CHAPTER V
SUMMARY
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5.1 INTRODUCTION

Communication is the means of existence of all living organisms. Having deprived of communication, one cannot locate food and water and cannot protect itself from destruction. Absence of communication cannot establish conjugal relationship between two sexes. An individual has in him the unconscious socio- personal motives like self esteem, security, knowledge, pleasure and rest he communicates to and his fellow beings continuously to fulfill these motives. Thus, communication involving interaction with physical, biological and social environment is indispensable to one’s existence and continuance.(1)

Communication is a basic life skill, as important as the skills by which you make your way through school or earn a living. Your ability to communicate largely determines your personal happiness. When you communicate effectively you make and keep friends. You are valued at work. Your children respect you and trust you. If you are less effective at communicating you will find your life deficient in one or more areas.(2)

Every human being is blessed with five sense organs i.e. eyes to see, ears to hear, nose to smell, tongue to taste and skin to feel; that helps an individual to understand the surroundings and the environment. These senses help in our motor development, physical and social development. From the very beginning when a child is born, he tries to make the exploration of world around him through his eyes.

Even research says that the first systematic exploration of the environment is made with the eyes and not the hands. So our sense to visualize is an important factor which helps in our motor ability. The child who is blind by birth is slow in learning the motor activity and faces many problems as compared to his sighted peers. If a person is disabled then his other senses should be developed and made his strength so that he can try to overcome the problems that he is likely to face because of the disability particularly in case of vision as according to researchers the first exploration a human being does is with eyes and then he uses his sense of auditory and motor to grab the things.
Summary

The loss of eye or impairment possess a very serious threat to the social and economic security of the individual. It is one of the most important senses. We see the things and this is how our learning starts. Vision is inside one's thoughts and imagination like when we dream we see; in our imagination we see. So is the case with blinds. Though they are deprived of sight but their vision to understand the world is the area where this study would like to focus.

The world of any individual consists of the people the person is surrounded with. And we make relations with others through communication; be it through silence, words, understanding, empathizing, showing anger, frustration all are the forms which are present in relationship. So, the study would elaborate on the patterns of communication adopted by this particular section and the way they perceive about them, so that the problem areas can be focused and the solutions can be worked out.

As per the media report in year 2007, India is now a home for the world's largest number of blind people. Of the 37 million people across the globe who are blind, over 15 million people are from India. (3)

So, there was a need that some work towards this section of society could be undertaken as country can progress only if all sections of society contribute towards its progress and development.

The first step in this direction would be to provide ample facilities to the disabled population so that they can also contribute towards the growth of the nation. Secondly there is a need to adopt a two way approach of communication with them. First approach is that society should be trained and accustomed to accept them in society as a normal human being and second visually impaired people should be given such congenial and friendly environment where they can feel free to share their thoughts and feelings with the society at large.

And in this research, the researcher would focus on the most convenient form of communication as perceived by blinds, the pattern of communication with both sighted and blind. In the category of blind- blind friends and teachers were considered and in sighted- sighted friends and parents were considered. It was also tried to work out the place that blinds accord to media in their life.
5.2 NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Communication is the basic need of all human beings. According to Abraham Maslow there are five basic levels of human needs, arranged in hierarchy based on their importance.

1- Physiological
2- Safety
3- Social/love and belonging
4- Esteem
5- Self-actualization

So every human being communicates first to fulfill his basic need and then he communicates for self-esteem. The way we communicate with others determine our relationship with that person. In this study, the motive would be to work on how blinds perceive about the people they are surrounded with.

This study focuses on the communication patterns of visually impaired students. Communication patterns are modes of communication that we use frequently in certain situations or with certain people. Some patterns may be prevalent, that is, appearing in most communication regardless of the situation, while many are situation specific, that is, used with certain people (friends, spouse, children, boss) or in certain situations (at work, in conflict, in fear). Communication pattern may include apologizing frequently, self-criticism, criticism of others, complaining, self-justification, blaming, praising, avoiding, judging, lecturing, questioning, insulting, supporting, gossiping, expressing emotions by yelling, crying, throwing things, banging doors etc. (5)

Patterns can be any way of communication or the way they communicate, the frequency of communication. So this study would be focussed on the way the blind students communicate with their self i.e. (intrapersonal), their parents, teachers, friends (both sighted and blind) i.e. (interpersonal, group). In this study researcher would focus on the perception of the visually impaired students who are studying in the institutes about their teachers, parents, their classmates, friends, institution mates and would also try to find out the difficulties as perceived by them in communicating because of their lack of vision or we can say partial vision. After having a careful investigation into the problems the researcher would tried to locate some solutions to minimize them so that this particular group of special people are better understood
Summary

and well accepted by the society. As media plays a very significant role in the lives of people and people rely on media for knowing about the happenings and mishappenings of the world around, so researcher has tried to ascertain the role of media in the life of blind students. The way blinds use media, the reasons of their dependence and to find out that which medium is best suited to them for their educational and entertainment needs and also with the growing age of technology, are these blind students updated and trained enough to use the latest technology.

