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## Promoting the Social Adjustment of Visually Impaired Students: A Perception of Teachers in Inclusive Set-Up



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**Abstract:** *This study seeks special education teachers' perception of visually impaired students' social adjustment in inclusive settings with qualitative & exploratory design. The sample of the study included 20 teachers working in inclusive schools in the Lahore district. A self-developed semi-structured interview protocol was administered to collect data with a purposive sampling technique. The instrument's validity was assured by expert opinion (N=02). The instrument's reliability was confirmed through an extensive literature review. Four major themes were drawn from the thematic analysis of data i.e., teachers' perception, problems of visually impaired students, peers influence, and teachers' efforts. Findings revealed teachers perceive orientation and mobility, supportive behaviour, the least restrictive environment, assistive technology, and motivational support as major requirements for social adjustment of visually impaired students in an inclusive set-up. The study recommended appropriate training should be provided to teachers of inclusive settings about the social adjustment of visually impaired students.*

**Key Words:** Social Adjustment, Inclusive Education, Visually Impaired Students, Orientation & Mobility, Technology

### Introduction

In a school that practices inclusive education, all students are in the same classroom. It offers not just children with visual impairment but also the group that has been historically excluded from real learning opportunities. In inclusive schools, in which students with special needs are assumed for becoming competent, and develop a social bonding positively with their peers, but fully engaged school community members, there is a culture of cooperation and respect (Lamichhane, 2016).

Any condition that affects an individual's ability for performing daily tasks successfully is known as visual impairment. Infants, toddlers, kids, and teenagers with visual impairments have visual system impairments that affect their ability to learn. According to Collins et al. (2018), loss of vision is a visual impairment that cannot be restored in regular sight despite using glasses and even contact lenses.

Students with visual impairments must learn to adapt socially in a welcoming environment that will aid in their development as well-rounded

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individuals. When they attend classes that are inclusive, students with visual impairments benefit from the normal peer learning environment.

Even educational tools like tactile graphs, assistive technology, maps, the braille alphabet, physically accessible infrastructures, and trained staff are available in inclusive classrooms and resource rooms. Additionally, it consists of specialists in special education who have worked with visually impaired students (Erdem & Yakut, [2022](#)).

Adjustment refers to preserving harmony and peace in the family, the classroom, the community, and the nation. A positive relationship with the teachers and students, as well as a thorough comprehension of social needs and scenarios, are indicators of social adjustment. All children receive a better education in inclusive settings that helps to eradicate bias.

A child is offered such settings by the school with initial interactions with unfamiliar people by facilitating them through social interaction. Inclusive education involves educating special children alongside children without disabilities for the purpose of their educational practices. Because inclusion enhances learning for both classified and unclassified students, inclusive education is crucial. As a result of the social interactions between children with and without visual impairment, Children gain a comprehensive understanding of individual differences in this environment and form new friendships. Inclusion deficiency that students with special educational needs experience has been noted by numerous researchers (Koster et al., [2009](#); Bossaert et al., [2013](#); Hassani et al., [2020](#)).

For students with visual impairments, a collaborative and respectful school culture results in competence and the development of positive social relationships with peers.

The students who are blind become active members of the school community. According to Allen et al. ([2016](#)), there is general agreement that well-being is connected to self-esteem, happiness, and additional social, emotional, and psychological outcomes, all of which serve as crucial indicators of inclusion (Gökmen, [2021](#)).

Inclusive education is an effective universal educational strategy that guarantees access to

quality education by developing institutes which respond to the community and the students' special needs (Hankebo, [2018](#)).

## **The Rationale of the Study**

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To succeed academically and socially, visually impaired students must be socially adjusted to receive peer support and a supportive environment. In this regard, the role of the teacher is important. As social adjustment has been regarded as the very first step of education in an inclusive setting, improving the learning environment for visually impaired students in that setting is crucial. Within the pedagogical discourse, the purpose of inclusion is to make possible participation of visually impaired students in accessing opportunities for education through encouragement and support. Nevertheless, it is still difficult to ensure that both students with and without visual impairment have social participation in their respective classrooms (Lindner et al., [2022](#)).

