

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING BY BLIND
AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED STUDENTS IN
PAKISTAN: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE
EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES AND
SOLUTIONS**

By

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English Language Learning by Blind and Visually Impaired Students in Pakistan: A Qualitative Study of the Experiences, Challenges and Solutions

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ABSTRACT

Title: English Language Learning by Blind and Visually Impaired Students in Pakistan: A Qualitative Study of the Experiences, Challenges and Solutions

This qualitative study explored the English language learning experiences and challenges faced by Blind and Visually Impaired (BVI) students in integrated classroom setting through the lens of interpretivism, which assumes the “out-there reality” as a construction of individual experiences and culture. The study sought to unravel the challenges confronted and the experiences of the students and their teachers in Pakistan. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with ten BVI students and five teachers having the experience of teaching at least one BVI student in a regular class. The semi-structured interviews focused on areas including language learning strategies, interpersonal relations with sighted peers and teachers, use of assistive technology, and obtaining study material in accessible formats. The findings of the study reveal that assistive technology was central to the learning process facilitated by self-advocacy and assertiveness by the BVI learners and good interpersonal relations within the class. The lack of easy access to study material and their inability to achieve written communication with their sighted teachers affected their sense of normalcy, independence, and self-esteem, however. The study recommends comprehensive training for the stakeholders to sensitize them to the special needs of BVI students in areas including but not limited to the use of assistive technology, access to study material and interpersonal skills.

Keywords: Blind and Visually Impaired Learners; Assistive Technology; Accessibility; Interpersonal skills.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my late parents, who despite their meagre resources, made arrangements for providing me quality education. May Allah grant them the highest place in Jannah (Amen).

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Visual handicap is defined in terms of visual acuity, field of vision, and visual efficiency. An Individual's visual ability is evaluated via a chart known as Snellen's chart, developed by a Dutch doctor Herbart Snellen. The big "E" at the top of the chart can be seen by a normal eye from a distance of two hundred feet. When an individual's vision is impaired to such an extent that he could see that "E" clearly on the chart from a distance of not more than twenty feet, she/he is then considered legally blind. In other words, a legally blind person has a vision of, with correcting lenses, 20/200 in the better eye, i.e. she/he can see something clearly at a distance of twenty feet which sighted individuals can easily see at two-hundred feet. Partially sighted individuals have visual acuity of not more than 20/70 feet, i.e. their vision is significantly reduced but can use large or regular print for reading. Thus, when a person's vision is deficient to such an extent that she/he can't function effectively in his academic and daily life, he is declared legally blind and visually impaired (MDE 2020).

Another criterion generally used for categorizing an individual as blind or visually impaired is the phenomenon of "tunnel vision" (concerned with visual field limitation). If a person's visual field is less than twenty degrees in width, she/he is also categorized as blind despite the fact that her/his visual acuity may not be within the range of blindness. Total blindness is the phenomenon wherein individuals have completely lost their vision, i.e. they have no light perception (AFB, 2022). Educationally speaking, blind learners are those who are unable to read study materials using their sight and have to access them in alternative formats (e.g. tactual and auditory means), and visual impairment includes blindness, and even with correction, severely hampers an individual's academic performance. Partially seeing are those who can read large print but generally have to

switch over to Brailed materials and talking books like fully blind learners as they experience severe headaches, especially after reading for longer periods of time. Thus, the challenges faced by visually impaired learners in their academic pursuits are by and large similar to those confronted by blind learners.

The first school for blind and visually impaired individuals in Pakistan was founded in 1958 in Rawalpindi and the founders of the school had a firm faith in the potential of the BVI individuals to be capable of becoming contributing members of society. Following the success of this school in turning BVI individuals into independent, contributing and earning members of society, the government realised the need for the establishment of more such schools to cater to the needs of many more such people throughout the country.

Since then, special schools for BVI students have been established in almost every district of the country with the aim of orientating the BVI students into society. The blueprints for these special schools were borrowed from European boarding schools. These schools are still functioning in Pakistan, but there has been a gradual shift from specialised schools back to integrated education - a movement that began in the United States and Europe in the 1960s (Perkins, 2011).

Like in regular schools, English language is also taught as a compulsory subject in these schools, where BVI students are largely taught with the help of braille books.

The eye is very important sensory organ which accounts for a very large fraction of total information available to a person through his senses. It has been estimated that more than three-fourth of all learning comes through the use of the eye (Cuban, L. 2001). The visually handicapped learners have to do all their learning using their other senses which are not impaired (i.e. hearing, taste, and smell, sensation or touch). They need specialised apparatus and are generally taught in specialised classes or resource rooms in which special gadgets are available. In many cases they can be educated in a regular class if special material and equipment are provided. In other words, they must be facilitated to receive input through their tactile and auditory senses (in the case of blind learners) and large print (in the case of partially sighted students).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In Pakistan, there are no reliable data available on the number of BVI individuals in the country and their inclusion in general educational settings. According to the 2017 Population and Housing Census, 0.48 percent of Pakistan's population is disabled which shows a stark decrease from the 2.38 percent figure in the 1998 census. The World Bank Report on Disability, on the other hand, places the disability ratio in Pakistan at 3.56 percent. The country, however, has taken certain measures to ensure the right to education for all its citizens including BVI individuals, such as: adopting the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2005), signing the Islamabad Declaration on Inclusive Education (2008), signing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2013), and ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2017), and so on, but these have not yet reached to the desired level in terms of implementation. For instance, all the national and international legislation, agreements, treaties and conventions emphasise the right to education for all, including the BVI individuals, but implementation of inclusive teaching requires that not only the essential support mechanism be in place (e.g., physical infrastructure, accessibility tools and gadgets, accessible study material, etc.), but also teachers be primarily responsible for educating all the children regardless of disability in the integrated classroom, something which is not easy to materialise. According to Tefera (2005, p. 108): "inclusion requires a lot of struggle and commitment to overcome attitudinal and social barriers." Though "Education for All" is the motto of the country, creating equal opportunities and ensuring the blind and visually impaired (henceforth "BVI") students' participation in an integrated English language class are very limited. BVI students need support and orientation to be as mobile and independent as their sighted peers in an integrated class. They are often restricted from certain activities, even where such support is available, which significantly restrict their learning as well as curtail their interaction with peers.

The barriers to learning confronted by BVI students in integrated classes can be complex and varied. They can result from various sources such as limited understanding of visual impairment (on the part of those closely associated with them), lack of knowledge about the concept of inclusion, negative attitude towards blindness, lack of training, the non-availability of administrative support, as well as pedagogical challenges. Visual

impairment also forces the BVI students to adopt distinct techniques and approaches for their learning as compared with their sighted peers.

Methods and strategies employed by BVI learners to obtain information in an integrated classroom setting differ significantly from those used by sighted learners, as they have to rely on other senses, particularly on their tactile and auditory senses, to make-up for their visual deficiency. They need special materials, equipment and assistive technology to overcome their sight-related challenges (Bardin & Lewis, 2008). Moreover, the sighted teachers of the BVI learners need to be aware of the specialized needs of these learners in order to cope effectively with their blindness-related challenges (Davis & Hopwood, 2002). Any deficiencies in the above may cause the blind and visually impaired learners to face challenges in learning in integrated classes.

As far as inclusive education is concerned, it should be clear that every learning context has its own unique set of challenges in relation to BVI students . Successful solutions can only be found if the local context is thoroughly investigated and taken into account. This study is aimed at doing just that, as it investigates the challenges faced by BVI learners while learning the English language in integrated settings in Pakistan.

The recent trends in research for BVI students mainly focus on the teachers' perceptions of services for BVI students in regular classroom environment (Al-Ayoudi, 2006; Wungu & Han, 2008); the impact of blindness on the cognitive abilities of BVI learners with regard to second language learning (Smeds, H., 2015); educating them in regular classroom settings (Bishaw, 2013; Janae, 2017; Murray, & McKenzie, 2010; Simon, Echeita, Scandoval, & Lopez, 2010); characteristics of their learning styles under the impact of assistive technology (Hussin, 2013; Nguyo, 2015; Padure, 2011); and teachers' competence for teaching BVI students (Smith, Kelley, Maushak, Griffin-Shirley, & Lan, 2009). These and other studies (see literature review) have investigated learning in general by BVI learners from various perspectives, but no study, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, aimed at exploring the experiences of, challenges confronted by BVI students and finding solutions to them, through the views of the BVI students themselves and their sighted teachers, has been conducted in Pakistan. The very fact that this study is the first of its kind in the local context means that learning experiences and

challenges confronted by BVI learners of English language have not yet got due research attention in our country. This research is, therefore, intended to fill the gap of this widely ignored area, and make the problem plausible in the field of language instruction to BVI learners in integrated classroom settings in Pakistan.

Visual impairment is a low occurrence disability, and research about this population is hardly conducted from the BVI individuals' point of view (AFB, 2021). Tobin's (2011) opinion is still valid, who, along with Orini-Jones (2009) and Topor and Rosenblum et al (2013) argued for extensive research into the field of second language learning by BVI individuals. It is for this reason that the researcher undertook the task of exploring the English language learning experiences of BVI university students and their teachers in Pakistan, using the interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) – an approach that seeks to explore and interpret the participants' lived experiences (Smit et al., 2009). In other words, IPA is an experiential methodology that focuses on how people make sense of what happens to them.

This interview-based qualitative study explored the process by which BVI second language learners and their sighted teachers tackle the problems caused by sightlessness in inclusive classes in Pakistani context. Such areas as the use of various learning strategies, the BVI learners' social skills and interaction with their sighted teachers and fellow students were investigated. Moreover, the use of various strategies for gaining access to assistive technology and to materials in alternate formats employed by the BVI learners in order to ensure successful English language learning were also studied.

In this study, Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is used to refer both to the study of individuals and groups who are learning a language subsequent to learning their first one as young children, and to the process of learning that language. The terms “L2”, “target language” and “second language” are used interchangeably in this study to refer to the same phenomena. Similarly, I use the terms first language, mother-tongue and L1 interchangeably to refer to language [s] which is acquired during early childhood – normally beginning before the age of about three years – and that it is learned as part of growing up among people who speak it.

1.3 Main Objectives of the Study

This study aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- To examine the English language learning experiences of BVI learners in Pakistan
- To obtain greater understanding of, and insight into, the challenges they face
- To find possible solutions to these challenges
- To explore as to what extent the sighted teachers of the BVI learners were aware of their specialized needs and were willing to adapt their teaching strategies to help them overcome their blindness-related challenges in an integrated classroom environment
- To find out as to what blindness-specific support services and assistive technology, according to the study participants, are available for the BVI learners and their teachers in Pakistan, and how do they assist them in teaching and learning the target language.

1.4 Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What is the general experience of BVI learners of English in integrated classes in Pakistan?
2. What blindness-related challenges, specific to the learning of English as a second language, do the BVI learners encounter in integrated classes in Pakistan?
3. To what extent are the sighted teachers aware of the blindness-specific challenges faced by the BVI learners of English in integrated setting in Pakistan?
4. How do teachers and administrators help the BVI students achieve their goals?
5. What blindness-specific support services and assistive technology, according to the study participants, are available for the BVI learners and their teachers in Pakistan, and how do they assist them in learning and teaching the target language?

1.5 Significance of the Study

While huge data pertaining to second language acquisition by adult learners exists (Brown, 1994; Carson, Kroll, and Kuehh, 1990; Celcemurcia, 2001; Davies, 1987; Elis, 2008; Goldman and Trueba, 1987; Krashen, 1982; Hinkel, 2011; Hunsten, 2010; Gass and Selinker, 2008; Blevins, 2014), the area of second language acquisition related to disabled

individuals largely remains unexplored. Moreover, very few studies have been conducted focusing on the unique challenges confronted by blind and visually impaired second language learners. There is only a small body of literature available about the teaching techniques which are believed to be useful for persons with various types of incapacities (Conroy, 2006; Donley R., 2009; Holcomb, 1993; Tobin, 2011; Topor and Rosenblum, 2013; Wright et al., 1995). Similarly, very little research has been done into the needs of the BVI students and the manner in which they can best compensate for their sightlessness during their attempts to learn a second language (Araluce, 2005; Coşkun, 2013).

According to AFB (2021), BVI students are often under-served and under-identified. This study will make a meaningful contribution to the general body of SLA literature as it yields qualitative data which can be used in future to further unravel language learning strategies used by visually challenged learners. By detailing the experiences of both the BVI learners of English language and their sighted teachers as well as problems confronted by them in integrated classroom environment in Pakistan, this study also provides insights to various stakeholders (e.g. teachers, administrators, and parents). Moreover, this study can also be helpful in informing government policies regarding teacher training and the availability of assistive technology in the field of special education in Pakistan. It will enable the stakeholders to evaluate the quality, equity and access of services provided to BVI individuals in integrated classroom environment in Pakistan.

