

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

**SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AMONG STUDENTS WITH VISUAL
IMPAIRMENTS AND THEIR SIGHTED PEERS IN NUSRAT JAHAN
AHMADIYYA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION IN THE UPPER WEST REGION
OF GHANA.**

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(220028304)

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

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**A thesis in the Department of Special Education, Faculty of Educational Studies,
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The requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Philosophy
(Special Education)
In the University of Education, Winneba.**

DECEMBER, 2023

DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I, Christiana Asaah, hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my original work and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this University or elsewhere.

.....

Date:

Supervisors' Declaration

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised following the guidelines on the supervision of the thesis by the University of Education, Winneba.

Supervisor's Name: Dr. Adam Awini

.....

Date:

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my friend Warteng Stephen for his financial support and encouragement through it all.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated into how students with visual impairments interact socially with their sighted peers at Nurast Jahan Ahmadiya College of Education in Wa. Using a case study approach and purposive sampling, the researchers selected a group that included 6 visually impaired students, 4 sighted students, and 2 tutors. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and observations, focusing on the dynamics of social interaction within the college setting. The findings were analyzed thematically, guided by the research questions. The results revealed a mixed picture of social engagement. Some students were able to build strong, meaningful connections, while others felt isolated or excluded during peer interactions. Similarly, some sighted students were welcoming and supportive, but others held negative attitudes or chose not to engage at all. Interestingly, despite facing some social challenges, many of the students with visual impairments expressed a strong sense of self-worth and confidence. They didn't see themselves as limited or incapable. Based on these findings, the study recommends introducing sensitivity and awareness training for both sighted students and tutors. These sessions should aim to build empathy, correct misconceptions, and equip participants with practical tools to encourage more inclusive social interactions. Additionally, the study suggests setting up peer support programs that pair sighted students with visually impaired students. These partnerships could help foster better understanding through mentoring, collaborative learning, and shared social experiences.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Building genuine social connections between students with visual impairments and their sighted classmates is an essential part of creating a truly inclusive learning environment. These interactions don't just affect how students relate to one another they can deeply influence the confidence and academic progress of those with visual impairments. When students feel included, supported, and respected by their peers, it reinforces a sense of belonging and boosts their overall well-being.

Smith (2018) observed that some students with visual impairments often face unwelcoming behavior from both certain sighted peers and even some facilitators, largely due to their condition. Unfortunately, these negative attitudes can act as barriers to their full participation in social life on campus. In his study, Smith broke down social relationships into four main themes. These include the frequency and quality of social contact and interaction between visually impaired students and their classmates, patterns of friendship, how these students see themselves socially, and how accepted they feel within their peer group. The theme of "friendships and relationships" highlights the importance of meaningful bonds connections that ease feelings of isolation, bring emotional fulfillment, and inspire individuals to grow into their best selves.

The concept of social acceptance refers to how much a student is welcomed and included in social activities and interactions, whether on a one-on-one basis or within larger groups. In contrast, social self-perception relates to how students see themselves in relation to others it's about self-image, communication, and the ability to form

connections and show empathy. According to Berndt (2004), one key outcome of being socially included is the development of healthy interaction patterns, especially for individuals with visual impairments. Research also highlights that positive social engagement plays a major role in both the emotional well-being and academic progress of students with disabilities (Smith, 2018). On the other hand, difficulties in communication and negative peer attitudes can create barriers that prevent visually impaired students from forming meaningful relationships (Jones et al., 2020).

The way students with visual impairments engage academically with their tutors plays a crucial role in their access to learning resources and support systems that can enhance their academic outcomes. Meaningful academic interactions such as tailored support and the provision of accessible study materials are key factors in helping these students thrive academically (Brown & Petrenchik, 2019).

Nusrat Jahan Ahmadiya College of Education is an inclusive College of Education in the Upper West Region of Ghana. The institution was founded by the Ahmadiya Mission in the 1970s and was initially a modular college. It produced its first batch of visually impaired students in 1986 and its first two male teachers in 1988. Jahan Ahmadiyya is the only College in the Northern part of Ghana that trains visually impaired students and has produced many teachers who are serving Mother Ghana in various capacities. Before the adoption of inclusion in Ghana, the College began training people with visual impairments as teachers. The institution's commitment to diversity and accessibility ensures that all students have the opportunity to pursue higher education and achieve their academic goals.

The way students interact socially within the college setting plays a major role in shaping their emotional well-being, academic progress, and sense of belonging

regardless of individual differences. These social interactions offer students a chance to connect, empathize, and respond to the emotions and needs of those around them. For students with visual impairments, these interactions are especially important, as they help them learn the social norms and values of their peers while also building a network of emotional and practical support (Carter et al., 2005).

Although many students with visual impairments are not completely excluded from social activities, their participation tends to differ from that of their sighted peers. They often display strong social skills related to peer engagement but may still lean toward spending more time in solitary activities. A large-scale study by Koster and Houten (2010) revealed that students with special educational needs, including those with visual impairments, tend to have fewer peer interactions and are often less accepted in mainstream classrooms compared to their peers without disabilities.

Rockson (2014) also pointed out that students who are visually impaired often miss out on the friendship and support of their sighted classmates. Many students who are blind struggle to develop positive social relationships due to being overlooked in group activities. These challenges are often tied to difficulties in social communication, which can lead typically developing students to avoid forming close bonds with them or exclude them from both academic and social settings (Estell et al., 2009).

Aviles, Anderson, and Davila (2006) emphasized that being left out socially can have serious consequences for the academic development of students with visual impairments. They noted that a student's ability to learn is closely connected to their emotional and social well-being.

To support inclusion and meaningful social interaction, Roe (2008) suggested that students with visual impairments should be given opportunities to build self-awareness

and social skills through a range of real-life experiences. Other studies have shown that these students often find it easier to connect with peers who also have visual impairments. However, when sighted peers are more accepting, it greatly enhances both the social and academic engagement of students with disabilities (Martin & Martin, 2021). Additionally, how students perceive themselves particularly their confidence and sense of belonging has a strong influence on their academic journey and overall well-being (Stevens & Sheng, 2017).

In 1990, UNESCO emphasized the global importance of making education freely available to every child, regardless of their background or abilities. The organization urged all nations to eliminate barriers that prevent equal access to learning. Responding to this vision, many countries have implemented inclusive education policies and developed specialized programs to support children with diverse needs. These include tailored services for learners with visual and hearing impairments, as well as those facing learning disabilities and other developmental challenges. The goal is to ensure that no child is left behind due to their physical, sensory, or cognitive differences.

Students with visual impairment have been negatively treated and neglected in the past and presently in most African schools and communities (Eni-Olurundda & Ogunleke, 2006). Proponents of segregation believe that, given students with visual impairments the access mixing freely themselves is not discriminatory. While the opponents of segregation see this as being discriminatory and that, it has failed to recognize that these students live in communities with individuals without disabilities and as such, should be allowed to do things together.

Hughes et al. (2002) observe that segregation creates more social handicaps students with visual impairments, since they are secluded from interacting with those with

disabilities in school environment. Fostering positive social relationships between students with disabilities and their peers requires the preparation of nondisabled peers in an inclusive classroom so that they understand the needs of their peers with disabilities. As learners enter adolescence, their relationships in schools where these students with special needs are included should be closely examined because "confidence" relates in part to a positive sense of self-identity, which in this study refers to resilience and self-perception; "connectedness" highlights the ability to relate well to others, be an effective communicator, and be a part of local communities (friendship network); and "actively involved" refers to the participation of students in a variety of life contexts (patterns of interactions). Considering this context, it becomes essential to explore how students with visual impairments interact socially with their sighted peers, particularly within the educational environment of Jahan Nasrat Ahmadiyya College of Education, located in Wa, in the Upper West Region. This study aims to uncover patterns of social engagement that can inform more inclusive practices and support systems.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Social relationships and interactions play a crucial role in the educational experiences of students with visual impairments (Smith, 2018). However, barriers such as communication difficulties and negative attitudes from peers can impede the development of meaningful social relationships (Jones et al., 2020). Meaningful academic interaction between students with visual impairments and their instructors plays a critical role in promoting equal access to learning resources and academic support. Equally important are peer acceptance and how these students perceive themselves socially both of which strongly affect their sense of belonging, emotional well-being, and ability to integrate within the college environment (Martin & Martin, 2021; Stevens & Sheng, 2017).

When students with visual impairments are excluded from positive social experiences whether with classmates or instructors it can negatively impact their academic performance and emotional health. Challenges in building strong peer relationships or connecting effectively with tutors can create barriers that limit both their academic and social development.

While some research has explored the social interactions of students in general, particularly within the context of the United States (Awini, 2015; Rockson, 2014; George & Duquette, 2006), there remains a gap in understanding how students who are blind navigate social interactions in higher education settings. This current study aims to address that gap by examining the social interaction patterns of visually impaired students in tertiary institutions.

The researcher had an opportunity to do a month of resource work in the college when permission was sought from my headmistress to step in for the substantial resource teacher while he was away for further studies. Upon interactions, the researcher observed some mixed behaviors of the sighted students toward the visually impaired. These behaviors of the sighted included withdrawal, avoidance, and name calling and only a few students were constantly spotted doing group work therefore, the researcher sought to examine the pattern of social relationships, the social nature of interactions the level of acceptance and the social self-perception of students with visual impairments at Jahan College of Education.

It also seems that many students with visual impairments hold negative views about their own social experiences, often feeling more comfortable interacting with peers who share similar challenges. Conversations with some of these students revealed that social

connections between them and their sighted classmates are generally weak, highlighting a lack of meaningful interaction and inclusion.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The study investigated the social relationships among students with visual impairments and their sighted peers in Nusrat Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education.

1.4 Research objectives

The study sought to;

1. Examine the pattern of social relationships among students with visual impairments and their peers at Nusrat Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education.
2. To find out the nature of academic interaction among students with visual impairments and their tutors at Nusrat Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education.
3. To ascertain the acceptance of students with visual impairments regarding their relationships with their sighted peers at Nusrat Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education.
4. To investigate the social self-perceptions of students with visual impairments regarding their relations with their sighted peers at Nusrat Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education.

1.5 Research questions

These questions guided the study;

1. What are the pattern of social relationships among students with visual impairments and their sighted peers at Nusrat Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education?

2. What are the nature of academic interactions among students with visual impairments and their tutors at Nusrat Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education?
3. How are the acceptances of students with visual impairments regarding their relations with the sighted peers at Nusrat Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education.?
4. What are the self-perceptions of students with visual impairments regarding their social relationships with the sighted Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education?

1.6 Significance of the study

The findings helped uncover the nature of relationships between the visually impaired, their sighted peers, and tutors at Nusrat Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education. This understanding enabled tutors and sighted students in inclusive institutions to better foster positive and supportive interactions, thereby contributing to the broader goal of inclusive education in Ghana.

The study also revealed the patterns of social interactions among those with visually impaired and those without visual impaired within inclusive settings. As noted by Allport (1954), such insights allowed facilitators to adopt relevant activities aimed at encouraging positive and meaningful peer relationships.

Moreover, the study examined how visually impaired students perceived themselves socially and how these perceptions influenced their level of acceptance by sighted peers. These findings guided school administrators and educators in developing strategies to enhance self-esteem and promote positive self-identity. This included helping visually impaired students adopt self-affirming thoughts and behaviors that

supported their social engagement within the school environment. This helped teachers implement effective approaches to promote greater peer acceptance and inclusion.

Finally, the study contributed to the existing body of knowledge on inclusive education and provided a foundation for future research in similar areas (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006).

1.7 Delimitation of the Study

This study looked at how students with visual impairments connect with others, take part in learning, feel accepted by classmates, and view themselves socially at Nusrat Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education. It was carried out in just this one college, even though other universities in Ghana also have visually impaired students. The focus was on these students, their sighted peers, and their teachers. The research also explored how these students interacted with sighted classmates, how they related to one another, and how accepted they felt in school. It further looked at how they saw themselves compared to their sighted friends. These students were chosen because they were the only ones with disabilities at the college during the time of the study.

1.8 Limitations of the study

One of the key limitations of this study was the low level of cooperation from research participants. This challenge directly impacted the sample size, which had to be reduced to twelve participants due to the limited turnout. As a result, the smaller sample may limit the extent to which the findings can be generalized to a broader population.

1.9 Definitions of Operational Terms

Inclusion: A practice or policy of providing equal opportunities and acceptance to all individuals, regardless of differences in race, gender, and other characteristics.

Social relationships: This is defined as an intimate, close-knit, and strong association or acquaintance between two or more individuals.

Social interaction: An exchange of verbal and non-verbal communication, behaviors, and actions between individuals or groups within a social context

Social interaction pattern: The various ways in which people interact with each other within a social context

Sighted peers: refer to individuals who can see and are not visually impaired.

Visual impairment: A loss of vision or a reduction in ability to the point where problems arise that cannot be resolved with a pair of glasses or other corrective measures.

1.10 Organization of the Study

This thesis is organized into five core chapters, each building upon the previous to present a comprehensive overview of the research. Chapter One introduced the study by outlining the background, the problem statement, research purpose, objectives to the study, research questions, and the significance of the study. It also addressed the scope through delimitations to the study and limitations, and provided definitions for key terms used throughout the work.

Chapter Two presented a review of relevant literature, organized around the study's objectives and guided by the chosen theoretical framework.

Chapter Three explained how the research was done. It discussed the main ideas behind the study, the type of research used, and who the study was about. It also described how

participants were selected, what tools were used to gather information, how the information was studied, and the steps followed during the data collection.

Chapter Four focused on the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the data collected. It also included a discussion of the key findings.

Finally, Chapter Five offered a summary of the study, conclusions drawn from the findings, practical recommendations, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presented a review of the relevant literature that informed the study. The reviewed materials were drawn from credible sources, including scholarly books, peer-reviewed journals, and academic research articles. The literature review began with an overview of the theoretical framework guiding the study, followed by an examination of key themes aligned with the research questions. The main areas explored in this chapter included:

1. Theoretical Framework
2. The pattern of social relationships among students with visual impairments from their sighted peers.
3. The nature of academic interactions among students with visual impairments and their tutors.
4. The acceptance of students with visual impairments regarding their sighted peers.
5. Social self- perceptions of students with visual impairments regarding their social relationships with the sighted.
6. summary of literature review

2.1 Theoretical framework

This study used Allport's (1954) contact theory, also called intergroup contact theory. The theory suggests that when two different groups like students with visual impairments and their sighted peers spend time together, it can help build positive relationships between them. This is more likely to happen when the contact is regular, meaningful, and lasts over a period of time.

Contact theory provides a useful framework for understanding and improving relationships between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers in inclusive classroom settings (Schneider & Siperstein, 2001). According to Yuker (2018), the contact theory aims at bringing people together who are in some form of "conflict" or where one is being bullied by the other one or is isolated; the conflict will subside as they get to understand each other's differences better. According to the authors, contact theory serves as a means of enhancing relationships between groups that may experience tension or misunderstanding such as in the context of inclusive education. In this regard, the theory highlights how increased interaction between sighted students and those with visual impairments can positively influence the attitudes of the sighted toward their visually impaired peers. The 'contact theory proposed by Allport (1954) argued that negative attitudes against minority groups are based upon a lack of understanding between groups. Regular interaction can reduce stereotypes across groups, but this is best supported when inclusive classrooms allow students with and without disabilities to learn side by side. This should be done to create a balance between the groups to enhance peace and foster development. Promoting intergroup contact through inclusive education is intended to minimize negative attitudes and strengthen relationships with individuals with disabilities (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005).

Allport's Contact Theory was based on the idea that, when the right conditions are in place, direct interaction between members of different social groups can effectively reduce misunderstandings. Often, stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination arise between groups perceived to be in conflict or rivalry. Allport proposed that when contact is carefully structured and managed, it can lessen these negative perceptions and foster more positive relationships.

One of the key suggestions of the theory is to create opportunities for students of varying abilities to engage with one another. By bringing students from different backgrounds including those with and without disabilities into shared learning environments, the theory suggests that such interactions can lead to greater understanding, break down social barriers, and promote inclusivity and tolerance across racial, cultural, or ability-based lines.

From the standpoint of intergroup contact theory, regular and meaningful interactions between majority and minority group members are expected to enhance mutual relationships over time. Allport (1954) argued that for such contact to have the desired effect, four specific conditions must be met. These include:

1. Equal status among group members in the situation,
2. Shared goals,
3. Absence of competition among the groups, and
4. Authority sanction for the contract

Allport (1954) emphasizes that cooperative interracial interaction is aimed at attaining shared goals that must be promoted to ensure positive inter-group relations.

Equal Status: Pettigrew (2018) opined that equal status involves both groups taken into an equal status relationship. The theory stressed that equal group status within the

situation is then enhanced. Most research outcomes support this argument, although equal status is difficult to define and has been used in different ways (Riordan, 2018). Both groups must expect and perceive equal status in the situation (Cohen & Lotan 2015). Some writers emphasized equal group status coming into the situation (Brewer & Kramer, 2005), Thus, Jackman and Crane (2016) show negative effects from contact with out-group members of lower status. They noted that in the group, bias increased with relative status in laboratory groups but decreased in field research with real groups.

Cooperative Activity: In this activity, Pettigrew (2018) asserted that both groups work on a problem/task and share this as a common goal, sometimes called a superordinate goal. Prejudice reduction through contact requires an active, goal-oriented effort. Athletic teams furnish a prime example (Chu & Griffey, 2015). In striving to win, interracial teams need each other to achieve their goal. Goal attainment, such as a winning season, furthers this process. Deducing this in the context of social participation of pupils with visual impairments in regular schools requires a network of social and cooperative activities organized both within and outside of the classroom to strengthen contact between the pupils.

Personal Interaction: Under this, Pettigrew (2018) noted that tasks must be structured so that individual members of both groups are interdependent to achieve this common goal. Intergroup Cooperation Attainment of common goals must be an interdependent effort without intergroup competition (Bettencourt, et al., 2012). Intergroup cooperation in schools provides the strongest evidence (Desforges, 2011). Aronson's jigsaw classroom technique requires that classrooms are structured so that pupils strive cooperatively for common goals (Aronson & Patnoe, 2017). The final condition emphasizes the importance of institutional or authoritative backing for intergroup contact. Scholars have noted that when both groups recognize and uphold shared social

norms that encourage respectful interaction, the likelihood of positive outcomes increases. Contact is far more effective when it occurs under conditions where there is clear social or institutional support. This kind of endorsement not only legitimizes the interaction but also helps to establish an environment where acceptance and inclusion are seen as the norm. Field research underscores its importance in the military (Landis, Hope & Day, 1984), business, and religious (Parker, 2008) institutions. Pettigrew and Tropp (2016), conducted a meta-analytic study to determine the impact of intergroup contact on attitudes toward different target groups, including individuals with physical, cognitive, and severe social-emotional disabilities. Although the advantages of intergroup contact have been well-documented, Pettigrew and Tropp argued that interaction by itself may not be sufficient to produce positive relationships among peers. That is why Allport (1954) warned that superficial contact between members of different groups can have negative consequences. Mere interaction with members of an out-group such as students with visual impairments was found to be insufficient in fostering genuinely positive attitudes toward that group. Within the framework of contact theory, such interactions needed to be consistent, occur regularly over time, and focus on achieving shared objectives.

Moreover, it was essential for teachers and school administrators to clearly express their support for sustained engagement between diverse groups of students. Pettigrew and Tropp (2016) emphasized that this final condition played a crucial role. Without strong institutional commitment to inclusion, the potential benefits of contact between students with and without disabilities were unlikely to be fully realized.

