

Challenges and Prospects of Vocational Education and Training for Specially-abled Students in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades, there has been an increase in vocational and skilful programmes that can help students achieve a better career, particularly those with special needs. The transition of students with physical challenges like impairments has become increasingly complicated as a consequence, and both the students and their families demand better transition procedures. The organisational challenges and ensuing issues faced by students, families, and care providers are documented in the academic literature on early childhood transition, leading to further difficulties later in their careers. The specific factors influencing this intricate transition process have recently become the subject of insightful transition studies. This framework will help students with special needs and their families cope with the transition process, provide an organisational framework, and start laying the foundation for improving transitions for such students. The framework used in this research includes challenges that are categorised into four categories: environmental challenges, attitude challenges, institutional challenges, and financial challenges. The framework concludes with the actions that may be taken to address the problems impeding the vocational education and training performance of students with physical impairments.

KEYWORDS:

Specially-abled students, Challenges, Vocational Education, Prospects, Pakistan

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INTRODUCTION

According to the International Classification of Functioning (ICF), disability is described as "a complicated phenomenon, reflecting the relationship between elements of a person's body and features of the society in which they live" (Groenewoud, Hämäläinen, and Stucki, 2021; Oliver, 2021; Sinha, Dubey, and Hussain, 2021; World Health Organization, 2002; Üstün, Chatterji, Bickenbach, and Kostanjsek, 2022). Although (Ahmed and Khan, 2011) describe disability as a physical and mental defect, with various kinds of disabilities, such as being crippled, deaf, stupid, or mentally retarded. In the same view, Pakistan's National Policy on the Issue of Disability from 2002 defines a disabled person as unable to get a profitable job or profession due to an inability caused by injury, inborn deformity, or disease. This definition includes mentally or physically challenged people and those with visual or hearing impairments (Ahmed and Khan, 2011). People with disabilities (PWDs) may be found in every region globally and come from various socio-economic backgrounds (Boorse, 2010; Farooq, 2012). Disability affects around one billion people worldwide, equivalent to 15% of the world's population (Ahmed and Khan, 2011). It is stated that 16% of people in the Western Pacific Region have a disability that is moderate to severe (World Health Organization, 2011b). As a result of the rise in the number of disabled people, civilised society has made a concerted effort to strengthen this more vulnerable segment of the population (United Nations, 2022). In this context, the United Nations has also been essential in ensuring that the rights of people with disabilities are protected (Anderson, 1996). In order to commemorate the Year of the Disabled Person 1981 under the support of the United Nations, the third day of December was titled as the "International Day of Disabled Persons." This helped raise awareness about the challenges that people with disabilities face, which led to the development of solutions to those challenges.

Learners who have physical limitations encounter obstacles throughout their educational careers. Students with special needs face personal restrictions in educational environments. These limitations have an impact on student's social and psychological spheres, which likely has an impact on their academic performances. At the worldwide level, various support systems are available to students with physical limitations. For instance, legal help is available for students with physical limitations in the United States. Students who enrol in public institutes despite having a physical disability have numerous facilities, such as the special education laws, which ensure that necessary rooms are made for students with physical challenges. Even though the research conducted by Bright Hub Education did not highlight the difficulties that students with physical impairments experienced while they were pursuing their education or vocational training in institutes, in Pakistan, a significant yet limited amount of assistance is provided to students with special needs. The

research did not reveal the obstacles students with physical disabilities encounter while attending educational institutes.

In Pakistan, there are a variety of support systems in place for students who struggle with physical assistance. For instance, the Ministry of Education stated that it would promote equality of educational opportunities for special needs students, including students with special needs. This applies to learners who have special educational or training requirements. The Pakistan government's policy statement supports policies geared toward students with physical limitations. However, the policies do not discuss the difficulties students with physical impairments face when attaining education or vocational training.