1.6 Delimitation of the Study

Delimitations relate to the restrictions the researcher imposes on his/her study prior to initiating it and are essential for narrowing the focus of the study (Creswell, 2018). Second language learning is a complex phenomenon involving a multiplicity of variables, such as learner variables (e.g. the identity and relationship of their L1 and L2, their aptitude for L2 learning, personality factors, level of motivation, different learning strategies used by them, social, economic, and political differences among learners, learner experiences in negotiated interaction, aspects of their group identity and their attitudes toward target language speakers or toward L2 learning itself); linguistic variables (e.g. the quality, quantity and sequencing of input), psychological variables (e.g. level of motivation, personality type, attitude, etc.), social variables, situational variables, teacher variables, and

many more (Brown, 1994; Celcemerucia, 2001; Chastain, 1988; Ellis, 1997; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Myles & Mitchell, 2019; Saville-Troike, 2005;). All these variables are interconnected in complex ways, and for a fuller understanding of second language learning, all of them need to be taken into account. However, taking all the variables in SLA into account requires huge amounts of time and budget resources. It is for this reason that this study has been delimited only to the experiences of and challenges confronted by BVI learners of English as a second language and their sighted teachers in Pakistan.

The study focused on the BVI students and their teachers from two universities (NUML Islamabad and IIU Islamabad). The researcher intended to include participants from the Quid-e-Azam University Islamabad as well, but no BVI student from there expressed his/her willingness to participate in this study. Moreover, the condition of blindness is considered by experts (Evans, B., 2009; Jones, K., 2017; Milian, 1996; Schroeder, 1989) in the field to be a disability of low occurrence, the quantity and quality of participants availability can, therefore, not be equated to the study of a general population.

Participation in this study was delimited to students who were (a) blind or visually impaired to such an extent that he/she could not read normal print and relied on alternative means, (b) studied the English as a compulsory subject up to the intermediate level (grade twelve), (c) did some English language course from some university (preferably either from NUML or IIU) before enrolling in undergraduate program, (d) enrolled in BS English at the time of the study, and (e) the teachers who had the experience of teaching at least one BVI student in the inclusive classes. There were ten student participants and five teacher participants. The age range of the students varied from 18 to twenty-two, and the age range of the teachers was not collected.

1.7 Organization of the Study

This study has been organized into six chapters. This chapter comprises introduction and statement of the problem, the background to the study, objectives of the study, research questions, delimitations of the study and organization of the study. Chapter Two is concerned with reviewing literature, focusing specifically on the critical issues in general second language acquisition, the access dilemma for the blind learners and second

language Acquisition by learners with other disabilities and its Relevance in second Language Acquisition by individuals who are blind. The Third chapter, research methodology, begins with a brief description of the theoretical framework, and the epistemological and ontological stance taken in this study. The chapter then briefly presents the methodological approach adopted for this study, focusing on such areas as approach, strategy of inquiry, researcher's role, research participants, sampling techniques, instrumentation, translation procedures, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical issues. Chapter Four is concerned with profiles of the study participants and their impressions about their English language learning and teaching experiences. Chapter Five, major themes, contains findings from the student participants, conclusions and observations. In the last chapter of the study, chapter six, conclusions and discussions, major findings of the study and their implications for practice, theory, and further research are laid before the reader.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide background information related to English language learning by visually impaired individuals in integrated classes. The chapter commences with a discussion on visual impairment, its major causes and types. The legislative measures taken for the education, rehabilitation and employment of BVI individuals in Pakistan are discussed next. Then second language learning by individuals having various types of disabilities (other than blindness and visual impairment) is discussed, followed by a discussion focusing more specifically on the needs of BVI second language learners. After that, the advantages and disadvantages of educating BVI students in integrated classroom settings are considered. This is followed by a discussion on the English language learning experiences of BVI learners across cultures. Discussion will then be centred on the role of assistive technology in learning a second language by BVI learners. The chapter concludes with a summary of the possibilities for improving the outlook for BVI students of English.

2.2 Defining Visual Impairment

The term visual impairment is used globally to refer to the same phenomena, but visual impairments may vary in terms of visual acuity, field of vision and distance at which things can be seen. Visual acuity is the individual's ability to resolve detail, field of vision is the area that can be seen, accommodation is her/his ability to focus, adaptability to light, and color vision (Douglas, McCall, McLinden, & Pavey, Ware, Farrell, 2009). Moreover, the degree of impairment may range from mild to severe (AFB, 2012). Visual impairment may result from various causes such as glaucoma, genetical disorders, cataracts, corneal scarring, diabetic retinopathy, and age-related macular degeneration etc. (Foster & Resnikoff, 2005). The main causes, however, according to Pascolini and Mariotti (2010), are cataract, uncorrected refractive errors (myopia, hyperopia, or astigmatism), and

glaucoma. NICHCY (2012) terms visual impairment as a functional loss of vision, instead of the eye disorder itself. Similarly, Douglas and McLinden (2005) also term visual impairment as a loss of visual function. The US Department of Education defines it as impairment in vision, even with correction, that adversely affects a child's education performance. Factors such as the age of onset, intensity of impairment, eye condition, and part of the visual system affected, and so on determine the degree of possible correction through various interventions such as contact lens/glasses, medicine, or surgery.

Literature suggests that there is no universally agreed-upon definition among scholars of visual impairment. Visually impaired individuals are generally categorized in either of these four categories: blind, legally blind, partially sighted, and low vision. Totally blind are those who are either totally blind or can perceive light only. Low vision individuals' vision ranges between 20/70-20/160, and cannot be corrected through corrective interventions. Legally blind are those whose vision ranges from 20/200-20/400 and even those whose vision ranges from 20/400-20/1000. Partially sighted are those whose vision is deteriorated to the extent that it adversely affects her/his educational performance even after ultimate correction. (Gabbert, 2012). For the provision of appropriate educational services, the nature of visual impairment needs to be properly determined, as these services should be linked to the functional implications of visual impairment along with clinical assessments.

2.3 Legislative Measures for the Education and Employment of Disabled Individuals in **Pakistan**

With a population of around 249.57 million, according to the digital census (2023), Pakistan is the sixth most populous country in the world. Unfortunately, there are no reliable data available on the BVI individuals and their inclusion in general educational settings. Other sources, such as the World Bank Report on Disability (2019) places the disability ratio in Pakistan at 3.56 percent, whereas the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) indicates that 22.1 percent of the government schools have children with disabilities. According to the 2017 Population and Housing Census, 0.48 percent of Pakistan's population is disabled; this shows a stark decrease from the 2.38 percent figure in the 1998 census. While Pakistan has taken vital steps to advance the right to education through the provision of free and compulsory education for children aged 5–16 (including

children with disability), the government needs to focus on improving the quality of education through such measures as increasing the capacity of teachers, reforming curriculum, and bringing about improvement in the education sector, particularly with regard to governance mechanisms (The World Bank, 2019). Children with disabilities face difficulties in accessing educational institutions, the relevant learning materials, proper staffed services and information (UNICEF, 2021).

International estimates show that ten to twenty percent of children and adolescents population has special educational needs (ILO 2004, Peters 2003, UNESCO 2001, Wimam and Sandu 2004). CRPD (the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities), particularly Article twenty-four, urges the member-States to improve their respective educational systems by taking measures to grant the BVI individuals the right to inclusive education (UNO, 2006). Although education has seen improvement globally, individuals with disabilities still remain a most marginalized group. As compared with normal individuals, they are less likely to participate in and complete their education (WHO, 2011).

Pakistan has tried to give legislative cover to international conventions on inclusive education in order to achieve the goals set out in them. The 1973 Constitution (amended in 2012) ensures free and compulsory education for all children aged 5–16 years (Article 25-A), and non-discrimination in education (Article 26). The United Nations adopted a resolution in its “Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” (2008) demanding from the signatory nations to take measures for the preparation of legal framework for the provision of equal opportunities to disabled persons in every sphere of life (including education) (Singal, 2015). Pakistan, being a signatory to this convention, must take the necessary steps for the education and rehabilitation of disabled individuals in accordance with the guidelines laid down in that convention. The first steps to address the needs of persons with disabilities were taken in the early 1980s (Singal, 2015) when the 1981 ordinance, known as “Disabled Persons” (Employment and Rehabilitation) Ordinance”, was promulgated through which the Council for the Rehabilitation of Disabled People was established to make policy for the protection of disabled people’s rights, the prevention of disabilities, and the provision of education and employment to individuals with disabilities. The ordinance provides legal cover to individuals with disability to have equal access to

quality education from the primary to the university level and guarantees equal opportunities to them with regard to employment (Singal, 2015). The ordinance directed the provincial governments to form provincial councils to execute the national policies made for the rehabilitation and education of these individuals.

Similarly, Pakistan's Vision 2025 also includes focusing on individuals with disabilities. The vision includes: taking measures for effectively implementing the action plans for children; expanding and strengthening the social safety nets and social protection systems; taking steps for inclusive education for individuals with special needs; enforcement of a special quota in education and employment for persons with special needs; and the creation of sports facilities for individuals with disabilities (UNICEF, 2021).

The federal government adopted the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities 2002 and operationalized it by a National Action Plan in 2006. The main goals of the policy included: empowering persons with disabilities by enabling them to have access to facilities and thus fully integrating them in society; enabling them to enjoy their rights like other citizens; getting them involved in the planning and implementation of programmes related to them; and allowing them, without any discrimination, to have equal access to education, social, medical, vocational training, rehabilitation and employment (Mujahid-Mukhtar, E. 2018). However, a report to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights notes that up until 2015, long-term strategies set out in the action plan had not been implemented. (Mujahid-Mukhtar, E. 2018).

In Pakistan's first national policy on disability, it was pledged that equal opportunities will be afforded to individuals with disabilities in the areas of education and employment. It is the most important official document with respect to disability till date (Singal, 2015). However, it is a very aspirational document quite aloof from ground realities and it offers no practical measures for the materialization of the goals and objectives outlined therein. It emphasizes, for example, inclusive education for disabled individuals, but the rationale advanced in favour of making a shift from exclusive to inclusive system of education is, ironically, based on the argument that this is what is preferred at the international level (Singal, 2015). Nevertheless, the goal of mainstreaming

the disabled individuals outlined in the policy is a significant one. However, the lack of implementation is a major cause for concern.

The Islamabad Declaration on Inclusive Education was signed by both the federal and all provincial governments in 2005. The declaration termed “inclusive education” as a process to “ensure that all children regardless of gender, abilities, disabilities and socio-economic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds are treated with dignity and respect; have equal access to education, health services, work and all other aspects of life; are enabled to develop their full academic, physical, emotional and social potential; have access to learning material through appropriate media and technical devices; and develop confidence in their abilities, skills and future prospects”.(Ministry of Education, 2008) The National Education Policy (NEP) 2009 referred to children with disabilities as “handicapped” children. While the terminology used was not in accordance with the standard norms among special education circles, the policy aimed to “equalize access to education through the provision of special facilities for handicapped children and adults” (National Educational Policy, 2009, p. 18).

The policy, however, did not provide clear strategies on how to achieve such goals. It merely repeated the main points given in the 2002 policy, such as the promotion of inclusive and child-friendly education, steps for the inclusion of special persons in mainstream education, forming a team of specialized teacher trainers (p. 43), and emphasis on literacy and technical and vocational education programmes (p. 19). A 2016 research report, however, established that there was limited commitment with regard to the rights of persons with disabilities at the policy level (Singal, N, 2016). The 2017 NEP also gave particular attention to inclusive and special education. The policy aimed at bringing “50 per cent of all children with disabilities in school by 2025 and creating inclusive learning environments in 50 per cent of existing formal education institutions at all levels”.(National Education Policy, 2017)

The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Rights of Persons with Disability Act was approved in 2020. It adopts the key definitions and principles of CRPD. The act maintains that general education settings must be equipped and reasonably staffed to implement inclusive education (ICT, 2020).

One of the main hurdles in the provision of quality inclusive education in Pakistan is the shortage of funds. According to UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal 4 monitoring, the country's investments towards education are below the benchmarks set by the Incheon Declaration which were to allocate at least four to six per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) to education and/or allocate at least fifteen to twenty per cent of public expenditure to education (UNESCO, 2021). The departments of health and education need some serious investment in general, as well as interventions facilitative of disability-inclusive education requires huge increase in funding.

