

## **A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF NEEDS AND FACILITIES OF SPECIAL STUDENTS AVAILABLE AT GRADUATION/POST GRADUATION LEVEL**

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**ABSTRACT:** *All over the world we can see different type of individuals in the educational journey. Some are mentally sharp, average or below average. At the same time we have seen people with physical impairment who are pursuing at their path of education with a lot of courage and motivation. Yet in developing countries like Pakistan special students are facing many problems in their Academic process because of lack of primary resources as well as lack of implementation of policies which especially made to facilitate them. Present research was aim to identify the lack of special resources in academic process of visually impair students, which can facilitate them towards a better education at graduate and post graduate level. Twenty five (N=25) visually impaired students were purposefully selected. Nineteen were from Karachi University and rests of the six were from IDA RIEU welfare association deaf and blind school and college. A semi-structured interview was conducted, where participants were asked about 1- their current issues regarding available academic resources or problems they face in their academic process 2- provided resources by the institution 3- possible solutions of their problems. Along with prevalence of the different problems and available facilities (checked by their frequencies and percentages) the qualitative analysis of the interviews showed that available resources are not satisfactory for the facilitation of academic process of visually impair students in both private and Govt. graduate and post graduate institutions.*

**KEYWORDS:** Visually Impair, Students, Academic Resources, Special Needs

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### **INTRODUCTION**

All over the world we can see different type of individuals in the educational journey. Some are mentally sharp, average or below average. At the same time we have seen people with physical impairment who are pursuing in the field of education with a lot of courage and motivation. There are different types of physical impairments like visual (completely or partial loss of vision), auditory, speech, motor coordination, anatomical and physiological. Yet there are certain impairments which can directly linked up with the quality reception of education for example blind, deaf and dumb. Who may have more difficulties in the process of education as compare to the physically handicap who have problem with their walk etc and that problem is not directly influence or become barrier in the academic process.

According to WHO 285 million people are visually impaired worldwide: 39 million are blind and 246 have low vision whereas about 90% of the World's visually impaired live in developing countries. (Fact Sheet N°282 June 2012) There are four levels of visual function, according to the International Classification of Diseases -10 as 1) normal vision 2) moderate visual impairment 3) severe visual impairment 4) Blindness. (Update and Revision 2006)

ACB (American Council of the Blind) strives to improve the well-being of all blind and visually impaired people by: serving as a representative national organization of blind people;

elevating the social, economic and cultural levels of blind people; improving educational and rehabilitation facilities and opportunities; cooperating with the public and private institutions and organizations concerned with blind services; encouraging and assisting all blind persons to develop their abilities and conducting a public education program to promote greater understanding of blindness and the capabilities of blind people. (2005)

The Purdue University VISIONS Lab, which stands for Visually Impaired Students Initiative on Science, is a research laboratory dedicated to providing access to the numerous science courses at Purdue. Since its inception in the summer of 1995, this university-funded lab has served as a production facility for providing visually impaired students with educational materials and as a research lab for developing new adaptive technologies. (Schleppenbach, 1996) .

Need for further research and social intervention is also been signified with reference to a research report (Adnani, 2009), which point out individual differences among visually impaired students in terms of their intellectual, spatial, social and educational development.

When we look at the different facilitative method, visually impaired people are using a variety of methods to learn, read, write, and acquire other academic and non-academic skills. For example, Braille, large print or regular print outs, low vision aids and devices with computer-generated speech, while others have sufficient functional vision to use regular print, although with difficulty as their blindness is categorized as partial having B1 & B2 while B3 for complete blindness.

One of the important developments in the educational process of physically impair population from birth to age 18 or 21 in was the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** which is a United States federal law that governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to children with 14 specified types of disabilities. In defining the purpose of special education, the most recent IDEA 2004 clarifies Congress' intended outcome for each child with a disability: students must be provided a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) that prepares them for further education, employment and independent living. (Turnbull, et.al 2004)

By reviewing literature it can be realized that proper facilitation in terms of skill development to read and use of technology, proper system of instructions in different subjects like language arts, composition, and science and mathematics, can make visually impaired population as well as the people with other disabilities more functional and effective in different areas of life like academic non-academic and daily routine activities

A very unfortunate reality in Pakistan is that which are specifically made for especial people are mostly run on donations and funds. The reason might be lack of resources or lack of governmental interest into education sector as. For the year of 2013-2014 only 1.8% of total federal budget has been allocated to education whereas only 0.003% of the total budget has been allocated for special education and social welfare. (Federal budget 2013-2014)

