

BRIEF REPORTS

PARENTAL PERSPECTIVE TOWARDS THE EDUCATION OF VISUALLY IMPAIRED CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to understand parents' attitude towards the education of their visually impaired children attending special and integrated schools. The study was conducted on parents of 140 visually impaired children aged 11-13 years, attending special and integrated schools in the selected districts of Karnataka State, India. The survey method was used to elicit information about their children in the area of daily living skills, recreation and socialisation, concept of special and integrated education, adjustment at home, social and emotional behaviour and sibling attitude etc.

Data were collected using the attitude scale developed and standardised by the investigators. Results indicate that there was a significant difference in the attitude of the parents towards their visually impaired children in the area of social and emotional behaviour, sibling attitude and towards the concept of integrated education.

INTRODUCTION

Attitude is a vital ingredient for the success or failure of children with visual impairment in their optimum development. The attitude of parents can have a profound effect on the social and educational integration of visually impaired children. It makes a great difference to these children whether the attitude and actions of parents reflect considerations for their real needs or are merely prompted by pity or monetary limitations. The adjustment of visually impaired children to society begins with the ability to adjust to their own family members. The child brought up with affection and care in the least restrictive environment would be able to cope up better with the sighted world. Therefore, the family shapes the social integration of the child more than a formal school. Turnbull (1) has identified four basic parental roles:

parents as educational decision makers; parents as parents; parents as teachers and parents as advocates.

Since the parent's attitude is so important, it is essential that the home and school work closely together, especially for children with disabilities. The Warnock Report (2) stresses the importance of parents being partners in the education of their children. The role of parents should actively support and enrich the educational processes.

The present study was undertaken with the objective of examining the attitude of parents towards the education of their visually impaired children attending special and integrated schools.

METHOD

A sample of 140 parents of visually impaired children (70 children attending integrated schools and 70 children attending special residential schools) was selected for the present study. Information about the children was collected by contacting government organisations and educational institutions, and purposive sampling procedure was used to select the sample of visually impaired children from integrated schools. In the case of special schools, the children were selected through systematic random sampling, based on their name entries in the attendance register. The study was conducted over for a period of two academic years.

Tool Used: The Attitude scale for the parents of visually impaired children was formulated and standardised by the investigators. The tool comprised of basic information/data, information pertaining to the daily living skills of visually impaired children such as eating habits, toilet training, hygiene, handling money, recreation/socialisation, concept of special education, concept of integrated education, educational procedure, sibling attitude, and adjustment at home. The formulated attitude scale was translated from English into the local language.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Table 1. Concept of Special and Integrated Education

Characteristics	Mean \pm Standard Deviation		Significance of 't' value
	Parents of Special School	Parents of Integrated School	
Concept of Special Education	3.00 \pm 0.00	2.80 \pm 0.44	3.8095**
Concept of Integrated Education	2.77 \pm 0.44	2.67 \pm 0.50	1.2578 ^{NS}

NS : Not significant; ** : Significant at 1% level

The study reveals that there is a significant difference in the attitude of parents towards the concept of special education. Parents of visually impaired children attending integrated schools have very little knowledge/awareness about special schools, as right from the beginning of their child's schooling they had an exposure to an integrated school.

In contrast, the parents of visually impaired children attending special school opined that special education is better than the regular programme. They believe that their children will receive education that is tailored to their knowledge, abilities, aptitudes, interests, and personality qualities. According to Kirk and Gallagher (3), special education is, "those additional services over and above the regular school programme that are provided for exceptional children to assist in the development of their potentialities and/or the amelioration of their disabilities".

There is no significant difference between the mean scores of the parents towards the concept of integrated education.

Parents of visually impaired children attending special schools are of the opinion that integrated education is an education programme in which visually impaired children receive education along with their sighted peers. It is a system which provides general education with some special provision. They further pointed out, that in an integrated set up the visually impaired children get the chance to read and learn with the normal children, further, it saves the children from developing various psychological complexes, which promotes normal mental

growth in visually impaired children. The orientation received by these parents during the process of their child's schooling at special schools, has given them the insight and the significance about integrated education. They further pointed out the economic factor as one of the main reasons for enrolling their children into special schools. Glazzard (4) is of the opinion that parents should be informed of the purpose of the mainstreaming programme and the effects of the programme on their child's education.

Parents of visually impaired children attending integrated schools had very little knowledge about the significance of integrated schools. These parents were happy about the fact that their children could be a part of the family during his/her schooling and formative years, as they attend school as day scholars.

Daily Living Skills

It was noted that there was no significant difference in the parents' opinion towards learning daily living skills in special and integrated schools.

Children attending special schools are trained in the school, while children attending integrated schools are trained by local non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Teaching Aspects

Table 2. Teaching Aspects in Special and Integrated schools

Characteristics	Mean \pm Standard Deviation		Significance of 't' value
	Parents of Special School	Parents of Integrated School	
Teaching Aspects in Special Education	3.00 \pm 0.00	3.00 \pm 0.00	0.0000 ^{NS}
Teaching Aspects in Integrated Education	2.80 \pm 0.57	2.84 \pm 0.55	+0.4232 ^{NS}

NS : Not significant

Parents of visually impaired children attending both special and integrated schools were of the opinion that education for visually impaired children plays an important role, as most of

the learning for these children takes place through auditory and tactile senses/ sensorial experiences.

