

Barriers for Working Women with Visual Impairment in Special Education Institutions of Punjab: An Exploratory Research

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Abstract

Working women with visual impairment in special education have a dual role to perform in their normal lives. This exploratory study was intended to seek the barriers for working women with visual impairment in the special education institutions in the province of Punjab. It involved qualitative gathering data technique interviews by administering a self-developed semi-structured interview protocol from working women (N = 15) with visual impairment from special education institutions (N = 04) Punjab through purposive sampling technique. The validity of the self-developed semi-structured interview was confirmed through the relevant field' expert's opinion (N = 03). The reliability of the instrument was examined through an extensive literature review. There were four major themes that emerged from the thematic analysis technique i.e, perception of working women, Barriers for working women, efforts for facilitation, and strategies for eliminating barriers. The findings of the study revealed that the majority of the working women consider their job as the most important aspect of their social life. Additionally, the majority of working women face different types of barriers in their workplace. This study strongly recommends that a comprehensive training programme on a regular basis should be administered at the departmental level to facilitate working women in their workplace. The department must establish a special section to eliminate the probable barriers for working women in special education.

Keywords: *Barriers, Working Women, Visual Impairment, Special Education, Punjab*

INTRODUCTION

The special education department is working to meet the educational needs of students with special needs with the help of professionals include teachers with or without disabilities. Female teachers with visual impairment are supposed to perform the same responsibilities as female teachers without visual impairment. In realizing an ambition of quality education from sustainable development goals, the feature of educational reforms addresses the high expectations from female teachers (Clarke et al., 2023).

Visual impairment imposes various challenges for any visually impaired individual, especially for teachers with visual impairment (Eklund et al., 2021). These barriers become apex hurdles in daily mobility and in the performance of daily tasks, especially for women with visual impairment working in the special education department. To bring harmony among the teachers of special education, either with or without visual impairment, it is necessary to work collaboratively in the schools of special education to develop an inclusive environment for female teachers with and without visual impairment. To make such integration successful, there is a crucial role of practicing emotional support and attitude by the teachers (Alhassan et al., 2025).

Therefore, the apex responsibilities of the teachers with or without visual impairment, even the females, are to work only for the betterment of the children with special needs, regardless of their challenges. Consultation and appropriate collaboration are much required for a smooth teaching and learning process among the teachers and school staff (Sundqvist et al., 2019).

Working women struggle with “organisational and practical barriers” in consultative and managerial roles (Mihajlovic, 2020). In short, in the special education department, working women with vision loss may face a lot of barriers in their jobs. Many barriers are faced by persons with disabilities (PWDs) during their entry into employment (Yaqoob et al., 2025).

Rationale of the Study

The rationale of the study is the barriers that are unseen and are only experienced by women with visual impairment in the special education department. Although the duties of a teacher in the special education department are really challenging, the matter of being Blind as a woman and the performance of responsibilities are two parallel paradigms in the special education department. Therefore, the rationale of the study is based on identifying the barriers for working women with visual impairment. According to Alsamiri (2025), there are numerous social and educational barriers in institutional settings due to visual impairment.

Statement of the Problem

Visual impairment becomes a real hurdle for working women, with visual impairment especially when performing their job responsibilities or even in their domestic life. The statement of the problem is to explore the barriers for working

women with visual impairment who are serving in the special education department of Punjab.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Find the perception of working women with visual impairment about the importance of the job for them.
2. Identify the barriers faced by working women with visual impairment in special education institutions.
3. Highlight the nature of support by the department in eliminating the barriers.
4. Suggest ways to remove the barriers experienced by working women with visual impairment.

Research Questions

The questions of the research were to:

1. What is the perception of working women with visual impairment about the importance of a job for them?
2. What are the barriers faced by working women with visual impairment in special education institutions?
3. What is the nature of support by the department in eliminating the barriers?
4. What are the ways to remove the barriers experienced by working women with visual impairment?

