

Survey on Special Education Procedures for Children with Intellectual Disabilities in Special Education Institutions of Faisalabad

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Abstract

The research aimed to identify the special education procedures, including assessment, admission, and placement process for Children with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) in Special Education Centers and Institutes of Mentally Challenged Children (Shadab) in Faisalabad. The survey research design was used, and the researcher conducted personal open-ended semi-structured interviews with senior and junior special education teachers who were chosen as a sample for the interview purposely. The researcher ready seven questions related to special education procedures. All the responses were collected using field notes and tape-recorded with the participants' permission, as they were informed about the interview in advance. The interviews revealed that most institutes use different special education procedures and that special education personnel were not confirmed about the age of a child with ID when struck off to the institutes. Results showed that special education procedures differ due to the absence of any authentic Standard Operating Procedural Manual. These variations and differences cause unfairness and inconsistency when serving Children with ID.

Keywords: Children with ID, Special Education Procedures, Special Education Institutions.

Introduction

Special education is referred to as schooling planned to improve the learning of students with disabilities who require more assistance and personalized instruction to succeed and achieve learning objectives in an educational program (Special Needs Education, n.d.). Educational institutions are viewed on their ability to provide opportunities for each student to fulfill their maximum achievement. Children with special needs have different skills, learning styles, capabilities and weaknesses, ages, learning performances, and behaviors or temperaments. Special education services are provided to all children depending on their learning needs. Children with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) have different learning issues, requiring more time and support for learning new skills. These difficulties are most visible in the classroom because Children with ID struggle to know well. Children with ID typically receive specialized instruction for this reason.

As the government of Punjab set up the Special Education Department in 2003, the province has established 185 Special Education Centers and Institutes for Mentally Challenged Children (Shadab), running in 36 districts. Compared to any other province, it is commonly considered that the Government of Punjab has committed substantially more funding to develop special needs education (Noor, 2021). Special education services, including psychological services, speech therapy, physiotherapy, transportation, etc., are provided to children with disabilities (Ali, 2021), including Children with ID. These services help the children in learning and achieving goals.

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According to Punjab's Special Education Policy, 20% of children with ID were enrolled in various Special Education Institutions (Punjab Special Education Policy, 2020). The Special Education Department offers free schooling, student transportation, a monthly stipend of 800 rupees, and vocational training. Physiotherapy, behavior therapy, speech therapy, and play therapy are among the therapeutics also offered (Ali, 2020).

A parent or guardian refers children with ID to a special education institution where the psychologist assesses the child. The school principal finalizes the admission, and the child is placed in the class. An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) provides Children with ID with carefully modified education programs tailored to their specific requirements. This plan ensures they receive the necessary support and assistance to achieve their academic goals. The IEP outlines each service, including the start date, frequency, and duration of services to students with disabilities.

Every country has its own set of procedures for admission, assessment, placement, and providing services to children with disabilities. Before a student enrolls in any particular education program, several essential procedures, such as identification and referral, must be executed in the United States (Chomba et al., 2014). Different techniques are also used in special education institutions of Punjab, but there needs to be systematic standards for admission, assessment, placement, and provision of services. When parents or guardians enroll their child in a particular school, a psychologist or any professional assesses the child and places the child. Certain education institutions in Punjab carry out their special education procedures; hence, inconsistencies are seen because the department of special education has yet to develop or produce a standard procedural manual or guide to help special education teachers and professionals carry out all unique education processes consistently and efficiently while working with ID children.

To gain insight into all the present conditions of unique education processes, it was necessary to explore the current practice of special education procedures in Faisalabad's particular education institutions.

Study Objectives

1. To gather information from Special Education Centers and Institutes for Mentally Challenged Children (Shadab) in Faisalabad on the present status of unique education processes,
2. To find out the maximum age restriction for striking off children with ID.
3. To identify the need for a standard operating procedural manual for special education.

Review of Literature

Millions of people globally experience Intellectual Disabilities (ID), with an estimated frequency in countries with higher incomes ranging from 1 to 3 percent (Pettersen et al., 2007). ID is a significant lifelong disability that presents severe constraints on the community as a whole. (Afshan et al, 2022). It was observed earlier that scholars and teachers did not have much hope of dramatically changing the performance of people with disabilities. They believed that ID was unchanging, not dynamic. According to them, it was difficult to minimize the disability condition of ID. So, they thought educating individuals with ID would be a good use of time and services. Pise et al. (2018) believed that individuals with ID can acquire new skills at a slower rate. According to Beirne-Smith et al. (2006) children with ID may be able to understand fundamental mathematical skills, but they may need help to use those concepts effectively when problem-solving. There is evidence that empirical research supports the idea that school-based instruction is beneficial for children with mild to moderate ID in learning new things, interacting with others,

becoming more independent and orientated, and making decisions (Browder et al., 2006). So, it is clear that children with ID require the same level of education and training as other children without disabilities. People worldwide are becoming more aware of what is happening with the education of children with ID. Every child, regardless of any disability, deserves the right to education, and they should be offered appropriate facilities and services to develop their aptitude and abilities. Morad et al. (2001) justify that in the Islamic religion, society must consider, encourage, and respect individuals with ID and ensure they receive the same opportunities for living their lives.