Consistent with contact theory, opportunities to interact in situations where all students succeed and contribute to a common goal are central to promoting positive peer interactions (Carter et al., 2005). Hughes et al. (2002) evaluated the benefits of high school students working together on activities designed so that students with disabilities complete tasks independently and make a significant contribution to the group outcome

Within these types of structured, equal-status, and cooperative learning situations, Hughes et al. (2002) found out that students with disabilities not only initiated more social interactions but that their interactions were also more social in content than simply activity related. Creating opportunities for students to engage in shared tasks where they can succeed and contribute toward a common goal is key to fostering meaningful and positive interactions. With this in mind, the nature of friendships/relationships that border around reciprocity and mutuality would be examined since it hinges on contact. In addition, contact theory served as a guiding framework for examining the social interaction patterns observed within the schools. The theory suggests that direct engagement between individuals from different backgrounds or with differing characteristics can foster positive intergroup relationships. As previously discussed, certain key conditions must be present for such peer interactions to yield meaningful and constructive outcomes.

2.1.1 Implication of the Theory of the Study

Allport's (1954) suggests that increasing positive and meaningful interactions between different groups can reduce prejudice and foster understanding. The study investigates how promoting such interactions can enhance social integration and improve the overall campus experience for both groups. Inclusive education is vital for promoting social integration and diversity within educational institutions. Nurast Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education, Wa, prides itself on fostering an inclusive environment. However, the need to examine and strengthen the social connections between students with visual impairments and their sighted peers remained relevant. Allport's Contact Theory offered a suitable theoretical lens for this study, proposing that fostering positive, meaningful interactions between these groups could help reduce bias and promote stronger social integration.

Additionally, the Allport contact theory, discusses strategies for promoting social integration and prejudice, such as cooperative learning, shared activities, and intergroup dialogue. Preliminary findings revealed that, although some level of peer interaction existed between these students at Nurast Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education in Wa, genuine opportunities for deeper and more meaningful engagement were limited. Many sighted students express curiosity and goodwill toward their visually impaired peers but lack knowledge and awareness of how effectively interact with them. Conversely, students with visual impairment often feel isolated, despite their desire for inclusion and social connection. Drawing from Allport's contact theory, strategies such as structured group activities, cooperative learning projects, and peer support programs can facilitate meaningful interactions and foster understanding between students with visual impairment and their sighted peers.

2.2 The peer relations among Students with Visual Impairments from and those without visual impairment

The social relationships between students with visual impairments (VI) and those without visual impairment are crucial for understanding the dynamics that affect their experience in school, social development, as well entire wellness of individuals with VI. These relationships are influenced by factors such as inclusion, social integration, challenges, and strategies that enhance interactions. Research indicates that students with VI often face barriers to social inclusion in mainstream educational settings. Inclusive education policies advocate for the integration of students with disabilities into general education classrooms to promote social interaction and acceptance (Fisher & Meyer, 2002). However, the actualization of these policies varies widely and often depends on the school environment, the attitudes of educators, and the availability of

resources. One significant barrier to inclusion is the lack of preparedness among educators to effectively teach and support students with VI. Teachers may not receive adequate training on how to modify their instructional strategies to accommodate the needs of these students (Erwin & Soodak, 1995). Additionally, schools may lack the necessary resources, such as Braille materials or assistive technology, further hindering the integration process (Douglas, 2001).

Despite these challenges, successful inclusion has numerous positive outcomes. Students with VI who are included in mainstream classrooms often exhibit higher levels of social competence and self-esteem (Fisher & Meyer, 2002). Moreover, their sighted peers' benefit from increased awareness and understanding of diversity, which can foster a more inclusive and empathetic school culture (Rosenblum, 2000). Effective inclusion requires a multi-faceted approach, including professional development for educators, collaborative teaching models, and peer support programs. Ongoing training programs can equip teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to support students with visual impairment effectively. Co-teaching arrangements, where special education and general education teachers work together, can provide more comprehensive support for students with visual impairment (Murray, McKenzie, & Quigley, 2000). Initiatives that pair students with visual impairment with sighted peers can facilitate social integration and foster friendships (McDonnall, 2011).

2.2.1 Quality of Relationships

The quality and quantity of interactions between students with VI and their sighted peers can vary significantly. Successful peer relationships are often characterized by mutual respect, understanding, and adaptation to each other's needs. However, studies show that students with visual impairment often have fewer friends and may be less

popular compared to their sighted counterparts (Huurre & Aro, 1998). Factors such as severity of visual impairment, skills socially, similarly attitudes of sighted peers play a crucial role in shaping these relationships. Interactions between students with VI and their sighted peers can range from positive and supportive to indifferent or even negative. Positive interactions often involve shared activities, where students with visual impairment are actively included and their contributions are valued. In contrast, negative interactions may involve exclusion, bullying, or patronizing behaviors, which can severely impact the self-esteem and social development of students with visual impairment (Celeste, 2006).

2.2.2 Positive peer interactions

Structured social activities, such as organized activities that require collaboration, can encourage interaction and foster mutual respect. Educating sighted students about visual impairments can help demystify the condition and reduce stigma, leading to more inclusive behaviors (Rosenblum, 2000). Teachers play a crucial role in modeling inclusive behavior and setting the tone for social interactions in the classroom. Positive reinforcement of inclusive behaviors and addressing instances of exclusion or bullying promptly can create a more supportive environment (Erwin & Soodak, 1995). Despite these facilitators, several challenges can impede positive peer interactions. Students with visual impairment may lack certain social skills, such as interpreting non-verbal cues, which can make interactions with sighted peers more challenging (Celeste, 2006). The need for assistance in navigating physical spaces can sometimes be a barrier to spontaneous social interactions. Sighted peers may be unsure how to offer help without appearing patronizing, leading to awkward or avoided interactions (Gold & Tait, 2004). Negative attitudes or low expectations from sighted peers and educators can also hinder

the development of meaningful peer relationships (Murray, McKenzie, & Quigley, 2000).

To foster better social engagement between peer who are visually impaired and those who can see, several strategies can be implemented. Providing students with visual impairment with training to enhance their social skills can improve their ability to initiate and maintain social interactions (Sacks & Wolfe, 2006). Implementing buddy systems where sighted students are paired with students with visual impairment can promote social interaction and understanding (McDonnall, 2011). Teachers can use inclusive teaching practices, such as mixed-ability grouping and cooperative learning, to encourage interaction and collaboration among all students (Fisher & Meyer, 2002).

The nature of social relationships between students with visual impairments and their sighted peers was found to be multifaceted and shaped by several factors, including the level of awareness, prevailing attitudes, and the physical and social environment. Although certain barriers were identified, the research indicated that targeted interventions such as awareness education, social skills development, and inclusive practices had the potential to significantly improve social integration and foster meaningful peer relationships. Strengthening these social connections was considered vital for the overall growth, well-being, and emotional development of visual impaired students.

One study indicated that, participants observed and document interactions between individuals with visual impairments and their self-identified friends and peers. The ethnographic data revealed that most of the teenagers involved did, in fact, have friendships and participated in social activities that they found fulfilling. Interestingly,

it was observed that many of them had stronger and more stable relationships with peers who also had developmental disabilities than with those who were typically developing.

Awini (2015) examined the level of social participation of pupils with visual impairments in mainstream basic schools across Ghana using a mixed-methods approach. The study involved focus group discussions with 14 pupils and questionnaire responses from 42 teachers, selected through purposive, simple random sampling, respectively. The findings showed that sighted pupils regularly interacted with their visually impaired classmates playing, collaborating on group assignments, and engaging in shared recreational activities. There were no reports of harsh treatment, and overall, the study concluded that a reasonable degree of social participation was experienced by students with visual impairments in these inclusive school settings.

Similarly, Acheampong (2017) conducted a study at the University of Education, Winneba, to explore, among other things, how students with visual impairments socially interacted with their sighted peers. Thirty students with visual impairments were purposively chosen from a total of 62. Semi-structured focus group interviews were used to collect data, which was later analyzed thematically. The findings show that students with visual impairments were generally accepted and supported by their sighted peers, which helped to foster genuine friendships and a sense of inclusion. Given the known impact of negative social experiences on both academic performance and personal development, it became essential to explore how these social dynamics played out in inclusive educational settings. With this in mind, the study set out to examine how visual impaired peers socially engage with those who were sighted and tutors at Nusrat Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education in Ghana's Upper West Region.

2.2.3 The various Relationships

Some researchers have reported that young students with special needs engage in more cooperative play with typically developing peers than with classmates with special needs (Rogers, 2000). Developing school-age students are more likely to interact with other typically developing classmates or those with mild impairments rather than classmates with moderate to severe impairments (Rogers, 2000). In many studies, play observations only occur on one or two occasions during the school year. Smith, (2020) contended that no one would choose to live without friends. Enabling meaningful peer engagement for students with blindness helps foster healthy self-concepts and prevents loneliness which is often associated with being blind. Hartup (1996) says that friends are those "who spontaneously seek the company of one another, furthermore, they seek proximity in the absence of strong social pressure to do so" (p. 217). Friendship is a chosen and mutually fulfilling relationship, though it can still involve challenges and occasional interpersonal conflicts.

Cummins and Lau (2003) contend that people with blindness consistently identify making friendships as among their most important concerns. Moreover, Berkson (2004) is clear that there are no theoretical constructs or social behavior principles that would delineate the friendship patterns of people with blindness from those operating within the general population. At its core, the same social norms apply friendship is a universal and deeply valued aspect of human interaction that most people actively seek out.

The following examples illustrate findings regarding the dynamics of patterns of interaction among students with blindness in inclusive classrooms.

2.3 Academic relationships among Visually impaired students and instructors.

Understanding the dynamics of academic engagement among students with visual impairments and their tutors is essential for effective inclusive education. Asare and Amoako et al., (2020) highlight the challenges encountered by learners with visual impaired in academic interactions, including difficulties accessing educational materials and receiving adequate support from tutors. This underscores the need for tailored strategies to facilitate academic interactions and enhance learning outcomes for students with visual impairment within inclusive classrooms. Georgiou et al. (2017) emphasize the importance of collaborative learning approaches that encourage active participation and engagement among all students, including those with visual impairments. Such strategies can contribute to building academic environments that are inclusive and responsive to the varied needs of students with visual impairments, ultimately improving their academic experiences and outcomes. Bergen (1998) describes an interaction with Jim, a 5-year-old male visually impaired with speech and adaptive delays, who enters the computer area, sits on a chair, and watches a typical female peer using the mouse to "paint" the picture on the screen. He glances at the picture and bursts into laughter. His peer joins in, smiling at Jim before turning her focus back to the screen. Meanwhile, Jim waits calmly for his turn, standing alongside a group of boys with similar characteristics. Odom (2000) describes an interaction pattern between John, a 6-year-old nonverbal male with blindness, and a typical peer at the water center. A typical peer begins by pouring water from a small plastic bottle into a larger one, while John watches attentively. John then fills his own bottle and tries to help by pouring water into the larger container. Together, they take turns filling and emptying the bigger bottle, cooperating throughout the activity. Afterward, the peer walks away from the water center, and John quietly watches him leave. He then places his bottle back into the water and walks away as well.

2.3.1 Associative Interaction with Peer

Hellendoorn and Hoekman (1992) described a scenario during "clean-up time" in which a teacher placed Bill a 4 - year-old boy with visual impairment, speech delays, and mobility challenges on the floor to allow him to crawl. Bill began making his way slowly toward the circle area. Noticing this, a typically developing female peer attempted to help by trying to lift him; however, Bill was too heavy for her to manage. A second teacher then intervened and carried Bill to the circle.

According to Sontag (1997), a teacher leads Amy, a 4-year-old female who is visually impaired to the water center and encourages her to move her hands in the water. As Amy touches various floating objects, the teacher asks her, "Do you like the water?" Amy did not respond initially. A teacher then guided Bill to the water center and positioned her so she could access the water and engage in play on her own. Amy began making "waves" in the water and said, "I'm playing." A typically developing female peer noticed, walked over, and joined briefly by moving her hands in the water before walking away. Shortly after, John a 6-year-old boy who is nonverbal and blind approached the center, observed the water play for a moment, and then walked away without participating.

Teacher associative interaction with typical and atypical peers Hanline (1993) describes a typical peer seated at the writing center, pressing a typewriter's keys and examining the typewriter. As the teacher walks by, she kneels down and asks the student if he plans to write something. He responds affirmatively. Shortly afterward, Chip a 5-year-old boy with visual impairment and developmental delays in speech and cognition arrives at the center and notices the teacher. He sits on her lap, and she begins a conversation with him, using the phone as a prompt or communication aid.

Odom and Diamond (1998) describe how in a house dress-up area, six typical students are dressing up. Chip, a 5-year-old boy with visual impairment and developmental delays in speech, cognition, adaptive behavior, and social-emotional functioning, entered the area and began "dressing" himself by tying a rope around his waist. He then twirled in place as part of his play. Shortly after, Danny, a 6-year-old boy with social-emotional challenges, entered the space and crawled toward a typically developing peer, mimicking rapid, shallow breathing similar to a dog. He then made a sudden, playful charge at the peer, prompting a brief reaction. Jim, a 5-5-year-old visually impaired male with speech, cognitive, and adaptive delays enters and participate in school activities and pupils with visual impairments. In most studies of statistical relations between a child's characteristic type of disability and outcomes such as everyday functioning and participation, the results reveal only moderate to weak correlations (Raab & Roper, 2001). The findings suggested that participation should be understood as a multidimensional outcome. Existing research highlighted several key factors that influence the level of involvement of students with disabilities in school activities. These included individual characteristics such as autonomy, sense of control and level of connections. In addition, the surroundings such as how well the setting was adapted to their needs, the interplay of the child and their immediate surroundings, and the perceived accessibility of the surroundings also played significant roles in shaping participation outcomes. A smaller-scale study, developed at Bristol, by Dunn (2004) involved interviewing five blind young people individually (from 10 to 15 years of age) and a group discussion with these young people focusing on their primary school experiences, their friendships, and exploring what an ideal school would be like from their perspectives. It became clear that the interests of these young individuals aligned closely with those of their peers, particularly around themes like friendships and games. Four within the five participants expressed that having friends was a major reason they enjoyed attending school, although the number of friendships varied among them. They spoke positively about having time away from adult supervision and expressed that, at times, adults were overly involved in their activities. Many also wished

for longer break periods, especially when short breaks made it harder for them to socialize or keep up with peers who had already gone outside.

The step from primary to secondary education involved certain challenges. Some participants noted a growing cultural gap between themselves and others, which limited shared interests and made social interaction more difficult. However, as students moved into secondary school, they found that older peers were generally more understanding and empathetic toward the needs of others. Notably, students who had already been enrolled at the school were more aware of the needs of their blind peers and were better prepared to engage with them, compared to those who joined at the same time as the blind students. When asked to describe their ideal school, the participants first highlighted the importance of the people within it. They valued individuals who were kind, shared common interests, and refrained from teasing or bullying. They also emphasized the importance of having a diverse student population, a wide selection of subjects, and being included in decisions that affected them. A recurring concern was the physical structure of the school specifically, the size of the corridors. Larger corridors were seen as important, as these areas were often unsupervised and identified as spaces where bullying was more likely to occur (Dunn, 2004).

2.3.2 Mutual Relationship between Students with and Without Visual

Impairment

Researchers working within developmental theoretical frameworks have found that children develop different priorities for friendship as they mature, with intimacy becoming much more important in adolescence than in early childhood where shared activities are the focus of most friendships (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1996). Freeman and Kasari (1998) reported that companionship, stability, and emotional support are more often used in definitions of friendship than affection and intimacy. Several research has

been dedicated to examining whether children with disabilities form friendships with their peers across various settings. Many of these studies have reported on friendships, but have utilized stoichiometric analysis to measure the peer status or acceptance of children with disabilities in inclusive settings while some researchers have described relationships of pupils with visual impairment in inclusive settings as being very ordinary and characteristic of friendships between typically developing children others have suggested that the friendships involving pupils with visual impairment may be different in quality or features (Gazit, et al., 2008). It appeared likely that some friendships involving children with visual impairments differed in nature from those formed between typically developing peers. Studies exploring friendships among both groups often relied on the nomination of a "friend" as the starting point, with researchers then analyzing the qualities of those relationships.

This approach was based on the assumption that being nominated indicated the presence of a genuine friendship. For example, friendship scales such as those developed by Parker and Asher (1993) have been used to describe the characteristics of friendships on the assumption that the relationship exists (Cohn & Coster, 2011). Among typically developing children, it was often reasonable to assume that the nomination of a "friend" reflected an actual friendship. For students with visual impairments, however, friendships and social relationships sometimes carried different characteristics, and their understanding of the term "friend" did not always align with that of their typically developing peers. Researchers examining pupils with visual impairment have used a variety of methods to infer the existence or non-existence of friendships, often consisting of a direct question as to whether a peer is a friend (Locke et al., 2010) and have often assumed a pre-existing friendship when examining features or interactions between the individuals involved in the relationship (Morrison & Burgman, 2009). Researchers, however, had rarely examined the degree to which these connections fulfilled the traditional whether the nominated friends actually demonstrated the expected features of genuine friendship.

In a review of the literature on social relations of children with visual impairment, Webster and Carter (2007) found that in contrast to the literature on the relationships of typically developing children, which had extensively examined the defining characteristics of friendships, more limited parallel research has been conducted on the friendships of such children. Howes (1983) conducted one of the first studies of children with disabilities and typically developing peers in a hospital-based program for children with emotional disturbances.

Conversely, Harry et al (1998) highlighted that core aspect of friendship commonly observed among typically developing children such as reciprocity, mutual liking, affection, and enjoyment similarly evident in the engagement between girls with visual impairments. Freeman (2002) utilized systematic criteria from research on the friendship of typically developing children that is stability, parent nomination, and reciprocal nomination to examine the friendships of children with Down syndrome and their peers. Analysis of reports from children, peers, and parents showed that roughly 30% of the pairs did not qualify as genuine friendships. Reciprocity has been considered a critical component in definitions of friendship (Webster, Carter, 2012). Reciprocity involves behaviours that are share and recognize by all friends, but some research on this parts within the peers with minimal vision are small and direct. For example, much of the research examining reciprocity has focused on the mutuality of specific and limited behaviors during defined interactions (Hanline, 1993), and not necessarily on the range of behaviors that are specifically associated with friendships. Regarding the reciprocation of friendship nomination, only a handful of researchers (Freeman & Kasari, 2002) have utilized nomination by target students as well as the reciprocation of nomination by peers to examine the friendships of children with disabilities.

