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Factors Affecting School Participation of Visually Impaired Children

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Abstract

Factors Affecting School Participation of Visually impaired children is a narrative inquiry on the affecting factors that hinders the visually impaired children at school and home from learning. This research aims at exploring the current scenario of the participation of visual impaired children in school education and its affecting factors. I used qualitative research design with a narrative approach. The site of this study was one of the community schools in the Parsa district. The population of this research was two students and a teacher from the school. I used a purposive sampling procedure. I conducted an in-depth interview using interview guidelines as a data collection tool, developed themes based on the information provided by the participants, and linked them with theories. It was found that the participation of visually impaired children seemed very poor being affected by the factors like-poverty, pedagogical preparation, required materials for visually impaired children, peer behavior, lack of self-efficacy, decreased ability to perform physical tasks, traditional perceptions towards disability, violence and defending capability. This research will support the policymakers, teachers, related stakeholders, and duty bearers for policy making and implementation to increase the participation of visual impairment students in school education and reduce the factors that influence them to place them in educational opportunities.

Keywords: Disability, Inclusive Education, Vision, Impairment, Participation

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Introduction

A disability is any condition of the body or mind impairment that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities limitations and interact with the world around them (participation restrictions) (WHO, 2007). A disability is a physical or mental problem that makes it complicated or incredible for a person to walk, see, hear, speak, learn, or do other important things. Some disabilities are permanent, or last forever. A disability can be something a person was born with or the result of an illness or an accident in life. Vision is reduced to the point of causing problems that cannot be corrected by conventional measures, such as glasses or medication. Cataracts can be congenital or acquired and the age-related cataracts are the most common.

According to the World Health Organization's World Report on Disability, an estimated 95 million students (5.1%) aged 0–14 years have some form of disability (Jones, Bellis, Wood, Hughes, McCoy, Eckley, & Officer, 2012). Common issues include Autism Spectrum Conditions, Developmental Delay, Behavioral Disorders, and Learning Difficulties. In many countries, these students have the right to be included in mainstream schools. For professionals who work with students, this shift towards social and educational inclusion has meant that practices have had to evolve in tandem. Rehabilitation specialists offer a variety of approaches to early intervention and prevention support for students with diverse needs. This includes school-based approaches with teachers and families to help students fully and actively participate in school.

Participation or involvement in life situations is a key outcome. Participation takes place anywhere. In this paper, the participation is focused on the context of the school. Participation in school includes unstructured activities, organized activities, classroom-based activities, and engagement in social roles. Students with disabilities are at risk of limited participation in school as well as in other areas of life. Such restrictions have substantial lifetime consequences for achievement, quality of life, and well-being (Ryff, & Singer, 1996). Attendance for students with disabilities is reduced in comparison with peers.

Peters, (2004) identified important attributes for inclusive education, such as the need for inclusive schools to respond to the diverse needs of students, accommodate both different styles and rates of learning, and ensure quality education to all students with appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities. Students with disabilities are less likely to participate in structured and unstructured activities, interact and participate in the playground less. Students with disabilities additionally show less engagement in the wider school world (Maciver, Rutherford, Arakelyan, Kramer, Richmond, Todorova, & Forsyth, 2019).

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Before 1964, Nepalese with visual impairments had no access to education, as there were no schools either in special or inclusive settings that could accommodate their individual needs (Lamichhane, 2013). Students with visual impairments remain in these schools until they gain such necessary skills as the use of braille, Independent Living Skills, and Orientation and Mobility. Problems, they may develop negative attitudes towards educational institutions, subjects, materials, teaching-learning methods, and instructional strategies. Since 1964, students with visual impairments have been studying together with their peers without disabilities in an integrated educational setting (Hall, 1990). One of the main innovations of Nepal's education program is the introduction of skill-based classes for students with visual impairments, before their placement in mainstream classes (Lamichhane, 2010). Existing rules and regulations need reviewing to align with school governance and management including the functions with the new constitutional mandate, especially relating to management, and monitoring to conclude the students in school education from disadvantaged groups. Due to negative attitudes, they may even discontinue their education and drop out of school (Mwakyeya, 2013).

