



Visual Disabled in Classroom: Challenges & opportunities

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Challenges Experienced by Visually Disabled Students in Education

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Abstract

In the present existence, the significance of education is widely recognized among the individuals belonging to various categories and backgrounds. Quality education is necessary for all the individuals to develop and advance in the knowledge driven world. Most of the current educational curriculum is oriented towards the use of eyesight, hence, individuals, who are visually Disabled experience challenges when acquiring education. The challenges experienced by visually Disabled 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 Disabled 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 Disabled students, aspects of learning of visually Disabled students and resolution strategies

Children with Visual Disabled come from different backgrounds. Everyone has the right to get access to quality education including Children with Visual Disability. This article tried to explore how Children with Visual Disability experience their life in school. Students with Visual Disabled experience various challenges in life, like – in education regarding financial, public stigma, accessibility, peer acceptance and many other difficulties. The challenges experienced by visually Disabled can be resolved by the use of technology, materials, devices and equipment, and support from family members and society.

Keywords: Challenges, Students, Visual Disabled.

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Introduction

Students with Visual Disabled do lead a normal life with their own manner of doing things. But they face difficulties due to inaccessible infrastructure and social challenges. Let us have an empathetic look at some of the daily life problems, struggles and challenges faced by the Student of Visual Disability.

Eyes are organs that allow us to see. Many parts of our eye work together to bring objects into focus and send visual information to our brain. Several conditions and injuries can cause detrimental changes to eyesight. Some conditions can lead to permanent vision loss.

The human eye is like a camera that collects, focuses, and transmits light through a lens to create an image of its surroundings. In a camera, the image is created on film or an image sensor. In the eye, the image is created on the retina, a thin layer of light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye.

Students who have vision loss that cannot be corrected with glasses, contacts, or other methods that can be called as Visual Disabled. They may have complete vision loss (blindness) or partial vision loss (low vision).

The definition of Visual Disabled by the RPWD ACT 2016

As per law people are considered to be blind or with low vision if they have any of the following conditions-

Blindness means a condition where a person has any of the following conditions, after best correction:

- a. Total absence of sight or
- b. Visual acuity not exceeding 6/60 or 20/200 in the better eye with correcting lenses
- c. Limitation of the field vision subtending an angle of 20 degree or worse.

Low-vision means a condition where a person has any of the following conditions, namely:

- a. Visual acuity not exceeding 6/18 or less than 20/60 upto 3/60 or upto 10/200 (Snellen) in the better eye with best possible corrections; or
- b. Limitation of the field of vision subtending an angle of less than 40 degree up to 10 degree.

It may be said that Visual Disabled is the functional limitation of the eye or eyes or the vision system. This leads to –

- Loss of visual acuity and inability of the person to see objects as clearly as a healthy person
- Loss of visual field meaning inability of an individual to see as wide an area as the average person without moving the eyes or turning the head.
- Photophobia – inability to look at light
- Diplopia – double vision
- Visual distortion or distortion of images
- Visual perceptual difficulties or difficulties of perception
- Or any combination of the above features

Challenges of visually Disabled students

- Not be able to see objects at a distance, like on a whiteboard or blackboard.
- Having trouble reading (or learning to read) and participating in class.
- Not be able to focus on objects or follow them, may squint often and rub their eyes a lot, have chronic eye redness or sensitivity to light.

Lack of Resources and Poor Participation of Parents –The Visually Disabled students, who belong to deprived, marginalized and socio-economically backward sections of the society usually are not able to make provision of resources and materials for themselves, as they do not have a proper source of income. The parents, belonging to these communities are normally not educated and they do not possess the skills and abilities to enhance learning and education among their Visually Disabled children.

Poorly Built Classrooms – Within educational institutions, the learning environment should be pleasant and amiable for the students. The classrooms should be well equipped with proper furniture, seating arrangement, tables and teaching and learning materials.

Labelling and Negative Attitudes –In some instances, the development of labelling and negative attitudes proves to be barriers within the course of learning and acquisition of education. Visually Disabled students do experience problems in listening, speaking, reading, writing, understanding concepts and even in communicating with others. Due to these problems, they may develop negative attitudes toward educational institutions, subjects, materials, teaching-learning methods and instructional strategies. Due to negative attitudes, they may even discontinue their education and drop out of school.