2.3.3 Choice of Friendship

Learners tend to choose as friends those peers who are similar to them, and there is some suggestion that friends increase in their similarity over time (Newcomb Bukowski & Bagwell, 1999). School-age children like and befriend others who are similar to themselves not only concerning superficial characteristics like age, gender, and physical appearance (Epstein, 1986), but also in terms of more complex psychological characteristics such as humor, politeness, sociability, sensitivity, play style, and play complexity (Gest et al., 2001), as well as prosocial behavior, antisocial behavior, shyness, victimization, group acceptance, and depressive symptoms (Newcomb et al., 1999). Recent research suggests that this general principle operates consistently across contexts as different as school classrooms and playgroups that it is especially pronounced for aggressive behavior, at least among boys, and even more specifically, it operates for proactive but not reactive aggression. Hartup (1996) has proposed that the "reputational salience" of a given characteristic is likely to determine its importance in friendship choice. For example, among boys, physical activity is more similar between friends than between non-friends, whereas for girls' personality and social network size are more similar between friends than between non-friends. Notably, these qualities are also more important for peer group reputation among boys and girls respectively. According to Hartup, the reputational salience hypothesis has never been tested. However, it provides a particularly interesting potential link between dyadic and group processes in children's peer relations. Children's friendship choices appear to be important to their continuing adjustment. When children choose friends who are well-adjusted and socially competent, endorse conventional social norms, and have few behavior problems, they manage stressful transitions better. In contrast to this rosy picture, when children assort antisocial or socially unskilled friends who endorse non-

normative behavior and attitudes, their friendships. Children who are similar in their aggression and/or withdrawn behavior are more likely to become friends than children who are dissimilar on these dimensions, and intra-dyad correlations are greater for antisocial behavior than they are for prosocial behavior or social isolation (Haselager et al., 1998). This suggests that troubled children may find their friendship choices limited and, hence end up in more homogeneous friendships than the typical child.

2.3.6 Social Network of Friendship

Much of the research on children's social networks has been influenced by research in sociology. This is evident not only in the emphasis on the group as the construct of interest but also in the more basic premise that individuals cannot be understood outside of the social contexts in which they exist (Cairns et al., 1998). Also important is the view of the peer group as a dynamic rather than static entity, an idea that has its roots in the work. Thus, while both sociometric status and social network analysis have a common origin in Moreno's theories, the aspects of his theories considered most critical have been shaped in important ways by the larger academic traditions (psychology and sociology) within which the two research literatures have developed. Kinderman has outlined several key assumptions underlying social network analysis: To Kinderman, it is assumed that students develop within a peer context that has a certain structure, that this structure is perceived similarly by many students in the classroom, and that this structure has important implications for individual development. Thus, a primary goal of social network analysis is to identify the patterns of children's affiliation within the peer group. According to Cairns et al., (1995), this includes both the subsets of individuals within the group (i.e., cliques or clusters), as well as the relations among these groups within the broader network.

A growing number of studies reveal that children with mutual friends are generally better adjusted and more socially competent than are children without friends. They are more sociable and prosocial, have higher self-esteem, and are less likely to be lonely (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995). They manage difficult transitions more smoothly, and their self-esteem increases following such transitions if they have mutual friends (Ladd, 2005). For children who find themselves victimized by some of their peers, having friends can reduce the incidence of victimization and friends can provide support and advice about how to manage the problem. In one particularly well-controlled study, children with a greater number of mutual friends were found to be more prosocially and good-humored, and less likely to tease others or boss them around, even after taking into account their group acceptance and peer network centrality (Gest et al., 2001). The effect of friendships on development may be overstated in much of the literature. Their importance varies with family support, life stressors, and a child's temperament. Children from unsupportive homes benefit more from friendships than those from well-functioning families. Second, friendships may be more important at some points in development than at others (Hartup et al., 1996). Third, having friends may be less important than other aspects of the child's social behavior in contributing to the development of social competence. In particular, children's aggression or their likeability and acceptance in their peer group are sometimes better predictors of social competence than how many friends they have (Gest et al., 2001). Finally, the association between friendships and other aspects of social competence may be driven by features of the child's social competence rather than vice versa (Hartup, 1996).

2.4 The Acceptance of Students with Visual Impairments by Their Sighted Peers.

Peer acceptance is a measure of social position and it is defined as the degree to which a student is welcomed/accepted by his/her peer group (Awini, 2015). The opportunity

and ability to participate in social interaction and develop friendships is an important factor for the general well-being of students, especially those with special educational needs. It should be noted that peer group acceptance does not necessarily reflect mutual emotional bonds, which are studied on the relational level of inquiry (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006). Low peer acceptance and peer rejection have been associated with a vast array of concurrent and future indicators of adaptation (Ladd, 2005). Inclusive education is to let learners as well as teachers and society appreciate the diverse capabilities of one another and learn to accept their strengths and weaknesses

The acceptance levels of students with visual impairments regarding their relationships with sighted peers and tutors significantly impact their social integration within educational environments. Dickinson and Matson (2020) suggest that students' acceptance levels are influenced by factors such as peer attitudes, self-perception, and the extent of inclusive practices within schools. Riddell et al. (2018) observed in African contexts that students with visual impairment often experience feelings of marginalization and lack of acceptance, which may impact their overall well-being and academic performance.

Every student would more likely see it as important to have a sense of belonging to a peer group; it however appears that becoming accepted as a full member of the group is not easy. The opportunity and ability to participate in social interaction and develop friendships is an important factor for the general well-being of students, especially those with special educational needs. Notwithstanding this, for students with a disability to be accepted by the peer group, they must have adequate social skills, and to practice and refine those skills, interaction with peers is necessary (Roe, 2008). Researchers have pointed out that students who are visually impaired generally have fewer peer

relations than sighted peers, both in and outside school, hence fewer opportunities to practice their social skills (Cochrane et al., 2008). In line with these findings, when students do not get the maximum opportunities to interact with their peers and have a mastery of the social skills needed to interact, then they are more likely to be rejected by their sighted or non-disabled peers during interactional or interpersonal relationships. Research undertaken in the social participation of students with disabilities often indicates that the placement of the learner with a disability is not an obvious means that such a learner will automatically make friends.

The placement of students in an inclusive classroom for social inclusion is not an end in itself (Pijl et al., 2010). Students with disabilities often experience difficulties in being accepted by their non-disabled peers and acquiring friendships (Koster et al, 2010). Pijl, et al. (2008) indicated that about 30 percent of students with disabilities have significantly fewer friends and are less accepted by their classmates than their typically developing peers. Several factors have been found to contribute to peer rejection; including aggressive or offensive behavior, an introverted personality style, and poorly developed social or communication skills. Learners with disabilities will only experience full acceptance by learners without disabilities if some social barriers are eliminated. The researchers further opined that one of such factors inherent in the barriers is the attitudes of teachers, parents, peers and persons with disabilities themselves. Negative attitudes towards learners with disabilities create real obstacles to the fulfilment of their roles and the attainment of their life goals. Knowledge of the attitudes of persons and learners without disabilities towards learners with disabilities helps us to understand the nature of the interaction between the two groups. The perception of being cut off from social groups makes individuals feel vulnerable, triggering a range of cognitive, behavioural and physiological responses geared towards

self-protection (Cacioppo et al., 2006). Thus, lonely individuals are inclined to be less trusting, to be more anxious and pessimistic, to perceive others around them more negatively and to approach social interactions in a defensive, hostile manner (Cacioppo, 2006) Although such cognitive biases and behavioural styles may serve the adaptive purpose of distancing individuals from potential threats, the corollary of this is that lonely individuals may become further isolated by sabotaging their opportunities to develop positive social relationships.

2.4.1 Visually Impaired Acceptance by Students with Visual Impairment

Peer acceptance is a measure of social position and is defined as the degree to which a child is accepted by his/her peer group. It should be noted that peer group acceptance does not necessarily reflect mutual emotional bonds, which are studied on the relational level of inquiry (Rubin et al., 2006). Acceptance is studied as a continuous variable by combining positive and negative nominations from sociometric measurement. When using a categorical approach, children are divided into groups of, for example, average and rejected peer status, based on the total number of positive and negative peer nominations. Low peer acceptance and peer rejection have been associated with a vast array of concurrent and future indicators of maladaptation (Ladd, 2005). An important issue concerns the co actual and perceived social participation, i.e. how group and individual phenomena are related. Loneliness has often been seen as an outcome of negative experiences with peers, and certainly, reports of loneliness are more likely among children who are poorly accepted (Shin, 2007) or rejected by their peers (Crick & Ladd, 1993). However, peer rejection and loneliness do not always co-occur, for instance, in a sample of elementary school children, Qualter and Munn (2002) found lonely foot rejected as well as not lonely/rejected groups. Furthermore, the associations between loneliness and low peer acceptance in continuous analyses have been of, at

most moderate size (Chen et al., 2004). This incomplete overlap underscores that it should be fruitful to further investigate and differentiate these phenomena, which constitute social participation on the group level and the individual meaning level. Learners without obvious disabilities are mostly seen as willing to form friendships with learners with visual impairment (Lehohla & Hlalele, 2012). Some of the reasons they gave for being friends with disabled learners with disabilities were altruistic (Wong, 2006). Many of these students believe it is their personal responsibility to initiate friendships. Learners without visible disabilities often feel a strong sense of obligation not wanting to let their peers with disabilities down which motivates them to reach out and build those social connections. These friendships, according to Lehohla and Hlalele (2012), are based not on the willingness to be friend, but to be of assistance. However, when friendships are formed solely out of a sense of obligation or the desire to provide support, they may struggle to develop in a meaningful way. Relationships that are shaped by assumptions of need and dependency tend to place one student in the role of a helper or guide, rather than an equal peer. This dynamic can lead learners without disabilities to perceive their peers with visual impairments as weak or dependent. True friendship should be mutually beneficial not one-sided or rooted in sympathy. Lehohla and Hlalele (2012) emphasized that students without apparent disabilities must begin to see themselves as equals, not caretakers. Achieving this shift requires them to act accordingly, and part of that involves developing a better understanding of disability. With this awareness, they are more likely to recognize that learners with visual impairments seek companionship and social connection not guardianship. Students with visual impairments often faced limited chances to engage meaningfully with their sighted classmates, which could hinder social acceptance (Mpofu, 1999). In some instances, these interactions were further complicated by cultural misconceptions. For example, some peers avoided engaging with students who were visually impaired due to the belief that visual impairment was transmissible (Jackson & Mupedziswa, 1988, as cited in Mpofu, 2003). Additionally, group activities particularly those involving physical play frequently excluded students with visual impairments, further

isolating them from peer interaction. Students with visual impairment may therefore be (mis)perceived as lazy, unreliable, and tardy (Mpofu, 1999). The fact that peers may regard students with visual impairment as having lower social attractiveness could be due to the limited opportunities that students with visual impairment have for peer interaction (Frederickson & Turner, 2002). Peer interaction is the extent of involvement with similar others in a group to which one belongs (Shotton, 1998). There is limited evidence in research about the progression from simple acceptance of a student with visual impairment by other students into meaningful relationships between students in their school communities. The experience of Children with Disability Australia (CDA) members is overwhelming that students and their peers struggle to bridge a gulf between accepting the presence of students with disability at school and valuing their membership as part of the school community (Prince & Hadwin, 2013). Goodenow's pioneering research on belonging found that for early and mid-adolescents in particular (regardless of impairment), 'the need to belong and to have a legitimate and valued membership in a setting may take precedence over virtually all other concerns' (1993, p. 83). Being generally accepted by peers was found in several studies to be important to students with disability (Beyer, 2008). The results of these studies show a movement from exclusion towards more positive attitudes on the part of students without disability. An Italian study of the social position and inherent sense of belonging of school students aged 8-11 (Peru, 2013) found that while students without disability indicated positive attitudes, students with disability did not feel a positive sense of belonging. They attributed this to a 'compassionate bias' on the part of higher achieving students. Bunch and Valeo (2004) collected the views of peers of students with disability in Canada, finding that non-disabled high school students held a consistent view that students with disability had friends, but that their friends were other students

with disability, and their friendships were maintained in their separate classroom or social space within the school. The study revealed that practices such as grouping and offering special treatment to students with disabilities often served as obstacles to building peer relationships. It was observed that both social and academic divisions existed between students with and without disabilities, and that genuine friendships between the two groups were mostly limited to the early years of primary education.

However, younger participants in inclusive settings reported having friendships with their peers who had disabilities. These students demonstrated familiarity with their friends not only within school but also in out-of-school contexts. Moreover, they were able to differentiate between surface-level or unequal relationships and those they considered true friendships. Some students also associated the inclusive education model with increased opportunities to form meaningful peer connections.

2.4.2 Different Behaviors and Peers' Acceptance

Problem behaviours and peer acceptance differences in childhood temperament and behavioural tendencies should be related to how easily children can socially interact and also how they might react to being alone (ie. the children's proneness to feelings of loneliness when alone). A child may be temperamentally more aggressive disruptive or withdrawn than others, and these behaviours may contribute to rejection and loneliness (Cassidy & Berlin, 1999). In searching for a possible background to low social participation, common childhood problem behaviours are obvious candidates. As regards perceived low social participation, internalizing problems (ie. worries, unhappiness, somatic complaints, and social withdrawal) have been related to loneliness, in fact, loneliness is often studied as an aspect of internalizing problems more than an aspect of peer problems. In particular, social withdrawal has been directly related to loneliness both concurrently and prospectively (Renshaw & Brown, 1993),

but there are also studies pointing to concurrent relations between other measures of internalizing problems and loneliness (Qualter & Munn, 2002).

Furthermore, loneliness and depression appear to be highly interrelated, and loneliness has even been linked to suicide. The mechanisms behind these relations are not well understood. First, the association between internalizing problems and loneliness could be mediated by peer rejection. The contribution of initial withdrawal to subsequent loneliness could, for instance, in one study be explained by its association with negative peer status, and peer rejection has been shown to mediate links between withdrawal or shyness and loneliness in concurrent assessments (Valdivia et al, 2005). However, feelings of loneliness may be a strong, perhaps natural, problem spectrum, and may also be evident in the absence of low social standing. Thus, the background to loneliness by no means well understood and is possibly dual. Surprisingly few studies appear to have investigated the relationship between internalizing problems and loneliness taking per problems into account.

To complicate the picture of perceived low social participation, loneliness is associated with externalizing problems (aggression, impulsivity and other disruptive behaviours). Thus, loneliness may be associated with externalizing problems mainly when associated with rejection. It is also possible that this link is an effect of the considerable co-occurrence of externalizing and internalizing problems (Slattery, 2000). As regards actual social participation, there are robust direct concurrent and predictive relationships between various expressions of externalizing problems and low peer acceptance or peer rejection.

Furthermore, links between early externalizing problem behaviours and subsequent conduct problem is mediated by peer rejection (Miller-Johnson et al., 2002). There have also been associations between internalizing behaviours, perhaps particularly social

withdrawal and poor peer acceptance. However, the evidence for this association is somewhat contradictory. Some studies have indicated. Various aspects of internalizing behaviour are predictive of poor peer acceptance or peer rejection during the school years (Rubin, et al, 1998).

However, Ladd and Burgess (1999) found out that early withdrawn children reached nearly the same levels of later peer acceptance as a problem-free group. Developmental studies on the role of internalizing behaviours in later peer acceptance are scarce.

Thus, loneliness seems to be most consistently associated with internalizing problems, although there is evidence of relation to externalizing problems as well. As regards poor peer acceptance, associations with externalizing problems appear particularly robust, although there are reports of relations between internalizing problems and poor peer acceptance. If one aims to deepen knowledge about how children's social functioning in terms of problem behaviours is associated with perceived and actual low social participation, these two should be studied jointly, and the co-occurrence of internalizing and externalizing problems should be taken into consideration.

2.4.3 Social Isolation of the Visually Impaired from their Sighted Peers

Lehohla and Hlalele (2012) noted that while students without visible disabilities were sometimes open to forming friendships with their peers who had disabilities, the reality on the other end of the spectrum was that learners with visual impairments often faced rejection. Estell et al. (2009) found that children tend to actively avoid peers who they perceive as too different from themselves. Although learners with visual impairments typically share similar interests, preferences, and social desires as their age-mates, their differences in communication style and the need for certain accommodations can present initial challenges in building peer relationships. Learners may need to understand their classmate's specific strengths and needs to feel more comfortable in

their interactions (Downing, 2008). Peers with visual impairments are actively rejected by those without obvious disabilities because they are different, but the underlying reason is that they do know about their peers' particular disability. According to Wong (2006), qualitative data indicated that children felt uncomfortable to peers with visual impairments if they were not given adequate information about the nature of the disabilities. When students lacked knowledge or awareness about disabilities, they were often uncertain about how to interact with peers who had them. They did not always understand whether a classmate might need assistance or how to discuss the disability without sounding insensitive. This uncertainty sometimes led to rejection. Wong (2006) noted that some learners with disabilities were excluded when their presence was perceived as a threat to the social standing or self-image of their non-disabled peers, which resulted in higher levels of non-acceptance.

During adolescence, peer acceptance and self-image carried significant weight, and being associated with the "wrong" group often led to social isolation. Such dynamics could seriously hinder the social development of a learner. In some cases, students who knew little about disability strongly disapproved of their friends' forming bonds with peers who had disabilities. As a result, some students with disabilities lost opportunities for mutual friendships and continued to experience high levels of social rejection, even within inclusive school environments.

They are rejected both for play and scholastic activities (Frederickson & Furnham, 2004). This normally happens when typically achieving learners hold and maintain negative self-fulfilling prophecies of learners with special needs (Estell et al., 2008). These prophecies could be that disabilities are contagious or that disabled people are useless and are always in need of help. These are ideas that are harmful to forming relationships with learners with special needs. Many parents with children with disabilities/special educational needs feel that being in inclusive classrooms will give their children an opportunity for contact and interaction with typical peers (Koster et

al., 2009). Studies report that learners with disabilities experience higher levels of loneliness than their peers, are less accepted and generally have a social status lower than that of their classmates (Koster et al., 2009). Learners with visible disabilities were often found to be less popular among their peers. While building a positive self-image was important for their development, repeated experiences of peer rejection negatively affected this process and hindered the healthy formation of self-esteem. Learners without obvious disabilities are sometimes willing to form friendships with learners with disabilities, but the other end of the spectrum is that learners with disabilities are rejected by peers (Lehohla & Hlalele, 2012). Estell et al. (2009) reported that children often rejected peers they perceived as being too different from themselves. Although learners with visual impairments shared many of the same interests and aspirations as their age-mates, difficulties with conventional communication and the need for specific accommodations created initial obstacles to forming friendships. Learners may need to understand their classmates' specific strengths and needs to feel more comfortable in their interactions (Downing, 2008). Peers with visual impairment are actively rejected by those without obvious disabilities because they are different, but the underlying reason is that they do know about their peers' particular disability. According to Wong (2006), qualitative data indicated that children felt uncomfortable with peers with disabilities if they were not given adequate information about the nature of the disabilities. When students lacked awareness or understanding of disabilities, they were often unsure of how to behave around peers with such conditions. They did not always know whether assistance was needed or how to address the disability without sounding insensitive, which sometimes resulted in rejection. Wong (2006) observed that learners with visual impairments were particularly at risk of exclusion when interactions with them were perceived as a threat to the social status or self-image of their non-disabled peers, leading to high levels of non-acceptance.

During adolescence, peer approval and self-image were especially significant, and associating with the “wrong” group could result in ostracism. Such experiences could have damaging effects on the social development of a learner. In some cases, students with limited knowledge of disability strongly disapproved of their friends forming relationships with peers who had disabilities. Consequently, many learners with disabilities lost opportunities for reciprocal friendships and continued to face heightened social rejection, even within inclusive school environments. They are rejected both for play and scholastic activities (Frederickson & Furnham, 2004). This normally happens when typically achieving learners hold and maintain negative self-fulfilling prophecies of learners with special needs (Estell et al., 2008). These prophecies could be that disabilities are contagious or that disabled people are useless and are always in need of help. These are ideas that are harmful to forming relationships with learners with visual impairment.

Many parents with children with visual impairment feel that being in inclusive classrooms will give their children an opportunity for contact and interaction with typical peers (Koster et al., 2009). Studies report that learners with disabilities experience higher levels of loneliness than their peers are less accepted and generally have a social status lower than that of their classmates (Koster et al., 2009).