After carefully going through the literature, it became clear that the institutes that are providing education to this particular section of the society are residential schools. Residential schools mean that the visually impaired students will study in the school and will be provided accommodation and food free of cost.

Visually impaired students in this study mean that all those children who are studying in special schools-residential or integrated. The entire campus of the residential school is designed, equipped and staffed specifically to meet the needs of the visually impaired children. In addition to the classroom teachers, there may be other specialists in physical education, orientation & mobility, activities of daily living, music, craft teaching, occupational therapy, career counselling, vocational counselling, social work and psychology. The educational materials, educational and mobility devices and specialized equipment are accessible to all the students throughout the campus.

Generally, a residential school avails grant-in-aid from the State Department of Social Welfare or such other department. It avails and mobilizes public support as donations, endowments, sponsorship of meals or special events. The residential schools are symbols of public charity, pity and compassion for the visually impaired children. Most schools are managed by public charitable organizations and supported by the State Departments of Social Welfare. Under this system of education, the visually impaired children are provided residential accommodation, meals and clothes and they attend special schools. Most of these schools follow the regular academic curriculum. The students are also imparted training in various crafts, orientation & mobility and activities of daily living.
So in case a child is blind/visually impaired his senses of touch, smell, taste, proxemics or spatial cognition should be enhanced and given training at right time. This training can be given initially at home by parents and then later on in the residential schools.

5.3 FORMULATION OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Communication patterns of visually impaired students- A survey based study in Punjab.

5.4 OPERATIONAL DEFINITION

The definition of visual impairment adopted in India in the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 as well as under the National Programme for Control of Blindness (NPCB) is given below:

**Blindness:** refers to a condition where a person suffers from any of the following conditions, namely:

- Total absence of sight; or
- Visual acuity not exceeding 6/60 or 20/200 (Snellen) in the better eye even with correction lenses; or
- Limitation of the field of vision subtending an angle of 20 degree or worse.

For deciding the blindness, the visual acuity as well as field of vision has been considered.

**Low Vision:** The Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 also recognizes low vision as a category of disability and defines it as follows:

“Person with low vision” means a person with impairment of visual functioning even after treatment or standard refractive correction but who uses or is potentially capable of using vision for the planning or execution of a task with appropriate assistive device” (7).

Blind students in this study means that all those children who are studying in special schools-residential or integrated. According to Frampton & Kerney (1953), residential school for the visually impaired may be defined as: “A boarding school offering education and care to blind children from ages three to twenty-one, or from pre-school through the
Summary

high school. Educationally speaking, these schools attempt to provide complete education and care for the blind children. These services include medical, academic, musical, social, vocational courses, placement, and follow-up.”(8)

The visually impaired is an umbrella term, used widely and understood in an educational context. This term is used to describe the total group of persons whose vision is affected by impairments in seeing, irrespective of the nature or extent of these. The term refers to all the persons where vision disadvantage has resulted from impairment as well as disabilities. In case of persons who are completely without vision, or who have light perception only, it is desirable to use the term “blind”. In all other cases of visual defects falling in the definition, the term “visually impaired” should preferably be used.(9)

Patterns can be any way of communication or the way visually impaired communicate, the frequency of communication. So this study would be focussed on the way the visually impaired students communicate with their self-i.e. (intrapersonal), their parents, teachers, friends (both sighted and blind) i.e. (interpersonal , group).

5.5 DELIMITATIONS

- As the respondents were visually impaired, the researcher had to fill the questionnaire. On an average it took one and a half hour to extract the information and in few cases it took longer. Few young respondents were tough to tackle as they became emotional and started crying while replying the questions.
- In a few cases, the questions has to be repeated two three times to make respondents understand it properly.
- The present study is confined to the institutes for blinds in Punjab only.
- The study was confined to the perception of blinds only.
- It was very tough to make rapport with the respondents and then they showed their willingness to talk.

