Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review
www.plhr.org.pk

RESEARCH PAPER

Exploring Transitional Pathways to Post Secondary and Higher Education for Youth with Physical Disabilities in Punjab

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ABSTRACT

The transition from high school to post-secondary education is difficult for most students, but those difficulties are amplified by the extra complexity of handicap. The purpose of the study was to explore whether school administration obstructs seamless transition for students with physical disabilities, the effect of school-institution collaboration, and whether self-help skills, and travel training are barriers to successful transitions. Survey approach as well as descriptive research was employed. 30 items, self-constructed questionnaire was used. A sample of 115 teachers of physical impaired students, working in government special schools, was taken from five divisions of Punjab i.e., Multan, Lahore, Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, and Sahiwal. Results revealed that schools evaluate students' readiness, provide travel training, challenging courses, use role-playing activities and offer community-based programs for transition of students with physical limitations to college. It is recommended that a collaborative effort involving parents, educators, administrators, and nonprofit organization is vital for smooth school-to-higher education transitions.

Introduction

After completing high school, a growing percentage of people with special needs choose to obtain higher education. However, as compared to their counterparts without disabilities, handicapped adolescents are constantly overlooked in this profession. A post-secondary certificate or degree, like those without disabilities, will boost job opportunities in terms of both options and money. Most students find the transition of education from high school through postsecondary tough, but the additional complication of handicap will make it considerably more difficult. As a result, a smooth transition between secondary and postsecondary situation is not only advantageous but also required.

Postsecondary education must be accessible in order to be inclusive. The transition stage must help the student by taking into consideration their strengths, difficulties, interests, and aspirations, as well as the post-secondary environment. Successful transition plans must be centered on the requirements of the individual children, be collaborative, begin early, and include quantifiable, exact steps that are particularly designed to aid each child in bridging the gap. Important things to consider include the following: A few examples of what needs to be done include creating the right environment and fit, encouraging the student's capacity for self-advocacy, customizing accommodations to the

student's abilities in academics, social interaction, and independent living, and providing the student with mental and emotional support throughout the transition and beyond.

Additional concerns include using assistive technology, mentoring programs, and other elements, as well as familiarizing the student with the new environment before the transition. Regardless of that, it is frequently believed to be the solution to the numerous academic and organizational challenges faced by students with disabilities, assistive technology is most helpful if introduced early; this gives the student the chance to experiment, pick, and become familiar with it before leaving high school. Official and informal mentorship programs and services should be carefully considered as effective strategies for smoothing the transition. Along with academic and social barriers, the disruption of routines and the unfamiliar post-secondary environment may be exceedingly difficult for students with disabilities. To negotiate and lessen these problems, it could be useful to provide students the option to get to know the post-secondary institution before enrolling. By facilitating and supporting their transition in this way and other ways, some of the challenges experienced by students with disabilities are eased. Equal access to postsecondary education and employment for students with disabilities is vital for a society that values inclusion as well as being ethically imperative.

As children with disabilities get older and outside the scope of pediatric services, the quality of their medical care declines. However, there is little discussion in the medical literature on the transition from pediatric to adult treatment, the significance of different types and degrees of impairment, or the implications of law.

The 1993 Education Act made changes to this statute, which were later included into the 1996 Act. The Secretary of State created a code of practice explaining how the Act should be used in as part of the implementation process. The recommended strategy includes the Local Educational Authority (LEA), the NHS, and the Social Services Department (SSD), and highlights the need of multi-agency planning for the transition to adult services. It uses legislation that were established before 1994 and that should have been put into force at that time. It outlines the sections of the code of practices that are relevant to transition.

Literature review

All students may find it difficult to make the transition from secondary school to a postsecondary institution, but students with special needs may find it tougher. A thorough team planning approach that is motivated by the aspirations, preferences, and skills of young people leads to a transition process that is actually effective (Certo & Luecking, 2011).

For kids getting ready to graduate from secondary school, there are several possibilities and programs available. Numerous of these options for education and training entail formal or unofficial relationships between educational, employment, training, social services, and health services institutions. Students with disabilities are trained for adult duties throughout transition periods, with the objective of continuing on to college, vocational school, job, independent living, or community integration (Butler, 2016). Adelman (2006) went on to claim that students, even those with poor performance levels, are better prepared to enroll and persist in post-secondary education when they participate in more rigorous academic programs in high school, such as Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), or dual enrollment.