In our country at all educational levels 2% quota is reserved for physically disable students who provide district assessment board registration certificate of disability. For a student it is very difficult to get that certificate due to certain reasons like, Lack of proper information, complicated system of registration, Lack of responsibility among registration staff. So the student has to wait for years for the registration certificate. Educational institutions do not

provide them with the proper books (in Braille) or recorded course material, and students tend to struggle more than their sighted counterparts, a Dawn investigation has found. The situation is particularly serious in smaller provinces like Sindh, where it seems no centralized official authority exists to address the issues of physically challenged students desiring higher education. Educationists like Qudsia Khan and Mirza Mohammad Sultan, principals of the Ida Rieu School for the Blind and Government Qandeel Secondary School for the Blind, respectively, however, believe that the government must act as a facilitator and provide all possible options to blind students

The interviews conducted from students by Dawn talking about possible solutions to the problem, students suggested that they should be allowed to take exams in Braille. A majority of students in Punjab face similar problems, though the provincial directorate general of special education claims that Braille and voice recording options have been introduced at the intermediate and university levels.

There was investigated about providing a better education for visually-impaired learners is an objective pursued by many scientists and academics. One of the key areas where such innovations can be of use is that of the examination. This article examines the possibility of devising written examinations suitable to be taken by visually-impaired students. It presents the various advantages of written examinations and describes the construction of a tool allowing such exams to be taken by those with defective vision. Essentially the method involves the use of special computer programs combined with screen-reading software. Its greatest advantage is that users do not need any special knowledge and it can be easily employed by teachers at any level. Of equal importance is that it is fully adapted to the special features and needs of visually-impaired people. (Papadopoulos, et al, 2007)

In federal public service commission exam (CSS) no seats are reserved for disable persons despite the fact that they have proved their capabilities in recent years by competing with the other students in these exams. So, proper quota should be reserved for disable persons in CSS so that they can also impart their role in society (Ahmed, 2011).

By having the aforementioned literature review it is evident that people with special needs do have some difficulties in their academic process and for the solution government and educational authorities with their limited sources and approach, have made some policies for the betterment of especial education. But the question is that are these policies been fully implemented, are these students getting benefit from the facilities been provided. If facilities provided then are they enough to fulfill their needs and have enough potential to grow and succeed them as the other students. Are they getting the same benefits from the education after completion as other do?

So to find answer of these questions an effort been made through this present research by keeping in mind that the aim of the present qualitative interview study is to identify the current problems, in the academic process, faced by physically impaired students of the graduate and the facilities which they have. Another dimension would be to have demands and suggestion directly from the needy ones and the reason is that the people who are facing trouble as educated person they could better suggest and identify their needs.

As a community work this research has to be effective at three levels that is concerned field, community and state. So at first by identifying the needs through interview techniques it would be a contribution in the field of research as its finding would be helpful to conduct action

researches especially with reference to community psychology. At the second level the present research finding can be utilized as a social advocacy in which the issues would be discussed with the community, experts of different fields especially social scientist, teachers, media personals, concerned authorities of university administration and leading cooperate world representative as well. At the third level the research finding may also be able to seek attention of the state policy makers especially those who are been associated with education ministry.

So the major objective of the study is to identify the needs and problems of visually impair students and create a document for the awareness of general public, university administration, educational policy makers and implementers, and especially university teachers.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants**

Eleven male and fourteen female, visually impair students (nineteen from Public Sector University and six from private institute) of Graduate and Post graduate program have been purposefully taken from the different departments of the university of Karachi and IDA RIEU welfare association deaf and blind school and college . The average age range was 23 to 25. Mainly the snowball techniques have been utilized to collect the sample as most of sample was consist of blind and partially blind students and generally they knew each other.

### **Instruments and Description**

*Demographic sheet:* It was consisted of information regarding age, gender, type and intensity of impairment, education, and contact numbers, email address, university/institute.

*Interview:* A qualitative interview method had been adapted based on open ended semi structured questions about “the current problems which the visually impaired people are facing in their academic process”, “the available facilities which they have from the university administration, department and policy vise”, “the type of facilities and improvements they need to facilitate their academic process and “what are the possible strategies to get these facilities in approach”.

