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Quality of Life of Undergraduate Students with Visual Impairment

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Abstract

Quality of life (QOL) is an individual's perception of their position in life, including physical and mental health, financial stability, meaningful relationships, personal freedom, and a balanced lifestyle. People with disabilities often face greater restrictions in social activities, impacting their overall well-being. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aims to foster inclusive education for visually impaired students, but there is a gap in understanding their lived experiences and well-being. This study aims to assess the QOL of undergraduate students with visual impairment at NIEPVD, Dehradun, and provide evidence-based insights for policymakers, educators, and rehabilitation professionals.

The study assessed the Quality of Life (QoL) among 52 undergraduate students with visual impairment at NIEPVD, Dehradun. The Quality of Life Scale (QOLS) was used, which consists of eleven subscales. Out of 52 students, 90.38% scored in the "Extremely High Level" category, while 9.62% fell into the "High Level" category. The study found that the majority of visually impaired UG students at NIEPVD experience a significantly high level of QoL across various dimensions, including emotional well-being, self-care, personal development, and social inclusion. The study challenges the assumption that individuals with visual impairment inherently experience lower QoL, suggesting that the NIEPVD's specialized support systems, inclusive educational practices, and rehabilitative services contribute to the high QoL scores observed.

Keywords: Quality of Life, Children with Visual Impairment, Mental health, Personal Development and Social Inclusion.

Introduction

Quality of life (QOL) is an individual's perception of their position in life within the context of their culture and value systems, as well as their goals, expectations, standards, and concerns (WHO, 2024). It encompasses physical and mental health, financial stability, meaningful relationships, personal freedom, and a balanced lifestyle. Schalock (2013) describes QOL as reflecting a person's desired living conditions across eight core dimensions: emotional well-being, interpersonal relationships, material well-being, personal development, physical well-being, self-determination, social inclusion, and rights. The meaning of quality of life varies among individuals and groups. Salvesen (2003) emphasizes that a good quality of life entails access to essential needs, emotional fulfilment, and living in an environment that fosters happiness and growth.

However, people with disabilities often experience greater restrictions in social activities compared to healthier individuals, impacting their overall well-being. Habib & Irshad (2018) revealed that visually impaired adolescents scored lower in all domains of QOL compared to their sighted peers. Vuletic & Benjak (2016) highlight that health, education, social life, and rehabilitation programs should be prioritized to enhance the quality of life for individuals with visual disabilities. A good quality of life ensures physical and mental well-being, financial stability, and meaningful relationships. It enables individuals to flourish, accomplish their objectives, and find happiness and fulfilment. Testa & Simonson (1996) emphasize that limitations related to health and disability can greatly affect a person's perception of health and satisfaction with life; two people with the same health status may have very different qualities of life.

QoL of Person with Visual Impairment

Multiple factors, such as social inclusion, accessibility, psychological well-being, and economic opportunities, shape the quality of life for individuals with visual disabilities. Abraham (2013) found that most individuals with disabilities experience an average quality of life. It is crucial to give their support as well as opportunities to maintain a good quality of life. NEP 2020 also seeks to enhance the educational experience for visually impaired students by promoting inclusivity and accessibility to ensure a good quality of life. Despite some challenges in implementation, the policy is a crucial step toward creating a fair and supportive learning environment, ultimately enriching the lives and future opportunities of visually impaired students.

Rationale of the Study

The quality of life (QoL) is a multidimensional concept that encompasses physical health, psychological well-being, social inclusion, and access to opportunities (WHO, 2024). For individuals with visual impairment, these dimensions are often compromised due to systemic barriers, limited accessibility, and social stigma, which can significantly affect their academic and personal development (Amin et al., 2021).

Despite progressive policy interventions like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which aims to foster inclusive education, there remains a gap in understanding the lived experiences and well-being of visually impaired students in higher education settings.

Research has shown that students with visual impairments often face challenges related to accessibility, peer interaction, and institutional support, which can hinder their overall quality of life (Alabdan & Hanafi, 2024 2).

Undergraduate students with visual impairment encounter unique challenges that can significantly impact their academic performance, emotional health, and life satisfaction. Institutions like the National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Visual Disabilities (NIEPVD), Dehradun, play a pivotal role in shaping the educational and personal development of these students. However, there is limited empirical data on how effectively such institutions contribute to enhancing the QoL of their students.

This study is essential to assess the current level of QoL among UG students with visual impairment at NIEPVD, identify areas of strength and concern, and provide evidence-based insights for policymakers, educators, and rehabilitation professionals. Understanding the QoL of these students is crucial for designing targeted interventions, improving support systems, and ensuring that educational environments are truly inclusive and empowering (Vuletic & Benjak, 2016; Habib & Irshad, 2018). Accordingly, this study aims to assess the level of Quality of Life among UG students with visual impairment studying at Dehradun.

