

## Capacity building initiatives for visually impaired students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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**Abstract:** Capacity building is the need of every individual, institution, and society. Its need and importance become more crucial for the special children, especially visually impaired children. Therefore, different types of special assistance, support, facilities, services, treatment and training technique provided to visually impaired children in their education. In this way, these students lead normal, contributing and productive life. The main objectives of this study were to identify the problems faced by visually impaired students and their teachers in visually impaired schools of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, as well as to evaluate different capacity building initiatives, available facilities and services in visually impaired schools for Visually Impaired students and present workable suggestion and recommendation for improving the visually impaired children education in the province and country. The study was descriptive in nature and quantitative method was adopted for data collection. A sample of 5 visually impaired schools was selected, out of 10 visually impaired schools in the province. A Self-constructed questionnaire was used for data collection and data was analyzed through SPSS by finding out its Mean and Chi-Square. The data revealed that visually impaired schools provided a limited amount of various services and facilities, each school has a shortage of teaching and administrative staff, irrelevant curriculum. The study recommended that government should fill up all vacant posts in visually impaired schools and provide a different type of training to their teachers, improve the existing services and facilities, modify the existing curriculum, establish a Braille printing press and establish more schools and institutions for uplifting visual impaired children education in the province.

**Key words:** *Visually Impaired children education; Visually impaired children; Capacity building initiatives; Special assistance*

### 1. Introduction

The term visually impaired is classified into two broad categories which are blindness and low vision (Doake, 1995). The students who are without sight are called blind and they basically dependent on other senses. These students frequently use braille for reading and writing. Braille is an embossed symbolic system and specific placement of six raised dots that are numbered. Various arrangements of the dots make up 63 combinations, which are called cells and represent numerals, letters of the alphabet and word contractions. However, Low Vision students central acuity of 20/70 or less in the better eye after correction is using contact lenses to deal with their impairments (Susan et al., 2003). Other instruments adopted for their learning are Braille, Audiocassettes, recorded materials, technologies, printed materials, and computer. The written communication abilities developed in visually impaired students through the computer (Doake, 1995; Shepherd, 2001). Besides these, mostly these children teach with the aural/ oral method, also with the help of touching things and making vision about

a thing and their surrounding environment and using hearing capability in the learning process (Akbar, 1997; Iqbal, 1995). According to Rafiq (2013) educating visually impaired children can be taught through various means, which includes Mathematical sleet which contains none pointed holes, Abacus for counting, Beam and option, Kurzweil personal readers are widely used for blind or visually impaired children education process and the use of helpers, guide dogs, white can/ white long, electronic sonic devices etc.

Unfortunately, the visually impaired children schools are unable to provide suitable helping and assistive materials to teachers for their teaching and to students for their learning. Which results in the low interest and low motivation level of students. Lacking different relevant facilities compelled visually impaired children towards social ineffectiveness and failure, which lead them to live below the level of their potentials (Attaullah, 2010). Furthermore, the curriculum and methodology are inappropriate to meet the needs of these visually impaired students and unable to develop skills and capacity in these children (Blake, 2003; Ojala, 2004) it has also been observed that visually impaired students are discriminated against on the basis of

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gender, caste, race and disability due to which they faced problems in acquiring an education. According to Hatlen & Blateh (1997) students who are visually impaired should be treated as same as all other students. A large number of visually impaired children is growing up illiterate. However, this problem is solved only through Braille (Ianuzzai, 1999; Mullen, 1990).

Phillips et al (1990) pinpointed that positive attitude of the teachers towards special children was being developed through proper training. Likewise, improvement in the performance of teachers comes through the positive administrative support. The present curriculum is unable to fulfill and complete the special children with normal children because curriculum missing current trends and techniques, and it needs changes and modification. Besides this, the provision of services and facilities are lacking in along with a shortage of staff (Aziz & Madani, 2007).

