Study Habits of Visually Impaired Students in Relation to their Study Related Variables

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Abstract

Study habits are affected by several factors such as physical health of the individual, home condition, emotional and social adjustment; personality traits or the study environment etc. Good study habits of the children may lead them to a long way in their education, rehabilitation and to achieve long-term goals. In the present study an attempt was made to investigate the level of study habits of visually impaired (VI) students in relation to their socio-demographic and study related variables. A sample of 100 VI students from 7-17 years of Classes I to X of two residential special schools for the blind was selected. A self-designed socio-demographic data sheet was used to collect socio-demographic characteristics of the visually impaired students. The Test of Study Habits and Attitude (TSHA) was used to measure the study habits and attitudes of students. Contingency C test was used to find out correlation. Findings of the present study reveal that VI students possessed good and satisfactory level of study habits. The association between study habits of VI students and their age, sex, grades, socio economic status and parental education were found statistically significant. Study related variables like attitude towards teachers, attitude towards education, self confidence, concentration, coping with mental conflicts, school and home environment, home assignment, and attitude towards examination were also found significantly related to study habits of VI students.

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Introduction

Study can be interpreted as a planned programme of subject-matter mastery to acquire knowledge and habits which will be useful in meeting new situations, interpreting ideas, making judgments and creating new ideas and in general enrichment of life. Study habits are central factors in learning. The educability of a man depends largely on his ability to form and reform habits. Study-habits are caught rather than taught and are affected by several factors such as physical health of the individual, home condition, emotional and social adjustment, personality traits and/or the study environment. Study skills are the tools students use to absorb the materials which they are expected to learn (Stephen, 1998). Study habits play an important role in human performance in academic field (Verma, 1996; Verma & Kumar, 1999; Stephen, 1998; Satapathy & Singhal, 2000; Vyas, 2002). Study skills are systematic procedures that students initiate to complete such complex tasks as skimming, determining relevant information, taking notes and studying materials for test (Gleason et al., 1991). Major factors that affect learning style include motivation, readiness to learn, learning environment, individual learning style and material to be learnt (Narayan, 2003). Hence, study habits of school students are essential to learning, and fundamental to school success.

Children with visual impairment (VI) display a wide range of visual disabilities, ranging from total blindness to relatively good residual vision. The Persons with Disabilities Act'1995 (MSJE, 1995) defines visual impairment in terms of Blindness and Low vision. "Blindness refers to a condition where a person suffers from total absence of sight or visual acuity not exceeding 6/60 in the better eye with corrective lenses or limitation of the field of vision subtending an angle of 20 degree or worse" and "Low vision refers to a condition where 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". The one characteristic that students with visual impairment have in common is a visual restriction of sufficient severity that interferes with normal progress in a regular education programme without modifications. Visual impairment results in several educational, social and psychological effects. The effects are both objective and subjective depending on the type and degree of visual impairment (Mani, 1992). The VI child may need to be given direct assistance to learn systematically even the easy skills that the sighted child learns almost spontaneously through imitation and visual contact with the world (Jangira & Mani, 1990). Acquired blindness reduces the confidence of the individual in the remaining senses especially in the early transition period. Due to the lack of visual feedback, a VI child may have to skip a number of intervening steps of an activity, which have visual orientation. It is not only the impairment, which creates all difficulties, but the child should learn to live with that impairment by not allowing it to affect his social life adversely. Children with visual impairment showing

no improvement in studies, may not have cognitive deficits, but their academic performances may be affected by the extent of family assistance, socio-economic status etc. (Matuszek & Haskin, 1978; Shakiba-Nejad & Yellin, 1981; Nanda, 2000; Vyas, 2002). Sometimes blindness adds additional problem if the defective eye continues to pain and proper treatment is required at this stage; otherwise this may affect education of the child directly. The functional vision and light perception in the children may cause a different type of behaviour in the children. In case of additional impairment, special support is needed based on their multiple disabling conditions (Jangira & Mani, 1990).