Whether the learner's next step is job opportunities, enrollment in a postsecondary training program, or an educational program, it is of the utmost importance for students with disabilities to have as much job experience as they can to prepare for adult life. At an integrated vocational site, individuals have more chances to acquire a certain career, task, or talent with community-based work experiences including internships, apprenticeships, and other on-the-job training opportunities. They can also apply the knowledge they acquire to actual work situations. It is also advised by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD) (2023) that a student with a disability engage in a variety of work-based learning opportunities, with the experiences being closely tied to the student's academic course of study.

Under the IDEA, transition services are essential to free adequate public education (FAPE). One of the key objectives of the IDEA is to make sure that all children with disabilities have access to a FAPE that prioritizes special education and associated services designed to suit their unique requirements and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent life. The requirements for the least restrictive environment are applicable to all transition services, including those that are related to employment, as well as to the placement's and program's employment component. The Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) includes an Individualized Transition Plan (ITP) to assist students in making the transition from high school to higher education. IEP/ITP postsecondary objectives that have been combined are focused upon the learner's special requirements, talents, choices, and interests and seek to provide them the information, competencies, and mindset they need to live a successful independent life while contributing to the well-being of their community (Edeiken-Cooperman, 2011; Mazzotti et al., 2009).

Research suggests that positive qualities might help children with impairments manage their academic commitments and setbacks. The impact of intrinsic agency (self-initiated effort) on college students with learning disabilities in their academic, social, emotional, and personal domains was examined by Connor (2012). He gathered information through interviews. He discussed the transitional challenges they faced and the strategies they used to succeed with three college freshman with learning disabilities. According to Connor's research, proactive students with learning disabilities were fairly well-prepared to handle the academic demands of college, despite the fact that a disability may have serious negative effects on a student's academic performance, self-esteem, aspirations, socialization, integration, and participation in education.

The education of and transition to college for individuals with impairments is impacted by several outside variables. When Baer et al. (2011) studied 112 students with disabilities, they found that poor transition plans, the socioeconomic status of the family, the lack of financial aid, and the number of applications to colleges all decreased the likelihood that these students would transition to college. Lack of appropriate information and lack of readiness for college are other variables that affect the number of students with disabilities who enroll in college. According to Edeiken-Cooperman's (2011) study, the execution of the individualized transition plan (ITP) ended as soon as the low incidence students with impairments graduated or turned 21. Their prospects of attending college or university were reduced by a lack of support or a dearth of transitional services. Moreno (2013) discovered that teachers were less helpful and imposed hurdles to accessing accurate information.

On the contrary, Brigharm et al. (2006) found that the across the school customs had an impact on the independence of students with disabilities from high school to college. These factors included collaboration among educators, administrators at the school, and service organizations; access to assistance services that boost positive personal

characteristics (like self-motivation); possibilities to take standardized assessments and college-entry lessons; and improved home-school partnerships. Very few pupils with disabilities who want to go to college really do so because of systems that interplay with physical, physiological, socioeconomic, political, cultural, and linguistic factors to deny them access to an adequate education (Getzel & Thoma, 2008).

Hence, interactions between a number of factors, such as those relating to government policies, disability laws, educational systems, communities, and personal disabilities, have an impact on learners with disabilities' access for educational purposes as well as how they move through various structures and connect with the community as a whole. Greater funding from the government, disability laws, and research into alternative approaches have all been used in efforts to make education accessible for these learners. The fact that fewer students with disabilities transition to college than students without disabilities, however, shows that obstacles still exist in providing all pupils with disabilities with an equal opportunity to learn (Banks, 2014; Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Wagner et al., 2005).

Material and Methods

Research Design

The current study was conducted to paint a complete picture of the routes that young people with physical disabilities may take to continue their education after high school in Punjabi areas. Through descriptive research, an attempt is made to provide a comprehensive account of a situation, subject, phenomenon, service, or project.

Population

Teachers working in Punjabi special education institutes for children with physical impairments made up the study's population.

Sample

115 instructors of kids with physical impairments working in special education facilities in Punjab from five divisions (Lahore, Gujranwala, Rawalpindi, Sahiwal, and Multan) comprised the study's sample.

