

Special Education and Deaf Children in Pakistan: An Overview

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Abstract

It is important to understand special education and the services being offered to individuals who are deaf in light of research conducted in Pakistan. A brief historical background of special education as well as the educational setting, curriculum and instructional approaches used for deaf students are explained. Moreover, the perception of Pakistani society about deaf people and their social emotional adjustment is highlighted. At the end the current status of special education and deaf education is presented.

Keyword: Deaf, Educational Setting, Sign Language, Cultural Model

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Introduction

Pakistan, with a population of 130.58 million, stands seventh among the world's most populous countries but ranks 160th with regards to literacy, placing them at the 55 percentile for literacy around the world (Pakistan Ministry of Finance, 2003). The country spends only 2.5% of its annual Gross National Product (GNP) on education and training; a low figure compared to other countries in the region such as Malaysia, Thailand and India, which allocate between 3.5% and 7% of their GNP to education (Khan, 1998).

It was estimated that 2.49% of the population is disabled (National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2002). Of this disabled population, 7.40% are deaf. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) the general prevalence of disability is 10% which makes Pakistan seem as if they have relatively fewer people with disability. Many parents tend to conceal the fact that they a disabled child or deny the presence of disability in their children (Khatoon, 2003).

The history of Special Education is not very old in Pakistan. At the time of independence only three schools were working with children with special needs. The first school was established in 1906 to cater to the educational needs of children with visual impairment. In 1920 the second school was opened for deaf children in Karachi. The parents of deaf children have formed a society called the Deaf and Dumb Welfare Society which also established a school named Gung Mahal (Palace of Deaf). At that time some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) started playing an active role in the education and rehabilitation of the persons with disabilities (Hameed, 2003). Following independence, in 1959, for the first time The National Commission presented the education of special people to the government agenda. Progress was seen between 1983-1992 when the United Nations Organization (UN) declared this time the decade of disabled persons. The Pakistan National Policy for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Disabled was formulated in 1985 and improved in 1988. The government of Pakistan approved this policy in October, 2002. In 1985, at the federal level a separate directorate was established to run model special education schools throughout the country. In addition the National Institute of Special Education was established to provide in-service training to teachers of special schools (Khan, 1998).

Today, the Directorate General of Special Education runs 56 institutions focused on the educational and rehabilitation of children with special needs. At the

provincial level, the Government of Punjab recently established a separate Department of Special Education under the direct supervision of the Chief Minister and runs 48 special schools. The provincial government also recently opened 90 special schools at the district level (Bashir, 2005).

In Pakistan 66% of children are enrolled in school at the primary level, leaving 34% without education. Children with disabilities constitute a major part of this marginalized group. It is estimated that six million children have been left out from schools (Pakistan Ministry of Finance, 2003). Hameed (2003) reported;

The reason for such marginalization include distance from home to school; value of education perceived by the family; gender discrimination in which the son is preferred over the daughter in going to school; poverty; disability and lack of the knowledge of parents about disability and how to handle it properly. (p. 1)

Education of Deaf Individuals

Deaf children have been educated in separate special schools since the beginning in Pakistan. They are placed in a segregated system that keeps them apart from their non-disabled peers. Physical segregation has reduced all possibilities of social interaction and therefore isolates them from the day-to-day educational and social emotional experiences of hearing children. However due to changes across the world, the idea of “education for all” in Pakistan is taking steps towards a more inclusive education.

The lack of policy initiative is one of the major barriers to inclusive education in Pakistan (Bashir, 2005). Further parents and teachers feel that the educational performance as well as the behavior of hearing children will be negatively affected because children with special needs will dilute their non-disabled children’s education. In general both teachers and parents think that deaf children have low abilities for learning (Bashir, 2005). This belief is the reason that the majority of regular schools hesitate to admit deaf children. The teachers and staff at these traditional schools lack the training and resources to manage deaf children in regular classrooms; thus believing that it is the responsibility of special school to provide education to deaf children (Bashir, 2005).

Curriculum

The special education program for deaf children focuses on communication and language skills to allow them to access to the regular curriculum (Khatoon, 2003). Their curriculum for deaf children similar to those in general education programs but adds auditory training and speech development programs. Some subjects, such as science, are eliminated from the curriculum for this group of children. Khatoon reported that only 2% of the deaf children and 5% of their parents are satisfied with this curriculum. These concerns mirror the concerns of hearing families because there are challenges in the curriculum for hearing children as well. Kazimi (2007) states:

It is largely, traditional, rigid and divorced from the realities of schools. The emphasis is more on theory than on practical work. There is a need for a shift in emphasis from theory to application of theory in actual classroom practices. (p.13)

Therefore, education in general and education for deaf children specially is not felt to be effective at this time in Pakistan.