For professionals in special education, it becomes imperative to promote better education to children with impairment (Sharma, 1988). Only a small percentage of children with visual impairment are getting education in different schools like day special schools, residential special schools and regular schools etc. (Shukla & Mittal, 2004). Most of the VI students are attending special schools having residential facilities (Mani, 1992; Panda, 2001). Research evidence suggests that blind children receive very limited training in basic compensatory skills such as Braille, daily living skills, personal management, mobility etc., in integrated education programmes (Punani, 1997). Children, who get admission in regular school, are generally unable to cope with the school atmosphere, curriculum, mode of instructions, teaching learning processes and examination system etc. and finally drop out from the school. Children should know and use good rules of study. The teacher needs to be well acquainted with the functioning of study rules in order to provide proper guidance in study practices.

Texts for the persons with visual impairment are available in three forms: print (standard and large), braille and aural (personal reader or electronic). For some students, the development of Braille skills is a priority, though there is decline in the number of Braille readers since 1963 (Rex, 1989; Schroeder, 1989; Stephens, 1989). Causes may be many, some of them are reported as nonreaders visually impaired children with additional disabilities (Rex, 1989), disputes on the utility of the Braille code (Thurlow, 1988), the decline in teachers' knowledge of Braille and methods for teaching it (Schroeder, 1989; Stephens, 1989), negative attitudes toward Braille (Holbrook & Koenig, 1992; Rex, 1989), and the greater reliance on speech output and print-magnification technology (Paul, 1993). Sometimes, problems in learning may be due to additional impairment in the child (Tamboli, 1981; Rex, 1989).

The ability to use Grade I and/or Grade II Braille increases the range of resources and tools available. Grade I Braille restricts the student to using Braille as a personal system since textbooks are available only in Grade II. In addition, the transfer from Braille to print will be more efficient if Grade II rules for contractions are followed. Some Grade II users may not learn the correct spelling of words that always appear in contracted form in Grade II Braille. However, VI students who use computer equipment with a standard

keyboard need to learn standard spelling. Students using live readers should be comfortable asking the reader to repeat specific passages and to pause while the student summarises or paraphrases the information read. The reader should know in advance what the student needs from the text, and give careful verbal descriptions of diagrams and charts. In the classrooms, lecture-notes require the student to develop the structure and organise the information by writing key words, and using such adaptive devices as a tape recorder or a Braille note-taker. However, the support systems should not foster dependence nor restrict academic progress (*Hirschberg & Barbara, 2007).* Therefore, it is important that students should devise their own systems for taking notes both in the classroom and at home. Good study habits of the children may lead them to a long way in their education, rehabilitation and to achieve long-term goals. Bad study habits of children with visual impairment can be studied to improve their academic achievements and ultimately their quality of life. In the present study, an attempt was made to investigate the level of study habits of children with visual impairment (blindness) and its socio-demographic and study related correlates.

Objectives of the study

1. To assess the level of study habits of students with visual impairment.
2. To assess the relation between study habits of students with visual impairment and their gender, age, socio-economic status (SES), grades and parental education.
3. To assess the relation between study habits of students with visual impairment and study related variables such as attitude towards teachers, school and home environment, attitude towards education, specific study habits, mental conflicts, concentration, home assignment, self confidence and attitude towards examination.

Methodology

Sample: Considering the predetermined inclusion criteria (blind students, attending residential special school and Braille readers) and exclusion criteria (low vision, day scholar, attending pre/post school programmes and print/aural readers), a sample of 100 visually impaired (blind) students studying in Classes I to X (4.35 ± 2.986 grades) of two residential special schools for the blind in Assam was selected. Forty one percent participants were boys and 59per cent were girls. Mean age of boys was 13.39 ± 2.82 years and of girls was 12.12 ± 2.71 years. Majority (76%) of them belonged to lower socio-economic status and were studying in primary classes. Most of their parents were either illiterate (33%) or were non-matric (31%).

Tool: A self-designed socio-demographic data sheet was used to collect socio-demographic characteristics of the VI students.

