Exploration of Academic Experiences and Challenges Faced by Visually Impaired Student at University

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Abstract

The notion of inclusion in education undertakes the principle that each student has a right to equitable access to education. It also expects that all educational institutions must organize learning spaces that facilitate every student either gifted, special or general. It is an on-going process and quest, aimed to increase participation of all learners in learning process. In this study the author was focused to get an insight regarding academic challenges and experiences through the lens of visually impaired student in an inclusive classroom at university. Case study approach was used to get the insight about learning experiences and challenges of visually impaired student. To select the single case for the study purposive sampling was used. Semi-structured interview guide was developed to collect the data. The collected data was transcribed and after that thematic analysis was used to develop themes from the data. Major themes emerged as a result of thematic analysis are Life changing event, Role of a teacher, Challenges regarding admission, classroom activities and peers behaviour and lastly Measures to support gifted student in an inclusive classroom. The study findings revealed that problems and challenges experienced by visually impaired student are associated with teachers who are unskilled and non-proficient in the execution of their duties in an inclusive classroom as well as the negative attitude and unsupportive behaviour of peers towards them. These findings will be helpful for departments and university on how they can take effective measures to address these problems and improve learning environment to make such students feel supported and a part of general classroom.

Keywords: Visually Impaired Students, Inclusive Classroom, Challenges and Experiences.

Introduction

According to national and international agreements, education is a fundamental human right (Ministry of Education, 2016). Everybody has an equal right to take part in education, regardless of their level, gender, age, background, economic status (World Bank, 2009). A key component of a successful educational system is the acknowledgement of each student's entitlement to an education, reasonable accommodations, and institutionalized procedures that allow everyone to participate in the educational program of their choosing (Odame et al., 2021). Inclusive education is a fundamental approach to education that seeks to advance every student's education in traditional classroom settings. The essential principle of inclusive education is that conventional education systems, beliefs, courses, and programs should change in order to provide high-quality instruction to all students while honouring and appreciating their individual differences (Rafi, Ahmad, et al., 2020). Inclusive education is viewed as a sign of social justice, by which the desires of all learners at all levels of learning are taken into contemplation (Odame et al., 2021). However, in reality special students are among the most side-lined groups and more likely to be deprived of tertiary education (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2011).

Globally the involvement of learners with disability at higher education level is becoming an increasingly widespread subject of research. Academic success and retention of student with any disability are not entirely their sole responsibility. Additionally, it is the responsibility of universities to ensure that all students can engage in learning process by equipping them with necessary environments and occasions (Morina, 2019). That is why, it is presently being acknowledged as a mark of the quality schooling.

Many researchers (Collins et al., 2019; MacLeod et al., 2018) have highlighted the necessity for higher education institutions to become more inclusive, not only because this will be beneficial for special students, but it will also have a progressive influence on the collective process of teaching and learning. It is imperative that higher educational institutes involve special students because universities are becoming more and more accessible and nowadays inclusive education is reflected as a mark of quality teaching. Additionally, research has also shown that having special students on campus improves the institution as a whole since it necessitates changing procedures and fostering behaviors and attitudes that are disability

sensitive. Furthermore, universities should act as a source of empowerment, opportunity, and a way of enhancing the worth of life for special students (Helena et al., 2018).

As disability research progressed through several stages of development the medical model of disability (illness and the medical community's role in threatening it) transformed into an environmental response to people with disabilities. Researchers are now focusing on disability as a feature of human uniqueness rather than as a flaw by employing an interpretative lens related to disability (Creswell & Poth, 2016). It is only one aspect of human diversity, and as such, its meaning is socially constructed (that is, based on how society views certain people). Since inclusive education was introduced, every student – including those with special needs— must have fair grant to first-class instruction in conventional schoolrooms starting from elementary schooling to universities.

Visual Impairment

Visual impairment refers to the loss of vision brought on by eye conditions or trauma even with the use of corrective lenses. It is divided into low vision and blind categories. In order to succeed academically, challenges faced by such students must be addressed because students with visual impairments are a different population with a number of concerns and contests. This in return ask for special deliberation when creating courses and instructional plans. Learners who are visually impaired do academically poor; they tussle not just to understand educational content but also to complete schoolwork and test-taking processes. In light of the problems and challenges students with special needs face a call for expert instructors is needed who are experienced, knowledgeable and capable to fulfil their duties in special education (Agesa, 2014).