No due concentration is given on vocational training for special children (Khatoon, 2003; Sajjad, 2004). These children required more vocational educational program than normal children. The importance of vocational training for Visual Impaired students is recognized worldwide. Because, it enables them adequately to earn for their living and economically self-sufficient, emotional rehabilitation, choose a vocation of their self (Sajjad, 2004). Therefore, the focus needs to be given to teacher training and appropriate on-time services and facilities for special children educational institutions. Beside this, institutes and schools working for the visually impaired children education in the country are not sufficient. Therefore, it was strongly suggested in a study that to fulfill the requirements of the special community more institutions and schools needs to be established (Shah, 2003; Khatoon, 2003).

According to Naz & Sulman (2012) 28.9 % of the whole population of Pakistan constituted special people. Out of this 7.48% are visually impaired population. Another study Awan (2012) state that the total special population of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are 560265 out of which 40084 consists of the visually impaired population. Keeping in view such a huge strength of the overall population of Pakistan, the researcher feels the need to investigate the main problems of visually impaired students and suggest some capacity building initiatives for these students. This study is highly significant as it will offer alternatives to policymakers to develop and elaborate their plan and policies concerning institutes for visually impaired children. This study provided prospects for heads and teachers of these institutes to cope with challenges and avail opportunities while working with Visual Impaired children. This study will also provide a base for other researchers who in the future want to conduct such type of studies.

Keeping in mind the goal to give a proficient learning system, teachers ought to utilize the most suitable and dependable strategy by spotting and

perceiving their students' interest, strength, motivation and learning capacity

### 1.1. Educating visual impaired children

It was revealed by Rafiq (2013) that educating visually impaired children through various means, which includes Braille, Perkin Braille, Mathematical sale which contains none pointed holes, Abacus for counting, Hearing assistive aid such as tape recorder etc, Beam and option, Kurzweil personal readers, Besides that researcher put emphasis and in viewed that mobility training for the visually impaired student is possible through the use of helpers, guide dogs, white can/ white long, electronic sonic devices etc.

### 1.2. Visually impaired children education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

1. Providing education to visually impaired and Low vision aids, for example, large print, short circuit TV, Contact lens etc
2. Vocational training such as caning, basketry, muni etc
3. Cognitive skills development
4. Touch/observation system
5. Talking books/calculator
6. Music therapy
7. Facilities of Braille books, audio aids, and transports
8. Medical treatment and care
9. Rehabilitation
10. Religious education
11. Facility of transport
12. Sports and recreation activity
13. Entertainment and excursive trip

### 1.3. Objectives of the study

The study was followed by the following objectives:

1. To identify the problems faced by teachers and visually impaired students in special education institutions.
2. To evaluate different capacity building initiatives, available facilities, and services for visually Impaired children schools.
3. To formulate workable suggestions in order to improve the visually impaired children schools and institutions.

### 1.4. Research questions

1. What are the main problems visually impaired students and their teacher's faces in visually impaired schools?
2. What are the perceptions of teachers and students on capacity building initiatives, to improve visually impaired education system?

## 2. Method and procedure

### 2.1. Population

All visually impaired children's schools, serving teachers both male and female, and visually impaired children in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa constituted the population of the study. There are 45 government special children schools in the province out of which 10 are government visual impaired schools.

### 2.2. Sample size and its distribution

Stratified Random Sampling was the probabilistic sampling option for the study. The strata were further split into male stratum and female stratum. Both strata were again divided into substratum age. Population schools were 10, sample school was 5, 210 boys and 123 girls.

### 2.3. Research design

The study is the descriptive survey design and the Quantitative data collection method was adopted in which questionnaires were used for data collection. Quantitative data were collected, analyzed through SPS Software accordingly and interpreted in order to get the final results.

### 2.4. Research instrument

The questionnaire was used as an instrument to collect data from visual impaired schools teachers and students. 5 point Likert Scale Questionnaire was used because it collects information more rapidly and accurately than any other means.

### 2.5. Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed among the schools selected for participation in the study. The researcher collected data personally from the sample schools. Before data collection, the researcher provided their participants with an information sheet which included the purpose of the study, their role in the study, assurances of confidentiality, and volunteer nature of participation.