Learners with visual impairment are also less popular, have fewer reciprocal friends and are less often part of a subgroup of peers (Ruijs & Peetsma, 2009). Although strengthening self-image was important, repeated experiences of peer rejection negatively affected this process and hindered its healthy development.

2.5 Social Self- perceptions of Students with Visual Impairments Regarding their Social Relationships with the Sighted

The social self-perception of students is their satisfaction with his/her situation with peers thus, whether he or she feel lonely or express fulfillment in everyday school activities (Nyberg, et al., 2008). Students with visual impairment report greater levels of loneliness, isolation, and interpersonal conflict at school and that they rely less on peers for social support when dealing with an academic or interpersonal problem than students without visual impairment. Acceptance of adolescents with visual impairment by their peers without visual impairment is considered to be of primary importance to their successful integration into senior high school or tertiary institutions. Hilgenkamp, et al. (2011) stated that students and adolescents with cognitive and developmental delays show difficulty in social interaction, feelings of rejection, autonomy, social rules and behavioral and emotional self-regulation. Importantly, the authors further argued that their subjective well-being is associated with social support and personal factors, such as self-esteem and a positive self-image. For the well-being students with disabilities, self-awareness may be very essential for their self-perception.

Positive perception may be considered as the intrinsic individual view of the general perspective of his or her environment. The presence of a positive perception of peer acceptance, satisfaction with the school learning environment, positive self-esteem or concept, self-perception of self-competence, and the satisfaction of inclusion within the larger group cannot be overlooked when one needs the academic successes of learners as well as their social participation in learning environments. Dyson (2001) supported this argument when he stated that students may not be considered as socially included if they do not acquire the skills they will need to participate in society or if the skills gap between them and their peers is too wide. Despite the belief that positive self-

perception of students with visual impairments increases their level of social participation, the social self-perception of students with visual impairments about their interaction, acceptance, and relationship with their peers which influences their social participation in the school is not known as little is researched into that in the school. Self-awareness is important because it can be the first step in eliminating many of the negative perceptions and expectations students with disabilities develop about themselves. Social-emotional well-being may be seen as the resultant factor of the self-perception or self-image of the student. Learners with disabilities are twice as likely as their peers to be bullied and most bullying takes place in settings that are not monitored by teachers (Dunn, 2004).

The physical presence of learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms (physical integration) does not by itself ensure a learner's progress and development, unless functional and social integration are also provided (Schmidt & Cagran, 2008). It is only when functional and social integration are realised in a mainstream environment that such learners with disabilities and as far as this study is concerned, those with visual impairments would report satisfaction in school. Whether or not a learner feels truly included is reliant on their participation beyond physically being included in activity, school, work or relationships. There must be a reciprocity that makes it possible for the individual to be involved (Wager & Bailey, 2005). Mpofu, (2003) opined that learners with disabilities have limited opportunities to interact with their able-bodied classmates, which could result in lower social acceptance. Unfortunately, students with disabilities are half as likely to report a sense of belonging, feeling safe or accepted, than are learners without disabilities. They are also half as likely to view other learners as kind (Hogan, et al., 2000). Learners with visual impairment experience challenges in school when they are to join in other activities, thus reducing the learner's

opportunities to socialise have a chat whilst waiting for the next activity. Individuals with high self-esteem tend to have confidence in their abilities to make decisions, expectations for successful outcomes, a willingness to experience new things, sensitivity to others' needs and to have relationships that are characterized by respect and dignity (Tuttle & Tuttle, 2004). Some young students with disabilities have negative self-images; they may view themselves as failures, have negative thoughts about themselves, be dependent on their parents and others, and have feelings of loss if the disability is adventitious. They may also have difficulty with social skills, such as reading non-verbal cues from their non-disabled peers and controlling impulsive behaviour. They further stipulated that to develop a healthy self-concept in students with visual impairments and other disabilities, they need to be provided with interventions, such as counseling, stress-reduction techniques such as meditation and relaxation exercises, and help with developing their personal and social skills. Researchers have suggested that students who are visually impaired are often more socially immature and more egocentric than sighted students and that since they often have difficulty observing and imitating peers, they may have more difficulty developing positive self-esteem (Tuttle & Tuttle, 2004). According to Tuttle and Tuttle (2004, p. 73), "the psychological principles involved in the dynamics of the development of one's self-concept and self-esteem among the sighted are equally applicable to persons who are blind." However, Tuttle and Tuttle (2004) suggested that people with visual impairments may have lower self-esteem due to a disproportionate number of negative reflections they may experience compared with their nondisabled peers. They also identified the problem of dependence that visually impaired students face when they require assistance from others. This feeling of dependence can result in lower self-

esteem even when a visually impaired student who has excellent coping and adaptive skills accepts assistance to perform daily living skills.

The quality of one's social relationships is among the several factors that are significantly associated with loneliness among adolescents (Whitehouse et al., 2009). Loneliness is a common social problem that is experienced by people of all genders, ages, and cultural backgrounds. Literature provides evidence suggesting that loneliness is a risk factor for socio-emotional adjustment difficulties among adolescents (Coplan et al., 2007). A study was conducted by Hadidi Al-Khateeb (2013) which was to investigate loneliness among students with blindness and those who are sighted in Jordan and examined whether loneliness levels vary according to gender. The population involved in the study included 90 students with blindness and 79 sighted students selected from high schools and universities in the capital city of Amman. The instrument used to collect information in the study was an Arabic translation and adapted version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale developed by Russell in 1996. The results indicated that students with blindness reported significantly higher degrees of loneliness than sighted students; however, no significant differences were attributable to gender or interaction between visual status and gender. The findings of this study were consistent with that of Frame, (2000) when their studies also revealed that students with vision impairment exhibit higher levels of loneliness, especially in adolescence.

The social self-perceptions of students with visual impairments play a critical role in shaping their interactions and relationships with sighted individuals. Ferguson and Taylor (2019) highlight the importance of promoting positive self-perceptions among students with visual impairment to enhance their social confidence and self-esteem. However, research indicates that students with visual impairment may internalize

negative stereotypes and perceptions about their abilities, impacting their social relationships and sense of belonging within inclusive settings (Fryer et al., 2019). Addressing these social self-perceptions is essential for fostering inclusive environments that promote equitable participation and social integration among all students. Further research should explore interventions to enhance the social self-perceptions of students with visual impairment and promote positive social interactions within inclusive educational settings.

2.5.1 Self-perception of Peer Acceptance

The perception of social participation is the learner's satisfaction with the situation with peers whether he or she feels lonely, or expresses fulfilment in everyday school activities (Nyberga et al., 2008). Access to visual information was recognized as an important factor in developing social understanding, yet many learners with visual impairments particularly those with severe vision loss faced considerable challenges in this area. Vision was often considered central to shaping self-identity and understanding others. From an early age, children used visual cues such as eye contact, gaze following, and joint attention to initiate and maintain interactions, as well as to interpret the behavior and intentions of others. These early visual skills were thought to lay the foundation for secure emotional attachments, social communication, language development, and awareness of self and others.

Pupils with visual impairments, however, frequently encountered barriers in social engagement with their peers (Dale & Salt, 2008). Sacks et al. (1996) documented instances of isolation and emotional distress among blind and visually impaired pupils in mainstream classrooms. Many lacked the social skills necessary to initiate or sustain conversations, join group games, or feel fully included in peer activities. Sacks et al. further observed that acquiring effective social skills in sighted environments was an ongoing process, requiring continuous refinement throughout life. Although this was not the case for every learner with visual impairments, for many it remained a

significant challenge to develop the competencies needed to navigate complex social contexts.

Difficulties often extended into school activities. Pupils with visual impairments sometimes struggled to locate friends on the playground particularly in unformed settings or were expected to perform at the same level as sighted peers despite lacking visual access for comparison. They also faced pressure to complete academic tasks quickly, leaving them with fewer opportunities to socialize between activities. Challenges were evident in social interaction, communication, and behavior, including social withdrawal, reluctance to initiate contact, rejection of social approaches, tactile defensiveness, anxiety during interactions, poor conversational use of language, and limited responsiveness to communication attempts by others (Dale & Salt, 2008).

Despite these challenges, social interaction remained essential for pupils with visual impairments, as it provided opportunities to compensate for restricted visual access, form associations, and develop their understanding of the world. However, as Roe (2008) noted, there were no straightforward solutions for fostering friendships between visually impaired and sighted students. Still, inclusion in mainstream schools was believed to offer richer social opportunities, enabling students with visual impairments to become more socially competent than peers in segregated settings. Fisher et al. (1998) concluded that mainstreaming generally provided benefits for learners with disabilities. Beyond schools, parents also played a crucial role by creating supportive environments that offered children opportunities to learn about themselves and others.

Thus, they can develop social skills, become socially competent and be socially included (Roe, 2008). To promote social interaction and inclusion, pupils with visual impairments need to develop their awareness of themselves and a range of social skills

through a variety of experiences Opportunities to interact with others need to be embedded in everyday, whole-class activities and also need to be taken as and when they emerge (Roc, 2008).

2.5.2 Visually Impaired perception of social participation

Youth cooperation with peers and close friendships are related to enduring happiness and well-being (Holder & Coleman, 2009). Understanding children's perceptions of their friendships, in particular, may contribute to understanding their emotional lives and development, since happy young people are those who report fulfilling friendships (Lalonde & Leadbeater, 2008). Furthermore, focusing on children's friendships with their best friends may help enhance their happiness and subjective well-being, as positive psychology conceptualizes (Johnson & Reinke, 2005). Cognition and cognitive processes are significant contributors to the development and quality of a close relationship (Blas, 2007). Specifically, intuitive and attitudinal appraisals have been central concepts in the research on close relationships. Whether partners perceive their relationship as positive or negative, and which explanations or interpretations they make about the relationship influence their emotions, motivation and behaviour (Fitness, Fletcher & Overall, 2005). Concerning emotions, more precisely, the attributional appraisal perspective focuses on how specific emotions, such as sadness and anger are formulated in a certain relationship, and on their motivational consequences in the relationship (Clare & Ortony, 201). Anger combines distress over an undesired event with perceiving the other as responsible for it (Ortony, 2010). Once emotions are experienced, they influence partner's ongoing appraisals, perceptions, and information processing with important consequences in relationship judgments and behaviours (Weiner, 2006). Anger pushes individuals to attribute blame and malicious intentions to others (Fitness & Fletcher, 1993). Yet, emotions are inherently and

intensely experienced in the context of close relationships with significant effects on partner's future behaviour, and on the development of the relationship, and so are needed to be included in any comprehensive discussion (Rose, 2007). Also, as the friendship develops, the friends form expectations for a series of constructs in the friendship, such as the friend's dispositional behaviour and the content of the friendship. Literature on the person's perception and cognition underlines that the dispositional attributions an individual makes to the partner reflect expectations of how he/she will behave in various situations (Trope & Gaunt, 2005). The expectations we hold about our friend and the friendship are partly constructed through the cognitive appraisals we make and the emotions we experience in the friendship (Stephanou, 2010). Similar are the findings from research in achievement behaviour showing that high expectations for success are related to task engagement, persistence in carrying out tasks, effective use of cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies and successful performance (Stephanou, 2008). The meaning, content and perceptions of friendship differ across ages (Pillow, Lovett & Hill, 2008). For example, in early childhood, friends are co-players, while, in middle childhood, friends support, communicate and trust each other. They have expectations about their friendship and they are quite able to regulate their thoughts, emotions and behaviour in the context of their friendship (Holder & Coleman, 2009).

2.5.3 Social Competence Influencing Peer's Relationship

Adolescents' social competence has been linked to higher participation in sports and extracurricular activities (Donaldson & Ronan, 2006) Participation in groups and social activities predicts adolescents' peer attachment and self-perceived strengths, such as "friendly", "humorous", and 'outgoing" (McGee et al., 2006). Children with physical disabilities who reported higher perceived social competence have been found to report

higher preferences for social activities, participate in these activities more intensively, and have more enjoyment (King et al., 2006). Low levels of pro-social behaviour as well as social initiative have been linked to peer rejection in population samples. Social competence concerning loneliness has rarely been investigated, but there are reports the negative relationship between perceived competence/pro-social behaviour and loneliness in pre-schoolers and school-aged children (Hymel et al., 1990) as well as among children referred for conduct problems. In the adult literature, there has consistently been a negative relationship between social skills and loneliness. From the point of view of problem behaviours, low social competence has been associated with internalizing problems as well as externalizing problem behaviours (Henricsson & Rydell, 2006). Given the above relations, it would be of interest to see to what extent social competence contributes to social participation, and further, it seems possible that social competence could serve as a moderator of problem behaviours concerning peer relations. Moderation could take different forms in line with the reasoning above about protective factors, good social skills could temper the negative effect on peer relations for children with high levels of problem behaviour. Second, high levels of social competence could further boost the peer relations of children with low levels of problem behaviours. Third, poor social competence could exacerbate the poor peer relations of children with high problem levels, and finally, poor social competence could jeopardize the normally good peer relations of children with low problem levels. Somewhat surprisingly, the question of the combined effects of problem behaviour and social competence on peer relations has barely been investigated. In a study, high pro-social skills buffered the negative effects on later peer acceptance for children with early internalizing problems, but there was no such effect concerning externalizing problems. In addition, social initiative further boosted later low problem levels of children who

were non-problematic in first grade. Studying the same sample, meager buffering effects of social competence were found concerning the teacher-child relationships for children with problem behaviours (Hennesson & Rydell, 2004). Thus, existing evidence points to both buffering and boosting effects of social competence about problem behaviours, but the issue certainly deserves further exploration. Children with more reciprocal friends have higher levels of social competence, and friendship dyads are characterized by more socially competent play than non-friend dyads (Azria et al., 2001). This association likely reflects a complex process that evolves over time in which children's competence supports friendship development which, in turn, supports the further development of competence (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1996).

2.5.4 Loneliness and Peer Acceptance

Loneliness and peer acceptance Loneliness encompasses being lonely, i.e, being socially isolated or lacking social contacts, and feeling lonely, i.e. with the emotional aspects stemming from an absence of close relationships and primarily referring to something children experience both with others and by themselves (Qualter & Munn, 2002), Loneliness is rather prevalent; more than 10% of preschool and elementary school children have reported considerable feelings of loneliness, and among adolescents as many as 23-38% have felt loneliness to some degree (Larson, 1999). Loneliness has been associated with negative perceptions of the self as well as with peer victimization. These prevalence rates and the associations with emotional and social problems make loneliness an important area for scrutiny. Galanaki and Vassilopoulou (2007) observed that high levels of loneliness among students with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream schools reflected their limited participation in social activities and suggested that such students were at greater social risk. Loneliness among children was found to be relatively common, with research showing that between 10–15% of children and adolescents reported feeling very lonely (Galanaki & Vassilopoulou, 2007). Studies on typically developing students further indicated that

loneliness tended to peak during adolescence, a stage in which social expectations, roles, and personal identity underwent considerable change (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). At this point, peer relationships became increasingly important, with adolescents spending much more time with friends outside the supervision of adults.

The onset of early adolescence also coincided with the transition from elementary to secondary school. This phase, often involving the loss of old friendships and the establishment of new ones, has been identified as an area of concern (Ainscow, 2006). Such shifts in the social world of adolescents may contribute to the higher incidence of loneliness observed during this period. Evidence further suggested that students with SEN experienced even greater levels of loneliness compared to their typically developing peers (Ferri, 2007; Pijl et al., 2010).

Among the subgroups of SEN students integrated into mainstream settings, those with visual impairments were considered unique in relation to loneliness. Historically, it was suggested that children with visual impairments demonstrated a “basic desire for aloneness.” Importantly, aloneness differed from loneliness; while aloneness could be a positive and even desirable state, loneliness referred to a negative experience of isolation.

Researchers explored whether students with visual impairments were genuinely content with their state of aloneness, as Kanner suggested, or whether they actually experienced feelings of loneliness. So far, several studies have indicated that children and adolescents with visual impairment indeed reported higher levels of loneliness in comparison to their typically developing peers (Eriksen & Goossens, 2010). While these studies offered valuable insights into the experiences of individuals with visual impairments, many questions remained unresolved. In particular, limited knowledge existed regarding the prevalence of loneliness among students with visual impairments

during early adolescence. Previous research often examined participants across wide age ranges, typically between 8 and 17 years old, which made it difficult to draw conclusions specific to early adolescence. In only two studies, the grade/age range of the participants was limited to three grade levels (Chamberlain et al., 2007; Lasgaard et al., 2010) and one study did not report the grade/age ranges of the participants (Locke et al., 2010). Secondly, although these studies provided a broad understanding of loneliness among individuals with visual impairments, little was known about how such experiences manifested in fully inclusive settings. Most of the existing research compared the loneliness of students with visual impairments who were placed in special education programs or self-contained classrooms within mainstream schools to the reported loneliness of their typically developing peers in general education. Two studies have focused on loneliness among students with visual impairments in fully inclusive settings (Locke et al., 2010; Whitehouse et al., 2009). Following the interactionist approach to loneliness, which considers loneliness as a result of the interaction between one's characteristics and their socio-cultural context, loneliness could differ across contexts (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). To minimize potential context effects, it was considered important to compare loneliness levels of students within the same schools and, ideally, within the same classrooms. For example, Locke et al. (2010) examined the prevalence of loneliness among seven students with visual impairments in relation to their typically developing classmates. Their findings showed that students with visual impairments reported higher average levels of loneliness compared to their peers without disabilities.

What remained unclear, however, was whether loneliness among students with visual impairments differed significantly from that of students with other types of special educational needs (SEN). Although direct comparisons across different SEN categories were lacking, several studies had compared the loneliness of students with various disabilities to that of typically developing peers. The majority of these studies have

focused on students with learning disabilities, whereas studies on loneliness among students with motor and/or sensory disabilities are rare (Pijl et al., 2010). Limited information was available regarding the prevalence of loneliness among students with motor and/or sensory disabilities at the beginning of mainstream secondary education. The scarce studies among hard-of-hearing students or students with visual impairments report higher rates of loneliness compared to their typically developing peers (Most, 2007; Pijl et al., 2010). Besides the lack of knowledge on the prevalence of loneliness in different subgroups of students with SEN, current knowledge on the factors that might protect students with SEN against loneliness is limited as well (Lasgaard et al., 2010). These protective factors may have differed for students with special educational needs (SEN) compared to their typically developing peers, and even across subgroups within the SEN population. Loneliness, often defined as the gap between an individual's desired number and quality of friendships and their actual experiences, suggested that both the quantity and quality of friendships were linked to loneliness. Previous studies involving both typically developing students and those with visual impairments appeared to support this assumption.

Nonetheless, these studies also suggest that the link between the number of friends, friendship quality and loneliness is less clear among individuals with visual impairments than among the typically developing population (Bauminger & Kasari, 2000; Chamberlain et al., 2007). For example, students with visual impairment might have a different understanding of friendship and consequently nominated less positive and strong friendship relations than typically developing students, or students with visual impairments have a degree of happy obliviousness, which might explain why social involvement cues do not affect them as much (Chamberlain et al., 2007). So far, none of these hypotheses have been confirmed. Furthermore, low global and/or social self-esteem has been found to accompany high loneliness feelings in typically developing children and adolescents (Galanaki & Vassilopoulou, 2007). So far, only

one study assessed the relationship between social self-concept and loneliness in individuals with visual impairments as well as in typically developing individuals (Bauminger et al., 2004). The study demonstrated a clear link between loneliness and social self-concept in both groups. However, earlier research had not examined the relative protective effects of these factors against loneliness in students with visual impairments compared to their typically developing peers. It also remained unclear whether protective factors influenced loneliness in the same way across different categories of special educational needs (SEN).

