

THE IMPACT OF INCLUSIVE AND EXCLUSIVE EDUCATION ON THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to find out the impact of inclusive and exclusive education on the social, personal and professional lives of visually impaired males and females in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Purposive snowball sampling technique of non probability sampling was used. Interview method was selected for the present study so the interviewer could pursue in-depth information about the participant's experiences around the topic. The major findings showed that both education systems have their pros and cons, but overall inclusive education was preferred by both genders. As it is in inclusive education that the visually impaired through their integration with sighted people feel accepted by society, and were able to rise to great heights alongside their sighted brother's and sisters. Where as on the other hand, although it was exclusive education which laid foundations for inclusive education by developing feelings of security but it hinders one 'inclusion' as, 'one's potential is not allowed to blossom out because one is exclusively competing with the visually impaired which in turn does not give one a sense of achievement. The result showed that in inclusive education if given the correct environment and facilities with regard to their disability, visually impaired are just as capable as their sighted brothers and sisters to receive an education

and enter the workforce on their own merit to become earning members of society and contribute to the welfare of the country.

Key Words: Inclusive Education, Exclusive Education, Visually Impaired

INTRODUCTION

There are two systems providing education to children; special education system (exclusive) and mainstream education system (inclusive). Special education is the specially designed instruction provided by the school district or other local education agency that meets the unique needs of students identified as disabled (Campbell, 1999 and Bursuck, 1999). Majority of the special schools do not meet the minimum requirements of the visually impaired people. The equipment is available in large number but is lying idle due to non availability of trained staff. The majority of the special needs of the visually impaired is imported and therefore is very expensive. For example the most needed small Braille slate for the visually impaired is not manufactured in Pakistan and is imported. The course books and other reading material are not available in proper format for special people of any kind (Khatoun, 2003).

On the other hand, inclusive education talks about providing access to education to everyone, regardless of their differences, study in the same classroom and acquire the same education as anybody else. (Afzal, 2010). In theory inclusion is practised in schools to establish collaborative supportive and nurturing environments for learning that are based on giving all the students including the visually impaired the services and accommodation that they need to learn , as well as respecting and learning from each other's individual differences (Salend, 2001).

(Pearpoint, 2001), states that there are many factors contributing to the worldwide movement of ending segregation and developing inclusive education, as one of them is normalization which aims to provide social interaction and experiences that parallel those of society to adults and children with visual impairments. The philosophy of educating students with visual impairments in regular classrooms rests on the principle that

educational opportunities for students with visual impairments should resemble as closely as possible the opportunities and activities enjoyed by their peers who are not disabled.

Second contributing factor to developing inclusive education is deinstitutionalization which means, up until very recently, people with visual impairments were feared, ridiculed, abandoned or placed in institutions that isolated them from the general public, because of terrible conditions found in many institutions, as well as a growing awareness of the negative effects of institutionalization, smaller , community based independent living centres were developed for people with visual impairments.

Early intervention and early childhood programs is the third factor to end segregation and develop the practice of inclusion. These programs have increased the physical, motor, cognitive, language, speech, socialization and self help skills of many people. They have decreased the probability that children with visual impairments will be socially dependent as adults.

When a person with visual impairment is put in to inclusive education, it can provide a more stimulating environment versus the traditional special education system. This environment always leads to enriched growing and learning for the special education person. Research reveals that people with visual impairments that are put in to inclusion programs have more engaged instructional time, and have a greater exposure to academic activities (Fred, 2004). They are able to develop friendships with their same age peers, which leads to greater acceptance by their peers in and out of the school community. The regular education students become conscious of the person first and concern for labelling fades (Wood, 1993). This develops sense of worth in them and they feel good about themselves because it enables them to share some of the same experiences and opportunities as their non disabled peers (Larry, 1999). Inclusion brings added dimensions to the persona of the visually impaired person. It helps the person become intellectually more alert, confident, competitive and ambitious. One becomes better equipped with communication and social skills.

On the other side of the issue of inclusion, there are many who see it doing more harm than good for all persons involved. These opponents of inclusion view it as policies driven by unrealistic expectations where by schools try to force all students in to the mold of regular education. The literature has shown when not implemented appropriately, inclusion can have many detrimental effects of those involved with it (Knightly, 2001). One is that the people with visual impairments need the special education classroom where there is a small class size, one to one instruction, and an individualized academic program so that they are learning the important skills that they need to be successful once they are out of school. In a regular education most visually impaired are not able to get this type of academic intensity (Jamie, 1998).

