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To study the impact of Artificial intelligence on Persons with Disabilities accessibility at Higher Education

Dr. Sarita Bajpai

Course Co-ordinator, Shree Dev Special Teacher Training centre, Gulabpura, Rajasthan

Mr. Sarvendra Kumar

Assistant professor, Rajasthan Rehabilitation Research Institute Jamdoli Jaipur, Rajasthan

Abstract

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in higher education has revolutionized learning methodologies, especially for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). This research paper aims to analyze the impact of AI-driven tools and technologies on the accessibility, inclusiveness, and academic performance of PWDs in higher education. The study identifies the role of AI-based assistive technologies, such as speech-to-text converters, screen readers, and intelligent tutoring systems, which have significantly improved the learning experience for students with visual, auditory, cognitive, and mobility impairments. The analysis reveals that AI enhances accessibility by providing customized learning materials and enabling adaptive learning paths, catering to the specific needs of PWDs. Furthermore, AI-powered applications like voice recognition software and predictive text tools promote independent learning and reduce dependency on human assistance. This study also highlights the role of AI in enabling institutions to create a more inclusive academic environment by incorporating features like AI-based predictive analytics for student performance and personalized feedback systems. However, certain challenges persist, such as cost of AI implementation, data privacy issues, and technological resistance from faculty and students. The paper suggests policy-level interventions, increased funding for AI-enabled tools, and the development of more inclusive AI-based platforms as potential solutions to overcome these barriers. The role of government and educational institutions in ensuring equitable access to AI-driven tools for PWDs is emphasized. The findings of this research provide a roadmap for higher education institutions to leverage AI for inclusive education. The study concludes that with appropriate technological, financial, and policy support, AI can bridge the accessibility gap for PWDs

and foster an inclusive and equitable learning environment in higher education.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), Higher Education, Accessibility, Inclusive Education, Adaptive Learning, AI-Driven Tools, Educational Technology.

Introduction

The advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has revolutionized various sectors, including education. The use of AI in education has led to the development of personalized learning systems, intelligent tutoring, and adaptive assessment methodologies. For Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), the role of AI is even more transformative as it provides accessibility solutions that were previously unattainable. Globally, a significant percentage of students in higher education are individuals with disabilities who face challenges in accessing educational resources and participating fully in academic activities. Traditional teaching and learning methods often exclude PwDs due to the lack of necessary infrastructure and assistive technologies. However, AI-driven tools such as screen readers, speech-to-text converters, and AI-based predictive learning models have enhanced educational inclusion.¹

AI has the potential to bridge the gap in higher education accessibility for PwDs by providing customized learning experiences and enabling more inclusive environments. The introduction of AI-powered adaptive learning systems allows students with disabilities to receive educational content tailored to their specific needs. For example, a visually impaired student can access educational material through screen readers and voice assistants, while students with hearing impairments can benefit from speech-to-text transcription services. AI also facilitates personalized learning, where students can learn at their own pace and in a manner that best suits their cognitive and physical abilities. In addition, AI-based predictive analytics allows educators to track the performance of students with disabilities and provide timely interventions to improve their learning outcomes. Moreover, virtual learning assistants can provide continuous support to PwDs, answering their queries and helping them navigate complex learning platforms. Beyond student support, AI also enhances faculty development and administrative decision-making. It assists universities in developing more inclusive admission processes, enabling institutions to support a diverse student population. By integrating AI-driven insights, educational institutions can create more effective policies to improve the overall learning experience for PwDs.²

Accessibility refers to the process of ensuring that individuals, regardless of their abilities, have equal access to education, technology, and other societal resources. For PwDs, accessibility involves creating an inclusive environment where they can engage with educational resources on par with their peers. Accessibility encompasses various aspects, such as physical access, digital access, and cognitive access. Physical access entails removing physical barriers such as inaccessible buildings, classrooms, and libraries. Digital access refers to ensuring that all digital platforms, such as learning management systems (LMS), e-books, and online assessment platforms, are compatible with assistive

technologies like screen readers and text-to-speech (TTS) tools. Cognitive access involves presenting information in formats that are easier to understand, such as simplified text, multimedia content, and interactive learning tools. AI plays a significant role in enhancing accessibility for PwDs. AI-based tools provide real-time language translation, gesture recognition for sign language, and virtual assistants to support the learning process. These AI-driven solutions ensure that educational content is accessible to all students, including those with visual, auditory, and cognitive impairments.³ By facilitating accessibility, AI not only enhances the academic performance of PwDs but also fosters their independence and self-confidence.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to explore the impact of AI on the accessibility of higher education for PwDs. The following objectives guide the research process:

1. To assess the role of AI-driven tools in improving the accessibility of higher education for PwDs.
2. To identify the benefits and challenges associated with the implementation of AI-based accessibility solutions.
3. To explore the role of educational institutions, faculty, and government bodies in promoting the adoption of AI for accessibility.
4. To provide policy recommendations for the effective implementation of AI-based accessibility tools for PwDs in higher education.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the simulation of human intelligence in machines that are designed to think, reason, and learn like humans. AI enables machines to perform cognitive tasks such as problem-solving, decision-making, and learning from experience. AI systems are equipped with algorithms that allow them to learn from data and improve their performance over time. In the context of higher education, AI plays a pivotal role in personalizing learning, enhancing accessibility, and supporting students with disabilities through assistive technologies. The core components of AI that support accessibility in higher education for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) are as follows:⁴

1. Machine Learning (ML): ML algorithms enable systems to learn from past data and predict outcomes. For PwDs, ML-driven tools like adaptive learning platforms and speech-to-text converters provide tailored learning experiences.
2. Natural Language Processing (NLP): NLP enables AI systems to understand, interpret, and respond to human language. For students with hearing impairments, NLP-based speech-to-text applications convert spoken language into text, facilitating learning.
3. Computer Vision (CV): CV allows machines to understand and analyze visual data. Image recognition systems and gesture-based navigation assist visually impaired students by providing them with navigational support and access to visual learning materials.

4. **Deep Learning:** Deep learning involves neural networks that mimic the human brain's structure. It enhances speech recognition software and real-time translation tools, which are essential for students with hearing and speech impairments.
5. **Robotics and IoT (Internet of Things):** IoT-enabled devices and AI-powered robotic assistants provide mobility support for students with physical disabilities, enhancing their ability to participate in academic activities.

Accessibility in education refers to the design of learning environments, resources, and technologies to ensure they are usable by all students, regardless of their physical, cognitive, or sensory abilities. Accessibility requires the elimination of barriers that prevent learners from fully engaging in the educational process. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an educational framework that promotes flexible learning approaches to accommodate the diverse needs of all students. UDL is based on three key principles: multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation, and multiple means of action and expression. By incorporating these principles, higher education institutions can ensure that learning materials are accessible to PwDs. AI enhances UDL by providing personalized content, language translation, and adaptive assessments. For example, AI-powered platforms can personalize e-learning experiences, offer voice-guided navigation, and provide access to content in alternative formats (e.g., audio or large print). These AI-driven tools enable students with disabilities to engage with learning materials independently.⁵

According to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPWD Act, India), Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) are individuals with long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that hinder their participation in social, economic, and educational activities on an equal basis with others. PwDs are classified into the following categories:⁶

1. **Physical Disabilities:** Impairments affecting movement, such as paralysis, cerebral palsy, and musculoskeletal disorders.
2. **Sensory Disabilities:** Impairments related to vision (e.g., blindness) and hearing (e.g., deafness or hearing impairment).
3. **Cognitive and Learning Disabilities:** Conditions that affect a person's cognitive functions, such as dyslexia, autism spectrum disorder, and intellectual disabilities.
4. **Mental Disabilities:** Mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety disorders, that hinder learning and participation.

AI plays a transformative role in enhancing the accessibility of higher education for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). AI-driven tools address the diverse needs of students with disabilities, providing them with personalized learning experiences. The following are some key roles of AI in accessibility:⁷

1. **Assistive Technologies:** AI-powered speech-to-text converters, screen readers, and voice recognition systems enable students with sensory

impairments to access educational content. These technologies provide real-time language translation, enhancing communication and participation in academic activities.

2. **Adaptive Learning Systems:** AI-driven adaptive learning platforms offer personalized content, assessments, and study materials tailored to the learning pace of students with disabilities. Machine Learning algorithms detect students' strengths and weaknesses, providing customized learning paths.
3. **Predictive Analytics:** AI-based predictive analytics identifies students at risk of academic failure and enables universities to offer timely interventions. These insights are particularly useful for tracking the academic progress of students with cognitive and learning disabilities.
4. **Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS):** AI-enabled ITS provide on-demand, one-on-one tutoring support to students with learning disabilities. By offering interactive guidance, students receive instant feedback, enabling them to improve their academic performance.

