



The Role of Inclusive Education in Enhancing Social Skills of Students with Visual Impairment

Dr. (Mrs.) Patricia Ellah Okim Agbor¹ & Appolonia Ukamaka Ezekperechi²

Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling
Faculty of Education, Rivers State University, Nkpolu Oroworokwu
Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria
Phone Number: 08033697766/07032048702
Email: patricia.agbor@ust.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

Inclusive education plays a pivotal role in fostering the social skill development of students with visual impairment, by promoting equal participation and interaction in classroom settings. Inclusive education is a cornerstone of equitable learning, providing students with disabilities, including those with visual impairments, the opportunity to participate fully in society. Teachers play a central role in facilitating this process by adopting adaptive teaching strategies, fostering a supportive classroom atmosphere, and utilizing assistive technologies to ensure equal participation. This paper explores the concept of inclusive education, visual impairment, and social skills. The paper further explores the role of inclusive education in fostering social skills such as communication, empathy, collaboration, problem-solving, conflict resolution and so on, among students with visual impairment. It highlights the challenges, and discusses strategies for fostering social integration of visually impaired students in inclusive settings. The paper concludes with suggestions for effective inclusive practices to enhance social skill development for the visually impaired students.

Keywords: Inclusive education, visual impairment, social skills, Students

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone for personal and societal development. It encompasses the systematic process of facilitating learning, acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits. Yet, students with visual impairments often face challenges in developing social skills due to limitations in accessing visual cues essential for social interaction. Inclusive education has emerged as a transformative approach in contemporary educational discourse, emphasizing the integration of students with diverse needs into mainstream classrooms. It emphasizes removing barriers to learning and participation (Ainscow, 2020). Through various pedagogical methods, education aims to empower individuals to reach their full potential and contribute meaningfully to society. In recent years, the concept of inclusive education has gained prominence as a transformative approach in educational pedagogy. Baepler (2023) define inclusive education as an educational setting where students of all abilities and backgrounds learn together in the same classrooms, ensuring equal access to learning opportunities. This approach recognizes the right of every individual, regardless of differences, to receive a high-quality education. As noted by Jardinez and Reyes (2024), "inclusive education represents a paradigm shift in education".

However, implementing inclusive education is not without challenges. Review by Kurowski, (2022) identified several barriers to inclusion in primary schools, including inadequate teacher training, lack of resources, and societal attitudes towards disability. Despite these challenges, the benefits of inclusive education are well-documented. It fosters empathy, tolerance, and respect

among students, preparing them for the complexities of the real world. Moreover, inclusive settings have been shown to enhance academic achievement for all students, not just those with disabilities (Jardinez & Reyes 2024). A recent study has also highlighted the role of technology in supporting inclusive education. For instance, Jardinez & Reyes (2024), found that assistive technologies can enhance learning experiences for students with specific learning difficulties, thereby promoting inclusivity in higher education. Furthermore, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) as an educational tool has shown promise in creating more personalized and accessible learning environments. Report by the Special Olympics Global Center for Inclusion in Education as noted by Willings (2025) indicates that both educators and parents believe AI can foster more inclusive learning settings, though concerns about reduced human interaction persist.

Thus, while the journey towards fully inclusive education systems is ongoing and fraught with challenges, the commitment to providing equitable learning opportunities for all students remain steadfast. This makes continued research, policy development, and the integration of innovative technologies essential to overcome existing barriers and to realize the transformative potential of inclusive education. Additionally, teachers can serve as role models by demonstrating empathy, patience, and effective communication skills. When educators foster an inclusive and supportive classroom culture, visually impaired students are more likely to feel valued and confident in their social interactions. Training teachers in the use of assistive technologies, such as screen readers and braille devices, further enables them to support visually impaired students in accessing educational content and participating in collaborative activities (UNESCO, 2020). For example, activities like group projects, role-playing exercises, and peer mentoring programmes encourage visually impaired students to collaborate with their sighted peers. These interactions not only enhance their social skills but also help sighted students develop a greater understanding of diversity and inclusion. Research by Zebehazy (2018) highlights that inclusive classrooms provide a safe space for all students to learn from each other's experiences, thereby fostering mutual growth and understanding. Inclusive education also empowers visually impaired students by providing them with opportunities to showcase their talents and abilities. Participation in extracurricular activities, such as sports, music, and drama, allows students to build self-confidence and improve their social interactions. For instance, visually impaired students can participate in adaptive sports or join school clubs, where they can interact with peers and develop a sense of belonging (American Foundation for the Blind, 2021). Social skills are the abilities we use to communicate and interact with others, encompassing verbal and nonverbal communication, understanding social cues, and building relationships. These skills are crucial for positive interactions, making friends, and navigating social situations effectively. Goleman (2021) note that social skills enhance students with disabilities by enabling them to interact effectively, build relationships, and participate fully in their communities. These skills are crucial for navigating social situations, improving communication, and boosting self-esteem. A social skill is any competence facilitating interaction and communication with others where social rules and relations are created, communicated, and changed in verbal and nonverbal ways. The process of learning these skills is called socialization (Willings, 2025)

