

English Language Teaching To Blind Students In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: An Investigation Of Teachers' Challenges

MUHAMMAD SOHAIB¹, Iqra Maheen², Imdad Ali³, Muhammad Farooq⁴, Murad Khan⁵

¹Lecturer, Department of Linguistics, University of Haripur, Haripur, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

²Lecturer, Abbottabad University of Science & Technology, Abbottabad, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

³Lecturer, Department of Linguistics, University of Haripur, Haripur, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

⁴Lecturer, Department of Linguistics, University of Haripur, Haripur, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

⁵M. Phil Scholar, Hazara University Mansehra, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

Abstract

Teaching English to blind students is crucial, just as it is to everyone else in the world. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, English language instruction for blind children begins in primary school. The growing interest in teaching English as a second language around the globe signifies that blind people's requirements for language learning cannot be disregarded. Teaching English to students with blindness poses another challenge to the teachers. In this regard, the study was conducted to learn more about the difficulties experienced by English teachers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's primary and secondary institutions for blind students. Data for the qualitative study was gathered through interviews and observations. The outcomes of the research have shown that the teachers faced several challenges in teaching English to blind students. The major challenges were individual differences of students and diversity in Blind Classrooms, unavailability of required teaching material, limitations of braille medium, insufficient braille skill and absence of training programs.

Key words: Blind students, Teaching English, English language, Challenges.

1. Introduction

In the history of language teaching, English language instruction has generated a lot of debate among policymakers, educators, psychologists, and language teachers. Similar discussions and debates take place in Pakistani policymaking, educational, and language teaching circles. The growing demand for English in the developing countries has increased the importance of its teaching. It plays important roles as the official language, the medium of instruction in educational institutions, and the language of cross-cultural contact. In Pakistan, it is utilized as a language of instruction in elite private institutions in addition to being an official language and the primary language of instruction in higher education (Rahman, 2001).

English now holds a paramount importance in the modern world, whether it is in the fields of business, education, or international communication. The National Curriculum for English Language in Pakistan placed focus on teaching English language beginning at the primary level of school in recognition of the significance of English in the modern world (Ministry of Education, 2006). Since grade one, English is taught as a required subject in Pakistan's educational system (elementary education). Both regular and special education institutions are part of the educational establishments.

There is a great demand for English language instruction worldwide due to the ever-increasing requirement for effective communication in English. Similar to this, the significance of teaching English to blind students has grown over time. There are adequate researches on the subject of non-disabled students' acquisition of second languages, which gives language teachers enough methodological backing. The literature also describes the difficulties encountered by English language instructors while instructing these students in the language, however there is little literature on the subject of language teaching to blind students. Galetova (2012) notes that while it is necessary to educate blind people because it is a growing population, there is little methodical research in this area.

Despite the fact that English is equally important for blind students, there is very little literature on the subject and very little study has been done on how to teach and help blind students learn foreign languages (Coşkun, 2013). The demands of blind people in terms of learning foreign languages are largely disregarded, according to Guinan (1997) and Araluce (2005). While Araluce (2005) contends that blindness will not in any way hinder language learning as long as fundamental methodological and pedagogical conditions are upheld, blind people will actually have an advantage over sighted people in language learning due to their superior oral sensitivity and memory. This study aims to analyze the difficulties encountered by English language teachers while instructing English at the institutes for the blind in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

1.1 Research Objectives

- a. To explore the challenges that English language teachers face while teaching English language to blind students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
- b. To examine the impact of these challenges on English language teaching in the institutes for blind in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What are the challenges faced by English language teachers while teaching English

language to blind students in the institutes for the blind in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?

2. How do these challenges impact English language teaching in the institutes for the blind.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Importance of Vision

It is appropriate to place the human visual system at the core of their sensory modalities. Not only does the brain devote a large portion of its resources to understanding visual input, it also consumes half of its capacity for sight (Shepherd, 2001). Additionally, visual studies have identified the deliberate preference for the visual sense (Shams, 2000). According to Shore, Spence, and Klein (2000), when compared against other sensory input, visual input always wins out; either vision has the ultimate say or it alters the nature of the situation.