The Test of Study Habits and Attitude (TSHA) by Dr. C.P. Mathur (1974) was used to measure the study habits and attitudes of students. The test is made for the school and college students to discriminate their good and poor study techniques. The tool consists of 60 items distributed in nine areas, namely, attitudes towards

teachers, school and home environment, attitude towards education, study habits, mental conflicts, concentration, home assignment, self confidence, and examination. Responses are recorded in 'Yes', 'Doubtful' and 'No'. A high score on this test indicates high order of correct study habits and proper attitudes while a low score shows low study techniques.

Procedure: For the collection of the data, principals of the schools were approached and the purpose of the study was explained. All the VI students were contacted and the tool was personally administered to the sample of 100 subjects. The items were translated in Assamese for Assamese speaking students. The responses were recorded in the separate answer-recording sheets.

Data Analysis: Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows version10.0 was used for data analysis. Since data was on category variable, Contingency C test was used to find out correlation.

Results

Based on the normative data of the Test of Study Habits and Attitude (TSHA) manual, the level of study habits of the visually impaired (blind) students was assessed and categorised into poor, satisfactory and good study habit. Findings show that more than half (57%) of students had satisfactory level of study habits, whereas 31 per cent and 12per cent of students had good and poor level of study habits respectively. Study habit was significantly correlated with socio-demographic variables, namely, gender, age, socio-economic status, grades and parental education (Table 1). Boys had better study habits in comparison to girls. Students possessing poor study habits were more (40%) in younger age-group (7-10 years) and nil from older age-group (15-18 years). Poor study habit was found in students belonging to low

Table1

Showing relationship between socio-demographic variables and level of study habits.

Socio demographic variables		Level of Study habits						C (df)
		Good (N= 31)		Satisfactory (N= 57)		Poor (N= 12)		
		N	%	N	%	N	%	
Gender	Male (N=41)	19	46.3	18	43.9	04	09.8	0.267*
	Female (N=59)	12	20.3	39	66.1	08	13.6	(2)
Age-range	7-10 years (N=20)	—	—	12	60.0	08	40.0	0.422**
	11-14 years (N=53)	16	30.1	33	62.2	04	07.5	(4)
	15-18 years (N=27)	15	55.5	12	44.4	--	--	
SES	Low (N=76)	19	25.0	45	59.2	12	05.8	0.297*
	Middle (N=9)	06	66.7	03	33.3	—	—	
	High (N=15)	06	40.0	09	60.0	—	—	(4)

Grades	Primary (I-V) (N=64)	10	15.6	42	65.6	12	18.8	0.429**
	Secondary (VI-X) (N=36)	21	58.3	15	41.7	—	—	(df=2)
Parental Education	Illiterate (N=33)	05	15.2	22	66.7	06	18.2	0.384*
	Non-matric (N=31)	08	25.8	17	54.8	06	19.4	(df=8)
	Matric (N=18)	09	50.0	09	50.0	—	—	
	Hr. Sec. (N=9)	03	33.3	06	66.7	—	—	
	Graduate (N=9)	06	66.7	03	33.3	—	—	

*significant at 0.05 level. **significant at 0.001 level.

socio-economic status and illiterate and below matric level parental education. No student studying in secondary grade had poor study habit.

Findings of relation between study habits and study related variables (attitudes towards teachers, school and home environment, attitude towards education, specific study habits, coping with mental conflicts, concentration, home assignment, self confidence, and attitudes towards examination) are given