Inclusive Education

The concept of inclusion in education is grounded on the belief that all learners must have equal right to learning and educational institutions must set up classrooms that can accommodate all students. The goal of inclusion is to promote everyone's involvement in education, and it is an ongoing process that never ends. Furthermore, the principles of public righteousness, equality, civil rights, and complete involvement of everyone form the foundation of inclusion (Gudjonsdottir & Oskarsdottir, 2016, pp. 8–9).

The aim of inclusive education is to make and design agendas, actions, institutes, and teaching space in a way that inspires involvement from all kids. In order to reduce and eliminate

hurdles and impediments that might cause exclusion, students must involve in a shared learning setting that provide additional aids to deserving students (Yalo, 2010).

The surroundings in which inclusive education is implemented are common learning environments in which learners with various impairments, needs and skills study and learn together. It is imperative to keep in mind that in such classroom's learners with special needs, as well as cognitive impairments, should not be excluded and teach apart from their fellow student (Agesa, 2014).

Visual Impairment and Its Impact on Learning

Visual impairment can be defined in either a medical or learning setting. At learning institutions, students with visual face a mass of obstacles and problems, which can negatively influence their learning performance and achievement. Medically, students with visual impairment have limited or lack of proper vision (Agesa, 2014). To ensure just and equal access of educational content to all students, instructors must educate themselves about how poor eyesight upsets and influences the teaching-learning process prior to the commencement of teaching process and interactions with learners who have visual impairment. Teachers must also teach students about how to communicate and interact with their surrounds and fellows. Because it is a vital requirement for students with visual impairment to develop cognitively and excel academically (Mwakyeja, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

All students are members of the school community regardless of their strengths and shortcomings, according to the widely accepted notion of "inclusion in education" ("Sec. 300.8 Child with a Disability"). Students with disabilities must be granted complete access to all opportunities and social connections available in general education classrooms. Inclusive physical education helps visually impaired students feel "normal" and contributes to their overall well-being (Haegele et al., 2022). At university level the number of such students in a classroom is often limited to 1 – 2 per session. The challenges they face are different from a regular student. Therefore, addressing these challenges through inclusive education for students with visual impairment can lead to increased accessibility to academic opportunities. This can happen when teachers possess effective instructive approaches, audio-visual aids, and assistance from other educational stakeholders (Miyauchi, 2020). The current study was

conducted to get in depth understating of such experiences associated with the challenges through the lens of visually impaired student in a general classroom.

Significance

The main aim of this research was to get profound information about the problems students with visual impairment faced in a classroom full of normal students. It also aimed to identify the participant's views of teachers and peers role in facing and arise of these challenges. The findings will be helpful for special centres dealing with such students in university and department how they can take effective measures to address these problems and improve learning environment to make such students feel supported and a part of general classroom. Because it is evident in literature that inclusive education benefits visually impaired students by enabling peer tutoring, peer consultations, a slower pace of teaching, and improving their social life (Ralejoe, 2021).

Research Objective

The objectives of this study were:

1. To explore the learning experiences of a student with visual impairment at university level.
2. To explore the learning challenges of a student with visual impairment at university level.

Research Questions

The objectives of the study was answered by the following research questions:

1. What are the learning experiences student with visual impairment gained at university level?
2. What are the learning challenges student with visual impairment faced at university level?
3. How the student evaluates the behaviour of teachers in facing those challenges?
4. How the student evaluates the behaviour of peers and administration in facing those challenges?

Literature Review

Learners with visual impairments, when put in normal or main stream institutions, are a diverse population with a variety of issues that need proper attention in curriculum implementation to ensure acceptable academic achievement. Numerous scholars have examined the difficulties and educational opportunities that visually impaired pupils encounter in their research (Bhatti, M, W. et all, 2023). In the exploration of visually impaired students' learning experiences, Frank et al. (2020) identified both facilitators and obstacles. The hurdles were time and effort commitment, unsupportive behaviours, and environmental issues (K.

Ahmad et al., 2019). Relationships of support, characteristics of the students, and tactics and modifications were the enablers. Similar findings were made by Ridell and Weedon (2014), who discovered the significance of the society and surroundings in which disability is experienced as well as the effects of both positive and negative discourses about disability that are mirrored in work placement experiences, educational and appraisal practices. Morina and Orozco (2020) found that teachers who worked with nursing students who had impairments reported both positive and bad experiences. Since they had assisted them in becoming better professionals, the influence of disabled students was larger in the professional sphere. The study comes to the conclusion that inclusive pedagogy which takes into account the requirements of the students and creates methods that facilitate their involvement and learning is essential.