According to the research, there should not be any obstacles to blind learners learning to speak if there are no cognitive disabilities present. However, this does not imply that blind people learn language in the same manner as sighted people do. They undoubtedly have special demands, and teaching them presents distinct difficulties that can only be overcome by familiarization with the problem in order to come up with efficient solutions.

2.2 Language Teaching to Blind Learners: Assessment of Challenges and Needs

In the academic circles, everyone agrees that blind students have special learning demands. Despite their best efforts, teachers will not be able to successfully guide the learning of blind pupils if they are unaware of their requirements and potential. Unawareness of the difficulties involved in teaching blind youngsters may cause the failure of the learners in the classroom and subsequently in society. Making out difficulties becomes much more relevant in a situation like Pakistan where the requirement for comprehension is crucial but lacking. As a result, this part examines the research and scholarly views that focus on what it means to teach blind students in a language classroom.

According to Sharlin (2015), the challenges that educators face depending on whether a student has a congenital or acquired vision impairment are different. Students who are naturally blind adapt to their surroundings and their circumstances. They also have fully developed other senses. Conversely, those who became blind later in life experience a terrible emotional condition. They still haven't found peace with their situation. Such students require more attention and tailored teaching methods. As a result, teachers face a variety of difficulties depending on whether a handicap is innate or develops later in life. Additionally, he makes it clear that blind pupils are susceptible to distractions just like other students. They must, in fact, exert greater effort to avoid boredom and distraction. Such circumstances frequently develop when there is no external support.

According to Kocyigit and Artar (2015), there is a challenge that both teachers and their blind students face known as an emotional challenge. The results of their investigation indicate that the teachers engaged in positive discrimination because they are compelled to feel sympathy and compassion for their blind students. Their blind students express the same feelings in various ways. Concerns about adaptation and teacher and peer attitudes plague them. The research draws attention to the difficulty with professionalism. The blind student may be pushed by positive discrimination to consider their "oddity," which causes them to experience inferiority complex. Teachers, on the other hand, must dispel any such concerns about their students through their impartial attitude.

The study by Kocyigit and Artar (2015) highlights other issues with the assessment procedure. Students who are proficient in braille have little trouble answering questions on tests, while those who struggle with the braille and must rely on others to explain questions and write answers for them highlight challenges since they must rely on memory and ask the helper to read the material again. As a result, it necessitates dependency and extra mental effort. Therefore, a reading and writing mechanism introduction is crucial.

In order to teach the blind about items, Kashdan and Barnes (1998) highlight the inclusion of a multisensory approach, particularly the use of touch. Without the chance to employ their senses, as is frequently the case, blind students tend to become passive recipients rather than actively exploring, which is essential for the growth of comprehension. According to Kashdan and Barnes (1998), some researchers think that blind people's haptic mechanisms play a significant role in how they conceptualise the world. By stimulating this sense and developing ways to use it, we can help blind people feel more integrated and inspire them to learn specific languages.

The most significant obstacle to language learning, as suggested by Kashdan and Barnes (1998), Kocyigit and Artar (2015), and others, is visual-based material. The heavy reliance on visual materials and aids in programmes and textbooks makes it nearly hard for blind language learners to adapt and teachers to teach.

Some teachers advocate touch-centered models, like toys for learners to touch and understand, however these models are believed to slow down the learning process. Others advise conducting a group project where sighted persons explain visual cues to blind students in an inclusive environment. Such an alternative, however, impairs the child's capacity for independent learning. Lack of viable alternatives results in extremely poor teaching practises, which are harmful to learning

A concern regarding the teachers of blind students is raised by Lerner (1991). He asserts that non-disabled teachers have reservations about the capacities of impaired students to learn. Such bias results from naive assumptions about the scope of learning processes. Although a learning deficit, such as the inability to construct fundamental concepts in the learning of a foreign language, is likely to develop in individuals with any kind of disability, it is not overwhelming.

Lerner (1991) emphasises the significance of a multi-sensory approach in language learning as a result. In order for students who have a learning disability in one particular area, like vision, to have the chance to overcome it through other manifestation through several channels.

Ginan (1997) urges that the blind learners need qualified professionals. She makes the argument that if the teacher is unaware of the specific needs of the blind students, how is it that he uses the theories and methods to identify and solve the special obstacles that the students with blindness face? She feels that a trained instructor can make a significant difference in a student's success or failure because it all relies on how far he is prepared to go.