Another disadvantage with inclusion for visually impaired people is that in regular education students with visual impairments often feel depressed, and academically inadequate compared to their non disabled peers, because they cannot do the things that normal sighted people can, which results in low self esteem and a low self concept (Horn, 2009 and Pat, 1998). Bringing people with visually impairment into the regular education can cause problems when the regular education students are not ready to accept that their peers with visual impairments are going to be their classmates. They may find the visually impaired people as easy targets and focus on them for harassment, name calling and teasing. This can cause added stress and anxiety for people with visual impairments, and aide in the inclusion process being unsuccessful (Hook, 2001).

Having talked about inclusive education and its advantages and disadvantages on the social, personal and professional lives of the visually impaired males and females, now light will be thrown upon exclusive education and how it affects the lives of visually impaired males and females.

Exclusive education is an education system which is tailored according to the needs of special people. The Individuals with Disabilities Act or (IDEA) proved the fact that separate is never equal. It is believed that visually impaired students are in fact

better served by special schools that have the facilities and faculty necessary to cater the student's unique needs (Schreiner, 2010). Special training to teachers and support staff, who work with the students, helps to provide better level of care. In this system visually impaired students are surrounded with other students who suffer from the same or similar disabilities. This creates a homogeneous group of students which decreases the likelihood that the child will not be subjected to bullying or taunting and increases the probability that the student will be able to engage in positive social interactions and develop healthy friendships. In a special school, the student is taught using a curriculum specifically designed for students like him, not just accommodated so that he can reach the level of other students. This specialized curriculum is generally more effective than general classroom accommodations, because it is customized to the student and tailored to his unique needs (Taylor, 2000). Special education has helped the visually impairers to break out in to the world and embark on a path of self-realization and self expression. Special schools have opened avenues for the visually impaired from the dark corners and crevices of the world where they were tucked away for years on end by their families and society.

But in exclusive education the individual's potential is curbed, their talents do not blossom, and the spirit of wanting to excel in life does not improve. Life is more challenging in inclusive education as one is fully able to face and overcome the challenges and problems of daily life (Puri, 2010). (Ferrell, 2006) reveals that, the social life of the visually impairer's is kept to a minimum level by mixing with only the exclusively visually impaired which decreases the opportunities for healthy, positive social interactions with peers because they also have problems with social interactions. Along this their contacts with normal people is restricted as one's interaction is only with the visually impaired which removes the chances of confidence and competition. A research by (Ryndak, 1992) states that, exclusive education play a minor role as far as the visually impairers professional lives are concerned. Lack of conducive and competitive environment hinders their mental capabilities and a positive approach to life.

So by keeping in view the above mentioned literature the current study is planned to find out the impact of inclusive and exclusive education on the social, personal and professional lives of the visually impaired. It will be examined that how inclusive and exclusive education separately effect the lives of the visually impaired males and females regarding their social, personal and professional lives, and to prove the fact that the visually impaired are just as talented as their sighted brothers and sisters are and are able to compete side by side with them to earn their living in today's competitive world if given the correct opportunities.

METHODOLOGY

Problem Statement :

To ascertain the impact of inclusive and exclusive education on the lives of visually impaired.

Objectives :

- To find out the impact of inclusive education on the social, personal and professional lives of the visually impaired people.
- To find out the impact of exclusive education on the social, personal and professional lives of the visually impaired people.
- To find out the preference of the visually impaired regarding inclusive and exclusive education.
- To know gender differences of the visually impaired with respect to inclusive and exclusive education.

Operational Definitions :

Visual Impairment : In the present study visual impairment means a severe reduction in vision that cannot be corrected with standard glasses or contact lenses and reduces a person's ability to function at certain or all tasks.

Inclusive Education :

In the present study inclusive education is the education which is provided in a community for all the children.

Exclusive Education :

In the present study exclusive education is a system which has special arrangements, which are tailored according to the needs of special children.

Social Life :

In the present study social life is human social behaviour which is concerned with all group activities: economic, political, religious and social.

Personal Life :

In the present study personal life is the course of an individual's life, viewed as the sum of personal choices contributing to one's personal identity.

Professional life :

In the present study professional life means a career in industrial, commercial or professional activity, conforming to the rules or standard of a profession.

Research Design :

The research design was based on qualitative research.

Sample :

16 visually impaired males and females were selected out of which 8 were males and remaining 8 were females. Age limits of the respondents ranged between 25-40 years. The sample consisted of teachers, lawyers, chief executive officers (CEO'S), non-governmental organization (NGO) workers, psychologists and even civil servants. Purposive snowball sampling technique of non-probability sampling was used, as the targeted sample was relatively less in number. The criterion selection was established to approach the required sample:

The criterion includes :

1. People visually impaired since birth.
2. Visually impaired having had exposure to both inclusive and exclusive schooling.

