

An Exploration of Teaching Difficulties Confronted By Blind Teachers At Higher Education Level

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Abstract-The outcome of a research study is based on the motive of highlighting the importance of blind teachers and the problems confronted by them in performing their duties especially at higher education level. A mixed methodological approach has been adopted to explore the issue. In-depth interviews have been conducted from some blind teachers whereas a survey among students has been conducted with the help of questionnaire. The results of the study revealed that the blind teachers have been performing their duties with great commitment and hard work however their performance is hurdled by various issues. The maintenance of class discipline, checking of examination copies and keeping their knowledge up to date by accessing latest books are the main problems reported by the blind teachers. The study suggested that Urdu talking software must be introduced to facilitate the learning and teaching process of the blind teachers so that they can play even more effective role in nurturing the educational base of the students. Moreover, the research study insisted upon facilitating the blind teachers by providing them maximum support to enhance their teaching skills ;specifically through adequate and efficient use of advancement in technology.

KEYWORDS: exploration, confronted, higher level, visually impaired

1 INTRODUCTION

Health is wealth and when someone gets into a professional life, possession of various mental and physical capabilities became more important. The performance of people in various fields depends upon their capability to possession mental and physical abilities up to certain level. Visual impairment is one of the most challenging problems that hinder the career progression of people at large. People with this disability often fail to perform various tasks like normal people. However, it is also observed that people with blindness often defeat the odds of society and find their way despite of all difficulties and challenges. In teaching profession also, blindness appears to be a very serious problem because teaching involves interaction between teachers and student and conduction of classroom and other educational activities that are affected when the teacher is not able to see. Still, blind people could be seen commonly engaged in teaching practice and with great enthusiasm and devotion; one can see blind teachers playing a very constructive role in nurturing the foundation of society. However, there are several challenges and problems that have been faced by the blind teachers in performance of their jobs. The issue is very serious and has been explored by the researchers in foreign country however, after the review of literature it has been realized that in Pakistan there is no research work conducted so far

in this area. There is no credible research study found at higher level that explores the problems of blind teachers in Pakistan. Thus, there was a gap found in the literature and with the intention of filling the identified literature gap, this research paper attempts to explore the issue in great depth and primary research has been conducted to discuss the issue comprehensively. This research paper is aimed at exploring the core issues, problems and challenges that the blind teachers commonly face in teaching specifically at higher level. Moreover, the research aims to put forward some suggestions to point out towards the ways through which the blind teachers could be assisted in best possible way to perform their jobs. The intention behind the entire effort is to bring improvement in overall situation of blind teachers working at higher level and the resolution of the problems that they are commonly facing at the workplace.

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2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH

The research was aimed to raise voice for the blind teachers and their rights that must be granted to them in the society. Since teaching is a respectable and crucially important profession that affects the overall progression of a society, it is imperative that all people associated with this field must be granted due rights and get all due facilities and growth opportunities regardless of their disabilities. Keeping in view this fact, the blind teachers also need to be given due importance and a sensible society must learn how to respect people specially those associated with the teaching profession. Thus, the main objectives of the research were as follow:

- To seek acceptance for active role of blind teachers at higher education level
- To review the current teaching practice of blind teachers at higher education levels
- Identify the problems faced by the blind teachers in performance of their duties
- Identify the problems reported by the students in getting education from a blind teacher
- Highlight the problems in the checking and evaluation process
- Identify the steps and measures that can help blind teachers in playing effective role at higher education level.

3 Research Questions:

The study was aimed to find out the answers of following research questions:

- [1] Is it possible for the blind teachers to adopt modern techniques at higher education level?
- [2] Is it possible for the blond teachers to perform their responsibilities without the help of any other person?
- [3] Blind teachers can satisfy the educational needs of the students by solving their individual conflicts?
- [4] Blind teachers can evaluate the educational performance of students with standard?
- [5] Blind teachers can enhance their teaching skills by attending different professional educational courses?

Blind teachers can easily attain social compatibility?