Table 2

Showing relationship between study related variables and level of study habits

Sociodemographic variables		Level of Study habits						C (df)
		Good (N= 31)		Satisfactory (N= 31)		Poor (N= 31)		
		N	%	N	%	N	%	
Attitudes towardsteachers	Excellent (N=44)	22	71.0	20	35.1	02	16.7	0.610**
	Good (N=37)	09	29.0	28	49.1	-	-	(6)
	Satisfactory (N=4)	---	---	---	---	04	33.3	
	Poor (N=15)	---	---	09	15.8	06	50.0	
School and Home environment	Excellent (N=2)	---	---	02	03.5	---	---	0.489**
	Good (N=45)	22	71.0	21	36.8	02	16.7	(8)
	Satisfactory (N=46)	09	29.0	31	54.4	06	50.0	
	Poor (N=2)	---	---	---	---	02	16.7	
	Very poor (N=5)	---	---	03	05.3	02	16.7	
Attitude towards education	Excellent (N=50)	24	77.4	22	38.6	04	33.3	0.444**
	Good (N=38)	05	16.1	29	50.9	04	33.3	(6)
	Satisfactory (N=9)	02	06.5	03	05.3	04	33.3	
	Poor (N=3)	---	---	03	05.3	---	---	
Specific study habits	Good (N=58)	25	80.6	27	47.4	06	50.0	0.337*
	Satisfactory (N=31)	03	09.7	22	38.6	06	50.0	(6)
	Poor (N=11)	03	09.7	08	14.0	---	---	
Coping with mental conflicts	Excellent (N=27)	17	54.8	10	17.5	---	---	0.635**
	Good (N=39)	11	35.5	28	49.1	---	---	(8)
	Satisfactory (N=19)	03	09.7	14	24.6	02	16.7	
	Poor (N=4)	---	---	02	03.5	02	16.7	
	Very poor (N=11)	---	---	03	05.3	08	66.7	

Concentration	Excellent (N=9)	06	19.4	03	05.3	---	---	0.560** (8)
	Good (N=45)	23	74.2	22	38.6	---	---	
	Satisfactory (N=27)	---	---	21	36.8	06	50.0	
	Poor (N=12)	02	06.5	08	14.0	02	16.7	
	Very poor (N=7)	---	---	03	05.3	04	33.3	
Home assignment	Excellent (N=3)	03	09.7	---	---			0.519** (8)
	Good (N=15)	02	06.5	13	22.8	---	---	
	Satisfactory (N=56)	20	64.5	34	59.6	02	16.7	
	Poor (N=8)	---	---	04	07.0	04	33.3	
	Very poor (N=18)	06	19.4	06	10.5	06	50.0	
Self confidence	Excellent (N=41)	24	77.4	15	26.3	02	16.7	0.514** (8)
	Good (N=12)	03	09.7	09	15.8	---	---	
	Satisfactory (N=10)	04	12.9	04	07.0	02	16.7	
	Poor (N=21)	---	---	17	29.8	04	33.3	
	Very poor (N=16)	---	---	12	21.1	04	33.3	
Attitudes towards examination	Excellent (N=30)	13	41.9	17	29.8	---	---	0.489** (8)
	Good (N=43)	12	38.7	27	47.4	04	33.3	
	Satisfactory (N=16)	06	19.4	08	14.0	02	16.7	
	Poor (N=2)	---	---	---	---	02	16.7	
	Very poor (N=9)	---	---	05	08.8	04	33.3	

*significant at 0.05 level. **significant at 0.001 level.

in Table 2. All the variables very significantly related with study habits.

A significant number (81%) of VI students possessed excellent and good attitude towards their teachers. All the students having good and satisfactory study habits had excellent and good attitude towards their teachers. Most (91%) of the students belonged to good and satisfactory environment of their school and home. All the students having good study habits and maximum (91.22%) number of students having satisfactory study habits belonged to good and satisfactory environment of their school and home.

Majority of VI students having good and satisfactory study habit had excellent attitude towards education, specific study habits and excellent or good attitude towards examination. They used to do home assignment at satisfactory level and had excellent or good coping skills, concentration and self confidence.

Discussion

Findings of the present study revealed that most of the VI students possessed satisfactory and good study habits. Ryles (1996) also found that the Braille readers demonstrated positive reading habits at a significantly greater rate than did the print readers. They spent substantially more time reading, read more books, and subscribed to more magazines. This finding is particularly noteworthy when one considers the comparative availability of print and Braille materials because higher education depends to a great extent on a background of reading skills and habits. However, Sharma (1998) found that visually disabled children were less involved in their studies and were more frustrated than sighted children.

Findings suggested that study habits of VI students were significantly related to gender, age, socio-economic status, and parental education. Good study habit was found in 15 to 18 years old boy students belonging to middle and high socio-economic status, studying in VI to X Grade whose parents were educated above matric level.

