

Alienation in Students with Visual Impairment in Special and Inclusive Schools: A Study of Haryana State

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the feeling of alienation in students with visual impairment studying in inclusive and special schools. The sample comprised of two hundred visually impaired students in the age group of ten to twenty five years. The results indicated that the visually impaired students studying in inclusive schools were less alienated than those in special schools. The findings of the study were in consonance with the underlying principles of inclusion and the role of inclusive education in reducing alienation was highlighted. Remedial measures for special schools are recommended to minimize the feeling of isolation and rejection among students with visual impairment.

Keywords: Alienation, Visually impaired, Special school, Inclusive school.

Visual impairment is a broader term used to describe the complete or partial loss of vision. It also refers to degrees of reduction in vision. It has been broadly divided in two broad categories: low vision and the blind. According to Census 2011, persons with visual impairment constituted for about 18.8 percent of the total disabled population in India. Providing education to this large segment of population is a challenge before concerned teachers, policy makers and administrators. Presently, educational provisions for children with visual impairment are covered by special schools and inclusive schools across the country. Inclusive school refers to an educational setting where both the sighted and visually impaired students study in the same social, emotional and physical environment with all the necessary resources and support from the school. In special schools, only the students with visual impairment study in an exclusive/segregated environment. Kohama (2012) explained that policies in India have always prioritized inclusion but, these are not perfectly inclusive. In fact, there are problems at the implementation level. Whereas, Farrell (2016) mentioned that over the last thirty years there have been numerous publications from academics and practitioners that have focused on various aspects of inclusive education. However, there is some confusion amongst the

key stakeholders, parents, policy makers and practitioners, about the definition of inclusive education and about the extent to which the findings from research have made a contribution to the development of effective inclusive practice. Singh and Agarwal (2015) recommended that inclusive education in India requires serious planning and efforts. Existing school systems in terms of physical factors, curriculum aspects, teaching expectations and styles, and leadership roles requires change.

Despite of the fact that the Government has run various schemes across the country, the Census, 2011 reported that the literacy rate of the visually impaired was only 52 percent (<http://punarbhava.in>), which was considerably lower than the national literacy figure, which was around 75 percent. This shows that about half of the total visually impaired population is yet to be included in the educational programmes. Apart from others, the main reason cited for this dismal educational status of visually impaired is being alienated, ridiculed, and bullied by peers, teachers and other people inside and outside the school. The feeling of being neglected and alienated in educational institutions, adversely affects the overall personality, behaviour and educational outcomes of students with visual impairment. Alienated students experience frustration, low self concept and loneliness.

Jain (2013) defined alienation as a socio-psychological state within an individual in which he/she feels 'no sense of belonging' to his surrounding, group or nation. It is the condition whereby people become strangers in the world they are living in. It is a stage when a person feels rejected or disliked by others. The term alienation originated from the work of Karl Max (Bottomore and Rubel, 1961; Taylore, 1967; Lawrence and Wishart, 1968 as cited in Nelson and O'Donohue, 2006). According to Marx, alienation is a condition, in which a man becomes isolated and is cut off from the product of his work, and has given up his desires for self-expression and control over his own fate at work. Marx observed it as an objective experience. Blauner (1964 as cited in Nelson and O'Donohue, 2006), however, counteracted the view by arguing that alienation is the subjective experience and is described by four dimensions of alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation and self-estrangement. The phenomenon of alienation is slow and systematic at the affective level. It may have some specific psychological re-inforcers, which might be present in certain type of personalities.

Seeman finds alienation as an umbrella concept that includes five dimensions (Seeman, 1959, 1967, 1971, 1975, and 1983, as cited in Schmidt, 2011). These are isolation, normlessness, powerlessness, meaninglessness, and self-estrangement. Isolation is a condition, in which a person feels alone. The visually impaired students who feel isolated tend to be separated from the mainstream society. They feel lack of connection with others in their environment. The absence of personal interaction outside a specific domain is clearly visible. Normlessness is a belief that socially unapproved behaviour is required to achieve the given goal. Normless people perceive themselves as unhelpful, and also believe that others perceive them as being different in a negative way. Powerlessness represents a condition when a person perceives that he/she cannot control the situation. The visually impaired students who feel powerless believe that they can not affect the choices of others. Meaninglessness is a condition when one is lacking in terms of how their work contributes to the whole. The visually impaired students who

face this condition feel minimum attachment with the society. They lack autonomy and creativity. Blauner (1964 as cited in Nelson and O'Donohue, 2006) defined self-estrangement as a feeling of detachment, no sense of identity or personal fulfilment.