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) oversees the university education in Pakistan and provides guidelines on the various aspects of higher education such as the non-discrimination and admission of students with disabilities to higher education institutions. HEC issued the first policy for students with disabilities in 2019 which was amended in 2021. The policy guides higher education institutions throughout the country on the inclusion of students with disabilities by issuing directives on accommodation, access, and teacher and staff training related to disability-inclusive education (HEC, 2019). The policy enumerates such services as medical assistance, discounted miscellaneous fees, provision of full tuition fee subsidy, provision of assistive devices and other learning materials in accessible formats, and the building of accessible facilities/infrastructure (HEC, 2019). Similarly, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) provides guidelines on teaching methodologies capable of addressing the diverse learning needs of students, including individuals with disabilities (MFE, 2019). The first Braille book corner in Pakistan's National Library was inaugurated in 2018, which advocates hailed as important for persons who are blind and visually impaired. The introduction of the Braille book corner was envisioned to facilitate persons who are blind in their learning needs. More than 60 Braille books have been made available, with more books expected to be added soon (Express Tribune, 2018).

In spite of the assurances the various legislative measures afford to individuals with disability in terms of access to quality education and jobs, they often fail to ensure both quality education as well as the procurement of jobs for them, mainly because the classroom environment cannot be regulated by law. One important aspect that cannot be ensured through legal means is that of the "affective domain" – the attitude of those

involved with the education of individuals with disability towards their education and proper accommodation. Likewise, there is no law on the books which can alter the negative stereotypes held by certain individuals with respect to persons with disability who opt for studying in the regular classrooms alongside fully sighted students (Millstein et al., 2004). Such laws often fail to take into account some of the specific challenges faced by BVI learners. They are often too ambiguous in terms of their implications to be of any practical assistance to those individuals who are directly influenced by them (Burns, 1991; Millstein et al., 2004).

Other specialized educational challenges confronted by BVI learners and those involved with teaching them are so particular that any effort to address them through legal means would be highly unfeasible. One such situation arises when there is a breakdown of support owing to lack of cross-training or interface between the regular language teacher and the blindness professional, especially when they both try to assist them in their own ways (Guinan, 1997). To support his argument, Guinan quotes the findings of Frantz and Wexler (1994) who studied a program administered by a qualified ESL teacher who was completely ignorant to Braille as well as to the specialized educational needs of the BVI learners. Likewise, the majority of those related to blindness-related skills (e.g. Braille) teachers do not possess the minimum knowledge and expertise related to the theories and practice of SLA. Consequently, both the blindness professional and the ESL teacher do not hold a complete concept of the specialized needs of the BVI learners (Guinan, 1997). This study explores the level of training received by teachers working at universities for teaching to BVI students in integrated classes at various universities in Pakistan.

While various laws and policies assure “reasonable accommodation” to individuals with disabilities comparable to those of their physically able-bodied peers, the term “reasonable accommodation” has not been well defined in either of them and is, as a result, open to interpretation. Does the term suggest, for example, that a student having problems in reading owing to weak sight would have the opportunity to learn Braille? The laws do not assure guaranties for such cases and the matter of the reading medium for the BVI learner is often left to be decided by the special educational professional.

Similarly, the “National Plan of Action for Persons with Disabilities” (2006) was constituted with the express aim of suggesting measures for the implementation of the National Policy for the Persons with Disabilities (2002). It suggested certain short-term measures to be taken till June 2009 (e.g. the promotion of inclusive education and employment), and many long-term steps (e.g. the creation of barrier-free physical environment for individuals with disabilities) to be adopted by July 2025 (Singal, 2015). Some of these measures are also enumerated in the “Special Citizens Act” (2008) and “Special Citizens (Right to Concessions in Movement) Act” (2009) with the addition of providing easy access to disabled individuals in public transport, public buildings, the right to open and maintain a personal bank-account, etc.

A significant landmark in recent years has been the passing of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Bill (2012), which guarantees free education for all children aged 5-16 years as enjoined by article 25-a of the constitution; however, somewhat ironically the act makes no mention of children with disability (Singal, 2015). This lack of interest on the part of those at the helm of affairs in the education of persons with disabilities in Pakistan is evident from the fact that the World Bank has at the moment eight programs in Pakistan and not a single of these include special persons (Singal, 2015). According to a report published by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA, 2002), persons with disabilities are the most marginalized group in Pakistan.

It can Thus be safely said that education for individuals with disabilities is very low down at the priority list of authorities, let alone devising policies on second language learning for them. Moreover, the 18th amendment to the constitution has further complicated the issues with regard to the education of individuals with disabilities by devolving education from being a federal subject to a provincial one (Singal, 2015).

2.4 Second Language Learning Experience in General

Most of the literature on the general principles of second language instruction does not take into account the BVI second language learners (who fail to fit into the "norm" of second language learners). Asher (1982), for instance, argues that second language instruction can be best administered through TPR - total physical response - procedures. Students are encouraged in this method to employ all senses in the learning of a second

language - namely, reading, writing, listening and speaking (Asher, 1982). While the main emphasis is laid on the employment of the listening skills, the method fails to offer an explanation for the intrinsic difficulties it could present for learners who may suffer from a lack of eye-hand coordination or who are unable to readily figure out nonverbal communication (e.g. gestures).

Blindness and visual impairment, according to Warren (1994), do not appear to hamper L1 or L2 acquisition as far as the acquisition of interpersonal communicative skills is concerned. Lack of vision, however, can have a major impact on the use and acquisition of language in a social context. Areas such as initiating conversation, figuring out if one's conversational partner is paying attention to one, discovering suitable ways of interrupting and determining the interest level of one's interlocutor may be affected (Warren, 1994). The situations highlighted by Warren underscores the unique challenges BVI second language learners could potentially face during drilling or group interaction in a mainstream second language classroom. This study explores the interactional challenges confronted by BVI students of English language in integrated settings in Pakistan.

Students who are either congenitally blind or lose sight at a very early age face the additional challenge of properly developing the basic concepts which sighted learners either experience on a daily basis or take for granted. For sighted children the meaning of words is richer and more elaborate as compared with the meaning for the BVI learners . . . vision appears to enable children to generalize and widen semantic associations (Guinan, 1997; Warren, 1994).

A blind student might not be able to give the correct response to the question: "what colour is a start light," (if asked, for example, by a language teacher during the course of a drill on colour terms) not because he simply does not know the appropriate vocabulary item, as may be the case for indecision in answering on the part of a sighted learner, but because the blind student might have never actually seen colours, let alone start lights. Similarly, a BVI student may have difficulty in answering the drill question of "what is the weather like outside?", simply because, unlike his sighted peers, he is unable to look out the class and observe the weather over there. He might be able to answer this question, however, if he has gone outside the classroom in the immediate past and felt the weather

outside.

Warren further argues that decoding the meaning of deictic expressions always poses challenges for BVI individuals as these expressions depend for their meaning on temporal and spatial context (Warren, 1994). Similarly, when objects are held up in a class (consisting predominantly of fully sighted learners) and students are asked to provide the objects' names in the target language during the course of a rapid drill, it will neither elicit any response nor any mastery over the target language forms on the part of the BVI learner. For this reason, the second language teacher will have to allocate extra attention and time to her/his BVI students' specific needs in order to help them overcome such challenges. Here a great deal of commitment and expertise is required on the part of the general education teacher to help a BVI learner overcome his/her sighted-related challenges in an inclusive setting (Nyoni, 2012). This study explores how far the sighted teachers are able to adapt their largely visual teaching style in order to accommodate their BVI students in integrated classroom environment.

Krashen's (1982) "input hypothesis" can, however, prove useful in such situations (Guinan, 1997). The input hypothesis states that for an effective learning of the target language, learners must be exposed to a meaningful linguistic input which is slightly above the current language level of the learner. He termed this type of input as "roughly-tuned input". The practical application of Krashen's input hypothesis renders it necessary for a teacher to work with a BVI learner on a one-to-one basis, apart from his/her class participation, for a better assessment of the student's comprehension and performance in the target language (Guinan, 1997). For Krashen's hypothesis to be more effective in the case of BVI learners, it would be necessary for second language teachers to assess them separately from the rest of the fully sighted students, since, as has been mentioned above, the BVI learners have unique needs which differ significantly from those of their fully sighted peers. Guinan (1997) argues that BVI learners need more time and effort to comprehend the more basic target language concepts ahead of the more complex ones, rather than moving on to the more complex material quickly before having enough time to master the rudimentary concepts first. In other words, while it is most of the times possible to quickly move, in the case of the sighted second language learners, to the "i+1" level, it sometimes becomes necessary, for better clarification and comprehension, to spend some

more time with the BVI learners at the “i-1” level. One wonders, however, whether BVI learners (who are unable to receive visual input) would fit into Krashen’s five hypothesis as discussed in (Brown, 1994; Gass and Selinker, 2008; Mitchell, R. 2013).

Krashen’s philosophy of second language acquisition is also exemplified in his “natural order hypothesis” which states that certain grammatical structures associated with the acquisition of a second language are acquired naturally before others (Brown, 1994; Gass and Selinker, 2008; Mitchell, R. 2013). While this hypothesis is universal and is, therefore, not influenced by any classroom technique or method of instruction, sightlessness may potentially present challenges in the manner in which a second language would usually be acquired. Without the visual input, which is frequently utilized in regular second language classrooms, it would appear that the lack of this vital sense would have an effect on the order in which crucial elements of the target language are comprehended. Krashen is of the view that people acquire the target language much better when the “affective filter” is low and the input is comprehensible (Mitchell, R. 2093).

Krashen intends his theory to be aimed at the normal fully sighted second language learners and he does not mention the types of comprehensible input that would be easily acquired by BVI learners. The way the BVI second language learners view the world, and the way they experience it, significantly differs from the means by which sighted learners view the world (Doleson et al., 1992; Milian, 1996). The BVI learners, owing to lack of vision or visual memory, for example, experience difficulties in such critical areas of perception as colour identification (Milian, 1996), the identification of geographical location (Connell, 1994), and mobility and orientation (Hill et al., 1997). It means that the roughly-tuned input obtained by a BVI learner would be significantly different from that obtained by a fully sighted learner.

Krashen is of the view that the two major skills in the second language i.e. reading and writing will emerge only when the learner is intellectually ready (Richards and Rodgers, 2002). Although Richards is very critical of Krashen’s theories and views on a general level, yet neither Richards, in the course of his critical evaluation of Krashen’s theory, nor Krashen himself has made any attempt to take into account learners who may deviate from the norm in terms of their learning styles.

Many SLA experts believe that motivation is one of the key factors in the second language acquisition process. According to Harmer (2002), the learners, regardless of age, are motivated to learn languages by the prestige factor associated with the target language. For a learner battling with a crucial deficit in the reading and writing skills, however, prestige is hardly an issue (Wright et al., 1995). Ma lave (1991) found in her study on mentally handicapped students that the learners had difficulty just getting by; prestige was simply an insignificant factor for them. Other studies have shown that individuals with disabilities may be very sensitive with regard to their prestige and any challenge in this regard can easily demotivate them (Avramidis, & Norwich, 2010; Barnet, & Webb, 1985; Brinckerhoff, 1991; Fichten, Ansel, Bourdon, Creti, 1988; Guinan, 1997; Orsini-Jones, 2009). Moreover, it can also result in the display of odd behaviour on their part (Guinan, 1997; Orsini-Jones, 2009; Porter, Lace, 2008; Rae, Murray, & McKenzie, 2010).

Parents and teachers need to take into account the affective domain when deciding on a child's schooling. The affective factors are concerned with the way in which the perception and attitude of those involved with a particular set of circumstances affect the way a given situation is handled (Brown, 1994). All disabled populations, regardless of the type of disability, confront challenges connected with factors which play a part in the affective domain. The affective factors play a significant role in a student's attempt to learn a second language, as, based on their experiences as well as on the task at hand, they determine to a large extent the learner's attitude towards the target language (Brown, 1994). Learners with severe hearing impairments, for example, are generally overlooked in a mainstream classroom mainly because of their inability to freely communicate in a medium used by the rest of their peers (Holcomb et al., 1993). Likewise, mentally retarded learners are generally labelled as "stupid" by their physically fit peers, resulting in feelings of lowered self-esteem and inadequacy, which lead to deterioration in in-class performance (Barnet et al., 1985). In the same way, BVI learners who, as has been mentioned above, have deficient reading and writing skills, often experience feelings of inadequacy in the class (Schroeder, 1989). Although no literature addressing this subject within the context of SLA was found, it would be obvious from the above discussion that visual deficiency among the BVI students would not only result in low academic performance in second language acquisition, but would also bring about the feelings of lowered self-esteem and

low expectations among the BVI learners. This study investigates the in-class behaviour of the BVI students and their sighted teachers and peers, its impact on their motivation, and , in turn, its impact on the English language learning behaviours in integrated setting.

