

**RESEARCH PAPER****Career Education and Vocational Training as Part of Expanded Core Curriculum for Primary Level Learners with Vision Impairment: A Qualitative Review****¹Dr. Muhammad Jahanzaib, ²Dr. Ghulam Fatima* and ³Saima Hanif**

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The study was planned to evaluate the vocational training and carrier education opportunities for children with visual impairment (CWVI) at primary level. It was a descriptive qualitative inquiry. Semi structured interviews were used to gather data from randomly selected 16 vocational teachers including six males and 10 females working in 12 special education institutions of Punjab. Vocational teachers are available in 18 special education schools of CWVI and three devolved special education complex whereas approximately 170 special education centers have no vocational teachers in the field of visual impairment. An interview guide validated by five field experts was applied to conduct interview comprising eight queries about demographic information of informants and 14 open ended questions about existing vocational practices and career education. Data were analyzed by applying descriptive statistics. Thematic analysis was also carried out and nine themes and six sub-themes were derived. Results revealed that majority of vocational teachers are well qualified females teaching CWVI for more than 10 years. In-service training opportunities are limited and less effective. Although specific time is reserved for vocational training but still some students are deprived of resources and most of the vocational trades are outdated. The study recommended that pre service vocational trainings should be upgraded. Specialization in vocational diploma should be started in various disabilities. Remuneration for out dated vocational trade should be given to carrier education opportunities.

Keywords: Carrier Education, Children with Visual Impairment, Vocational Training**Introduction**

Vocational training plays an essential role in the empowerment of individuals with visual impairments by empowering them with skills needed for employment and autonomous living. It ensures individuals with visual impairments to master the skills that augment their independence and self-dependence. Individuals with visual impairments can dynamically participate in society and break huge barriers of isolation and stigma by developing their vocational skills. They can become contributing members of their communities, endorsing social solidity and diversity. Pakistan is signatory of many international declarations and commitments to protect the rights of persons with special needs by their optimum development. Although in Pakistan, like in many countries around the world, ensuring inclusive and quality education for children with visual impairment is a significant challenge. But Directorate of Special Education (DSE) Punjab took several initiatives in this regard at federal and provincial level. As DSE Punjab offered six vocational subjects in its curriculum for CWVI. Similarly, it recruited a significant number of vocational teachers, cane workers and music teachers however situation is not satisfactory particularly about the provision of vocational training (Nayab, Chaudhary, & Fatima, 2021).

Many primary level institutions lack resources and infrastructure to provide adequate vocational training to visually impaired students. Parveen, Yousuf and Ammara (2020) reported that need based facilities and necessary arrangements were insufficient in special education institutions. The study further revealed that visually challenged learners received less coordination from institutional heads. There is shortage of trained educators proficient in teaching vocational skills tailored to the needs of visually impaired individuals. Partnerships between government agencies, NGOs, and private sector entities are fostering the development of inclusive vocational training programs.

In the same way, career education is another essential part of ECC, enabling students with visual impairments to explore their potential for future opportunities. Career education is crucial for children with visual impairments, as it helps them develop skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for future careers. It also enhances their self-esteem, independence, and confidence. Career education at the primary level lays the foundation for future career choices and prepares students for vocational training or further education. But on the other side the curriculum of special education schools focuses mainly on academics, with limited emphasis on career development. In fact, vocational training and career education are inter related domains working to rehabilitate the persons with different abilities and make them independent and self-sufficient. A prominent problem regarding vocational training and career education of CWVI is limited career opportunities and job market demand. However, they allow them to pursue careers in fields such as customer service, IT support, telephone operation, massage therapy and music (Zafar & Fazil, 2023).

Career education plays a pivotal role in empowering children with visual impairment by fostering independence, confidence and essential skills from an early age. Introducing children to a wide range of career possibilities, including those traditionally considered inaccessible to visually impaired individuals, promotes aspiration and motivation. Various NGOs such as Pakistan Foundation Fighting Blindness (PFFB) and Sight Savers Pakistan collaborate with schools and communities to advocate for inclusive education, career education and provide support services. (PFFB, 2024; Sight Savers Pakistan, 2024). Particularly at the primary level, where foundational skills are established, there is a critical need to provide comprehensive career education tailored to the unique needs of visually impaired children.

The literature also highlights the importance of vocational training in improving the quality of life for visually impaired individuals. Chu and Chan (2024) found that Vocational training expressively enhances the quality of life (QOL) for learners with visual impairments. Deka (2024) reports that vocational trainings have effectively raised skill levels and thereby increasing employment opportunities for CWVI. This study aims to provide a qualitative overview of the existing opportunities for career education and vocational training for primary-level CWVI in government special education institutions in Punjab. It seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of these practices, assess the continuous professional development of vocational training programs for teachers of special education institutions. It reflects on the use and availability of resources required for vocational training. By investigating existing subjects for vocational training and trades contained within DSE Punjab curriculum, this research will subsidize valuable discernments into improving the vocational training outline for CWVI.