4 LITERATURE REVIEW

- [6] Miles [1] conducted an extended research to trace the history of blind people's contribution in the teaching field. He traced the contributions of blind teachers who struggled during the seventeenth and eighteenth century and paved the way for other blind teachers in the field of teaching. The study tells that during the eighteenth center there was official stat of blind schooling in Asia where the teachers were also appointed who were visually impaired. In 1837, Mary Gutzlaf appointed several blind teachers in her boarding school. He provided the teachers specially training so that they can handle their responsibilities as teachers and so the trend of appointing blind people in teaching professional became an acceptable and common practice in Asia.
- [7] The challenges faced by blind teachers have been discussed in various studies. For example, Brothers [2] realized that the blind teachers are the people who have experienced difficulty in gaining knowledge as blind students. The weaknesses they countered during their education affect their teaching experience as well. The problems in reading and writing as students remain with them even when they turn into a teacher and hence, there are possibilities that they might not be able to perform well at schools specially at higher level of education. Brantlinger et al [3] found that technology has assisted the blind teachers in their work for several years. Braille for example is a very important source of providing support to the blind teachers. However, there is need of further enhancing their reading experience because as a teacher the blind people need to constantly keep their knowledge update and for this it would be better that they can make use of technology rather completely depending upon any other person.
- [8] Corn, Wall & Bell [4] found that the blind teachers need some special facilities to work as normal teacher and this is not difficult for the authorities and school or college management to arrange such facilities. Flanagan [5] noticed that the continuous evolution in technology has opening several ways to the blind teacher also because they have not become able to cope up with the updating trends with the help of advanced devices and software that have been designed specifically to support and facilitate the blind people. Jahangir [6] found that the blind teachers are employed at educational institutions of Pakistan at different levels and the administration usually attempts to facilitate them to assist their teaching however, at higher level, things often become difficult for the blind teachers. The use of technology can make the situation much better and it is imperative that the blind teachers should work at their own as well to keep them

update with their surrounding and provide better quality and standard of education to the students.

- [9] The literature review conducted around the topic shows that there are not much work done to explore the challenges and problems of blind teachers at higher level. Due to this reason the above presented review of literature is very brief and it is expected that this research work will make significant contributions to the literature and will be a position and useful addition to the literary work conducted around this topic so far. It will also guide the researchers intended to further explore this area.

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was based on a mixed methodological approach. There were 6 in-depth interviews conducted from blind teachers serving at different colleges of Karachi. Among them two were female and four were male. Moreover, 100 students studying at different colleges were also included in the study. Their responses were collected with the help of questionnaire. Interviews of blind teachers were conducted face to face after taken appointments at their colleges whereas the survey close ended questionnaire were also presented to the students face to face, after randomly selecting them from the colleges based on their willingness and availability to participate in the study. The responses collected from the interviews and survey are analyzed to sort out the issues and challenges that the blind teachers face during teacher and also the problems that student might face when they have a visually impaired person as their teacher.

6 DATA ANALYSIS

6.1 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The survey results revealed that the students were widely agreed to the fact that the blind teachers were capable of explaining them different topics and concepts just like any other teacher and they have also accepted that the blind teachers usually did not take strict attitude towards the students. Students also believe that students mostly have a positive attitude towards the blind teachers and they commonly cooperate with them in terms of class attendance and maintenance of discipline. It was also revealed from the survey results that the students see that blind teachers do not use any supporting device for teaching though they believe that if the blind teachers will use any support, they would be able to teach the students in better way. The students were found satisfied from the evaluation and checking process conducted by the blind teachers and they do not mark any significant difference in the teaching style of a regular teacher as compared with a visually impaired

one. The results of the study show overall a satisfactory response towards the blind teachers from students' side. It shows that the students are concerned with gaining knowledge and understanding and they don't want to give importance to the fact that the teacher is blind. The students believe that their learning process is not negatively affected by the blindness of the teacher. They also declared that it is not a common practice of the students to take advantage of the blindness of the teacher and thus, they commonly don't go outside after marking their attendance neither they have developed a habit of getting their attendance marked by someone else.