At the worldwide level, there has been a variety of assistance directed at students with special needs. In the United States, for example, despite the help offered to students with physical impairments on a global level in Pakistan, the difficulties experienced by these students while attending educational institutes have not been recognised. As a result, the primary objective of this continuing research project will be to investigate the difficulties that students with physical impairments have while attending a vocational educational institute.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The social model of disability developed by (Rieser, 2002) will be the basis of this research. According to this model, disability is a result of an interaction between persons with special needs and the surroundings in which they live. This model gives the exclusive right to the person with special needs to be considered an equal member of society instead of discriminating them from the community based on their special needs in different situations. This model particularly encourages society to see the challenges of special needs people as basic human rights and treat them equally. Because of this, the implication is that the challenges posed by the environment, attitudes, institutions, and finances need to change to make it possible for people with physical disabilities to participate in society on the principle of equality with others (Barnes, 2023; Priestley and Runswick-Cole, 2021; Rieser, 2002; Shakespeare, 2022; Thompson, 2017; United Nations, 2022).

This model will be used to understand the challenges faced by students with special needs in the TVET sector by understanding the environmental, attitudinal, institutional, and financial challenges that are highlighted in this model. Additionally, the framework will give a rich understanding of the research phenomena by identifying the challenges of physically challenged students in educational institutes. This research will discuss the main aspects determined from the social model that will assist in finding the problems encountered by students with special needs in daily life while attending an educational institute (Mukhtar and Khatoun, 2017; Thompson, 2017).

Within the framework of the social model of disability, environmental obstacles are conceptualised and comprehended. According to (Rieser, 2002) interpretation of the model, environmental difficulties are defined as obstacles brought on by the natural environment and the infrastructure, and they affect the mobility of students who have physical impairments. It is possible that the natural surroundings and the infrastructure does not provide any accessible design features like ramped buildings with double doors, terrains that do not make it difficult for students with physical disabilities to participate in academic activities, and passageways in the natural environment that are accessible to students with physical disabilities so that they can move through the natural environment without any problems (Jones, 2008; Üstün et al., 2022).

Learners with physical impairments, particularly those who use wheelchairs or other mobility aids, should be able to utilise the natural surroundings and infrastructure of the educational institute environment (Jones, 2008). This is especially important for students who use wheelchairs. It will also imply that learners who have special needs will need the provision of elevators in buildings with several floors, ramps, and paved walkways in all of the buildings. There is a need for double doors in the infrastructure (McLeod, 2014).

The second problem that was taken into consideration by the social model of disability is the obstacles that come with attitudes. According to (Rieser, 2002) social model of disability, attitudinal problems are interpreted as a negative attitude toward specific mental features or behaviours, or an underestimation of the possible quality of life of those with impairments. In many cases, it has been noticed that regular students do not feel comfortable with students with special needs and, therefore, do not want to eat, learn, play, or study with them. Such behaviour negatively impacts the academic learning of students with special needs as the learning will be more by working in a group (McLeod, 2014). Another interpretation of the term "attitudinal challenge" is that other students at the institution see those students with physical limitations as persons who can function at a lower level than the norm. Because of this, others could see them with contempt and dislike them.

The social model of disability also addresses the problem of being institutionalised as a separate topic. According to the social model of disability, Rieser (2002) pointed out that institutional issues are regarded to be those that entail legislation and associated rules and policies. Rieser (2002) stated that relevant law impacts people with disabilities by needing access to fundamental rights such as education. Legislation and policy may exist, but they may impact students with physical impairments in institutes if not implemented. The academic performance of students who have physical disabilities could be negatively affected if the curriculum designed for those students is not fully implemented; if the

infrastructure is not modified, if the number of teachers who are adequately trained to work with those students is insufficient, and if the teaching and learning materials are not sufficiently provided because it is not mandatory for the providers to do so. This may also result in difficulties that students with physical limitations may have while attending educational institutes (Mifflin, 2003).

According to the social model of disability, the problem of having financial difficulties is also comprehended. According to Rieser (2002), the model claims that the financial issues faced by educational institutes are perceived as insufficient financing and a lack of initiatives to raise money for the institutes. Students with special needs require exceptional support and effective training from trained staff that will help them to support the students' needs and related services and to provide individual support to such students (Rieser, 2002). It will also require additional resources and investment to run the institutes smoothly, particularly in Pakistan. Therefore, insufficient financing creates barriers to the educational experience of students with physical impairments (Mifflin, 2003).