2.5 Second Language Learning by Students with Other Disabilities and its Relevance to Second Language Learning by BVI Individuals

While very few studies have been carried out on second language learning with respect to BVI university undergraduates, much of the literature related to second language acquisition by individuals with other types of disabilities cites learners' strategical learning challenges and their learning deficiencies which are similar in many respects to those experienced by BVI learners. Visual impairment poses certain challenges in accessing the written word which connects BVI second language learners to learners with other types of disabilities. While accessibility issues to the written word create countless conceptual challenges to BVI learners, the lack of access to the spoken word on the part of deaf individuals invariably results in deficiency in both their reading and writing skills, whose mother-tongue writing style is, most often, comparable to a third-grade level (Holcomb et al., 1993).

This deficiency in mother-tongue competence also extends to students who are mentally retarded. Mentally retarded students must be worked with more intensively, as they often have problems in interpreting abstract concepts (e.g. the written word). Second language teachers generally find that mentally retarded students are never worked with sufficiently enough to enable them to develop adequate competency in their mother-tongue so they can utilize it in learning a second language (Ma lave, 1993). While observing students having learning disabilities, Edwards (2013) notes that these learners are also deficient in properly developing mother-tongue concepts, since they are often forced to work below grade level. BVI learners also experience the same circumstances, as they are confronted with a lack of exposure to fundamental written mother-tongue concepts (Milian, 1996; Spungin, 1989). Although no literature exists to support this, yet it can be argued that like mentally retarded learners or students with learning disability, BVI learners deficient in certain basic concepts would have corresponding conceptual difficulties when trying to have mastery over a target language.

Another thread binding together all disability groups is the stereotypical view held by the non-disabled faculty towards them; they regard the academic capabilities of individuals with disability with scepticism and prejudice (Milian, 1996). Numerous studies have focused upon the perceptions of teachers on providing instructions to BVI learners in inclusive settings (Avramidis & Norwich, 2010; Jones, 2017; Rae et al., 2010; Wungu & Han, 2008). General education teachers often do not think highly of the disabled students' capabilities (Nyoni et al., 2011). Difficulty in the utilization of language by deaf and dumb individuals, for example, often results in the erroneous assumption on the part of those involved in academe that students with this disability can perform better in classroom (Holcomb et al., 1993). Similarly, second language teachers often believe that the cognitive level at which the second language courses are taught is not appropriate for learners with mental retardation (Tessier et al., 1993). Moreover, students with learning difficulties are often prevented from enrolling in second language courses (Wright et al., 1995). BVI learners, like students with other types of disabilities, also face resistance or lowered expectations with respect to their abilities from mainstream educators, and they often do not get the opportunity to prove their academic worth in mainstream classroom environment (Spungin, 1999). One of the main objectives of this study is to find out about the attitudes of the sighted teachers towards the BVI students in integrated second language classroom setting.

Yet another binding thread of all groups with disability is the mainstream educators' urging them to seek exemption from the second/foreign language requirement (Wright et al., 1995). The main reason behind this urging is that the mainstream second language teachers often consider themselves quite unequal to the task of catering to the special needs of the disabled populations with respect to the basic language concepts (Holcomb et al., 1993; Lonton et al., 1991). Inadequate teacher training and preparation often result in poor learning on the part of the BVI learners (Silberman, Bruce, & Nelson, 2004). In places where modified second language classrooms for disabled learners exists, these students are put there, as the mainstream educators deem them incapable to function in regular second language classrooms (Wright et al., 1995).

The placement of BVI learners in modified classrooms is often accomplished, however, mainly because blindness, according to professionals in the field, is a rare or

uncommon disability (Milian, 1996). Such modified language classrooms per se are generally not available for BVI learners in order to cater to their specialized needs. Similarly, in a regular second language class, extra written clarification (Barnet et al., 1985), or academic aids like peer tutoring, (Wright et al., 1995) cannot be made available to meet the specialized needs of BVI learners in a regular second language class. This study tries to find out as to what extent the sighted teachers are trained to teach their BVI students, and to what extent the lack of training has an impact on the teaching/learning process in regular classes.

2.6 Educating BVI Students in Integrated Classes: Advantages and Disadvantages

Historically, BVI individuals were educated in segregated environment; however, today most of them are educated in their integrated classes (AFB, 2011). Integration of the BVI students into the general education classroom affords them more opportunities to have shared experiences with their sighted peers and is more advantageous for all students (AFB, 2012).

But a variety of factors need to be taken into account before integrating BVI students into the mainstream classes (AFB, 1995). Despite the fact that governments around the world have taken certain measures to facilitate them, The BVI students still face a variety of challenges such as severe shortage of qualified teachers of the blind, orientation and mobility specialists, weak credentials, gainful employment, and independent living. Moreover, special schools for BVI students are too costly (AFB, 2005).

The movement towards integration began in the 1990s and the term "inclusion" was introduced after sticking to the segregated system for more than a century. The movement called for educating students with disabilities alongside the mentally, physically and visually fit students through a single, unified and responsive education system. It was supported by the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB, 2011) along with many other advocacy groups.

Research conducted so far has indicated several advantages of educating BVI students in integrated classes (Baker, Wang, & Walberg, 1995). Apart from being less costly (Felman, 2000), one of the main advantages of inclusive education is the social

integration of BVI students with their peers without disabilities. Integrated classroom settings give BVI students opportunities to create relationships with others that would not be possible in segregated environment (AFB, 2012). Moreover, integrated settings also help students without disabilities to be accepting of differences and develop feelings of respect for disabled individuals (Perles, 2010). Similarly BVI individuals educated in integrated settings have been found to be more successful in competitive employment (Katz & Miranda, 2002).

Research has also shown academic advantages of inclusive education for BVI students, as both teachers as well as peers have higher expectations of them, and they have opportunity to have academic role models in their sighted peers (AFB, 2011). The inclusive education offers diversity, and hence affords opportunities for better learning, varied instruction, enhanced social interaction, and collaboration among students (Perles, 2010).

Research has also demonstrated certain disadvantages of integrated classes for BVI students. It is not easy to provide for the individual needs of students with disabilities in integrated classes (Bateman & Bateman, 2002). Sometimes a student with disability may be so disruptive that it becomes almost impossible for a teacher to teach which results in a loss of precious learning time for other students. This study explores the extent to which the BVI students themselves, and the tools and gadgets used by them in in-class tasks and activities, have an adverse impact on the English language learning of the sighted students.

Another disadvantage of integrated environment is that BVI students generally do not receive the attention needed to be successful within classroom settings. Moreover, BVI students may feel uncomfortable on account of their visual impairment, which may result in their social withdrawal (NICHCY, 2012). Lack of teacher training has also been noted to be disadvantageous to BVI students in inclusive environment. As a result, they may not be aware of the specialised needs of the BVI students, and hence would be unable to adopt appropriate strategies for teaching such students. Moreover, they may not be adequately trained to provide necessary adaptations for students with disabilities (AFB, 2012).

It may be noted that educational goals should be essentially the same for BVI students as their sighted peers. BVI students require specific interventions and modification with regard to their educational programming. On account of their visual impairment, BVI

students adopt different ways to access information, relying on their other senses (NICHCY, 2012). According to AFB (2011), most traditional teaching strategies are based on the sense of sight. This study explores the teaching styles of the teachers who teach in integrated classroom settings.

After reviewing visual impairment education and pedagogy, Douglas and McLinden (2005) concluded that past research emphasized the concept of accessing information. According to Cavanaugh (2002), the rationale underlying this may be the lack of access on the part of the BVI students to visual information. This study explores the methods used by BVI students to access information in an educational environment which is tailor-made for sighted individuals.

Full participation of BVI students in integrated classes is also affected by the need to access print materials through alternative means. The reading speed of braille users is considerably slower than print readers (Nolan & Kederis 1969; Trent & Truan, 1997; Wormsley, 1996). Similarly students with low vision who use magnification devices and large print also face the problem of slow reading speed (Corn et al., 2002; Cowen & Shepler, 2000; Gompel, van Bon, & Schreuder, 2004). Assistive technology devices are very useful, but they also pose the same problem of resulting in a loss of valuable academic learning time. This study aims to explore as to what extent the use of alternative media hampers or facilitates the English language learning endeavours of BVI students.

Another set of problems may emanate from the general educational environment as the classrooms are designed from the perspective of the sighted students. Similarly, the mode of presentation is predominantly visual: videos, charts, posters, diagrams, demonstrations, models, and print materials are frequently used. BVI students often find it hard to benefit from these materials (Cavanaugh, 2002). Notwithstanding these issues, all students are expected to acquire the same standard of knowledge and skill regardless of disability (AFB, 2012). This study tries to determine as to what extent the general educational environment is conducive for English language learning by BVI students.

Visual impairment definitely affects learning, and BVI students require specialized instruction to grasp concepts. BVI individuals have specific needs and should be educated

through a holistic, team approach. Therefore, instruction should be designed in line with the needs of the BVI students in order to promote learning among them.

Another main hurdle in BVI students affective learning is inadequate teacher training and preparation. Untrained or improperly trained teachers hinder the rate of learning for BVI students (Silberman, Bruce, & Nelson, 2004). Teachers of BVI students are responsible for providing adequate instructions and support to these students, so that they might be able to learn along their sighted peers in integrated classes. Effective teachers of BVI students exploit the students' multisensory capabilities (auditory, visual, and tactile) (AFB, 2011). They try to utilise all sort of means: appropriate books, specialized services, and materials (including Braille), as well as specialized equipment and technology in order to meet the specialised needs of their BVI students. They alter their teaching style in order to meet the BVI students' individual learning needs. This study seeks to establish as to what extent teachers are trained to teach BVI students in integrated classes, and how far they adapt their teaching style to meet the specialised needs of the BVI students.

The educational environment itself can be a barrier for students with visual impairments if the environment is not designed for their specific needs (Hatlen, 2005). This could include anything from the delivery of instruction to the independent practice activities for students. Students with disabilities benefit from receiving instruction in general education settings, yet limited studies have been conducted that investigate the students' perspectives of experiences in these settings. This study aims to establish, through the views of the BVI students and their sighted teachers, whether BVI students of English confront the same type of challenges in integrated classroom settings in Pakistani context.

2.7 BVI English Language Learners in Integrated Classroom Setting Across Cultures

Susanto (2018) conducted an ethnographic case study at a school for visually impaired students in Bandar Lampung, Indonesia and studied the English language learning/teaching there. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with BVI students and teachers and participant observation, using a social constructivist framework of disability. The study revealed that the students received inadequate modifications of instruction on the part of their sighted teachers in English language learning. However, the

students used a variety of resources on their own with the screen reader technology such as NVDA and JAWS. Findings of the study suggest that BVI students can have unique ways of learning foreign language supported by the assistive technology. It highlights the importance of further research into the various learning strategies used by BVI students to learn the English language.

Agesa (2016) investigated the challenges faced by BVI learners in inclusive classroom setting in Kenya. Using descriptive survey design to explore the challenges confronting BVI learners, a sample of one hundred and ten students was used. Data was collected through both quantitative and qualitative procedures and questionnaires, interviews and documentary analysis were used. The study found that most learners with visual impairments performed poorly in academics due to lack of implementation of the visually impaired school which calls for a differentiated curriculum as per the laid down policy on Special Needs Education, which is attributed to social, economic and partly cultural factors. The study suggested that the specialised needs of the BVI students warranted more and properly trained teachers in regular schools. Moreover, parents of BVI learners and community should also be sensitized on their education. The study emphasised on the need for an in-depth study of the behaviour of the sighted teachers and peers as well as the techniques used by these teachers in integrated setting.

Efstathiou and Polichronopoulou (2015) conducted a study in Athens Greece on the teaching materials used by teachers of English as a foreign language for BVI students. The 80 participants of the online survey, ten of whom also participated in semi-structured interviews, shed light on the teaching materials and the technological support they use when teaching English to visually challenged students. The study found out that the majority of teachers had little knowledge about the instructional materials that were especially used for visually impaired students. Most of them also stated that even the basic teaching materials for BVI students were hardly available to them.