Methodology

A descriptive survey design has been adopted for the present study, which has included 52 individuals pursuing undergraduate courses in the season 2024-25 at NIEPVD, Dehradun, session 2024-25 as the sample of the study. The sample consists of students with visual impairment in both categories, i.e., total loss of vision and low vision.

The tool used for this study was the “Quality of Life Scale (QOLS)” developed by Sharma & Nasreen (2014), which is a psychological determinant of the quality of life that consists of eleven subscales, i.e., life satisfaction, goals and motivation, spirituality, happiness, hope and wishes, stress reduction, frustration/depression/anxiety, adjustment, physical well-being and self-care, effectiveness/efficiency of myself, and personal development/personal evolution. Braille conversion of the scale was developed for students with visual impairments, and they were given Braille paper for their responses. Since the scale was a time-free test, students had been given time as per their convenience to respond. Some responses were collected in the schedule form by one of the researcher, i.e., responses were noted by the researcher. After the data collection, descriptive statistics was used for analysis and findings.

Findings

The descriptive statistics used through calculating the mean, standard deviation, and percentage of the scores for the data analysis. As the study aimed to assess the level of Quality of Life (QoL) among undergraduate students with visual impairment at NIEPVD, Dehradun, the score of students were calculated as presented with number of students falls under the corresponding different levels of QoL and their percentage for each level.

Table 1: Quality of Life of Students with Visual Impairment

Level & Score Range	No of Students (N=52)	Percentage
Extremely High Level (103 & above)	47	90.38
High Level (95-102)	5	9.62
Above Average (88-94)	0	0
Average(77-87)	0	0
Below Average (69-76)	0	0
Low Average (61-68)	0	0
Extremely Low Level (60 & Below)	0	0
Total	52	100

On the basis of above table, following are the key findings:

- Out of 52 students, 47 students (90.38%) scored in the "Extremely High Level" category of QoL (score ≥ 103).
- The remaining 5 students (9.62%) fell into the "High Level" category (score range 95–102).
- No students were found in the categories of "Above Average," "Average," "Below Average," "Low Average," or "Extremely Low Level."

These results indicate that the majority of visually impaired UG students at NIEPVD experience a significantly high level of quality of life across various dimensions such as emotional well-being, self-care, personal development, and social inclusion.

Discussion

The service provided for the visual impairment students improves the quality of life of these students (Ovenseri-Ogbomo et al., 2016). The students studying in the NIEVPD, Dehradun have access of the services facilitated by the institute such as identification of jobs and placement, Financial Support for Development of Accessible Learning Materials (under SIPDA scheme), Distribution of Aids & Appliances under ADIP Scheme, Community/Outreach Programmes, Clinical, Referral and Guidance & Counselling etc.

With above all these facilities, students are also provided required psychological assistance to maintain their mental health. Residential care has the potential to enhance the mental health of the youth (Nelson et al., 2014), as NIEPVD is a residential institute, it facilitates its students with mental health campaign to improve their quality of life.

In certain studies, there has been found that financial strain has a significant contribution on health related quality of life (Garey et al., 2017; Angel et al., 2003). As this study is primarily focusing on the mental health aspect of quality life, the financial aid comes in a peripheral support, as NIEPVD provided scholarship on monthly basis to its undergraduate students (Annual report 2023-24, NIEPVD, p. 46).

Conclusion

The findings challenge the commonly held assumption that individuals with visual impairment inherently experience lower QoL. In contrast to studies by Habib & Irshad (2018), which reported lower QoL scores among visually impaired adolescents compared to their sighted peers, this study reveals a more optimistic scenario within the NIEPVD context. This discrepancy may be attributed to the specialised support systems, inclusive educational practices, and rehabilitative services provided at NIEPVD. As highlighted by Vuletic & Benjak (2016), access to health, education, and social programs plays a critical role in enhancing QoL for persons with disabilities. NIEPVD's infrastructure and tailored interventions appear to align with these recommendations, fostering a nurturing environment for students.

Furthermore, the NEP 2020 emphasises inclusive education and accessibility, which may have positively influenced the institutional practices at NIEPVD, contributing to the high QoL scores observed. Schalock's (2013) multidimensional model of QoL—encompassing emotional, physical, and social domains—finds strong representation in the outcomes of this study.

The results also resonate with Testa & Simonson's (1996) assertion that QoL is subjective and can vary significantly even among individuals with similar health conditions. The high scores suggest that students perceive their lives positively, likely due to a combination of institutional support, peer interaction, and personal resilience.

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