For students with physical impairments, appropriate financing is essential for instructors and support personnel to effectively assist students with physical impairments. Second, inadequate funding for educational institutes will cause students to experience difficulties while enrolled in training institutes (Howell, 2000). The problems include a shortage of finance to manage physiotherapy materials and additional materials like beds, shoes, and computers for students who cannot write (Mifflin, 2003).

Regarding the people who can assist, in this scenario, the socio-economic standing of the parents may prevent them from providing enough financial assistance to their children. It might potentially result in a significant obstacle for such students. The social model of disability was appropriate for this research, focusing on researching the challenges that students with physical disabilities face in vocational institutes. This research will investigate the difficulties that students with physical disabilities face in TVET institutes. It is because the social model of disability emphasises problems posed by the environment and challenges posed by attitudes, institutions, and finances, all of which serve as a foundation for this research.

The aim of this study

The current research aims to determine the difficulties that students with physical impairments encounter in the TVET sector and how these difficulties impact their academic performance.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the significant challenges faced by specially-abled learners who want to enter the TVET sector.
2. To identify the challenges that affect the vocational performance of specially-abled learners in TVET.
3. To identify the potential measures needed to be in place to counter these challenges by TVET administrators.
4. To analyse the TVET teachers' contribution in handling challenges specially-abled learners face.

Research Questions

1. What are the significant challenges faced by specially-abled learners who want to enter the TVET sector?
2. How do these challenges affect the vocational performance of specially-abled learners in TVET?
3. What are the potential measures needed to be in place to counter these challenges by TVET administrators?
4. How could TVET teachers contribute to handling challenges faced by specially-abled learners?

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research design represents the particular opinions and concepts of the study's participants. Qualitative research approach is helpful in getting an in-depth analysis of the research. It helps to get useful insights from the views of the participants that explains the research into current literature. An exploratory research approach benefits this study since it examines challenging and few-researched subjects. According to (Stebbins, 2001), in qualitative research, the researcher utilises the viewpoints of numerous respondents to get insights and an in-depth understanding of a topic that has received little prior investigation. A researcher may utilise their imagination and let the respondents discuss the phenomena using an exploratory research technique to give a broad background for the crucial issues (Stebbins, 2001). Participants' lived experiences and perceptions of these interactions were gathered using semi-structured telephone interviews.

A focus group research was conducted with 12 individuals to gather the data. (Hallberg, 2014) Four participants represented public sector schools and institutions for special children in Lahore, four participants were teachers from a private school for special children, 2 of the participants work with the Special Education department, and the other two affiliate with technical and vocational training institute in Lahore. All of the twelve participants were based in the capital city of Punjab that is Lahore. Participant were invited at an event held on International Day for persons with disabilities. There they express their thoughts and the researcher take notes while the speakers speak in the event. Later, the focus group was conducted to gather their detailed perspectives and experiences. When choosing the participants, consideration

was given to their prior experiences working in Special Education. Moreover, all members in the focus group were directly involved with the specially-abled students' education or vocational training.

There is little research on specially-abled students in Pakistan, particularly for Technical and Vocational Education. As a result, it is critical to gather the valuable ideas of stakeholders who have worked in this sector for a long time and are familiar with such students. As a result, the purposive sample is used to target administrators, educators, policymakers or trainers from various special education institutes. The focus group session with the participants was conducted at a private hotel in the city. Thematic analysis technique is used to carry out the analysis that later discussed in accordance with the conceptual framework used.

The material collected was examined using thematic analysis. Qualitative research uses thematic analysis to find, evaluate, and present data patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2006) (Chandra et al., 2013)(World Health Organization, 2011a). The assessment investigation's most essential and frequent elements were determined with the help of the developing patterns. Pakistani vocational credentials must overcome the following difficulties: Critical insights were produced using the stakeholders' perspectives.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this conceptual framework is to comprehend the problems that students with special needs encounter while attending TVET institutes. The arrows indicate a reflective route that the researcher will take while doing the study. The description of the idea of a learner with physical impairment comes first in the framework, followed by the discussion of the classroom topic. Following that, an explanation of the problems that students who have a physical impairment experience at TVET Institute is provided. These challenges are categorised into four categories: environmental challenges, attitude challenges, institutional challenges, and financial challenges. The framework concludes with the actions that may be taken to address the problems impeding the academic performance of students with physical impairments.