Material and Methods

The study was planned to understand the exact situation about career education and vocational training opportunities as an integral part of ECC for primary level CWVI in government special education schools and centers working under supervision of Punjab special education department. It was a descriptive qualitative investigation in origin. Semi structured qualitative interviews were organized for vocational teachers working with primary level SWVI (students with visual impairment) in government special education

institutions in Punjab to evaluate the various aspects related with phenomenon. As Jennifer Mason (2002) narrated that one of the most well-known types of qualitative research methods is the interview. The term "qualitative interviewing" is typically used to describe in-depth, semi-structured, or loosely structured interviewing techniques.

Sample of the study

The province of Punjab was split into four sectors by drawing one vertical and one horizontal line from the center of the map to extract a sample of vocational teachers. Only 18 special education schools for CWVI and three devolved complexes throughout Punjab have qualified vocational teachers on staff; however in 160 special education centers there are no vocational teacher for children with visual impairment. Thus, the number of vocational teachers working in the field of vision impairment is limited to 25. Four CWVI-affiliated vocational teachers were chosen randomly from each zone in order to create the sample of vocational teachers for the interview. There were 16 vocational teachers, six of them were males and 10 of whom were females.

Research Instrument

To evaluate the teaching strategies that vocational instructors offer to SWVI a schedule for interviewing vocational teachers about current vocational practices is created. The interview guide was divided into two segments. The first section covered 8 questions regarding the demographics of vocational teachers, including sector, district, qualification, number of trainings, length of trainings, length of employment etc. Moreover, 14 open-ended questions about current vocational practices at government special education institutions for CWVI made up Part II. Each statement explores a different aspect regarding the methods used by vocational teachers to instruct students, the value of vocational training in their institution, training of various skills related to the six optional vocational subjects offered in the vocational curriculum published by the Directorate of Special Education Punjab, a specific time slot is set aside for vocational training in each class schedule, the vocational curriculum published by the DGSE Punjab is followed in the institution, the resources required for vocational training are available in this institution and the skills taught in the vocational diploma help vocational teacher to train the students in accordance with the vocational curriculum. The panel of five experts having extensive experience in working with CWVI verified the interview schedule with its all contents.

Data Collection

The principal author administered and recorded most of the interviews from vocational teachers in his personal capacity while visiting the special education institutions in Punjab but some interviews were taken by telephonic discussion because those vocational teachers were belonging from some far-flung areas.

Data Analysis

The percentages of the data gathered concerning vocational teachers were determined using descriptive statistics, and a thematic analysis of their answers was also performed. Nine primary themes and six subthemes were identified.

Results and Discussion

Thematic analysis of interviews taken by vocational teachers working with CWVI:

Existing Situation of Vocational Training in Special Education Institutions

In this section the researchers revealed the facts about situation of vocational trainings in special education field for CWVI. It has been further divided into four sub-themes.

Specified time for vocational training

The majority of informants reported that specific time is allocated for vocational training of CWVI in every time table of institution.

Vocational Curriculum is Being Followed in Prescribed Order

The informants revealed that the vocational curriculum formulated by Directorate of Special Education is being implemented in special education institutions. In the same way five informants described that students learn vocational skills according to their mental capabilities. Students are usually different from each other in their learning style so the prescribed sequence to instruct the vocational skills defined by DGSE in vocational curriculum is usually not followed. Moreover, teachers decide the sequence of vocational training according to the needs and condition of the students.

Provision of Necessary Resources for Vocational Training:

Majority of informants said that necessary resources for vocational training are always provided by the school management. Some of the informants reported that usually resources are provided by the institution but sometime we have to manage the resources by our personal efforts due the lack of funds. On the other hand, one of the informants said in this regard that it is very rare that resources for vocational training are being provided by the institution. Most of the times, I personally manage the resources by some donors and friends.

Beneficiaries of Vocational Training

The heavy majority of informants expressed that vocational training is being provided to all students from class 1 to 5. Moreover, respondents gave their opinion in this way that most of the students of each class learn all prescribed vocational skills but exceptionalities are always there so some students studying in same class can't learn vocational skills due to their disability related limitations and mindset.

Effectiveness of Pre-Service and In-Service Teacher Training for Children with Visual Impairment

In this section the researcher the facts about effectiveness of pre-service and in-service teacher training for children with visual impairment It has been further divided into two sub-themes.

