

Status of Muslim Immigrants' Children With Learning Difficulties in Vienna

M. Naeem Mohsin, Muhammad
Shabbir, Wizra Saeed
GC University Faisalabad Pakistan,
Faisalabad, Pakistan

M. Saleem Mohsin
UAF, Faisalabad,
Pakistan

The study was conducted to know the status of Muslim immigrants' children with learning difficulties and importance of parents' involvement for the education whose children are with learning difficulties, and the factors responsible for the learning difficulties among immigrants' children. There were 81 immigrant children with learning difficulties who were identified for detail information. Eight parents of children with learning difficulties, and five directors of SPZs (Sonder Pädagogik Zentrums) who were already involved with the education of children leaning difficulties were the part of the study. Following instruments were developed and used to achieve the objectives and test the hypothesis, such as: (1) questionnaire for children; (2) schedule interview for directors of SPZ; and (3) structured interview for parents. The results showed that the presence of male children was more than females. Parents, less interest, home environment, parents' qualification, age of children, and teachers' attitude with parents were powerful indicators which are responsible for learning difficulties among immigrants' children.

Keywords: immigrants, learning difficulties, home environment

Introduction

The total population of Austria is 8.47 million (Austrian census, 2001). The performance of immigrants children lags behind than non-immigrants' children (Crul, 2007). According to Census 2001, Muslim comprised of 4.22% and it is estimated that by 2010 Muslim population has reached by 6% of total population. Majority of Muslims entered to this land during the 1960s as migrant workers from Turkey, Bosnia, and Herzegovina. There are also communities of Arab and Pakistani origin. Although Muslim population is 6% in Austria, the presence of Muslim immigrants in learning difficulties school is high as compared to non-Muslim (Mohsin & Kaplan, 2011).

The literacy rate in Austria is 99%. It is compulsory for all children who were permanently resident in Austria to attend school for at least nine years for the age of six upwards. There is no datum available about how many special needs persons have in the country, because question regarding disability was not asked during the last Census, 2001. In Vienna, there are 35 special needs school with 2,941 children (1,105 females) are located only in Wien Vienna. At primary level from Grades 1-4, there are 1.2% (0.8% females) special

M. Naeem Mohsin, director, GC University Faisalabad Pakistan.
Muhammad Shabbir, Ph.D., assistant professor, GC University Faisalabad Pakistan.
Wizra Saeed, M. Phil scholar, GC University Faisalabad Pakistan.
M. Saleem Mohsin, principal, Laboratory H/S, UAF.

needs children. The large numbers of special needs children (1.9%) are in Grades 5-8. The average class size in special needs school is 6.8 per class. The total special needs teachers are 5,768 of whom 4,895 are females (Report of Federal Ministry of Education, 2008-2009).

There are 10 types of special needs schools available in Austria on the basis of disabilities and difficulties among children. All types of special schools exist, each with different curricula: special schools with their own curricula. SPZs (Sonderpädagogik Zentrums) are dealing with children with learning difficulties in Vienna. In 1962, Kirk used the term "learning disability" in the following definition:

A learning disability refers to retardation, disorder, or delayed development in one or more of the processes of speech, language, reading, writing arithmetic, or other school subjects resulting from a psychological handicap caused by a possible cerebral dysfunction and/or emotional or behavior disturbance. It is not the result of mental retardation, sensory deprivation, or cultural and instructional factors. (S. A. Kirk, McCarthy, & W. D. Kirk, 1961, p. 263)

In Austria, according to the Austrian Statistical Bureau, in mid-2006, 814,800 foreigners legally lived in Austria, representing 9.8% of the total population, which is the highest rate in Europe. One third of total immigrants are living in Vienna. Although SPZs are dealing with these children who have problems in their learning, there is still a great need for such programs which help to solve their learning problems and provide direction for Austrian education system to develop different policies which help to immigrant children to reduce learning difficulties in schools. The researcher attempts to present a portrait, status of immigrants' children in learning difficulties schools, and parents' cooperation and support with school staff. The present study was conducting with following objectives: (1) to know the status of Muslim immigrants' children in learning difficulties school; (2) parents' role in the education of children with learning difficulties; and (3) factors responsible for learning problems among children with learning difficulties.