The study concluded that the BVI students needed to have equal access to study material as their sighted peers. (It also established that the specialised tools and gadgets used by BVI could not be properly capitalised upon in integrated setting owing to time and class management constraints. The study suggested further research into the use of teaching

strategies by sighted teachers in integrated classroom setting and availability of study material to BVI students. It also underscored the need for further research into the strategies used by BVI students to communicate with their sighted teachers.

AL Ghafri (2015) conducted a study into the problems confronted by BVI students in learning the English language at Sultan Qaboos University. Data was collected from eighteen students (who had studied English as a compulsory subject in schools) through a questionnaire. One teacher of the blind was also interviewed. The study found that the BVI students faced difficulties in all four skills, with writing being the most challenging.

It further established that sighted teachers were largely unaware of the specialised needs of these students. The study recommends a more in-depth study of the sighted teaching styles and the challenges confronted by visually-impaired students in learning the English language in integrated classes.

Kocyigit and Artara (2015) conducted a qualitative study with the aim of picturing the conditions of BVI learners in their learning environment. Data was collected through unstructured in-depth interviews conducted with BVI learners and their teachers of prep school of two foundation universities in Izmir, Turkey, and analysed through content analysis using Weft QDA, a freeware program available on the Internet that has been developed to be used in qualitative studies. The study found that personality traits of the BVI learners are key to the success of the teaching/learning process. It further established that inclusion of other actors (administrators, curriculum planners, classmates, families can make the situation more favourable for the BVI learners. The study suggests further research to corroborate the findings of this study.

Mugambi's (2011) study investigated the challenges confronted by teachers of BVI learners in integrated classroom setting. Apart from aiming to find out whether teachers were adequately trained to teach BVI students in integrated environment, it also investigated the challenges the teachers confronted in adopting the syllabus for BVI students. The study was conducted in the Moi Girls' School in Nairobi which has the highest number of BVI students studying along with their sighted peers. Data was collected from forty-seven teachers from the said school including 25 female and 22 male teachers through a questionnaire using a purposive random sampling technique, and analysed

through the lens of The normalization theory which argues that a child with whatever kind of disability can live a normal life if given all kind of support just like any other normal child. The test-retest technique was used to test the reliability of the research instrument.

The study found out that the specialized facilities were limited, and that the teachers could not muster enough support and cooperation from the administration. The study recommends that the Ministry of Education need to extend its full support for the construction of specialized facilities for BVI students, especially with regard to the availability of brailled material, and the arrangement of workshops and seminars for teachers of the blind. Further research into the area of assistive technology for BVI students is also suggested.

Coşkun (2013) discuss the pros and cons of a project called the T3 project (Talking Tactile Technology)., an innovative method of teaching English to the visually impaired learners. He presented the key stages of an international project aimed at training non-native English teachers in Turkey to become aware of the concept of using T3 as a vehicle for teaching English. He asserts that the project not only enabled trainees to incorporate this new technology into their classes but also reduced the shortfall by providing continuous professional development to non-native teachers of English for the benefit of visually impaired learners. He asserts that the application of T3 in other English language teaching contexts is expected to contribute to the neglected field of foreign language teaching for BVI students. The researcher acknowledges, however, that the extent to which this technology can be effective in integrated class setting is yet to be studied.

2.8 The Access Dilemma: BVI Learners' Struggle for Literacy and its Impact on English Language Learning

In an era when obtaining information is experiencing a substantial increase in importance, individuals having difficulty in reading normal text or even enlarged print or who are unable to do so at all do not get the opportunity to have the option of learning Braille (Spungin, 1999). According to Schroeder (1989), Braille is a six-dot system developed specially for the print-challenged individuals to enable them to read and write with the same amount of accuracy as fully sighted people can read normal print. Schroeder (1989) asserts that forty-four percent of the total blind and those who were declared legally

blind children could read Braille in the late 1960s in the United States, but this number diminished to merely nine percent in the 1990s. Several reasons have been identified for this drop in the number of BVI learners learning Braille. Learning Braille is not considered essential for students of a certain age with low vision, as the special educators responsible for educating them believe that these children have enough vision to render a tactually-based system to be of no practical utility for them (Burns, 1991; Cruze, 1987). Although children with low vision can read for short periods of time, yet they experience severe headaches and eyestrain after extensive reading (Schroeder, 1989). Consequently, individuals with low vision avoid doing reading except when it is absolutely necessary. As a result, these individuals with low vision enter adolescence as virtual non-readers, having very little reading and writing proficiency in the target language and in its rules of spelling or phonics (Milian, 1996). Moreover, with regard to the use of Braille as an effective reading medium in comparison to print, many adverse stereotypes still exist, and many special educators believe that the braille code is too complex for many BVI learners to understand (Spungin, 1999). This study tries to unravel the impact of braille literacy/illiteracy on the English language learning experiences of the BVI students.

Students with low vision alone are not at the risk of becoming non-readers; completely blind learners are also exposed to this threat, as many special educators consider Braille to be virtually impractical and expensive in an age when technology has considerably progressed and electronic talking books as well as numerous text-to-speech softwares are widely available. They believe that computers (and to some extent smart phones) can potentially replace large braille textbooks, bringing down the cost of braille transcribers and braille production equipment (Hussin, 2013; Johnson, 2011; Kelly, 2008; Khan, 2022). Even the American Foundation for the Blind also believes that BVI learners should be encouraged to learn through other mediums, using their other senses (AFB, 2021). However other special educators like Cruze (1987) argue that these softwares and talking books are not very effective in helping the BVI learners' improve their spellings and punctuations.

Another access difficulty directly influencing the study of second languages by BVI individuals lies in the non-availability of tactile maps and other models, mainly owing to the shortage of funds (Connell, 1994). The non-availability of these maps and models can

badly affect these learners' attempts to have mastery over the target language as without them, they often fail to develop a solid conceptualization of such visual phenomena as tangible objects. This study tries to explore the issue of accessibility with regard to the BVI students' English language learning experiences in integrated classes.

2.9 Assistive Technology: A Solution to the Challenges Faced by BVI Learners?

BVI learners need supplementary instruction and support in order to overcome the challenges resulting from their vision loss (Jones, 2017). Various studies suggest that the BVI learners' needs are generally not met in inclusive setting (Al-Zyoudi, 2006; Gyimah, Sugden, & Pearson, 2009; Nyoni et al., 2011). Assistive technology, however, if made available and properly utilised, can help them overcome many of the challenges they face while studying a second language.

Assistive technology refers to the services and devices used to maintain, increase or improve the capability of a learner with disability (Dell, Newton, & Petroff, 2012). Acaimpesd (2011) Defines it as technology and software that helps the disabled individuals with unique needs to overcome or mitigate the intensity of the challenges they face in learning and communication. The high-tech assistive technology used by BVI learners include both software and hardware products such as accessible cell phones, screen magnifiers, electronic magnifiers, screen readers, closed-circuit televisions, portable and refreshable Braille displays, scanners and optical character readers, digital readers, digital and electronic data, and so on (Nguyo, 2015). According to AFB (2018) and Presley & D' Andrea (2008) the American Foundation for the Blind categorizes the available assistive technology for BVI learners into three major types: (1) technology used for obtaining access to print material (e.g. acetate overlays, magnifiers, video magnification systems, telescopes, scanning and optical character recognition (OCR) systems, tactile graphics, electronic whiteboards, digital talking books, Braille reading, e-book readers, talking dictionaries, large print, etc.); (II) technology for accessing electronic information (e.g. cursor-enlarging software, Large monitor, screen magnification software, online dictionaries, accessible personal digital assistant, touch tablet, refreshable Braille displays, e-book reader, text reader, digital voice recorder, etc.); (III) Technology for producing written communication (e.g. dedicated word processor, drawing software, Felt-tip pen and

bold marker, imaging software, slate and stylus Braillewriter, Braille embosser, electronic Braille writer, etc.)

Different BVI second language learners feel comfortable with different types of assistive technology depending on their unique needs determined by their residual vision, learning style and aptitude of the learner. Learners with low vision and blindness generally require assistive technology related to print access, braille access, speech access, tactile communication systems, or any combination of these (Nguyo, 2015). They need, however, the guidance of skilled specialists having expertise in both blindness-specific assistive technology and individuals' learning styles and strategies (Kelly, 2008; Mbugua, 2012).

Assistive technology can be helpful in two ways: to assess the BVI learner to complete a task successfully and to enable him to go through an area of difficulty successfully (Williamson-Henriques, 2013). When a print-challenged learner listens to the digital version of a book, for example, he is in fact solving a major challenge confronted by him. Similarly, when a BVI learner gets the highlighted words read aloud through a computer, he is in fact completing the task of learning unfamiliar words. Yet various studies have reported that disabled learners as well as their teachers generally underutilize the available assistive technology (Kelly, 2009; Wong & Cohen, 2011).

The utility of assistive technology for disabled populations in the process of teaching and learning has been studied (Bart et al., 2011; Bishaw, 2013; Hovorakova, 2016; Hussin, MohdNor, & Suhaimi, 2008; Kiamoko, 2014; Leporini, 2007; Martins, Steil, & Todesco, 2004; Nguyo, 2015; Pal, Vallauri, & Tsaran, 2011; Williamson-Henriques, 2013). All the studies assert that assistive technology has positive impact on both teaching and learning for disabled learners. Moreover, it serves as an equalizer for disabled students learners with their able-bodied peers. It helps the BVI learners, for example, improve their reading speed as well as comprehension rates – one of the main challenging areas for BVI learners (Bera, 2011; Corn et al., 2002; Kennedy, 2002).

Although the available assistive technology does solve the reading and writing difficulties of BVI learners to some extent, as they have access to a variety of print material in the form of digital talking textbooks (DTTS) and E-books in the English language, yet it does not solve all the problems they face (Bera, 2011). The OCR technology is very

helpful, but it has issues of its own (Hovorakova, 2016). Moreover, there is no effective OCR technology available till date which can successfully recognize handwritten material. The available assistive technology has, however, been successful to a large extent in resolving the writing difficulties of the BVI learners, but it needs a great deal of typing practice to get perfection and achieve the right level of typing speed on the part of the BVI learners to be of any practical value to them in written exams, assignments or job-related functions (Nguyo, 2015). Technology is, nevertheless, advancing at a rapid pace and one would hope that most of the challenges confronted by BVI learners with regard to second language learning, particularly the reading and writing skills, would be solved in the near future. A major objective of this study is to find out as to what blindness-specific support services and assistive technology, according to the study participants, are available for the BVI learners and their teachers in Pakistan, and how do they assist them in teaching and learning the target language.

2.10 Summary and Possibilities for Improving the Outlook for BVI Second Language Learners

Owing to the lack of availability of studies directly related to the area of second language acquisition by BVI students, it is essential to examine the challenges in learning a second language confronted by them on a more basic level. Whereas second language study was once considered beyond the reach of disabled learners, educators are now becoming aware that they have to cater to the needs of second language students, students who come into the regular classroom environment with a variety of unique needs and concerns (Barnet et al., 1985). Moreover, special education experts argue that learners with all types of disabilities who are desirous of learning a second language must have an opportunity to do so. The second language teacher has a responsibility to ensure that a disabled learner attain his/her full potential in the mainstream second language classroom (Coven, 1992; Dun ley, 1989; Lonton et al., 1991).

One way of accommodating BVI learners into the regular second language classroom is to modify second language examination so that the learner's visual impairment may not prove a hindrance in effectively demonstrating his knowledge of the target language (Milian, 1996). Milian himself conducted a study in 1996 in which he altered the examination format, testing the conceptual abilities of BVI learners, from being

visual cues and picture-based to the one based on oral cues. The results were quite encouraging for the BVI learners.

All the literature reviewed conveys the reassuring message to BVI learners of second language the same access to the mainstream classroom settings. On the other hand, the literature also highlights the disastrous consequences which can result when the rudimentary conceptual mother-tongue foundation is not properly laid. Careful attention to and facilitation of this group of disabled population will afford a greater chance for success to these BVI learners in the regular second language classroom settings.