## **Statement of Problem**

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Due to visual impairment, students with vision impairment face many difficulties. Teachers who work in inclusive environments are dedicated to helping both students with and without visual impairment succeed academically. The problem statement is to seek how teachers view their visually impaired students' ability to adjust socially in an inclusive environment.

## **Objectives of the Study**

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The study's objectives were to:

1. Explore inclusive education teachers' perspectives regarding visually impaired students' social adjustment.
2. Highlight visually impaired students' problems encountered in inclusive settings.
3. Find out peer influence on visually impaired students while their social adjustment.
4. Discover the efforts of the teachers for visually impaired students about their social adjustment in the inclusive setup.

## **Questions of the Research**

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The questions of the research were:

1. What is the perspective of inclusive education teachers regarding visually impaired students' social adjustment?
2. What are the problems of visually impaired students that they encounter in inclusive settings?
3. What is peer influence on visually impaired students while their social adjustment?
4. What are the efforts of the teachers for visually impaired students about their social adjustment in the inclusive setup?

### Study's Significance

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The study is distinctive in that it emphasizes visually impaired students' social adjustment, which is a crucial element in inclusive settings. This study will help special education teachers in understanding the significance of adjusting socially for students with visual impairment within inclusive settings. The knowledge gained from this study will help visually impaired students adjust socially in a supportive environment. The social adjustment of the visually impaired within the inclusive set-up will also be highlighted in this study, along with the issues that arise and how to address them. This study will surely guide administrators and managers maintain a social environment that is fair for students with visual impairment in order to produce effective inclusive education results.

Therefore, all stakeholders will have a better understanding of the significance of social adjustment for visually impaired students within the inclusive environment as the result of this study.

### Limitations & De-limitations of the Study

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- This study was limited to only the province of Punjab due to time and financial constraints.
- This study was delimited to only the teachers working in schools with inclusive education in Lahore city only.
- A semi-structured interview was developed to use as an instrument due to the unavailability of the standardized instrument.

### Literature Review

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Maintaining social connections is one of the difficulties that blind or visually impaired students

face. Faculty and classmates in an educational setting provide social assistance to students with visual impairments. The three pillars of social support are constructive help, empathic behaviour, and cooperation (Bodaghi et al., 2017; Manyumwa, 2018).

Students who are blind or visually impaired turn on staff members for social support when they face difficulties such as a lack of information and training. Their social and emotional development as well as their academic learning may benefit from this.

They deal with a range of problems, including sadness, anxiety, and terror. Auestad, 2017. In inclusive settings, accommodations are essential for kids with visual impairments. There are numerous lodgings available. The move towards more inclusive practises, including an increase in placement in settings not specifically designed for students with vision impairments, has resulted in significant changes in curriculum design, delivery, and support for children and young people with vision impairments in recent years (McLinden et al., 2016).

The value of each student's unique contribution is valued in inclusive education, which permits these diverse groups for everyone's benefit.

The notion of inclusion does not seem to be clear or consistent in the literature (Nilholm and Göransson, 2017). Inclusion is defined by Nilholm and Göransson (2017) as (a) placing students with SEN in classrooms with typically developing students; (b) addressing the social and academic needs of students with SEN; (c) addressing the social and academic needs of all students; and (d) fostering communities with particular traits (p. 441).

The concepts in the current study are based on the inclusion concept Felder (2018) developed, which highlights that inclusion comprises two interacting dimensions: the societal and the interpersonal. While the societal aspect relates to a larger social environment, the interpersonal aspect refers to relationships based on interactions and emotions. The majority of a child's and adolescent's life is spent in school. As a result, it is now widely agreed upon in research and educational policy that schools must transform into settings where all students feel

included and have equitable access to opportunities (UNESCO, 2020).

Similar to how the concept of inclusion is viewed differently, inclusive education is also seen as a tactic to foster inclusion. Different approaches to educational policy and practice are the end outcome. "(...) provide all learners with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers" is the stated objective of the current study (Watkins, 2017, p. 1). As stated on page 1 of the report, inclusive education is "(...) a systemic approach to education for all learners of any age" (Watkins, 2017).