Literature Review

Immigrants especially youth are now the fastest growing sector of the child population (Landale & Oropesa, 1995). Even in USA, one in five immigrants children have some sort of learning difficulties in their studies and reported by Rong and Prissle (1998). Christensen and Sanat (2007) observed that language plays a vital role in the learning process and the language of instruction in school is often different as spoken at home. The performance of those children remains less who are unable to speak, read, or write the language of instructions in school compared to other classmates (OECD, 2001).

PISA's (2000) study found that pupils from immigrant families performed relatively poorly in the field of literacy, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture considers it an absolute priority to improve the reading skills of pupils whose mother tongue is a language other than German.

Smith and Madsen (2001) identified that some children find learning difficulties in regular classrooms due to many reasons. There are many studies available but a few data are available for children with learning difficulties in Austria.

Parents are well aware of many aspects of the students' background and existing present conditions about which trainers and professionals know very little (James, 1986). Parents can assist by gathering data about the students' performance both before and after the treatment and provisions of special services (Drew, Hardman, & Logan, 1992). If parents are alerted to the critical areas being assessed, they can be more supportive and cooperative in instructional program.

Parents' involvement in the education of their children with intellectual disability causes improvement in

children's outcome (Karnes & Taska, 1975).

Parents' involvement in each stage of intervention is necessary, Baine (1991) suggested following modes for parents' involvement in education of their children with disability: It is necessary for parents to break down each activity into small steps. For example, drinking is an activity, which includes these steps: holding the mug, pouring water in the glass, taking mug to mouth, and drinking water. Parents should teach one step at a time with rewards:

(1) Repetition and drill method is frequently used for children with intellectual disability. Parents have ample time opportunities to repeat the same activity every day for two to three times;

(2) Demonstration of the task is very important in teaching the task to children with intellectual disability. Parents can demonstrate different activities to their children during their daily interaction with children;

(3) Reward helps to increase the possibility of desired behavior and parents are capable delivering rewards in their daily routines.

Methodology

Participants

Keeping in view and available resources, three SPZs, Vienna who showed their strong commitment and consent to participate in the study were selected:

(1) Eighty-one immigrants' children with learning difficulties (67% males) were identified for detail information. The age range of the children was from 6 to 15 years;

(2) Eight parents of children with learning difficulties were involved for data collection. Parents' educational levels ranged from Grade 5 to Grade 12;

(3) Five directors of SPZ were involved. Among these, four were females and one was male. The age range of directors was from 48 to 54.

Instrumentation

Following instruments were developed and used for collection of data: (1) questionnaire for children with learning difficulties; (2) schedule interview for directors of SPZs; and (3) structured interview for parents.

Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

(1) Are parents become equal partner in the education of their children?

(2) Is there need for remedial program for children with learning difficulties?

(3) Is there relationship of parents less interest in students' performance?

Data Collection

The data were collected on self-developed questionnaires in German language by researcher. Information from children was collected by concerned class teachers due to restriction from directors, so guideline for data collection from children was prepared and explained to directors and teachers. In some schools, directors took responsibility to collect data and explain the guidelines to teachers. The guidelines were prepared and explained to school directors. Researcher used translator for interview with parents due to language obstructions.

Data Analysis

There are two types of data: qualitative and quantitative. The SPSS (Statistical Package for Social

Sciences) was used for quantitative data and for qualitative data was analyzed through transcribing the interviews and thematic analysis approach.

Results

The data revealed that 63% immigrants' children with learning difficulties were in Vienna. The enrollment of immigrants' children was high compared to non-Muslim children and majority of children with learning difficulties were male in Vienna (see Table 1).

Table 1

Age and Sex Wise Distribution of Children With Learning Difficulties

Age	Male	Female	Total
7-10	4	0	14
11-14	29	12	41
15-17	8	10	18

The majority of students (65%) fell in the age range of 12-14. The majority of children belonged to Christianity (54%) and Muslim (42%), and remaining (6%) did not expose their religious affiliation. In 2005, at least 18% (in Vienna more than 30%) of the population was either foreign or of foreign origin in Austria. Among these, Muslim is 4.2%. The presence of Muslim children with learning difficulties in SPZ is high as expected with reference to Muslim ratio in Vienna. The majority of gender belonged to male in SPZ. Most of male children belonged to 13 years old, and female belonged to 15 years old of both religions (Christian and Muslim) in SPZ.