Instrument :

Interview method was selected for the present study to get in-depth information about the participants experiences around the topic for

which an interview guideline was constructed on the basis of literature.

Procedure :

On the basis of information provided by Pakistan Foundation Fighting Blindness (PFFB) Islamabad ten respondents for the study were located who were working in different fields, like: Livelihood Resource Centre (LRC) Islamabad, Radio Pakistan, Islamabad, Gogi Studios Islamabad, and Bahria University Islamabad, and then those ten respondents informed the researcher about more visually impaired people who could be interviewed regarding the researcher's topic. Participants were briefed about the purpose of research and informed consent was taken before the interview. Analysis was done on the basis of the respondent's responses to the questions that were put forward to them by the researcher.

ANALYSIS

Inclusive Education and Social Life

With reference to social life both male and female visually impaired were of the view that it was inclusive education which gave them the basic confidence to interact with sighted people and enhance their social skills. As one of them quoted "In inclusive education teachers give a lot of support and encouragement to students despite their impairments which increases the confidence level, self esteem of students which helps one in mingling with sighted people". They were also with the view that inclusive education helped them in making friends belonging to diverse backgrounds, which helped their social circle to grow wider. As one of them said "inclusive education helps one to interact and move forward in life, as the friendships one makes forms and paves the way for one's success in life".

Inclusive Education and Personal Life

When visually impaired were inquired about the impact of inclusive education on their personal life, both male and female reported that, inclusive education had a good affect on their personal lives. As one of them said "inclusive education increases the general knowledge of a person, and one is able to interact with normal sighted people who have a better exposure to life". They learnt not to blame

their drawbacks on their disability. They began to have faith in themselves; their spirit to wanting to excel in life improved. As one of them coded, "inclusive education helps one to move on with life, you realize the whole world around you is not blind so it helps you to strive and work hard to reach to the top". The overall personality improves, one works extra hard and becomes aware of his potentials. As one of them quoted "mainstream education is necessary as people accept you for what you are, and you learn not to blame things on your disability; but instead you strive and work hard and prove yourself just as hardworking as sighted people". The females of the study also reported that, in inclusive education you are not labelled as special; but people accept you and treat you like a normal human being, despite your disability.

Inclusive Education and Professional Life

Among males seven out of eight reported that their professional lives were greatly affected by inclusive education, as it was due to inclusive education that they could obtain jobs according to their potential and be a part of the workforce. As one of them quoted "professionally; inclusive education proves that visually impaired need not be a burden, but can support themselves in any profession provided they are given the correct opportunities". The one with a different point of view said that it was exclusive education which enabled him to get a job as an Educator for Slow Learners in Rawalpindi. As he coded "exclusive education gave him the ample opportunity to tend to each child on individual basis which ensured better development and growth".

Where as on the other hand females of the study reported that professionally; inclusive education was of greater help to them as they were able to pursue careers of their choice. As one of them coded "In inclusive education with the cooperation and encouragement from colleagues, makes a person able enough to earn his/her own living and be a use to society alongside their sighted brothers and sisters with confidence".

Exclusive Education and Personal Life

Overall the visually impaired were of the view that exclusive education was the foundation on which

their education was laid. But among males; six out of eight reported that they had inferiority complex, low self esteem and their coping strategies were not enhanced because of lack of competitive environment in exclusive education. As one of them rightly quoted "In exclusive education one feels that activities and connections are hindered, one doesn't have a sense of belonging in society, and there is no interaction between the sighted people and the visually impaired".

Where as on the other hand the remaining two were of the view that personally, exclusive education for them was good as they found it to be the foundation on which they could interact and improve themselves in the mainstream. As one of them quoted, "personally; exclusive education helps one to take care of one's self, and encourage others in communication skills, teach songs, games, numbers, alphabets, rhymes, and helps in making new friends and to share and do things with other children".

Out of eight only two females acknowledged the impact of exclusive education on their personal life as one of them wisely quoted, "exclusive education is a stepping stone to success in life later on, as everyone gets individual attention and acceptance despite being disabled". While the remaining six were of the view that exclusive education helped them only by learning Braille. As one of them coded, "exclusive education does not affect one personally, as the spirit of what I want to achieve is not present".