### **Procedure**

As the sample was collected through snowball technique so first of all with the help and permission of the administration and chairperson of the department of Special Education few of their enrolled visually impair students have been contacted. By telling the brief purpose of the study the appointments of the participants were taken on telephone to conduct interview on their convenient place and timings. They were also been requested to give contact numbers of some more visually impair students in their contact. Most of the students have interviewed in the seminar libraries of their own department so that the environment should be calm. Although the verbal consent have already taken at the time of appointment on telephone yet before starting the interview they were thoroughly informed about the purpose of the study and confidentiality issues. The participation of the sample population was voluntary in which they could step aside from the study whenever they want. Each interview consumed 25-30 minutes on an average. The interview was based on open-ended semi structured questions through which the participants were asked about the current problems which they are facing in their

academic process, the available facilities which they have from the university administration, department and policy wise and what they want to facilitate their academic process and how these problem be solved During interview probing was also done where necessary for example to those participants who are less expressive.

### **Result and Statistical Analysis**

By keeping the nature of the study in mind that was qualitative, the analysis was mainly comprised of frequencies and percentages. And rest of the analysis is completely qualitative based on variables. Tables are available at the end of the article.

### **DISCUSSION**

Today almost everybody is aware about the significance of education especially in urban areas people are continuously striving for getting education in different field yet a great number of people are not part of this pursuit. This might be because of lack of resources, poverty, uncertain conditions, poor governance; and sometimes physical or mental incapacity might become the reason. All over the world this is a strong belief that if mentally and physical below average individuals been facilitated through different resources they can be part of main stream in almost every field and can play an effective role in the society, and can have proper education, in other case a fantastic talent could be ruined.

In present study also, current problems, in the academic process, faced by physically impaired students of the graduate and post graduate program have been identified in which some are due to lack of resources like financial, technical, and trained man power, whereas few are related to weaknesses of policy implementation bodies as well as law enforcing bodies. Simultaneously some problems stem from lack of awareness at individual, Microsystems, organizational, and cultural level, but even people have not reached the first level of making solution, that is “awareness”.

People with certain impairments need special care; particularly when they want to get education.

So the first issue raised concerns with the types of problem they may have and at what level they are aware of all these problems. As far as the results are concerned the most prevalent problem was the “unavailability of Braille books” and especially equipped library for the blind, as it was mentioned by almost 100 % of the participants, so that they can easily access the information in their convenient form. This facility is available in the private institution which is especially made for blinds, deaf and dumb people. Unfortunately no books are available for higher classes after intermediate which creates a barrier in the path of success of these students.

Another rampant problem identified by almost all the participants was “writer’s problem”. Writer becomes a thorny deal in various manners like arrangement of writers, their competency in examinations, refusal or disappearance of writer at 11<sup>th</sup> hour etc.

Sometime limited financial resources becomes the barrier to arrange a “writer” and some time “age discrepancies between the writer and the visually impair student” make their selection restricted. Selection of writer becomes more limited when the people of same age level might

get busy in their own examination and therefore not able to provide their volunteer or professional services as a writer.

Writer's competency can be another source of de-motivation for the visually impaired students like some times their spelling or expression is so bad that results in low marks and there is no compensation of it because there is no identification on the answer sheet that it is the copy of a blind student and filled by a writer.

Another area is the requirement of a "Reader". There were mixed type of opinion observed. Although few class fellows volunteer to help, volunteers are difficult to find. This becomes a problem if they ask someone to read something for them they merely show interest to help in this regard especially near the exams and in library settings.

Another issue which needs a proper attention was about lack of social awareness. According to most of the respondent it's a root cause of almost all the problems. This lack of awareness is present almost at all the levels of academic process, as people are not aware about how to deal and how to respond to a physically impaired student. For example, the conductors and drivers of the public transport they use to come to the universities are not aware of the needs of the special students like how to stop the vehicle and pick them. Sometimes they are not willing to pick them in the rush hours. Even if they pick, they do not get the seats which are reserved for them by law.

Lack of social awareness could be observed through the student's attitude toward them in the library setting, as one of the respondent pointed out that when he used the magnifier or put a book very near to his eyes students passed the remarks like "he is eating books". That kind of social behavior becomes a threat to the mental health of the students.