Despite significant advancements in education and technology, Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) continue to face numerous barriers in accessing higher education. The barriers are multifaceted and impact students' learning experiences, academic performance, and overall participation in educational activities. One of the key barriers is physical inaccessibility in educational institutions. Many higher education institutions lack ramps, elevators, and wheelchair-accessible classrooms, limiting the mobility of students with physical disabilities. Digital inaccessibility is another major barrier. Educational resources such as e-books, online learning platforms, and academic websites are often not compatible with screen readers, speech-to-text converters, and other assistive devices. For visually impaired students, inaccessible digital platforms make it difficult to access course materials and submit assignments. Moreover, students with hearing impairments face challenges in accessing lecture content when captions or subtitles are not provided.

Technological, social, and infrastructural challenges hinder the implementation of accessible education for PwDs. Technologically, the cost and availability of assistive devices and AI-based learning tools are key barriers. Many educational institutions in developing countries face budgetary constraints and are unable to provide state-of-the-art technologies for PwDs. From a social perspective, the stigma and negative attitudes associated with disability remain a significant barrier. Students with disabilities often face discrimination and isolation within academic spaces. Faculty members may lack adequate training in inclusive education practices, leading to a lack of sensitivity toward the needs of PwDs.⁸

Assistive technologies play a crucial role in enabling accessibility for PwDs in higher education. These technologies, driven by AI, machine

learning, and computer vision, offer tailored support to students with different types of disabilities. One of the most widely used assistive technologies is the screen reader, which reads out text displayed on a screen, allowing visually impaired students to access digital content. Similarly, speech-to-text converters and captioning tools help students with hearing impairments access lectures and course materials. AI-powered learning platforms provide personalized learning pathways for students with disabilities. Through adaptive learning, students receive content that matches their pace and cognitive ability, enabling a more inclusive learning experience. Robotic assistants and IoT-based smart devices support students with mobility impairments, allowing them to navigate campus facilities and access educational resources independently. Recent advances in gesture recognition technology have made it possible for students with speech and hearing impairments to use sign language to communicate with AI-powered devices. Furthermore, natural language processing (NLP) tools enable voice-based interactions, thereby supporting students with motor disabilities in accessing educational resources through voice commands.⁹

Role of AI in Higher Education

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transformed the landscape of higher education by introducing innovative tools such as chatbots, virtual assistants, and smart classrooms. These AI-driven tools provide real-time support to students and faculty, thereby enhancing the overall educational experience. AI-based chatbots act as virtual counselors, addressing students' queries related to courses, schedules, and administrative procedures. For example, chatbots like IBM Watson Assistant have been integrated into the student support systems of several universities, offering 24/7 support. Virtual assistants such as Amazon Alexa for Education facilitate learning by offering students voice-controlled access to educational content, reminders, and study schedules. These tools promote hands-free interaction and offer accessible learning opportunities, especially for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). Virtual assistants can be particularly beneficial for students with visual or mobility impairments. Smart classrooms are another significant advancement driven by AI. These classrooms use IoT-enabled devices and AI-based interactive learning platforms to create a personalized and immersive learning experience. Smart boards, real-time performance analytics, and predictive tools help faculty monitor student engagement and adapt their teaching strategies accordingly. AI-based video analytics also enable universities to track student attention during lectures, thereby improving the quality of instruction.¹⁰

Online learning platforms like Coursera, edX, and Udemy have adopted AI to make education more accessible and personalized. AI enhances the effectiveness of online learning by providing students with real-time feedback, personalized course recommendations, and AI-generated assessments. AI-enabled platforms track students' learning behaviors and recommend resources tailored to their preferences and learning pace. AI-based platforms also offer automated grading systems, where assessments are graded by AI algorithms, saving time for instructors. Natural Language Processing (NLP) algorithms review and

grade students' essays and written responses, ensuring timely feedback. The use of AI-based evaluation tools not only enhances the student experience but also allows instructors to focus on more critical aspects of education, such as conceptual clarity and critical thinking. AI also improves the inclusiveness of online platforms. Tools like speech-to-text and automatic subtitles enable deaf and hard-of-hearing students to access lecture materials. Additionally, screen readers powered by AI assist students with visual impairments in navigating course content. Through these AI-driven solutions, online learning platforms are becoming more accessible to a wider range of students, including those with disabilities.¹¹

