



CHALLENGES FACED BY VISUALLY IMPAIRED STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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CHALLENGES FACED BY VISUALLY IMPAIRED STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION (Case study of District Rawal Pindi)

Abstract:

Acquiring knowledge and skills are the basic right of everyone including visually impaired persons. However, they are facing difficulties in the process of attainment of education in the absence of specific facilities at higher education institutions. This research explores how students with visual impairment experience their life at a higher education institution in the district of Rawalpindi. Sample Size of 10 visually impaired respondents (50% male and 50% female) were selected from 5 different universities of district Rawalpindi, including the University of Wah, Quaid-e-Azam University, NUML University, International Islamic University, and Fatima Jinnah Women University. A qualitative approach was used for the present research. Data was collected through in-depth interviews. The findings showed that students with visual impairment experience multiple challenges in higher education. Such as the non-availability of writers, absence of computers with special software (Jaws), need for audio assistance in libraries, transport issues, communal stigma, approachability to different civic facilities, peer acceptance, and problems in learning at the university. Based on research findings, higher education authorities are given recommendations to improve their support and facilities for students with visual impairments efficiently.

Keywords: Challenges, Students, Visual Impairment, Higher Education, Institution

Introduction:

Visual impairment is defined as loss of vision which may be caused by any eye disease, accident, or eye condition present from birth. Students with visual impairment experience multiple problems in educational institutions which not only harm their academic performance but also disturb their personality development. Visually impaired students are in a neglected state and



require appropriate attention to facilitate their education. Visually impaired students face difficulty in understanding academic concepts, performing assignments and quizzes, taking exams, and inconveniencing using libraries, etc. These problems demand well-trained teachers in special education who can educate the students with visual impairment to learn through their senses other than sight just as tactual and auditory senses. If students with visual impairment are facilitated with their basic rights in educational institutions, then wonders can be made by them in every field of life.

(JPS,87-88,2017)

At Kyambogo University, the staff of special needs education has ramps and can be reached through wheelchairs. However, many senate buildings are not accessible to people with disabilities. According to the government sponsorship scheme, support to 4,000 students is provided at the university level every year. of which 64 are students with special needs including physically handicapped and visually impaired. However, there are many challenges faced by visually impaired students in higher education. Hodges and Keller (1999) conducted a study to explore the extent to which students think about the inclusion process of disabled students at the university level. The results highlighted many issues visually impaired students face, especially in transport and making social relations with peers. Hougang (1999) conducted research to identify challenges faced by visually impaired students at higher education institutions. Results indicated many issues such as the absence of counseling services, few braille printed books, shortage of visual readers, problems of adjustment with university life, teachers forsake of their special needs, transport issues, and exam handling were most significant.

(Wandera, 76, 2017)

Significance of the Study:

This study is very significant as it mainly focuses on university students with visual impairment in the district of Rawalpindi, Pakistan. At the University level, the need to become independent is very high for students as it is a milestone in their practical and professional lives. The present



research not only highlighted hurdles faced by visually impaired students to become independent but also gave practical solutions that can be helpful for them in their education.

Purpose of the study:

- The present research was conducted to explore the following four problems:
 1. Impact of visual impairment on the learning abilities of students.
 2. Importance of technological skills learning for visually impaired students.
 3. Impact of social stigma about visual impairment on their personality development
 4. Impact of visual impairment on their mobility.

Methodology:

- Qualitative research methodology was used for the research.

Method:

1. Using an interpretive descriptive approach, In-depth interviews were conducted with five male and five female respondents.
2. Participants were recruited using a snowballing technique.
3. Interviews were the primary and only method because of the sensitive nature of the topic.
4. A discussion guideline was developed.
5. The questions were open-ended to allow the participants' experiences and interpretations to drive the conversation.
6. The time duration for each interview was 20-30 minutes and was digitally recorded, transcribed, translated, and analyzed with emerging themes to show the results.

Results and Interpretations of the Research:

Three main themes emerged from the research.



1. EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS
2. SOCIO-CULTURAL PROBLEMS
3. PERSONAL PROBLEMS

Educational Problems:

The first theme highlighted the following problems:

Gender	Age	Name Of Institute	Audio Lecture Recording	Non-Availability Of Writer	Requirement Of Extra Time In Exam	Audiobook Library	Special Software Computer Labs
Male	22	UOW	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Male	24	QUAID E AZAM	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Male	23	NUML	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Male	24	IIU	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Male	25	NUML	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Percentage			100 %	100%	80 %	60 %	100%

GENDER	AGE	NAME OF INSTITUTE	AUDIO LECTURE RECORDING	Non-availability of writer	Requirement of extra time in exam	Audiobook Library	Special software computer labs
Male	22	UOW	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Male	24	QUAID E AZAM	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Male	23	NUML	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Male	24	IIU	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Male	25	NUML	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Percentage			100 %	100%	80 %	60 %	100%



Interpretations:

- Results show that 100% of the respondents faced the same problem with the non-availability of the writer.
- 20% of males and 40% of females faced the problem of the non-availability of extra time during exams.
- 60% of males and 40% of females highlighted the need for an audiobook library and 100% of respondents experienced the absence of computer labs with special software.

SOCIO-CULTURAL PROBLEMS:

The second theme highlighted the following problems.

Gender	Age	Name of Institute	People show sympathy rather than acceptance	Need to establish societies for special students	Fewer involvement opportunities in sports
Female	22	Fatima	Yes	Yes	No
Female	22	IIUI	Yes	Yes	No
Female	21	NUML	No	Yes	Yes
Female	23	Fatima	No	Yes	Yes
Female	25	Quaid	Yes	Yes	Yes
Percentage			60%	100%	60%



Gender	Age	Name of Institute	People show sympathy rather than acceptance	Need to establish societies for special students	Fewer involvement opportunities in sports
Female	22	Fatima	Yes	Yes	No
Female	22	IIUI	Yes	Yes	No
Female	21	NUML	No	Yes	Yes
Female	23	Fatima	No	Yes	Yes
Female	25	Quaid	Yes	Yes	Yes
Percentage			60%	100%	60%

Interpretations:

- 60% of males and females experienced labeling and negative attitude.
- 100% of males and females mentioned the need for the societies of special students.
- 60% of males and females faced the difficulty of being involved in sports.

Personal Problems:

The third theme highlighted the following problems:

Gender	Age	Name of institute	Transport to the university is feasible	Initial guidance for campus orientation by the administration	Counseling union for psychological support	Awareness seminar for educating sighted students
Male	22	UOW	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Male	24	QUID	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Male	23	NUML	No	Yes	No	Yes
Male	24	IIUI	No	Yes	No	Yes
Male	24	NUML	No	Yes	No	Yes
Percentage			100%	100%	40%	100%



Gender	Age	Name of institute	Transport of the university is feasible	Initial guidance for campus orientation by the administration	Counseling union for psychological support	Awareness seminar for educating a sighted student
Female	22	Fatima	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Female	22	IIUI	No	Yes	No	Yes
Female	21	NUML	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Female	23	Fatima	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Female	25	Quaid	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Percentage			80%	100%	60%	100%

Interpretations:

- 100% of males and 80% of females faced inconvenience with the university transport.
- 100% male and female highlighted the need for initial guidance for campus orientation.
- 40% of males and 60% of females suggested establishing the counseling union.
- 100% male and female experienced a lack of awareness among sighted students.

Conclusion:

The study concluded various challenges faced by visually impaired students in higher education such as educational challenges, personal problems, and sociocultural barriers. 70% of the respondents experienced multiple problems during education such as insufficient use of technology, non-availability of writers, and time management. 80% of respondents experienced many socio-cultural barriers such as labeling and lack of opportunities to participate in sports. 80% of the respondents experienced mobility and transport issues.

Finally, we can clearly conclude that all the objectives of the research are verified.



Practical Groundings:

- The government should make it compulsory for all the universities to establish a technological unit that should be well equipped with new technology so they can facilitate the visually impaired students.
- NGOS should also take part in facilitating the visually impaired students such as the provision of funds to establish the audio library setup.
- Social society should also play a part in normalizing visual impairment such as inflation, unemployment ETC and visually impaired students should be facilitated as it's their right rather than sympathy.
- Media should play a vigilant role by keeping a close eye on international research centers and should introduce the latest technologies to facilitate the visually impaired.
- **Keywords:** Challenges¹, Students², Visual Impairment³, Higher Education⁴, Institution⁵

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