Mayer and Shalev (2022) discovered few characteristics of social support for students with visual impairment: (1) The need to be accepted and not questioned when asking for support, (2) Support interactions that do not heighten otherness, (3) Failure to acknowledge the challenges, (4) Interactions that support the process of disclosure (5) Interactions that allow mobilization of social support without strain or an extra effort. According to the research of Carballo et al. (2022), faculty members have also described a number of advantages and positive aspects of having learners with special needs in their teaching space in addition to the key difficulties they face in providing these students' social and academic inclusion.

According to the work of Reed and Curtis (2012) the impaired pupils take longer than four years to finish their higher education. They said that their incapacity to engage in certain activities, group projects, and rigorous reading requirements prevented them from fully utilizing their higher education. According to a different study, the majority of visually impaired students did poorly academically because the visually impaired school of thought was not implemented. This is because the policy on special needs education calls for a distinguished syllabus, which is partly due to cultural, social, and economic factors (Jin et al., 2024). Due to the wide range of needs that students with visual impairments have, more special needs educators are needed, with the goal of having one in every normal school. Additionally, parents of visually impaired learners as well as the society at large ought to be informed about their education. (Agesa, 2014).

Lourens and Schwartz (2016) disclosed a university's visually impaired students' experiences with their built environment through in-depth interviews with fifteen of them. Simultaneously, bodies bereft of fear, humiliation, and agony exposed persistent inadequacies in services for students with disabilities. This research makes it evident how the environment has a profound impact on physical worlds and how bodies may communicate the existence of harmful social systems.

According to Kapur (2018) reading and writing are among the academic difficulties faced by visually impaired students. Other difficulties include an absence of information, policies, and procedures; minimal participation of parents; inadequate resources; grouping and negative outlooks; insufficiency of teachers' alliance; and an inflexible set of courses (M. Ahmad et al., 2023). Temesgen (2018) stated that three main obstacles to the instruction of visually impaired kids in schools are inaccessible environments, rigid finance policies, and inadequate teacher training. Major findings, as reported by Fatimah et al. (2014), showed that students with visual impairment were having difficulties with academics, transportation, orientation, Braille, soft, and audio reading material, taking exams in a variety of ways, and using information technology. Perveen et al. (2020) reported that there weren't many specialist facilities. It also revealed that the management of the school provided little assistance to visually impaired students.

In Kocygit and Artar's (2015) examination, it is presumed that: i) the character qualities of visually impaired students have a specific assurance on getting the hang of teaching learning process; ii) In spite of sharing a typical disability, they truly do have different learning habits/systems; iii) educators ought to share experimentation encounters with in-administration stages of course preparation; and iv) the consideration of different stakeholders (managers, educational program organizers, colleagues, families) appears to be significant for an extensive strategy for the visually impaired students.

According to Redd and Kurtis (2012), it took the pupils more than four years to finish their education. They said that their incapacity to engage in certain activities, group projects, and rigorous reading requirements prevented them from fully utilizing their higher education. The study's participants said that the librarians' kind demeanor gave them a sense of being respected, appreciated, accepted, and welcomed, which encouraged the development of their sense of belonging, according to Bodaghi et al. (2016). According to Meyers and Pitikoe's

analysis from 2021, a) unsuitable hardware; b) a bad internet connection; c) difficulties accessing and navigating Moodle; and d) the requirement for a detailed tutorial to assist the student with visual impairments in becoming proficient with the Moodle platform.

National Context

Several studies in Pakistan show that instructors in schools have deficiency of the motivation and supplies to meet the long-term necessities of students with special needs. As a result, despite attending a local school, a substantial proportion of these youngsters remain out of school. Even conservative schools find difficulties educating on the needs of students with impairments (Singal, 2015; Hassan, et al, 2010). In a survey of 75 mainstream schools in Lahore, it was found that schools were not quipped to contain these students owing to a lack of resources, substructure, and, most importantly, teacher attitudes and abilities (Safdar, 2012).