Lack of Teacher Collaboration and Rigid Curriculum –Within the job settings, it is vital for all individuals to work in collaboration. They need to exchange valuable and useful ideas and suggestions, so that one may make one's work performance efficient and are able to meet the desired objectives. When there is lack of collaboration among teachers and abiding of rigid curriculum, then the Visually Disabled students may experience problems in understanding the concepts and may not feel comfortable within the school environment.

Dependency –The Visually Disabled students are usually dependent upon others for their learning. In school, these individuals comprise of teachers and at home, they are dependent upon their parents and other family members. Due to their visual disability, they need support and assistance, in the execution of various activities and especially, when they are going out of the house.

In the classroom, there are many support systems that can help make learning more successful. These include assistive devices, technologies, or special accommodations.

Learning Environment –The learning environment should be created in such a manner that students should be able to adapt easily and enhance their learning. The availability of learning materials should be well-organized in order to facilitate learning. When the learning environmental conditions will not be supportive to the students, then their learning will, undoubtedly get interrupted. It should contain the technology and the assistive devices, whose utilization will be to assist students in the acquisition of education. Therefore, there is a need for the stakeholders in education to consider the reformation of the education system to enable these students to learn better.

Assessment of Learner's Needs –Assessment of the learner's needs refers to the systematic procedures of gathering and identifying the needs of the learners. Quality teaching can only take place in an effective manner, when the needs, backgrounds and prior knowledge of the learners is known. Assessment of the learning needs of the students with visual impairment, prior to the beginning of the study program is important for both the students and the teachers. The reason being, it allows for an understanding of the student's academic abilities, approaches, strategies and learning styles.

Educators, eye doctors, parents, and students with a Visual Disabled can work together to create an educational plan. This may include setting up an individualized education program (IEP) or 504 plans to help kids reach their full potential. Plans may include a classroom aide or someone to assist with note-taking, and more. As a child grows, this plan will change.

To support Student with Visually Disabled

- Make seating changes, when needed, to help kids see you, whiteboards, blackboards, or learning materials. Extra lighting may be needed.
- Keep walkways open. Make sure your classroom is easy to move through and free of obstacles. Students may need extra help moving around or reaching things.
- Give extra time, if needed. Some kids may need more time to travel between classes, complete assignments or activities, and take tests.
- Know about assistive devices, technology, or other learning aids. Kids may use magnifiers for reading or read from large-printed books and handouts. Audiobooks are a good idea. For kids who cannot type, voice-activated computers help them do their classwork.
- Allow verbal responses for assignments or tests to measure learning.
- Have a plan for missed instruction, assignments, and testing. Students with a Visual Disabled may miss class time to go to doctor visits. Know how the student will make up for missed time.
- Talk about and celebrate differences. Students with visual impairments want to be accepted like everyone else. But sometimes they're targeted by others who see them as "different." Talk about and celebrate differences, and focus on the interests that kids share. Be mindful of bullying, and keep a zero-tolerance policy for that behaviour.
- **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 Disabled 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 magnitude of visual defects and the needs of the students. Therefore, it is important to consult a specialist teacher on preparation of materials prior to the lesson, the reason being, different students use different materials depending on the degree of their visual impairment.
- **The Use of Audio, Optical and Non-Optical Devices** – Verbal learning proves to be beneficial to the students with visual impairments. The incorporation of audio devices assists the teaching processes; these include audio cassettes and compact discs. Optical devices such as, eye glasses, magnifiers and telescopes use lenses to increase a person's residual vision and are normally prescribed by a medical specialist. The examples of non-optical devices include large prints, Braille and Braille writer, tape recorders, book stands, recorded

and talking, books and calculators and computers. The role of both optical and non-optical devices is to improve vision and increase functionality of the students through the use of other senses. It is the role of a teacher to encourage these students to use visual devices and assistive technologies to help them with vision.