Moreover, inclusive schools often organize awareness campaigns and workshops to educate the school community about visual impairment. These initiatives help create a more accepting and supportive environment, where visually impaired students feel encouraged to engage socially without fear of judgment or discrimination (Helen Keller International, 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Clarifications

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is a transformative approach to education that seeks to provide equal access, opportunities, and participation for all learners, regardless of their individual differences, abilities, or disabilities (Forgrave, 2022). Rooted in the principles of equity and social justice, inclusive education aims to create a learning environment that accommodates the diverse needs of all students

and fosters their full potential (UNESCO, 2020). Inclusive education is defined as an educational approach where schools are designed to welcome and support the learning of all students, including those with disabilities, linguistic differences, or socio-economic disadvantages. It is not limited to merely integrating students with disabilities as well as those with visual impairment into mainstream classrooms but emphasizes restructuring educational systems to meet the diverse needs of every learner (Wolffe, 2022).

The origins of inclusive education can be traced back to international declarations and frameworks that advocate for the rights of individuals with disabilities. Notably, the Salamanca Statement, adopted in 1994, called for inclusive schooling and asserted that regular schools with inclusive orientations are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, and building an inclusive society. This landmark declaration underscored the principle that every child has a fundamental right to education and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning (UNESCO, 2020).

Implementing inclusive education involves several critical components. Firstly, it requires the adaptation of curricula to accommodate diverse learning styles and paces, ensuring that educational content is accessible and relevant to all students. This may involve differentiating instruction, employing universal design for learning principles, and utilizing assistive technologies to support various learning needs. Secondly, teacher training and professional development are paramount. Educators must be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to effectively teach in diverse classrooms, fostering an environment where all students can thrive. Thirdly, fostering a school culture that values diversity and promotes inclusivity is essential. This includes cultivating positive attitudes among staff and students, implementing anti-bullying policies, and encouraging collaborative learning experiences (Loreman, 2020). The benefits of inclusive education are multifaceted. For students with disabilities, such as or learning difficulties, inclusion in mainstream classrooms can lead to improved academic outcomes, enhanced social skills, and greater opportunities for peer interactions. Research indicates that inclusive settings can promote higher levels of engagement and motivation among these students, contributing to their overall development. Moreover, inclusive education benefits all students by fostering an environment of empathy, respect, and understanding. Exposure to diverse perspectives and abilities prepares students for life in a heterogeneous society, promoting social cohesion and reducing prejudices (Jardinez & Reyes, 2024).

Visual Impairment

Visual impairment refers to the loss of sight even when a person makes use of corrective lenses (Ainscow, 2020). Visual impairment is the reduced sight caused by eye diseases, accidents or eye conditions present at birth (Agesa, 2014). It is a partial or complete loss of vision that affects an individual's ability to perform daily activities, even with corrective measures as observed by Yihun (2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines visual impairment as a significant loss of vision that cannot be corrected fully with glasses, contact lenses, or medical intervention. According to WHO (2019), visual impairment is categorized into two primary groups:

- **Low Vision:** A person with low vision has a visual acuity of less than 6/18 but equal to or better than 3/60 in the better eye with the best possible correction. Low vision refers to a significant visual impairment that cannot be fully corrected with glasses, contacts, or surgery, making daily activities difficult. It's characterized by reduced visual acuity (sharpness) or a narrow field of vision (Rani, 2024).
- **Blindness:** This is defined as a visual acuity of less than 3/60 or a corresponding visual field of fewer than 10 degrees in the better eye. Blindness refers to the complete or nearly complete loss of sight, meaning an inability to see, or a loss of vision that cannot be corrected with glasses or contact lenses. In its most severe form, blindness means an inability to see even light (Rani, 2024).

WHO (2019), emphasizes that visual impairment affects not just individuals' ability to see but also their overall quality of life, including education, employment, and social participation. American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) stresses that visual impairment is not just a medical condition but also a social and educational issue. According to the AFB (2021), visual impairment includes a spectrum of conditions ranging from total blindness to partial sight. The organization emphasizes the importance of accessibility, rehabilitation, and assistive technology in enabling individuals with visual impairments to live independently and productively. AFB also highlights the psychosocial implications, noting that individuals with visual impairments often face stigma and barriers in social integration (AFB, 2021).

