to have acceptable reliability. Table 2 shows the summary of scores in attitude. The mean score of attitude is 65.3.

|          | Mean | Median | SD   | Minimum | Maximum | Q <sub>1</sub> | Q <sub>3</sub> |
|----------|------|--------|------|---------|---------|----------------|----------------|
| Attitude | 65.3 | 66     | 7.89 | 25      | 85      | 60.0           | 70.5           |
| Age      | 27.1 | 26     | 4.35 | 22      | 48      | 24.0           | 29.0           |

The scores of participant on the attitude scale was as shown in figure below: Majority of the participants scored in the range of 55-75.

**Figure 1**

*Distribution of Attitude Scores*



Taking 42.5 (the median value of total score possible) as the cutoff score, almost all students were found to have the negative attitude.

**Table 3**

*Frequencies of Types of Attitude*

| Type of Attitude                 | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Positive (scores: 42.5 or below) | 4         | 1.0        |
| Negative (scores: above 42.5)    | 383       | 99.0       |

T tests revealed that attitude significantly depends on sex but not on marital status or previous contact with people with disability at .05 level of significance.

**Table 4**

*T Tests for Independent Means*

|                  | t     | df  | P    |
|------------------|-------|-----|------|
| Sex              | -2.45 | 385 | 0.02 |
| Marital status   | -1.98 | 384 | 0.05 |
| Previous Contact | 0.22  | 383 | 0.83 |

One-way ANOVA tests revealed that attitude does not significantly depend on religion, caste, and subject major at .05 level of significance.

|          | F   | df <sub>1</sub> | df <sub>2</sub> | P    |
|----------|-----|-----------------|-----------------|------|
| Religion | 2.6 | 3               | 29              | 0.07 |
| Caste    | 1.2 | 3               | 8.3             | 0.37 |
| Subject  | 1.5 | 2               | 131             | 0.23 |

The findings of the present study demonstrated that college students expressed negative attitude towards participation of students with disabilities in physical activities. In other words, they favored more in exclusion rather than inclusion. Attitude influences behavior including inclusion of students with disabilities. Previous studies have shown that negative attitude affecting inclusion whereas positive attitude benefits students with and without disabilities.

Even though majority of the previous studies indicated that people expressed more accepting attitude towards inclusion (e.g., Hwang & Evans, 2011; Elhoweis & Alsheikh, 2004), the present findings demonstrated negative attitudes regarding participation of students with disabilities in physical activities.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The result revealed that college students in Nepal have negative attitude about including disabled students in physical activities. This clearly shows their lack of awareness about special abilities of disabled students. Attitude is an important aspect of students' participation. Positive attitudes motivate and encourage students to participate in physical activities whereas negative attitudes create barriers to inclusion. This can have many consequences. Many of the college students become teachers in future and their attitude can determine inclusion or exclusion decision of students with disabilities, not only in the physical activities but also other curricular and extracurricular programs. The college students should be made aware about the special abilities of disabled students. Their disability in one organ may not inhibit people with disability in involvement of physical activities. The interventions to sensitize college students and general people are needed and these can be initiated by colleges, municipalities or non-governmental organizations.

The result of the current study aligns with Polikandrioti's (2020) findings, indicating that students had more negative attitudes towards People with Disabilities. The attitudes towards the people with disabilities often shows inconsistent, and varied outcomes in previous research. This may be because studies have been conducted in diverse populations, places, and cultural settings. For example, majority of the previous studies indicated that people expressed more accepting attitude towards inclusion (e.g., Hwang & Evans, 2011; Elhoweis & Alsheikh, 2004).

Participation in physical activities is recommended for all people not only because it is good for their health, but also because it plays an important role in preventing social exclusion and can contribute is social inclusion. Thus, it is essential for the citizens of Nepal's government to grasp the significance of participating in physical activities.

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