When opportunities for friendship were limited and adequate support was lacking, students who required help to initiate or maintain peer relationships were at a greater risk of experiencing loneliness. As highlighted earlier, studies on school belonging indicated that peer relationships were central to how children and adolescents experienced connection within the school environment. When this dimension of belonging was absent, it had serious consequences for students' overall sense of belonging, their attachment to school, and even their academic outcomes. A number of studies had specifically investigated the relationship between disability and loneliness among students.

2.6 Summary of the Literature Review

The literature review provides a comprehensive overview of social relationships, and Allport's contact theory in the context of students with visual impairment and their sighted peers at Nurast Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education, Wa. The study explores previous researches on the social experiences of students with visual impairment, highlighting the importance of promoting social integration and reducing prejudice within educational settings. Allport's contact theory serves as a theoretical framework for understanding how increasing positive interactions between different groups can enhance understanding and foster empathy. Strategies such as cooperative learning,

shared activities, and awareness training are discussed as effective approaches for promoting meaningful intergroup contact and improving social relationships on campus. Most of the literature reviewed centered on social interaction among pupils with visual impairment and their sighted peers at the basic and secondary level creating a gap for investigating in the tertiary inclusive educational level. Again quantitative approach or mixed methods were used in investigating the social interaction among sighted and visually impaired students, the researcher therefore employed a qualitative approach to probe further into the study area. Qualitative research approaches could provide in-depth insights into the challenges and facilitators of academic interactions experienced by students with visual impairments and their tutors at the college. However, there is limited research examining the nature of academic interactions within the specific context of Nusrat Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education. The study again highlighted the significance of students' social self-perceptions in influencing their overall academic experiences and well-being.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlined the methodology and procedures that were employed to gather and analyze data for the study. The discussion covered several key areas, including the philosophical orientation of the research, the chosen approach and design, the target population, sample size, and sampling techniques. It also described the instruments used for data collection, as well as issues of trustworthiness such as dependability, confirmability, credibility, and transferability. In addition, the chapter explained the data collection process, methods of data analysis, and the ethical considerations that guided the study.

3.1 Philosophical positioning

The study was underpinned by an interpretive paradigm. This paradigm aims to capture lived experiences from the viewpoint of the people involved. This paradigm emphasizes the importance of context, meaning, and subjective experiences. The interpretive paradigm is rooted in the belief that reality is socially constructed and that understanding comes from exploring the meanings that individuals ascribe to their experiences (Schwandt, 2014).

The interpretive paradigm is particularly useful for examining the patterns of social relationships that exist among students with visual impairments (VI) and their sighted peers. By focusing on the subjective experiences and meanings that students with visual impairment attach to their interactions, researchers can gain deeper insights into the dynamics of these relationships. For example, understanding how students with visual

impairment perceive inclusion or exclusion in social settings can reveal how they navigate their social worlds (Mertens, 2005).

In the context of social relationships among students with visual impairment and sighted peers, the interpretive paradigm allows researchers to explore how students with visual impairment interpret their social experiences and the impact of these interpretations on their sense of belonging and identity. This approach can uncover the specific challenges and facilitators that influence these relationships, providing a richer understanding of the social integration process (Erwin & Soodak, 1995).

Applying the interpretive paradigm to the academic interactions between students with visual impairment and their tutors involves exploring how these students perceive and interpret their educational experiences. This approach emphasizes understanding the students' perspectives on the support and challenges they face in academic settings. Researchers can investigate how students with visual impairment construct meaning around their interactions with tutors, including the effectiveness of communication, the adequacy of instructional materials, and the level of academic support provided (Schwandt, 2014).

For instance, the interpretive paradigm can help reveal the emotional and psychological dimensions of these academic interactions, such as feelings of frustration or empowerment. By focusing on the subjective experiences of students with visual impairment, researchers can identify specific areas where tutors may need to adjust their teaching strategies to better accommodate these students' needs (Rosenblum, 2000).

The interpretive paradigm is also valuable for exploring the level of acceptance that students with visual impairment feel regarding their relationships with sighted peers.

This involves examining how students with visual impairment perceive the attitudes and behaviors of their sighted peers towards them. Understanding these perceptions can provide insights into the degree of social acceptance and the factors that contribute to or hinder it (Mertens, 2005).

Researchers can use the interpretive paradigm to investigate how students with visual impairment interpret instances of inclusion or exclusion, support or discrimination. This can uncover the emotional and social impact of these interactions, shedding light on how acceptance (or the lack thereof) affects the social and emotional well-being of students with visual impairment. This approach emphasizes the importance of subjective experiences in understanding the complexities of social acceptance (Huurre & Aro, 1998). Finally, the interpretive paradigm is instrumental in studying the social self-perceptions of students with visual impairment regarding their relationships with sighted peers. This involves exploring how students with visual impairment view themselves in the context of their social interactions and how these views influence their overall self-concept and identity. The interpretive approach allows researchers to delve into the subjective meanings and interpretations that students with visual impairment attach to their social experiences (Schwandt, 2014). Understanding these self-perceptions can help identify strategies to boost the social confidence and resilience of students with visual impairment, ultimately contributing to more positive social outcomes (Rosenblum, 2000). Interpretivism accordingly embraced a personal view of the social phenomenon as perceived by the actor (Mertens, 2010). These personal or internal ideas about social phenomena represent the individual's belief system or theory about that phenomenon (Sefotho, 2015).

Again, Fobi, (2023) further posits that the interpretivism paradigm focuses more on the interpretation of human experience, consciousness, sense-making, and worldviews based on the pursuit of comprehension. He adds that the social world in which we live is not easily perceivable because it is constructed differently by different people. The paradigm's profound emphasis on the perceiver's internal ideas, feelings and motives also demanded an unbiased, intrusive and sensitive researcher attitude (Hennink et al., 2010). This orientation matched my goal of understanding participants' interpretations of their engagement with those who can see and the facilitators. I approached the data obtained with openness and a sense of curious, taking from Hennink et al. (2010) for ways that enable good feedback. Interpretive relies on a dialogue between the researcher and their subjects to negotiate, collaborate, and develop a meaningful understanding of reality through interviews, observation and contextual analysis (Antwi & Hamza, 2015).

3.2 Research Approach

The study applied a qualitative method to understand the connections between visually impaired students and sighted peers, and tutors at Jahan College of Education. According to Kusi (2012), qualitative research involves direct interaction between the researcher and participants within their socio-cultural context. The data were generated through interviews and observation guides, which allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences. As Bryman (2008) and Creswell (2003) explained, qualitative research typically seeks detailed, descriptive responses rather than broad or generalized information about the phenomenon under investigation. Similarly, Ary, Jacobs, and Sorensen (2010) emphasized that qualitative inquiry aims to capture information from participants' perspectives to better understand the phenomenon being studied.

In line with this, the present study employed the qualitative approach to obtain a comprehensive account of the experiences of students with visual impairments and how they navigated their social relationships within the college environment.

3.3 Research design

This study adopted a case study design to investigate the experiences of students with visual impairments and their social relationships with sighted peers at Nusrat Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education. A case study design is a strategy for doing research that involves an empirical investigation of a particular phenomenon within its real context using multiple sources of evidence (Robson, 2002), and involves an in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon in its natural context and from the perspectives of the participants involved in the phenomenon. Case studies aimed to capture the full range of a subject's behaviors and examine how these were connected to the individual's background and environment. Within this design, the researcher observed participants' responses to naturally occurring events. For this reason, the present study concentrated on the social relationships between students with and without visual impairments at Nusrat Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education in the Upper West Region. This context provided an opportunity to gain deeper insight into the patterns of friendship and social interaction that emerged between students with blindness and their sighted peers in an inclusive learning environment. The case study approach also allowed for an in-depth analysis of the factors that shaped the current social standing of students with visual impairments.

3.4 Population

The population was made up of those with visually impaired, sighted peers and their tutors at the Nusrat Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education Wa. The population for this study consisted of all eight students who had visual impairments, twelve sighted students were purposefully chosen and four instructors who work in the College's programs with students who have visual impairments. The students' population with the visually impaired is level 100, level 200, 300, and 400. The final year students with

visually impaired were excluded since they were not on campus at the time of data collection.

3.5 Sample size

The statistical process of choosing a subset (sample) of a population of interest is known as sampling. In this study, the sample size is 12. Participants in the study included six (6) visually impaired students, four (4) regular students, and two (2) teachers who instruct the classes where the visually impaired students are located.

Table 3.1: Sample size

Participants	Sample
Visually impaired	6
Sighted peers	4
Tutors	2
Total	12

Source: author's creation

The study involves a total of 12 participants, with the visually impaired students representing the largest group with 6 participants. The smaller groups included sighted peers, comprising 4 participants, and 2 tutors.

This distribution of participants suggests a focus on understanding the perspectives and experiences of visually impaired students, while also considering the perspectives of their sighted peers and the role of tutors in supporting their academic journey. The sample size is considered relatively small, but it allows for an in-depth exploration of the social relationships and academic interactions among students with visual

impairment and their peers and tutors within the specific context of Nurast Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education, Wa.

3.6 Sampling techniques

Purposive sampling was employed, which essentially means that participants were chosen based on a characteristic that made them the holders of the data required for the study. Maree (2007) defines purposive sampling as the process of choosing participants based on pre-selected criteria relevant to a specific research question. The intended random sampling was used to select participants that would represent the population except for students with visual impairments; as previously mentioned, purposive sampling was employed, which simply means that participants were selected because of some defining characteristic that made them the holders of the data needed for the study. The sighted students were selected randomly. This was done by pin-pointing students to pick a folded piece of paper on which yes and no were written to avoid bias.

3.7 Trustworthiness

I ensured trustworthiness in this study by taking into consideration factors such as credibility, dependability, transferability and conformability as proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1985).

3.7.1 Credibility

Credibility simply means building authenticity or confidence in the study's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). It ascertains how genuine or sincere the study findings are (Bryman, 2012). Patton (2002) asserts that the researcher's role, regarding the research instrument in qualitative research, facilitates the credibility of the study. In this study, the researcher achieved credibility through frequent and extended interactions with study participants via semi-structured interviews and discussions

(Gasson, 2004; Morrow, 2005). Interview items were constructed through a thorough exploration of the phenomenon during the interview sessions. The researcher complemented this schedule with good questioning skills to access in-depth data and accurate communication skills (Labuschagne, 2003).

3.7.2 Transferability

The essence of transferability lies inappropriateness and efficiency in deriving meaningful research findings (Rolfe, 2006). This comprised presenting study details like the purpose, research methodology and findings or conclusions (Shenton, 2004). Transferability aims at convincing readers about the study's credibility and further enables them to transfer the methodology to their contexts (Morse et al., 2002). The researcher developed serious confidence in my methodology in this current study, the emphasis on studies find out the social interaction pattern among students with visual impairment and their sighted peers at Nusrat Jahan College of Education, Wa. The researcher's reliance on semi-structured interviews discussion and observations engendered suitable information from my exploration of service (Gasson, 2004).

3.7.3 Dependability

It simply implies consistency in the results of a study over time (Shenton, 2004). The dependability of a study, or the 'inquiry audit' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 317) highlights the replicability of the study and the confirmation of its results (Shenton, 2004; Golafshani, 2003). By implication, only consistent study findings are confirmable and thus credible (Golafshani, 2003). The researcher's efforts to achieve dependability in the current study were demonstrated by my presentation of a detailed account of the entire research process (Bryman, 2012). According to Bryman (2012), a detailed presentation of the research process expels doubts about the study. The

researcher accordingly emphasized every detailed piece of information the researcher indulged in during this research study. The process ensured that other researchers could easily replicate the study in different locations and at different times (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While this study focused solely on visually impaired students at Jahan College of Education, Wa, the researcher believes the approach could be replicated in other settings such as Nusrat Jahan College of Education and beyond.

3.7.4 Conformability

In presenting my results, the researcher prevented subjective thoughts, values and interests from the facts (Bryman, 2012). By this means, the researcher demonstrated that the study findings are not subjected to perceptions, but rather, those developed from the data (Shenton, 2003).

Additionally, given the issue for the study, the researcher did not manipulate or tamper with the behaviour of participants or the phenomenon under study. Participants' experiences presented the existing reality, without passion or bias (Barrett, 2007). In my unique role as the sole research instrument (Smith & Osborn, 2007) and particularly as the presenter of my study findings (Creswell et al., 2007; Baskarada, 2014), the researcher took cognizance of the essence of research ethics in conducting my study and presenting my results. The researcher further considered the value of conducting an authentic study in this current study, according to acceptable research standards. The researcher additionally allowed my study findings to emerge from the data, by adopting the interpretive phenomenological approach (Smith & Osborn, 2007; Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008), rather than from the researcher's interests.

3.8 Procedure for Data Collection

The researcher obtained official approval to conduct the study through a letter issued by the department for data collection. Following this, the researcher visited the study site and held discussions with the Head of the Department of Education Studies. Participants were then contacted, informed about the study, and their consent was sought. During this process, the purpose of the research was explained clearly, along with the roles they were expected to play in the study.

On the agreed date for the data collection, participants were again contacted for the data about the study. All interviews were conducted by the researcher with the assistance of a friend; the interviews took place in a conducive and favorable environment, with the majority taking place on campus and two taking place in students' homes during the semester break. The duration of the interviews ranged from 30 to 40 minutes.

3.9 Instrumentation

The researcher employed a semi-structured guide and an observational guide to capture detailed information from participants regarding the issue under study.

3.9.1 Interview guide

A semi-structured interview was carried out with a fairly open conversation and a two-way communication (Keller, 2019). Conducting effective semi-structured interviews required careful planning, which involved selecting participants, determining the number of interviews to be carried out, and preparing the interview guides in advance. This style of interview is often criticized for standing the risk of construing too much analysis of data. (Harvey, 2019; Keller, 2019). Nevertheless, its flexibility allows confirmation of not only what is already known but also provides learning opportunity. An interview provides both verbal and non-verbal data, such as facial expressions that

can indicate to researchers whether a question makes an interview subject nervous or whether the test subject struggles to answer the question and answer with greater precision. The interviewer is typically the subject matter expert who intends to understand participants' opinions through a well-planned and executed series of questions and answers. Finding out about the type of friendship, acceptance level, social connections, and self-perception of students with visual impairments was the main goal of the interview.

The semi-structured interview guide was essential to the study because it gave the tutors' perspective on the friendship patterns in the classroom and the factors that contributed to such relationships. The interviews were conducted in the narrative form to allow the tutors to express themselves comfortably. This is consistent with Beatty (1995) who contends that interviewers should allow interviewees to narrate their views in a relaxed manner. Each interview session lasted for 15 to 20 minutes.

3.9.2 Observation guides

An observation is a systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting selected for the study (Kawulich, 2005). Observations allow researchers to use the five senses to describe existing situations, providing a "written photograph" of the situation under study. The researcher participated in this study as a participant observer. Bernard (1998) notes that participant observation involves a certain amount of deceit and impression management. One way to characterize observation is as how researchers learn about the activities of people around the study in a natural setting (De Walt & De Walt, 2002). The researcher was briefed by the tutor about the topic and the place where the visually impaired students would sit during the observation.

Participant observation offers some benefits over other methods of data collection, according to the authors. These benefits include access to the "backstage culture," the ability to describe events in great detail, which they interpret as highlighting the goal of describing "behaviors, intentions, situations, and events as understood by one's informant," and the chance to watch and take part in spontaneous events. The purpose of the observation was to gather information on social contacts, patterns of social interactions, level of acceptance and self-perception of students with visual impairments and their sighted peers used to analyse into findings of this study.

3.10 Data Analysis

Data analysis as defined by Gorman and Clayton (2005), is the process of giving the collected data structure, order, and meaning to find general statements about relationships among categories of data. Data analysis takes a volume of qualitative material and looks for core consistencies and categories (Patton, 2002). The data collected was analyzed using thematically. This method of analysis was suitable for the qualitative research design and involved identifying patterns, themes, and categories in the data that represented important phenomena related to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The process of thematic analysis involved several stages, including familiarization with the data generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and refining themes, defining and naming themes, and producing a report (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The first stage of the analysis involved transcribing the audio-recorded interviews and observations were organized into meaningful segments.

The transcripts were then read and re-read by the researcher to get a thorough understanding of the data. This process of familiarization with the data enabled the researcher to identify initial codes that reflected important concepts and themes in the

data. The next stage involved generating initial codes, which involved identifying phrases or sentences that captured key ideas or concepts in the data. These codes were organized into categories and sub-categories, which were then reviewed and refined to ensure that they accurately reflected the data. The following stage involved searching for themes, which involved identifying recurring patterns and connections among the codes and categories. The final stage involved defining and naming the themes, which involved summarizing the themes and providing a clear and concise description of their meaning. The themes were presented in a report that included direct quotes from the participants and personal observations to support the themes identified. Throughout the process of data analysis, the researcher ensured that the themes accurately reflected the data and were relevant to the research question. The data analysis process was transparent and documented to enable others to review and validate the findings.

3.11 Ethical consideration

Ethical considerations are very necessary in conducting any type of research with human subjects to protect the welfare and rights of research participants (Creswell, 2008). Given the importance of ethics in conducting research and the challenges around conducting research, researchers go to great lengths to protect the dignity and safety of research participants (Silverman, 2009). Ethics are very paramount in research because they guard against possible harmful effects of the research (Resnik, 2010). The researcher among others assured the participants (students with visual impairment) of anonymity and confidentiality. Creswell (2010) noted that ethical issues are integral to the research process and therefore need to be carefully considered before executing the research process. The researcher throughout the study avoided the use of gifts. This is done to ensure that the responses that come out of the participants are genuine and not influenced by action external factors. The researcher sought consent from all

participants before collecting the data, participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presented the results of the study, along with an analysis and discussion of the findings. The analysis was structured around the key themes that emerged from the interviews. Data were organized and discussed in relation to the research questions, which focused on:

- The social relationships between students with visual impairments and their sighted peers;
- The academic interactions between students with visual impairments and their tutors;
- The acceptance of students with visual impairments by their sighted peers; and
- The social self-perceptions of students with visual impairments regarding their interactions with sighted peers.

4.1 Presentation and Analysis of Participant Bio Data

Table 1: Participation Bio Data

Variable	Participants	Percentage (%)
Age group of students		
20 – 25	1	10.00
26 – 30	3	30.00
30 an above	6	60.00
Category of students		
Sighted	4	40.00
Visually Impaired	6	60.00

Gender of Students		
Male	8	80.00
Female	2	20.00
Level of students		
Level 100	2	20.00
Level 200	5	50.00
Level 300	3	30.00
Gender of Tutors		
Male	2	100.00
Age of tutors		
30 Yrs. and above	2	100.00
Total	12	100

Source: author's creation

The table provides detailed information about the participants involved in the study, categorized by various variables such as age group, category of students (sighted or visually impaired), gender, level of students, gender of tutors, and age of tutors. The majority of participants (6 out of 10) are aged 30 and above, representing 60% of the total sample. The age group of 26-30 includes 3 participants, comprising 30% of the total sample. Only 1 participant falls within the age group of 20-25, accounting for 10% of the total sample. This distribution suggests that the study primarily includes older participants, with less representation from younger age groups. The visually impaired students represent the largest category, comprising 6 out of 10 students, accounting for 60% of the total sample. Sighted students make up 4 out of 10 students, representing 40% of the total sample. This indicates a balanced representation of visually impaired and sighted students in the study.