Başaran (2012) investigated the way English (foreign language) is taught to visually impaired students. He looked at the challenges EFL teachers face when instructing visually impaired students in English. The research revealed that none of the EFL instructors had any professional experience instructing children who are visually challenged. According to Basaran, it is a major issue that there are students in the classroom who have multiple disabilities. Other issues include the curriculum being inappropriate, verbalism among blind students, problems with families, a lack of resources, and the teachers' frequent use of outdated grammar-translation methods. Contrary to early research that suggested blind learners have their own learning style, the teachers taught the blind students in a manner comparable to how they educate sighted and non-impaired pupils.

Galetova (2012) focused her research on lesson planning for the English language instruction of blind students with the goal of identifying discrepancies between lesson plans for sighted students and blind students. Teaching blind children is a challenge since there is a lack of methodological support in the literature. As a result, the primary obstacles are a lack of lesson planning activities and a lack of similar assistance.

The issues that blind students and teachers faced when teaching and learning English in an inclusive setting, their strategies for overcoming these difficulties, and the unique needs of students in terms of the teaching strategies and methods employed, the learning resources offered, and the opportunities suggested to enable better teaching and/or learning were investigated by Kocyigit and Artar (2015). The study found that blind students' unique learning styles, personality traits, and habits have a special impact on the teaching and learning process. Because each of these students is unique, it is clear that no single teaching strategy will work for all blind students. It is the responsibility of the instructors to modify their instruction in accordance with each student's strengths and shortcomings. The teachers relied on trial and error methods and did not receive enough academic and pedagogical support, but the outcomes highlighted the importance of the role played by administrators, curriculum designers, students, and families in enhancing the learning process.

It is true that blind students have particular demands, and they face particular difficulties in their academic work. The severity of their sickness, their concerns about the environment, their

lack of experience, the world's design for the sighted, and the training and viewpoint of the teacher all contribute to the extraordinary requirements that learning for blind children implies. The educators can create a successful approach to satisfy the needs of the students for seamless learning when they have a greater understanding of the demands of blind learners.

3. Research Methodology

The purpose of this research was to find out the challenges faced by English language teachers while teaching English language in the institutes for blind in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. As this study was intended to explore the problems faced by teachers which is an experiential investigation, qualitative research approach was considered best fit. qualitative methods were adopted to collect data and analyze it. The instruments for data collection were semi structured interview and observation. The data collected with semi structured interviews from the samples and observation of their English language classes was appropriate to understand the problem under consideration.

In this study a sample of eight English language teachers from eight institutes for the blind students were chosen as sample through purposive and convenient sampling technique. Out of these, six teachers were blind and rest of the two were sighted. The sample teachers were interviewed and A forty minute class of each participant teacher was observed. The non-participant observation was noted on the observation sheet. The guidelines for interview and observation were taken from the study of Başaran (2012). The collected data was analyzed through content analysis procedures in which thematic analysis was conducted to come up with the conclusion of the study.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The study is based on Vygotsky's semiotic mediation and internalisation (1998) and Krashen's input hypothesis (1982). According to the Krashen model, understandable input is a key element in learning a second language (Krashen 1982). In order to make up for their lack of vision, blind students get input through their oral and tactile senses. The diverse and sequential nature of this input makes it difficult to teach language to blind students. It is impossible for students who are blind or have low vision to comprehend a text holistically and logically. This input issue for blind students poses a significant challenge for their teachers as well.

Students who are blind share similar higher cognitive functions with sighted students, such as semiotic mediation and internalization. In their situation, the role of the mediator and mediator components, the tools, and the sign are more significant. When it comes to the language acquisition of blind students, Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the "zone of proximal development" best captures the significance of the instructor (mediator), who plays a crucial role in the internalization process for blind students. Due to their inability to understand notions of things that cannot be understood by senses other than vision, blind students are at a disadvantage when interacting with objects. As a result, the instructor is the only one who can enhance this student engagement. Therefore, the challenges of the instructors are to be considered on priority.

4. Analysis And Results

In this study, the qualitative methods of data collection were used, including semi structured interview and observation. These two methods were thought to be the most appropriate because they could provide rich and in-depth information on the issue at hand. The difficulties experienced by English language instructors at blind institutes were carefully examined, and first-hand information was gathered in the field. Through the use of content analysis techniques, the data gathered for this descriptive study was examined. Below, there is a detailed discussion of the findings and results.