Alienation has also been viewed as a situational and institutional construct describing the relationship between an individual and his/her environment. Mighty (2016) found that the institutional environment may affect a person adversely or positively and hence, increase or decrease the feelings of alienation. Strong negative association between institutional environment and the level of alienation suggests that the supportive environment of the institute can help in decreasing the level of alienation.

Previously, the human society had the tendency to isolate and categorise people with disabilities. The categorization and isolation led to various emotional and social problems among the disabled. The literature and experiences suggest that these problems occur because of the attitude and behaviour of the society rather than the actual limitations of the disabled. Mittler and Mittler (2000) explained that the social model of disability is based on the notion that it is the society and its institutions that are repressive, biased, discriminatory and disabling. This situation may lead to the emergence of diverse patterns of alienation, dominated by the feelings of being powerless, meaningless, normlessness and severe isolation. This social discrimination affects their self-concept, confidence, esteem and social behaviour. This fact is supported by the study conducted by Mohanty (1984) and Mohan et al. (1999) who found that alienated adolescents differed significantly from their non-alienated peers on all the dimensions of personality viz. psychoticism, extraversion, neuroticism, lie scale, aesthetic values, home, social, emotional and total adjustment.

The feeling of alienation may lead to the development of feeling of deprivation, which ultimately results in various personality disorders. Crowder (1970 as cited in Sharma 2012) found that the feeling of alienation increased with the feeling of deprivation. People who felt deprived because of their economic conditions were more

likely to manifest greater alienation than those who did not feel deprived. Sharma (1997 as cited in Sharma 2012) conducted a comparative study of the deprived and non-deprived high school students in relation to self-concept, alienation, ego-strength and life stress. It was found that the deprived subjects were more alienated than non-deprived subjects.

Alam (2001) in a study conducted on the hearing impaired found that they were more alienated than their normal counterparts. Rambir (2007) found that there existed a negative, significant relationship between alienation and emotional intelligence among visually impaired college students. Sharma (2008 as cited in Sharma 2012) observed that female students were more alienated than the male students.

Sahu, Kirandeep and Kalia (2009 as cited in Sahu 2012) pointed out that alienation had a significant relationship with minorities, socio-economic status, emotions, personality and academic achievement. Agarwal (2010) found that people with disability live in a world that is not of their kind, where they live continually under the shadow of social biases and prejudice. It was highlighted that a diverse pattern of alienation reactions emerged, dominated by a sense of meaninglessness, normlessness and severe isolation. Resultantly, people with disability neither realized their potential nor got an opportunity to participate and contribute to the society. These studies revealed that alienation has an adverse effect on the academic achievement and normal development of children. Sharma (2012) also found that alienation had an adverse effect on the academic achievement. In this study, emotional intelligence was found to be negatively correlated with alienation. Sahu (2012) revealed that academic achievement, locus of control and socio-economic status were found to have significant, negative effect on alienation and its five dimensions (powerlessness, self-estrangement, social isolation, meaninglessness and normlessness).

The review of literature revealed that alienation is not a newly developed or studied concept. A number of studies have examined specific variables related to alienation but,

there is a dearth of research concerning alienation observed among the visual impaired people. Moreover, alienation is a key factor influencing the normal growth and development of an individual and this area needs further exploration. Thus, alienation was selected as an important variable to be explored for the visually impaired for the present study.

It is evident from the review of literature that alienation is consistently associated with the feeling of deprivation, personality disorders and a negative impact on emotional intelligence, academic achievement and other related factors. Therefore, attention should be focused on the removal of feeling of alienation among the disabled, especially visually impaired children and the adults. The approach of inclusion places the students with visual impairment from a segregated environment into an inclusive environment. The aim of such reform is to ensure equal access and participation in all activities and opportunities provided by the school to all the pupils and avoiding segregation and isolation. The present study can help in understanding whether an educational placement namely inclusive schooling has an effect on dealing with the issue of alienation? It is assumed that a school setting has an effect on experiencing alienation by the visually impaired students.