It is understandable that children with ID can perform at their best when provided with specific resources and help to ensure the highest quality education. For this purpose, special education institutions are indispensable for providing the education and services they need to reach their full potential. Special education offers an environment in which children with different disabilities receive specially designed plans and other appropriate services such as physiotherapy, speech therapy, counseling service, transition service, vocational service, music therapy, occupational therapy, etc. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is an international human rights convention that acknowledges the rights and respect for the humanity of people with disabilities, including ID. It has a substantial impact on educational opportunities for individuals with ID. Most children with ID in the United States are eligible for federally required special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Lipkin et al., 2015). Several different programs for special education, laws, and acts have been developed to support the education of children with disabilities, including children with ID. The Government of Punjab has taken many initiatives to meet national and international obligations. For example, the Punjab Special Education Policy 2020 indicates a significant development. This policy intends to enhance the quality of education by providing vocational training, rehabilitation services, and psychological services to children with disabilities in specialized educational environments. The Punjab Right to Education for Children with Disabilities Act (2020) specifies that the governing body will ensure the accessibility of educational opportunities for children with disabilities with no prejudice and will implement the steps required to offer special education services, IEPs, and incentives.

For the education and training of children with ID, there are 171 Special Education Centers and 14 Institutions for Mentally Challenged Children (Shadab) developed in Punjab, which serves 6041 children with ID. The Directorate General of Special Education (DGSE) Punjab offers free education, support, and services to children with disabilities across all special education centers. For this purpose,

Special education teachers and professionals are appointed. To manage the needs of children with ID, they prepare an IEP because children with ID require extra help and support in school in the format of an IEP to acquire new skills and train them for practical life.

Hence, the researcher, has been a senior special education teacher since 2008 and has worked in different special education centers. She observed special education procedures for many years and discussed them with her colleagues. The experiences of her colleagues help to ensure the current practices of special education for children with ID. The researcher has worked in different special education institutions in Punjab as a senior special education Teacher for 15 years. She observed and discussed special education procedures with her colleagues. Her colleagues' insights contribute to current particular education practices for children with ID. For the objective of this study, the researcher chose to investigate current special education procedures by interviewing special education teachers of special education institutions about the department's circulated special

education rules. The researcher conducted a study to establish the current situation of special education centers and Shadab in Punjab and identify gaps or possible development opportunities. The Department of special education circulated admission criteria for children with ID; this document pointed out the age limit of a child at the time of admission and the required documents; however, it did not include a standardized procedure for age to strike off the child, assessment, placement procedures, and other essential guidelines for in the written form. They regularly shared documents and forms for case histories, admission forms, initial assessments, and IEP templates as guidelines. It has been noted that special education personnel do not employ uniform practices and procedures of special education to assist children with ID's learning and achievement. Differences in special education procedures are seen in various special education institutions in Punjab. Every institution has its admission criteria and age limits to strike off. The placement of children also varies in every institution. Such differences make it difficult for children with ID to receive a good education and training and to achieve goals.

Research Methodology

A descriptive method with a qualitative research approach was chosen because this approach underpins an understanding and interpretation of the views of special education personnel regarding special education procedures for children with ID. The researcher used a survey research design from special education institutes in Faisalabad. The sample for the study was purposively chosen. It included 20 senior and junior special education teachers. All the personnel are involved in the assessment, admission, placement, development, implementation, and review of the IEP. The survey was hosted by the researcher and was comprised of seven open-ended questions. All questions were planned and based on the research topic. There was essential demographic information about the participants, such as age, gender, designation, qualification, and experience.