A similar survey conducted by Haider (2008) found that the majority of instructors (70%) believe they are not adequately educated or encouraged to adjust orders and curricula for learners with learning difficulties. Inclusive education in educational institutions: problems and prospects there is a lack of support for instructors and bad views about teachers. There are no viable policy methods or guidelines in Pakistan for the systematic adjustment of teacher education agendas on some of the most important topics of inclusion and teacher education. In the current study the researcher explored the learning challenges and experiences of students with visual impairment at tertiary level.

Research Methodology

Research paradigm

This study followed the interpretive paradigm. The main assumption of this research paradigm includes thorough comprehension of a specific focus or occurrence through continuous communications and surveillance instead of hypothesis testing using statistical techniques. Through participant perspectives, personal experiences, and backgrounds, interpretivist researchers uncover truth (Creswell, 2009). It makes the assumption that when people engage with their environment, they generate and associate their own subjective and intersubjective meanings.

Research Design

Yin (2014) single case study design was used in this study after taking into the consideration of circumstances, setting, and requirements of a single visually impaired student.

A severe example and an ordinary case were thoroughly examined in a single case study. A thorough investigation of this kind of situation leads to a comprehensive and intricate description of the phenomena. (Creswell & Poth, 2016 p. 185).

When the researcher wants to give a comprehensive knowledge of a case and has clearly identified cases with limits, a case study is a viable method (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This research design was created by keeping in mind the circumstances, background, and experiences of a student with visual impairment at higher education. As a result, just one case was used. In a single case, an individual's situation is thoroughly examined leading to an ample and detailed explanation of the situation.

Case

When employing the case study technique, defining a case is essential. It is possible to choose a certain scenario because it is distinct or common. The case is specified as a "bounded system," meaning that it is contained inside certain bounds. The phenomena needs to be recognisable in a particular setting in order to be delimited. A case study may not be the most effective method of analysis if it cannot be explained in this manner (Ary, 2018). The difficulties that visually impaired students confront in higher education were examined in the current study.

Sampling Technique and Participant

Single participant was selected to study the case. In a case study, the researcher makes an effort to look closely at a person or thing. The focus lies in comprehending the reasons behind an individual's actions and how their behavior evolves in response to their surroundings. (Ary, 2018). To access the participant interview consent will be sent to her family and asked permission for her participation.

The individual was chosen using a purposeful sampling strategy. This non-random strategy includes selecting a participant consciously based on their attributes and willingness to share information based on their knowledge or familiarity. In qualitative research studies, it is typically applied to get information that is relevant to research purpose so that the efforts are utilized efficiently (Etikan, et al. 2016).

Instrumentation and Data Collection

The researcher used a semi structured interview guide to explore and to gain insight into the learning experiences and challenges faced by the participant in a classroom of 45

physically normal students. Self-structured questions was used keeping in mind the research questions and art of probing was also used to get more enrich information about each question. Participant was informed beforehand that recordings of interview sessions will be produced and then transcribed for drawing themes through consent form. The recorded interview was conducted in two sessions approximately 40 - 45 minutes each for follow up and obtaining insights.

Validation and trustworthiness of Instruments

Ensuring the validation and trustworthiness of the interview guide is essential to collecting rich and meaningful data that accurately reflects the perspectives of visually impaired student. The questions included in the interview guide was open-ended to elicit detailed responses from the participant, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of her experiences. Content validity of the interview guide was established through 2 experts' review who had expertise in visual impairment, academic support, and qualitative research methods. Experts assessed whether the questions adequately capture the range of experiences and challenges faced by visually impaired student in university settings. Trustworthiness in qualitative research ensures the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the findings. Credibility of the instrument was ensured through prolonged engagement with participant.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Thematic analysis of the collected data was directed in a way portrayed by Yin (2009). The data was transcribed and in the wake of finishing the transcribing stage, the author read all interview texts a few times to understand the fundamental phenomena and themes that were drawn from the case. The themes were cross-checked by the participant of the study to validate the content. Simply define, researcher did an overall subjective examination to foster codes and themes in view of significant explanations in every record. Field notes and interview records were inspected every once in a while to distinguish the arising subjects or examples.