The National Eye Institute (NEI) focuses on the clinical aspects of visual impairment, stating that it is caused by conditions such as cataracts, glaucoma, macular degeneration, and diabetic retinopathy. NEI (2020) categorizes visual impairment based on the extent of visual function and its impact on daily life. The NEI underscores the importance of early detection and intervention to prevent avoidable blindness and to support individuals with irreversible vision loss through adaptive strategies and tools. Helen Keller International (HKI) focuses on the educational and advocacy aspects of visual impairment. Rani (2024), noted that education for visually impaired individuals must include specialized teaching methods, such as braille literacy and orientation and mobility training. HKI also advocates for inclusive education, where children with visual impairments learn alongside their sighted peers in mainstream schools.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) views visual impairment as a significant barrier to achieving inclusive education. UNESCO (2020) emphasizes the need for accessible learning materials, teacher training, and assistive technologies to ensure that visually impaired students can access quality education. UNESCO also highlights the importance of universal design in creating learning environments that accommodate students with diverse needs.

Social Skills

Social skills are abilities that enable individuals to interact effectively and harmoniously with others. They are essential for individuals to navigate relationships and participate effectively in society. It includes communication, empathy, conflict resolution, teamwork, Problem-Solving, social etiquette, turn-taking in conversations and active listening (Rani, 2024). They are critical for building relationships and participating in group activities. The American Psychological Association (2019), defines social skills as "a set of learned abilities that enable an individual to interact competently and appropriately in a given social context. For visually impaired students, acquiring social skills can be challenging due to limited access to visual cues and social interactions. However, with targeted interventions and training, these students can develop the skills needed for meaningful social engagement. The development of social skills begins in early childhood and continues throughout one's life. Early interactions with caregivers and peers play a crucial role in shaping these abilities.

In educational settings, fostering social skills is essential for students' overall development. According to Crewdson, Kalkusch and Guo (2022), social skills are acquired through learning, and the school environment is ideal for developing these skills, especially between the ages of six and nine, when children become more conscious of themselves and their peers. The significance of social skills extends beyond personal interactions; they are linked to broader societal outcomes. It is needful to reset and restore our behaviours and emotions to effectively address mental health, addiction, and abuse issues. Therefore, developing compassion and empathy is crucial for building and maintaining meaningful relationships (Reuters, 2025). Social skills are essential competencies that facilitate effective and appropriate interactions within society. Their development is influenced by early life experiences, educational environments, and ongoing personal growth. Emphasizing the cultivation of these skills can lead to improved individual well-being and a more harmonious society. These social skills are discussed below:

Communication skills

Understanding Non –verbal communications: Communication is the process of exchanging information, ideas, or emotions through verbal and non-verbal means. Effective communication includes clarity, conciseness, and active engagement. Visually impaired individuals cannot see facial expressions, body language or gestures, they may need explicit instruction on interpreting tone of voice, pauses, and verbal cues. For example, Role-playing exercises can be used in classrooms where students practice expressing their thoughts clearly in a given scenario (Hargie, 2021).

Empathy: Empathy is the ability to understand and share another person's emotions and perspectives. It is crucial for fostering relationships and social harmony. For Example: Perspective-taking activities, such as "walking in someone else's shoes," where students discuss how they would feel in different situations (Goleman, 2021).

Collaboration: Collaboration involves working with others to achieve a common goal. It requires mutual respect, sharing responsibilities, and effective teamwork. This can be taught using group projects where students must divide tasks, contribute ideas, and achieve a shared objective. Collaboration or teamwork is the ability to work effectively within a group to complete tasks or projects. It requires cooperation, accountability, and communication. For instance, Collaborative sports or classroom activities where students must rely on one another to succeed (Slavin, 2021).

Problem-Solving: Problem-solving is the ability to identify challenges, analyze them, and develop effective solutions. It enhances critical thinking and decision-making. An example may be in case studies where students analyze a real-world issue and propose solutions using logical reasoning (Dweck, 2023).

Conflict Resolution: Conflict resolution involves addressing disputes constructively and finding solutions that benefit all parties. It helps maintain positive relationships. For example, Mediation role-play where students practice resolving disputes using negotiation strategies (Deutsch, Coleman and Marcus, 2022). It can also be taught using step-by-step problem-solving processes, like stating the issue, listening to others, and proposing solutions. Example, include role-play scenarios involving conflicts (Zebehazy, 2013).

Social Etiquette: Social etiquette refers to the accepted behaviors and manners in social interactions. It includes politeness, respect, and cultural awareness. This can be taught using classroom discussions on different social norms and practicing greeting etiquette across cultures.

Turn-Taking in Conversation: Turn-taking is the ability to recognize when to speak and when to listen in a conversation. It promotes respectful and structured dialogue. For example, Structured debates where students must wait for their turn before contributing to the discussion (Cameron, 2022).