Instructional Approaches for deaf children

In Pakistan an Aural/Oral approach is the choice for classroom instruction but in conjunction with sign language. Pakistani Sign Language (PSL) varies from place to place as signs have not been standardized at the national level. According to Khatoon (2003) found the majority of deaf persons (72% of the sample) and the majority of parents of deaf children (57%) revealed that the teachers in the schools are not capable of handling teaching of all subjects through the use of PSL. She also mentioned that 88% of the teachers never used finger spelling and 90% of the teachers never used cued speech in the class rooms. These teachers are teaching in Special Schools for deaf children. They revealed that they never received any training for using these approaches.

Husain (2008) reports:

The schools of deaf children are very backward in their teaching methods and educational system. The schools are just unable to groom our deaf citizens into confident and capable individuals as well as these schools have failed in the efforts to stimulate the deaf students to develop their fullest potential to

meet the challenges of hearing world. (p.21)

Other Special Services for Deaf Children

The provision of services regarding assessment and other medical and assistive technologies such as hearing aids are not sufficient. Only a few schools have multi-professional teams that include psychologists, special education teachers, speech therapists and physiotherapists. There is a critical and serious shortage of doctors, audiologists, speech therapists and qualified educators (Husain, 2003). Majeed and Saeed (1998) examined the audiological services available in the schools. They selected 13 schools in the major cities of Pakistan. The questionnaires were distributed to the principals, audiologists and the parents of deaf children. They concluded that none of the schools met the minimum standards of audiological services. According to Khatoon (2003), 53% of teachers reported that less than 10% of the children use hearing aids in the class room in spite of repeated instructions on how to use their aids. She further mentioned that the hearing aids are expensive and therefore the cost is one of the reasons for not wearing the hearing aids. Majeed and Saeed (1998) also found that most of the principals and audiologists do not have enough education and experience in the related field. Moreover they also concluded that majority of the parents are illiterate and this lack parent education has not been investigated in regards to the educational outcomes of deaf Pakistani children.

Perception within the Pakistani Society about Deaf Individuals

In general there is lack of awareness about the nature of disability among the Pakistani people. Individuals with disabilities are regarded as unfortunate ones who cannot perform their roles correctly or effectively. Usually the parents and relatives viewed their children with disabilities as an economic burden and the result of family sins (Miles & Hossain, 1999). Similarly, Batool and Shahbaz (2008) stated that our society has a common perception that deaf individuals have limited capabilities and they are cognitively deficient. (p.57)

Husain (2008), herself a deaf woman, criticized the way deaf people are labeled as deaf and dumb in Pakistan. She mentioned that hearing people interpret the phrase “deaf and dumb” as “Not being able to hear and being stupid”. Therefore Husain believes that people need to stop using the phrase deaf and dumb. Historically, this phrase meant “not able to hear and not able to speak” but the misinterpretation of the phrase increase negative stereotypes about deaf people. This phrase is frequently use as many schools for deaf children deaf in Pakistan are also referred to schools for the “deaf and dumb”. Husain (2008) also criticizes how deaf

citizens in general are treated by the Pakistani society which reinforces her statement that the phrase “deaf and dumb” has a strong negative impact on deaf Pakistani.

Husain (2008) also reported that the people of Pakistan in general think of deaf people as being hearing impaired, placing a focus on disease and deformity. They believe that it can be “cured” by medicines or surgery showing their belief in a medical model to understand deaf people.

As stated earlier, most parents and relatives view their children with disabilities as an economic burden and the result of their sin (Miles & Hossain, 1999) and this perception is held by most of the people of Pakistan. Iftikhar and Yasmeen (2009) looked at the stress experienced by parents of deaf children and found that 74% of the parents saw their deaf children as an economical stressor. In addition 66% of the parents reported that they felt that their deaf children were a social burden. Parents reported that their social lives have been restricted by society’s negative view of their children with 84% stating that their deaf children increased their worries and 44% reporting that the disability caused them anxiety. In addition the majority of these parents are illiterate with a monthly income between Rs. 1000 to Rs. 10000 only. Parental monthly income is associated with the provision of better assessment, educational and other special services to their deaf children, creating a situation where this low income parents do not have the financial resources or the education necessary to be strong advocates for their deaf children (Iftikhar & Yasmeen, 2009). Finally and importantly most of these parents are hearing themselves.