Procedures

The survey was conducted on special education personnel in December 2023. Only special education centers and Shadab in Faisalabad were chosen for this study because the researcher lives and works as a senior special education teacher in Faisalabad, so it was convenient to collect information directly from the participants based on their knowledge and experience. The researcher prepared a list of participants and set up an appointment telephonically, then planned to schedule personnel interviews. Participants who agreed to participate in the study were individually interviewed using a set of predetermined questions by semi-structured interview technique. The interviews were recorded, and notes were taken with the consent of the participants. The answers were kept confidential to ensure privacy. The purpose and benefits of this study were briefly introduced before conducting an interview. So, the participants were aware of the situation and willing to provide their responses. The estimated duration of the interview was between 10 and 15 minutes. The demographic details are shown in the table below.

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The demographic information is presented in Table 1. 13 Junior and 7 Senior special education teachers from special education centers and Shadab from Faisalabad participated in the survey. There were nine males and 11 females in terms of gender distribution. All participants have completed a master's degree in special education and a bachelor of education degree; 6 of them did an M. Ed in special education, and 5 participants took an M. Phil degree. The participants have 02 to 15 years of experience in special education institutions.

Table 1

No	Age	Gender	Education	Designation	Experience
1	29	Male	M.A B.Ed	J.S.E.T	04 years
2	41	Male	M.A B.Ed M.Ed	J.S.E.T	06 years
3	30	Male	M.A B.Ed M.Phil	S.S.E.T	03 years
4	32	Male	M.A B.Ed	S.S.E.T	04 Years
5	28	Male	M.A B.Ed M.Phil	J.S.E.T	06 Years
6	40	Female	M.A B.Ed M.Phil	J.S.E.T	10 Years
7	42	Male	M.A B.Ed	S.S.E.T	13 Years
8	38	Male	M.A B.Ed	S.S.E.T	10 Years
9	39	Female	M.A B.Ed M.Ed	J.S.E.T	03 Years
10	29	Female	M.A B.Ed	J.S.E.T	03 Years
11	34	Female	M.A B.Ed	S.S.E.T	06 Years
12	38	Female	M.A B.Ed M.Ed	J.S.E.T	05 Years
13	24	Female	M.A B.Ed	J.S.E.T	03 Years
14	45	Female	M.A B.Ed M.Ed	J.S.E.T	14 Years
15	30	Female	M.A B.Ed	J.S.E.T	04 Years
16	37	Female	M.A B.Ed	J.S.E.T	07 Years
17	33	Female	M.A B.Ed M.Phil	S.S.E.T	02 Years
18	41	Male	M.A B.Ed	J.S.E.T	15 Years
19	40	Male	M.A B.Ed M.Phil	J.S.E.T	10 Years
20	32	Female	M.A B.Ed M.Ed	S.S.E.T	05 Years

Survey Questions

1. When parents first apply for admission, who do they contact?
2. What are the admission criteria for a child with ID?
3. Who takes responsibility for the assessment?
4. Who finalizes the admission of a child with ID?
5. Who is accountable for the placement of the children with ID?
6. What is the age restriction for striking off the child with ID?
7. Should a procedural manual for special education be developed?

Data Analysis

Semi-structured interviews revealed the present particular education practices and provided thorough answers. The participants were asked question 1, "When parents first apply for admission, who do they contact?" Nine participants stated, "Parents go directly to the principal's office for admission." Four participants said, "Parents first greet the watchman, who directs them to the psychologist's location." "Parents ask the watchman about child admission, then he sends them to the messenger boy, who sends them to the in charge of the admission committee." Seven participants stated, "The watchman directed the parents to the admissions in charge."

The participants were asked question 2, "What are the admission criteria for a child with ID?" Eleven participants said, "We need the parents' CNIC and B-Form Parents. Other documents, such as a disability certificate or smart card, are unnecessary at admission." Nine surveyors said, "We require the child's B-Form, photocopies of parents' CNICs, and a disability certificate (if available) for enrollment of a child with ID." We need the B-Form of a child, photocopies of the CNIC of

the parents, and disability certificate (if available), which are the documents required for admission of a child with ID."

The third question was about the assessment. "Who takes responsibility for the assessment?" Fifteen participants said, "The school psychologist assesses the child and makes decisions about the child's disability level." Only five participants stated, "The class teacher of children with ID, speech therapist, or other professional can assess the child if the psychologist is on leave or seat is vacant."

Question four was about the finalization of admission. "Who finalizes the admission of a child with ID? All the participants stated, "The Head of the institution finalizes the admission and signature on the admission."

The participants were asked question 5, "Who is accountable for the placement of the children with ID?" "Fifteen participants agreed that the placement is the psychologist's responsibility." Five participants said, "Psychologists and teachers of children with ID decide the placement."