Objectives

The study was conducted to achieve the following objectives:

1. To study the feeling of alienation among visually impaired students in inclusive and special school settings.
2. To compare feeling of alienation among visually impaired students in inclusive and special school settings.

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the feeling of alienation among visually impaired students in inclusive and special school settings.

Method

In the present study, the visually impaired students studying in the inclusive and special school settings respectively were compared by the following descriptive method. A self-

developed and standardized Alienation Scale was used for the collection of data.

Sample

Two hundred visually impaired students in the age group 10 to 25 years, studying in five special schools and fifty two inclusive schools were selected through multi stage random sampling technique covering the entire state of Haryana. Out of 200, one hundred visually impaired students were selected from special schools while the other 100 were drawn from inclusive schools. A multi-stage random sampling technique was used in the view of the fact that the population of visually challenged students studying in Haryana state was widely scattered.

For drawing a sample from special schools, at the first stage, a list of special schools for visually challenged across the state of Haryana was prepared by the investigators. It was found that throughout the entire state, seven special schools were serving in the area of educating the visually challenged including one government school in Panipat city. The investigators personally visited the schools to check the feasibility of the research. Out of these seven schools, five schools were randomly selected for data collection. Similarly, 52 inclusive schools were selected by adopting multi-stage random sampling technique. While applying the multi-stage random sampling technique, out of 21 districts in Haryana, about 8 districts were selected randomly. Afterwards, a list of educational blocks of these eight districts was obtained from the website: <http://haryanarural.gov.in/block-names.htm>. It was found that 42 educational blocks were falling in the selected districts. Out of 42 blocks, 14 blocks were randomly selected. The investigators personally visited the office of the designated IEDSS (Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage) model school in each of the 14 blocks to obtain enrolment data of visually challenged students in each school of the respective block. Based upon the data obtained from IEDSS schools of 14 blocks of 8 districts, 52 inclusive schools were selected for the study. Students having multiple disabilities along with visual impairment were excluded from the study, as they might influence the final results.

Tools

A self-developed and standardized Alienation Scale for Visually Impaired (AL-VI) containing forty five items was used for the collection of data. These items were categorized into six sub-scales namely powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation, self-estrangement and cultural estrangement. Item analysis was done by using t-value and discrimination index. Reliability of the battery was determined by using the Cronbach's alpha value and split-half reliability. The value of Cronbach's alpha and split-half reliability came out to be 0.87 and 0.86, which indicated that this scale is fairly reliable. The construct validity was determined by computing the coefficient of correlation between the scores of this scale and the scores obtained by using Student Alienation Scale (SAS) of R.R. Sharma (1988). The coefficient of correlation was found to be 0.74, which was highly significant and this provided the indices for the construct validity. Norms were determined by administering the scale to one hundred and eighteen visually impaired students on the basis of percentiles. The scores were divided into five categories i.e. very high, high, moderate, low and very low alienation. This tool was also developed in Braille.

Visually challenged students comprised of both low vision and blind students. The degree of visual impairment varies in both the groups. Looking at the different needs of the subjects, the tool was administered in three different ways. The blind students who knew Braille, Braille sheets of the tool were provided, whereas those who did not know Braille, every item of the tool was explained to them and the responses were filled-in by the investigator themselves. The low vision students who were able to read and write without difficulties, printed copies of the tool were provided to them. These students filled their responses themselves.