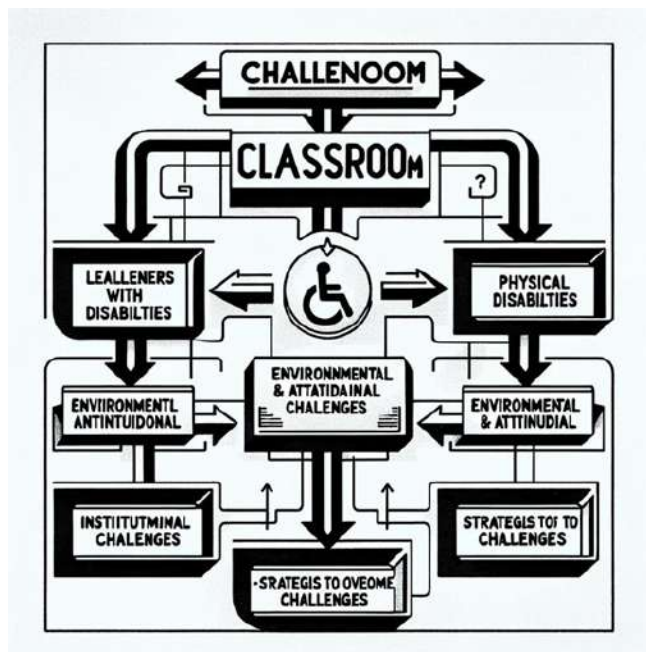


Figure 1: A diagrammatic representation of the conceptual framework of challenges for learners with physical disabilities

ANALYSIS

Following are the main themes that are studied within the data and are described in detailed below:

1. **Learner with a physical disability** The umbrella term "physical disability" encompasses various illnesses and disorders and includes congenital and acquired disabilities as part of its definition (Mifflin, 2003). A student who suffers from a physical handicap that substantially and permanently impacts their ability to participate in everyday activities, such as learning, is said to have a physical impairment. A person who has a slight physical disability may struggle with mobility concerns, such as having trouble ascending stairs, and will need walking aids or assistance

to get about. A person who has a substantial physical disability will be unable to walk and will need help to move about. Students with physical restrictions need to be put in a supportive classroom or learning environment to operate properly.

2. **Classroom environment** The environment must be accommodating for a student with physical restrictions and must learn via physical activity in the classroom. Other than that, it is a space or area where students are taught, and the seating arrangement is considered. For instance, a student who uses a wheelchair will need more space, a large table to accommodate their chair, ramps, and access doors modified to meet their needs. Students with physical restrictions might have problems learning in a classroom that is not appropriately organised. The following analysis attempts to show how incorporating environmental, attitudinal, institutional, and financial challenges might be employed to identify the obstacles faced by students with physical impairments while attending TVET institutes. This is done to determine the difficulties that these students face.
3. **Challenges faced in schools** Students who suffer from physical impairments may have challenges in the form of hurdles or issues they encounter when studying. These students may confront these difficulties in TVET institutes. According to (Anderson, 1996), students with physical impairments are more likely to face numerous obstacles in their day-to-day academic lives than students who do not have disabilities. It is in comparison to students who do not have disabilities. This is in contrast to the experience of students with no disability. (Bairavi and Sundhara, 2018) These difficulties manifest in environmental, emotional, institutional, and financial difficulties. Some of the challenges that these people face as a direct result of the physical conditions that they have are difficulties with accuracy caused by poor coordination, small or missing limbs, problems with communication, muscle degeneration that lowers physical endurance, and disruptions in consciousness in the case of those who have seizure disorders.

Environmental Challenges

Environmental barriers are obstacles or challenges posed by the built environment and infrastructure and hinder the mobility of students with special needs. Environmental barriers are also known as architectural barriers. Environmental barriers are also sometimes referred to by their architectural name. Likely, the environment and the infrastructure do not contain any components of inclusive design such as ramped building entrances, topography that makes it easier for students with physical impairments to interact, or routes that make it easy for them to travel through (Savolainen and Kaikille, 2000; Smith, 1998). If the learning environment at TVET institutes is hostile, it is also the case that students with physical disabilities have a more difficult time achieving academic success in the classroom. It is the case because hostile learning environments make it more difficult for students with physical disabilities to learn.