Iftikhar and Yasmeen’s (2009) concluded that their results of the study reflected on the stress level of fathers. They reported that fathers were not as close to their deaf children as mothers. They recommended that the parents should be educated and that the government must support them in the process of education and provision of the special services to their deaf children.

Akram and Parveen (2009) selected 50 parents for their study and found that majority of the parents pay more for the education of their hearing children than they do for their deaf children. However Arshad and Mustafa (2008) found that deaf children have warm interpersonal relationships with their normal siblings. Similarly, Aziz and Madani (2007) conducted structured interview with the parents of disabled children and found that the parents of mentally retarded children appeared to be involved in their children’s welfare more than the parents of deaf children. They further revealed that majority of the parents neither attend the parents-teachers meetings nor follow the guidance and suggestions of teachers given in meetings. However they mentioned that some parents of children deaf help them in doing their

school work. Aziz and Madani again concluded that parents themselves do not have the required education and training in order to understand their children with special needs and therefore the majority of them are not actively involved in their children's education. Importantly Aziz and Madani also found that often schools do not want to involve parents in the learning process. In conclusion, the authors strongly recommend the development of a positive relationship between parents and teachers of the children with disabilities.

Aziz and Iqbal (2008) conducted a study of 80 teachers of hearing children in Lahore city to understand their perception about deaf children. The study showed that the majority of the teachers believed that deaf children cannot be taught in the regular classrooms because they cannot develop reading, writing and arithmetic skills like their hearing counterparts. Furthermore, 40% of the teachers reported that deaf children cannot understand and respect the feelings and emotion of others. However, the teachers also expressed the importance of training, appointment of multi-professionals teams and other equipment necessary to educate deaf children in regular classrooms. Similarly according to Batool and Shahbaz (2008) the teachers of deaf children mentioned that these children have a shorter memory span therefore this issue causes them to have difficulty in learning. Moreover they also believe that children deaf cannot study science. The researchers found that 60% of these teachers have not had relevant training to teach children deaf.

With regard to obtaining work, Sajjad (2007) found that persons with disabilities were given employment mainly due to the quota fixed for them. Pakistan established a 2% employment quota for disabled individuals but this level is not fully implemented. The jobs provided to people with disabilities have been characterized as low paying with low status and fewer privileges. Mostly people with disabilities were hired as low-grade employees like an office assistant, a person to run errands or be a messenger a computer operator, typist, and a vocational teacher in schools for deaf persons or to work in advertising agencies. Other jobs include working in the laundry of five star hotels, as a cook in five star hotels, and also as a tailor doing embroidery, handicrafts or dress designing. The employees with disabilities had the same duty hours as other non-disabled employees with no special provisions to provide them barrier free environment at their jobs. The deaf employees faced a problem communication. They also need environment, free of sound pollution, which was not provided in these organizations.

The Social Emotional Adjustment of the Deaf Individuals in Pakistan

Waheed (2007) explored the effect of being deaf on a child's personality and found that the majority of deaf participants were resentful. However they did not show any signs of an inferiority complex but the majority of them did not trust others. Waheed concluded that being deaf in itself is not a cause of poor social adjustment and other psychological problems. Rather, these problems are the outcomes of the communication gap that make a deaf child more at-risk for having psychological problems like aggression, poor self-concept and low self-esteem than the others in general population.

Husain (2003) reported poor self-image as well as poor social emotional adjustment of individuals who are deaf. She collected data through interviews, anecdotal records and questionnaire from 25 adolescents and 25 deaf adults. She explained that the cultural and social factors like communication barriers, lack of understanding the nature and etiology of deafness, illiteracy and poor policy implementations are the main causes of deaf people's social isolation. Husain also found a lack of confidence, increased anxiety and aggression, inferiority complexes, a fear of failure and state of helplessness among individuals who are deaf. She stressed the importance of sign language because she found that all of the participants preferred to use sign language. Therefore Husain suggested that parents as well as teachers should be trained to sign. She also indicated that her participants who reported that they were restless and stressed, related these issues to the expectations of people that they should hear and speak.

Similarly, Umar and Muhammad (2007) concluded that adolescent deaf boys are suffering from emotional problems such as anxiety, social immaturity, aggression and poor understanding of their own as well as others emotions due to the inability to communicate and the unacceptable attitudes of the society. Their study reveals that the dominating style of the parents may cause confusion and poor decision in these boys. Here dominating style refers that parents take all decisions related to their education, entertainment and social interaction themselves. Usually they do not share the information in this regard with their deaf boys and do not give importance to their opinion and wishes. Therefore, these adolescent boys were unsatisfied with their present educational and job opportunities. On the other hand Saeed and Aslam (1996) found that over-protective behavior of the parents may lead to anxiety, lack of confidence and social immaturity in the deaf girls. Umar and Muhammad found that emotional education was missing in the schools. Therefore they recommended the development of an emotional education program for the deaf adolescent as according

to Qaisar (1993) there is no special education program for emotionally disturbed individuals in Pakistan.

