

Emphasis on Education of Visually Impaired Children: A Retrospection

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Abstract: According to Topor, Rosenblum & Hatton (2004), the primary goal of special education for students with visual disabilities is to reduce the vision-related handicaps as much as possible they experience. There is a great need of a proper education system for visually impaired children in terms of all-round development. Therefore, special school education and studies on special school have become important. Teaching visually impaired children is a challenging task, and a teacher often faces a variety of challenges. The school also comes under certain circumstances to fulfil the needs of children with different skills in terms of resources and the quality of education. Considering the importance of the education for children with visual impairments, this study sheds light on some noteworthy studies on the same. The study revealed that the coverage of education is inadequate for visually impaired children and new approaches and models are needed to address the same.

Index Terms - Visually impaired, disabilities, Education, Special education, Inclusive education.

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's society, every child, as a citizen of the nation, has its unique value and needs ample educational opportunities for maximum growth and development. Education, in the context and style of special education, should meet the individual needs of the children. According to Ysseldyke and Algozzine (1990), "Special education is the instruction designed for students with unique learning needs. Many of these students have difficulty in learning in regular classrooms and therefore they need special education to acquire functional skills in school. If they are to perform in regular classrooms; they need special education to help in developing their additional skills, in short, in order to achieve their full potential. Special education is evidence of the willingness of society to recognize and respond to the individual needs of students and the limitations of regular school programmers to accommodate these needs".

In providing special educational provision, there are some vital roles played by special schools, special teachers, special teaching methods and special materials and aids in the development of a successful educational system for visually impaired children. As per the 2011 Census, over 2.68 Cr people in India have a different kind of disability, which is equivalent to 2.2% of the population. Among the five types of disabilities on which data were collected, visually impaired as (18.8%) emerges as the third-highest category among other disabilities.

II. Education and visually impaired children:

Visually impaired children have specific constraint requirements because of their impairments and deficiencies, and problems with their education in terms of mobility than the regular children, the functioning of the sense organs makes them disabled to learn as normal peers. Therefore, the education system for visually impaired children needs special attention and special educational provisions that are quite different from the education system for normal vision children. Topor, Rosenblum & Hatton (2004) provides an instance that the primary goal of special education for students with visually impaired is to reduce the vision-related handicaps as much as possible they experience.

According to Gupta, H.O. and Singh, A. (1994), the quality of visually impaired science teaching in India was much lower than anticipated standards in both types of schools. Sengupta (1999) study of measurement-related concepts among 160 children (60 blind, 40 partially sighted and 60 sighted) aged 6-12 revealed that Blind and partially impaired children were found to be similar to sighted children in continuous direct and indirect measurements. Even, they lagged in discrete conservation measurements. It also revealed that blind children had difficulties in relating time to their surroundings. However, distance conversation was found to be a problematic concept regardless of the presence or lack of vision. Another study of Singh (2001) on 450 disabled children belonging to three categories, viz. visually impaired, hearing impaired and orthopedically impaired

indicates that the educational needs of all the children are not the same, and the repetitions of the same contents in science, social science and general knowledge have been considered irrelevant. The visually impaired group was expected to be rehabilitated by writing poems and teaching, while the total sample expected to be rehabilitated by teaching only. The study also opined that elements of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities should be an integral part of the curriculum of these children. Satapathy et al. (2002) compared the academic performance of visually impaired and hearing-impaired persons with disabilities. The final test marks were used as measures of academic performance. ANOVA, Mean, Standard Deviation and 't' values were used to analyze the academic performance. The study revealed that visually impaired people performed better than hearing-impaired and non-impaired. The hearing-impaired people performed better than the non-impaired people. Similarly, a further dimension of academic anxiety was studied in relation to academic achievement of 282 visually impaired secondary school students in Delhi. Academic anxiety scale was developed by Dr A.K. Singh and Dr. Km. A. Sen Gupta was used. Anxiety was found to have an incremental effect on achievement and motivates students to put their efforts into better performance in all academic activities. Female students show a higher level of academic anxiety than male students. It was also found that the academic performance of female students was better than their male counterparts (Rani, 2010). Research on school environment (Rani, 2011) revealed that visually impaired students studying in an integrated school setting had higher emotional intelligence than their counterparts in a segregated environment. Integrated students academically performed in pair compared to segregated peers. Besides, the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic achievement was found to be significant for both schools separately as well as for the overall sample, regardless of the school setting.