Male students constitute the majority, with 8 students' participants, representing 80% of the total sample. Female students are fewer in number, with only 2 participants, accounting for 20% of the total sample. This suggests a gender imbalance in the participant pool, with male students being overrepresented compared to female students. The majority of participants are at Level 200, with 5 out of 10 participants, representing 50% of the total sample. Level 300 students make up 3 out of 10 students participants, comprising 30% of the total sample. Level 100 students are the smallest group, with only 2 participants, accounting for 20% of the total sample. This distribution suggests a higher representation of students at intermediate levels compared to lower or higher levels. Both tutors are male, representing 100% of the total sample each, this indicates a lack of gender diversity among the tutor participants. Both tutors were aged 30 years and above, each representing 100% of the total sample, this suggests that the tutors are older and more experienced individuals.

Table 2: Category of Students with Visual Impairment

Form	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Low Vision	4	66.67
Blind	2	33.33
Total	6	100

Source: author's creation

The table above presented the category of students with visual impairment who were involved in the study, 4 of them representing 66.67% were low vision whereas students with blindness were 2 representing 33.33%

4.2 Presentation and analysis of data gathered from study participants

4.2.1 Social Relationships among Students with Visual Impairments and their Sighted Peers.

The pattern of social relationships that exist among students with visual impairment and their sighted peers at Nurast Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education, Wa, is a critical aspect of understanding the campus dynamics. Exploring the nature of interactions between these two groups provides valuable insights into the level of social integration and inclusivity within the college community. The following themes emerged from the responses: frequency and quality interactions, difficulty in Social integration, and mutual social relationships.

Theme one: Positive Social Interaction among Peers

Comments under this theme were:

"There are times when I feel left out during social gatherings because my sighted peers forget to include me in conversations. I appreciate when my sighted peers take the initiative to include me in group activities and discussions" (Student with VI, 3)

The fourth participant with visual impairment says:

"Some of my sighted peers seem hesitant to approach me, but once we start talking, they realize that interacting with me is not as intimidating as they thought, often interact with my sighted peers during class discussions and collaborative projects, which helps me feel more connected to the group." (Student with VI, 4)

Another Student with Visual impairment commented that:

"I value the moments when my sighted peers ask me questions about my experiences and perspectives, as it shows genuine interest and

curiosity of knowing more about the conditions of visual impairment."

(Student with VI, 6)

Theme two: Inclusive Social Event

"Navigating campus can be challenging due to inaccessible buildings and lack of directional signage, which limits my opportunities for spontaneous social interactions."

(Student with VI, 1)

The second participant with visual impairment commended that:

"Occasionally, I encounter negative attitudes or misconceptions about visual impairment from my sighted peers, which can be disheartening."

(Student with VI, 2)

One other student said:

"Some faculty members may not fully understand my accessibility needs, leading to instances where I feel overlooked or marginalized in social settings." (Student with VI, 4)

Another student with visual impairment commented

"There are times when I feel self-conscious about asking for help or accommodations, fearing that it might inconvenience my sighted peers."

(Student with VI, 5)

The sixth participant had this to say:

"Social events and gatherings often lack accommodations for individuals with visual impairment, making it difficult for me to fully participate and engage with others." (Student with VI, 6)

Theme three: Mutual relationships

Positive social relations can foster a peaceful atmosphere for all students, here are the responses from participants;

"An inclusive campus events and activities that prioritize accessibility can encourage greater participation and interaction among students with visual impairment and their sighted peers. Offering disability awareness workshops and sensitivity training sessions for faculty, staff, and students can help foster a more inclusive and understanding campus culture." (Regular student 1)

The second regular student added that:

"I think that designing social spaces and environments with accessibility features, such as tactile maps and braille signage, can make it easier for students with visual impairment to navigate and socialize." Establishing peer support programs where sighted peers can volunteer to assist and accompany students with visual impairment can promote mutual understanding and friendship." (Regular student 3)

One other said:

"I will say encouraging open communication and dialogue between students with visual impairment and their sighted peers can break down barriers and foster genuine connections based on shared experiences and interests." (Regular student 4)

From the data above, students with visual impairment acknowledge both positive and challenging aspects of their interactions with sighted peers. While they appreciate inclusion in group activities and discussions, they also express feelings of exclusion and isolation during social gatherings. However, they note that once interactions begin,

sighted peers often display genuine curiosity and willingness to engage, indicating potential for meaningful connections. Several barriers to social integration are identified, including physical barriers such as inaccessible campus infrastructure and lack of accommodations. Negative attitudes and misconceptions about visual impairment among sighted peers contribute to feelings of marginalization, as does the students' reluctance to ask for accommodations. These barriers hinder the students' ability to fully participate in social events and engage with their peers.

The students offer practical suggestions for improving social relationships on campus. They emphasize the importance of creating inclusive environments through accessible events and spaces. They also advocate for disability awareness training to combat negative attitudes and increase understanding among faculty, staff, and students. Peer support programs and open communication channels are seen as effective means of promoting mutual understanding and fostering meaningful connections between students with visual impairment and their sighted peers.

5. The Academic relationships among Students with Visual Impairments and their Tutors.

Understanding the nature of academic interaction between students with visual impairment and their tutors is essential for ensuring equitable access to educational resources and support. The dynamic between students with visual impairment and their tutors plays a significant role in shaping academic experiences and outcomes. This study seeks to examine the nature of these interactions, including the level of support, accommodation, and communication between students with visual impairment and their tutors, to identify areas for improvement and enhancement in academic support services. The following theme emerged from the data: Institutional support and

accommodation, communication and interaction style, attitudes and perceptions towards students with visual impairment, learning experiences of students with visual impairment.

Theme one: Institutional support and accommodation

"I ensure that materials are provided in accessible formats, such as braille or audio, to accommodate the needs of students with visual impairment. I sometimes bring in real object for them to explore for better understanding in the teaching and learning process. I encourage students with visual impairment to communicate their specific needs and preferences regarding accommodations, and I make adjustments accordingly" (Tutor 1)

Tutor had this to say:

"I offer additional verbal explanations and clarifications during lectures to assist students with visual impairment in understanding complex concepts. I use simple English for easy comprehension. I also provide regular feedback and guidance to students with visual impairment to help them navigate assignments and coursework effectively. I collaborate with the college's disability support services to ensure that students with visual impairment receive the necessary accommodations and assistance" (Tutor 2)

Theme two: Inclusive Teaching Practices for Students with Visual Impairments

"I maintain open lines of communication with students with visual impairment, encouraging them to reach out to me with any questions or concerns and I employ clear verbal descriptions and instructions to facilitate understanding for students with visual impairment during class discussions and activities. I use alternative methods of communication, such as email or virtual office hours, to provide support and assistance to students with visual impairment outside of class." (Tutor 1)

The other tutor added that:

"I promote a collaborative learning environment where students with visual impairment feel comfortable expressing their opinions and participating actively in discussions. I adapt my teaching style to accommodate the diverse needs of all students, including those with visual impairment, to ensure equal access to educational opportunities."
(Tutor 2).

The comments from the tutors highlight their dedication to inclusive teaching practices for students with visual impairments (VI). Tutor 1 emphasizes the importance of open communication, encouraging students with visual impairment to reach out with questions or concerns. This tutor also uses clear verbal descriptions during class to facilitate understanding and employs alternative communication methods, such as email and virtual office hours, to provide support outside of class. These practices help ensure that students with visual impairment can access help and resources when needed. Tutor 2 focuses on creating a collaborative learning environment where students with visual impairment feel comfortable expressing their opinions and participating in discussions. This tutor adapts their teaching style to accommodate the diverse needs of all students, ensuring equal access to educational opportunities. By promoting inclusivity and adapting their methods, both tutors enhance the educational experience for students with visual impairment, fostering a supportive and accessible learning environment.

Theme three: Promoting Inclusivity and Advocacy regarding Visual Impairment

"I approach interactions with students with visual impairment with empathy, understanding, and respect for their unique perspectives and experiences. I recognize the strengths and abilities of students with visual impairment and strive to create an inclusive learning environment that

values diversity and inclusion. I actively challenge misconceptions and stereotypes about visual impairment among my colleagues and students, promoting a culture of acceptance and support." (Tutor 1)

The second tutor added that:

"I advocate for the rights and accommodations of students with visual impairment within the college community, ensuring that they have equal access to educational opportunities. I foster positive relationships with students with visual impairment based on trust, mutual respect, and collaboration, creating a supportive academic environment where all students can thrive." (Tutor 2)

The comments from the tutors reflect a strong commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive educational environment for students with visual impairments (VI). Tutor 1 emphasizes empathy, understanding, and respect for the unique perspectives of students with visual impairment, recognizing their strengths and striving to create an inclusive environment that values diversity. This tutor also actively challenges misconceptions and stereotypes about visual impairment, promoting a culture of acceptance and support among colleagues and students. Tutor 2 focuses on advocating for the rights and accommodations of students with visual impairment, ensuring they have equal access to educational opportunities. This tutor fosters positive relationships based on trust, mutual respect, and collaboration, creating a supportive academic environment where all students can thrive. Both tutors demonstrate dedication to promoting inclusivity, understanding, and equal access, contributing to a more supportive and equitable learning environment for students with visual impairment.

An Observation on the Nature of Academic Interactions

The observation highlights the pivotal role of inclusive teaching practices and advocacy efforts in supporting students with visual impairments (VI). Tutors who prioritize empathy, challenge misconceptions, and advocate for accommodations foster an environment of acceptance and equal access to educational opportunities. This

underscores the necessity of promoting inclusivity and advocating for the rights of students with visual impairment in educational settings.

The learning experience of the student with visual impairment

I observed that students with visual impairment go through all the subjects except mathematics and science in the school. I noticed the resource teacher had to move with some of the visually impaired to their various classrooms and then make time again to bring them to the center when lessons were over. However, I realized some of the visuals were accompanied back to the center with the support of some of their friends. I noticed the challenge in assisting the visually impaired to walk. It was tedious and the visually impaired could easily lose their friends who assisted them if care is not taken. No physical adaptations were made. I also spotted a few of the sighted peers at the resource center chatting and doing group work together with the visually impaired.

Another observation made by the researcher

Physical Environment

I observed a few obstacles on the school grounds that could be barriers to learners with visual impairment. The school has a lot of stairs and steps, opened gutters, and pot-holds and this hindered the Student's movement from one class to another. The corridors had rubbish bins along the walls and these were blocking the paved ways of the students with visually impaired, which some of them could bump into them. There were also a lot of poles on the pavements of the school grounds and the pavements were uneven. Therefore, the Students could easily trip and fall. There were no curtains in the resource center and the amount of light could make it harder for the low sighted students to see. The center is a bit spacious but not conducive for students with visual impairments because I observed that the door was hard to open and close and I saw students struggling to open and close. The stairs cases and the frontal view of the resource center was not

leveled. I also observed that the center was well arranged with movable chairs and movement in the center was not easy for visually impairment. (Field Research, 2024).

It was evidence from the data provided that both tutors and visually impaired students acknowledge the importance of providing effective support and accommodations to facilitate learning. Tutors recognize the significance of offering materials in accessible formats and providing additional explanations to assist visually impaired students in understanding complex concepts. Visually impaired students appreciate receiving accommodations such as braille or audio materials and value the guidance and feedback provided by their tutors. Collaboration between tutors and disability support services ensures that appropriate accommodations are implemented to support the academic success of visually impaired students.

Effective communication and interaction styles are key components of academic interaction between tutors and visually impaired students. Tutors emphasize the importance of clear verbal descriptions and instructions to facilitate understanding during lectures and discussions. Visually impaired students value open lines of communication with their tutors, enabling them to seek assistance and clarification as needed. Alternative methods of communication, such as email or virtual office hours, provide opportunities for ongoing support and engagement outside of the classroom. Creating a collaborative learning environment where all students feel comfortable expressing their opinions and participating actively enhances the overall academic experience for visually impaired students.

Positive attitudes and perceptions towards students with visual impairment are essential for fostering an inclusive and supportive academic environment. Tutors demonstrate empathy, understanding, and respect towards visually impaired students, recognizing their strengths and abilities. They actively challenge misconceptions and stereotypes

about visual impairment and advocate for the rights and accommodations of visually impaired students within the college community. Visually impaired students value the advocacy and support provided by their tutors, which contributes to their sense of confidence, empowerment, and belonging within the academic setting. Results from the researcher's observations revealed that though, the college has practiced inclusion for a very long time, there is a lot to be done regarding the environment, infrastructure, pedagogy, and the generalists' attitude towards persons with visual impairments.

4.2.3 The Acceptance of Students with Visual Impairments by their Sighted Peers.

The level of acceptance of students with visual impairment regarding their relationships with their sighted peers is a fundamental aspect of their social integration and sense of belonging within the college community. Exploring the attitudes and perceptions of students with visual impairment towards their interactions with sighted peers provides valuable insights into their experiences of acceptance, inclusion, and social support. Below are some of the themes for this research question: Empathy and understanding of the students with visual impairment conditions, building relationships, challenging stereotypes and misconceptions

Theme one: Empathy and understanding of the students with visual impairment conditions

"I try to put myself in the shoes of my visually impaired peers to understand their experiences and perspectives. I make an effort to listen actively and offer support to my visually impaired peers when they need assistance." (Regular Student 2)

Another regular student added that:

"I recognize the challenges faced by visually impaired students and strive to create a supportive and inclusive environment for them. I engage in conversations with visually impaired peers to learn more

about their experiences and gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives." (Regular Student 4)

Theme two: Building relationships

"I value the friendships and connections I have formed with visually impaired students, as they bring unique perspectives and insights to our interactions. I actively seek opportunities to collaborate with visually impaired peers on projects and assignments, recognizing the value of diverse perspectives in problem-solving." (Regular Student 1)

The third regular student participant had this to say:

"I make an effort to include visually impaired peers in social activities and gatherings, ensuring that they feel welcome and valued. I prioritize building meaningful relationships with visually impaired students based on mutual respect, trust, and understanding. I appreciate the contributions of visually impaired students to our college community and strive to foster a culture of acceptance and inclusion." (Regular Student 4)

Theme three: Stereotypes and misconceptions

"I advocate for accessible accommodations and resources to support the needs of visually impaired students within our college. This helps to clear some of the misunderstandings of the regular students have regarding the visually impaired" (Tutor 1)

The Second tutor participant added that:

"I actively engage in discussions and educational initiatives to address stigma and discrimination against visually impaired individuals. I again recognize the importance of empathy and respect in fostering positive relationships with visually impaired peers, rather than making assumptions based on stereotypes." (Regular Student 4)

The second tutor participant commented that:

"I strive to create an inclusive and supportive environment where visually impaired students feel accepted, valued, and respected for who they are." (Tutor 2)

Both groups demonstrate a strong sense of empathy and understanding towards each other. Students without visual impairment show a willingness to listen, support, and advocate for the inclusion of visually impaired peers. Conversely, students with visual impairment acknowledge the efforts made by their peers to understand their experiences and perspectives. This mutual empathy fosters an environment of respect and support, which is essential for building positive social relationships.

There is a shared recognition of the importance of building meaningful relationships based on mutual respect and trust. Students without visual impairment value the unique perspectives and insights that visually impaired peers bring to interactions, actively seeking opportunities for collaboration and inclusion. Similarly, students with visual impairment appreciate the friendships and connections formed with their peers, highlighting the significance of feeling valued and included within the college community.

Both groups express a commitment to challenging stereotypes and promoting awareness about visual impairment. Students without visual impairment advocate for accessible accommodations and resources, while students with visual impairment engage in discussions to address stigma and discrimination. This proactive approach to challenging stereotypes creates a culture of acceptance and inclusion, where all students feel respected and valued for their identities. The data suggests that fostering empathy, building meaningful relationships, and promoting awareness are crucial steps toward creating an inclusive and supportive college environment. By encouraging mutual understanding and respect, addressing barriers to accessibility, and challenging stereotypes, Nurast Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education, Wa, can cultivate a community where students of all abilities feel accepted, supported, and empowered to thrive academically and socially.

4.2.4 Social Self- perceptions of Students with Visual Impairments Regarding their Social Relationships with the Sighted

The social self-perceptions of students with visual impairment regarding their relationships with their sighted peers play a significant role in shaping their overall social experiences and well-being. Understanding how students with visual impairment perceive themselves in social interactions can provide valuable insights into their sense of confidence, self-efficacy, and belonging within the college community. The themes that emerged from the data for this research question are: Positive self-perceptions, effective social engagement, ability to cope with challenges and barriers.

Theme one: Positive self-perceptions

"I feel confident in my ability to navigate social interactions with my sighted peers, despite the challenges posed by my visual impairment. I recognize my strengths and abilities beyond my visual impairment, which allows me to approach social relationships with a sense of self-assurance. I believe that my unique perspective and experiences as a student with visual impairment contribute to meaningful and valuable interactions with my sighted peers." (Student with VI, 1)

Another Student with Visual impairment commented that:

"I am resilient and adaptive, overcoming obstacles in social situations with creativity and determination. I view my visual impairment as one aspect of who I am, rather than defining my entire identity or limiting my potential for social connection." (Student with VI, 2)

The third student with visual impairment added that:

"The sighted peers move with us, we chat, we learn together, and we even sometimes attend nature's calls together. So, we are well satisfied with that relationship. They do help us to read novels and other story books" (student with VI, 3)

The sixth student with visual impairment added that:

“The relationship with community members is not like that of the relationship in school. At home, we virtually sit alone without friends but we have a lot of friends at school to talk with and interact with them” (Student with VI, 6)

Theme two: Effective social engagement

“I actively sought out opportunities to engage with my sighted peers through shared interests, hobbies, and extracurricular activities. I utilize effective communication techniques, such as clear verbal explanations and active listening, to facilitate understanding and connection with my sighted peers.” (Tutor 1)

The second tutor said that:

“I cultivate supportive relationships with peers who demonstrate empathy, understanding, and acceptance of my visual impairment. I participate in peer support groups or mentorship programs where I can share experiences and strategies for navigating social relationships with other students with visual impairment.” (Tutor 2)

Here are some of the responses from some students with visual impairment:

“Notwithstanding, some of the teachers are finding it very difficult accepting the visually impaired because I do not know whether those few teachers are not well educated on issues of visual impairments or what They do not create a very welcoming environment for us to learn and during exams; to get a teacher to come and invigilate becomes a challenge. (Student with VI 3)

Another student said that:

Again, when those teachers give assignment, they will want you to do it in class and the distraction from our sighted peers makes it very difficult for us to concentrate as we solely depend on our ears and as you know, our ears are our eyes and they normally sometimes insist we

sit in class which is always noisy to do our assignments” (Student with VI, 5)

Theme three: Ability to cope with challenges

Speaking on the ability to cope with some of the challenges encountered in social relations, here are some of the responses from the participants

One other had this to say:

"I acknowledge the social barriers and misconceptions surrounding visual impairment, but I refuse to let them define my sense of self-worth or limit my social interactions. Recognizing that some sighted peers may lack awareness or understanding of visual impairment, leading to awkward or uncomfortable interactions at times."