Constitutionally, every citizen shall have the right to access of basic education. Baxipatra, (2013) stated that the citizens with disabilities and the economically indigent shall have the right to get free higher education by law. The visually impaired citizens shall have the right to get free education through brail script. However, girls and disabled people don't have access to friendly infrastructures in schools. So, due to the structural exclusion in Nepal, people with visual impairment are not able to participate in school and they are facing more challenges in school for getting a quality education and it has been challenging for inclusive education.

National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2076 mentions that there is no significant participation in the accessibility of education from the indigenous community, Dalit, people with disability, Madheshi, geographically remote people, and vulnerable groups. To increase the participation of people with disability, need to increase the accessibility of friendly infrastructures, quality of education, and an inclusive curriculum, and should be removed different types of discrimination in schools and community level too. School environments need to be inclusive and disabled-friendly, and appropriate teacher management, curriculum, and pedagogy should be inclusive which motivates them in education. However, recognizing these as important attributes, teachers are considered one of the central components to implement inclusive education (Haskell 2000). So, to respond to diversity in education teachers need to be able to address the diverse student's learning competencies.

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Over the past two decades, remarkable progress has been made in expanding access to education, but evidence suggests many students with disabilities are still being left behind (Aron & Loprest, 2012). Without ensuring quality education for students with disabilities the world will not be on track to meet Sustainable Development Goal 4 to achieve quality education for all. Elwan, (1999) recognizes the fundamental human rights of students with developmental disabilities, including their right to healthcare, education, social protection, and community participation, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, poverty, or impairment. Unfortunately, many students and adults with disabilities are excluded from school, employment, healthcare, and other services, due to discrimination, inaccessibility, or lack of provision.

Accordingly, School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) has highlighted equity and quality education, Education Act, and Regulation are also thought in the same line in the case of accessibility, assurance of quality education, and learning achievement for all types of diversified learning abilities people (Vaidya, 2017). Education Act, 2028 has allocated extra time for examination for students with a disability however in the practice, implementing strategy is poor as compared with policy provision, which seems huge gap between policy, planning and practices. More students with severe visual impairments or blindness are now being included in ordinary school settings than ever before. However, how best to provide an appropriate curriculum for them has raised some absorbing questions (Kirk, Gallagher, & Coleman, 2014). Participation of visually impaired students in educational activities is an important aspect for making education accessible and ensuring quality education for all. Increasing their participation in education is one of the most crucial tasks to accomplish the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG4).

Nepal has committed to many international as well as national forums and conventions for education for all. Although, to fulfill the commitment Nepal Government has made significant efforts to promulgate a new constitution and make new policies, and programs there are still many students with and without disabilities who are out of the education system due to the accessibility, curriculum, content delivery mechanism, and teaching learning materials.

According to the Population Census of 2011, there are 1.94% of people are having a disability. Among them, 18.46% of the population are visually impaired. Among the total population, 47,041 males and 47,724 females are visual impairment. However, a very fewer population is in the school system and the remaining are excluded from educational opportunities. Of the estimated 120-150 million students globally with disabilities under the age of 18, more than 90% of those living in developing countries do not attend school (UNESCO, 2009).

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Students who are blind or visually impaired have significant vision loss that affects how students can access printed information. Students may use accessible formats, such as braille or large print, for reading and writing or assistive technology to help them obtain information (Presley & Andrea, 2009). Lack of appropriate and accessible teaching-learning materials and devices most students with visual impairment are denied by the educational system. However, they are not able to get an education without the support of general teachers and the teaching-learning process.

It is through interaction with others that people learn and make sense of their world. For students with visual impairments, interacting with others is important to overcome some of the visual accessibility limitations they face and to help them connect and develop an understanding of the world. Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, (2004) argue that “it is widely accepted that social-emotional development plays a crucial role in students’ development and for students to develop and be successful in many contexts they require both social-emotional and academic achievement”. There is a dynamic interaction between these two: improving social and emotional competencies not only has a positive impact on interpersonal skills and the quality of interactions students establish, but also on their academic achievement, and to be prepared and ready to learn, students need to have healthy social-emotional development (Aviles et al., 2006).

