



Bridging Social Gaps: A Study of Socialization Among Visually Impaired Students

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Abstract

Most of the current educational curriculum is oriented towards the use of eyesight, hence, individuals, who are visually impaired experience challenges when acquiring education. The challenges experienced by visually impaired can be resolved by the use of technologies, materials, devices and equipment. The availability of human assistance in making them understand the concepts and taking exams is vital. The main areas that have been taken into account in this research paper are, visual impairment and its impact on learning, adaptive teaching methods for students with visual impairments, challenges experienced by students with visual impairments, challenges experienced by teachers in working with visually impaired students, aspects of learning of visually impaired students and resolution strategies.

Keywords: Visual Impairments, Education, Teachers, Students, Teaching Methods, Learning

INTRODUCTION

Visual impairments are the reduced vision caused by eye diseases, accidents or eye conditions present from birth. The students in educational institutions experience numerous challenges and problems as a result of visual impairments and these adversely effects their academic performance. Visual impairment is categorised into blind and low vision. The loss of vision imposes limitations upon students. Learners with visual impairments are the heterogeneous group with varied nature of problems and difficulties that require appropriate attention in the implementation of curriculum and instructional systems in order to perform well academically. The academic performance of the visually impaired students is in a deprived state, they experience problems in not only understanding of academic concepts, but also in the performance of assignments and in taking exams. The problems and difficulties experienced by these students calls for more teachers in special needs education, who are skilled and proficient in the implementation of their job duties (Agesa, 2014). The teaching of Braille and other tool subjects in which the remaining senses take the place of sight are only the apparent and elementary attempts to meet the needs of the visually impaired students. Special provisions to this group of students must take into consideration all implications of perceptual restrictions, which go far beyond the adaptation of tool subjects. Visually impaired students, who are born without sight or those who have lost their sight early in life need to build up their conception of the world by the use of their remaining senses. In doing this, they depend almost completely on tactual and auditory perception and kinaesthetic experiences. Although auditory sense provides certain evidences with regards to distance and direction, it does not transfer any existing ideas of objects. The significance of the hearing senses to a student with blindness is to assist verbal communication and aid in undertaking. Hearing therefore, is of limited value in achievement of concrete clues of an object for a blind student (Agesa, 2014).

Visual impairment can be defined legally and educationally. It can be congenital, occurring at or shortly after birth or acquired through other means later in life. Some of the congenital causes of visual impairments include conditions like retinopathy, glaucoma, cortical visual impairment, optical nerve hypoplasia etc. Visual impairment can also be acquired later in life as a result of cataract, trauma, accidents, inadequate nutrition and so forth. Before teaching students with visual impairments, it is important for the teachers to acquire information about how the loss in vision influences the teaching-learning processes. Visual information is fundamental in helping children observe and interpret what happens in the environment. It is also an important prerequisite for conceptual development in a student's learning (Mwakyija, 2013). Deformity and destruction of this part of the body, brings about a reduced amount of sensory data to the learner, leading to insufficiency or delay in various skills learned through observing others. This impacts language development, reasoning skills, problem solving



abilities and abstract thinking. This finally causes great impact on the individual's learning and performance, because a student cannot perceive and use visual information to interpret various learning situations taking place within the environment (Mwakyeja, 2013). The teachers, who are working with visually impaired students need to plan the environmental conditions based upon the following factors: (Mwakyeja, 2013).

Teaching Collaboration (Co-teaching) - Teaching collaboration (Co-teaching) is an important aspect of inclusive education, because inclusive classrooms comprise of students with different learning needs. A single teacher cannot have all the skills needed to meet students' diverse needs within inclusive classrooms. Co-teaching involves two teachers teaching the same class at the same time. The regular teacher taking responsibility of the main teaching, and a special needs teacher, dealing with disability specific needs of the students. A teacher, who has specialized in visual impairments, should help students with visual impairments learn and understand. A special teacher will be assisting a general teacher in preparation of teaching materials and learning environment for these students. A co-teacher will also be responsible for teaching skills like reading and writing by using Braille, glasses, lenses etc.

Collaboration with Parents - Parents make a major contribution to the education of their children, and are prospective sources of information about the academic abilities of students with visual impairments. Parents are the ones, who know their children well, they know their interests and the things that can prove to be beneficial to them. They also know their educational needs, and can plan their future. They will provide information about social, physical and emotional development. Having obtained this information, a teacher will endeavour to structure and modify his or her teaching.