Attitudinal challenges

Attitude problems may take the form of a negative view of certain mental features or behaviours of the quality of life that may be feasible for those with physical limitations. It suggests that other people in the area do not accept these students because they do not want to study, eat, play, or connect with them in any other way. Others have the impression that they can function at a lower-than-average level. This finding aligns with the claim made by (Khursheed, Gupta, Singh, Khursheed, and Bansal, 2015; Loreman and Deppeler, 2002), which states that these students may encounter considerable challenges due to the attitudes and abilities of general education teachers and administrators. If instructors have negative attitudes about students with physical limitations or low expectations of them, then it is possible that their academic performance in institutes may suffer as a result.

Institutional challenges

Institutional challenges are any difficulties or issues that, owing to the acts of the institution, put the safety of students with physical disabilities at risk. An example of an institution that faces obstacles is a TVET institute that has a high number of students who have special needs. According to (Howell, 2000), these challenges include a curriculum that may not be fully modified and implemented for students with physical disabilities, an infrastructure that has not been modified, teachers who are insufficiently trained to handle these students, managers who may not comprehend and plan for these students, and an insufficient amount of teaching and learning resources, such as computers, for students with physical disabilities who are enrolled in a TVET institute. In addition, there is a lack of teaching and learning resources for students with physical disabilities who are not enrolled in TVET institutes.

Financial challenges

Inadequate money for institutes to operate, which might come from the government or fundraisers, can lead to financial challenges or concerns. (Rieser, 2002) emphasised providing individualised assistance to students with physical impairments; hiring specialists and more personnel is necessary to meet the students' requirements, coordinate services, and allocate more funding to manage the institutes efficiently. Because of this, it is difficult for kids with physical disabilities to acquire an education because there is not enough financing. In addition, if there is a lack of funding for

the TVET institutes, it may be difficult for pupils to get resources such as computers for those unable to write, callipers, electric beds, artificially created shoes, crutches, and physiotherapy equipment. These are just a few examples.

DISCUSSION

The development of new jobs increases political participation, and overall economic expansion depends critically on adequate vocational education. It is developing a competent workforce to contribute to the country's prosperity. In addition, it offers an opportunity to underserved areas by ensuring they have access to high-quality educational possibilities. At the higher education level, an effort is being made to ensure that the policies are centred on safeguarding the rights of individuals with unique circumstances. Even though Pakistan has initiated some initiatives to accomplish the "Education for All" objective, the aim will not be reached as long as students with impairments are excluded from the equation. The conceptual framework aligns with the current situation of our education sector for specially abled students. The key themes described and explained in the analysis give a thorough picture of the whole sector working.

In Pakistan, policies have been drafted in preparation for the rollout of an inclusive education system for students with various impairments. (of Education, 1996) Notable examples of education provided to students with disabilities include "National Policy for Persons with Disabilities 2000" and "National Education Policies 1998." In addition, the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan has devised guidelines for an all-encompassing education at the post-secondary level. These policies' overarching objective is to provide at all levels of vocational education a setting conducive to good health and convivial interaction for students with special needs.

Students with disabilities in Pakistan's vocational educational institutions face various challenges, including inappropriate curriculum, learning difficulties, defective methods, and a lack of equipment availability, all of which harm the student's ability to function effectively in regular or inclusion-based settings. Similarly, the students who struggle with their vision cannot participate in class discussions since they have trouble reading the whiteboard. Additionally, some teachers do not let their students record their lectures using audio recorders, making it difficult for them to follow the lessons. Additionally, the perspective that vocational institutions faculty members have toward these students is critical to accomplishing the goal of inclusive education at higher education institutions. Due to the unfavourable attitude of the general public and the social stigma associated with a disability, these students with impairments are put through challenging circumstances. In addition, the related aspects of the conceptual framework and their explanation in context with a developing country like Pakistan will help to remove the challenges of the system within TVET sector.