Ethical Considerations

"Informed consent" and confidentiality are the cornerstones of ethical research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The phrase refers to "informed" and "consent," two crucial components that both demand serious thought. Through the interview consent form, the researcher secured these ethics by making sure the participant was fully aware of the purpose of the data collection, its

intended use, and any potential negative outcomes. In order to participate in research, the subject was required to give clear, active, and written permission. This included acknowledging that they understood their rights to view their information and to withdraw at any time. Data interpretation is another ethical consideration in qualitative research. It is required of a researcher to do data analysis in a way that keeps fraud, misinterpretations, and false assertions to a minimum. This ethic was addressed by sending the transcribed manuscript of interviews to the participant so that she can ensure that her words and thoughts were properly written and not interpreted wrongly.

Findings

The purpose of the study was to get an in-depth understanding of the learning challenges and experiences through the lens of visually impaired student in an inclusive classroom at university.

Participant of the study stated that personally "*I don't want my physical disability to be a hindrance in my life goals. I want to contribute as a teacher in the society and be a positive personality as much as I can be"*. No doubt this attitude was difficult for me to develop but I took many steps to overcome this life challenge and improve my skills so that I can play my part as an active member of this society. I have achieved certification in many different courses i.e., Computer Course, Personality Development and Course English Language course. The purpose was to groom my personality and improve my communication. I have also provided my services as a teacher assistant in a college and recently I cleared PPSC exam and given interview for the job. Such as she stated "the *only disability is the lack of passion to do something or lack of positive attitude.*

Life changing event

Participant: the thing is when I got admission in the university I came to know that there is a day celebrated as an International White Cane Safety day on 15th of October. In this event different entertainment like plays, tablos, singing etc. were organized by disable students. We celebrated this event in the university in which people from different departments and other universities came and encouraged us. Participant of the study also participated in this a play. According to her *"the theme of the play was "how society perceived blind people". My participation in this play has a great role in the development of my positive attitude"*

Further she describes that the play was about a visually impaired student who faced a lot of challenges in the learning institutions. Especially the disrespectful and immoral behaviour of her peers towards her disability. She used to come home dis heartedly and when she shared her problems with her family her sisters encouraged her with words like *"do not let other define what you can do or not", show them what you can do, do not let other people let you down.* These words worked like a wonder and the girl started to believe in herself. She started writing poetry and introduced herself in the society as a poet and earned respect and support. The participant said: I played the role of her sister and seeing how the blind girl did not let her disability stop her from achieving success. *The purpose was to show that not only education but other skills and especially a strong personality can build confidence in a person and help gain respect among peers.*

> *"The idea behind the play was that what role a society play in the lives of special students. Because in a common practice society consider blind person incompetent, make fun of them and back bite about them. The play showed that no one's going to accept you unless you accept yourself and work on things that can help you overpower your disability. This idea kind of encouraged me to enrolled in different courses and improve my skills".*

She shared that her class fellows and teachers did not come but students and teachers from other departments came and encouraged them for participating in such activities. They used kind words to appreciate us like "we performed better than them". It was very motivating and life changing for me.

But there are some events that made her sad as she stated earlier that these feelings and experiences are associated with teachers and their behaviours. To be honest in every class there are some bad teachers and some good teachers and their students' motivation to continue learning and quitting greatly depends on the way they treat their students. *I have also experienced many incidents that made me feel that if this attitude of my teacher will continue I should just quit my education.*

Role of a teacher

Participant shared that a bad teacher is the one who does not take into consideration the needs of an individual student. She likes teasing students and giving them anxiety makes them feel happy. (..) Yes these kind of teachers exist for example during bachelors my Teacher G

used to say that visually impaired students do not need extra time or special support to complete their assignments and papers. This teacher taught us three subjects during bachelors i.e. Research, Critical Thinking and Statistics. The issue I faced in my Statistic course was that being visually impaired this course paper can neither be typed nor wrote manually. So as a result I failed that course but later cleared it during supplementary exams.

> She remarked that *"This was a sad moment for me to fail an exam and what more saddened me was the idea that teacher could have supported me but instead she chose to fail me. The teacher did not help or support me in any regard. I think a teacher must be familiarized with the challenges visually impaired student face and also know that they need support from their peers and teachers to overcome these challenges".*

She further explained that I believe that teacher had a grudge with me. Because her behaviour with me in the class was also not good. After giving every task she used to point me out and made me feel uncomfortable. She would say that "*Especially you have to complete the task on time no exception will be tolerated".* These comments used to hurt me. Like if I delayed any assignment submission then instead of understanding my problems she used to say comments like I intentionally did not completed the assignment on time. I failed her exam but cleared that exam in second attempt. The thing is one time my supplementary paper got lost by the department. I did not know about this until I went to collect my DMC. They told me that my supplementary paper was missing and that's why my result was not finalized. Because of this I suffered a lot. I had to go to different offices. So I conveyed this issue to the coordinator in exam branch. I filled a complaint against the department to controller examiner and because of this she held a grudge against me and still do. Still when I went to meet her regarding my degree she did not greet me properly or you can say she ignored me and denied straight at my face that she is not available at the moment.