Significance of the Study

Special education is crucial for students with special needs to promote quality learning. Working women with visual impairment play an important role in promoting quality learning for students with special needs. This study will certainly enhance the role of working women with visual impairment in promoting quality education. This study will highlight the barriers for working women with visual impairment. This study will give rise to thoughts for the school heads to encourage the working women with visual impairment to participate and necessary adaptations for promoting academic quality. Furthermore, this research will help working women with visual impairment to cope with numerous challenges accordingly. This research will be beneficial for future researchers because it provides new dimensions to work on a broader perspective of the role of working women with visual impairment.

Limitations and Delimitations for the Study

1. The study was limited to the province of the Punjab only.
2. The study was delimited to the working women with visual impairment working in the special education department.
3. A self-developed semi-structured questionnaire was used due to the non-availability of the standardized instrument.

Literature Review

It is quite difficult for individuals with visual impairments to adjust to society and themselves because of their condition, which causes them to struggle with many aspects of daily life. In order to support the career aspirations and job adjustment needs of visually impaired people and ultimately encourage their full participation and success in the workforce, it is crucial to establish targeted solutions (Aftab et al., 2024). Working-age individuals with visual impairment (VI) have a substantial influence on the economy and public health (Zhang et al., 2025). One of the conditions that needs to be taken into consideration is blindness. The primary goals of the study are to determine the limitations that visually impaired women experience, investigate the social network structure that helps them survive, and pinpoint coping strategies that help them get past these obstacles (Raj & Priyadharshini, 2024). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines visual impairment as blindness or mild to severe visual impairment (Stolwijk et al., 2023). Low vision services can help people with VI improve their quality of life by assisting them in regaining their independence and being able to fully engage in society and daily activities. These services could include, but are not restricted to, assistance with everyday tasks, instruction in orientation and movement skills, prescription and usage of low-vision equipment, and advice on adjusting to or accepting the visual impairment (Jahanzaib et al., 2023). Human growth is complex and holistic, and a large portion of it depends on learning through the senses—taste, smell, touch, hearing, and sight (Tshuma et al., 2022). Developing inclusive practices and policies requires an understanding of the difficulties faced by those with visual impairments on the job (Sabar et al., 2024).

People with special needs often struggle with inaccessibility. These issues with accessibility (Cushley et al., 2023) highlighted the necessity for improved infrastructure to support employment opportunities. Furthermore, there are insufficient workplace modifications, which may hinder their capacity to carry out their jobs efficiently (Basu & Rani, 2023). Additionally, visually impaired women usually have limited access to social networks, which makes it challenging for them to get the resources and support they need to develop in their careers (Raj & Priyadharshini, 2024).

Methodology of the Study

Research Design

This was a qualitative and exploratory study that determined the perception of working women with visual impairment who are presently working in the special education department of Punjab about the barriers they face in performing their job responsibilities.

Population of the Study

The population of the study was the working women with visual impairment who were working in the special education department.

Sample & Sampling Technique of the Study

The sample of the study was only the working women (N = 15) with visual impairment who were serving in the special education department. The sample of the study has a specification of their demographics, including the institute level of special education center, special education school, and special education college. The demographics also include the qualification of the participants, that was BS/ M. A special education (N = 11) and M.Phil special education (N = 04). The demographics section contained a specific point for the number of kids they bring to their institute during duty timings. Most of the participants bring their 1 (N = 01) child; however, only two (N = 02) participants bring their two (N = 02) kids to their schools. The age range OF THE SAMPLE WAS BETWEEN 30 AND 45 years. Most of them (n = 8) have more than 8 years. Some of them (n = 4) have experience of 4-5 years. However, the rest of the sample have the experience of less than 4 years.

A purposive sampling technique was used in this study to collect the most relevant data from the participants of the study. These working women belong to various cities of the Punjab, including Lahore, Multan, Okara, and Bahawalpur districts of Punjab province.

Instrument of the Study

By keeping in view, the objectives and questions of the study, a self-developed semi-structured interview protocol was administered as the tool for this study. The instrument contained 7 items for open-ended responses. The instrument was administered through an interview technique.

Validity & Reliability of the Instrument

The validity of the instrument was confirmed through the relevant field expert (N = 03). The reliability of the instrument was established through an extensive literature review.