The majority of students enrolled with the age of 8-12 years. German proficiency level among children with learning difficulties was good and satisfactory and only 16% have poor level of proficiency which is the main problem during their studies in school. Table 2 is showing religion and German proficiency level of children with learning difficulties.

Table 2

Relationship of Religion and German Proficiency Level of Children With Learning Difficulties

German proficiency level	Islam (%)	Christian (%)	Unknown (%)	Total (%)
Good	26	52	66	48
Satisfactory	50	36	34	40
Poor	24	12	0	12

German proficiency level among Muslim children is low compared to other religions in Vienna.

Role of Parents' Involvement in Education

Majority of parents know the importance of communication with school staff, but due to working condition, fear of insult, and language barriers, they are not in a position to contact school frequently. Parents meetings should be organized in evening or holidays and special training, so that they become equal partner in school in the education of their children. Training must be organized for teachers about how to increase parental involvement in school. Teachers should be bilingual as possible as to communicate with parents. Mother proficiency level was also need to be improved, intensive focus must be given on this issue, and in each school, German-speaking courses should be ensured. Some of the learning difficulties, such as in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, can be eliminated through remedial language teaching program. There are also some problems, such as mothers' proficiency level can be increased after optimal use of existing resources.

Parents can play a vital role in the training and development of children with learning disabilities. They are considered as leading mentors for children in their early life as well as later life. Parents can be involved in any part of education and training of their children. There is no boundary for parents' participation. Structured interviews with parents were conducted. Majority of parents involved in this study were from Turkey, Serbia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Rumania. Majority of parents have information in which class their children are reading, but at the same time, have no information about the performance status of their children in school.

Factors responsible for learning difficulties among immigrants' children: Structured interviews were conducted with parents and directors of schools (SPZs). Following were major factors identified from interview:

(1) Proficiency in German language: Proficiency in school medium of instruction is necessary for better performance. About 16 % children have a level of proficiency in German. However, percentage of sex ratio is the same in both genders. In Vienna, large numbers of children with learning difficulties belonged to Serbia and Turkey and a poor level of proficiency in German among children with Turkish background was recorded more than Serbian children with learning difficulties (Mohsin & Kaplan, 2011);

(2) Parents' less communication with school: Parents' communication with school staff positively affects students' performance. Teachers can get information from parents about home environment and facilities available. The 37% parents have good communication with school staff, 37 % had satisfactory communication with school staff, and 26% had unsatisfactory communication with school staff regarding the performance and others matters of their children.

Majority of parents responded that they have following problems from teachers. Teacher often blame on them about the poor performance of their children in studies, and they have no enough time to visit school in busy hours because they are busy in their work places which sometimes are far away from school; parents have fears of consulting from teachers; teachers never hear their voice, and they only try to force their decisions on them, but parents remain reluctant to communicate with school due to language and communication barriers;

(3) Parents education level: Parents' qualification also plays a very vital role in performance of their children by providing guidance in their studies at home. Among children with learning difficulties, only 1% children's fathers have qualification more than secondary education, 10% have secondary education, and remaining have less than secondary education;

(4) Parents' economic condition: The economic condition of parents is one of the major indicators for better performance of their children. For immigrant's children with learning difficulties, their parents' monthly income range is recorded from 1,000€ to 3,000€, among these, majority of parents have monthly income around 1,000€

(5) Behavior of teacher: Majority of parents reported that language barriers, different system of education in Austria as system in their native country, teaching style and methodology of teachers, labeling of their children, and shift their child back to lower grade class due to low performance were the major factors responsible for creating learning problems in their children;

(6) Below-average talent of children: Low IQ (intelligent quotient) of children also creates problems in better performance of students in school. In this case, teachers should give special attention and use creative methods of teaching.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Majority of children with learning difficulties in SPZs were with immigrants' background. Majority of children belonged to Serbia and Turkey, and at the same time, majority of them were also in Vienna. German

proficiency level in Christian ethnic group was higher than Muslim due to many reasons, such as home environment, education status, and communication with school staff and other ethnic groups. The communication level with school staff was also less among Muslim parents. The majority of children have problems in reading and writing among 82% of children and few have problems in listening and speaking. These factors create problems among children which lead to learning problems or difficulties.