The interviews of the blind teacher allowed gathering some very useful information and fact regarding the challenges and issues surrounding the teaching practice of blind teachers. It is found that the blind teachers have to limit them to the social science subjects only and even if they have interest in science subjects, they are not able to expertise it due to lack of facilities. They inform that the attitude of their colleagues and students is most of the time very cooperative with them and they don't face difficulties due to lack of cooperation from the people around them. In fact they become able to perform all their activities with the help of their friends and family members like checking process and getting access to different material. Sometimes they face difficulty in invigilation process however, with the help of co-teachers and other staff they become able to go through this process also successfully. The teachers believe that every individual in the society is struggling for rights in one way or other and they are also going through struggle to get their due place in the society. Due to visual impairment, their struggle becomes difficult and sometimes they strongly feel that they would be able to perform better and participate in many more activities if they would have the ability to see the world however, they are content with God's will and working at their best to utilize the other skills that God has bestowed them.

The findings of the study revealed that there are several ambitious people in our country who have not made their visual impairment an excuse for their development and despite their inability to see the world around, they have engaged them in a respectable profession of teaching and have been nurturing the minds of their students by imparting knowledge. They are great source of inspiration and admiration for the others having any sort of disability because they are setting examples that the limitations cannot stop anyone from attaining their goals. The blind teachers are found performing their duties with same quality as the normal teachers do. The students are also found satisfied with the performance of the blind teachers. It implies that the profession of teaching is suitable for blind teachers however, the interviews revealed some limitations that are affecting the progress level of blind teachers. For instance, even if they have interest in science subjects, they are not able to teach science at higher level due to lack of lab resources for blind teachers. Moreover,

they also sometimes face problem in getting reliable person for paper checking and keeping their knowledge update. The use of advanced supporting devices and system for blind teachers is not a common practice in Pakistan. The performance of blind teachers could be enhanced to better level with use of special equipment and arrangements. The findings point out towards a positive side of the situation that people specifically students have developed a positive attitude towards blind teachers. In their interviews, they show respect for the blind teachers and assure that they don't use to take undue advantage of their blindness. It implies that overall there is acceptance in the society regarding the contribution of blind teachers and people are ready to cooperate with them. However, there is need of having specially arrangements and set up to further facilitate the teachers so that they have carry on their work more professionally and proficiently.

7 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study identifies various issues, problem and challenges confronted by blind teachers serving at higher level of education. It has been revealed that there is satisfactory level of awareness among people regarding the rights and respect of blind teachers and it is due to the cooperative attitude of peers and students that the blind teachers have been performing their duties with same standard as of a regular teacher. There is however, great room for improvement in this field. However, it is also realized that the availability of a reliable and trustworthy at the same time competent person is very necessary for a blind teacher. If someone in the family or friend circle is not reliable and educated enough to handle the matters related with checking, evaluation of students and getting access to different material; there are possibilities that the checking and evaluation process would be manipulated. Moreover, the blind teachers might not be able to get access to credible and reliable sources of information to keep them update, if they don't have any reliable person around them. This dependency of blind teacher upon some other person is the major setback that opens up the possibilities of problems within their teaching practice and also invites several challenges for them. People need to be made more ware regarding the rights of blind teachers. They need to be sensitive towards the feelings and expectations of blind teachers. moreover, at government level there is need of increasing facilities for the blind teachers to further support their working. The research concludes by presenting some workable and much needed recommendations intended to bring improvement in overall conditions of blind teachers in Pakistan. These suggestions and recommendations are as follow:

- There is essential need of developing an Urdu reading software by following the pattern of English reading software Jaws. Along with development of software, it is also imperative to arrange workshops to make blind teachers well

versed with the use of the Urdu reading software for blinds

- Government need to appoint assistant for the blind teachers at higher education level so they don't have to search at their own for reliable and credible person to get assistance.
- The use of modern technology is imperative to enhance the teaching experience of blind teachers. Recent development in ICT having implications to blind person must be tracked and implemented to facilitate the blind teachers.
- Steps should be taken to assure the working quality of Braille press all over the country
- Blind teachers must be included in different seminars and workshops held for enhancing the teaching skills in different disciplines
- Blind teachers must be provided with extended opportunity to nurture their skills and boost their creativity
- Blind teachers must also be made part of the policy making process regarding change in different subjects' curriculum.

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