Data Collection Process

After validating the instrument of the study, the researcher started the data collection procedure. Due to the nature of this study, an interview was conducted by administering a self-developed semi-structured interview. There were seven (N = 07) open-ended questions. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study as part of research ethics. Every interview took almost 10 – 15 minutes to complete. The responses of the participants were recorded after getting consent from the participants of the study. The researcher assured all participants of the confidentiality of their responses.

Data Analysis Procedure

After collecting the data, '''''''''' the data was transcribed for the purpose of thematic analysis. After transcription of the data, the open-coding technique was used to generate categories and sub-themes. Then, major themes emerged from the

categories to answer the research questions. These major themes were interpreted with the supportive literature.

Ethical Consideration

As a part of research ethics, the researcher complied with all ethical considerations for this study. The participants were informed before commencing the data collection process. The participants were also assured of the time for each interview. The participants of the study were assured that the information collected from them would only be used for this research.

Thematic Data Analysis

Research Question 1: What is the perception of working women with visual impairment about the importance of a job for them?

Theme 1: Perception of Working Women

This theme is based on the perception of working women with visual impairment. This theme has emerged from the categories of matters of self-development, job as a passion, and accomplishing financial needs. Many inequalities and deficiencies are still there in female teachers' employment (Xu, 2024).

Category 1: Matter of Self-Development

This category reflects that the majority of the participants responded that their job is the process of their self-development. These participants further added that their personality is developed through this job. Additionally, one of the participants expressed that:

"To get out of the mode of passiveness, you need to do a job, and you are contributing to the society."

Category 2: Job as a Passion

The category mentioned above depicts that most of the participants stated their views about their job as a passion for them. They are doing this job with dedication. One of the participants narrated that:

"I like this job very much and I do this job as a passion of teaching the students with special needs."

Category 3: Accomplishing Financial Needs

This category shows that participants expressed their views about their job as a source of fulfilling their financial needs. These participants also stated that their job helps them to overcome all financial needs, and they use the salary to fulfil their financial needs. Moreover, one of the participants said that:

"I purchase all the items with the help of the income that I am earning from my job."

Research Question 2: What are the barriers faced by working women with visual impairment in special education institutions?

Theme 2: Barriers for Working Women

This theme has emerged from the responses of the participants about the barriers that working women with visual impairment experience while performing their job

responsibilities. The theme has emerged from the categories of domestic barriers, inadequate resources, and departmental barriers. Hanek & Garcia (2022) found that many of these barriers are thus the product of prescriptive, sometimes restrictive societal expectations that impact women's own choices as well as the external social punishments imposed on their conduct.

Category 1: Domestic Barriers

The category contains the majority of the working women with visual impairment who expressed their views about the barriers for them in the workplace. The participants

Domestically, I face the barrier of my sleep and the sacrifice of my rest, and to get up early in the morning, and to manage everything like a sighted person. To maintain everything to maintain is necessary. You have to maintain your professional life with your domestic life. Some places are not accessible, and sometime classroom and other rooms are in accessible, and if you have health issues, then you may have difficulty. Being visually impaired, students get advantages of visual impairment. Proxies are there. Students cheat because of the visual impairment.

Category 2: Inadequate Resources

This category reflects the shortage of resources in the special education institutions for working women with visual impairment. The participants also stated that inadequate resources that are related to supporting their visual impairment become a barrier for them during their job. Moreover, one of the participants also expressed that:

"I don't find any computer with JAWS or any assistive technology in my instructions that could support my disability."

Category 3: Departmental Barriers

This category shows the participants' responses to their outstation posting as a major barrier for them in doing their job responsibilities. These participants also narrated that there are various problems for them while doing a job at an outstation. Additionally, one of the participants said that:

"I feel much trouble while travelling from school to home because my home and the schools are situated in two different cities."

Research Question 3: What is the nature of support by the department in eliminating the barriers?

Theme 3: Efforts for Facilitations

This theme reflects the support provided by the special education department to working women with visual impairment. The theme is based on the categories of accessible buildings, day care centres, and the colleagues' support. Dwivedi et al. (2024) found a key moderator as a supportive working environment in relation to the work-life balance and training programmes for female teachers.

Category 1: Accessible Buildings

This category reflects the department's support for working women with visual impairment. The majority of the participants responded that the department has made its building accessible for individuals with visual impairment. One of the participants expressed that

“Female staff room is on 1st floor and I reach to my female staff room easily by using various mobility technique.”