4.1 Challenges faced by The Teachers

The study's primary focus was on the difficulties faced by English language instructors when instructing blind students in the language. According to the study, English teachers of blind students play a crucial role in their language acquisition, but they also face challenges such as student diversity in blind classrooms, students with a variety of disabilities, poor object perception of students, lack of necessary teaching materials, braille's limitations, inadequate braille proficiency, absence of training programmes, and scepticism of teachers toward the disability. The difficulties that came in light from this study's investigation are described below.

Individual Differences of Students and Diversity in Blind Classrooms

Blind students' unique variations and diversity have a specific impact on teaching and learning practices. Students with different levels of variations and diversities were present in a blind classroom. The teachers of blind children had to deal with students who had a range of sight levels, varied ethnic backgrounds, varying ages, and different learning styles. The study's findings corroborated Kocyigit and Artar's (2015) assertion that blind students' unique habits and personalities have a special impact on the teaching and learning process. Since no single teaching method would be suitable for all blind students, it is the responsibility of the instructors to recognize these students' strengths and weaknesses and adjust their instruction accordingly. This pressure placed on the instructor is a challenge for them.

Students with Multiple Disabilities

There are students with multiple disabilities in blind classrooms. Students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's blind classrooms also have disabilities other than blindness. A few students had intellectual disabilities, while others had hearing difficulties or other sensory issues. This study's findings corroborated those of Başaran (2012), who stated that it is problematic to have kids with multiple disabilities in blind classrooms. Multiple disabilities cannot be managed by teachers in the classroom since each disability has different needs, and if one kid has multiple impairments, the rest of the class would be disregarded. Teachers cannot meet the needs of a variety of children in a single classroom, including those who have multiple disabilities.

Weak Perceptions of Students about Objects

The lack of object perception among the children in the class of blind students presented another difficulty for the language teachers. The teacher thought that because the kids had no prior

knowledge of the new terminology and vocabulary, they were unable to explain it to them. Students could not understand the difference if they tried to discuss two veggies or a fruit and a vegetable since they did not have an image in their minds. When a person has an image in their mind, they typically recall that information. The teachers were faced with a dilemma as a result of their poor object perception.

Unavailability of Required Teaching Material

Students who are blind employ compensatory mechanisms to fill the gap left by their blindness. They take in information and process it for learning using their memory, oral or tactile techniques. The sole instructional aid available to blind teachers in their classes was braille books. Except for braille books, they had no access to educational resources. The teachers had very few resources to teach language to blind students because they had no availability of other tactile materials like embossed images, models, or realia.

Limitations of Braille Medium and Insufficient Braille Skill

Braille is a reading and writing method for the blind, and braille proficiency can lead to satisfactory outcomes. However, the braille system has several inherent drawbacks that blind teachers and students must deal with when using it. This investigation confirmed Fernanda's (2017) assertion that the braille system is essentially a sluggish method of reading and writing. Additionally, other braille limitations presented challenges for the teachers. However, this study also validated Rollan's (2013) assertion that both blind students' teachers and the students themselves must be proficient in the learning medium, in this case, Teachers who lack braille proficiency cannot instruct blind students effectively.

Absence of Training Programs

The pedagogical skills of non-native English language instructors must be improved by ongoing professional development, and this requirement is particularly greater for teachers of blind students. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the teachers of the blind had never gone through any kind of training for instructing blind kids in English. The majority of teachers lacked specialization in teaching English as a second language, and they were unaware of the adaptations that must be made in order to integrate blind pupils in language learning effectively. This study fully supported the claims made by Başaran (2012) and Kocyigit and Artar (2015) that English language teachers lack the necessary professional preparation to teach language to blind pupils, which makes it difficult for them to do so.

Skepticism about the Disabled Learning Capabilities

The ability of blind students to fully participate in all language-learning activities is questioned by the non-disabled staff. The sighted teachers at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's blind institutions conceptually believe that practical activities pose a challenge to the students. They felt that blind children had functional limitations and were unable to engage in a variety of educational activities.