One of the most transformative applications of AI in higher education is the development of personalized and adaptive learning systems. Personalized learning systems leverage machine learning algorithms to customize course content, assignments, and assessments according to each student's learning pace and style. This personalized approach ensures that students receive content and assessments that cater to their individual needs. Adaptive learning platforms, such as Knewton and DreamBox, use AI to analyze student performance and provide tailored learning paths. If a student struggles with a particular topic, the system offers additional resources, practice questions, and feedback. These platforms adapt the content in real time, offering a highly interactive and flexible learning experience. The role of AI-enabled personalized learning is particularly beneficial for students with cognitive disabilities, as it allows them to learn at their own pace and reduces the cognitive load. By tracking their strengths and weaknesses, AI-driven platforms ensure that these students receive customized learning support. Furthermore, universities can use predictive analytics to identify students at risk of academic failure and provide timely interventions. AI has revolutionized the traditional methods of teaching, assessment, and evaluation in higher education. It supports instructors in creating more engaging and interactive learning experiences. AI-based intelligent tutoring systems (ITS) offer one-on-one personalized tutoring, enabling students to seek clarification on concepts they find challenging. These systems provide timely feedback and help students progress at their own pace. By enabling adaptive learning and predictive analytics, AI empowers students, especially those with disabilities, to achieve better academic outcomes. However, the successful integration of AI in higher education requires ongoing investment in technological infrastructure, faculty training, and policy support to ensure equitable access for all learners.¹²

AI-Based Tools for Accessibility for PwDs

Screen readers and Text-to-Speech (TTS) software have become essential AI-based tools for enhancing the accessibility of higher education for visually impaired students. Screen readers enable visually impaired students to access textual content on computers, smartphones, and educational platforms by converting on-screen text into synthesized speech. Popular screen readers like JAWS (Job Access With Speech) and NVDA (Non-Visual Desktop Access) have revolutionized access to e-books, PDFs, and online learning materials. These tools are supported

by Natural Language Processing (NLP) algorithms, enabling real-time text recognition and voice output. TTS software converts digital text into audio, allowing students to listen to lecture notes, e-books, and other study materials. AI-driven TTS tools like Google Text-to-Speech offer multi-language support and customization features, enabling students to control the reading speed, pitch, and language. This ensures that visually impaired students can participate in online courses, read e-books, and complete assignments independently, thereby promoting self-learning and educational equity. AI has transformed the process of Braille transcription and voice-based navigation for visually impaired students. Traditional Braille transcription required manual intervention, but AI-powered tools like Braigo have automated this process. These tools use Optical Character Recognition (OCR) and Machine Learning (ML) algorithms to convert digital text into Braille, making textbooks and research papers accessible to visually impaired learners. AI-enabled transcription systems reduce the cost and time associated with manual transcription while increasing the availability of educational materials in Braille format.¹³

AI-driven speech-to-text converters and real-time captioning tools have significantly enhanced the accessibility of higher education for hearing-impaired students. These tools utilize Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) algorithms to convert spoken language into text, enabling students to read lecture content as it is delivered. Real-time captioning services, such as Otter.ai and Google Live Transcribe, facilitate instant transcription of live lectures, video conferences, and webinars. By displaying real-time captions on screen, these tools allow hearing-impaired students to actively engage in online and hybrid learning environments. AI-based live captioning tools also support accessibility in video-based learning platforms such as YouTube, Coursera, and edX, where subtitles are automatically generated using AI. This ensures that hearing-impaired students can access pre-recorded lectures and online courses without barriers. Educational institutions have started integrating real-time captioning services into Learning Management Systems (LMS), allowing seamless learning experiences for students with hearing impairments.¹⁴

Voice-activated devices and smart wheelchairs have transformed the academic experience for physically challenged students, allowing them to engage in educational activities with greater autonomy. Voice-activated assistants like Amazon Alexa and Google Assistant enable students to control smart devices, access information, set reminders, and navigate educational resources through voice commands. These tools reduce dependency on manual actions, promoting self-reliance for students with physical impairments. Smart wheelchairs powered by AI, IoT (Internet of Things), and Machine Learning provide enhanced mobility for physically challenged students. Smart wheelchairs, such as WHILL Model Ci and iChair, are equipped with sensors, navigation systems, and voice control features. They enable students to move around campus independently and navigate through classrooms, libraries, and other academic spaces. Some smart wheelchairs are integrated with AI-powered path planning systems, allowing users to predefine navigation routes and avoid obstacles, thereby ensuring

greater safety and efficiency. Eye-tracking devices and gesture recognition systems play a vital role in enabling hands-free control for students with physical disabilities. Eye-tracking technology uses infrared sensors and cameras to detect and analyze eye movements, allowing students to interact with digital interfaces by simply moving their eyes. Tools like Tobii Eye Tracker enable students to control computers, navigate e-books, and access online educational platforms without using their hands.¹⁵

AI-based learning apps and focus-enhancing tools play a pivotal role in supporting neurodivergent students, including those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). These tools leverage Artificial Intelligence (AI), Natural Language Processing (NLP), and Machine Learning (ML) algorithms to create adaptive and personalized learning environments. AI-driven educational apps such as Brain in Hand and Mightier offer step-by-step guidance, emotional regulation support, and task management assistance for neurodivergent students. AI-based focus-enhancing tools use features like gamification, break reminders, and cognitive load management to keep students engaged in learning activities. These tools monitor attention spans and provide personalized interventions to help students stay on track. By using predictive analytics, AI can detect when a student's attention is waning and recommend short breaks or engaging activities.