Active Listening: Active listening involves paying full attention to a speaker, understanding their message, and responding thoughtfully. It enhances comprehension and interpersonal connections. This can be taught through listening exercises where students summarize what they heard from a peer before responding (Brownell, 2021).

Teaching social skills to the visually impaired

Generally speaking, some of the social skills for the visually impaired can be taught in the following ways:

- i. **Role-Playing Activities:** Role-playing allows visually impaired individuals to practice social interactions in a controlled environment, helping them develop confidence in various situations. For instance, a teacher can simulate a scenario where a student must ask for assistance at a store, providing feedback on tone, wording, and posture (Sacks & Wolffe, 2021).
- ii. **Verbal Descriptions and Explanations:** Since visually impaired individuals rely heavily on auditory cues, detailed verbal descriptions help them understand social norms and non-verbal behaviors. For example, educators can describe facial expressions, gestures, and spatial awareness in conversations (Hatlen, 2022).
- iii. **Peer Interaction Opportunities:** Interaction with peers fosters social skills, confidence, and relationship-building in a natural setting. For instance, organizing peer-led group activities, such as storytelling circles, where visually impaired students engage in social communication (Lewis & Allman, 2023).
- iv. **Audio Feedback and Practice:** Providing recorded feedback allows visually impaired learners to refine their conversational tone, clarity, and articulation. For example, Recording a student's speech and playing it back to discuss improvements in pronunciation and clarity (Ferrell, 2023).
- v. **Teaching Empathy and Perspective:** Encouraging students to understand different perspectives helps them navigate social settings effectively. For example, using group discussions where students describe their feelings in various scenarios, promoting awareness and connection (Goleman, 2021).
- vi. **Self-Advocacy:** Self-advocacy enables visually impaired individuals to express their needs and seek assistance confidently. For instance, teaching students how to request accommodations and articulate their needs in school or public settings politely (Wolffe, 2022).

Importance of Inclusive Education

Integration of students with visual impairment in inclusive settings not only benefits these individuals, but also promotes empathy, understanding and interpersonal relationship among peers. Inclusive education benefits all stakeholders within educational community, educators, policymakers, curriculum designers and researchers, as it highlights the practical strategies and systemic changes required to enhance the social skills of the visually impaired students (Mitchell, 2014). They include:

Academic Benefits

Inclusive education ensures that visually impaired students have access to the same curriculum as their sighted peers, which is essential for their academic growth. Hadidi & Al-Khateeb (2015), observed that general education teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with visual impairment were both positive and negative and were influenced by teacher-, student-, and environment-related factors. This highlights the importance of teacher preparedness and the need for supportive environments to facilitate effective learning for visually impaired students.

Social Integration

Being part of an inclusive classroom allows visually impaired students to interact with their sighted peers, promoting mutual understanding and reducing social stigmas. As noted by the Teachers Institute (2023), creating an inclusive environment for students with visual impairments is crucial in fostering a society that celebrates diversity and provides equal opportunities for all. This inclusive setting encourages meaningful relationships and social development for visually impaired students.

Technological Advancements

The integration of assistive technologies in inclusive classrooms has significantly enhanced learning experiences for visually impaired students. Innovations such as screen readers, Braille e-books, and voice-assisted learning platforms enable these students to access educational materials effectively. Report by Battle for Blindness (2023) emphasizes that technology plays a pivotal role in bridging the educational divide, providing visually impaired students with tools to access quality education. Inclusive education is essential for the holistic development of visually impaired students. By embracing inclusive practices, educational institutions can ensure that all students, regardless of their visual abilities, have the opportunity to learn, grow, and succeed in a supportive environment.

Benefits of Inclusive Education in Enhancing Social Skills of Students with Visual Impairment:

Inclusive education significantly enhances the social skills of students with visual impairments by providing them with opportunities to interact, communicate, and build relationships within mainstream educational settings. There are benefits to be derived from inclusive education which would enhance social skills of students with visual impairment. These include:

i. Improved Interpersonal Relationships and Social Communication Skills

Inclusive classrooms facilitate regular interactions between students with visual impairments and their sighted peers, promoting the development of essential social communication skills. systematic review by Caron, Barras, Nispen, & Ruffieus (2023), highlights that social skills are primarily acquired through imitation using the visual system, and inclusive settings can help mitigate challenges faced by visually impaired students in this area.

ii. Increased Confidence and Self-Esteem

Participating in an inclusive educational environment fosters a sense of belonging among students with visual impairments, which can lead to enhanced self-esteem and confidence. Miyauchi (2020) found that inclusive education is linked to positive post-school outcomes, including improved self-perception and social interactions.

iii. Opportunities to Build Friendships and Networks

Inclusive settings provide students with visual impairments the chance to form meaningful friendships and social networks. Baepler (2023) emphasizes that inclusive education promotes social integration, allowing students with and without disabilities to form relationships and social interactions, which gives everyone a feeling of inclusion.

iv. Equitable Access to Quality Education

Inclusive education ensures that students with visual impairments have equitable access to the same quality of education as their sighted peers. This access not only enhances academic learning but also provides diverse social experiences that are crucial for developing social skills. Yakubu, Bodang & Amwe (2017), discuss the importance of orientation and mobility programs within inclusive settings, highlighting their role in providing equitable educational opportunities. Inclusive education offers a comprehensive approach to enhancing the social skills of students with visual impairments, contributing to their overall personal development and societal integration.