Exclusive Education and Social Life

Both male and female participants of the study reported that exclusive education was a stepping stone, but they did not benefit socially in exclusive education, because they did not become self reliant, as they were exclusively with the visually impaired which was not beneficial to them socially; as there was no spirit of competition. As one male of the study was of the opinion that "social life is made of family, friends, teachers, when one is in exclusive the family is there for you socially, but contacts with sighted people is restricted to a minimum, one mixes with visually impaired in the social environment only which hinders the

spirit of confidence and competition". Similarly one of female participants reported, "socially one does not benefit from exclusive education, as one's social interaction is only restricted to the visually impaired".

Exclusive Education and Professional Life

Both male and female participants of the study reported that exclusive education had no affect on them professionally. As one of the male participant said "exclusive education is the building block for one's education, but since it is a competitive world where one has to build a spirit of competition, hard work and dedication to move forward which is missing in exclusive education system". According to females exclusive education has no impact on professional life as the spirit of "I will strive to achieve", is not provided in exclusive education, and the coping strategies and mechanisms are not directed towards a profession in exclusive education professionally.

DISCUSSION

Overall the responses showed that all three aspects, social, personal and professional of the visually impairer's life were greatly affected by their exposure to inclusive education. Both male and female think that this education helps them to become part of the mainstream. As it is inclusive education which removes the barriers between sighted people and visually impaired. It is in the mainstream education that all God's creation can live and learn side by side with each other in an atmosphere of equality. They are able to face challenges and take on responsibility to prepare them for their success in life. Where as on the other hand they think that, exclusive education, even though it is the building block which laid the foundation for their schooling, but it hinders one 'inclusion' as, 'one's potential is not allowed to blossom out in an exclusive school system. This results in development of inferiority complex and low self esteem and as spirit of competition is not present which makes a disabled child feel left out from the mainstream of life to compete with their sighted brothers and sisters to prove themselves as capable and hardworking.

With reference to inclusive education both male and female respondents majorly identified that

their personal and social lives were profoundly affected by inclusive education. They began to have faith in themselves, their spirit to wanting to excel in life improved. Inclusive education enhances a person's abilities and interests in life; they become more focused and confident in their dealings with normal sighted people in the mainstream of life. As one of them quoted "Whatever I am in life today I owe it to my exposure in inclusive education".

Similar findings were found in the literature, (Poon, 2001 and Meyer, 2006); that, mainstreaming has shown to be academically effective than exclusion practices. By being in inclusive education the visually impaired learn not to blame their drawbacks on their disability, but being included in a regular paced education setting, students with visual impairments have shown to be more confident and display qualities of raised self efficacy. Regarding their social life the visually impaired said that, it was inclusive education which gave them the basic confidence to interact with sighted people and enhance their social skills. One of them reported " inclusive education helps one to become part of the normal everyday happenings in today's world , it creates a spirit of competition and makes one face the challenges of today in order to succeed and move on in life". In literature (Wolfberg ,1999) also supports the findings that, any kind of inclusion practice, including mainstreaming, allows students with visual impairments gain a better understanding of the world around them, and become part of the regular community.

One can obtain jobs according to one's potential and be a part of the workforce, because you consider yourselves as soul breadwinners for your family as you are not begging other people to help you at your time of need; you are able to fend for yourself and your family, which in turn gives you a feeling of self satisfaction. As one of them coded, "inclusive education makes a person able enough to earn his living, which in turn gives him encouragement, and boosts his self esteem to move on with life". As according to Alper (1992) this is possible in inclusive education which opens doors for them to obtain professions on open merit and become earning members of society and not a burden on their families.

Along this they do have some concern regarding inclusive education as they think that teachers are responsible for the education of all her students, so they may not have the necessary specialized training to address the needs of students with visual impairments. As one of them said, " Teacher's may not be capable of managing the classroom time in order to give the visually impaired students the time they need to succeed academically, while managing her time with her other pupils as well". Similar findings were reported by Douglas (2010) that Mainstream classrooms may not be an appropriate fit for students with visual impairment because the normal sighted children may not know how to deal well with their differences. The visually impaired child will feel like an outcast, an alien who is not accepted by society to fit in to the mainstream of life because of his impairment.