5.6 OBJECTIVES

The survey was conducted to achieve the following objectives:
Summary

• To find out pattern of communication of blind/visually impaired student with their self/teacher/blindstudent/sightedfriend/siblings/stranger/parents/neighbourhood/relatives;
• To find out the most convenient and effective medium of communication as perceived by visually impaired students;
• To find out whether visually impaired students are dependent on media and to find out the reasons for their dependence;
• To identify the problems or barriers that visually impaired students are facing in communication and to find out ways that can minimize barriers.

5.7 SAMPLE

Sampling is an important aspect of conducting any study. Sample should be representative of the universe. The competence of the sample depends on whether the sample selected is the right representative of the universe/population. Universe refers to all the cases that can be studied for investigation and sample is the subset of the observation drawn from the population. In this study as the focus is on the blinds students studying in schools so all the students who are studying becomes our universe. The sample in the present study was drawn at the institute level.

5.7.1 The institute sample

To conduct this study the researcher selected three cities one each from three regions of Majha, Malwa, Doaba. Based on the population distribution of the census 2011, the researcher selected Amritsar, Ludhiana and Jalandhar for further study. The institute sample was drawn from representative of Social Welfare Department, Punjab. After getting the list the researcher made a visit to all institutes.

In Amritsar a total of three institutes were located namely Andh Vidyalaya, Soorma Singh Ashram, Chief Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar. Bibi Bhani Istari Netraheen Kirat ate Sikhlayi Kendra, Chherata. Out of these three, only bibi bhani istari netraheen kirat ate sikhlayi Kendra was for girl students and the rest two institutes were catering to male students. All the three institutes were taken for conducting the research.
Similarly in Ludhiana there were two institutes Vocational Rehabilitation Training Centre, Ludhiana, Government Institution for Blinds, Jamalpur, Ludhiana. The former one VRTC was a private institution and the later one was a government institution. Both the institutes were undertaken for study purpose.

In Jalandhar the researcher could locate only one institute Rashtriya Andh Vidyalaya, Jalandhar and that was taken for the research. One more institute was reported for girls blind students but that institution has been closed five years back due to dearth of funds.

So in all six institutes were undertaken for conducting the research namely:

1) Andh Vidyalaya, Amritsar
2) Soorma Singh Ashram, Chief Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar
3) Bibi Bhani Istari Netraheen Kirat ate Sikhlayi Kendra, Chherata, Amritsar
4) Vocational Rehabilitation Training Centre, Ludhiana
5) Government Institution for Blinds, Jamalpur, Ludhiana
6) Rashtriya Andh Vidyalaya, Jalandhar.

5.7.2 The student sample

In all the six institutes a total of 278 cases were found. These students in the institutes had varied degree of impairment. Few were complete blind and few were having light perception, no light perception, could differentiate day and night. So we have categorized the sample into blind and visually impaired group. In the category of blind- the students who cannot see at all are covered and in the category of partial students- the students who can see a little are covered. Students in the institutions were of different age groups. So all the students were undertaken for the study. A total of 250 students were examined through indepth interview using a structured questionnaire of 80 statements/questions and three open ended questions. The students which were excluded from the study were 28. The reasons for not including them in sample was that the researcher recognized that few of the respondents in addition to their visual disability were mentally challenged. And 7 respondents were too young to understand the questionnaire. Those students joined the institute recently and respondents were unable and not willing to talk to the researcher. The rest of the 250 students were examined through questionnaire. The researcher spent almost 2 hours with single respondent to fill the questionnaire as before starting the process.
of question answer the researcher had to spend time in making the students understand the reason of conducting the research. In few cases students got emotional while answering the questions regarding family.

5.8 DESIGN

Designing the study is one of the crucial step that has to be carefully planned. To conduct this study, dimensions were worked out and on those dimensions questions were framed. Questionnaire was framed after carefully going through the literature and few areas were identified. In the category of intrapersonal- communication of blind/visually impaired with the self-i.e. talking to yourself few things were taken into account. It was tried to work out to know the way blinds/visually impaired perceive, his beliefs,values, attitude and expectation. So statements were framed keeping in mind these dimensions. In the category of interpersonal communication- communication between two persons; statements were framed keeping in mind their comfort level, satisfaction, understanding, sharing, and perception. In this category statements were framed for blind/visually impaired to teacher, parent, friend. In the category of group communication- communication of blind/visually impaired with a group of persons; it can be sighted or blind both; statements were framed through which feel upset/comfortable- the way they perceive them. Similarly statements were framed to locate the communication of blind with blind community which includes their blind friends and teachers, blind with sighted community which includes their parents and sighted friends; likewise the same was worked out for visually impaired – communication of visually impaired with blind community which includes their friends and teachers, visually impaired with sighted community which includes their parents and sighted friends. To find out that which medium according to them is best suited for educational and entertainment purpose, statements were framed keeping in mind all the media available to them.