Current Status of Special Education in Pakistan

Pakistan is a signatory of the World Conference of Education for all (UNESCO, 1990), Salamanca Declaration (UNESCO, 1994) and the Dakar Framework for Action of Education for All (UNICEF, 2004). Therefore, presently Pakistan is actively pursuing this target of education for all. This target cannot be achieved without including the children with disabilities in schools. The Pakistan National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2002) clearly indicates a shift from segregated to an inclusive system of education that can improve the literacy rate as well as the quality of education. Three Special Education Departments in the major universities (Punjab University, Karachi University and Allama Iqbal Open University) of the country are conducting researches to indicate the nature and possible solutions of the problems in the field of special needs. These universities have become an important source of information about deaf education. This research will also increase the awareness of the stakeholders. Much of this research has been completed at the Master's level but recently the studies are being conducted at Master of Philosophy and Doctoral levels. This work is emerging and most is not published because they are master's level work and the students have not had the support to publish. The most recent studies showed that the schools are considering seriously offering science education to deaf students (Mahboob & Ijaz, 2011). Further the parents, siblings and teachers of deaf children have started to realize the importance of sign language that will minimize the communication gap. In the result the social emotional adjustment of deaf children will be better and the concept about deafness as a disorder will be reduced (Qurat-ul-Ain & Yaqub, 2011). The Important issues like curriculum, the standardization of Pakistan Sign Language (PSL), teacher's training, awareness of stakeholders, provision of advanced assessment facilities and other assistive technologies are under considerations by the Special Education Department of the Punjab Government.

Pakistani Perspectives on Deafness

Special educational affairs have been under the authority of Ministry of Health for many years. Therefore the model of services provided has a medical orientation rather than an educational one. Qaisar (1993) reported:

“People in the Ministry of Health are not educators and the administration of educational programs suffer from their lack of expertise and experience” (p. 4).

In Pakistan the majority of people have traditional view of about deaf people

which is based on a pathological perspective or the medical model of the disability. This view is far different from a cultural perspective which understands deaf people as having culture with a unique language and not a disability (McLeod & Bently, 1996).

Moving from Medical Model of Disability to Cultural Model

In 2004, the Department of Special Education of Pakistan was separated from the Ministry of Health, Social Welfare & Special Education. Now it is known as the Ministry of Social Welfare & Special Education. Keeping in view the current scenario of special education it can be said that soon the Pakistani people will be able to understand that being disabled is not being defective but rather a different way of being. In Pakistan the members of the deaf community form a cultural minority. The Deaf community offers many deaf Pakistanis what they could not find at home, easy communication and a positive identity. The Deaf community is like a family for deaf persons (Husain, 2003). They use Pakistani Sign Language (PSL). They share sorrows and joys with one another and marry each other (Husain, 2003). In Pakistan the deaf community also transfers its knowledge, language and values to other deaf individuals (Husain, 2003). However there is a lack of awareness among people (especially hearing people) about the Deaf community as a culture. Hearing parents of students who are deaf stress that their children need to learn to speak and ask their teachers not to use sign language with them. However the Deaf community is becoming active in Pakistan and its members are helping to change the traditional view of deaf people. Therefore, people are moving from the medical perspective to the cultural model of disability (Husain, 2008).

Moving from Hearing Impaired to Deaf

Not only the view of the Pakistani people is being changing from a traditional perspective of disability to a cultural perspective but they are also moving away from using the phrase “hearing impaired” to deaf. The use of the phrase hearing impaired is criticized and rejected within the Deaf culture movement, where the terms Deaf and hard of hearing are preferred.

Conclusions and Future Implications

In short the perception of the people of Pakistan about deaf individuals is changing. This change leads to the dire need for trained special education teachers, multi-professionals teams and technological aids in the schools of deaf children. To facilitate this educational change, experts should revise the curriculum for deaf children. Moreover, parents and teachers should be skilled in sign language. At the government level parents, teachers and other community members should be educated about deaf people’s strengths and their need for visual language, preferably a natural sign language. The government should promote the inclusion of deaf adults in the education of deaf children and make these role models available to hearing

parents of deaf children. The government could also engage in an advertising campaign designed to change attitudes toward deaf education and deaf people. Furthermore, the Deaf community should be given a voice in the development of deaf education and the promotion of sign language at the national level.

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