To be socially competent, each person must read situations and understand the feelings, preferences, and perspectives of others. Access to visual information is an important advantage because many of these behaviors are sophisticated. Students with limited vision can use other suggestions: like tone of voice to read other people’s emotions but has a very complex range of nonverbal behaviors and facial expressions that can be more difficult for them to access. Early social interaction with peers is branded by many non-verbal manners, such as students spending time watching their peers, imitating others, and offering or showing objects to initiate interaction (Eckerman, 1993). Though, students with visual impairments could not participate in non-verbal and visual communication. They couldn’t communicate with images, in pictorial form and there are limited extra-curricular activities that they can participate with their sighted mates. But in those limited opportunities, teachers and their friends neglect to let participate them. So, they have been facing lots of challenges in school education and they choose to drop out of school.

There are fewer studies have done in this area but could not cover and address the issues of participation and the challenges they are facing in school education. Most of the studies related to this area are based on devices used in brail learners’ status of enrollment in primary and secondary levels, and the way of interacting with others. If any studies could

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not do on this issue, students with visual impairment always face challenges, and could not obtain educational attainment and the consequences appear in family, community as well as in nation respectively. For quality life, link them in income generation, to make their dignified lifestyle and independent need to mainstream all in education. This study aims to explore the status of visual impaired students and their influencing factors in school education.

Research Question

1. What factors are affecting to participate in school education to visually impaired children?
2. Why does the visually impaired children are not participated in school education?
3. How does the factors, are influencing in participation of visually impaired children in school education?

Methods and Procedures

This research paper selected a critical/ transformative paradigm under qualitative research design. For this research, I have selected two of the community school's students through the purposive sampling method. Designated one girl student, one boy student, and a teacher who teaches visual impairment students, all together three people were the participants of this study. The study site of this research is Trijuddha Secondary School of Parsa District. The interview guideline was the tool for collecting data and collected information through face-to-face in-depth interviews with participants. After data collection from the field through interviews make categorizing and built-up theme by using Thomas's general induction method. "The general inductive approach provides an easily used and systematic set of procedures for analyzing qualitative data that can produce reliable and valid findings" (Thomas, 2006). The description has made of the information based on themes and has discussed and drawn a conclusion. To assess the state of inclusive education in terms of policies and practices, secondary sources of data such as government documents, study reports, and literature are used.

Result and Discussion

The information of the interview was recorded after taking consent from the participants. The information has been analyzed and built an applicable theme. Finally, the findings of the study have been highlighted and provided some implications of the study. In the discussion section, P1, P2, and P3 (P3 was the teacher of resource class) to refer to the participants of the study first, second, and third respectively.

Perception towards Disability

Perception of disability is an important construct affecting not only the well-being of individuals with disabilities but also the moral compass of society. Negative attitudes toward disability disempower individuals with disabilities and lead to social exclusion and isolation (Babik & Gardner, 2021). All three participants expressed their views and perceptions of people with disability as very conservative and destructive in the community. Their parents did not know about the education in which visually impaired students can also read and write and there is an opportunity for them as they have the right to education. As P1 shared “*Community people believe that children with disability are burden for the earth, and they are facing such because of their sin done in a previous life*”. They also think that they can’t do anything in their life and must be always dependent on others to survive. As community people are not aware that visually impaired students can also learn from resources available in brail script, most of them are deprived of educational opportunities. School teachers are not interested to enroll and involve them in school classroom setting, as they don’t possess required materials for visually impaired children, pedagogical knowledge, teaching learning process and strategies for assisting them.

Poverty and Backwardness

As mentioned by the participants, when the participants and individuals are residing in conditions of poverty, then parents experience several problems and challenges to meet the minimum requirements of family members. This study is evidence to relate to the fact that poverty acts as a strong stimulus to students engaging in household work which compels them to be irregular in school. Correspondingly, poverty leads to a sharp drop in the general educational experience of the students (Ray,2000, p.3519).

