

Review of: "Challenges of Learners with Disabilities in Open Schools in India"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Peer review of "Challenges of Learners with Disabilities in Open Schools in India" by Dr. Sunita Joshi Kathuria

This is a very interesting article which deals with a very important topic – education and disability and the provisions that need to be made in order to provide equity of access. This related specifically to "open schools" - a system that needed defining, to a non-Indian reader at least. The introduction set the scene nicely and included helpful graphics around educational costs and the major challenges facing learners with disabilities. The main aim of the study was, however, rather too broadly and somewhat vague. It was: "to improve current practices." The study was carried out in two parts: first to explore the challenges faced by a cohort of disabled students, and second to provide and test an intervention programme, based on "universal design" (a term that needed definition and explanation).

The "Statement of the problem", which was "To study the challenges of the Learners with Disabilities enrolled in Open Schools in India" read more like an 'aim'. In fact, the problem might instead have referred to the under-performance (or alienation, or poor attendance etc.) of students with disabilities, or the lack of provision of resources or adequate teacher training. "The challenges" also appeared, more appropriately, as a research question. I felt that the research objectives (which also included the same sentence about "challenges") were not specific enough, in my view. They should make convert the aims into practical and measurable steps to be taken in addressing (and achieving) them. The population (disabled students at the NIOS) and sample were well-described, but a new heading 'Methods' was required half way through this, where the questionnaire and its format were described and details were given about the control and experimental groups.

The results of the research were well reported, with several important barriers being elicited. However, these related to registration, student support and access to the study centres rather than to the curriculum content. Indeed, even the problem of 'accessing the study material' related to the "proper distribution of study material and delivery of marksheet/certificate" rather than to its format – the focus of part two of the study. Thus, each part of the study seemed complete in itself, with the revised format for the study materials not being created as the result of researching needs, but on unreferenced universal design principles. In fact, no prior research or literature was cited with regard to this phase of the study.

Moving to presentation, format and quality of writing, the English was of a very high standard, albeit with some minor

mistakes. For example: “This study aims to improve the current practices of existing open schools and carried out this research in two phases” is not a sentence. I suggest “This study aims to improve the current practices of existing open schools and was carried out in two phases”.

The tables and figures were helpful, but some standardisation is necessary. The figure on page three is not labelled (although given a title), so that on page 4 labelled figure 1. The “Chapter preview” images on pages 11-15 are not numbered, and the graph on page not numbered or adequately titled (“Control v/s experimental Group” should say e.g. “Test scores compared between the control and experimental group”). By contrast, the tables were all numbered and titled appropriately (although I felt that Table 1 was far too detailed. It would have been better presented graphically, and edited to show only the most important information.

The article was well-referenced , although I felt that with such wide ranging content in the article, a greater number of references was required. Again, some standardisation was required. One citation was to Abdul Ghafar (presumably a fore and surname), another to Tanyanylwa, V (surname and initial, as with most citations in the article), one to Yagya (surname only) and one to A.M. (forename and surname initials?) This inconsistency was evidence in the reference list too. Also, two citations were missing completely (UNESCO, 2018 and 2019). Finally, on this point, web references should follow a conventional (e.g. APA or Harvard) format. Thus <https://www.unicef.org/india/media/1191/file/Making-Schools-Accessible.pdf> should be referenced as:

UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund) (2016) *Making Schools Accessible to Children with Disabilities* Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/india/media/1191/file/Making-Schools-Accessible.pdf> (accessed 08.12.22) (Note that as it was published in 2016, it is not one of the missing references).

In summary, this was a very interesting paper. I feel it would be worthy of publication with the following modifications.

Standardisation of references, citations, figures etc.;

Reformulated problem statements and objectives;

More prior literature referenced in the area of formatting, use of images etc.

In addition, I suggest either explicit acknowledgement in the paper that each part of the study is complete in itself or (although requiring more work) splitting the paper into two articles.

Finally, I do appreciate that needing to address many points can be dispiriting, but I really am only trying to help, and will be happy help guide any amendments.