They further expressed, that in a special school setup visually impaired children are treated equally. Teachers not only focus on the educational needs, but also make use of the necessary learning materials to teach both academics and vocational needs.

Considering the opinion of the parents of both school systems it was observed that the parents of the integrated school setup had a better perspective about the teaching aspect in an integrated setup. They attribute this to the awareness from the NGOs that work with their children. Grossman (5) pointed out that communication should occur on a regular basis so that parents keep in touch with the school programme, are informed of current events and begin to accept and support integration. Kroth (6), states that parents should be recognised as the major teacher of their children and the professional should be considered consultants to parents. Further, parents pointed out that integration can be successful only when there is a modification, omission and adaptation in the curriculum, accepting the child's limitations and capabilities, cooperation from their sighted peers and regular Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings to keep the parents abreast of their child's progress in school. Israelson (7), points out that the PTA should feature programmes on the needs of special learners, pamphlets explaining integration can be sent to all parents, and the acceptance of special students can be a topic of discussion at parent-teacher conferences.

Behavioural Characteristics

Table 3. Behavioural Characteristics of Visually Impaired Children

Characteristics	Mean ± Standard Deviation		Significance of 't' value
	Parents of Special School	Parents of Integrated School	
Social and Emotional behaviour	2.89 ± 0.33	3.00 ± 0.00	+2.7989**
Sibling Attitude	2.85 ± 0.37	3.00 ± 0.00	+3.4013**
Adjustment at Home	1.35 ± 0.70	1.27 ± 0.66	0.6968 ^{NS}
Recreation and Socialisation	3.00 ± 0.00	3.00 ± 0.00	0.0000 ^{NS}

Table 3 shows that there is a difference in the opinion of the parents of visually impaired children, attending special and integrated schools towards the social and emotional behaviour and sibling attitude of visually impaired children.

Parents of visually impaired children attending integrated schools are of the opinion that their children have a balanced social and emotional behaviour. They were of the opinion that since the visually impaired children attending integrated schools are day scholars, their interaction begins at home, continues at school and in the community at large, when compared to their counterparts studying in a special school which is residential in nature. McGuinness (8) compared the social maturity of visually impaired children enrolled in residential and public schools and concluded that those in the public schools had a higher social maturity score. McGuinness (8) attributed the low scores of residential school children to the lack of contact with age-appropriate social behaviour, and the greater availability of special help.

Parents of visually impaired children attending special school attribute the differences among the sibling interaction to the lack of time that both get to spend together, as a result of which there is a strained relationship between the siblings.

Parents of visually impaired children attending special and integrated schools reported that they have not come across behavioural abnormalities like teasing each other, throwing objects or being aloof from others etc. Parents had never considered their visually impaired child as a burden to them and the family.

As far as socialisation of the visually impaired child is considered, parents are of the opinion that like any other normal child of his/her age, the visually impaired children play games etc. but their method of play is a slightly modified one. Tait (9) opines that the parents' psychological well-being and the ease or difficulties with which they decipher the cues that facilitate the socialisation process influence the personal and social development of the child.

CONCLUSION

The family plays a significant role in the development of the visually impaired child. It is the parents who exert the major influence on the development of the visually impaired child from birth to maturity. One of the most important attributes of parental attitude is consistency. The present study also highlights the fact that the parents of the visually impaired children attending

the integrated schools showed a favourable attitude towards the teaching aspect in integrated schools. Their visually impaired children's social and emotional behaviour and sibling relationship was cordial with both the visually impaired children and their sighted siblings experiencing both positive and negative aspects of emotions in their day-to-day life. This was mainly attributed to the factor that these children were a part of the family in their daily routine. The same was not observed in the case of visually impaired children attending special schools, as their interactions with their siblings and their family members was only for a short duration, especially during the vacations. The reason being, that these children are placed in a residential school (special school). It is therefore necessary for the parents to adopt different strategies to help their children better.

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**DISABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT MODULE AT THE VU UNIVERSITY,
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The Athena Institute, Faculty of Earth and Life Sciences, VU University (Amsterdam), together with Enablement (Alphen aan den Rijn) and the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT, Amsterdam) will organise a 4-week module on Disability and Development to be held from **November 23rd to December 19th 2009** at the VU University. This course, a 4-week elective module, which is part of an academic Master degree programme, is open to external participants also. (<http://studiegids.vu.nl/> type 'disability' as search term).

Module I: Disability models and stereotypes, culture and disability, ICF conceptual framework, experience of having a disability, frequencies and distribution of disability, determinants of disability, including stigma and discrimination, poverty, gender and HIV/AIDS, rights of persons with disabilities, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, measurement of disability, disability-relevant research methods, survey methods, examples of disability research and an introduction to community-based rehabilitation.

Module II: Project planning and management, monitoring and evaluation of community-based rehabilitation (CBR) programmes, management information systems, CBR as a preferred strategy for rehabilitation, organisational and institutional development, Disabled People's Organisations, educational and economic empowerment of disabled people, the role of specific rehabilitation services, and sports and disability.

Target Group: Rehabilitation professionals and professionals with an interest in disability and development.

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