The teachers' ability to evaluate their students' emotional inclusion, academic self-concept, and social participation depended on how well they used inclusive teaching methods. (Lindner and others, 2022).

Some sighted classmates dislike the welcoming custom. However, some educators and students who are blind support inclusive education. Equal educational opportunity is established by inclusive education, which also shows that in the US and Saudi Arabia, normal peers are not covered by the proposal. Normal peers believe they would be unable to follow the lessons being taught (Dare et al., 2016).

## Research Methodology

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It was an exploratory, qualitative study. It's common to assume that exploratory research is qualitative and inductive.

## The Population of the Study

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The populations of the study were the teachers from the schools of inclusive education in Lahore.

## Sample of the Study

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Teachers working in inclusive education institutions made up the study's sample (N = 20). Teachers ranged in age from 26 to 44 years old and older. Data for this study were gathered using a purposeful sampling strategy.

## Data Collection Tool

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The tool for data collection was a self-developed semi-structured interview. This instrument was comprised of 11 items and these items were

associated with the research topic and objectives of the study.

## Validity & Reliability of the Instrument

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There were field experts (N=03) who assured the content validity of the study's instrument and declared the instrument as valid for the study. Moreover, an extensive literature review helped the researchers to confirm the instrument's reliability.

## Analysis of the Data

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After collecting the data, the interviews of the participants were interpreted & transcribed for the purpose of coding & thematic analysis. For this purpose, the interview of the participants was read by the researchers carefully. Then, open coding was administered to find similar answers from the participants. Categories were further drawn to make the code-based expression and idea from the data. These categories were elaborated with their sub-themes. At last, \_\_\_ to reach the findings & conclusion of the study, four major themes were generated. These four major themes were explained and supported with relevant literature as well.

## Study's Ethics

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Before commencing the data collection process, permission to collect data from the participants was taken as a part of research ethics. The participants were given confidence that all information taken from them, will be kept confidential and their names will not be revealed in this regard. Furthermore, these participants were also assured that their information will be used only for research purposes.

## Study's Procedure

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The researchers selected the topic first and then review the literature to get a comprehensive understanding of the particular research area. After the selection of study objectives and study questions, a semi-structured interview protocol was developed by the researchers and administered accordingly. The data was collected and analyzed through coding & thematic analysis techniques. There were four major themes that emerged from the interview transcription of the collected data. Then, the findings of the study

were drawn to reach towards conclusion and recommendation for the study.

## Data Analysis

### Coding & Thematic Analysis

On the basis of the interview transcription, data was analyzed. The information from this interview was compiled into an interview transcription after going through a semi-structured interview technique. Demographic information and participant responses made up its two elements. The following is an examination of the demographic data:

### Demographic Information

**Table 1**

*Participants' Age*

Age	Sample	Frequency
26-30	5	25%
32-35	6	30%
36-39	6	30%
40-44	3	15%

Table 1 shows that 25% of participants are between the age of 26 to 30, 30% of participants are between the age of 32 to 35, 30% of participants are between the age of 36 and 39, 15% of participants are between the age of 40 to 44. It means that a maximum of 30% of participants were between the age of 26-39.

**Table 2**

*Gender of Participants*

Gender	Sample	Frequency
Male	14	75%
Female	6	25%
Total	20	100%

Table 2 shows that 30% of participants are female and 70% of participants are male. It means that the maximum number of participants 70% were male

**Table 3**

*Qualification of the Participants*

Qualifications	Sample	Frequency
M.A.	15	75%
M.Phil	4	20%
Graduation	1	5%

Table 3 depicts that 75% of the participants' qualification is M.A special education, 20% of the participants' qualification is M.phil, and 5% of the participants' qualification is graduation. It means that the maximum number of participants i.e. 75% were qualified in M.A. special education.

**Table 4**

*Experience of the Participants*

Experience	Sample	Frequency
Above 5years	15	75%
Below 5years	5	25%

Table 4 shows that 75% of participants experienced above 5 years and 25% of participants experienced below 5 years. It means that the maximum number of participants experienced 75% were above 5 years.

### Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis of the data has been given below. Themes and categories have been drawn from the transcribed data. The categories include frequencies to reach towards findings.

### Research Question 1

What is the perspective of inclusive education teachers regarding visually impaired students' social adjustment?

### Theme 1: Teachers' Perception

The areas of orientation and mobility, supporting behaviour, least restrictive environment, assistive technology, and motivational support all contributed to the development of this theme. The lesson plans represent the professors' opinions on how visually impaired pupils can adjust to social situations in inclusive environments. Since both of these strategies work to foster social inclusion, it has been claimed that they might be seen as complementary (Douglas et al., 2019).

### Category 1: Orientation & Mobility (O & M)

This category shows that only a few of the participants responded that students with visual impairment can adjust socially in an inclusive set-

up. If they are good in orientation and mobility. One of the participants expressed that

“If students with visual impairment are good in orientation and mobility, then they can adjust themselves in an inclusive set-up.”

### **Category 2: Supportive Behavior**

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This category depicts that few of the participants narrated that children with Visual Impairment adjust socially in inclusive settings if teachers and peers of the visually impaired are cooperative. These participants also stated that the supportive behaviour of the teachers and peers helps visually impaired students to adjust socially in an inclusive setting. One of the participants responded that

“If teachers and peers of the visually impaired are cooperative. Then they can adjust themselves in an inclusive setup. If none cooperative they find difficulty in adjustment.”

### **Category 3: Least Restrictive Environment.**

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This category states that only a few of the participants articulated that students with visual impairment can adjust socially in an inclusive set-up by providing the least restrictive environment (L.R.E). These participants also expressed that visually impaired students perform well if they are facilitated in a barrier-free environment. One of the participants described that

“I think a barrier-free environment is very necessary for every visually impaired student.”

### **Category 4: Assistive Technology**

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This category demonstrates how vital assistive technology is to help visually impaired pupils adjust socially in a welcoming environment. These participants also discussed how assistive technology enables visually impaired kids to maintain relationships with their teachers and peer groups on social media. According to one of the participants

“They can easily adjust themselves and get an education in an inclusive setting because they have the technology and use mobile devices.”

### **Category 5: Motivational Support**

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This category depicts that the majority of the participants expressed that visually impaired

students can be adjusted socially in an inclusive setting if they are provided with motivational support by their teachers and families. These participants also stated that cooperation, interaction, and motivation to visually impaired students play a significant role in adjusting them socially in an inclusive set-up. One of the participants narrated that

“Visually impaired students observe deeply the sentences which are blended with cooperative, interactive and supportive sentences, spoken by their near ones.”

### **Research Question 2**

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What are the problems that visually impaired students encountered in inclusive settings?

### **Theme 2: Problems of Visually Impaired Students**

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This theme reflects the problems which are experienced mostly by visually impaired students in their inclusive settings. This theme has emerged from the categories of movement problems, untrained teachers, and non-friendly environments. Visually impaired students experience various problems in inclusive settings. It includes rejection by peers, accessibility problems, and difficulty in syllabi with a few other difficulties as well (Zaid, 2017)

#### **Category 1: Movement Problems**

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This category shows that half of the participants responded that students with visual impairment face problems moving from one place to another place. These participants stated that due to poor understanding of the infrastructure, the visually impaired face difficulty in movement. One of the participants expressed that

“My students with visual impairment mostly face the problem of movement.”

#### **Category 2: Untrained Teachers**

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This category shows that untrained teachers for visually impaired students in an inclusive setting become problems for their visually impaired students. These participants also narrated that due to the incompetency of untrained teachers, visually impaired students face difficulties in



adjusting themselves socially. One of the participants expressed that

“Few schools hire such teachers who have no idea to deal with visually impaired students in their inclusive set-up.”

### **Category 3: Non-Friendly Environment**

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This category shows that the majority of participants described how a setting that is inclusive is not friendly to pupils who are blind or visually impaired. These participants stated that children with vision impairments experience behavioural and attitude problems in their classrooms. As one of the participants described that

“Visually impaired students feel much difficulty in their inclusive classroom due to behavioural or attitude issues of their peer groups.”