- **The Use of Tactile Materials** – Teachers must be aware, that students with visual disability experience deficiency in conceptual experiences and understanding due to nonappearance of visual ability. Therefore, adaptations of teaching materials become principal, if they have to learn all the things other students without visual impairments learn in class. To help this, these students should be taught physically using concrete examples. Tactile diagrams are important to understand the images and concepts, which are difficult to explain and describe in words. Therefore, they should be used, when figures and designs are important to understand the concept but also, when the real objects are not available to help teaching. Tactile images or diagrams can be drawn on Braille papers, using a special mat and stylus.
- **Extra Time Allowance** –The students with visual disability are slow in completing their work. Therefore, extra time allowance is important for them in completing their work, to process visual information and complete their written assignments. Students with low vision take longer time to read a text as compared to students with normal vision. Also reading and writing in Braille as well as getting information from tactile sources for students with blindness is time consuming. At the same time, students with blindness need much time to integrate information coming through hearing. Normally, it is adequate to add half of the time for students with low vision, and twice as much for students with blindness.

By addressing special needs and offering support when needed, we can help students with a Visual Disabled learn as best as possible.

Orientating the Places

The biggest challenge for a student with visual disability, especially the one with the complete loss of vision, is to navigate around places. Obviously, blind student roam easily around their house without any help because they know the position of everything in the house. People living with and visiting blind student must make sure not to move things around without informing or asking the blind student.

Commercial places can be made easily accessible for the blinds with tactile tiles. But unfortunately, this is not done in most of the places. This creates a big problem for blind people who might want to visit the place.

Finding Reading Material

Blind student has a tough time finding good reading materials in accessible formats. Millions of student in India are blind but we do not have even the proper textbooks in braille, leave alone the novels and other leisure reading materials. Internet, the treasure trove of information and reading materials, too is mostly inaccessible for the blind student. Even though a blind student can use screen reading software but it does not make the Internet surfing experience very smooth if the websites are not designed accordingly.

Arranging Clothes

As most of the blind student depend on the objects' shape and texture to identify them — arranging the laundry becomes a challenging task. Although a majority of blind people device their own technique to recognize and arrange at least their own clothes but it still is a challenging chore. This becomes a daredevil task if it's about pairing and arranging the socks. All this is because recognizing colours is almost impossible for the persons with total blindness.

Overly Helpful Individuals

It is good to be kind and help others. But overly helpful individuals often create problems for the blind student. There are lots of individuals who get so excited to help a disabled person that they forget even to ask the person whether she needs help or not. A blind student might be doing something painfully slow (from our perspective) but we should not hurry in doing the work without asking the person properly. We might end up creating some trouble for the blind student.

The Visually Disabled students may perform their activities of daily living by themselves, such as, eating, bathing, dressing, toileting and transferring. But in some cases, they need assistance from family members and caregivers.

Meeting and Greeting

There are some general points to remember, which are really common sense and a matter of courtesy:

- Always ask first before offering any help and do not be offended if it is refused. Some people have had very bad experiences of what a sighted person thinks is being helpful!
- Be precise if giving instructions – giving directions by pointing and saying, ‘it is down there on the right’, is not much help and very thoughtless
- The use of a white cane does not necessarily mean that a person is totally blind
- In some countries a person is accompanied by a guide dog but the animal must never be distracted. Often it is the animal who receives attention and the owner ignored! Together they usually make a good working team and rarely need extra help
- Once into a conversation, never leave without saying you are doing so. Do not allow the blind person the embarrassment of talking into the air!

Approach and Attitude

- Always treat a blind person normally; speak first and introduce yourself
- Shake hands but only if a hand is offered
- It is also politeness to look at him/her during conversation and adopt the same level of position, e.g., sit or stand
- Do not be afraid of using normal language and include words like ‘look’, ‘see’, ‘read’, remembering that blind and Visually Disabled people have exactly the same vocabulary as sighted people
- Explain noises and silences and do not shout
- Do not expect or invite others to speak for blind people. Do not be afraid to ‘touch’ but be sensitive to cultural differences.

The most valuable thing for a disabled student is gaining independence. A blind student can lead an independent life with some specifically designed adaptive things for them. There is lots of adaptive equipment that can enable a blind person to live their life independently but they are not easily available in the local shops or markets. Refreshable Braille Display is an example of such useful devices. A blind student needs to hunt and put much effort to get equipment that can take them one step closer towards independence.

Everyone faces challenges in their life... blind people face a lot more. But this certainly does not mean that you cannot show sympathy to blind persons. They too, just like any individual, take up life’s challenges and live a normal life, even if it does not seem normal to sighted individuals.

CONCLUSION

The main purpose to obtain information of the challenges experienced by Visually Disabled students. The academic challenges that these students experience is with regards to reading, writing, lack of knowledge, information, 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 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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