Effectiveness of Skills Acquired During Vocational Diploma at the Time of Practical Teaching

Some of the informants revealed that the skills taught in vocational diploma provide us practical help in teaching of vocational skills most of the times. Whereas informants depicted that there is no practical use of vocational diploma in teaching.

Provision Of In-Service Vocational Training

Informants said that they did not attend any in-service vocational training for their professional development. Moreover, they reported that usually in service vocational training is being provided by the department but there is no training of advanced and latest skills. Just old and outdated skills are being discussed in trainings.

Situation of Cane Work Training

Majority of informants gave their opinion that they always provide cane work training to students according to the curriculum set by Directorate of Special Education. In the same way informant said that the training of cane work is particular job of cane workers because most of the vocational teachers don't learn the cane work skill in their vocational diploma. Department of special education appointed cane workers in some specific special education centers but most of the centers have no seat of cane worker so vocational teachers try to teach the cane work as per their capacity.

Situation of chik work training

Most of the informants revealed that we do not instruct chik work as optional subject for vocational training because we have to take training in it before teaching to students. It is not relevant to our expertise because we do not get any pre-service or post-service training about chik work.

Situation of Dori (Twine) Work and Makrama Making Training

Number of the informants told that they provide makrama making training to students because most of the vocational teachers have expertise in this subject of vocational training and students usually interested to seek this skill. Four informants demonstrated that they teach to make towel hangers with dori (twine). Moreover, informants reported that they do not provide dori (twine) work training. Instead of dori (twine) work we choose any other vocational subject because we did not take any particular training of dori (twine) work.

Situation of Knitting Work Training

A heavy majority of informants said that knitting is a tough and time consuming training so they do not choose this subject for vocational training.

Situation of Music Training

A heavy majority of informants said that music is an art as well as a source of entertainment. Music teachers are available in almost all special education institutions so they trained the students in music and a large number of students are working as music teachers so music training is most famous trait in our institutions. They taught music to their students and produces VI singer and musicians.

Situation of Health and Physical Education Training

Almost all vocational teachers revealed that health and physical education training is not considered a regular vocational subject in their institutions. The basic reason behind it is that it is a noncredit subject and its practical exam is not taken by directorate of special education Punjab so institutions are not taking it seriously. But some informants reported that sports and games are being conducted in their institution but their no class wise prescribed syllabus is being followed. Informants reported that physical instructors are not available in many special education institutions.

Competence Level of Students in Learning Vocational Skills:

A heavy majority of informants said that students seek all skills of vocational training mentioned in vocational curriculum till the completion of class 5.

Discussions

This study was a consolidated effort to evaluate the prevailing vocational training/career education opportunities provided for CWVI at primary level in government special education institutions of Punjab. So, it associates with many pervious researches in multiple dimensions. For example, present study informs that the majority of vocational teachers working in special education schools are female. Jahanzaib, Fatima and Amanat (2023) demonstrated the bulk of special education instructors working in the field of vision impairment were female and belonged to the 26–40 age range.

In the same way, this study reflects limited and narrow scope in service training opportunity for vocational teachers of CWVI and lack of proper availability and utilization of necessary resources for vocational training of students. Ali 2007 elaborated the same facts almost seventeen years ago with these words The centers for vocational training are ill-equipped to offer vocational instruction. Typically, vocational training center employees lack the necessary training to instruct individuals with special needs. Non-technical teachers who are not very skilled in that trade teach vocational education in certain of the schools (Zafar & Fazil, 2023)

Furthermore, this study shows that the vocational diploma obtained by vocational teachers does not fulfill the all professional requirements of vocational teachers while teaching to students with visual impairment. So, it could be said that vocational diploma is insufficient and less effective vocational training for vocational teachers who are working in special education institutions particularly in the field of visual impairment. In this scenario the study contradicts Nayab, Chaudhary and Fatima (2021) who claimed that Young people can effectively learn skills through Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

However, Bano, Yang and Alam (2022) endorse the finding of this study about provision of insufficient and less effective pre service and in service vocational training opportunities in this way; Technical Vocational Education and Training was established in Pakistan with the aim of producing a skilled labor force for different industries and sectors. Nevertheless, it is primarily responsible for the 60% of young, unskilled, and partially skilled workers that emerges from informal and non-formal sectors.

Conclusions

The majority of vocational teachers are female serving in the field of vision impairment in government special education institutions. It is a good sign that although the required qualification for the vacancy of vocational teacher is only FA with vocational diploma however a significant number of vocational teachers working with CWVI having master/MA qualification. On the other hand, almost half of the vocational teachers having 2-year vocational diploma while usually 3-year diploma is preferred. Although the department of special education provides in-service vocational training opportunity but a big number of vocational teachers are still deprived from it in-spite of sufficient job duration. In this context it is a considerable fact that most of the working vocational teacher having more than 10 years job experience. Thematic analysis reveals that specific time period is allocated for vocational training in most of the special education institutions for primary level CWVI. Usually, teachers try to follow the sequence of teaching vocational skills prescribed by DSE Punjab whereas many vocational teachers teach vocational skills in their self-decided sequence according to the situation.