We should encourage parents to keep in touch with school staff about the performance and status of their children and also provide supports to solve school matters. We should realize that they are partners in schools. Majority of parents suggested that due to extra support, use of creative methods of teaching, guidance in simple language, and bilingual school system help to reduce the learning problems among their children.

Many researches proved that successful immigrants children have a longer road to success, so extra year of schooling, creative and innovative methods of teaching can make them possible to show good performance in their studies. Parents' level of involvement and communication with school staff was also observed very low due to working condition of parents, lack of proficiency in German language, fear of blame of low achievements of their children, fear of insult, and bad experience from some teachers (Mohsin & Kaplan, 2011).

The main factors responsible for learning problems among immigrants' children are: (1) below-average talent of children or low intelligent quotient of children; (2) children are socially emotional and neglected; (3) poverty and malnutrition in yearly from one to five years specially; (4) lack of language skills and educated person in the family; (5) little knowledge of German among parents; and (6) no preschool attendance of children, in kindergarten basic skills of children can be improved and they can learn quickly compared to other children. And some teachers also respond the following factors: stress environment of school and home, less motivation among children, and low self-esteem.

Teachers should be trained in the second language acquisition. Classroom teachers and language teachers should work in cooperation. The early start of compulsory school in a number of countries is extremely important for the acquisition of the second language. Children who are not ready or having problems in learning difficulty must be placed in the same class, and extra support must be provided to them. Longer route to success will be useful for children with learning difficulties.

References

- Augur, J. (1985). Guideline for teachers, parents and learners. In B. B. Riddick (Ed.), *Living with dyslexia*. New York: Routledge.
- Baine, D. (1991). *Handicapped children in developing countries*. The Department of Educational Psychology, University of Alberta.
- Bakker, D. J. (1990). *Neuropsychological treatment of dyslexia*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- British Dyslexia Association. (1995). Dyslexia early help better future an idea about the early recognition of dyslexia. Reading Berkshire: British Dyslexia Association, In M. Turner (2000), *Psychological assessment of dyslexia*. England: Whurr Publishers Ltd..
- Christensen, G., & Stanat, P. (2007). *Language policies and practices for helping immigrants and second generation students succeed*. Washington: Migration Policy Institute.
- Clark, M. M. (1970). Reading difficulties in school. In B. B. Riddick (Ed.), *Living with dyslexia*. New York: Routledge.
- Critchley, M. (1963). The problem of developmental dyslexia, proceeding of the royal society of medicine. In C. S. Spafford, & G. S. Grosser (Eds.), *Dyslexia*. London: Allyn and Bacon.
- Crul, M. (2007). *Pathway to Success for the Children of Immigrant*. IMES, University of Amsterdam.
- Drew, C. J., Hardman, M. L., & Logan, R. D. (1992). *Mental retardation: A life cycle approach* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, N. J.: Prentice Hall.
- Dyslexia Association of Ireland. (2002). *Living with dyslexia*. Retrieved April 23, 2003, from <http://www.dyslexia.ie/index.htm>
- Elliott, S. N., Krotochwill, T. R., Littlefield, J., & Travers, J. F. (1999). *Educational psychology*. Singapore: Brown & Benchmark,

Publishers.