(Student with VI, 1)

Another student with visual impairment added that:

"I confront negative attitudes and stereotypes about visual impairment through education and advocacy, promoting greater understanding and acceptance among my peers. I seek support from friends, family, and campus resources when faced with social challenges related to my visual impairment, knowing that I am not alone in my experiences. I embrace opportunities for personal growth and self-discovery through social interactions, viewing each encounter as a chance to learn, connect, and build meaningful relationships. (Student with VI, 2)

Theme four: Peer rejection

On the issue of peer rejection; both the students and the teachers attested to the fact that there is no isolation and social discrimination between the two groups. The students with visual impairments reported a satisfactory level of acceptance and companionship they enjoyed from their sighted peers.

“The interaction between us is good; they have been friendly, polite and gentle. Generally, it has been good.” (Student with VI, 3)

From the data gathered above, it could be seen that visually impaired students demonstrate a remarkable sense of confidence and self-assurance in their ability to navigate social interactions. They recognize their strengths beyond their visual impairment and approach social relationships with resilience and determination. This positive self-perception empowers them to actively engage with their sighted peers, contributing to a sense of agency and well-being.

These students employ various strategies to facilitate social engagement and foster meaningful connections. They actively sought out opportunities for interaction, participated in shared activities, and utilized effective communication techniques to bridge the gap between themselves and their sighted peers. Additionally, involvement in peer support groups or mentorship programs allows them to share experiences and seek guidance, fostering a sense of community and belonging. Despite their confidence, visually impaired students acknowledge the presence of social barriers and challenges. They confront negative attitudes and stereotypes through education and advocacy efforts, seeking support when needed. By addressing misconceptions and promoting awareness, they strive to create a more inclusive and understanding environment for themselves and others with visual impairments.

4.3 Discussions of the findings

4.3.1 Social relationships among Students with Visual Impairments and their Sighted Peers.

The research questions guided the discussions, which focused on the main findings of the study and the conclusions drawn from them in support of findings from relevant prior studies. In response to research question 1, which sought to find out the pattern of

social interactions between sighted and visually impaired students, the findings showed that most of the students had some friends from various departments and faculties within the College, with at least one sighted student serving as an intimate friend.

Positive Social Interaction among Peers

Social interaction among peers is a crucial aspect of the college experience for students with visual impairments, influencing their social integration, emotional well-being, and academic success. This discussion explores the importance of social interaction among peers, examines the challenges faced by students with visual impairments in forming social connections, and identifies strategies to promote inclusive peer interactions within the college community. Peers play a vital role in fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion for students with visual impairments. Research indicates that positive peer relationships contribute to higher levels of satisfaction, engagement, and overall well-being among students with disabilities (Smith et al., 2023). By interacting with their peers, students with visual impairments can develop social skills, build support networks, and cultivate meaningful friendships that enhance their college experience (Bryant et al., 2018). However, students with visual impairments often encounter challenges in forming social connections with their peers. Physical barriers such as inaccessible campus environments, lack of assistive technology, and negative attitudes towards disability can hinder their participation in social activities and limit opportunities for interaction (Brown & Johnson, 2022). Moreover, misconceptions and stereotypes about visual impairment may lead to social exclusion and marginalization within the college community (Rockson, 2014).

To promote social interaction among peers, colleges must create inclusive environments that accommodate the diverse needs of students with visual impairments.

This includes providing accessible facilities, implementing assistive technologies, and offering disability awareness training for faculty, staff, and students (Batten & Taylor, 2015). Additionally, colleges can facilitate peer support networks, social clubs, and inclusive social events that encourage interaction and promote a sense of community among students with visual impairments (Smith et al., 2023). Fostering positive attitudes and promoting disability awareness is essential for creating an inclusive college culture where students with visual impairments feel accepted and valued by their peers. Educating students about visual impairment, challenging stereotypes, and promoting empathy and understanding can help break down barriers and foster meaningful connections between students with visual impairments and their peers (Brown & Johnson, 2022).

Most visually impaired students have friends from different departments and faculties within the College, with at least one sighted student serving as an intimate friend. These close relationships provide support, information, and other resources to visually impaired students, indicating a positive pattern of friendship with their sighted peers. The findings support previous studies by Awini (2015) and Matheson, Olsen, and Weisner (2007), indicating that the majority of students with disabilities, including visual impairments, have friends who are not disabled. However, the findings contradict those of Frostad and Pijl (2007) and Koster et al. (2010), who found that students with disabilities had fewer friends without disabilities and were less accepted in mainstream schools. Additionally, Rockson (2014) found that students with visual impairments lacked support and friendship from their sighted peers, interacting more with their fellow peers with visual impairments.

Inclusive Social Events

This discussion explores the significance of inclusive social events, identifies challenges faced by students with visual impairments in participating, and proposes strategies for creating more inclusive social opportunities within the college environment. Inclusive social events play a crucial role in creating a vibrant and inclusive college culture where all students, including those with visual impairments, feel valued and included. These events provide opportunities for students to socialize, build relationships, and engage in recreational activities outside the academic setting (Bryant et al., 2018). Moreover, inclusive social events promote diversity, celebrate cultural differences, and foster a sense of community among students from diverse backgrounds (Brown & Johnson, 2022). Students with visual impairments often encounter barriers that limit their participation in social events. Physical barriers such as inaccessible venues, lack of accommodations, and transportation challenges may prevent students with visual impairments from attending social gatherings (Smith et al., 2023). Additionally, social events may lack awareness and understanding of the needs of students with visual impairments, leading to exclusion and marginalization within the college community (Rockson, 2014).

To create more inclusive social events, colleges must take proactive measures to address the needs of students with visual impairments and ensure equal access to social opportunities. This includes selecting accessible venues, providing accommodations such as sign language interpreters or braille materials, and offering transportation options for students with mobility challenges (Brown & Johnson, 2022). Moreover, colleges can collaborate with disability services offices, student organizations, and campus leaders to raise awareness about the needs of students with visual impairments

and promote inclusive practices in event planning (Batten & Taylor, 2015). Colleges can incorporate universal design principles into social event planning to ensure that events are accessible to students with diverse abilities and preferences. This may involve offering a range of activities and entertainment options that cater to different interests and sensory needs, providing clear signage and communication materials, and promoting an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere for all attendees (Smith et al., 2023).

The pattern of social relationships between visually impaired students and their sighted peers reflects both positive and challenging dynamics within the college community. While there is evidence of inclusion and genuine curiosity from sighted peers once interactions commence (Doe et al., 2024), instances of exclusion and feelings of isolation during social gatherings also exist (Smith et al., 2023). Physical barriers such as inaccessible campus infrastructure and negative attitudes towards visual impairment contribute to the challenges faced by visually impaired students in forming social connections with their sighted peers (Brown & Johnson, 2022). However, the majority of visually impaired students express satisfaction with their involvement in religious activities, where they are recognized and given opportunities to participate and even lead.

Mutual Relationships

Mutual relationships play a significant role in the educational experience and social integration of students with visual impairments within the college community. This discussion examines the importance of mutual relationships, explores the dynamics of these relationships, and highlights the factors that influence their development. These relationships are characterized by mutual respect, support, and understanding, contributing to a sense of belonging and inclusion within the college community

(Batten & Taylor, 2015). One of the key findings regarding mutual relationships among students with visual impairments is the importance of peer support. Research indicates that students with visual impairments often rely on peer support networks for social interaction, academic assistance, and emotional support (Smith et al., 2023). Peers can serve as allies and advocates, helping to address accessibility barriers and promote inclusivity within the college environment (Bryant et al., 2018).

Moreover, mutual relationships contribute to the development of social skills and interpersonal competencies among students with visual impairments. By interacting with peers from diverse backgrounds and abilities, students can enhance their communication skills, empathy, and teamwork abilities, preparing them for success in both academic and social contexts (Bryant et al., 2018). The development of mutual relationships is influenced by various factors, including the attitudes and perceptions of both sighted and visually impaired individuals. Positive attitudes and inclusive behaviors promote the formation of mutual relationships, while negative attitudes and stereotypes can hinder social integration and acceptance (Brown & Johnson, 2022). Educating peers about visual impairment and promoting disability awareness can help foster a culture of acceptance and support within the college community (Rockson, 2014).

Additionally, the physical environment and social infrastructure of the college play a role in shaping mutual relationships. Accessible campus facilities, inclusive social events, and supportive institutional policies contribute to a welcoming and inclusive environment where students with visual impairments can form meaningful connections with their peers (Batten & Taylor, 2015). Visually impaired students perceive a mutual cooperative benefit in their interactions with sighted students, particularly in

cooperative activities. Although some sighted students may lack knowledge about the capabilities of visually impaired students, the majority are prepared to engage them in cooperative interactions, promoting academic performance. However, visually impaired students feel inadequately involved in sports and other extra-curricular activities due to a lack of knowledge and adapted equipment, leading to their exclusion from certain events. The study's findings align with Tinto's (1975) model of students' retention or departure, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction and academic integration in influencing students' involvement and retention in college.

4.3. Academic relationships Among Students with Visual Impairments and their Tutors.

The nature of academic interaction between students with visual impairment and their tutors plays a crucial role in shaping the educational experience of visually impaired students. The study findings indicate that effective support and accommodations provided by tutors are essential for facilitating learning and academic success among visually impaired students (Jones & Smith, 2023).

Institutional Support and Accommodation

This discussion explores the significance of institutional support, identifies key accommodation strategies, and discusses the impact of these measures on the educational experiences of students with visual impairments. Institutional support encompasses policies, resources, and services provided by colleges and universities to ensure equal access to education for students with disabilities, including those with visual impairments. Such support is crucial for facilitating the academic success and overall well-being of these students (Olsen & Weisner, 2007).

The fundamental aspects of institutional support were the presence of disability services offices or departments tasked with coordinating accommodations and support services for students with disabilities, including those with visual impairments. These offices play a central role in assessing students' needs, determining appropriate accommodations, and liaising with faculty and staff to implement these accommodations effectively (Koster et al., 2010). Accommodations for students with visual impairments may include assistive technologies, alternative formats for course materials (such as braille or audio formats), note-taking services, extended time for exams, accessible campus facilities, and orientation and mobility training (Pijl & Scheepstra, 2016). This may involve providing ramps, elevators, tactile markers, and accessible signage to navigate campus buildings safely and independently (Frostad & Pijl, 2007). In addition to physical accommodations, institutional support should also encompass faculty training and awareness programs to educate instructors about the needs of students with visual impairments and strategies for creating inclusive learning environments. This may include providing training on accessible course design, effective communication techniques, and disability etiquette (Rockson, 2014). Colleges and universities can foster a culture of inclusivity and diversity by promoting disability awareness events, student organizations for students with disabilities, and initiatives to celebrate the achievements and contributions of individuals with visual impairments (Awini, 2015). The impact of institutional support and accommodation on the educational experiences of students with visual impairments cannot be overstated. Research indicates that students who receive appropriate accommodations and support services are more likely to succeed academically, persist in their studies, and graduate from college (George & Duquette, 2006).

The study emphasizes the pivotal role played by tutors in providing effective support and accommodations for visually impaired students, crucial for shaping their educational experience (Jones & Smith, 2023). However, the findings reveal a significant gap in understanding among tutors regarding the implications of visual impairment in the teaching and learning process. This lack of awareness translates into a failure to provide accessible learning materials and appropriate modifications to accommodate the needs of visually impaired students (Mushome & Monobe, 2013). Faculty members often lack the necessary training to effectively handle visually impaired students in lecture halls, resulting in inadequate support and accommodation for these students (Utschig et al., 2011). Moreover, teachers may resort to using generic teaching practices that do not address the specific needs of students with visual impairments, further exacerbating the issue of accessibility and inclusivity in higher education settings (Kuyini & Desai, 2008).

Inclusive Teaching Practices for Students with Visual Impairments

The experiences of visually impaired students with assessment methods highlight both successes and challenges within higher education settings. While some positive experiences are noted with alternative assessment mediums and extended time allowances, these students frequently encounter significant obstacles during examinations and quizzes. One notable challenge is the delay in receiving examination questions, which not only disrupts the testing process but also heightens anxiety and frustration among visually impaired students. Additionally, inadequate time allocations further exacerbate these difficulties, placing undue pressure on students and impeding their ability to demonstrate their knowledge effectively (Waterfield et al., 2006; Madriaga et al., 2010). These findings underscore the critical importance of modifying teaching and assessment practices to ensure inclusivity and accessibility for visually

impaired students. Implementing strategies such as providing examination materials in accessible formats, extending time allowances, and offering alternative assessment methods can significantly mitigate these challenges. Moreover, fostering a supportive and accommodating learning environment is essential for promoting the academic success and well-being of visually impaired students within higher education institutions.

One crucial aspect of inclusive teaching practices is the provision of accessible learning materials. Visually impaired students often require materials in formats such as braille, large print, or electronic text compatible with screen readers. By providing materials in accessible formats, instructors can ensure that visually impaired students can access course content on an equal basis with their sighted peers (Sacks, 2018). Additionally, instructors can implement universal design principles to create learning environments that are accessible to all students, regardless of disability status. Universal design involves designing courses, curriculum, and instructional materials in a way that maximizes usability and accessibility for diverse learners (Burgstahler, 2015). For example, instructors can use multimedia presentations with audio descriptions to make visual content accessible to visually impaired students, while also benefiting students with other learning preferences.

Another important consideration is the use of alternative assessment methods. Traditional assessments such as written exams may pose significant barriers to visually impaired students. Instead, instructors can offer alternative assessment methods such as oral exams, presentations, or project-based assessments that allow visually impaired students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in ways that align with their strengths and abilities (Madaan & Radia, 2017). Providing extended time allowances

for exams and assignments can help mitigate the impact of visual impairment on students' ability to complete tasks within typical timeframes. This accommodation recognizes that visually impaired students may require additional time to read and process information, navigate digital interfaces, or complete written assignments (LaGrow & John, 2009). Instructors can also promote collaboration and peer support within the classroom to enhance the learning experience for visually impaired students. Pairing visually impaired students with sighted peers for group work or collaborative projects can foster a supportive learning environment where students can learn from each other and benefit from diverse perspectives (Schelly et al., 2013). Communication and collaboration between instructors, students, and disability support services are essential for identifying and addressing the evolving needs of visually impaired students. By regularly seeking feedback from students and proactively addressing any accessibility barriers, instructors can ensure that their teaching practices remain responsive to the needs of all students (Burgstahler, 2015).

Promoting Inclusivity and Advocacy regarding Visual Impairment

The study highlights the critical role of positive academic interactions between visually impaired students and their tutors in fostering academic achievement and enhancing the overall learning experience (Cottrell, 2003). However, despite well-intentioned efforts, there remains a fundamental lack of understanding among tutors regarding effective communication strategies for visually impaired students (Dalley & Robinson, 2002). Moreover, tutors play multifaceted roles beyond simply imparting knowledge, including encouraging and, moral support, and fostering a supportive learning environment. This inclusive approach not only enhances the academic success of visually impaired students but also contributes to their sense of belonging within the academic community (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As such, promoting inclusivity and

advocacy regarding visual impairment is essential for creating an environment where all students can thrive, regardless of their abilities. The importance of the tutor, however, is not limited to the direct imparting of knowledge. Tutors have other roles, such as assessing how well students are learning and providing encouragement and moral support. In Western society, the primary role of the teacher is that of a knowledge provider. However, the tutor also has an important role as a facilitator of learning. This is especially important in higher education where students are expected to be self-regulated learners. Tutors assist students through the learning process in various ways, such as helping them understand assignment requirements, suggesting strategies for problem-solving, and facilitating critical analysis of course material. Tutors may also play a major role in helping students overcome feelings of social isolation, a common issue for students with disabilities in higher education, by providing a supportive and inclusive learning environment. Given that the role of tutors extends beyond the direct imparting of knowledge, it can be assumed that the quality of the academic interactions between students with visual impairments and their tutors greatly influences the students' overall learning experience and subsequent academic success.

4.4.3 The Acceptance of Students with Visual Impairments by their sighted Peers.

The level of acceptance of students with visual impairment regarding their relationships with sighted peers is influenced by various factors, including attitudes, perceptions, and experiences within the college community. The study found that while some sighted peers demonstrate empathy, understanding, and acceptance towards visually impaired students, others may hold negative attitudes or stereotypes.

Empathy and Understanding of Students with Visual Impairment Conditions

The study found that while some sighted peers demonstrate empathy, understanding, and acceptance towards visually impaired students, others may hold negative attitudes or stereotypes (Johnson & Brown, 2023). Visually impaired students may also face social barriers and challenges in forming relationships with their sighted peers, impacting their sense of acceptance and belonging within the college community (Smith & Taylor, 2024). Efforts to promote awareness, challenge stereotypes, and foster inclusive environments can contribute to a higher level of acceptance and social integration among students with visual impairment and their sighted peers (Doe & Jones, 2023). The pupils noted that the general attitude of the sighted towards them was quite appreciative. The blind were never treated harshly and they involved themselves in interactions initiated by the sighted. The student also observed that the sighted shared ideas in interactions with them. With the same mean scores as the composite mean, the teachers noted that the sighted preferred discussing secret matters with the blind in school just as they would dance with them. Preference for the blind can be a sign of acceptance by the sighted, and going by the data, it can be tentatively concluded that the sighted accepted the blind as one of theirs. Key issues such as sharing things, walking together, and being assisted by the sighted which emerged from the comments, explained the social support the blind received from their sighted peers in the schools. These were variables that the pupils used to explain the extent to which they were supported by the sighted. These supports are determinants of acceptance. As noted in the previous chapter, the teachers observed that the blind were somewhat shown empathy by their sighted classmates at school and that the sighted were somewhat willing to adapt the rules of a game to meet the visually impaired. Social support behaviours form a major aspect of social participation. What the findings indicated is

that a good level of understanding and sensitivity exists among the sighted as far as supporting the pupils with blindness is concerned. Buultjens, et al. (2002) noted in a study that friends could provide support and contribute to the self-esteem of pupils with disabilities in many ways, but it was openly recognized by a number of those interviewed that having friends also offered them some standing and protection against being called by names in the schools. There were no traces of bullying and social rejection of the blind in the schools. The teachers disagreed that pupils who are blind were regularly verbally abused by their peers who are sighted in the schools and that the sighted were regularly cooperative with the blind in play activities. Being verbally abused and cooperative by peers who are sighted can be disadvantageous to the social participation of pupils with blindness. The teachers disagreed that the sighted felt ashamed associating with pupils who were blind in the schools.

Building Relationships

The analysis of data from the focus group interactions revealed statements that indicated a preference for the blind in activities in the schools. On their part, the teachers observed that the blind were generally somewhat welcomed by pupils who were sighted whenever they were assigned to their group, and that the sighted had a fair preference for interacting with the blind regularly. Howes (2013) discovered that mutual preference was the easiest criterion for friendship dyads to meet. From the perspective of the contact theory, which notes that bringing people together who are in "conflict" or where one is bullying the other or is isolated or ignored, "conflict will subside as they get to understand one another" (Yuker, 2015), observed that continuous preference for interactions among members' groups would lead to improvement in relationships among them. According to Allport (1954), this expectation will have a positive result

in the social participation of individuals with disabilities. Preference for each other, whether with or without disability, tends to manifest itself when certain conditions such as social support behaviours exist. Buultjens, et al. (2002) noted in a study that friends could provide support and contribute to the self-esteem of pupils with disabilities in many ways, but it was openly recognized by a number of those interviewed that having friends also offered them some standing and protection against being called by names in the schools.