## 3. Results

It can be seen in Table 1, that respondent teachers were agreed on  $M=1.2381$ ,  $SD=.42762$  that special children schools needed up-gradation. Available services provided in school for special children are insufficient. Similarly, the responses were disagreed ( $M=4.2362$ ,  $SD=.75020$ ), that Assistive /helping tools available in the school e.g. white cane, wheelchair, etc. The responses relating to the curriculum taught in the institutes is up-to-date approximately, respondent teachers disagreed  $M=3.7402$ ,  $SD=.69251$ . Therefore, with  $M=1.2677$ ,

$SD=.44452$ . Respondents agreed that improvement and modification required in present taught the curriculum. In spite of all, for the statement "the financial condition of institutional is good enough", the respondent teachers to some extent agreed and undecided  $M=2.9370$ ,  $SD=.99800$ . So far as, it was stated as agreed that the Existing Special children education policy of the government is fully implemented ( $M=1.8976$ ,  $SD=.30432$ ) similarly, there is a need to establish new schools for special children education  $M=1.2756$ ,  $SD=.44858$  and existing special education policy need modification ( $M=1.2677$ ,  $SD=.44452$ ) and Special education needs as a separate ministry at the provincial/national level ( $M=1.3622$ ,  $SD=.48254$ ).

Table 2 indicates the problems faced by the special children in their education. Above all Classrooms, the setting is not arranged according to the needs of special children. The results showed different opinions of the respondent teachers were agreed as  $M=2.0000$ ,  $SD=.00000$ . The other main problems faced by the special children having an inferiority complex due to family /society negative attitude majority of the respondent were agreed on  $M=2.4409$ ,  $SD=.86054$  as well. More or less, No transportation facilities were provided by the school were disagreed  $M= 3.7874$ ,  $SD= 1.03609$ . Alike, in the classroom, the Teachers teaching style is not motivating for special children the respondent teachers disagreed  $M=3.8346$ ,  $SD=.69879$ . Whereas, teachers do not prepare Lesson plan & relevant materials arrangement for lesson most of the results of respondent teachers showed agreed ( $M=2.1811$ ,  $SD=.77067$ ). So far as, in school, the Attitude of teachers is not friendly towards special children the majority of the respondent were agreed  $M= 2.6378$ ,  $SD=1.31939$ . Respondent teachers viewed as disagreed that the school building does not design properly, i.e. door, stairs etc.  $M=3.8583$ ,  $SD=.79407$ . Similarly, Majority of the teachers were of the view that not given an orientation about school building to special children as results shows disagreed that  $M=4.1969$ ,  $SD=1.05439$ . In spite all the Special Students face problems in day to day activities, traveling, communication, learning etc. Agreed  $M=1.6378$ ,  $SD=.55876$ . Similarly, Students face problem in communication with teacher disagreed  $M= 3.4331$ ,  $SD=1.11690$ . In special children schools, the taught curriculum was not according to the mental level of special students while the respondent teachers having different perceptions as agreed  $M=2.8819$ ,  $SD=1.37214$ . Likewise, the respondent teachers were agreed that there was a shortage of teaching staff in their school  $M=1.2677$  and  $SD=.44452$ .

At a closer look at Table-3, the results of the perceptions of student's indicated that the respondent student agreed that needed the Up-gradation of special children schools  $M=2.1026$ ,  $SD=.67666$ . As well as, coordination and cooperation among staff, students and departments are effective approximately  $M=2.5066$ ,  $SD=.61942$ . Along with this, the head of the institute has the administrative

and financial skills and powers ( $M=2.9801$ ,  $SD=.26962$ ). Training is provided to the administrative staff on various aspects by government / other departments were stated as agreed ( $M=2.9172$ ,  $SD=.27601$ ). While the Available services provided in school for special children are sufficient were disagreed ( $M=3.1821$ ,  $SD=.91678$ ). Therefore, the respondent students were agreed that the Improvement and modification required in present taught curriculum ( $M=1.7715$ ,  $SD=.53835$ ). Although, to some extent agreed that the financial condition of the institution is good enough ( $M=2.9901$ ,  $SD=.25105$ ). While Existing Special children education policy of the government is fully implemented were undecided ( $M=3.0000$ ,  $SD=.00000^a$ ), the existing special education policy need modification ( $M=3.0000$ ,  $SD=.00000^a$ ). So that, there is a need to establish new schools for special children education were agreed ( $M=1.4801$ ,  $SD=.75457$ ) and also agreed that the Special education needs as a separate ministry at provincial/national level ( $M=2.8444$ ,  $SD=.36311$ ). But, there was uncertainty found in the assistive /helping tools available in the school e.g. white cane, wheelchair etc. were undecided ( $M=3.2715$ ,  $SD=1.00122$ ).