Another related issue is that lack of social awareness results in people just showing their sympathy toward the special people, and not the altruistic behavior. What happens is that they have never been informed about how to deal with them or what a normal person can do (either psychologically or physically) for them. More surprising is the fact that even when media provides easy access to all types of information some students are still unaware about the use of white stick by blinds. Especially they reported feeling so helpless when people are not ready to give way to them. This gets worse during the panic situations especially in the public sector university where political parties are influential and can make conditions worse all of a sudden. And at that time no body have the ethics to help them in reaching a safe place.

Another important area which was explored during interviews was about teacher's role. Unfortunately interviewees seems disappointed from this side as some teachers were found to be rude, unsympathetic and not willing to understand their issue. Secondly prevailing teaching styles are also creating hindrances since lecture material presented on class room board or multimedia are useless for visually impaired students and for this no alternative is provided by the teachers ultimately the students have to have dependent on the fellow students who some time do not have enough time to explain the black board material to them.

Furthermore teacher's voice pitch and quality is important for them and any imbalance leads them toward ambiguity and poor reception that again effect on their marks in the exams.

Beside this one of the most alarming observation was that most of the university teachers except few, are not giving the allocated extra time in the exams which by rules is 15 min/hr so if the

exams duration is of 2 hrs then teacher have to give 30 min extra to the especial student by rules.

Now an additional problem which is been reported by the respondents relates to lack of administrative or educational policy which seems to hinder their academic process. For example one issue is related to the compulsory subjects of the BS syllabus including subjects like mathematics is near to impossible for them to grasp because it's not only hard for them to understand but to explain to the writer in the exams.

Another two important administrative issues are somewhat related to the logistics and accommodation problems. They are facing unnecessary barriers on their paths and no quota is reserved within University Hostel for them.

Related to examination system which is an ultimate responsibility of the administrative authorities that some time writer's permission is so difficult to take as few students do not look like they are blind and the concerned staff does not believe on their problem. Other than that there is no separate place where they can deal with their other examination relate issue like late fees or Performa taking any other thing for which they need extra help of the other students. Furthermore there is no identification on their examination copies that they are blind which at one side keep the process free of biases, but on the other side the writer's mistakes are considered to be student's mistake.

Now another important area is the technical support or facilities which are near to nothing provided by the institute. According to the respondents a recording system (which can facilitate the students in lecture taking) is available in one of the department but it's not enough to facilitate the more students at a time. For one recording they sometimes have to wait for a month which is considered to be so slow with respect to the 5 month semester. There also a computer lab available for the special student which is really a positive step but the limitation of the lab is that its timings are very short which cannot fulfill their needs. Also there is no trained staff available to understand their needs and facilitate them according to their requirements. Another aspect is that seminar libraries don't have any computer equipped with special software to facilitate them. Again it's unfortunate that all the technical facilities has to be afforded by the students themselves for example Braille, CCTV , JOS software, magnifier which should be provided by the institute especially for those students who are financially not very strong. Fortunately, JOS software can easily download the material and can hear it through the software and get updated. While, the students of private institute reported that they are using CCTV technology (provided by their institute) to make images larger and magnified. The magnifying glasses used in this device are specially designed for B1 and B2 categories of visual impairments.

Teacher's support is an important issue with reference to the blind students as they are sensitive to the people's behaviors as compare to the other students. The students perceive the teachers help as a great facility in form of relaxation in submitting their assignments, providing recorded material and frequency of the respondents was mostly comes from the similar department.

Nowadays, the trends of reading books and number of libraries decreasing so as in the case of Braille library. Some of the students of the private institute reported that they have library but not updated by the Braille books. The students also reported that they have been provided quota seats by the Government which is less but they thought it as a blessing. Few among them

reported that different organizations provide scholarships for them which are a good sign for them.

In the next section of the interview the students were asked to discuss about their unfulfilled needs regarding the academic facilities. They were also asked to share best possible solutions of their problems. The first and foremost needs were the Braille system and hiring of writers for their examination. The lack of Braille material is due to the unavailability of Braille printer and sponsor from any multinational company can resolve the issue or on Government level the Braille press can be reopened. For the writers problem they suggested that regarding the problems of visually impaired people an awareness campaign can be launched at all the forums of schools, colleges and other institutes and can get volunteer writers.

The second demand was related to recording system and for that they suggested that teachers should allow visually impaired students to record their lectures.