> She told *"we did take initiative to file a complaint against her but the authority said their hands are tied because the teacher is a part of permanent faculty and she has required knowledge on which she is serving in the university. Even the teacher show pride in her behaviour that she has more knowledge than others".*

First of all, according to me teacher's behaviour matters more. It is her behaviour that attracts students to learn better and more if she does not show good behaviour then students will not be able to acquire knowledge from her. Students will consider learning as a burden and

will not take interest in the studies. They will study for the sake of study. This kind of education will not be the part of their lifelong learning. In this world of technology we are one click away from learning on YouTube or other platform but it is a teacher's behaviour that attract students towards learning. She should be friendly, interactive, listen to the needs of students, understand her students and only then effective learning can take place.

Participant shared views about good teachers as in my department two teachers were very nice. Ma'am S and Ma'am Z. Their behaviour with others were so kind, they were soft spoken, interactive, used to motivate all students like encourage students even they do not know the answer. "*Especially ma'am S used to appreciate each and every student on participating in the class. She even allowed me to record the lectures*". These recording were very helpful during my exam preparations. She taught us Urdu and Islamiyat. She used to instruct my fellows to provide me notes that she dictated in the class. As a result my fellows provided me notes on time because it was the order from a teacher. Some students were already helpful but others were instructed by teacher to facilitate me. These teachers facilitated me in all ways they could and also instructed my peers to support me. A good teacher influence students with her own good behaviour, develop friendly interaction with the students, listen to the individual needs, do not give favouritism, are unbiased, develop understanding, know the initial level of students' learning and then make her lesson planning according. These things according to me are what makes a teacher good.

Challenges regarding admission, classroom activities and peers behaviour

Participant stated that Even though I am visually impaired I performed very well during my college years and secured good marks that my teachers suggested me to get admission in university. As I can recall the first challenge I faced when getting admission in the university was that I was told that I cannot select Education as my field because there is a course "Creative Arts" in this program which have practical and studied till 4th semester. I was told that I am unable to perform practical so how will I complete this degree? But I was determined to get admission in education so I struggled a lot and as a result a solution was proposed that instead of practical 2 extra theoretical questions will be given in my exams of this course. My teacher who was a blind person helped me a lot in this regard.

She said that *"I struggle for this because I love teaching profession. There was no pressure from my family or teachers to get admission in this field I was personally motivated to be a teacher and pursue this profession".*

Participant shared that as I have already mentioned that some teachers allowed me to record lectures some did not. And secondly I told you earlier that I was not blind by birth my vision got diminish in an unfortunate accident. So I did not really know the brailing system and still don't know. I have started learning Braille because I want to improve this skill too that will help me in my learning. But normally I used notes provided by my peers, teachers and recordings of the lecture to learn. The main challenge I faced in the beginning (during BS) was the behaviour of my peers towards me. For example when teacher assigned assignments and group task my peers did not properly conveyed the instructions of the task or presentation. In the start I told them I need learning material in advance so I can scan the document to read it in order to prepare my presentation but my peers were not co-operative in this regard. They used to give me my part of the presentation to prepare at the last moment and then blamed me for not preparing well. Some also used to make excuses like their hand writing were not good etc. so that they didn't have to give me notes. Though some students were co-operative and provided me with the material I needed but unfortunately their number was very small.

Yes, I believe it did effect my performance because in my early semesters I spend most of my time selecting notes and documents asked by teachers to read for different tasks and assignments. Only a few peers would share the notes with me other did not help at all. For example sometimes teachers gave assignments like book reading and summarizing the chapters you read. As I could not read I needed documents in advance so that I can scan them which I could listen through the software in my laptop JAWS. These tasks were part of the summative assessment and because of not getting documents on time I could not complete the assignments timely which I believe strongly affected my academic achievement and performance.