Table 4 indicates the problems faced by the special children in their education. Above all, the classrooms setting are not arranged according to the needs of special children the results showed different opinions of the respondent students as agreed  $M=2.9172$ ,  $SD=1.28489$ . Besides this, the other main problems faced by the special children were having an Inferiority complex due to family /society negative attitude majority of the respondent students were agreed  $M=2.5960$ ,  $SD=1.25054$ . More or less, no transportation facilities were provided by the school agreed 13.1%, on the other hand, disagreed  $M=3.9570$ ,  $SD=1.03500$ . In the classroom, the teacher teaching style is not motivating for special children the respondent's students were undecided  $M=3.9338$ ,  $SD=1.03538$ . Whereas, teachers do not prepare Lesson plan & relevant materials arrangement for lesson most of the results of respondent students showed agreed  $M=1.9536$ ,  $SD=.72760$ . In spite of all, the Special children face problem in day to day activities, traveling, communication, learning etc. very few respondent students were agreed on  $M=1.6854$ ,  $SD=.49286$  as most of them. Also, the respondent student's viewed that the school building does not design properly i.e.

door, stairs etc. Agreed on  $M=2.7384$ ,  $SD=1.18172$ . Furthermore, the respondent students were agreed  $M=1.3411$ ,  $SD=.47485$  that there was a shortage of teaching staff in their school. Similarly, Majority of the students disagreed  $M=3.8013$ ,  $SD=.82744$  that not given orientation about school building to special children Similarly, Students face problem in communication with teacher strongly agreed on  $M=3.3013$ ,  $SD=1.20019$ . So far as in school, the Attitude of teachers is not friendly towards special children the majority of the respondent disagreed  $M=3.8642$ ,  $SD=.84601$ . In special children schools, the taught curriculum was not according to the mental level of special students while the respondent students were different perceptions as disagreed  $M=3.3013$ ,  $SD=1.20019$ .

#### 4. Conclusion

In light of the results, this study suggested that learner's centered approach is the suitable way to teach visually impaired children because in this approach individual student is instructed according to his/ her ability and interest along with supporting flexibility in learning, the pattern, the curricula, the methods and materials of teaching, the assessment and examination system, and with easily manageable classroom.

For the visually impaired children growth and personality development, Sports & recreational activities are the key vital factor. Therefore, different recreational opportunities should be provided to them. Provision of Endow assistive and helping devices to visually impaired children schools on an urgent basis like, white cane, braille books etc and the curriculum of visually impaired children should communicate and meet the visually impaired children educational needs.

Furthermore, the curriculum must be flexible and sensitive to the diversified learning needs of special children. It must accommodate a range of learning styles and focus on the skills and knowledge that are relevant to students. Different Vocational training and skills development training needed to initiate as a part of all educational projects for special children. Which might help in the development of capacities that will enable them to find work and gradually improve their living conditions, become self-sufficiency and independence as possible.

Table 1: Perceptions of teachers regarding students' capacity building initiatives

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Standard Error
Need Up-gradation of special children's schools	1.2381	.42762	.03810
Assistive/helping tools available in the school e.g. white cane, wheelchair etc	4.2362	.75020	.06657
The Curriculum taught in institute is up-to-date	3.7402	.69251	.06145
The Financial condition of the institution is good enough	2.9370	.99800	.08856
Existing Special children education policy of the government is fully implemented	1.8976	.30432	.02700
The existing special education policy need modification	1.2677	.44452	.03944
There is a need to establish new schools for special children education.	1.2756	.44858	.03981
Special education needs as a separate ministry at a provincial / national level.	1.3622	.48254	.04282