5.9 PROCEDURE

In order to fully explore the perception of blind students, the research design chosen was a quantitative and to find out the problems faced by the trainers/teachers of blinds/visually impaired students qualitative technique was adopted.
Summary

The present studies deal with both qualitative and quantitative approach. Qualitative research involves several methods of data collection, such as focus groups, field observations, in-depth field interviews and case studies. This type of research increases the depth of understanding of the phenomena under investigation. Such studies can be helpful to reach at sound decision. The disadvantage of doing a qualitative research is that as the sample is small for such kind of studies so the results drawn cannot be generalized to the population.

The present study investigated the problems faced by blinds/visually impaired while communicating with others from the perspective of a blind student. In this way, the study provides administrators, parents and media organization with information so that the problems can be overcome by using some solution to the problems faced by blind students.

Keeping in mind this point that as the sample is small in qualitative research methods, the researcher gathered the information from 250 samples so that the results can be generalized. The techniques adopted were the questionnaire to be filled in from blind students. Besides, to check the internal validity the information was cross checked from the teachers and principals. The teachers and principals were interviewed regarding the problem that they face while teaching blind students. The interview was in informal one, though a framework of questions was there yet as per the information provided by the teachers the questions were framed on the spot. And few cases whose achievements were worth mentioning were also interviewed.

5.10 INFERENCES

Inference is a conclusion or an assumption that is rationally and logically made, based on the given facts or circumstances. An inference is based off on facts, so the reasoning for the conclusion is often logical. (10)

1. Blinds/VI share a close bonded relationship with their blind friends as they feel a level of comfort and satisfaction with them.
2. Blind/VI share their feelings/emotions with their family as they feel a part of the family. Family supports them for their needs and encourage them to be independent by sending them to educational institutes.
3. Blinds feel enthusiastic to work and to be bread winner for the family as their family supports them for the same and show trust in their ability.
Summary

4 A level of ease was observed in relation of blind with their blind teacher as their teacher can empathise with them and can give guidance in right direction. Moreover, they are given personal attention by their teachers while learning.

5 Blinds avoid talking to sighted (except parents and friends) as over protectiveness make them handicap again.

6 It was not clear whether blinds wanted to study in sighted school or special school as both systems had its advantages and disadvantages. But definitely they agreed that for initial years of schooling in special school as the training of Braille was required. For later years of education i.e. after primary, sighted school was preferred so that blinds can develop confidence level.

7 Blinds explore their surroundings with the help of cane or by touching surfaces and calculate their space with steps as they were not given proper training of orientation and mobility which forms the base of their gait.

8 Blinds feel upset in a group of sighted people as they are not given proper attention.

9 Blinds feel contended in a group of blind friends as they feel comfortable in sharing their problems with them.

10 Blinds don’t complain God for their blindness rather they visit temple, gurudwaras when they feel low about their blindness.

11 Radio is a useful medium for getting updated about news, entertainment and education.

12 Audio recorders is a bliss for the blinds to pursue higher education as books are not available in Braille.

13 With the coming of technology (computer with JAW software) and right training provided by institutes, blinds are capable of using computer for education and entertainment purposes.

14 Students with low vision face much problem as parents and others feel that they are befooling them whereas many people are not aware of the problems of low vision.
Summary

15 Few students were slow learners because of various reasons: poor finger co-ordination, late age of admission in schools (specially in case of girls), low IQ.

5.11 SUGGESTIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT

1) There should be separate teachers for separate subjects. More teachers should be recruited to teach the blind students.

2) Learning Braille should be compulsory for few years as it is the language of expression with the community. Though the technology has revolutionized the world and computer with JAW software has proved to be a bliss for this community, but the fact that they can’t see can’t be overlooked. Most of the students were of the view that Braille should be taught till 8th class and after that they should be given training on how to use gadgets effectively for educational purpose.

3) More awareness is required to make the society aware about the existence of special/residential schools so that students can be admitted at early age. The problem of dearth of teachers can be solved by clubbing the schools of boys and girls.