Category 2: Day Care Centre

This category reflects the responses of the participants about the departmental support from them in their department. The participants narrated that their institution contains a day care centre where they keep their babies and toddlers. They don't feel troubled during their working hours about the handling of their ward. One of the participants expressed that

“This is great facility for all working women to arrange a day care centre for their cities.”

Category 3: Colleagues' Support

This category depicts the responses of the participants about the support of their colleagues for working women with visual impairment. The participants of the study describe that their colleagues are very helpful while working in the department of special education. Additionally, one of the participants of the study expressed that:

“I never feel alone in my institute or in the performance of my job activities. My colleagues are very supportive of me, especially when I need them.”

Research Question 4: What are the ways to remove the barriers experienced by working women with visual impairment?

Theme 4: Strategies for Eliminating Barriers

This theme displays the strategies for working women with visual impairment regarding removing the barriers that they experience. The theme is based on the categories of pick-up drop for working women, skill-based training, and posting at home station. Since women are still underrepresented in these fields, training is desperately needed as society becomes more digitally connected than ever (Merayo & Ayuso, 2023).

Category 1: Pick & Drop for Working Women

This category is concerned with the responses of the participants about the pick and drop facility to them. The participants of the study stated that the department should provide them suitable pick and drop facility for women with visual impairment. This could support them in their accessibility to their workplace. One of the participants stated that:

“There is much difficulty for every blind woman to get ride early in the morning.”

Category 2: Skill-based Training

This category is related to the efforts of the special education department for its visually impaired employees. This category reflects the responses of the participants about the need for skill-based training for working women with visual impairment. The participants narrated that the special education department should conduct skill-based training for working women with visual impairment about assistive technology. Moreover, one of the participants stated that

“The need of the time for working women with visual impairment is to train them for future challenges. It can be done through provision of technology and it’s training that is necessary for performing job responsibilities.”

Category 3: Posting at Home Station

This category is based on the responses of the participants about the strategies for removing barriers for working women with visual impairment. The participants of the study narrated that blind women should remain in their cities; they should not be posted out of their town. This is the best way to remove barriers in the lives of working women with visual impairment. One of the participants expressed that

“I think that blind girls should be accommodated near their home town. Pick and drop facility should also be provided to them.”

Findings of the Study

1. This study found that working women with visual impairment perceive their jobs as a matter of self-development, a job as their passion, and a way to accomplish their financial needs.
2. This study revealed that working women with visual impairment face numerous barriers while working as professionals in the special education department. The most common barrier is the effects on their domestic life. It also includes the unavailability of those resources at their workplace, which are necessary to perform duty as a visually challenged lady. The third most common barrier that working women with visual impairment experience is the out-of-station posting. This brings certain challenges of accommodation, mobility, and adjustment in the far areas, with the problem of visual impairment.
3. This study found that the special education department is supporting the working women with visual impairment, mostly in accessible buildings and daycares for the children. Additionally, a few participants of the study highlighted the support of their colleagues while performing their duties. However, a few participants revealed that they require transport for pick and drop and a more accessible environment in some institutes.
4. This study revealed that various strategies are required to comply with for the betterment of the system in special education for working women with visual impairment. These strategies include Transport facility, including pick and drop by the department, skill-based training, and posting at home station due to visual impairment, can become the best strategies for working women with visual impairment as a part of their adjustment to acquire appropriate institute-oriented results.

Discussion

This study explores the barriers experienced by working women with visual impairments employed in Punjab's special education institutes. The results showed that working women with visual impairments perceive their jobs as a source of financial independence, personal fulfillment, and self-improvement. Coffey et al. (2014) recommended employers’ training, flexibility, adaptable equipment, possibilities for training and work experience, and more accessible opportunities.

Work was seen as a passion and a path to empowerment and self-worth rather than just a way to earn. Despite functional constraints, these women showed significant intrinsic desire and dedication in the special education setting, demonstrating their resilience and positive professional identities. Liu et al. (2025) found that higher life satisfaction was also reported by those who had faith in their ability to overcome obstacles.