Some Challenges Faced by Students with Visual Impairment

Despite the benefits, students with visual impairments face a lot of challenges in social skill development. These include: stigma, limited access to assistive technologies, inadequate teacher training, inaccessible infrastructures, Limited access to non-verbal communication, and Isolation in traditional classrooms. These hinder their participation in social and educational activities, thereby affecting social skill development.

i. **Stigmatization:** Societal stigma and negative perceptions of disability often hinder the acceptance of inclusive education (Slee, 2021). Visually impaired students are usually faced with stigmatization. This contributes to their being marginalized. These negative perceptions can adversely affect their self-esteem and hinder their willingness to engage in social interactions. They may be perceived by peers as less capable or be treated with pity rather than respect. Attitudes such as these may discourage students with visual impairments from participating actively in social or academic activities. As noted by Nollett (2019), "vision impairments are related to social isolation and reduced quality of life."

ii. **Limited Access to Assistive Technologies:** Access to assistive technologies is vital for visually impaired students to participate fully in educational and social activities. However, many face barriers due to the unavailability or high cost of these tools. Many schools lack the financial, material, and human resources needed to support inclusive practices (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2021). This limitation restricts their ability to communicate effectively and engage with peers, thereby impeding social skills development. The Battle for Blindness Organization (2023), highlights that "visually impaired students often experience social isolation in school settings" due to such challenges.

iii. **Inadequate Teacher Training:** Educators play a pivotal role in facilitating the social integration of visually impaired students. However, insufficient training in inclusive teaching strategies can result in a lack of support for these students' social development. Systematic review by Caron, et al (2023), emphasizes that "social skills are acquired primarily through imitation using the visual system," underscoring the need for specialized instructional approaches.

iv. **Inaccessible Infrastructures and Policy Gaps:** Physical and policy-related barriers within educational institutions can impede the social participation of visually impaired students. Inaccessible facilities and the absence of inclusive policies may limit their involvement in group activities, further isolating them from their peers. The International Journal of Progressive Sciences (2020), notes that "challenges experienced by students with visual impairments" include navigating environments not designed with their needs in mind.

v. **Limited Access to Non-Verbal Communication:** Non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions and gestures, are fundamental components of social interactions. Visually impaired students may miss these cues, leading to misunderstandings and difficulties in social engagements. Perkins School for the Blind (n.d), emphasizes that "for students who are visually impaired, social skills must be explicitly taught in the curriculum" to address this gap.

Role of Inclusive Education in Enhancing Social Skills of Students with Visual Impairment.

Inclusive education creates opportunities for students with visual impairments to engage in collaborative activities, improving them with social communication skills, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities. Exposure to diverse peers helps them develop a sense of belonging and social competence. Inclusive education is an educational approach that seeks to accommodate all learners, irrespective of their abilities or disabilities, within mainstream schools. It emphasizes removing barriers to learning and participation (Ainscow, 2020). Again, inclusive education incorporates role-playing, and assistive technologies to foster engagement among students with visual impairment. For example, using screen readers or audio-based educational games ensures that these students can actively participate alongside with their sighted peers (Kelly & Smith, 2019). Furthermore, students with visual impairment might use audio recordings, verbal presentations, or tactile diagrams to showcase their knowledge. These practices not only enhance academic participation but also build confidence and social skills, as students learn to communicate effectively with diverse audiences. It fosters a sense of belonging and ensures equitable opportunities for all students (UNESCO, 2020).

Once more, creating a supportive environment is essential for the social development of students with visual impairments. Inclusive education encourages sighted students to act as peer buddies or

mentors, fostering a culture of acceptance and collaboration. According to Zebehazy (2018), inclusive education reduces stigma and enhances positive attitudes among sighted students, which in turn promotes meaningful friendships and social bonds with their visually impaired peers.