Inequality stemming from discrimination based on gender may be shown when males are given precedence over girls in certain situations. Consequently, far less money is spent on females' education than boys'. In addition to these issues, students with disabilities also struggle with accessibility issues and frequently do not have access to appropriate auxiliary aids. Learners who have impairments have a significant need for educational institutions to be easily accessible to them. The inaccessibility of vocational education institutions is the root cause of both the low enrollment and high dropout rates seen in vocational education institutions. People with disabilities cannot complete their educational objectives in inaccessible facilities. These students' ability to move about relies heavily on the accessibility provided by various assistive gadgets. When we talk about "services for such students," we're referring to the physical and human resource arrangements that allow for the incorporation and addition of students with special needs. In order to access classes, the library, and administrative offices, students attending institutions in the country are obliged to use mobility aids such as ramps, elevators, and wheelchairs. Students who use wheelchairs cannot move freely across these campuses due to a lack of available space. In addition, no physiotherapy treatments are available, another obstacle for this marginalised group of people to overcome in today's society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following suggestions have been finalised based on this study:

1. Children with physical disabilities make up 2% to 4% of the population in our country, so more research has to be done to find solutions to the challenges they face. Specifically, in the context of Pakistan, more research is essential to understand and propose solutions contextualised to our society.
2. Each vocational institute needs a designated route for disabled students to follow on their way to the institute and subsequently to their respective classrooms. Wheelchairs and sign boards should be made available in TVET institutes for students with special needs to access the information they need more quickly. A central policy on infrastructure proposed and maintained by the government accreditation or affiliation authorities could have its mandate, so it becomes mandatory for all vocational institutes to abide by these infrastructural regulations fully.
3. To make it easier for students with special needs to attend institutes, toilets, washrooms, and playgrounds explicitly designed for their needs should be installed in each institute. Unfortunately, there is nearly no awareness about these facilities in Pakistan, specifically within the vocational education sector, with comparatively low financial budgets for developing such facilities. At a minimum, toilet facilities for specially-abled learners must be mandatory.

4. The administration should provide the appropriate amount of attention to the physically challenged students, and higher authorities should organise specialised training programmes for those who are physically challenged. One primary objective of this training is to raise their morale and enhance their confidence to raise their voices effectively.
5. The subject matter of classes dealing with the difficulties faced by physically challenged students should be included in all stages of the educator preparation process. A whole school approach must be applied in all vocational institutes for effective implementation. Teachers and institute administration need to review the progress of related issues regularly.
6. Vocational institutes' classrooms and training labs should be outfitted with various specialised teaching tools to effectively instruct physically challenged students. These could cover supporting materials and gadgets to enable the maximum types of difficulties these students could have.
7. It is the responsibility of teachers to keep parents apprised of their students' academic standing and progress in remedial work. Not all vocational training practice can be done at home, yet many aspects could be revised or exercised at home for the physically challenged students so their pace of learning is not slower compared to other students.
8. The contact between teachers and other students who are not physically impaired should be highly cooperative with the physically challenged learners regarding their challenges. The more the environment of acceptability and coexistence is cultivated in institutes, the more these students promise to excel in their training and education careers.

CONCLUSION

Based on the debate, the study concludes that the social model and conceptual framework may be utilised to pinpoint issues impacting students in Pakistan TVET institutes who have physical impairments. Recommendations made in the previous sections must be adopted in our current education sector that would help to resolve the challenges and make new prospects of Vocational Education and Training for specially-abled students in Pakistan. Environmental, attitude, institutional, and financial difficulties are all present in the two frameworks. Therefore, the environmental difficulty element will guide in identifying challenges or issues brought on by the infrastructure and the natural environment and influence the mobility of students with physical impairments. The aspect of attitudinal difficulty will guide in determining whether or not others, such as students and instructors, accept the physical limitations of these learners. The element of the institutional problem provides a guide to identifying challenges or issues that might pose a danger to students with physical impairments. Lastly, the financial difficulty will guide in recognising challenges or problems from insufficient funding to operate the vocational institutes, which may come from the government, fundraising efforts, or other sources.

CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT

Gouhar Pirzada: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing- Original draft preparation and reviewing.

COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS:

It is declare that all authors don't have any conflict of interest.

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