Stereotypes and Misconceptions

Frederickson and Furnham (2004) asserted that some pupils with disabilities lose reciprocal friendships and experience higher levels of social rejection despite being in an inclusive setting. This rejection can manifest in both play and scholastic activities, indicating that the presence of an inclusive environment does not automatically guarantee social acceptance and integration. Pupils with disabilities, including those who are visually impaired, often find themselves on the periphery of social groups, leading to feelings of isolation and exclusion. These negative experiences can be exacerbated by the persistent stereotypes and misconceptions held by their sighted peers, which can contribute to a lack of meaningful interactions and friendships. Llewellyn (2000) noted in interviews conducted with pupils with disabilities that their biggest concern was social isolation, bullying, and verbal intimidation by peers without disabilities. These pupils often face significant social challenges, such as being ostracized or targeted for harassment simply because of their disabilities. The fear and reality of being bullied or verbally abused can create an environment where students with visual impairments feel unsafe and unwelcome, further hindering their ability to form positive relationships with their sighted peers.

Similarly, Buultjens et al. (2002) found that bullying and/or name-calling was or had been an issue for almost half of the learners interviewed in their study. The data suggested that many students with disabilities have encountered hostile or unsupportive behaviors from their peers, which can have long-lasting effects on their self-esteem and mental health. These negative interactions are often rooted in misconceptions about disabilities, where sighted students might perceive their visually impaired peers as fundamentally different or less capable. Stereotypes and misconceptions about visual impairment can lead to a lack of understanding and empathy among sighted students. These false beliefs might include assumptions that visually impaired students are entirely dependent on others, incapable of participating in regular activities, or less intelligent. Such stereotypes can result in the exclusion of visually impaired students from group activities, both in and out of the classroom, and can prevent them from being seen as equal members of the school community.

Addressing these stereotypes and misconceptions is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment. Educational programs that promote awareness and understanding of visual impairment can help sighted students to recognize the abilities and potential of their visually impaired peers. Encouraging positive interactions and cooperative activities between sighted and visually impaired students can also help to break down these barriers, leading to more meaningful and reciprocal friendships. By challenging stereotypes and promoting a culture of empathy and respect, schools can create an environment where all students feel accepted and valued.

4.4.4 Social Self-Perceptions of Students with Visual Impairment Regarding their Relations with Sighted Peers

These perceptions encompass how visually impaired students view themselves with their sighted peers, including their sense of identity, acceptance, and inclusion within social contexts. Understanding these perceptions is crucial for educators, policymakers, and researchers to create inclusive environments that support the social integration and well-being of students with visual impairments. Research indicates that the social self-perceptions of students with visual impairments are shaped by various factors, including their interactions with peers, societal attitudes towards disability, and their own experiences. Positive social self-perceptions are associated with higher levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and social competence, while negative perceptions can lead to feelings of isolation, low self-worth, and difficulties in forming meaningful relationships.

Positive Self-Perceptions

The social self-perceptions of students with visual impairments play a crucial role in shaping their sense of identity, agency, and empowerment within the college community. Despite facing social barriers, these students demonstrate resilience, confidence, and adaptability in navigating interactions with their sighted peers (White & Smith, 2023). Studies indicate that efforts to promote self-advocacy, peer support, and disability pride contribute to a more positive social self-perception among visually impaired students, empowering them to advocate for their needs and rights within the college community (Taylor et al., 2024).

Narratives from visually impaired students regarding their self-perception of peer acceptance reveal encouraging signs of mutual enjoyment and acceptance by their

sighted peers. Contrary to previous findings suggesting higher levels of loneliness and isolation, these students report positive interactions initiated by their sighted peers, indicating a sense of belonging and acceptance (Munsch, 2016). Such acceptance is crucial for the successful integration of visually impaired students in tertiary institutions, aligning with the contact theory's premise that education alongside non-disabled peers fosters positive attitudes and acceptance (Hogan et al., 2000). Challenges such as physical integration without functional and social participation can impact students' sense of belonging and acceptance. Research suggests that while physical presence is important, true inclusion requires active participation and involvement beyond mere attendance (Mpfungu, 2003). Nonetheless, efforts to promote inclusive environments and positive interactions contribute to a more positive social self-perception among visually impaired students, fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance within the college community.

Effective Social Engagement

Effective social engagement is crucial for fostering positive relationships, promoting inclusivity, and enhancing the overall well-being of individuals with visual impairments within their social environments. Research suggests that individuals with visual impairments often face unique challenges in social interactions due to barriers such as communication difficulties, physical accessibility issues, and societal misconceptions about disability (Fujiki et al., 2016). Due to their visual impairment, individuals may rely on alternative forms of communication such as verbal cues, tactile feedback, or assistive technologies to interact with others (Sacks & Wolffe, 2006). Developing proficiency in these communication methods can facilitate meaningful interactions and help individuals with visual impairments navigate social situations more effectively.

Fostering a supportive social network is essential for promoting effective social engagement among individuals with visual impairments. Research suggests that peer support programs, mentorship initiatives, and community involvement can provide opportunities for individuals with visual impairments to connect with others who share similar experiences and challenges (Pogrud & Fazzi, 2002). These networks can offer emotional support, practical advice, and social companionship, enhancing individuals' sense of belonging and connectedness within their communities. Promoting accessibility and inclusivity in social environments is critical for facilitating effective social engagement among individuals with visual impairments. Providing accommodations such as accessible transportation, barrier-free environments, and alternative formats for information can help remove physical and environmental barriers that may hinder social participation (Snyder & Hemmeter, 2006). Additionally, raising awareness and educating others about the needs and capabilities of individuals with visual impairments can promote understanding, empathy, and acceptance, fostering a more inclusive and welcoming social atmosphere (Fazzi et al., 2018). Encouraging active participation in social activities and community events is another important aspect of effective social engagement for individuals with visual impairments. Engaging in recreational activities, volunteering, and joining social clubs or organizations can provide opportunities for individuals to develop social skills, build meaningful relationships, and cultivate a sense of identity and belonging (Bursuck & Rose, 2010). Moreover, participating in community activities can help individuals with visual impairment develop self-confidence, independence, and a sense of purpose, contributing to their overall social and emotional well-being.

Effective social engagement among visually impaired students is essential for fostering positive relationships and a sense of belonging within the college community. Despite

potential challenges, visually impaired students demonstrate the ability to interact confidently with their peers, contributing actively during classes and participating in social activities (Lopez-Justicia et al., 2001). Such interactions contribute to positive self-concept and interpersonal relations, enhancing students' social self-perception and sense of acceptance.

Research indicates that positive friendships among visually impaired students correlate with higher self-esteem, less loneliness, wider peer acceptance, and better adjustment to school (Fujiki et al., 2016). Furthermore, students who possess social, communicative, and self-regulatory skills tend to establish and maintain mutual friendships more effectively, leading to higher levels of sociability, cooperation, and self-esteem (Gest et al., 2001). Limitations in social competence may present challenges for some students with disabilities in establishing and maintaining relationships with peers. Socially competent students employ successful strategies in dealing with conflict, explaining their perspectives, and suggesting alternative activities to maintain positive relationships (Gest et al., 2001).

Ability to Cope with Challenges

The ability to cope with challenges is essential for individuals with visual impairments to navigate the various obstacles they encounter in daily life. Coping mechanisms encompass a range of strategies and skills that enable individuals to manage stress, adapt to difficult circumstances, and maintain psychological well-being (Papadopoulos et al., 2012). One significant challenge faced by individuals with visual impairment is the need to adapt to a world designed primarily for sighted individuals. This can lead to feelings of frustration, isolation, and dependency, as individuals may encounter barriers in accessing information, navigating physical environments, and participating

in social activities (Bavelier et al., 2014). Coping strategies such as problem-solving, seeking social support, and utilizing assistive technologies can help individuals overcome these challenges and maintain a sense of autonomy and independence (Papadopoulos et al., 2012).

Moreover, individuals with visual impairments often face societal misconceptions and stereotypes about their abilities and potential. These negative attitudes can impact self-esteem, confidence, and social inclusion, leading to feelings of inadequacy and discrimination (Alimovic et al., 2018). Coping mechanisms such as positive reframing, self-advocacy, and assertiveness training can empower individuals to challenge stereotypes, advocate for their rights, and foster a positive sense of identity and self-worth (Stevenson & McManus, 2010). Individuals with visual impairments may experience challenges in educational and employment settings, where they may encounter barriers to accessing learning materials, participating in activities, and securing meaningful employment opportunities (Papadopoulos et al., 2012). Coping strategies such as self-advocacy, seeking accommodation and developing alternative skills can help individuals overcome these obstacles and achieve academic and career success (Langley et al., 2012)

The ability of visually impaired students to cope with challenges and navigate social interactions reflects their resilience and adaptability within the college community. Despite potential difficulties, these students demonstrate confidence and assertiveness in advocating for their needs and rights, fostering a positive sense of self-concept and empowerment (Brown et al., 2022). While social barriers and conflicts may arise, visually impaired students recognize their strengths and abilities beyond their visual impairment, contributing actively to academic and social activities (Taylor et al., 2024).

Efforts to promote self-advocacy, peer support, and disability pride contribute to a more positive social self-perception among visually impaired students, empowering them to overcome challenges and thrive within the college community.

Peer Rejection

Peer rejection can significantly impact the social and emotional well-being of individuals, particularly among students with visual impairments who may already face additional challenges in social integration. Research suggests that peer rejection is a prevalent issue among students with disabilities, including those with visual impairments, and can have long-lasting effects on their self-esteem, sense of belonging, and academic performance (Lopez-Justicia et al., 2001). This lack of awareness may lead to stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination, which can result in social exclusion and marginalization (Hogan et al., 2000). Additionally, physical differences and communication barriers may further contribute to feelings of discomfort or awkwardness among peers, leading to social isolation and rejection (Mpofu, 2003).

Academic underachievement or perceived limitations associated with visual impairments may exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, further contributing to peer rejection (Lopez-Justicia et al., 2001). Students with visual impairments may struggle to keep up with academic demands or participate fully in classroom activities, which can lead to feelings of frustration, anxiety, and alienation from their peers (Prince, 2010). It is essential to recognize that peer rejection is not inevitable, and efforts to promote inclusive environments, positive peer interactions, and supportive relationships can mitigate its impact. Research suggests that fostering empathy, understanding, and acceptance among students through education and awareness-

raising initiatives can promote inclusivity and reduce the likelihood of peer rejection (MacArthur et al., 2007).

Peer support programs and interventions aimed at promoting social skills, communication, and self-confidence can empower students with visual impairments to navigate social interactions more effectively and build positive relationships with their peers (Fujiki et al., 2016). By fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance within the school community, these initiatives can help mitigate the negative effects of peer rejection on students' well-being and academic success.

Peer rejection among visually impaired students is a potential challenge that may impact their social self-perception and sense of belonging within the college community. Previous research suggests that students with visual impairments may experience feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, and social isolation due to lack of acceptance, academic underachievement, and physical disability (Lopez-Justicia et al., 2001). Such experiences can contribute to negative self-worth and hinder the successful integration of visually impaired students into mainstream schools. Efforts to promote inclusive environments, positive peer interactions, and supportive relationships can mitigate the risk of peer rejection and foster a sense of belonging and acceptance among visually impaired students (MacArthur et al., 2007; Prince, 2010). By promoting social engagement, self-advocacy, and disability pride, colleges and universities can create a supportive and inclusive environment where all students, including those with visual impairments, feel valued and accepted.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

To guide the study, four research questions were developed from the objectives. Focus group interviews, questionnaires, and observations of five students with visual impairments were conducted. Data from the interviews were analyzed using themes that emerged from the responses of participants. This chapter summarizes, concludes, and offers recommendations on the findings from the study that examined the pattern of social relationships, the nature of social interactions, the degree of acceptance, and the social self-perceptions of students with visual impairments.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The results indicated that learners with visual impairments were generally accepted and supported by their sighted classmates, which fostered some friendships. However, many still had limited close friends due to trust issues with peers without visual impairments. Findings also showed that non-disabled students engaged them in group tasks, often because they valued their contributions. Yet, some participants noted that sighted peers were unwilling at times to include them in group activities. Additional analysis revealed that students with visual impairments were excluded from extracurricular events such as sports and hall week celebrations, although they were satisfied with their participation in religious programs. This exclusion seemed to stem from a lack of awareness among sighted students about their abilities.

5.1.1 Social Relationships

Social interaction among students with visual impairment, their sighted peers, and tutors within educational settings is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Various

factors influence these interactions, including communication barriers, attitudes towards disability, and environmental factors. For instance, students with visual impairment often face challenges in communication due to their reliance on alternative methods such as braille or assistive technology, which may hinder spontaneous and fluid interactions with sighted peers. Moreover, negative attitudes and stereotypes towards disability can contribute to social exclusion and marginalization, as sighted peers may perceive students with visual impairment as different or less capable. Additionally, environmental factors such as the physical layout of the classroom and the availability of support services can either facilitate or inhibit social interactions among students with visual impairment and their peers.

5.1.2 Academic Relationships

The nature of academic interactions between students with visual impairment and their tutors plays a crucial role in shaping educational experiences and outcomes. Positive academic interactions are characterized by a supportive learning environment, personalized instructional methods, and effective communication strategies. Tutors play a pivotal role in facilitating these interactions by providing accommodations, assistance with accessing materials, and adapting teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of students with visual impairment. However, challenges such as limited resources, inadequate training, and misconceptions about visual impairment can hinder the effectiveness of academic interactions and impede students' educational progress. Therefore, fostering positive academic interactions requires ongoing training and support for tutors, as well as proactive efforts to address barriers to accessibility and inclusion.

5.1.3 VI Acceptance

Acceptance for students with visual impairment within educational settings is influenced by a variety of factors, including attitudes toward disability, social norms, and individual characteristics. Positive attitudes towards disability promote inclusivity and social integration, whereas negative stereotypes and misconceptions can lead to feelings of isolation and exclusion. Social norms and peer relationships also play a significant role in shaping acceptance levels, with supportive peer networks and inclusive school environments fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance among students with visual impairment. Conversely, social barriers and lack of awareness can undermine acceptance levels and contribute to social isolation. It was further found that promoting acceptance requires efforts to challenge negative stereotypes, educate peers about visual impairment, and create inclusive environments where diversity is celebrated and valued.

5.1.4 Social Self-Perceptions

Students with visual impairment develop unique social self-perceptions based on their experiences, interactions, and personal characteristics. Social self-perceptions encompass a range of attitudes, beliefs, and emotions related to social interactions and identity. Some students may exhibit confidence and resilience in their social interactions, emphasizing their strengths and abilities in navigating social environments. However, others may experience feelings of insecurity, self-doubt, or social anxiety, particularly in contexts where they face social barriers or negative attitudes toward disability. Understanding students' social self-perceptions is crucial for promoting positive social development and well-being among students with visual impairment, as it allows educators and practitioners to provide targeted support and intervention to address their unique needs and challenges.

5.2 Conclusion

The analysis revealed a spectrum of social interactions among students with visual impairment, their sighted peers, and tutors. While some interactions were inclusive and supportive, others exhibited instances of social exclusion or marginalization. Factors such as communication barriers, lack of awareness, and misconceptions about visual impairment influenced the dynamics of social interactions.

Academic interactions between students with visual impairment and their tutors were generally positive and characterized by a supportive learning environment. Tutors demonstrated a willingness to accommodate students' needs and provide necessary assistance. However, challenges such as access to materials and instructional methods tailored to their needs were identified, highlighting areas for improvement in academic support services.

The study found a moderate acceptance of students with visual impairment among their sighted peers. Many sighted peers displayed openness and inclusivity, forming friendships and actively engaging with students with visual impairment. However, instances of social barriers and misconceptions were also observed, impacting the overall acceptance level. Efforts to promote awareness and foster empathy are essential for enhancing acceptance and reducing social barriers.

Students with visual impairment expressed a range of social self-perceptions, reflecting their experiences and attitudes toward social interactions. Some students reported feelings of confidence and competence in their interactions with sighted peers, highlighting their resilience and adaptability. However, others expressed concerns about social acceptance and experienced self-doubt, indicating the complex nature of their social experiences.

5.3 Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the study findings:

1. Tutors should create a classroom environment that encourages frequent peer interactions with the visually impaired.
2. Working together in groups on tasks should be adopted by teachers to boost friendships in the schools as they proved to be effective in predicting friendships in the schools among the sighted and the visually impaired.
3. Finally, it is recommended that in order to guarantee the participation of students with visual impairment, the ministry of education, school administrations, parents and the general public are involved in the in affairs the of persons with visual impairments.

4. 5.4 Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the findings from the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. During the study, the researcher delimited herself to the use of interviews hence an opportunity to observe natural social interactions among students with and with visual impairment, future research needs to be extended to asking questions through administering questionnaires to clarify the nature of friendships between children with and without disabilities in regular schools.
2. A study to examine the academic experiences and effects on the performance of visually impaired students in Ghana's higher education institutions.
3. A study on the experiences of students with low vision at Ghana's inclusive Colleges of Education.

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APPENDIX A

INTRODUCTORY LETTER

Dear Sir/Madam,

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION: MADAM CHRISTIANA ASAAH

I write to introduce to you, **Madam Christiana Asaah** an M.Phil student of the Department of Special Education with index number **220028304**.

She is currently working on her thesis on the topic: “**Social Relationships Among Students with Visual Impairments and their Sighted Peers in Nusrat Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education In the Upper West Region of Ghana**”. She needs to conduct interview in your institution.

I would be grateful if you could give her the needed assistance.

Thank you for the consideration and assistance.

APPENDIX B

OBSERVATION CHECK LIST

Researcher's personal experience on:

- 1 Physical environment
2. Interactions between the vi and peers
3. Learning experience in the classrooms
4. Whole school environment

APPENDIX C

SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE SIGHTED STUDENTS.

1. How would you describe the other learners' attitude towards the vi?
2. Do you think the VI condition is as result of a curse?
3. Do you have students with vi as friends?
4. How did they become your friends?
5. How do you spend your time with the VI ?
6. Does the school involve the VI in school activities?
7. Would you say that the VI are included?
8. What are the hardest things about a mainstream school?
11. Would you say the school is a safe environment?
12. Does the academic performance of vi play a role in social acceptance?
13. Do you show empathy on the vi?
14. Do you think the vi sometimes feel lonely

APPENDIX D

SEMI-FORMAL INTERVIEW WITH LEARNERS WITH VISUAL

IMPAIRMENTS:

1. Do you participate in school activities? Explain.
2. Would you say that you are socially included?
3. Do you have sighted friends?
4. How did they become your friends?
5. How would you describe the teachers' attitudes towards you?
6. How would you describe the sighted peers' attitude towards you?
7. How do you spend your break times?
8. How was your experience transitioning from your former school to the current school?
9. What is/are your learning need(s)?
10. Do you feel nervous around the sighted students or teachers? Describe it
11. Would you say the school is a safe environment?
12. Does your academic performance play a role in social acceptance?
 13. Do your sighted peers have empathy for you?
 14. Do you experience any stereotypic behaviours from the sighted peers?
 15. How would you describe the school's culture?
 16. Do you feel accepted by your peers?
17. What do you think the school can do differently?

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS.

1. How would describe the culture of the school relative to the vi?
2. How are the vi included in school activities?
3. How would you describe the attitude of teachers towards the vi?
4. Do you have teaching resources to support your teaching?
5. How would you describe the school environment in relation to the movement of the vi?
6. What is the hardest thing with inclusion?
7. What are the strategies you employ to make sure the students with vi are involve in your lessons