Teachers play a pivotal role in fostering the social skills of students with visual impairments in inclusive settings. By employing differentiated instruction, adaptive teaching methods, and positive reinforcement, teachers can create an inclusive classroom climate that encourages social interaction. For example, teachers can use role-playing exercises and cooperative learning strategies to help students with visual impairments develop interpersonal skills (Friend & Bursuck, 2019). Additionally, teacher training programs that emphasize inclusive practices can further enhance their ability to support the social development of students with visual impairment as noted by Willings (2025).

Psychological Implication of Inclusive Education of Visually Impaired Students

Inclusive education seeks to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students, including those with visual impairments. While this approach offers numerous benefits, it also presents psychological implications that can significantly impact the educational experiences of visually impaired students.

Positive Psychological Implications

1. **Enhanced Self-Esteem and Confidence:** The integration of technology in inclusive classrooms can empower visually impaired students, fostering a sense of independence and boosting self-confidence. It emphasizes that the integration of technology, pedagogy, and theory is crucial in creating an educational environment where visually impaired learners can thrive alongside their sighted peers.
2. **Development of Coping Mechanisms:** Inclusive settings encourage visually impaired students to develop effective coping strategies to navigate challenges, promoting resilience and adaptability.

Negative Psychological Implications

1. **Feelings of Isolation and Exclusion:** Despite being in inclusive settings, visually impaired students may experience social isolation due to a lack of understanding or support from peers and educators. Belay and Yihun (2020) highlight that "there are still numerous challenges facing this area," indicating ongoing issues with social integration.
2. **Anxiety and Stress Due to Inadequate Support:** The absence of adequately trained teachers and appropriate teaching materials can lead to increased anxiety and stress among visually impaired students. While inclusive education offers valuable opportunities for visually impaired students, it is essential to address the associated psychological challenges. Implementing comprehensive support systems, including specialized training for educators and the integration of assistive technologies, can mitigate negative psychological impacts and promote a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Strategies for Enhancing Social Skills through Effective Inclusive Education

Inclusive education fosters a supportive environment where visually impaired students can actively participate in group activities, leading to enhanced social skills. Schools must implement adaptive teaching methods and inclusive policies to create a conducive learning atmosphere through:

- i. **Teacher Training:** There are needs conducting regular training of teachers who are involve in inclusive education. Equipping educators with specialized training is crucial for fostering an inclusive environment that supports the social development of visually impaired students. According to Rani (2024), "Inclusive education aims to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities. "This underscores the need for teachers to be adept in tailored pedagogical strategies that address the unique challenges faced by these students.

- ii. **Use of Assistive Technologies:** Assistive technologies play a crucial role in facilitating communication and social interaction for visually impaired students. Tools such as screen readers, braille displays, and speech-to-text software enable these students to participate more fully in classroom activities and social exchanges. As highlighted by Forgrave (2022), "assistive technology tools and devices... support students with learning disabilities, emphasizing their positive impacts, such as improved academic performance, increased independence, enhanced self-confidence, and a more inclusive learning environment."
- iii. **Collaborative Learning:** Implementing collaborative learning strategies encourages interaction between visually impaired students and their peers, promoting mutual understanding and social skill development. The Teachers Institute notes that "collaboration in education refers to the process where educators, specialists, and other professionals work together to address the diverse needs of students." This collaborative approach ensures that students, particularly those with disabilities, receive tailored support. Group projects and peer-assisted learning encourage teamwork, peer interaction and improve communication skills. Pairing visually impaired students with sighted peers in group tasks fosters interaction and mutual learning.
- iv. **Building Peer Relationships Through Inclusive Curriculum Development:** In inclusive curriculum that reflects diverse abilities and promotes empathy can help build peer relationships. Willings (2025) emphasizes the importance of providing contextual information to help visually impaired students understand social situations, thereby enhancing their ability to navigate interactions effectively. The suggests, "Help the student understand social situations by providing detailed information about who is involved, what they are doing, and why."
- v. **Policy Support Programme and Adequate Funding:** Robust policies and sufficient funding are essential to sustain inclusive education initiatives. systematic review by Zambone and Suarez (2020) underscores the need for comprehensive policies that address the unique challenges faced by visually impaired students, noting that "students are often placed in a learning environment that relies heavily on vision, with a limited presence of teachers qualified to support the visually impaired."

CONCLUSION

Inclusive education is the integration of all children with special needs, including those with visual impairments into regular classroom settings, with the support of social services. The essence of this, is to help normalize the life experiences of the visually impaired students. Inclusive education significantly influences students' social development by enhancing communication skills, improving social relationships, fostering empathy and emotional understanding, promoting positive behavioural development, boosting self-esteem and confidence, shaping identity and values, and supporting diverse social experiences. All these are essential for enhancing the social skills of students with visual impairments. It is pivotal in bridging the gap between visually impaired students and their sighted peers, fostering social skills that are essential for their overall development. By recognizing the critical role of inclusive education, addressing challenges and implementing effective strategies, educators, policymakers and parents can create environments where all students thrive.