Research Tool

A self-constructed questionnaire was utilized to collect data, and it had 30 closed-ended questions about the topic.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

Validity is the extent to which a measure's results accurately reflect the variable it is intended to evaluate. For establishment of content validity, senior specialists in special education, associate professor Dr. Ghulam Fatima, and Dr. Misbah Malik were consulted. Furthermore, SPSS was used to calculate the Alpha Cronbach reliability statistic to assess the internal consistency of each questionnaire item. The questionnaire was determined to have an alpha reliability value of 0.81, indicating that it was a reliable instrument for the target demographic.

Data Collection

The researchers used survey responses in the districts of Punjab with the goal to collect data regarding administration, resources, school management in the planning of transition for students with physical disabilities, cooperation among schools and higher educational organizations for transition for youngsters with physical disabilities is the obstacle to smooth transition.

Results and Discussion

By discovering trends in data, quantitative descriptive analysis identifies the world or a phenomena by providing answers to the what, where, when, and how much questions. Data analysis is descriptive analysis. A solid summary conveys what is understood about capabilities, needs, techniques, practices, policies, populations, and settings in almost every investigation in a way that is relevant to a specific study or policy subject. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed in the analysis of the data.

Table 1
Frequencies and percentages of the questionnaire's items

Sr. No	Transitional pathways	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not sure	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
1	For students with physical impairments, transition planning is done in schools in preparation for the move from secondary to post-secondary and higher education.	13	25	23	41	13
		11.3%	21.7%	20%	35.7	11.3
2	Schools assess students' needs and aptitudes for the transition from secondary to higher education.	13	10	27	48	17
		11.3%	8.7%	23.5%	41.7%	14.8%
3	Regional educational organizations and the state work together to support students as they move from secondary to higher education.	6	13	22	50	24
		5.2%	11.3%	19.1%	43.5%	20.9%
4	Schools create IEPs that meet kids' needs throughout transitions.	8	13	25	48	21
		7%	11.3%	21.7%	41.7%	18.3%
5	Using an appropriate transition as the foundation, schools create measurable post-secondary goals in an IEP.	9	15	33	40	18
		7.8%	13%	28.7%	34.8%	15.7%
6	School administers a transition assessment that is age-appropriate.	10	17	22	5	
		8.7%	14.8%	19.1%	44.3%	13%
7	There are numerous study programs that facilitate the transition from secondary to post-secondary and higher education.	11	11	32	39	22
		9.6%	9.6%	27.8%	33.9%	19.1%
8	To assist students in making the transition from high school to post-secondary and higher education, there is effective financial management.	9	15	35	41	15
		7.8%	13%	30.4%	35.7%	13%
9	To help students move from secondary to post-secondary and higher education, there are funds and scholarship programs available.	11	15	25	47	17
		9.6%	13%	21.7%	40.9%	14.8%
10	Youth with physical limitations can move to higher education more easily because to collaboration between schools and universities.	10	14	24	51	16
		8.7%	12.2%	20.9%	44.3%	13.9%