Most of the special education institutions have resources for vocational training but the time availability; adequacy and proper utilization are still the matters of debate. At the same time where most of the students are learning vocational skills, many students are still left behind due to their psychological, social and behavioral problems and less effort made by teachers for their inclusion. Similarly, vocational diploma helps the vocational teachers during teaching learning process but in several situations, it does not fulfill the requirements of comprehensive vocational training and carrier education at modern international standards. In the same way most of the provided in-service vocational trainings conducted by DSE Punjab don't have advance and latest vocational skills and carrier education training only outdated and less beneficial trades are being taught in these trainings. In addition, cane work is the specific skill therefore; DSE Punjab created the vacancy of cane worker for its training but in most of the special education institutions working for CWVI cane workers are not available. Special education teachers try to provide the training of cane work as per their capacity but usually they can't do it properly because cane work is not the part of their vocational diploma. It is another fact that the use of cane work-based furniture is almost going to end in Pakistani society.

Similarly, chik work is another out dated vocational trade because the use of chik is almost finished in present era. Moreover, according to majority of vocational teachers they do not teach it as they did not get any pre-service and in-service training about it. A large number of vocational teachers teach makrama making to their VI students because it is more relevant with their expertise than cane work and chik work. While the use of makrama for interior decoration is replaced by many modern and advance decorative items so its market value is nil. Some teachers teach making towel hanger, mobile pouch etc. by dowry work but a person with visual impairment cannot adopt this as business because these things made by other materials are more preferable among public. On the other side some vocational teachers reported lake of training regarding dori work. It is an astonishing reality that the heavy majority of vocational teachers bluntly stated that they do not select knitting for teaching as an optional subject as it is a tough and time taking job although the scope of knitting is maybe better for persons with visual impairment then previously discussed trades.

Meanwhile in the presence of all discouraging facts music training is a bright and most useful skill thought is existing vocational training. Music teachers are available in most of the special education institutions and it could be considered as a good professional support for CWVI because several visually challenged people became an earning hand by this skill. In contrast physical training is a most neglected area in majority of special education institutions because it is introduced as a non-credit subject by all drafts of curriculum issued by DSE Punjab. In-fact orientation and mobility training are an integral part of ECC and the subject of physical training (Games & Sports) cannot compensate it. However, although the subject of physical training is included in Syllabi for Visually Impaired Children 2021. But special education institutions do not take it seriously because neither its practical exam is being taken nor the specific time is allocated for it in school time tables. Whereas exceptionalities are always there.

In conclusion it can be said that few vocational subjects are being taught but they are less productive trades in present world. Beside it Syllabi for Visually Impaired Children 2021 is last curriculum draft issued by DSE Punjab it also reflected an intense need of change in vocational subjects in this way it identified the following vocational skills for CWVI

Marketing Professionals; > Human Resource Managers; > Business Managers; > Sales Representatives; > Agriculture Workers; > Lawyers; > Health Care Providers; > Counselors & Psychologists; > Social Workers; > Physiotherapists; > Writers & Journalists; > Customer Service Representatives; > Retail Employees; > Motivational Speakers;

But after the completion of three years no practical initiative is taken for it at any educational level.

Implications of study

The following reforms are recommended in the light of obtained results;

- Three years vocational diploma consisted of advanced vocational skills and career education should be necessary for the recruitment of vocational teachers.
- Specializations in vocational diploma should be offered by vocational training institutions about children with specific disability like VIC, HIC etc.
- Advance, productive and comprehensive in service training opportunity should be provided to all vocational teachers at least one's in an year.
- Sufficient and adequate required resources may be provided in time for vocational training in all special education institutions.
- The spectrum of vocational training should be expanded to all students so that no child left behind.
- Special remuneration in the shape of increment, allowance, honoraria etc. should be granted to vocational teachers on continuous outstanding performance in some vocational skills shown by their students.
- Outdated and less beneficial vocational trades like cane work, chik work, makrama making etc. should be replaced by some modern vocational trades and carrier opportunity options as customer service, IT support, telephone operation, massage therapy, music, beads work, handicraft making etc.
- Identified vocational areas by syllabi for Visually Impaired Children 2021 should be integrated in curriculum and their course outlines should be develop at each educational level.
- The subject of music should be selected for higher education in secondary, higher secondary schools and degree colleges working for CWVI.
- The subject of physical training (Games & Sports) should be replaced by orientation and mobility for CWVI and it must be taken as a credit subject due to its importance as an essential part of ECC.

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