Teachers usually gave assignments like book reading, summary making to CR in the staff room and asked them to communicate to the rest of the class. We had to read the chapter in one and summarize it on the next day. […] not all teachers were like that some did facilitate me like pairing up with the CR to provide notes for the assignments and papers. [Hesitant] but some teachers like Ma'am G used to say that you are like other normal students you do not need any special treatment and support. You will be treated like normal students.

Starting with the transportation I faced many issues during my BS years there were not proper rules stated to reserved seats for special students. I was told to travel in bus like normal students although sometimes students did facilitate me by giving their seats but bus-administration did not give any special facilitation in this regard but when I got admission in MS the administration took measures for me and an initiative was taken to reserved seats for special students like me so that they don't have to travel long distance by standing in the bus.

My department did facilitate me during my entry test for MS. My laptop was not working properly so instead of cancelling my chance they facilitated me that I can give my entry test exam on my centre computer. As compared to the peers in BS my MS fellows were way more supportive and very kind towards me. They helped me in every way and I feel that I did not face the same challenges as I faced during BS and the reason for this is I think that MS students are more mature and know how to handle and communicate with special students.

I don't think so the number of fellows in a class matter because in the last semesters of my BS program I got acquainted with a group and soon we became friends. Those fellows helped me really well like they would share notes with me, helped me in completing my assignments and preparing me for my presentations. So number does not matter as soon as the fellows are supportive, kind and helpful. The teachers teaching at BS level did not know how to tackle with special student in the class full of normal students. They did not know the strategies require to make sure that visually impaired students are not left behind in the class. They were not trained properly to solve issues of visually impaired students. Most of the time I was told that your problems will be viewed and solve by your centre because they know better about these kind of problems. But I think teachers at MS level knew how to assist visually impaired students.

Measures to support gifted student

Participant of the study stated that teachers firstly will be familiar with the needs, problems, and issues faced by the special student in a general classroom. Even if a single special student is present in the class teacher must have a proper training on how to deal with that student. "*It includes what type of guidance, facilitation, and support they need*". To name a few allow them recording of lectures also maintain discipline during lecture so that important things taught or said by teacher or even peers cannot be interrupted by noises, provide learning

material on time so performance of special cannot be affected because they need extra time to go through these documents.

> Participant remarked that "as for the centre it has already facilitating special students in many ways. First of all, it is providing them a safe place to be themselves, a place where they can communicate with each other and share their problems. For learning it is providing facilities like document scanning, computers, and printers".

A step that needs to be taken at this point is the responsibility of the University which should increase the staff at the centre and for this purpose post job advertisements for assistant so the burden will not fall on a single person to manage all task. Basically the main support blind or visually impaired students need from their fellows is the availability of learning materials on time. Learning material from soft copies and English language can be scanned easily but when Urdu written books or learning material are being studied peers must facilitate blind students in recalling and recording the lecture. Peers should take on this responsibility and divide among them so it won't be a burden on a single person.

Conclusion and Implications

Findings of the study revealed that problems and difficulties experienced by visually impaired students are associated with teachers who are unskilled and non-proficient in the implementation of their duties in an inclusive classroom as well as the negative attitude and unsupportive behaviour of peers towards them. These findings will be helpful for departments how they can take effective measures to address these problems and improve learning environment to make such students feel supported and a part of general classroom.

Discussion

Before focusing on the main discussion of this study, it is essential to acknowledge that in any qualitative study, researcher do not intend to generalize the results of the research. The findings of the study which revealed the various learning challenges and experiences faced by visually impaired student in an inclusive classroom are discussed in the light of literature as follows. Many researchers explored the academic challenges faced by disable students such as Simui et al. (2019) explored disablers (also known as barriers) to academic success faced by At the University of Zambia. He investigated the disablers also referred to as barriers that visually impaired students encounter in their pursuit of academic achievement. The study procedure was guided by a Hermeneutic Phenomenological approach. Thirteen disablers that

obstruct university learning have emerged from their lived experiences; they include, but are not limited to: (i) negative attitudes; (ii) policy practice disjuncture; (iii) staff un-readiness and unpreparedness; (iv) inaccessible buildings; and (v) rigid curricula.

In a different research, Lourens (2015) concentrated on the real-world experiences of South African college students who were visually impaired. The study's conclusions discussed the difficulties in navigating the complicated social relationships with peers who are not impaired. These classmates allegedly gave assistance but ignored or glared at the participants, making them feel as though they are "not seen." The participants occasionally experienced the following in the learning environment: uncooperative lecturers, a lack of communication from significant role-players, late course materials, headaches, and tense muscles from straining to read with poor vision.