Results

A cursory look of the Figure 1 made it clear that most of the cases in both special and inclusive schools were feeling moderate to high level of alienation. In special schools, the feeling of alienation among the visually impaired students was found to be very high

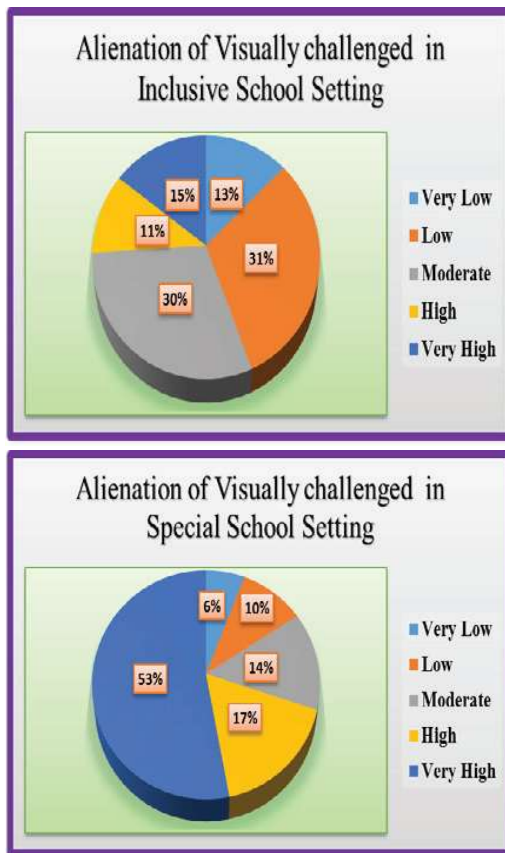


Figure 1: Pie Diagrams Showing Alienation Scores of Visually Impaired Students in Special Schools and Inclusive Schools (N=100)

(53 percent), high (17 percent) and moderate (14 percent). It means 84 percent of the visually impaired students were feeling alienated in special schools. In inclusive schools, 15 percent of cases were feeling very high level of alienation followed by 11 percent (high) and 30 percent of moderately alienated students, respectively. It means 56 percent of the total visually impaired students in inclusive schools were feeling alienated from the society. Table-1 also shows that the mean value for an overall alienation score in case of special and inclusive schools came out to be 153.81 and 125.31, respectively. Hence, it is evident from the mean alienation scores that the visually impaired students in special schools were more alienated than those

in inclusive schools. The t-value of 7.4 for the mean scores of alienation was found to be significant at the 0.01 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis H₀, "There is no significant difference in the alienation of visually impaired students in inclusive and special school settings" was not accepted.

Moreover, the t-value for all the dimensions of alienation was significant except in the case of powerlessness. The mean value of powerlessness was found higher in case of visually challenged students studying in special schools but, the t-value was insignificant at the 0.05 level. This finding illustrated that students in both special schools and inclusive schools were feeling powerless. The result demonstrates that the visually impaired students in both school settings perceive less control over the situations, feel helpless and depend on others. The finding on meaningfulness showed that the special education students had significantly higher levels of meaningfulness than inclusive education counterparts. It means that the visually impaired students in special schools had reduced attachment with the society. The mean value of normlessness was found to be significantly higher in case of the visually impaired students studying in inclusive schools. This indicated that exclusive setting had considerable impact on the alienation, hence supporting the importance of inclusive schools. As regard to social isolation, the result indicated that the students in special schools hold a greater sense of isolation in contrast to their inclusive education peers. The findings on self-estrangement and cultural-estrangement illustrated that special school students had significantly higher levels of self-estrangement and cultural-estrangement than their counterparts in inclusive schools. It means that students in special schools were feeling detached from society and world around them. These students neither had a sense of identity or personal fulfilment nor do they accept the prevailing social values.

The overall and dimension wise comparison of alienation mean scores in both types of school settings is also presented in the form of bar diagram in Fig 2.

Table-1. Significance of Difference between the Mean Alienation Scores of Visually Impaired Students in Inclusive and Special School Settings

Sr. No.	Variable	N	Mean Value in Inclusive Schools	Mean Value in Special Schools	t- Value	Remarks
1.	Alienation	100	125.31	153.81	7.4*	Significant
Dimensions of Alienation :						
A.	Powerlessness	100	21.61	22.09	0.65	Not Significant
B.	Meaninglessness	100	22.64	27.94	6.2*	Significant
C.	Normlessness	100	19.16	17.75	2.39**	Significant
D.	Social Isolation	100	27.38	40.83	8.5*	Significant
E.	Self –Estrangement	100	22.15	27.39	6.81*	Significant
F.	Cultural-Estrangement	100	12.37	17.81	8.10*	Significant