This chapter presented a brief review of related literature. I began by defining the term visual impairment. Then a brief survey of the legislative measures taken for the education, rehabilitation and employment in Pakistan was presented. Literature on second language acquisition in general was examined, and it was then related to the unique circumstances faced by BVI learners during the course of their second language study. Then the experiences, insights, theories and research of those who deal with disability on a more general level were put before the reader, and the needs of second language learners having various types of disabilities, other than visual impairment were discussed. I then focused on the needs of BVI second language learners in integrated classes. After that, a cross-cultural survey of various studies focusing on English language learning by BVI students in integrated classroom environment was presented. Then the access dilemma for BVI individuals was discussed. Finally, literature on the role of assistive technology in second language learning by BVI students was briefly reviewed. In the next chapter, the methodological approach utilized in this study will be presented.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological approach utilized in this study. The chapter commences with a brief description of the theoretical framework which guided this study. Here the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the study are also discussed. The chapter then briefly presents the methodological approach adopted for this study, focusing on such areas as approach, strategy of inquiry, research participants, sampling techniques, instrumentation, and data analysis procedures. It was followed by a discussion on the transcription processes used, translation procedures followed, and the researcher's role in the study. Finally the measure taken for ensuring the trustworthiness (reliability and validity) of the study and ethical issues were put before the reader.

Methodology is a combination of guiding principles that steers the study. It helps the researcher to determine a suitable method for the generation of data and assists him/her to arrive at a sensible and insightful interpretation of the data. The selection of methodology in a study is generally determined by the phenomenon under study, purpose of the study, theoretical considerations, and nature of data (Roberts, 2010). Moreover, decision with regard to methodology for a study is taken with the aim of finding the best possible answers to research questions.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

This study aims at achieving the following objectives:

- To examine the English language learning experiences of BVI learners in Pakistan
- to obtain greater understanding of, and insight into, the challenges they face
- To find possible solutions to these challenges
- To explore as to what extent the sighted teachers of the BVI learners were aware of their specialized needs and were willing to adapt their teaching strategies to help

them overcome their blindness-related challenges in an integrated classroom environment

- To find out as to what blindness-specific support services and assistive technology, according to the study participants, are available for the BVI learners and their teachers in Pakistan, and how do they assist them in teaching and learning the target language

To achieve these objectives, this study was guided by the interpretivist theory. “Interpretive inquiry,” according to Smith (2008), “as is the case with all other forms of qualitative inquiry, focuses on understanding (interpreting) the meanings, purposes, and intentions (interpretations) people give to their own actions and interactions with others.”(p. 459). Interpretivism is characterized by two threads of thought: relativism and rationalism. In other words, interpretivism assumes that empiricism (the perception of reality through senses) is not the best and only method for knowing something; there is an alternative way, rationalism (the idea that reality can be arrived at by thinking about it) as well. Relativism means that an individual’s experiences and his cultural background always condition the reality he/she perceives. The reality the people construct is defined and moulded by the filters of their culture, the tools they use like language, and their experiences (Every, 1998).

Thus, the out-there reality is perceived differently by different individuals, subject to their experiences and their culture. According to Smith (2008), interpretivists believe that “there are no permanent or time- and place-free criteria available for sorting out claims to knowledge.” (p.460). This study sought to unravel the experiences of BVI students and their teachers in integrated classes and the challenges confronted by them from their own individualized perspectives.

Difference in reality construction based on individual experiences apart, human beings are also social animals and hence they share similarities in reality construction as well. In other words, people may vary in terms of constructing reality because of variation in individual experiences and the context of those experiences, they are also influenced by their culture which is a major source of commonalities among individuals in a social class or community. BVI individuals form a community of their own, bounded by the common

thread of visual impairment. Thus, BVI English language learners may have different experiences depending on their familial, social and academic contexts; they may also share certain similarities in their experiences because of blindness. Similarly, they may both vary as well as bear resemblances in terms of challenges they face in their attempt to learn the English language in integrated classes.

Interpretivists also redefine the terms “subjectivity” and “objectivity”. Objectivity for an interpretivist, according to Smith (2008), instead of researcher detachment and accurate depiction, “is best seen as a compliment one pays to another who happens to agree with one’s interpretation or construction of reality.” (p.460). (Also see section 3.14: Researcher’s Role). Similarly, instead of viewing subjectivity as something when a researcher lets particular interests and purposes influence the research process and, thereby, distorts reality, it refers to disagreement or the idea that another has introduced an interpretation that one considers beside the point (Smith, 2008).

The inquiry procedures used by interpretivists are not different from those used by other qualitative researchers. It differs, however, from most qualitative research (and all quantitative research) which emphasise on the use of certain methods for obtaining a valid study (Smith, 2008). On the contrary, interpretivists believe that exactly what an inquirer does can vary from situation to situation. For example, in one situation, an inquirer might decide that triangulation is needed, whereas in other situations it might be judged as unproductive and, hence, unnecessary. (More on triangulation in section 3.15). Inquirers nevertheless are required to make a case for the use of certain procedures and not others (Smith, 2008). In-depth semi-structured interview was deemed to be a most suitable and sufficient tool for the collection of data for this study (More on data collection in sections 3.6, 3.7 and 3.9).

The idea of context influencing the nature of reality brings interpretivism closer to constructivism which asserts that reality can be understood in context only because it is socially constructed.

In order to understand BVI learners’ experiences of English language learning, it is essential to examine my own perspective about the nature of knowledge, and the way I interpret reality. (also See sections 3.3 and 3.16.)

The goal of interpretive inquiry is the interpretation of the interpretations people give to their own actions and the actions of others (double hermeneutic) (Smith, 2008). This is a process that is very much like ordinary conversation. The major difference between researchers and laypeople is that the former undertake the process more self-consciously and more intensely (Smith, 2008). The regulative ideal for this conversational interest in understanding is what Rorty referred to as human solidarity rather than objectivity, meaning that interpretive inquiry has more of an ethical/moral basis.

3.3 The Epistemological and Ontological Underpinnings of the Study

Passing on to the epistemological and ontological stance taken in this study, it may be stated at the outset that questions such as “What is knowledge?”, and “How is it acquired?” fall within the domain of epistemology. Heylighen (1993) argues that epistemology is mainly concerned with finding answers to questions such as, what distinguishes false (inadequate) knowledge from true (adequate) knowledge? Viewed from the perspective of research, such questions turn into issues concerning scientific methodology: how can one come up with better models or theories than the existing ones?

The epistemological stance assumed by interpretivism/constructivism is subjective (i.e. understanding of reality is co-constructed by both respondent and researcher), the ontological stance assumed by it is relativist (i.e. multiple realities may exist), and research is best conducted in naturalistic setting (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Yin, 2009). This study is aimed at neither developing a model or theory, nor proving or disproving a theory, rather, it is intended to produce a holistic account of the BVI students’ English language learning experiences within their own contexts and from their own perspectives. I believe that knowledge of BVI students’ learning experiences is inadequate unless understood within its specific context. Thus, as an interpretivist, my epistemological position is that every human action and behavior has to be understood and interpreted within its context. Moreover, I also believe that for a better understanding of an individual’s behavior, the world should be viewed from that individual’s point of view.

It may, however, be noted that an individual’s views are inevitably molded and shaped by his/her particular socio-cultural context. The researcher must, therefore, have access to the participants’ context so as to interpret the phenomenon under study from their

perspective. (Context for this study consists of integrated classroom where the BVI students of English language come into contact with sighted teachers, peers, study material and so on, and where their experiences are shaped and molded by such factors as peers and teachers' attitude, their cooperation, access to study material in some accessible format, availability of assistive technology, etc.) Bryman (2008) terms this process as "double hermeneutic", as both the other participants in the study and the researcher serve as interpreter. In other words, apart from understanding how participants view their reality, a researcher must also interpret his own understanding of participants' reality and the way the researcher defines their findings in the light of existing literature.

A social scientist adopting an interpretivist stance, does not merely describe the way members of a particular social group interpret the world around them, he also tries to place the elicited interpretations into a social scientific frame (Bryman, 2008). In other words, a double interpretation is underway: the researcher is giving an interpretation of others' (participants) interpretation. A third level of interpretation is, in fact, also going on, as the interpretations yielded by the researcher have to be further interpreted against the backdrop of the theories, concepts, and literature of the concerned discipline. In this study,

I interpreted the study participants' views about their English language learning experiences and the challenges confronted by them in integrated classes in the light of my own experiences as a BVI learner of English language as well as in view of concepts found in the literature hitherto made available in the relevant area.

Ontological questions cannot be detached from issues related to carrying out social research (Bryman, 2008). He asserts that ontological assumptions underly the formulation of research questions and the manner in which research is conducted. Constructivism underlies the ontological stance from which I perceive reality, along with the ontological assumptions guiding the formulation, in this study, of my research questions. In contrast to objectivism, which stresses the independent existence of social actors from the social phenomena and their meanings, constructivism emphasizes the interdependence of the social actors in the accomplishment of social phenomena and their meanings. It denotes that social categories and phenomena are not only formed through social interaction, but are also constantly revised, and thus create amendable and multiple realities (Fry et al.,

2009). Hence, this approach is suitable for this study, which attempts to apprehend the “what” and “how” of BVI students’ English language learning experiences.

This is closely linked with qualitative methodology of research, as it tries to understand study participants in naturalistic settings as well as use different approaches for the interpretation of meanings that study participants share (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Interviewing, as a naturalistic approach, (see sections 3.7 and 3.9) has been used for obtaining information which is in line with the underlying principles of this theory.

All qualitative research is characterized by a basic philosophy which is premised on the belief as to how the researcher views the world and behaves and acts in it (Yin 2009). All research, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), is interpretive, hence steered by the researcher’s views about the world and his views about the way it should be studied and comprehended. While investigating the BVI students’ experiences and the challenges confronted by them in integrated classroom settings, meaning in this study was constructed on the assumption that the researcher and the object of research were connected through a personal construal of knowledge. The experiential knowledge of the researcher is based on his experience as both a sighted and later a visually impaired student of English language himself. The experience of the researcher was an integral part of all phases of the study process.

Truth was established through a dialogue between the study participants and the researcher. (See section 3.16). The study findings emerged through interviews with the BVI students and their sighted teachers.

Research validity was ensured by using multiple sources such as interviews with BVI students, their sighted teachers as well as reviewing the related literature (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Yin, 2009). (More on triangulation in section 3.14)

3.4 Methodological Orientation

This study is qualitative in nature. According to Guba & Lincoln (1994), qualitative research attempts to investigate participants in natural settings and formulates different approaches to interpret meanings shared by the participants.

Generally, the purpose of qualitative research is to understand as to how people make sense of the world around them from a variety of aspects, and to acknowledge the different interpretations of human experience. It thus affords to both the research participants as well as the researcher a discovering experience. According to Denzin & Lincoln (2000), studies conducted in the qualitative tradition generally involve a naturalistic and interpretive approach. One of the key requirements of qualitative approach is that the phenomenon under study be examined with the assumption that nothing is irrelevant (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

This study adopted a qualitative approach on account of certain reasons as outlined by Creswell (2018), who argues that a qualitative methodology should be adopted when: (a) research questions commence with what, how and why, (b) the topic needs to be explored from multiple perspectives, (c) there is a lack of theory, and (d) the research needs to be conducted in a natural setting. All the above-mentioned reasons led to the adoption of a qualitative approach for this study. There are other reasons as well.

First, it is in line with the theoretical framework I used for this study. Second, it is consistent with my epistemological and ontological position - being an interpretivist, I have to grasp participants' reality from their perspective, and this is possible only with a qualitative approach. Similarly, in line with the constructivist ontological assumptions, the BVI students are considered to be constructing their own realities, and these constructed realities are in turn shaped and molded by social structures. These learners' realities can, thus, be best understood by talking to them. Thus, these BVI students' understanding of the world and the realities they construct can be understood in a better manner through a qualitative study. The goal of gaining access to the perceptions of realities by the BVI learners can best be achieved through a qualitative research approach, as it enables the researcher to conduct an in-depth analysis of the phenomena under study.

Moreover, the BVI learners' English language learning experiences have never been studied in the context of Pakistan, and, as Creswell (2018) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) argue, a phenomenon which is largely unexplored can be best investigated through a qualitative research approach. Similarly, Bryman (2008) argues that qualitative approach is more appropriate in situations where the researcher believes quantitative methods cannot

sufficiently describe or interpret a phenomenon. Another reason for using the qualitative approach is that it is more appropriate than the quantitative methodology for this study as qualitative research generally deals with subjective opinions, experiences, and feelings of individuals and thus the explicit goal of research is to explore the participants' views of the situation under study. Further, since almost every aspect of language acquisition and use is determined or significantly shaped by social, cultural, and situational factors, qualitative research is ideal for providing insights into such contextual conditions and influences. Yet another reason for using the qualitative approach is that I intended to have in-depth understanding of the phenomena under study, and thus uncover subtle meanings that would have inevitably been lost in quantitative research.