### **Research Question 3**

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What is peer influence on visually impaired students while their social adjustment?

### **Theme 3: Influence of Peers**

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This theme has arisen from the criteria of excellent learning and confidence building that are listed below. This subject demonstrates how peers can affect how well visually impaired students integrate socially in an inclusive environment. According to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, children with disabilities are entitled to inclusive pedagogical, geographic, longitudinal, consequential, and environmental education (Fanu et al., [2022](#)).

### **Category 1: Quality Learning**

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This category depicts that the majority of the participants expressed that visually impaired students gain quality learning if the influence of peer relationships is high. These participants also stated that to make quality learning for the visually impaired students, they make a grouping of visually impaired with their sighted peers in the class. One of the participants narrated that

“I make the group of two people in a class, one is visually impaired students and the other is sighted so that peer relationship could enhance the learning of both students.”

### **Category 2: Confidence Development**

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This category shows that half of the participants narrated that most sighted peers fully support their visually impaired class fellow which becomes the reason for confidence development among visually impaired students. These participants expressed that the visually impaired feel much more confident and interact with each other. One of the participants described that

“I have many visually impaired students who have very high confidence to speak at any stage in their lives.”

### **Research Question 4:**

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What are the efforts of the teachers for visually impaired students about their social adjustment in the inclusive setup?

### **Theme 4: Efforts by Teachers**

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The teachers' attempts to help their visually impaired students acclimatise to acceptable social settings as part of inclusive education are shown in this theme. The categories of interaction improvement, language and behaviour improvement, collaborative environment, and fascinating personality have led to the development of this theme. Teachers should make an effort to help sighted and visually impaired pupils build rapport and communication skills. The skills of students in higher education in a range of areas, including information literacy, communication, teamwork, and digital material, have been the subject of numerous studies (Blayone et al., [2017](#)).

### **Category 1: Interaction Enhancement**

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This category depicts that half of the participants responded that teachers do efforts to develop interaction between visually impaired students and sighted peers. These participants encourage sighted peers of visually impaired students to interact with each other to make firm social adjustments for visually impaired students. As one of the participants narrated that

“I try to make interaction between a blind student and sighted students.”

### **Category 2: Language and Behavior Improvement**

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This category displays that few of the participants

narrated that teachers should do efforts to develop good language skills. These participants described that mostly they focus on a visually impaired student who has a problem in language development. For this reason, Behavior problems are cured with behavioural therapies. One of the participants described that

"I performed many times behavioural therapy to improve the behaviour of the visually impaired students to adjust them socially."

### **Category 3: Collaborative Environment**

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This category shows that the majority of participants said they work to foster a collaborative environment in their institution amongst students who have visual impairments and their sighted peers. These participants also stated that a collaborative environment in any institute adjusts socially to the visually impaired students. One of the participants expressed that

"I give various activities to students with blindness and any sighted students to have collaborative working."

### **Category 4: Fascinating Personality**

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This category shows that few of the participants articulated that they focus on personality grooming of the visually impaired students to make it fascinating for others, especially their sighted peers. These participants also stated that visually impaired students have good personalities and become fascinated with their sighted peers and in this way, visually impaired students adjust socially. As one of the participants expressed that

"Social skills you teach to students without visually impaired students in an inclusive set-up help in personality grooming."

### **Findings**

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The followings are the findings of this study:

#### **Teachers' Perception**

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This study found that teachers teaching in inclusive settings perceive orientation and mobility, supportive behaviour, the least restrictive environment, assistive technology, and motivational support as the major requirement for

visually impaired students for social adjustment in an inclusive set-up.

### **Problems of Visually Impaired Students**

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According to this study, visually impaired pupils in an inclusive environment experience the problem of movement from one place to another place. Further problems include untrained teachers dealing with visually impaired students and a non-friendly environment.

### **Influence of Peer**

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This study discovered that, in an inclusive environment, peer influence has a significant impact on how well visually impaired children adjust socially. The influence of peers to a positive extent results in quality learning for visually impaired students and confidence development.