11	Postsecondary universities have a quota available for students with physical disability	9	15	30	44	17
		7.8%	13.0%	26.1%	38.3%	14.8%
12	Schools make ensuring that physically disabled pupils participate in integrated settings.	5	10	24	41	35
		4.3%	8.7%	20.9%	35.7%	30.4%
13	Students get access to mentorships that assist them in pursuing their professional goals.	9	10	23	49	24
		7.8%	8.7%	20.0%	42.6%	20.9%
14	Schools provide pupils with challenging courses that get them ready for college.	4	11	18	42	40
		3.5	9.6	15.7	36.5	43.8
15	Schools set up community-based events to aid students in their transition from secondary to higher education.	7	7	23	47	31
		6.1%	6.1%	20.0%	40.9%	27.0%
16	Schools guarantee that children will actively participate in an IEP.	5	10	23	51	26
		4.3%	8.7%	20.0%	44.3%	22.6%
17	Institutions of higher education make sure that students with physical limitations get structural support.	5	13	26	54	17
		4.3%	11.3%	22.6%	47.0%	14.8%
18	Physical impediments for students with physical limitations are removed by postsecondary institutions.	10	24	28	38	15
		8.7%	20.9%	24.3%	33.0%	13.0%
19	Higher Education Institutions Any classes that cannot be transferred should have their location or site changed.	10	10	19	54	22
		8.7%	8.7%	16.5%	47.0%	19.1%
20	Assistance for vocational rehabilitation are available for post-secondary and higher education.	14	25	31	33	12
		12.2%	21.7%	27.0%	28.7%	10.4%
21	Opportunities for pre-classes are offered for young people with physical limitations.	15	21	26	40	13
		13.0%	18.3%	22.6%	34.8%	11.3%
22	Students' social and emotional needs are met in schools so they may transition to postsecondary and higher education.	3	16	28	45	23
		2.6%	13.9%	24.3%	39.1%	20.0%
23	Role-playing exercises are used by students with physical impairments at post-secondary and higher education institutions to help them fit in with their peers.	4	14	17	51	29
		3.5%	12.2%	14.8%	44.3%	25.2%
24	Schools provide physical disabled students with travel training.	5	10	20	55	25
		4.3%	8.7%	17.4%	47.8%	21.7%
25	Schools promote career exploration for kids.	16	21	26	40	12
		13.9%	18.3%	22.6%	34.8%	10.4%
26	Schools assist pupils in enhancing their independence.	7	18	24	53	13
		6.1%	15.7%	20.9%	46.1%	11.3%
27	Schools encourage children to advocate for themselves	7	14	34	45	15
		6.1%	12.2%	29.6%	39.1%	13.0
28	Encourage kids to use the public domain	9	11	23	51	21
		7.8%	9.6%	20.0%	44.3%	18.3%
29	Assist students in selecting the appropriate college	6	18	26	46	19
		5.2%	15.7%	22.6%	40.0%	16.5%
30	Help students understand their rights and obligations in higher education and postsecondary institutions.	11	7	32	43	22
		9.6%	6.1%	27.8%	37.4%	19.1%

Regarding the significance of assisting students in understanding their rights and obligations in post-secondary and higher education, Table 1 offers insightful information about respondents' perspectives. 115 participants' comments reveal a wide diversity of opinions.

For determining if school administration hinders or facilitates a smooth transition for children with physical limitations, frequencies and percentages were calculated. The findings showed that While 35% of the sample thought that transition planning is done in schools for transition from school to post-secondary and higher education, 41% of the sample thought that educational institutions determine what pupils want and skills for transition from school to post-secondary and higher education. Additionally, 47% of respondents said that schools organize community-based activities to aid students in transition, while 40% of respondents thought there were funds or scholarships available to help students make the transition from secondary to higher education. Additionally, 35.7% of respondents thought that proper school management of finances could aid students in making the transition.

Additionally, 41% of respondents said that schools guarantee that physically unable children participate in integrated settings. Additionally, 36% of respondents said that schools provide challenging courses to get pupils ready for college. Additionally, according to 41% of respondents, schools guarantee students' active involvement in IEPs, and 47% of the sample revealed that post-secondary institutions guarantee structural assistance for students with physical impairments. Additionally, 42% of the sample agreed that schools should support students' career exploration, and 45% said they should address students' social and emotional needs to assist them acclimatize to post-secondary and higher education.

For exploration of teachers' perception about collaboration of school and higher higher education institutions for a smooth transition, frequencies and percentages were calculated using SPSS. According to data analysis, 44% of respondents agreed that there is a collaboration between schools and higher education institutions that aids in the smooth transition of young people with physical disabilities from high school to post-secondary and higher education, and 43% of the sample agreed there is a collaboration between local educational agencies and the state. In addition, 47% of respondents said that post-secondary institutions should shift their lessons to locations where structural obstacles can't be overcome without the help of other educational institutions.

For reflecting whether the barrier to a seamless transition is travel training, self-help abilities, and self-advocacy, frequencies and percentages were assessed. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to determine if travel training, self-help skills, or self-advocacy are the main obstacles to a smooth transfer. According to the findings, 46% of respondents said that schools assisted students in developing their independence-related abilities, and 39% said they encouraged students to advocate for themselves. Additionally, 44% of respondents agreed that schools assist students in using public information, 44% of respondents agreed that schools assist students in using public transportation, and 40% said that schools assist students in selecting the best institution. Additionally, 37% of respondents said that education in the classroom teaches students about their rights and obligations in post-secondary and higher education.

Findings

The key points and findings of this research are

1. Majority of the teachers of physical impaired students believed that schools play a crucial role in identifying and nurturing the aspirations and capabilities of students as they prepare to make the transition from secondary education to post-secondary and higher education. This pivotal responsibility involves not only imparting academic knowledge but also guiding students towards their future paths.