The aim of this study is to understand the BVI learners' English language learning experiences from their own perspectives, and this is possible only if the researcher talks to them, comprehends their views, and interprets their interpretations. This aim can be achieved only through a qualitative approach.

As has been mentioned above, the study has been placed in the interpretivist paradigm. Since interpretivists favour qualitative methods such as case studies, interviews, and observation because those methods are better ways of getting at how humans interpret the world around them, this study is, therefore, qualitative in nature and I used the interview method for the collection of data.

It is a fundamental principle of qualitative research that human behavior is based upon meanings which people attribute to and bring to situations (Punch 2005) and it is only the actual participants themselves who can reveal the meanings and interpretations of their experiences and actions. To gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of the BVI learners, I adopted an interpretive approach, which is linked with the hermeneutic tradition. It helped me in gaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomena by interpreting the meaning of the interaction and conversation with the BVI students. In this study, therefore, social reality is understood from the perspective of the participants (BVI learners of English language), as Heidegger argued: understanding is inseparable from human condition (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Moreover, qualitative research is fundamentally

interpretive, which means that the research outcome is ultimately the product of the researcher's subjective interpretation of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

3.5 Strategy of Inquiry

As a strategy of inquiry, this study used the interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA). IPA is a dynamic process in which the researcher plays a vibrant role in the study. It seeks to explore and interpret the learners' lived experiences. Interpretive inquirers do not see social and educational research as "scientific" in the conventional sense of that term. To the contrary, they emphasize the idea that research is a moral and practical activity that shares much in common with other forms of inquiry such as those practiced by novelists, journalists, and ordinary people in their day-to-day lives. Smith et al. (2009) asserts that the IPA assumes data can serve as a source of information about people's immersion in and viewpoint about the world, and about how they understand it. Through the two complimentary commitments of IPA – "giving voice" and "making sense", researchers seek to attain an "insider perspective" of lived experiences.

According to Smith (2008), most approaches to social and educational research are based on a realist/neorealist position holding that there is a reality "out there" that can be known or depicted as it really is independent of the interests and purposes of researchers. Although interpretivists have no problem with the idea that there is a reality "out there," they argue that the idea of no theory-free observation/knowledge means that as finite humans we can never access that reality as it really is. There is no way to eliminate the influence of the particular interests and purposes of particular researchers. As this process is invariably influenced and complicated by the researcher's own preconceptions (Heidegger, 1962), IPA recognises that it is impracticable to gain access to the exact personal world of another, completely or directly. The objective is, therefore, to obtain a description which gets as "close" to the respondent's view as is possible (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006).

This does not mean that interpretivists are antirealists in the sense that they believe that nothing exists outside of our minds. They are nonrealists, meaning they believe that there may be a reality "out there," but our descriptions/interpretations of that reality are not

“out there.” Social and educational reality is always something we make or construct, not something we find or discover.

The IPA is founded on three main theoretical keystones: (a) hermeneutics, (b) phenomenology, and (c) ideography. Hermeneutics is concerned with the theory of interpretation. It posits a dynamic relationship between the whole and the parts at all levels of interpretation. The researcher has to refer to the whole to understand a particular part, and consider the parts in order to understand the whole (Smith et al., 2009). Thus, while analysing the data, the researcher, instead of going through the data in linear, step-by-step order, has to move back and forth through the data.

Phenomenology is concerned with the essence of human experience and illustrates how complex and composite meanings are constructed upon different units of experience. According to Merriam (2002), phenomenology presumes that there is a core of shared experiences, and the cores are bracketed, examined, and compared to identify the essence of the phenomena Bracketing did not occur very often through the data collection in this study, as the researcher is culture-insider (see “the researcher’s role” below). It enabled me as a researcher to be aware of the value-bound inquiry issues (Smith et al., 2009).

Ideography is concerned with the particular. Viewed from an ideographical perspective, IPA takes up one case, thoroughly examines it, and then moves to the next case. Each individual case is central to IPA research; the investigator seeks to understand as much as possible about each respective case before progressing to the next (Cassidy, Reynolds, Naylor, & De Souza, 2011). The researcher can analyse the data for reoccurring themes only after a complete examination of all the cases under study (Willig, 2008). Even during the subsequent analysis of various cases, IPA remains faithful to the individual, giving a detailed description of both the life world of respondents (who have narrated their experiences) as well as explaining how they are in agreement with more general themes (Smith & Eatough, 2006).

To answer the research questions, the researcher used IPA in this study. This method has been found to be affective and useful in educational settings, especially to explore and explain the experiences of students (Smith et al., 2009). Thus, IPA helped me

to interpret and analyse the experiences of the BVI learners of the English language in regular classroom settings.

3.6 Population and Participants

According to Webster (2003), a sample can be defined as a limited part of a given population the properties of which are studied in order to obtain information about the whole. To put it simply, it is a set of people (participants) selected from a given population with the view to conduct an in-depth investigation or carry out a survey. For this study, purposive sampling was used. The purposive sampling aims at locating participants on the basis of certain characteristics (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

An IPA study is generally aimed at gaining a better understanding of a phenomenon, such as a particular group of people, an event or a process in a given context, IPA researchers, therefore, generate a purposive sample (Smith et al., 2009). Similarly, qualitative researchers generally focus on smaller and purposefully selected sample to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena under study (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The purposefully selected sample ensures that the study holds personal significance and relevance to respondents, and enables investigators to study in detail a specific group of individuals who have experienced a particular phenomenon. An IPA study is generally aimed at describing in detail the perceptions and understanding of this purposefully selected group, instead of prematurely making more general claims (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

In this study, a specific sampling approach was essential as the researcher intended to find a variety of participants from the target population. This selection was aimed at analysing the English language learning experiences of the BVI students. For this study, the research population comprised of BVI students, aged eighteen to twenty-two studying at the International Islamic University and National University of Modern Languages in Islamabad. I focused exclusively on both blind and visually impaired English language learners who, at the time of the research, were studying at university level in the capital city.

In Pakistan, English is taught and learnt as a compulsory subject up to grade twelve and all the students are required to study it as such. All the BVI study participants studied

English as compulsory subject till college. Moreover, for this study, only those BVI learners were considered who had done some English language courses, and were in their third or fourth year of their BS English studies at the university. So the criteria for the selection of student participants was: (a) the participant must be blind or visually impaired to such an extent that he/she could not read normal print and relied on alternative means; (b) studied the English as a compulsory subject up to the intermediate level (grade twelve); (c) did some English language course from some university (preferably either from NUML or IIU) before enrolling in undergraduate program; and (d) enrolled in BS English at the time of the study. The main reason behind this criteria was to ensure that the participants had ample experience with regard to English language learning and were genuinely interested in and motivated to learn this language. These students were believed to be thoroughly familiar with the challenges BVI students have in integrated setting in Pakistani context, as they have spent more time while learning the English language. The very fact that they did an optional English language course suggest that they are genuinely interested in and have a reasonable degree of motivation for learning this language. Thus it was believed that they could be in a far better position to have a meaningful contribution to this study.

For the location of suitable participants, I obtained a comprehensive listing of the BVI students from the universities concerned. After locating and identifying the BVI students, I then contacted these students to check their disability documents (which is duly issued to every disabled individual by the government of Pakistan after proper medical check-up) and obtained their willingness for participation in this study. Similarly, I selected five teachers who had experienced teaching English language to BVI learners from the same universities. I distributed consent forms to each study participant for their approval to participate in this study. These consent forms were duly signed by all those participating in the study.

3.7 Instrumentation

Willig (2008) asserts that it is essential for the researcher in IPA study to enter the lifeworld of the study participants. The research entered the life-world of the participants by listening to and documenting their account of their English language learning/teaching

experiences through in-depth interviews. IPA is best suited to a data collection approach which will “invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 56). The best available tool with the researcher, apart from the researcher himself, to capture the experiences of the research participants is in-depth interview. The main aim of this type of interview is to gain information regarding the life-experiences of the research participants (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). This tool has been used successfully with students ranging from pre-school age to those at the university level (Greene & Hogan, 2005).”

According to (Bryman, 2008), interviews used in qualitative research can be both unstructured and semi-structured. Most qualitative interviewers, however, prefer to use semi-structured interviews (Morgan & Guevara, 2008). I did not opt for the unstructured type of interview, mainly because in this type of interview, I would have little control over the interview process, and the unstructured nature of these interviews could have possibly diverted the discussion from the main themes of the research. Moreover, given the time and financial limitations, generally associated with such research studies, the use of unstructured interviews seemed unpractical.

The semi-structured interview, according to Ayres (2008) is a qualitative data collection strategy in which the researcher asks informants a series of predetermined but open-ended questions. This type of interview was deemed to be more appropriate for this study, as with the help of an interview guide, the researcher could gain the maximum amount of relevant information from the research participants within a limited span of time. In semi-structured interviews, the interview guide typically contains a general framework for the interview, but the researcher also has the freedom to pursue the questions in a different order and to allocate more time to some questions than to others depending on what is most appropriate for discussing the research topic with each individual participant (Morgan & Guevara, 2008). Smith and Osborn (2008) noted that formulating a schedule will lead IPA researchers to explicitly consider what they think/hope the interview may cover, and enable them to identify any potential difficulties they may encounter in terms of question wording or sensitive topics. Similarly, the semi-structured nature of the interviews also afforded the opportunity to the research participants to respond freely.

Semi-structured interview was thus an effective instrument to understand how the research participants viewed the world, something very important for this study.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with the BVI learners and English teachers in order to gain information regarding their experiences in learning and teaching English language in regular classroom settings. I developed a set of interview questions (see appendices A and B) for this study. Special attention was paid to creating a relaxed interactive environment with the participants, encouraging them to provide a detailed account of their experiences as BVI learners, and providing cues when the research participants had difficulties (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The interview questions were formulated in the light of the research questions and the purpose of the study.

The main purpose of this study was to carry out an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to investigate and comprehend the experiences of BVI students and sighted English teachers in learning English in regular classroom setting. The study especially focused on the specific types of challenges that arise during the process of second language learning in formal classroom environment for BVI learners. Moreover, I also explored the process by which BVI second language learners and their teachers dealt with the unique problems blindness presented to them in the learning of English language. Such areas as the use of various learning strategies, the use of social skills and interpersonal interaction with their sighted teachers and fellow students, the utilisation of assistive technology, and the use of various strategies for gaining access to materials in accessible formats employed by the BVI learners in order to ensure successful English language learning were explored.

3.8 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted with a sighted English language teacher and two English language learners (one totally blind and one visually impaired) before finalizing the interview guide. The same(appende) sample interview questions were asked of those in the pilot group as were asked of the actual study participants. However, modifications were made to the interview questions based upon information and perspective gained from the pilot study. In the pilot study, both participants cited accessibility to study materials, the availability and use of assistive technology and braille literacy skills or a lack there of as major factors in their success or failure in English language learning. Also cited as

crucial factors were whether material was delivered in a verbal or nonverbal manner and attitudes of sighted teachers toward students with blindness.

Piloting the interview guides proved very effective in the sense that the initial interview guides contained many technical terms and expressions which the study participants, especially the BVI students, found hard to understand. As a result, a great deal of the interview time was wasted in the explanation of these technical terms and expressions. As far as possible, in the actual interview guide developed for the main study, these terms and expressions were substituted by more readily comprehensible words and phrases. Moreover, some of the interview questions were reordered and rephrased with the view to improve the flow of conversation. The pilot interview with the teacher, however, went very smoothly and little major changes were required to be made to the interview guide used in the main study. The two pilot interviews with the BVI students were conducted in Urdu, whereas the pilot interview with the English language teacher was conducted in English in accordance with the wishes of the participants. All the pilot interviews were partially transcribed and analysed, which helped in finding the emerging themes.

3.9 Data Collection Procedures

Data was collected, through semi-structured, in-depth interviews from ten BVI students and five sighted teachers who had the experience of teaching to BVI students.

On average, the teachers' interviews took fifty-seven minutes, whereas those of the students lasted for one hour each. Two teachers' and three students' interviews were conducted at IIU Islamabad, whereas arrangements were made for seven students and three teachers' interviews to be conducted at NUML Islamabad. The teachers were interviewed at their respective offices, and for students' interviews, two teachers kindly allowed their offices to be used. All the participants were requested to express their willingness to participate in this study by signing a consent form (see appendix C) designed for this purpose. Moreover, those willing to volunteer for the interviews were also requested to suggest date and time for their interviews.