*Significant at 0.01 level ** Significant at 0.05 level

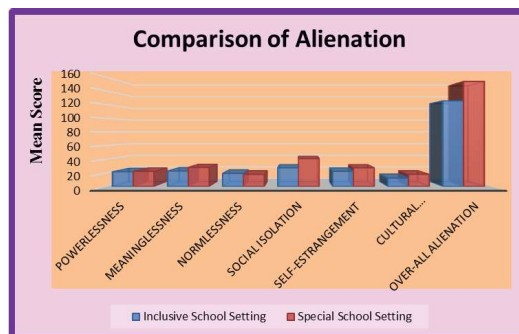


Figure 2: Bar Diagram Showing Mean Values of Overall Alienation and Its Dimensions in Special and Inclusive School Settings

Discussion

It is discernible from the results of the total as well as dimension wise alienation scores that the environment of inclusive school seems to be more suitable for the visually impaired students in terms of removing the feeling of alienation. This might be due to the reason that an overall environment of the special school was not conducive for the visually impaired students and they were feeling isolated and deprived. The findings seems to support the assumption that institutional settings had an effect on feeling of alienation as, in the present case, the special schools were found to foster a greater sense of alienation among visually impaired students.

The findings of this study could not be compared with the findings of other studies due to lack of empirical studies in this area. Though, in contrary to the findings of this study, Hatlen (2004), in a related study, stated that the blind or visually impaired learners in inclusive education settings often did not become socially integrated. Although, in the absence of more studies in this area, the findings could not be compared with other studies since most of the studies on the disabled were conducted by comparing them with their normal peers. In a related study, Rambir (2007) and Kumar (2012) reported that the visually impaired were significantly more alienated than those with normal vision. Similarly, Alam (2001) in a study on the hearing impaired found that they were more alienated than their normal counterparts. Agarwal (2010) highlighted that people with disability live in a world that is not of their kind, where they live continually under the shadow of social biases and prejudices. Crowder (1970 as cited in Sharma 2012) supported the fact that feeling of deprivation leads to alienation. Sharma (1997 as cited in Sharma 2012) also reached the same conclusion that the deprived subjects were more alienated than the non-deprived.

All these studies highlighted the fact that students with disability and reduced functionality were at greater risk of developing different psychological problems, feeling of deprivation

and alienation. Thereby, it could be concluded that the feeling of alienation increases with segregation from the society.

Conclusions

The students with visual impairment in special schools were found to be more alienated as compared to the students from inclusive schools. It was found that 86 percent of students in special schools were feeling moderate to high level of alienation. The findings are important in the backdrop that most of the students in special schools were boarders, hence staying away from their family and society. Further, they got very little chance to interact with other people outside the school. In such conditions, it is quite possible that they may perceive themselves different from the outside world. This is supported by the views of Banerji (1978, as cited in Alam 2001) who said that children who live in isolated environment develop the feeling of alienation. Perhaps, they may face repeated frustration and fail to learn how to tolerate frustration. Further, the feeling of being different from others is not good as the feeling of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement may lead to worthlessness, helplessness and insecurity. This situation can be detrimental for proper cognitive, emotional and social development.

It is evident from the above discussion that the findings of the present study were also found to be in accordance with the basic thought underlying the concept of inclusion i.e. exclusion of the disabled in almost all aspects of mainstream developmental activities places them in a disadvantaged situation. The experiential feelings of the individual, which he/she receives from the society in general, class-mates, parents and teachers, and also the difficulties faced by him/her in a particular way, play an important role in deciding the mental status of an individual.

The present study highlighted the need for taking appropriate measures by the school authorities, special education teachers, counsellors, and policy makers to reduce the level of alienation and improve the feeling of integration and attachment among the students with visual impairment in special schools. It must

be a priority for the special schools to create an environment by addressing the needs of students with visual impairment and keeping them away from alienation. It is important to organize field trips, cultural events and sports activities outside the special schools to increase the quality of interaction between the society and students with disabilities. Similar interventions are also recommended for inclusive schools as alienation was also found in students attending such schools although the level was much lower than the special schools.

In relation to the findings, it is worth observing that the data for the present study was collected from the Haryana State, so any attempt to generalize this study to other population should be considered within these limits.

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