

Participation of students with learning disabilities in higher education: Implications from a survey (0032)

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Part 1 Abstract (150 word)

Post-secondary students with disabilities have been accommodated to varying degrees under the premises of inclusion and social justice in the West. The reform policies for higher education in Hong Kong call for a diversified, massified, and inclusive system in which students can select their own path of learning based on their different aptitudes and abilities under the belief that all students have vast potentials, and education enables them to fully develop. However, a survey of the 10 universities using open-ended questions in Hong Kong revealed that none of them has a functional system to identify these students and accommodate their needs. Implications of the survey results include the need for a definitive policy mandate on providing reasonable accommodation for students with specific learning disabilities and consider the legalization of such provisions for these students. (134)

Part 2 Outline (1000 words)

Participation of students with disabilities in higher education has been a steady trend after World War II in the US. Massification and diversification of higher education began around the 1960s with the global economic growth. Nevertheless, issues related to students with disabilities in higher education are mostly discussed in the context of legal rights for equal access and reasonable accommodation. The move and policies to facilitate a trend from an elite to a mass higher education system are however closely associated with the rapid increase of the number of students with disabilities in higher education. Not only do the flexible and multichannelled system increase the enrolment of students from all walks of life but also those with disabilities. Students with specific learning disabilities (SLD) constitute more than 2% of the total U.S. undergraduate population (Vickers, 2010).

Following the implementation of the inclusion policy and accommodation provisions in 1997, students with SLD have been given more support at school levels in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, Education Commission (2000) also introduced massive reforms to overhaul the entire education system in Hong Kong. The reform policies for higher education call for a diversified and flexible system in which students can select their own path of learning based

on their different aptitudes and abilities under the belief that all students have vast potentials (Education Commission, 2000). Universities are recommended to overhaul their existing admission mechanism to give due consideration to students' all-round performance and the concept of community colleges has been introduced to offer alternative study routes.

The inclusion movement has brought a great deal of awareness to the challenges confronted by students with SLD. Both the accommodation provisions at the school levels and the parental awareness of their children's rights to an appropriate education have contributed to recent attention and demands from special educators and parents on accommodation provisions for students with SLD at the post-secondary level in Hong Kong. The call for a diversified and inclusive higher education system should have been a perfect ally to the inclusion movement to increase the participation of students with SLD. Nevertheless, no apparent changes have been identified in the higher education sector to facilitate the enrolment of students with SLD. Because of the lack of policy mandates to support these students, data on if and how these students are accommodated are scarce. In 2009, the Hong Kong Society of Child Neurology & Developmental Pediatrics (HKCNDP), a medical professional advocacy group, and Hong Kong Association for Specific Learning Disabilities (HKASLD), a parent organization, jointly conducted a survey of the 10 universities in an attempt to understand if they have established systems of identification and accommodation and how the universities are providing accommodations. This paper analyzes the survey results to reveal current support conditions at the higher education sector and implications.

Current Support Conditions Based on the Survey

Sent to presidents and deans of students of each university, the survey of the HKCNDP and HKASLD used open-ended questions to solicit information on support policies and measures, staff awareness, and monitoring procedures of each university. The survey results are summarized as follows: (a) all universities have a unit responsible for equal opportunities but did not give information as to whether there is a clear policy to accommodate students with SLD (as such, no reply was given on whether teaching/administrative staff and students were aware of the policy); (b) there was not a unit designated to serve students with disabilities; (c) three universities would provide information on symptoms of SLD, impact of SLD on university study, procedures for getting the necessary assessment/support and tips on study/exam skills to students with suspected or known SLD; (d) no clear policy and/or procedures were established for accommodation; (e) no reply was given on whether a mechanism to resolve disagreement between accommodations requested by a student with SLD and accommodation provided by staff; and (f) less than 10 students were registered as having SLD in all of the 10 universities.

Implications

The SLD has been recently recognized as a category of disability under the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (Equal Opportunity Commission, 2010) and under the Rehabilitation Program Plan of Labor and Welfare Bureau (2008). A recent local research study on SLD has found a population prevalence of 9.7-12.6% in Hong Kong (Chan, Ho, Tsang, Lee, & Chung, 2007). However, only a disproportionately small fraction of students with SLD is identified in the Hong Kong higher education institutions.

In recent years, students with exceptional abilities demonstrated in early ages have been known to gain early enrolment to universities as reported in Hong Kong newspapers. Parents are known to urge their children to compete for places in secondary schools with good public exam results in order to gain access to top universities. On the other hand, the survey results show no clear policy, commitment, and/or practices to accommodate students with SLD. The overall picture reflects that the elitist tradition of the existing higher education sector remains strong. Despite an apparent policy trend toward an inclusive higher education system, the government has not considered the participation of students with SLD. Consequently, local universities have yet to make a paradigm shift so that its operation, admission requirements, and teaching and learning are made possible reasonable accommodations for diverse student needs.

Some countries, such as the US, have legal mandates to ensure support for students with SLD and developed universities with a strong focus on accommodating students with SLD (Concord Special Education Parent Advisory Committee, 2010). Having a system to accommodate students with disabilities is an indicator of operating a massified and diversified education system. The survey data suggest that the Hong Kong higher education sector is in its infancy at best with regard to admitting and accommodating students with SLD. International experiences suggest that a definitive policy mandate is necessary and a legal mandate preferable to facilitate the development of a truly inclusive higher education system. (978)

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Abstract No. 0032

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Summary Post-secondary students with disabilities have been accommodated to varying degrees under the premises of inclusion and social justice in the West. The reform policies for higher education in Hong Kong call for a diversified, massified, and inclusive system in which students can select their own path of learning based on their different aptitudes and abilities under the belief that all students have vast potentials, and education enables them to fully develop. However, a survey of the 10 universities using open-ended questions in Hong Kong revealed that none of them has a functional system to identify these students and accommodate their needs. Implications of the survey results include the need for a definitive policy mandate on providing reasonable accommodation for students with specific learning disabilities and consider the legalization of such provisions for these students.

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Approval Confirm

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considered workshop	Yes
AV requirements	Computer projection,Internet Access
Biography	<p>Prof. Kim Fong Poon-McBrayer has been an educator for over 30 years. She was a school teacher in Hong Kong and the U.S. for 10 years, working with students of diverse needs. She taught in universities in the United States [Monmouth University], Hong Kong [University of Hong Kong], and Singapore [Nanyang Technological University (NTU)], and now in the Hong Kong Institute of Education. She has been a visiting professor to the University of Brunei and University of St. Joseph in Macau. She has served in numerous capacities in international and local professional organizations and been an invited speaker in many conferences. She has published books, book chapters, and many articles in a variety of topics related to special education and diversity needs in international, regional, and local journals with a particular interest in issues relevant to learning disabilities and policies for inclusive education.</p>
Only submission	Yes
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