- Hinshelwood, J. (1996). A case of dyslexia: A peculiar form of word-blindness. The Lancel, 1451-1454. In C. S. Spafford, & G. S. Grosser (Eds.), *Dyslexia*. London: Allyn and Bacon.
- Hunt, N., & Marshall, K. (1999). *Exceptional children and youth* (2nd ed.). New York: Houghton Mifflin Co..
- Jin, D., & Snowling, M. (2000). *Dyslexia and introductory guide* (2nd ed.). London: Whurr Publishers Ltd..
- Karnes, M., & Taska, J. (1975). Children's responses to intervention programs. In J. J. Gallagher (Ed.), *The application of child development research to exceptional children*. Reston, V. A.: Council for Exceptional Children.
- Kirk, S. A., & Kirk, W. D. (1976). *Psycholinguistic learning disabilities, diagnosis and remediation*. Chicago, I. L.: University of Illinois Press.
- Kirk, S. A., McCarthy, J. J., & Kirk, W. D. (1961). *Illinois test of psycholinguistic abilities* (Experimental ed.). Urbana, I. L.: University of Illinois Press.
- Kozulin, A. (1993). *Educational consequences of the erroneous placement of immigrant children in the primary school*. Final Report to the Israeli Ministry of Education.
- Landale, N. S., & Oropesa, R. S. (1995). *Immigrant children and the children of immigrants: Inter- and intra- ethnic group differences in the United States* (Population Research Group Research Paper No. 95-2). East Lansing: Michigan State University.
- Lerner, J. (2000). *Learning disabilities* (8th ed.). New York: Houghton Mifflin Co..
- Maurie, C. (2007). *Children of immigrants institute of migration s and ethic studies*. Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam.
- McCabe, K., Leticia, J. B., & Batog, C. (2010). *Young children in black immigrant families*. Annotated Bibliography, Prepared by Migration Policy Institute.
- Miles, T. R., & Miles, E. (1990). *Dyslexia: A hundred years on Milton*. Keynes: Open University Press.
- Mohsin, M. N., & Kaplan, H. (2011). Examining the relationship between learning difficulties, religious difficulties, and ethnic background a case study of immigrants children in Austria. *EKEV Academic Review*, 15(48), 2586-2601.
- National Description. (2004). *Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe Austria*. Brussels, Eurydice European Unit Avenue Louise 240, B-1050 Brussels.
- Obrzut, J. E., & Hynd, G. W. (Eds.). (1991). *Neurological foundations of learning disabilities*. New York: Academic Press, Inc..
- OECD. (2009). Children of immigrants in the labor markets of EU and OECD countries: An overview. Paper originally presented at *The Joint Technical Seminar on the Labor Market Integration of the Children of Immigrants*, co-organized by the European Commission and the OECD.
- OECD. (2001). *Knowledge and skills for life: First results from the OECD programme for international student assessment (PISA) 2000*. Paris: OECD.
- PISA. (2009) *Where immigrant students succeed—A comparative review of performance and engagement in PISA 2003*.
- Prior, M. (1996). *Understanding specific learning difficulties*. U. K.: Psychology Press.
- Riddick, B. B. (1995). *Living with dyslexia*. New York: Routledge.
- Robertston, J. (2000). Dyslexia. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 33(2), 137.
- Seymour, P. H. K., & Evans, H. M. (1999). Reading disabilities. *Dyslexia Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 32(5), 394-412.
- Smith, P. K., Shu, S., & Madsen, K. (2001). Characteristics of victims of school bullying: Developmental changes in coping strategies and skills. In J. Juvonen, & S. Graham (Eds.), *Peer harassment in school: The plight of the vulnerable and victimized* (pp. 332-351). New York, N. Y.: Guil-Ford Press.
- Snowling, M. (1987). *Dyslexia*. New York: Basil Black Well Ltd..
- Snowling, M. J. (1987). *Dyslexia: A cognitive developmental perspective*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Spafford, C. S., & Grosser, G. S. (1996). *Dyslexia*. London: Allyn and Bacon.
- Stackhouse, J. (1990). Phonological deficits in developmental reading and spelling disorder. In B. B. Riddick (1995), *Living with dyslexia*. New York: Routledge.
- Suddaby, A. (1992). Reform of the Soviet general school and the likely effect on children with learning difficulties. In J. Dunstan (Ed.), *Soviet education under perestroika*. London: Routledge.
- Tobias, B. (2009). Deinstitutionalisation and community living for people with intellectual disabilities in Austria: History, policies, implementation and research. *Tizard Learning Disability Review*, 14(1), 4-13.
- Turner, M. (2000). *Psychological assessment of dyslexia*. England: Whurr Publishers Ltd..
- <http://www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/bw/abs/Sonderpaedagogik1612.xml>
- http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Austria
- <http://www.eurydice.org>
- http://www.migrationinformation.org/integration/cbi_home.cfm
- <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/39/32/43880918.pdf>