P2 expressed that, family who are under poverty facing difficulty to arrange the stationary items, bag, uniforms, for school enrolment and to pay the exam fee for their students. Families, who are belonging to in conditions of poverty have the primary objective of generating sufficient income to just sustain their living conditions even though the nutritional requirement is not their priority. They face financial problems to the extent that even when education is provided free of cost, they still are not able to meet other expenses to support other educational requirements due to which educating students with disability is the second priority and sometimes they feel that educating them isn't worth it.

In the sense of poverty, P1 highlighted that, “*Due to the poverty, they had to change their religion. As she expressed that there are many gods and goddesses in the Hindu religion and had to spend more on offerings and were discriminated against by elite groups seeing the*

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number of offers made by them but have to spend less while being Christian as in this religion only one Lord exist and don't have to do any offering".

P2 shared his views, "as he was small and started to go to school, he had low vision. If his parents had the money for his treatment, he could see and got recovered on time. Due to their poverty, his parents did not take care and provide treatment on time. Gradually, his eyesight/vision had been lost and nowadays, he is fully visual impaired".

Social Discrimination

Social discrimination is defined as sustained inequality between individuals based on illness, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or any other measures of diversity (Bagilhole, 2009). Participants of the interview expressed; communities have traditional perceptions regarding person with disability. The girl participant (P1) told that *"In the rural area, parents still believe that when girls have menstruation they should not go to school. Women and girls are facing too much violence. Though, the constitution of Nepal has ensured social justice for all from the perspective of gender, race, religion, language, and other discriminatory practices. Misbehaving, verbal abuse, physical abuse, sexual harassment, discriminatory treatment, rape, acid attacks, human trafficking, domestic violence, untouchability, and neglecting someone all are punishable (Paneru, 2018). She also added that being visually impaired, if she faces any kind of violence on the way to school, she could not defend herself and must suffer from violence. The parents felt that there isn't a secure environment to send visually impaired girl children to school.*

Rawls (1958) offers the principles of social justice in education: the principle of "equal liberty in education", claiming that every person is to be granted the greatest degree of liberty in education consistent with a similar liberty for everyone. (Brighouse, 2002). The prevalence of injustice treatment against women and people with a disability regarding education aspects is not only a barrier within the course of their progression but also in the development of the communities and nation. From the participant's expression, it could be concluded that creating empowerment opportunities among personal with disability and girls, it is necessary to transform traditional perceptions and give equal rights and opportunities to everyone with a special focus on education.

As shared by P1, "they are facing lots of discrimination in school. Her schoolmates share that because she is visually impaired and can't do things like them, she shouldn't talk more or discuss anything and just sit in the class calmly. Listening to these from students in school, she felt discriminated against and decided to make a complaint to the principal but due to hesitation, she has not felt comfortable for

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complaining yet. She is facing such discrimination and dominant behavior not only from students but also from teachers. There is not a favorable environment in school for her to learn and is compelled to face injustice”.

As mentioned by P3, “*children have been facing lots of discrimination in school as being visually impaired students. Normal students in the school perceive them as being different from them and yet haven’t accepted them as their friends”.* Also, the visually impaired children are resisted from participating in any extra activities during leisure time because of which they are just living in an isolated environment. Students and teachers feel difficult to assist them to provide extra time for learning and take care of them, their maintenance in the classroom and hostel. I have tried to involve them in different activities like-chess, carom board, cricket and so on.

Accessibility on Education

Accessibility in education gives all people the same access to educational experiences, services, and information, whether a person has a disability or not. Another essential element is the ease of access for students who need these features and accommodations (Hashey, & Stahl, 2014). Most of the schools in Nepal don’t have the accessibility to mobility, using, the toilet, participating in games and sports, extracurricular activities, and so on. In the case of the learning materials and books, students with visual impairment have not got enough materials required on time. Teachers and students are not aware of dignified words to use for students with disability by respecting them. At the time of visits by visitors and supervisors, school representatives pretend of providing a good environment and amenities to students with disability and behave them well to collect funds while on other days they are misbehaved and are not given any attention. “*During vacation, elite parents receive students from school to take their home on time whereas those parents with the weak economic condition who are busy working on others field are not able to receive their students from school on time”.*

Regular participation in physical activity has physical and cognitive benefits for all children, including those with disabilities. Bull (2020) states, World Health Organization (WHO) recommended that children aged 5–17 years participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous-intensity physical activity daily. However, children with visual impairment don’t meet the minimum physical activities and tend to be more sedentary than their peers without disabilities because of their lack of self-efficacy in performing their decreased ability to perform daily tasks and their lack of motivation to participate in activities. Moreover, insufficient instruction and practice and overprotection prevent children with visual impairment from engaging in extracurricular activities (Qi, Xu, & Shao, 2020).