The study found several barriers that prevent women with vision impairments from being productive in their careers. The effect of work obligations on family life was one of the biggest obstacles. Due to firmly fixed gender roles in society, extra work pressure, and family responsibilities continues to be a major challenge. Another significant barrier was the absence of accessible and assistive resources in the workplace. Work productivity is decreased, and autonomous functioning is restricted when screen readers, braille materials, adaptive technology, and accessible teaching tools are lacking. According to Sabar et al. (2024), limited training opportunities, inaccessible infrastructure, and societal attitudes are the common barriers that are faced by the person with visual impairment in Pakistan.

Additionally, it was found that out-of-city postings were a significant hurdle, resulting in difficulties with travel, lodging, security, and social acclimation. The study found several hurdles that prevent women with vision impairments from being productive in their careers. The effect of work obligations on family life was one of the biggest obstacles. Hanek & Garcia (2022) presented the perspective of social psychological barriers of the working women at work place through their research.

These results are in line with other studies that identified systemic and environmental barriers as significant causes of the exclusion of people with visual impairments from the job. Despite reintegration initiatives and enabling laws, employment rates for people with visual impairments (VI) are consistently low and have a significant influence on job participation (Daniëls et al., 2025). The results also showed that the Special Education Department has taken several helpful actions, such as providing child-friendly childcare centers and accessible structures. These programs demonstrate institutional understanding of gender-specific demands and family obligations. Additionally, support from peers and coworkers was shown to be a beneficial element that promoted both mental health and work performance. But not all institutions provided the same level of help. A number of participants mentioned the unavailability of proper transportation with an inaccessible approach. Long-term consequences of inaccessibility include exclusion, modified patterns of travelling, and a decline in public space trust (Ulahannan Et al., 2025). This discrepancy highlights the need for appropriate support systems across all special education institutions and the non-implementation of the special education policies to achieve certain goals of facilitating persons with special needs in Pakistan.

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demands and family obligations. Additionally, support from peers and coworkers was shown to be a beneficial element that promoted both mental health and work performance. But not all institutions provided the same level of help. Khan et al. (2025) found that complex issues arise from personal, institutional, and organizational factors. In order to reduce mobility issues and promote a better work-life balance, posting at home stations was also highly advised.

By putting these strategies into practice, working women with visual impairments may experience increased job satisfaction, retention, and productivity, which will eventually help create a more inclusive and fair special education system. Overall, this discussion emphasizes how critical it is to create institutional support networks while tackling social, environmental, and structural barriers. In addition to being a question of equality, fostering an inclusive workplace for women with visual impairments is crucial for enhancing the quality of services provided by special education institutions.

Conclusion

The obstacles experienced by working women with visual impairments who work in Punjabi special education institutes were investigated in this exploratory research.

The results show that these women saw their work as a source of financial independence, personal fulfillment, and self-improvement, demonstrating significant motivation and resilience in the face of environmental and functional obstacles.

The influence of work obligations on personal life, a lack of accessible resources and assistive technology at work, and challenges related to out-of-town postings are just a few of the obstacles that the survey found to impede their professional efficacy.

Even while the Special Education Department has made progress by offering childcare centers and accessible infrastructure, assistance is still uneven among institutions, especially when it comes to transportation options and completely inclusive settings.

According to the report, departmental transport services, skill-based and assistive technology training, and home-station postings are examples of systematic and gender-sensitive solutions that are necessary.

In order to promote fairness, inclusion, and better service delivery within special education institutions, addressing these obstacles via coordinated policy implementation will greatly increase working women with visual impairments' job satisfaction, productivity, and retention of working women with visual impairments.

Recommendations

This study recommends that:

1. The government should increase the special quota for women with visual impairment in various departments to ensure their smooth participation in the country.
2. The special education department should accommodate working women with visual impairment at their home station to minimize the challenges experienced at out stations.
3. Transport facility must be provided as a part of the pick and drop facility to working women with visual impairment to reduce their mobility challenges.
4. Specialized and regular training must be conducted at the department level to get aware employees without visual impairment about supporting and accommodating the employees with visual impairment.
5. Future researchers are suggested to explore the same phenomenon by using quantitative and mixed methods designs to view new dimensions.

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