### **Efforts by Teachers**

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From the perspective of efforts made by teachers, This study found that teachers play a significant role in enhancing interaction between visually impaired students and their peers, language and behavioural improvement, provision of a collaborative environment, and making the personality of the student with visual impairment much fascinated for others.

### **Discussion**

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In a supportive setting, students with visual impairments can socially acclimatize. A barrier-free environment, accommodations, teaching support, and peer training are just a few of the requirements. The value of "Inclusive schools (...) adapting the learning environment to meet the needs of an individual student, rather than forcing the student to fit in the school system" (Erten and Savage, [2012](#), p. 222).

In an inclusive environment, visually impaired students encounter numerous challenges. They struggle with mobility and orientation. They occasionally experience behavioural problems, peer rejection, and difficulty in all curricula.

Due to a lack of knowledge and training, many teachers are unaware of the fundamental requirements of their students and are unable to provide for them in an inclusive environment. Little ([2017](#)) argues that it's crucial to provide



opportunities for involvement in educational settings, especially for students who struggle to interact with their peers in socially acceptable ways.

Most of the time, visually impaired students rely on their sighted peers for assistance because they need it.

The majority of sighted peers work cooperatively and encourage their visually impaired students to form friendships, feel confident, and interact with one another. Students with SEN have fewer friends in class or less social support than their classmates without SEN (Golden et al., [2021](#)).

In an inclusive environment, teachers employ a variety of strategies to ensure that all students learn effectively, and they have the opportunity to foster friendships, communication abilities, self-assurance, and interaction among visually impaired students. Koster et al. (2009) evaluated earlier research when considering social inclusion and pointed to friendships/relationships, contacts/interactions, the perspective of the student with SEN, and acceptance by classmates as crucial elements.

### **Education Implication**

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From the perspective of social adjustment, this research gives a comprehensive understanding that how the challenges can be identified in an inclusive setting for students with impairment and how can these challenges be tackled. It will give rise to thoughts about the social adjustment of students with visual impairment. An inclusive setup requires the professional expertise of the teachers to endorse a level playing field for all. Therefore, this study is beneficial for the teachers working in inclusive settings to implement the particular guidelines suggested in the recommendations of this study. Because inclusive education encourages diversity and the distinctive contribution each student makes to the classroom, it will be helpful for visually impaired kids. Every youngster feels secure and a part of the group when they are in an inclusive environment. Students who are visually impaired will learn to interact, make friends, and feel confident. Therefore, this study will also be helpful for visually impaired students to adjust themselves socially in an inclusive setting for the purpose of interacting with the community in future life.

Additionally, This study will give rise to the thoughts for all stakeholders to develop such a friendly and adjustable environment for visually impaired students in an inclusive setting that could enhance the trend of inclusive education in Pakistan.

### **Conclusion**

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The findings of this study brought to light a number of issues that students with vision impairments face in inclusive settings. However, the issues can be resolved by focusing on orientation and movement abilities, encouraging positive behaviours, and offering peer counselling. This will guarantee that kids with visual impairments may socially mature in age-appropriate ways within inclusive environments. It is a decisive step towards their social integration in the inclusive environment if visually impaired pupils are given the necessary facilities and assistance.

Although the phenomenon is not a new one in the context of Pakistan, inclusive education is dependent on teachers and their particular effort to promote the culture of inclusive education by developing confidence, supporting peer relationships, and working on the communication skills of students with visual impairment.

### **Recommendations**

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The followings are the recommendations of the study:

1. Teachers in inclusive set-ups should improve orientation & mobility skills by engaging visually impaired students through effective techniques.
2. Inclusive education schools should provide the least restrictive environment, need-based assistive technology, and motivational support to visually impaired students.
3. Appropriate training should be provided to the teachers working in inclusive settings to deal with visually impaired students about their social adjustment.
4. When instructing in inclusive environments, teachers should encourage cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and the development of pertinent skills among students with visual impairment and their classmates.

The school education department should create vacancies for special educators of the visual impairment field who could work together with

general education teachers for result oriented approach regarding inclusive education.

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