2. In recognition of the diverse needs of students, teachers believed that schools also provide specialized travel training to young individuals with physical disabilities. This training empowers them with the skills and confidence to navigate their environments independently, enabling them to access educational opportunities beyond the classroom.

3. Most of the teachers agree that a significant aspect of preparing students, especially those with physical disabilities, for the challenges of post-secondary and higher education is through role-playing activities. These exercises are arranged by schools and help students develop essential social and interpersonal skills, enabling them to better integrate into peer groups and engage effectively in educational institutions' social fabric.

4. Furthermore, most of the teachers are of the view that to holistically support students' transition, schools organize community-based activities. These activities serve as platforms for students to apply their learning in real-world contexts, fostering a sense of responsibility, teamwork, and civic engagement. Such experiences not only contribute to personal growth but also facilitate a smoother shift to post-secondary and higher education settings.

5. According to teachers, recognizing the demands of higher education, schools strive to offer a curriculum that includes rigorous and challenging courses. By providing academic rigor, schools equip students with the intellectual dexterity and critical thinking abilities necessary for success in college. These courses not only deepen subject knowledge but also cultivate a strong work ethic and a thirst for learning.

6. Majority of the teachers believed that schools with collaboration of other agencies function as the launch pads for students' educational journeys beyond the classroom. Through tailored support, practical training, social skill development, community engagement, and rigorous academics, schools pave the way for a seamless transition to post-secondary and higher education, empowering students to pursue their goals with confidence and competence

Discussion

Based on significant findings, it can be deduced that schools play a pivotal role in assessing students' aspirations and capabilities as they prepare to transition from secondary education to post-secondary and higher education. This holds particular importance for individuals with physical disabilities, enhancing the positive nature of their journey towards higher education. Additionally, schools provide travel training to young people with physical disabilities, a beneficial endeavor given the potential requirement to commute to distant college campuses. This training proves advantageous in facilitating their transition process.

Further, teachers believed that collaboration with other agencies function as the launch pads for students' educational journeys beyond the classroom for transition. Similar results were indicated by Luger et al (2016). They emphasized that the family, the child, the

community, agencies (government and NGOs), the schools, and professionals all need to be involved in collaborations that are ongoing and supportive and work towards interdisciplinary methods for transition of students with special needs towards higher education. Moreover, students with physical disabilities engage in role-playing activities, a constructive practice aiding their integration within post-secondary and higher education settings. This training serves as a valuable tool in preparing them for upcoming challenges. Simultaneously, schools orchestrate community-based initiatives aimed at aiding students in their transition beyond secondary education. These activities effectively broaden students' perspectives on life, fostering their role as valuable contributors to society.

In line with this, schools also offer demanding coursework tailored to ready students for the demands of college. This approach ensures students are well-prepared to excel in their chosen fields of interest. As a comprehensive strategy, schools' involvement in assessing desires and capabilities, providing travel training, facilitating social integration, collaborating with community activities, and offering rigorous coursework collectively contributes to a seamless and successful transition to post-secondary and higher education for all students, including those with physical disabilities.

Conclusion

The study highlight the multifaceted support provided by educational institutions to ensure the successful transition of all students, particularly those with unique challenges. Considering the results, the following conclusions were made. Teachers believed that schools are committed to inclusivity, demonstrated by their provision of travel training to youth with physical disabilities. Role-play exercises simulate real-life scenarios, enabling students to develop effective communication, interpersonal skills, and confidence. This deliberate preparation equips them to interact seamlessly with their peers, fostering a sense of belonging and enhancing their overall educational experience. Which can help them in smooth transition to higher education. The research emphasizes that schools are active in arranging community-based activities that extend beyond the classroom. These challenging courses are meticulously designed to provide students with a rigorous academic experience, thereby preparing them for the demands of college education.

These major findings collectively illuminate the multifaceted ways in which schools actively support students' transition from secondary education to post-secondary and higher education. Through collaboration with other agencies, tailored assessment, inclusivity measures, social integration strategies, community engagement, and academic rigor, educational institutions contribute to a seamless and successful transition for all students, regardless of their unique circumstances.

Recommendations

In an effort to fill the following gaps, parents, educators, administration, and other nonprofit organizations can work together.

1. There ought to be funds/scholarships programs accessible to aid in the transition from school to post-secondary and higher education.

2. Help students to know about Rights and Responsibilities in Post-Secondary and Higher Education.

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