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While teachers organize different competition in and out of the classroom, the children with visual impairment could not take part in the competition. Their classmates don't become interest to be close with them in any activities and to be a close friend.

They hate them in classroom and try to avoid sitting with them. Curricular and extra-curricular activities don't organize inclusively, and teachers don't motivate and encourage them for participation. In the leisure time, the children with visual impairment sit alone in the isolated area. Their friends leave them alone and go for playing in outdoor games and sports. Schools don't have any comprehensive plan and strategy for inclusive curricular and extra-curricular activities. They have not any materials related with visual impairment for playing them at break and leisure period.

P1 stated, *"Teachers just get in the way of everything, they assume because we've got a visual problem, 'Oh! You can't do this, and that'"*. This is an important insight because it shows that parents and teachers were limiting their children in the past and that they have continued with the same tendencies. If parents are reserved and are keeping their children with visual impairments out of physical activity, they could be sending the message that their child are not capable. Also, it could send the message to the child that they are different from their peers, and they shouldn't be involved in activities like their peers are (Stuart et al., 2006).

Extra-curricular activities support to the children with visual impairment for their cognitive, emotional, and affective domain of development and support to build up their confidence, enable children to self-regulate and self-manage better. It increases student's confidence in their work and giving them an increased sense of professional fulfilment to the teachers.

Conclusion

Given the great diversity of cultures, social structures, linguistics and religions, individual differences, and gender Nepal is one of the most unique countries in the world. Managing and respecting diversity in education is the most important aspect of SDGs goals achievement. As the concept of diversity, disability is one of the themes which need to address in education as the sense of the fundamental right to education.

The paper has aimed to explore the participation of visually impaired students in education and its affecting factors. Especially, people with disability are excluded from mainstream and key opportunities of the services provided by the government due to the lack of education.

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Disability as very conservative and destructive perceptions in the community. Parents are not aware about the education in which visually impaired students can also read and write and there is an opportunity about their right to education. As community people are not aware that visually impaired students can also learn from resources available in brail script, and most of them are deprived of educational opportunities. School teachers are not interested to enroll and involve them in school classroom setting, as they don't possess required materials for visually impaired children, pedagogical knowledge, teaching learning process and strategies for assisting them. Accordingly, poverty acts as a strong stimulus to put out the children with disability from education. *Educating the children with disability is not the priority to the parents and sometimes they feel that educating them isn't worth it.* For being visually impaired to the girls, they have to face various types of violence in and on the way to school, and they could not defend herself and they must suffer from violence. *There is not a favorable environment in school for them to learn which is obligated to face injustice.* In the case of the learning materials and books, students with visual impairment have not got enough materials required on time. Teachers and students are not aware of dignified words to use for students with disability for their respect and self-dignity. They could not take part in and out of the classroom in extra/curricular activities, due to the lack of self-efficacy in performing their decreased ability to perform and the interest of their mates to involve them.

From the perspective of educational rights, all diversified people are equally treated by the constitution. However, in implementation appear lots of inequality and discrimination which need to address to ensure the right to quality education for all. Important attributes of inclusive education, such as the need for inclusive schools to meet the diverse needs of students, accommodate both different learning styles and speeds, and provides a quality education for all students with appropriate curriculum, organizational arrangements, instructional strategies, and resource use. Therefore, this empirical study intends to partially fill the existing knowledge gap by aiming at facilitating further dialogues on providing a conducive educational environment for these students. As research on inclusive education begins to emerge in developing countries, studies like this will be an important contribution to the effective implementation of quality and inclusive education for the visually impaired.

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