With reference to exclusive education both male and female respondents identified that their personal, social and professional lives were not affected by their exposure to exclusive education. Although they think that exclusive education was the foundation on which their education was laid and gives them the feelings of security and has a feeling of belonging with their own kind. As one of them coded, "exclusive education helps one feel important, as one is valued as a normal human being, and one feels to see light at the end of the dark tunnel". But most of the participants think that exclusive education did not help them in widening their social circle because their social life was kept to a minimum level, and only occasional meetings were held with sighted people in the mainstream. As one of them said "socially one does not benefit from exclusive education, as one's social interaction is only with the visually impaired community which hinders the spirit of competition and confidence". Ferrell (2006) also reported that exclusive education keeps the visually imparer's social life to a minimum level. By mixing with only the exclusively visually impaired, their self esteem, confidence and social skills are deprived of being developed. When one is in exclusive education system then only the family is there for him/her socially but contacts with normal people is restricted which removes the chances of confidence and competition.

Most of them think that exclusive education had a minor role to play as far as their professional lives were concerned as compared to inclusive education. As one of them coded "In inclusive education one learns to do things for one's self, it gives one the push to compete on one's own merit and enter the competitive world of today". Where as on the other hand exclusive education is not conducive to learning, there is no spirit of competition, the will to move forward and achieve something in life for himself. These findings are in correspondence to the findings of (Ryndak, 1992) which describes that exclusive education plays a minor role in the professional lives of the visually impaired. In exclusive education a person's coping strategies do not develop, they feel inferior to other human beings, they feel the competition is missing in their lives, and the environment is not conducive and competitive enough to move forward and gain professionally. These factors hinder their mental capabilities.

Along this they also think that exclusive education provided with facility suitability dependent upon the nature of a child's visual impairment; to ensure his safety and comfort. In a specialized school, extra training of all educators and support staff who work with the students are fully versed in the appropriate accommodation and treatment methods that can be used to assist the child. This more specialized knowledge can lead the child to receive an overall better level of care. Visually impaired students are surrounded with other students who suffer from the same or similar disabilities which creates a homogeneous group of students and it decreases the likelihood that the special needs child will be subjected to bullying or taunting and increases the probability that the student will be able to engage in positive social interactions and develop healthy friendships (Taylor, 2000).

In a special school, the visually impaired student is taught using a curriculum specifically designed for students like him, not just accommodated so that he can reach the level of other students. As one of them quoted, "The specialized curriculum is generally more effective than general classroom accommodations, because it is customized to the student and tailored to his unique needs".

According to the visually impaired both systems of education, inclusive and exclusive have their pros and cons, but amongst these two they prefer inclusive because it allows all children to interact with many other children coming from diverse backgrounds, facilitating the learning process and making it more interesting for the children. This way, children learn to accept each others differences and any biases or prejudices they may have are dispelled by team working and learning together with everyone.

CONCLUSION

The participants responses showed that exclusive education system though it is the building block for visually impaired's schooling, but it creates inferiority complex, and a feeling of achievement is absent as the atmosphere, methods of teaching and the will "I will strive to achieve" is not present. Where as on the other hand in inclusive schooling, there is a spirit of competition and the will to move forward in life. In inclusive education visually impaired are able to compete on open merit with sighted people, face challenges, accept responsibilities and build a positive attitude towards life, so they are able to swim the waters of life and not become a burden on anyone.

Catering to the needs of the visually impaired is the responsibility of all governments. Similarly it is the need of the hour in our country, Pakistan, to make laws and implement them, to give a fair share to the visually impaired as far as their schooling is concerned. Trained teachers, infrastructural accessibility, accessible library with latest technology of Braille should be made available, as the visually impaired are just as intelligent as normal sighted people in to receiving an education and making something of themselves in life.

Recommendations

- There is a need of infrastructural accessibility that is; ramps, building codes, special parking areas, accessibility to classrooms etc should be made available by the heads of educational institutions, inclusive and exclusive for the visually impaired to move about easily without any hindrance in their way.

- There should be a Disability Facilitation Department where students with impairments should be facilitated so that there are no impediments in their path in to achieving their goals.
- Healthy indoor and outdoor co curricular activities should be provided in both exclusive and inclusive schools, as it is vital for confidence building and growth of the visually impaired people.
- Educational Institutions, inclusive and exclusive, should make efforts in providing guidelines in their syllabi to enable the staff to facilitate visually impaired in their academic life, and should motivate the staff so that they are in a position to be able to plan, design, formulate and implement strategies to help the visually impaired integrate in to society.
- The Government should provide proper teacher training and well paid staff to facilitate the visually impaired, along with an accessible library with latest technology of Braille in inclusive and exclusive education systems to encourage the visually impaired students to enhance their knowledge.
- Necessary resources for education should be provided by the government to facilitate the visually impaired in both education systems, so the visually impaired can get the opportunity to compete with their sighted brothers and sisters.
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