ADAPTIVE TEACHING METHODS FOR STUDENTS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

The adaptive teaching methods that teachers are required to utilize in order to facilitate learning among visually impaired students have been stated as follows: (Mwakyeja, 2013).

Encouraging Collaborative Learning –Encouragement of collaborative learning among students with different learning capabilities and learning needs in an inclusive classroom has proved to be effective in promoting academic achievement, positive attitude. Using Questions and Answers –Verbal communication among the teachers and the students is regarded as an imperative means of facilitating learning. After providing verbal explanation of the concepts, the teachers should encourage the students to clarify the doubts that they may have. Verbal communication of giving instructions and obtaining answers from the students is also a helpful technique. The teachers should record the answers given by visually impaired students, so that they are able to assess their needs and requirements in a better way.

Sound Projection and Calling Students Names –The teachers need to be clear in their speaking and in addressing the students. The voice of the teachers should be pleasant, he or she should be interesting to listen to, should read out loud and be coherent in providing explanations, and one should avoid the use of vague phrases, such as, this, that or over here. The teachers should make use of simple presentation and communication. The best teaching method is following up on the tasks of the individuals to ensure that they are able to understand the lesson plan in a better way.

Adapting Written Texts - Teaching materials need to be adapted. For example printed text can be adapted through increasing the font size, bolding the text, increasing contrast, adding colour, adjusting spaces between characters and large writing text should be used on the blackboard or visual aids. However, the extent of these adaptations is determined solely by the rigorousness of visual defects and the needs of the students.

Challenges that interfere with the provision of education of students with visual impairments have been stated as follows:

Language Challenges of Visually Impaired Students - There is a lack of material in the area of second language acquisition for visually impaired learners, possibly due to the well-known assumption that students with visual impairment follow the same path of learning as the sighted students. As far as there is proficiency in the acquisition of mother language, a second language will be integrated efficaciously. Students



with visual impairment, especially blind, are well prepared to learn a foreign language regarding their hearing sense, which is the essential concept of learning a second language with less or no relation to vision. Language acquired through asking questions improves the verbal skills as asking about things, they cannot observe not only improves visually impaired students' language acquisition but also their complete knowledge ability. The basic essential component of learning is learning words and improving vocabulary, which adds points to the sensitivity memory that this population has (Ghafri, 2015). Listening and Speaking Challenges

There is nearly an overall agreement among researchers that students with visual impairment do not have any serious problems associated to listening and speaking English skills. In fact, listening is the primary learning method for blind students and a strong helpful tool for visually impaired students. These students significantly rely on auditory data, so they are required to become skilful listeners to surface listening and speaking skills to analyse the incoming data including, facts, figures, structures, forms and details. Speaking is also an important skill that allows them to request the information needed and even transfer the information to others (Ghafri, 2015).

Challenges –Visually impaired students must learn reading, with the primary purpose to improve their knowledge, and writing skills are enhanced to reflect ones knowledge. However, the reason being, reading and writing skills are the skills that involve the use of visual abilities to acquire them. Students with visual impairment experience many challenges in learning these skills. They read slower than their sighted peers as they usually categorize words at a letter level instead of a complete word level, which makes them pause frequently while reading. Moreover, students experience difficulties in sentence structures and organizing ideas in essays, and their writing tasks tend to be as the spoken texts (Ghafri, 2015). Lack of Clear Policies on Inclusive Education – With regards to visually impaired students, in some cases, there are lack of formulation of policies and procedures. When the teachers and the staff members are not able to formulate proper measures and procedures that are necessary for the provision of education among the visually impaired students, this leads to numerous challenges. Inclusive education is mentioned in some of the policy documents such as, disability policy and education and training policy, but these policies do not state how inclusive education should be put into practice, scrutinized and evaluated. There is lack of teaching and learning materials that are required for the students with special needs (Mwakyēja, 2013). Lack of Knowledge –In visually impaired students, the knowledge regarding various concepts and areas is usually limited. Due to lack of knowledge, they experience problems and difficulties in improving their academic performance. When students are writing an assignment or are engaged in a group discussion, then it is vital that they should generate awareness and possess adequate knowledge of the topic and the areas that are discussed. Lack of adequate knowledge is one of the major challenges that these students experience in education (Mwakyēja, 2013).

CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY TEACHERS IN WORKING WITH VISUALLY IMPAIRED STUDENTS

The challenges experienced by teachers, when they are teaching and guiding visually impaired students have been stated as follows: (Yalo, Indoshi, Agak, & Were, 2010). Difficulties in Writing on Straight Lines – The Braille language that is used by visually impaired students, involve writing on straight lines. The teachers, who are experienced and have practice of writing on straight lines, usually do not experience problems, but those who are novice in this area, and do not have experience, would have difficulties in writing on straight lines, as a result of which, they would not be able to provide adequate knowledge and information to the students. Therefore, it is vital for the teachers to master the skills necessary in teaching, training, instructing and guiding students with disabilities. Tire Quickly due to Close Working Distance –The teachers, who are working with visually impaired students mainly find their work duties challenging. They are required to work diligently,



conscientiously and resourcefully with the students with disabilities, so that they are able to render an effective contribution in improving their knowledge and understanding. They find their job duties demanding and as a result of which feel fatigue and exhausted. At home, teachers are required to prepare the lesson plan, the students understand well. In educational institutions, the students depend upon the teachers to a major extent to improve their academic skills. Crowded Diagrams in Course books – The course books that have been used by visually impaired students, usually have images, figures and diagrams that are not clear and their explanation is also not adequately provided. When the explanation is not lucid and coherent in textbooks, then the teachers themselves experience problems and challenges in acquiring understanding of the concepts. This is apparent that when the teachers themselves, will not be able to understand the concepts better, then they will not be able to make the students understand. Therefore, it is vital that course books and textbooks for the visually impaired students as well as for the teachers working with them should be coherent and information should be understandable. Unable to Complete the Course Curriculum in the required Time – The visually impaired students are slow in learning and understanding the concepts. It is vital that teachers should be well prepared with the information before they come to class. When the students are large in number, then teachers are required to work really hard in enabling them to enhance their learning and in completion of the course curriculum. Teachers usually experience problems in the completion of the course curriculum. They have to ensure that students have acquired thorough understanding of concepts and are not just required to complete the course curriculum and fulfil their job duties. The course curriculum can be completed within the allotted time by implementing effective teaching-learning processes and making sure students pay adequate attention and listen carefully when the teacher is teaching

Finding Friends in the Playground – It is important for the visually impaired students to socialize with people and not remain confined within their homes. When they go out into the parks or playgrounds with their family members or friends, they are able to create a social circle. Creating a social circle is an imperative need for these individuals, so that they do not feel secluded or despondent. In educational institutions, there are periods, when these students are made to interact with the other people and get engaged in group work, so that they are able to socialize with the fellow students and develop effective communication skills. Orientation and Mobility - Orientation and mobility is a vital area of learning. Teachers, who have been specifically prepared to teach orientation and mobility to the visually impaired students are considered important in the delivery of services in this curriculum. Students will need to learn about themselves and the environment in which they move from basic body image to independent travel in rural areas and in towns and cities (Korir, 2015). Artefacts, Materials and Tools – The visually impaired students are taught how to make use of artefacts, materials and tools. These not only contribute in the development of skills and abilities among the individuals, but they are also able to develop constructive thinking. Academic knowledge and development of skills and abilities among these students, not only contribute in enhancing their living conditions, but they are able to generate a source of income in order to earn their living in an efficient manner.

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this research paper is to obtain information of the challenges experienced by visually impaired students in education. The academic challenges that these students experience are with regards to reading, writing, listening, speaking, lack of knowledge, information, policies, procedures, ineffective teaching methods, lack of resources and poor participation of parents, labelling and negative attitudes, and lack of teacher collaboration and rigid curriculum. These challenges can be resolved by possessing effective communication skills, paying adequate attention in class, sitting in front, close to the whiteboard, making appropriate use of technology and other assistive devices. In academic subjects, it is vital that the textbooks should contain enlarged diagrams and writing, so that



students as well as the teachers are able to make use of teaching-learning methods in an appropriate manner. The selection of the resolution strategies were determined by the number of factors, these include, extent of visual disability, knowledge of Braille, availability of material in Braille, availability of alternative formats such as tactile models, availability of human assistance reader, human scribe, affordability of the solution and perceived usefulness of the solution. In order to overcome the challenges and difficulties, it is vital that these students should be provided with proper support and assistance at home and in school, they should be aware of how to make use of technologies and assistive devices, should develop positive thinking and be motivated towards learning.

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