Poor study habit was found in children in 7 to 10 years of age group, belonging to low socio-economic status studying in primary grade whose parents were either illiterate or non-matric. Boy students showed better study habits than girl students. This finding is consistent with finding of Malathi and Malini (2006) who also found that study habit of boy students was better than girl students. Early entry of boys in the school might be the probable reason for better study habits than girls. Boys might have discovered different study procedures and develop good study habits in due course of special education programmes. The discriminatory attitude towards education of girls is still persisting in our society and girl students are restricted towards attending residential schools away from home either during early years or during adolescences period. Therefore, it is imperative to create mass awareness towards education of girls in our society particularly in case of girls with special needs.

Present finding indicates relation between parental education and study habits of children is according to findings of previous studies reporting that parent modeling, motivating children to learners, and parent contact with school had been found to increase academic achievement (Christenson, 1995). Home and school collaboration especially in residential setups needs to be strengthened so that cooperation among special educators and family members can be empowered to build up good study habits among these children.

Study habit was found significantly correlated with attitudes towards teachers, school and home environment, attitude towards education, specific study habits, coping with mental conflicts, concentration, home assignment, self confidence, and attitudes towards examination. Study environment is one of the success factors and it helps in attending the task and concentrating in the study related activities by reducing the distracting stimuli and fatigue generating factors. Sharma (1998) compared visually disabled and sighted students of secondary schools with respect to their study involvement and reported that visually disabled children were less involved in their studies. However, our findings reveal that attitude of VI students towards education was significantly related to their study habits.

Study involves more than mere reading of texts materials. Efficiency in study is increased when it is planned and purposeful. The learner's energies are focused further on mastery of learning materials and therefore enable to concentrate on the subject areas of his own interests. The successful student learns to modify the study activities with interest so that fatigue does not interfere with his successful achievements, and he discovers the truth of good study

habits. Therefore, trained special educators should be placed in special schools who can provide effective teaching using the specific and innovative method of education by means of special teaching learning materials such as Braille equipments, geometric devices, abacus and taylor frame etc., so that good study habits can be generated in the students.

Findings of our study showed a significant relationship between mental conflicts and study habits. It was also found that students having better coping skills during mental conflicts had better study habits. Satapathy and Singhal (2000) have emphasised on relation between stress, coping and studies. Sharma (2006) also reported relation between emotional stability and study habits of visually disabled. Her result reveals that children with high emotional stability had better study habits than their counterparts with low emotional stability. More frustration in Class VI students in comparison to sighted students was reported by her in another study (Shrama, 1998). For learning a concept, Class VI students use their auditory and tactile sensory channels mostly. There are limitations in these students to deal with the environment around them, which may create mental conflicts in these students. Hence, they should learn coping strategies to overcome their mental conflicts. So the professionals can create real-life-simulated conflicts situations for these students and train them for coping mechanism.

Overall findings suggest association between study habits of Class VI students and their age, sex, grades, socio economic status and parental education was found statistically significant. Study related variables like attitude towards teachers, attitude towards education, self confidence, concentration, coping with mental conflicts, school and home environment, home assignment, and attitude towards examination were also found significantly related to study habits of VI students. The amount and kind of study in which a learner engages differ with his age and grade level. During early years of schooling the child masters fundamental learning tools, habits, and attitude as a result of classroom stimulation and with little independent study. As the young child passes through the later grades of elementary school, high school and so on, study materials become increasingly more abstract. The learner's techniques and habits of study need to be adjusted to changing learning materials, purposes, desired outcomes and study environment etc. Educators are required to practice major strategies such as peer tutoring, cooperative learning, providing study buddy, home work organiser and assignment books, developing after-school programmes, using study skills and techniques, conducting parents workshops and applying several behavioural techniques etc. in the classrooms for developing and establishing good study habits specially among younger students attending lower grades belonging to low socioeconomic status and having lower level of parental education. Making a definite plan and procedures, systematising and organising the study tasks act as catalyst for school success. In common school system special educators and regular teachers should work together to

inculcate specific study habits in VI students and train them on different strategies for developing positive attitude towards examination, self-confidence, concentration, coping with mental conflicts and attitude towards education etc. to establish good study skills for their better academic performance.

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