Another conclusion drawn from this study result is that teachers are major facilitators, motivators and supporter who can make learning effective and easy for students with visual impairment if they are properly trained and equipped with necessary skills to tackle such students in an inclusive classroom. This conclusion is supported by a study conducted by Maguvhe (2015), who concentrated on elements that hindered visually impaired students' engagement in science and math classes. The study found that the utilization of instruments for learner empowerment and the motivation and mentoring of teachers in mathematics and scientific methods were weak, which had an impact on the learning of visually impaired pupils. It also showed that teachers were not equipped with the necessary special education abilities to maximize the potential of their students in science and math. Government involvement in the areas of teacher development and training is required in this circumstance.

Moriña (2019) investigated the significance of faculty-student interactions, motivation, and emotion in the learning processes of students with disabilities in a different research. Affective and emotional dimensions may be important components of learning and teaching processes. It has to do with the interactions between teachers and students and might encourage disabled students to continue their education. The conclusion is that there isn't much more that needs to be done to involve kids with impairments in the learning process because they are more motivated than their peers.

Another finding of this study related to effect of poor peer support, lack of academic facilities and resources that hinder the learning of visually impaired student are in line with a

study conducted by Firat (2021) who explored the factors that facilitate and complicate the higher education process for students with visual impairments. Six visually impaired university students and eight academics/faculty members who teach these students alongside other students made up the participants. According to the visually impaired students, they have challenges with accessing and navigating the institution, a lack of resources, trouble getting class notes, inadequate academic assistance, and issues with readers, and a lack of library resources. The students identified peer and academic support, along with personal characteristics, as the primary positive facilitators. It was discovered that the academic assistance provided to students with visual impairments was inadequate, and the academic community showed little understanding of the challenges experienced by these students. The findings suggest that there exist significant obstacles in the way of visually impaired students' access to higher education.

Odame et al. (2021) investigated the college experiences of employed graduates with visual impairments (VIs) in Ghana lends weight to these findings. Graduates with VIs who were selected from three areas of Ghana were subjected to in-person interviews. During their higher education, they also faced many significant challenges, including a lack of formal support, financial hardship, inaccessible programs and unfriendly physical environments, reliance on sighted peers for daily living activities in addition to their studies, inadequate learning materials, and negative attitudes from lecturers.

Universities must take a leading role in fostering social cohesion, lowering inequality, offering opportunities, and enhancing the general standard of the society in which they operate in order to fulfil the social component of higher education (Rafi et al., 2019). From a societal standpoint, we really believe that inclusiveness and accessibility are prerequisites for high-quality university education(Rafi, Jian Ming, et al., 2020).

Recommendations

Given the rise in the number of disabled students enrolling in higher educational institutions and the requirement that these students have regarding equitable access to educational and research opportunities, it is imperative to provide necessary support and environment so that these students can learn better and avail every learning opportunity like any other kid. Based on the findings of the current study following recommendations are made for concerning authorities and future researchers.

Implementing accommodations and support services for students with disabilities, such as accessible campus amenities, assistive technology, and specialist academic counselling, is one strategy to promote inclusive education in universities. Universities should also endeavor to develop and implement a more diverse and inclusive curriculum that takes into account the experiences and viewpoints of people with disabilities. This will help all students gain a better understanding of disability issues and create a more welcoming environment for learners of all skill levels. In addition, training on how to support and accommodate students with disabilities should be provided to teachers and staff. This will help to create a more inclusive and inviting campus community and provide students with disabilities a feeling of belonging. Involving people with disabilities in research studies and initiatives is a crucial part of advancing inclusive education in higher education and disability research. This guarantees that study findings are inclusive and reflective of all people with disabilities in addition to offering insightful viewpoints.

Future researchers ought to endeavor to go deeper into this domain by conducting classroom observations to scrutinize these procedures and examine the behaviors executed by these educators and challenges faced by visually impaired students in greater depth. Additionally, interviews with other students who have impairments might be conducted to find the best practices that support their learning and participation. Ultimately, hearing from the student having disability other than visual impairment would also be beneficial in identifying and delving deeper into the best practices that faculty members are doing to support the learning of such students.

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