The laws relating to disabled come in the Seventh Schedule under the Concurrent List.

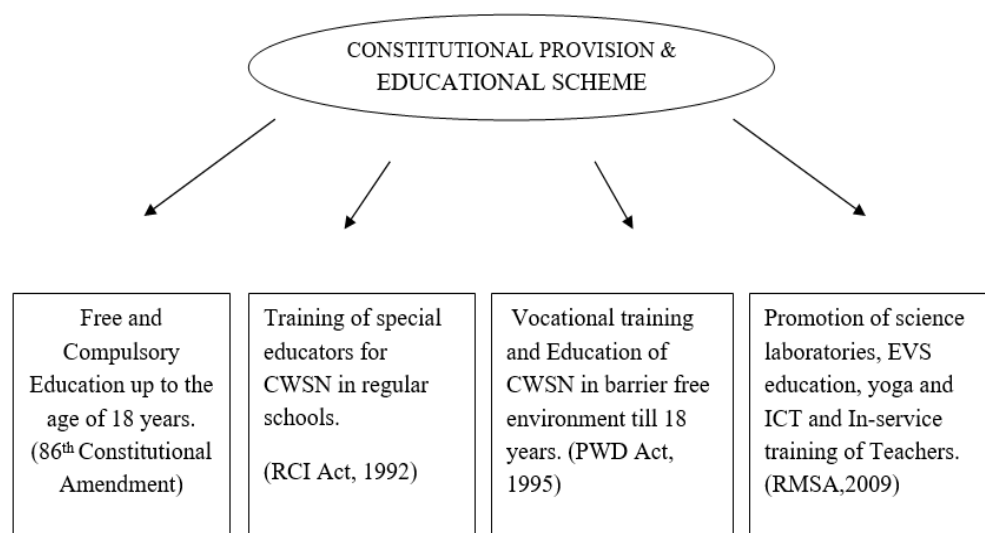


Figure 1. Constitutional provision and educational scheme

Figure 1. shows a few of the constitutional provisions adopted by the Indian Government for the education of people with disabilities. Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE), in accordance with the 86th Amendment Act to Article 21A, Part III of the Indian Constitution, where free and compulsory elementary education is a fundamental right, for all children in the 6-14 age group. This can only be done by having children with special needs (CWSN). Simultaneously, the Rehabilitation Council of India Act (RCI) governs and monitors the provisions of services to persons with disabilities, standardizes the curriculum and maintains a Central Rehabilitation Register of all qualified professionals and personnel working in the field of Rehabilitation and Special Education.

People who have been victims of discrimination, abuse, treated as juveniles and consigned to the bottom of human heap protected by Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights & Full Participation) Act, 1995. It also deals with the job reservation, social security, manpower development, government to promote and fund work for people with disabilities. Another significant educational scheme Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA, 2009) is a centrally sponsored scheme under the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. This focuses primarily on the

advancement of secondary school education and also focuses on CWSN for dynamic growth, development and equity for all. It also deals with the promotion of science laboratories, environmental education, the promotion of yoga and funding support for ICT computer education plans along with in-service training for the teachers.