This skepticism was quelled by their limited knowledge of the abilities of blind students and their weak preparedness for teaching blind students and how they learn languages. This information supports Lerner's (1991) thesis, and teachers' skepticism about the learning capacities of disabled children has caused a problem for them.

5. Conclusion

This study's primary goal is to better understand the difficulties teachers have when instructing blind children in English language. For its operational field work, the study takes a strictly qualitative research strategy. To conduct this qualitative field research, two fundamental and highly dependable qualitative procedures are used. The operational framework of the study is composed of qualitative interviewing (semi-structured interviews) and observation. Following interviews with teachers and observations of their English language classrooms, the study produces in-depth conclusions about the difficulties experienced by teachers.

The study examines how important English language teachers are to blind students' language acquisition, but also highlights the difficulties they encounter when instructing blind pupils in English. The results of this study show that the student diversity and individual differences in blind classrooms is a difficulty for teachers. Students in a blind classroom come in a wide range of variances and differences. The teachers of blind pupils must deal with students who have varying degrees of vision, varying racial backgrounds, varying ages, and varying learning styles. They have to cope with pupils that have a variety of difficulties. Students' understanding of items is too limited, and the necessary instructional resources are not available. These educational resources can be utilized for their better learning. The braille medium has some built-in restrictions, and neither teachers nor pupils are proficient enough to use it. There are no training programs for teachers on how to teach language to blind children, and teachers are skeptical of the capacities of people with disabilities to learn. If none of these obstacles are removed, language teachers working in blind institutions will continue to experience performance issues.

References

- Araluce, H. A. (2005). Teaching English as a foreign language to blind and visually impaired young learners: The affective factor (Doctoral dissertation, En la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, España).
- Basaran, S. (2012). Teaching English to visually-impaired students in Turkey: A case study. *Energy Education Science and Technology Part B: Social and Educational Studies, Special Issue 2*, 217-226.
- Coşkun, A. (2013). English language teaching for the visually impaired learners: Training non-native English teachers. *International Journal of Social Science & Education*, 4(1), 289–295.

- Fernanda, M. (2017). English as a foreign language method for the visually impaired. Asuncion, Paraguay, 6 (2), 60-75.
- Galetova, I. (2012). Lesson planning for visually impaired students of English (Doctoral dissertation, Masarykova Univerzita, Pedagogická Fakulta).
- Ginan, H. (1997). EFL for students with visual impairments. *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness*, 5 (2) 91-95.
- Guinan, H. (1997). ESL for students with visual impairments. *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness*, 91(6), 555-563.
- Kashdan, S. & Barnes, R. (1998). Kaizen program for new English learners with visual Limitations. *Kaizen Program for New English Learners with Visual Limitations*.
- Kocyigit, N., & Artar, P. S. (2015). A challenge: Teaching English to visually-impaired learners. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 199 (2015), 689-694.
- Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Lerner, W. (1991). Critical issues in learning disabilities: Foreign language learning. *Learning Disability Research and Practice*, 50-53.
- Ministry of Education Pakistan. (2006). Curriculum document on English Language Grades IXII.
- Rahman, T. (2001). English-teaching institutions in Pakistan. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 22(3), 242-261.
- Rollán, M. E. S. (2013). *La aptitud lingüística en estudiantes ciegos*. Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid.
- Shams, L. (2000). A visual illusion induced by sound. 2nd Annual Multisensory Research Conference. NewYork. Retrieved from <http://www.inform.umd.edu/imrf/abstracts.html>.
- sharlin, E. (2015). Suggesting techniques to teach visually impaired students using the listening skill, in the english lessons. san jose, costa rica.
- Shepherd, I. (2001). Providing learning support for blind and visually impaired students undertaking fieldwork and related activities. Gloucestershire: Geography & Environmental Management Research Unit, University of Gloucestershire.
- Shore, D I., Spence, C., & Klein, R M., (2000). Prior entry: Previous confounds and novel findings using an orthogonal design. 2nd Annual Multisensory Research Conference NewYork. Retrieved from <http://www.inform.umd.edu/imrf/abstracts.html>.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1998). *A Formação Social da Mente*. 6ª Edição. Trad. José Cipolla Neto,
Luis S. M. Barreto E Solange C. Afeche. São Paulo: Martins Fontes.