From the administration and examination perspective, they suggested that institution can provide separate examination rooms and place an internal examiner who is aware of the policies and rules for the special students so that they will give extra time in exams and read the papers for the students when required. Another important suggestion was that the exams should be conducted by providing Braille paper / oral exams / recorded instructions. They should provide the options for the subjects whom they can learn easily like other than Mathematics or Statistics. One of the participant, who was a student of MS level, suggested that at this level research assistant is necessary to guide and help in every step of research project. They also suggested fixing the quota in Hostel for blind or special students and separate transport facility. During the interview, they suggested that Educational Board should revise their policies concerning special students. They also felt the need to reduce the communication gap between administration and departments to facilitate the implementation of rules and policies.

From the teachers of institutes they suggested if the course outlines are provided in the beginning of sessions it will be helpful for them to find Braille notes. The students of government institutes were in the favor of group assignments so that they will be guided or facilitated by their peers.

The students of both private and government institutes highlighted the need for training and awareness programs not only for students but for teachers also. Many among them also focused on the need to have seminars and workshops to set their job opportunities in the corporate sector as the example of this was reported “the Standard Chartered Bank (SCB) Pakistan has become a pioneer in the country by meeting its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) through induction of 14 blind graduates of Ida Rieu in its tele-sales and tele-marketing department” (Hussain, 2009). They thought that media involvement open the doors of opportunities for them.

At the end it is important to identify that the root cause of all the problem and lack of facilities might be the educational policy which have decided many years ago (Public Law 94-142) that visually impaired student should study with the sighted students, because it was felt that by making them study together, a helpful, motivating and self-enhancing environment will be developed among them. But the present state is different. Culp (2000) has written in his article that “the original intention of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) was to prevent discrimination based upon a person's physical, intellectual and emotional limitations, the result of implementing IDEA has created a reverse discrimination effect”. As interviewees showed



the trends of low self esteem and other related thoughts with respect to their disabilities so there is a strong need to providing counseling guidance centers both at government and private institutions.

After analysing the interview content, a need to know the viewpoints of authorities was felt, since they are actually responsible to provide the relative resources for visually impaired student at higher education level.

To have more comprehensive work the present research also raised few questions related to the actual level of awareness of the relevant authorities and general public about special needs of visually impaired student especially in the universities which are the ultimately highest and supposed to be highly equipped platform for education.

In conclusion we can say that visually impaired people are equally significant part of a civilized society as the other people who do not have such problems. Being a student's they can also make the land mark in their academic careers as others do. The only need is to feel, observe and solve their basic problems and provide them with necessary facilities for their better grooming.

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## APPENDIX

**Table: 1 Table showing the frequencies and percentages that how frequently a problem is identified by physically handicapped population which they are facing in their academic process**

| s.no | Variables   | frequency | %    |
|------|---|-----------|------|
| 1    | commitment of writer                                  | 6         | 22   |
| 2    | unavailability of writer                              | 19        | 73   |
| 3    | competency of writer                                  | 10        | 37   |
| 4    | age congruency of the writer                          | 3         | 11   |
| 5    | unavailability of reader                              | 7         | 26   |
| 6    | uncooperative teachers                                | 6         | 22   |
| 7    | inappropriate teaching style issues                   | 13        | 50   |
| 8    | special library with BB                               | 26        | 100  |
| 9    | proper recording system                               | 8         | 30   |
| 10   | assignment related problems                           | 7         | 27   |
| 11   | software unavailability problems                      | 4         | 15   |
| 12   | social awareness problems                             | 14        | 53   |
| 13   | extracurricular activities                            | 4         | 15   |
| 14   | lacking in examination system                         | 3         | 11   |
| 15   | training of teachers & special students               | 4         | 15   |
| 16   | extra time problem in exams                           | 8         | 30   |
| 17   | subject problems, inappropriate paths, hostel issues& | 16        | 61.5 |
| 18   | transportation problems                               | 2         | 7    |

**Table 2: showing the percentages and frequencies, that how frequently people perceive the following facilities in their academic process.**

|    |                                 |    |      |
|----|---------------------------------|----|------|
| 1  | JOS software available          | 20 | 77   |
| 2  | institute don't charge fees     | 13 | 50   |
| 3  | social support available        | 13 | 50   |
| 4  | recording stuff available       | 8  | 30   |
| 5  | availability of Braille library | 7  | 27   |
| 6  | quota seats                     | 5  | 18.5 |
| 8  | availability of scholarships    | 1  | 4    |
| 9  | teacher's support               | 14 | 54   |
| 10 | technical facilities            | 3  | 11   |
| 11 | Braille system                  | 2  | 7    |