III. Education and Self-concept of visually impaired children:

Pradhan R. (1993) offers an insight into the fact that, in general, disabled children studying in integrated and segregated settings did not differ from each other on their self-concept and overall adaptation. Ex-post-facto research method was applied to explore the impact of the type of school setting. It was also revealed that visually impaired children had a better self-concept and overall adjustment in a segregated environment. However, hearing-impaired children had a better self-concept and adaptation in an integrated setting. In another study of Reddy and Rajguru (1994) found that self-concept of blind children was higher than low-vision children and gives an insight that self-concept of visually impaired children was positively associated with their achievement. Apart from it, most visually impaired students show high self-worth and self-acceptance by participating in a variety of activities. McAlpine & Moore (1995) investigated the prevalence of false perception in visually impaired children with a sample of 16 visually impaired children (4-11 yrs. old) to assess their awareness of false perceptions. The Slosson Intelligence scale was used to determine the mental age of the students. The findings revealed that the quality of social interactions of children with a visual impairment is affected both by the level of understanding of child's mind and by restricted or non-existent visual information, even when children have acquired some awareness of consciousness. Christy, et al. (2002) analyzed the self-perceptions of children with visual impairments in an institutional-based prospective study. A detailed questionnaire was administered to 50 subjects for expression of needs and wishes, for expression of preferences and decision making. There was no significant difference between subjects in the expression of moods and feelings, preferences and decisions. Some of the subjects, 46% showed variability and difficulty in expressing sympathy, 34% in choosing clothes and 50% and 54% respectively gave preferences for environments and play objects. There were very few issues with the expression of needs and desires was found. The study concluded that self-perceptions were stronger and occurred more often in childhood than at any other time in life. Naseema, C. and Usha, V. (2007) comparative analysis between visually impaired and normal secondary school pupils on school adaptation, self-conception and achievement in mathematics showed that normal pupils were higher than visually impaired on self-concept, school adaptation and mathematics achievement.

IV. Education and School personnel of visually impaired children:

Ainscow Mel (1990) gives instances of the significance of special needs in the classroom as a guide for teachers. The enquiry was conducted using questionnaire methods with a sample of 100 teachers in each country. The findings indicated that compulsory education for all, comprehensive education, and teachers up-grading training had been established as priorities for achieving the objectives set out. Singh (2001) study on educational needs of 450 disabled children belonging to three categories, viz. visually impaired, hearing impaired and orthopedic impaired and 30 teachers, 30 parents of these children and 30 teacher educators working on the special education issues. General Educational Needs (GENS), Special Educational Needs (SENs), Curriculum Relevance Analysis Scale (CRAS), and Rehabilitation Expectations Measuring Inventory (REMI) have been used for the data collection. Findings show that the educational needs of all the children are not alike and the repetitions of the same contents in science, social science and general knowledge have been considered irrelevant. The visually impaired group was expected to be rehabilitated by writing poetry and teaching, whereas the total sample expected to be rehabilitated by teaching only. The study also opined that components of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities, i.e. sports, drawing and painting, craft and cultural activities should be an integral part of the curriculum of these children. Antoniou (2006) looked at the source of stress and professional burnout of teachers by the Greek, SEN teachers using a six-point Likert style self-report rating scale to measure the pressure among teachers as a tool. Similarly, professional burnout was examined by Maslach burnout Inventory developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981) on 110 special teachers, who served in special classes and special schools in the area of Athens. This showed that there are three major types of job stressors, coping with troublesome children, work overload/lack of time and lack of support from the government. On the other hand, in case of a better administration, Kain (2010) investigation revealed that the Head of schools for visually impaired children with special education qualifications as well as general education with research

degrees are better administrators and better teachers for visually impaired children. Hedegaard, Soerensen & Tetler (2016) evaluated the quality of learning environments and teaching practices as special schools in Denmark are under pressure from three international educational agendas viz. the agenda for accountability, the agenda for standards and the agenda for inclusion. The research approach was collaborative as a sample of 35 teachers and principals from 16 special schools participated in the research process. The study suggests that teaching methods in general and special education are not as different as expected. This finding was reflected through systematic assessment instruments. The study also suggests that professional development is driven by a teacher but not driven by the accountability plan.

V. CONCLUSION:

A limited number of studies have been performed in the field of the present educational scenario of a Special school for visually impaired children. Nevertheless, significant research has been conducted on various disability-related domains since 1990. Several studies have been carried out abroad, covering different dimensions of visual impairment.

The study throws light on the various gaps that have emerged as there is less research being conducted to study the current status of education in India. The study concludes that in today's education system, more research on special educators' qualification, expertise, teaching practices, implementation, factors affecting teaching should be done for visually impaired children. Furthermore, less attention has been paid to teaching adaptive skills in an area other than reading, writing and vocational skills. However, there has not been much analysis of research defining the self-concept of visually impaired children with respect to their abilities or adaptive skills in a particular area. Therefore, there is a need of new approaches and models to address these issues. Additionally, there has also been a growing need for a more specialized institution for visually impaired children in India.

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