4) One most fruitful suggestion is to find out a way in which a blind student is not dependent on sighted to appear in their exams. As when a visually impaired student go for higher study, then he/she has to take help of writer in order to perform in exams. But every blind feels that they are not able to give 100% as the writer has poor vocabulary, or he/she is slow in writing and moreover they feel that it’s not an exam of checking their ability rather the ability of blind is at stake. So, if computer or typewriter can be used to attempt their exams, then it can be a best step for the betterment of the blind students.

5) Students should be given training in music after checking the aptitude or the taste for it. It should not be as a compulsion to learn music rather the mindset of the people that blinds can excel only in music should be changed.

6) The training of Orientation and Mobility should be imparted by professional trainer. As students who were from Shimla, Faridkot, Malerkotla were given training in the institutes and they felt that training is lacking here in institutes of Punjab.

7) In case of girl students, parents need to be counseled and be made more aware as it was observed that girl students take admission in late age. By that time their mannerisms develop and it becomes tough for them to adapt the environment.
Summary

8) Students should not be disturbed during their classes and examination when students who are pursuing B.ed. comes for study purposes. At times their exams are changed on the spot just to accommodate the B. ed. Students.

9) Subjects like math, science should be taught in all classes so that students can opt for new careers in other streams also. Even students shared that teachers pass their time while teaching science as no models and no new innovative techniques are used by teachers to teach them.

10) There should be proper classroom environment in these schools.

11) Blind matches should be telecasted so that it can be a source of inspiration for others.

12) Radio should introduce more educational programmes for blind student.

13) More awareness should be spread in society regarding the achievements of the blinds so that society can start accepting the blinds.

14) Mobiles or gadgets should be made available at concessional rates so that all can take benefit of it.

15) Classes on personality development and enhancement and functional English should be there, so that students can attain confidence to face the world of the sighted.

16) The books in Braille should be available for higher classes also. Students face difficulty pursuing graduation and post-graduation. They have to rely on recorders and then they make notes. Books are a better form of study.

17) Student exchange programme can be implemented when students are studying in residential schools. As by doing so, they can be familiar to the sighted students. Moreover more activities should be introduced where both sighted and blind students participate together.

5.12 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In the light of the findings revealed and conclusions drawn from the study, the following suggestions may be considered for further studies:

(i) Research studies may be undertaken to determine the effectiveness of teaching methods adopted to teach students.

(ii) The effectiveness of teaching can be studied on a sample of students from blind school and students who go to sighted school.
Summary

(iii) The present study was conducted to see the communication patterns of the blind students. Such studies can be planned to see the perception of parents, friends and teachers.

(iv) This study takes into account blind and partial sighted category, it can be further widened by incorporating other variables like gender, educational qualification, institution etc.

5.13 CONCLUSION

From the study it can be concluded that being blind/visually impaired is the hardest burden to bear. Through training from parents and institute a child learn to overcome this feeling and try to cope up with the society but the attitude of others make it tougher for blind to survive.

Dr. Helen Keller, the renowned American deaf-blind author and philosopher gave evidence of considerable perspicacity when she said that “not blindness, but the attitude of the seeing- to the blind is the hardest burden to bear”(11)

Dr. Gabriel Farrell, a former Director of the famed Perkins School for the Blind in USA when in his well-known book “ The story of blindness”, he says: “blindness is little more than a ’25 percent’ obstacle and that most of the difficulties derive from dealing with sighted people who believe that blindness is a terrible affliction.(12)

That’s why a feeling of hesitation was seen when blinds communicate with sighted. The need is to spread awareness amongst sighted community regarding blinds achievements and ability so that the negative attitude can be converted into an encouraging and a positive one.

In his book ‘Blindness’, Father Carroll enumerates no less than 20 losses of blindness. These include: loss of physical integrity, loss of confidence in remaining senses, loss of reality contact with environment, loss of visual background, loss of light security, loss of mobility, loss of techniques of daily living, loss of ease of written communication, loss of ease of spoken communication, loss of informational progress, loss of visual perception of the pleasurable, loss of visual perception of the beautiful, loss of recreation, loss of career, vocational goal, job opportunity, loss of financial security, loss of personal independence, loss of social adequacy, loss of obscurity, loss of self-esteem, loss of total personality organization.
Father Carroll also pointed out, blindness intensifies personal dependence. As a result a blind person is all too often more cognizant of and influenced by the attitudes of others. On these attitudes would depend the type of training offered to him, the type of jobs he can secure and the style of living permitted by the community.(13)

So, the attitude and behavior of sighted towards blind is the major decisive factor that will determine the strength of relationship between them. If this relationship can be strengthened, feeling of confidence will be observed in the behavior of blinds.

References
Summary

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