SUGGESTIONS

The following are some suggestions that would enhance inclusive education for students with visual impairment:

1. **Government and Stakeholders** should conduct regular training of teachers who are involved in inclusive education. Regular workshops and professional development programs are important for equipping teachers with the skills needed to accommodate students who are

visually impaired. Training should focus on using assistive technologies, adapting teaching materials, empathy and fostering an inclusive classroom culture. When teachers are adequately trained, they can significantly enhance learning outcome for visually impaired students.

2. Provision of special needs tool kits, technologies like screen readers, Braille displays, and audio books can significantly improve the learning experiences of students with visual impairments. Furthermore, creating accessible school environments with tactile paths, Braille signage, and inclusive restrooms promotes physical inclusivity. Investments such as these, not only empower students, but also, demonstrate institutional commitment to equity.
3. Creating public awareness about the importance of inclusive education can reduce stigma and promote acceptance. Therefore, awareness campaigns targeting students, parents, and communities can greatly reduce misconceptions about disabilities, including visual impairments and foster empathy and collaborative activities to ensure peer interaction. Again, extracurricular activities like games, quiz, etc. can also help normalize diversity and discourage societal stigmas as time goes on.
4. Inclusive education of students with visual impairments should be made mandatory by government and institutions. Government should enact policies mandating inclusivity in education for students with visual impairments in various levels of institutions of learning. For example, countries adhering to the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, have made strides in making education accessible for all.
5. Policies must prioritize funding for inclusive education. This policy should allocate funding for assistive devices, technologies, training of teachers, enforce accessibility standards, and monitor compliances. Curricula should be designed in such a way that it accommodates diverse learning needs through Universal Design for Learning principles. Hence, education is a fundamental human right.
6. National Education Plan, from 2020 to 2029 tagged, "Achieving Quality Education for All." Government and stakeholders should take into cognizance, systemic changes and effective practical strategies to ensure that quality education for all is achieve by the year 2029.

REFERENCES

- Agesa, Y. (2014). Emergency distance education in the conditions of COVID-19 pandemic: Experience of Ukrainian universities. *Education Sciences*, 11(7). 34-54
- Ainscow, M. (2020). Promoting equity in education: Lessons from international experiences, *Educational Review*, 72(1), 1-15
- American Foundation for the Blind, (2021). *What is visual impairment?* Retrieved from www.afb.org
- Baepler, P. (2023). Orientation land Social Inclusion: Supporting Students with Visual Impairments in Active Learning Classrooms. *Journal of Learning Spaces*, 12(1). 124-137
- Battle for Blindness: (2023). "Education Disparities: The Struggles of Visually Impaired Students;" *Battle for Blindness*. Battleforblindness.org
- Brownell, A. A. (2021). Teaching Strategies in an Inclusive Educational Institution: A Study Guide. (Series "Inkliuzyvna osvita"), Kyiv, A.C.K. Publishing Group, 239 p. (in Ukrainian).
- Cameron, S. (2022). Social Content of Psychological Specialists' Professional Activity. *Postmodern Openings*, 12(1), 01-20.
- Caron, V., Barras, A., van Nispen, R.M.A., & Ruffieux, N. (2023). Teaching Social Skills to Children and Adolescents with Visual Impairments: A Systematic Review. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*.
- Credwson, M., Kalkusch, C., & Guo, J. (2022). An Analysis of Social Skills Based on the Age of the Students. *Journal of Educational Research and Development*, 45(3), 123-135
- Deutch, M., Coleman, P.T., & Marcus, E.C. (2022). *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*. Wiley.