AI-Based Personalized Learning for PwDs

Personalized learning refers to the use of tailored educational strategies and resources to meet the unique learning needs of students. With the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI), personalized learning for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) has become more inclusive, efficient, and accessible. AI enables the customization of course content, assignments, and learning paths according to the specific needs of PwDs. Unlike traditional learning methods, AI-driven personalized learning offers dynamic and flexible learning experiences that accommodate the diverse needs of students with visual, auditory, cognitive, and physical impairments. AI-based Machine Learning (ML) algorithms analyze a student's learning history, preferences, and performance to design individualized learning paths. Natural Language Processing (NLP) models enable students to access course materials in various formats, such as audio, text, and Braille, while predictive analytics track students' progress and offer timely interventions. This approach ensures that PwDs can engage with educational content in a way that matches their learning pace and cognitive abilities. The impact of AI-based personalized learning on the education of PwDs is profound. AI promotes inclusive learning environments by enabling participation in both online and in-person classes. Students with cognitive impairments such as dyslexia and ADHD benefit from interactive multimedia content, adaptive assessments, and break reminders. AI-driven gamification tools make learning more engaging, encouraging active participation among students with attention difficulties.¹⁶

In terms of assessment, AI facilitates adaptive testing, where students receive tests suited to their individual abilities. Unlike traditional exams,

adaptive tests become more or less challenging based on the student's responses. This approach enhances the accuracy of evaluations for PwDs. Automated grading tools, powered by NLP algorithms, provide instant feedback to students, enabling them to improve continuously. AI-based platforms also offer accessibility features like real-time captioning and text-to-speech conversion, supporting hearing-impaired and visually impaired students. By providing access to assistive technologies and digital proctoring, students with physical disabilities can participate in online exams without the need for human intervention. These tools ensure a level playing field for PwDs, fostering fairness and equity in assessments.

Several AI-based tools and platforms are transforming the landscape of personalized learning for PwDs. Knewton, DreamBox, and Smart Sparrow are examples of adaptive learning platforms that create customized learning paths for students. These platforms adjust the content's difficulty level, learning pace, and format to suit the needs of PwDs. By using Machine Learning (ML) algorithms, these platforms predict students' learning patterns and adapt the content accordingly. AI-based learning apps like Duolingo offer personalized language learning experiences, allowing students to learn at their own pace. PwDs with cognitive challenges benefit from AI-powered gamification apps that make learning interactive and engaging. Voice-controlled assistants like Amazon Alexa support physically challenged students by offering hands-free access to educational resources and study materials. Additionally, AI-powered text-to-speech (TTS) tools like Kurzweil 3000 and Read&Write support students with visual and cognitive disabilities by converting written text into spoken words. Speech-to-text (STT) tools like Otter.ai help students with hearing impairments by providing real-time transcriptions of lectures.¹⁷ Proctoring platforms like ProctorU facilitate online assessments for PwDs by offering assistive features like additional time, extended breaks, and live human support when required.

Conclusion

This research paper aimed to explore the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in enhancing the accessibility of higher education for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). It examined the transformative impact of AI-driven tools, platforms, and assistive technologies that facilitate inclusive learning experiences. The study discussed how AI addresses physical, cognitive, and sensory barriers, enabling PwDs to participate actively in education. Screen readers, speech-to-text (STT) tools, gesture recognition systems, and smart wheelchairs are among the key AI-based solutions improving educational access. The paper also analyzed how AI-enabled adaptive learning platforms and predictive analytics support personalized learning for students with diverse needs. AI has the potential to revolutionize accessibility in higher education for PwDs. It enables personalized learning, enhanced participation, and equitable assessment through innovative tools and technologies. While the impact of AI has been transformative, the challenges of privacy, bias, and data security remain. To address these challenges, collaborative efforts by policymakers, educators, and technology developers are essential. Future

research must focus on algorithmic fairness, AI transparency, and affordable assistive technologies to ensure that every student, regardless of their disability, has access to inclusive education.

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