**Table 2:** Perceptions of teacher's regarding problems faced by the special children in their education

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Classroom sets is not arranged according to the need of special children	2.0000	.00000 <sup>a</sup>	.00000
Special children have Inferiority complex due to family /society negative attitude.	2.4409	.86054	.07636
No transportation facilities are provided by the school.	3.7874	1.03609	.09194
Teachers teaching style is not motivating for special children.	3.8346	.69879	.06201
Teachers do not prepare Lesson plan & relevant materials arrangement for the lesson.	2.1811	.77067	.06839
The attitude of teachers is not friendly towards special children in school.	4.1969	1.05439	.09356
School building nor design properly i.e. door ,stairs etc	2.6378	1.31939	.11708
Neither given orientation about school building to the special children i.e. door, stairs etc	3.8583	.79407	.07046
Special Students face problem in day to day activities, traveling, communication, learning etc	1.6378	.55876	.04958
Students face problem in communication with teachers.	3.4331	1.11690	.09911
The taught curriculum is not according to the mental level of special students.	2.8819	1.37214	.12176
a shortage of teaching staff in their school	1.2677	.44452	.01532

**Table 3:** Perceptions of student's regarding capacity building

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Need Up-gradation of special children schools	2.1026	.67666	.03894
Head of the institute has the administrative and financial skills and powers.	2.9801	.26962	.01551
Training is provided to administrative staff on various aspects by government / other departments.	2.9172	.27601	.01588
Available services provided in school to special children are sufficient.	3.1821	.91678	.05275
Curriculum taught in institute is up-to-date	2.4735	.67536	.03886
Improvement and modification required in present taught curriculum	1.7715	.53835	.03098
Financial condition of the institutional is good enough	2.9901	.25105	.01445
Existing Special children education policy of government is fully implemented	3.0000	.00000 <sup>a</sup>	.00000
The existing special education policy need modification	3.0000	.00000 <sup>a</sup>	.00000
There is a need to establish new schools for special children education.	1.4801	.75457	.04342
Special education needs as a separate ministry at provincial / national level.	2.8444	.36311	.02089
Assistive /helping tools available in the school e.g. white cane ,wheel chair etc	3.2715	1.00122	.05761

**Table 4:** Perception of student's on the problems faced by them in their education

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Classrooms setting are not arranged according to the need of special children	2.9172	1.28489	.07394
Special children have Inferiority complex due to family /society negative attitude.	2.5960	1.25054	.07196
No transportation facilities are provided by the school.	3.9570	1.03500	.05956
Teachers teaching style is not motivating for special children.	3.9338	1.03538	.05958
Teachers do not prepare Lesson plan & relevant materials arrangement for lesson.	1.9536	.72760	.04187
The attitude of teachers is not friendly towards special children in school.	3.8642	.84601	.04868
School building nor design properly i.e. door ,stairs etc	2.7384	1.18172	.06800
neither given orientation about school building to the special children i.e. door, stairs etc	3.8013	.82744	.04761
Special Students face problem in day to day activities, traveling, communication, learning etc	1.6854	.49286	.02836
Students face problem in communication with teacher.	3.3013	1.20019	.06906
The taught curriculum is not according to the mental level of special students	3.2815	.90967	.05235
Shortage of teaching staff	1.3411	.47485	.02732

For this cause NGOs needed to work on collaborations with government institutions at national, provincial and district levels for providing facilities and services for vocational training to special children.

Capacity building of teachers and staff of the school through initiating various training programs needs to be initiated. The government should make a relevant and reliable plan, which might consist of making the school building feasible, accessible and have goal-oriented curriculum development, teaching methods and fulfill the needs of materials of special students.

Additionally, Government of Pakistan should introduce visually impaired children education as a discipline in the universities across the country. Other than that initiate Braille as optional subjects at the college level for the purpose of inclusion, integration, and employment of visual faculties as already introduced in Karachi, Sindh. Establish monitoring and evaluation committee who will keep a regular check on for visually impaired children education schools and intuitions. Likely, It is very important to create an accurate database to collect and make available need-based assessment data on visually impaired children and adults. It will help the welfare organizations to serve and start programs for visually impaired students and will encourage organizations of special persons to become more involved in the promotion of access to education for visually impaired children. Furthermore, a positive attitude needs to be initiated among the general public towards visually impaired children education through seminars, workshops, and media.

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