- Dweck, C. (2023). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*; Random House.
- Ferrell, K. (2023). *Teaching Strategies for the Visually Impaired*. American Foundation for Blind Press.
- Ferrell, U. (2023). *Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities: A Critical Analysis of Government Policy*. Routledge.
- Florian, L., & Black-Hawkins, K. (2021). Exploring inclusive pedagogy. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 41(2), 175-188.
- Forgrave, K. E. (2022). *Assistive Technology in the Classroom: Enhancing the School Experiences of Students with Disabilities*. In *Inclusive Education with Assistive technology*. Retrieved.
- Friend, M., & Bursuck, W. D. (2018). *Including students with special needs: A practical guide for classroom teachers*. (8th ed.). Pearson.
- Goleman, D. (2021). *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. Bantam.
- Grewdson, G., Kalkusch, E. & Guo, M. (2022). Visual impairment and the development of children. *British Journal of Visual Impairment*, 32(2), 89-94
- Hadidi, A. & Al-khateeb, A. (2015). Organizational and pedagogical conditions for integrating children with special needs into the general educational space. *Defektolohiia*, No 4, P. 10–12. (in Ukrainian).
- Haregie, T. (2021). Integration of children with special educational needs in a secondary school. *Journal of Sotsialnyi pedahoh*. 5(2), 26-35.
- Hatlen, A. (2022). *Social and Pedagogical Work with Children and Youth with Functional Disabilities. Social Pedagogy: A textbook*. 3rd edition revised and updated, Kyiv. P. 329-368. (in Ukrainian).
- Jardinez, M.J., & Reyes, A. (2024). The Advantages and Challenges of Inclusive Education: Striving for Equitable Learning Opportunities. *International Journal of Education*, 12(2), 45-60.
- Kolupaieva, A. A. (2006). From exclusion to inclusion (Canadian experience). *Didactic and socio-psychological aspects of correctional work in a special school. Scientific and methodological digest*, Kyiv, No 7. (in Ukrainian).
- Kelly, A. & Smith, A. (2019). From segregation to inclusive education (Canadian experience). *Didactic and socio- psychological aspects of correctional work in a special school. Scientific and methodological digest*, Kyiv, Naukovyi svit, No 6. (in Ukrainian).
- Kurowski A. (2022). On the Problem of Conceptual and Terminological Definitions in Modern Special Pedagogy. *Didactic and socio-psychological aspects of correctional work in a special school. Scientific and methodological digest*, Kyiv, No 8. (in Ukrainian).
- Lewis, T. & Allman, D. (2023). Management of the sustainable development of machine-building enterprises: A sustainable development space approach. *Journal of Enterprise Information Management*, 34(1), P. 328-342.
- Lozman, S. (2020). Psychological and pedagogical support for children with special educational needs within inclusive education in European countries. *Actual problems of education and upbringing of children with special needs*. Kyiv, Universytet "Ukraina". (in Ukrainian).
- Mitchell, D. (2014). *What really works in special and inclusive education: Using evidence-based teaching strategies*. Routledge.
- Miyauchi, H. (2020). A Systematic Review on Inclusive Education of Students with Visual Impairment. *Education Sciences*, 10(11), 346-368.
- Nollett, N. (2019). The education for all and inclusive education debate: Conflict, contradiction, or opportunity? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 14(1), 1-15.
- Perkins School for the Blind. (n.d). *Making Connections: Essential Social Skills for Teens with Visual Impairments*.
- Rani, D.S. (2024). Inclusive Education for Visually Impaired Students: Integrating Technology, Pedagogy, and Theory. *International Journal of Research*, 11 (8), 45-53.
- Sack, A., & Wolffe, B. (2021). Inclusive Education for Visually Impaired Students: Challenges and Opportunities. *Journal of Educational Research*, 45(3), 215-230.
- Slavin C. (2021). Canadian Schools in Transition: Moving from Dual Education Systems to Inclusive Schools. *Exceptionality Education Canada*, 12 (2). 7–52.
- Slee, R. (2021). *The Irregular School: Exclusion, Schooling, and Inclusive education*. Routledge.

- Special Olympics Global Center for Inclusion in Education. (2024). A New Era of Special Education Begins with Inclusive AI. *Time*.
- UNESCO. (2020). *Inclusion and education: All means all*. Global Education Monitoring Report. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.
- UNESCO. (2020). *Inclusive education: Ensuring no learner is left behind*; Paris: UNESCO
- UNESCO. (2021). *Inclusive education: Global perspectives and practices*. UNESCO Publishing.
- UNICEF. (2023). "The Use of Assistive Technology in Education: A Guide for Teachers and Schools." UNICEF. [unicef.org](https://www.unicef.org)
- Willings, C. (2025). *Social Interactions – Teaching Students with Visual Impairments*. Retrieved.
- Wolffe, K. (2022). *Self-Advocacy for the Visually Impaired: A guide for educators*. AFB Press.
- World Bank. (2019). *Inclusive education: Achieving education for all by including those with disabilities*; Washington, D.C: World Bank;
- World Health Organization. (2011). *World report on disability*. Geneva: WHO Press.
- Yakubu, A.F., Bodang, J. R., & Amwe, R. A. (2017). Orientation and Mobility Programmes for Students with Visual Impairment: Implication For Inclusive Education. *International Journal of Academic Research in Education and Review*, 5(3), 95-100.
- Yihun, S. G. (2020). The challenges and opportunities of visually impaired students in inclusive education: The case of Bedlu. *Journal of Pedagogical Research*, 4(2). 112-124
- Zambone, A., & Suarez, M. (2020). A Systemic Review on Inclusive Education of Students with Visual Impairments. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 102,101571. Retrieved.
- Zebehazy, K. T. (2018). Teaching communication and social skills to children with visual impairments. *In Education and visual impairment: Research and practice*.