The participants were asked question 6, "What is the age restriction for striking off the child with ID?" Ten participants said, "The age restriction to strike out a child with ID should be 18." Four participants said, "Children with ID should have the pre-vocational syllabus so they can stay at the age of 20 in special education institutions, and after 20, they can get admission to a vocational training institution." Six participants stated, "A 19-year-old adult with ID is adequate to continue in special education facilities."

Question 7 was the last survey question about the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) Manual for Special Education. "Should the procedural manual for special education be developed?" "Fifteen participants agreed that having a manual is a wonderful idea, and I favor the SOP Manual." Five participants said, "The manual would substantially benefit special education institutions and staff. Examples include professionals, principals, and special education teachers who will grasp their obligations."

All these responses are taken from the special education institutions, Shadab. The researcher assured these professionals that views and responses would not be disclosed and used just for research purposes. After the findings of semi-structured interviews, it was clear that each institution has its admission, assessment, and placement criteria. They have their practices according to their experience and knowledge, and they do not have any manual to follow special education procedures when serving children with ID.

Discussions

This study uses an exploratory qualitative approach to explore particular education practices in special education institutions of Faisalabad. The main objectives of the research were to determine the existing practices of unique education processes, the maximum age limit for striking off children with ID, and the need for a standard operating procedure manual.

The findings of the present study showed that variations are seen in the admission process. Eligibility criteria are different for ID in most of the institutions. Admission is also responsible for other professionals when no psychologist is in the institution. The placement procedure must be clarified in many special education institutions in Faisalabad. The age limit to strike off the child with ID needs to be clarified. The special education teachers need to be assured about the exact criteria for each step of the unique education process. The professionals and teachers are performing their way. The results show that it is easier for special education personnel to follow the same steps of special education procedures with proper documentation and guidelines.

This research study was also conducted to investigate the idea of standard operating procedures in special education institutions. All participants are optimistic that the department should develop a manual to help the special education personnel and provide guidelines for special education procedures. The primary goal of SOPs is to ensure that all personnel complete jobs in the same manner, which is necessary for the process to provide the desired outcomes (Akyar, 2012). The findings of another study show that the professional writer or writing team must remain aware of the organization's interests, needs, and aims while developing the SOP. This planning process ensures that they produce a document that guarantees uniformity and efficiency as the maximum standard (Lolita, 2021). Gaines (2017) designed a special education manual for students with disabilities. The purpose of the manual is to help special education personnel adopt policies and procedures in line with relevant laws and school beliefs. North Carolina department of public instruction developed a manual to provide affirmation and clarification of processes, procedures, and requirements for the annual testing program and the accountability system to help the students with disabilities for the year (2023-24) so it will ensure the quality (Delay, 2023).

Results

Based on the research findings, it is proved that special education personnel work without doing a similar practice of special education procedures. Most institutions have different procedures like admission criteria, assessment responsibility, and placement procedures. They also have no idea when a child is struck off from school and what should be the age limit when a child will transition to other institutions or for work. Findings showed that inconsistency and unfairness are seen in every step of the education procedure because of the unavailability of any authentic procedural manual.

Special education personnel were hopeful for the manual. They want a government document to help special education teachers and personnel at every step when serving children with ID.

Conclusion

The current study focused on the processes followed by special education personnel in special education institutions for ID. The findings show that variations in the delivery of unique education processes adversely affect the quality of services offered to children with ID. These differences in practices appear to be impractical and unfair, considering that all children, regardless of ability or disability, should have the same chance to get a quality education. This study indicates variances in admission, assessments, and placement procedures in special education institutions at Faisalabad. Each institution has its method of educating and training children with ID. Exceptional education professionals must know the department's message about the maximum age to strike off children with ID. The research results contradict industrialized nations' literature, which claims that all children's requirements are carefully assessed and met in special education institutions. They follow standard procedures for special education, which help special education staff members work correctly and without knowledge loss, hence improving service quality. Consistency in method ensures uniformity and efficiency in all special education procedures. The most practical action plan to prevent losing information in an organization is to standardize procedures and ensure that valuable information is retained when individuals are appointed and leave.

Recommendations

1. The department of special education should check and balance special education procedures.

2. The department should revise and circulate special education procedures notifications.
3. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) manual should be developed for special education personnel who serve children with ID in Special Education Centers/ and Institutes for Mentally Challenged Children.
4. The department of special education should create a workplace environment that motivates exceptional education staff to use SOPs efficiently.
5. The importance and effectiveness of the SOPs manual should be conveyed by conducting workshops for special education personnel.
6. The scholars should expand the special education procedures and develop SOPs for other disabilities, such as students with hearing impairment, visual impairment, and physical impairment.

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