The interviewing process was initiated with the students and one teacher was interviewed after interviewing two students. Although, throughout the entire interviewing

process, this pattern was not strictly adhered to, the procedure proved very helpful in checking the teachers' perspectives regarding issues raised by students during the course of their interviews. It was also helpful in establishing a sort of dialogue between the students' and teachers' perspectives during the transcription and analysis stages of the research. It may be noted, however, that the interview process was not entirely free of any difficulties.

A number of challenges, particularly when conducting interviews with the BVI students, had to be dealt with. To begin with, most of the students were initially not comfortable with the idea of allowing their conversation to be audio-recorded. I managed to convince them, however, by reassuring them that their recorded interviews would be used only for research purposes, and that their identity would not be disclosed.

Another challenge was to conduct a one-to-one interview with the female participants. In our country, it is culturally not acceptable that men and women, who are not close relatives, be left alone. I resolved this problem by keeping the door and windows of the office opened where the interview was conducted. Moreover, the female participants were allowed to give the interview in the presence of another female. Although this made my female participants much more comfortable, the interview was occasionally disrupted by passers-by, as the offices, where the interviews were conducted, were located along busy corridors. One interview in particular had to be stopped twice because students came in search of the teacher who had lent me his office for the interviews. I must acknowledge that it negatively affected the flow of conversation during the course of that particular interview.

Some of the teachers too were initially quite hesitant to participate and allow their interviews to be audio-recorded. I had to approach these teachers off-campus and convince them to participate in this study by explaining to them the purpose and objectives of my research. Moreover, I also assured them that their responses and identities would be kept anonymous. I must confess that I found it much easier to convince the young teachers to participate in this study as compared with the more experienced ones.

All the interviews were digitally recorded using two devices, a Dell laptop and an iPhone 7+ mobile set. The main purpose for using two recording devices was to insure safe

and clear audio-recording of the interviews. The trick worked, and I managed to get the interviews audio-recorded in an excellent quality, which immensely helped me in the transcription and analysis phases of the study.

At the end of each interview session, I informed the interviewee about the individual member check session, which was to be held the following month. The BVI learners were read aloud the transcripts of their interviews during the member check sessions. Each BVI student listened, made adjustments (when needed), and ascertained that the interview transcript indeed showed the experiences that s/he wanted to convey during the interview. Similarly, the teacher participants read the transcripts of the interviews and confirmed to the researcher that they fully reflect their views.

3.10 Data Transcription

“Transcription is the process whereby recordings of research conversations (interviews, focus groups) are turned into textual material (transcripts), which then become the primary data for subsequent analysis.” (Poland, 2008, p. 884). Researchers need to pay close attention to transcribing, as during the process, the data are transformed in ways that may have consequences for interpretation (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). Cohen and Manion (2007) term transcription as a crucial step in interviewing, “for there is the potential for massive data loss, distortion and the reduction of complexity” (p. 366). In the first place, researchers need to be on their guard against factors which may result in poor transcription and, by extension, to poor interpretation and analysis. Factors such as “transcriber fatigue, poor-quality recordings (background noise, use of low-quality microphones and recording equipment, poor microphone placement), and difficulty understanding accents and culturally specific turns of phrase are said to lead to errors” (Poland, 2008). Similarly, lack of familiarity with qualitative research, with the subject matter, or with the interview itself may result in additional challenges (Kvale, 1996). Then there are issues of voice, contextuality, representation, audience, authenticity, and positionality, etc., which also need to be taken into account (Tilley, 2003).

The researcher was cognisant of the pitfalls of transcription and took certain measures to ensure an error-free transcription of the interviews. To start with, all the interviews were digitally recorded using two devices, a Dell laptop and an iPhone 7+

mobile set, in order to insure safe and clear audio-recording of the interviews. As a result, the audio quality of the recorded interviews was excellent, which immensely helped the researcher in their transcription. Then the researcher developed and used a notation system (e.g. how to deal with laughter, pauses, interruptions, intonation, etc.) to guide the transcription process. Moreover, the researcher did not involve anyone else in the entire transcription process and completed it all by himself, as he, being a culture-insider, was aware of the culture and idiom of the participants, and was more suitable than others for accurately transcribing the interviews. Further, the researcher made arrangements for the research participants to review the transcripts of their interviews for accuracy during the member check sessions. As has been mentioned above, the BVI learners were read aloud the transcripts of their interviews during the member check sessions. Each BVI student listened and ascertained that the interview transcript indeed showed the experiences that s/he wanted to convey during the interview. Finally, since the researcher himself conducted the interviews, he immediately flagged the ambiguous material, as and when it came up during the course of the interview, and sought a prompt clarification from the participants. These measures on the part of the researcher greatly enhanced the quality and accuracy of the interview transcriptions.

3.11 Translation Procedures

Most of the interviews, based on the choice of the participants, were conducted in Urdu so as to enable them to comprehend the questions and express themselves freely, without being restrained by any language barriers. Eight out of ten BVI students shared their experiences mainly In Urdu, the national language of Pakistan, interspersed with English expressions; only two students opted to respond in English. All of them preferred, however, that the questions be put to them in English. The teachers, on the other hand, preferred to be interviewed solely in English. The interviews were transcribed in the languages in which they were conducted.

Brislin et al (1993) suggest that consultation with other people can prove affective in eliminating translation-related issues which may emerge during the translation process. In line with this advice, at the end of the member check sessions, the Urdu interviews were translated into English with the help of a fellow teacher at the department of English,

university of Malakand. The translator, however, was not given access to the identities of the participants. Moreover, I also consulted the participants and got the translated interviews verified from them with regard to true representation of their thoughts and ideas in them, by showing them the transcripts of their translated interviews.

The quality of the translation, Birbili (2000) argues, depends on various factors: (a) the researcher's knowledge regarding the language used in data collection, (b) his/her knowledge of the culture of the participants, and (c) his/her command over the presentation language. The researcher's position as an insider proved very helpful here, in terms of both the language which they used during the course of their interviews, as well as recognizing the cultural and contextual aspects of their responses. Translation to English from Urdu was thus informed by this awareness of the participants' language, culture and context.

One of the main difficulties confronted when conducting research in one language and presenting it in another, according to Temple (1997), is the issue of comparability of meaning or conceptual equivalence. He argues that even a very familiar term, for which a direct lexical equivalent is available in one language, may have emotional connotations which may not be the case in another. In situations like these, the research/translator must strive for insuring conceptual equivalence in place of lexical comparability (Temple, 1997). Here too my position as insider enabled me to address this challenge: my understanding of English and Urdu, as well as my intimate knowledge of the participants' culture, their unique position as BVI learners of English, and the context of study, facilitated me in obtaining comparability of meanings.

Before embarking upon the process of translation, however, an essential question before the researcher was how exactly he would approach translation. Research reports generally lay before the reader, Wolcott (2004) argues, participants' responses as direct quotations, without any tangible explanation of the translation process. Direct quotations are undoubtedly an effective tool for presenting the participants' opinions, the issues they prioritize, and the manner in which they express these issues. A decision, therefore, had to be made regarding the manner of translating the text – literal or free.

A literal (word-for-word) translation might be viewed as fully representing the views of the participants, but it can, according to Honig (1997), hinder the readability of

the text, which may result in disengaging the reader, and, more importantly, render the reader unable to keep a track of what's going on. In the same way, researchers who opt for free translation must be cognizant of the implications of generating quotations that read well, as well as to what extent they deviate from participants' fundamental meaning. I decided, however, to adopt a mixed approach in this study so as to preserve the originality of quotations as well as to maximize their readability in the final report. In line with this approach, I was able to freely quote from the study participants to support my arguments wherever needed. Before analysing the interviews, the researcher reviewed the translated interview transcripts once more to make sure that they were translated correctly. The data analysis strategies adopted for this study are outlined in the following section.

3.12 Data Analysis

In qualitative study, Willig (2008) asserts, the researcher must actively engage with data to glean the contextual meaning of the phenomena under study. In IPA research, the researcher generally uses texts or transcripts created from the participants of the study. In this study, the researcher used the heuristic framework for analysis of an individual case as proposed by Smith et al. (2009). During the analysis phase, the researcher took up the next transcript for analysis only after a thorough analysis of the first participant's interview transcript had been carried out.

According to IPA data analysis procedures, data can be analysed in six steps (Smith et al., 2009): (a) reading and rereading the transcripts or texts, (b) doing the preliminary notetaking, (c) emergent themes development, (d) looking for and establishing connections across emergent themes, (e) moving to the interview transcript of the next participant, and (f) probing the data for patterns across participants. IPA experts highly recommend these six steps to novice researchers, and in this study too, these steps were followed.

The first and second steps were carried out simultaneously. Each interview transcript was read out several times and exploratory comments made about it by the researcher. "There are no rules about what is commented upon" (Smith et al., 2009, P. 83).

In the third step, the exploratory comments were analysed in order to establish the emerging themes within each section of the transcripts. Themes, according to Willig

(2008), represent the most essential aspects of the texts. The researcher recorded the emergent themes in brackets adjacent to the exploratory comments.

In the fourth step of data analysis, the emerging themes were clustered together.

Based on hierarchical relations and natural concepts of clusters, the researcher categorized and arranged these themes. This process of establishing the themes made it mandatory for the researcher to move back and forth through the lists of emergent themes.

In the fifth step of data analysis, the researcher moved to the next case. Here the same process was repeated as was performed in the case of the first interview transcript. It may be noted here that, as has been suggested by Smith et al. (2009), the researcher began the process of data analysis with the transcript of the participant's interview who succeeded in providing the most comprehensive details about the phenomena under investigation. It means that the analysis of interviews transcripts did not follow the same order in which the participants were interviewed.

In the last step of data analysis, the researcher looked for patterns across individuals' views.

Smith and Osborn (2008) suggested that themes should not be selected purely on their prevalence within the data, but also on the richness of the passages which highlight said themes, and how the themes assist in illuminating other aspects of the account. As such, although I decided that at least two participants must have discussed a topic for it to be considered a theme, theme selection was also driven by the length at which such phenomena were discussed, and thus the level of pertinence placed upon them by participants. Whilst this may engender a danger that priority would be given to those participants who were more articulate and verbose, I hold that for my particular study – where all participants were experienced academics, this was not a concern, as all participants were able to confidently speak at length.

All the participants' interviews were thus analysed using the above-mentioned procedure, one at a time. When the data analysis procedures were completed, the researcher reported the views of the participants in chapter four, the major themes derived from the data in chapter five, and the findings of the study, obviously based on the data, in the last chapter of this dissertation.

3.13 Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness can be thought of as the ways in which qualitative researchers ensure that transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability are evident in their research (Saumure & Given, 2008). In qualitative research, trustworthiness refers to the extent to which it can be accepted as authentic, rigorous, comprehensive and sound by those interested in research, such as fellow researchers, policymakers, research consumers and lay public (Yardley, 2008). Certain strategies have been adopted to maximise the trustworthiness of the study (e.g., continual verification of findings, member checks, self-reflection, peer debriefing, sampling sufficiency, and audit trails).

Transparency refers to clarity in describing the research process. Here researchers are providing their audience with a thorough description of the steps taken in conducting their research (Hiles, 2008). A detailed description of the measures taken for the selection and analysis of data as well as related issues laid before the reader in this chapter is in fact intended to render this study as transparent as possible.

Similarly certain steps have been taken to ensure the credibility (validity) of this study. These include establishing a good rapport with the study participants, approaching the problem under investigation from different perspectives (that of BVI students and their teachers), hiring the services of a colleague to carry out an independent audit of the data analysis procedures and subsequent research findings, using more than one sources of data, conducting member checks sessions with the study participants to make sure that the data accurately and truly represents and reflects their ideas and perceptions. According to Johnson and Christensen (2012), interpretative validity of a qualitative study is the extent to which the participants' experiences, views, thoughts, intentions, and feelings are correctly understood and presented by the researcher. The fact that the data was verified by the study participants in member check sessions is a step towards maximizing the interpretative validity of the study. As has been mentioned above, during the course of the member check sessions, the participants (the BVI students) were read aloud their interview transcripts and were asked to make adjustments (if necessary) and confirm whether the transcripts accurately depict their views and experiences.

Participants' confirmations and adjustments with respect to their views on the transcripts, known as "respondent validation", are essential for ensuring the accurate representation of their views and experiences (Anderson, 1990; Creswell, 2018; Smith, 2008). In this study, therefore, in a follow-up inquiry, the participants were later contacted via telephone again, so that they can be afforded another opportunity to confirm their original answers and elaborate on any point they deemed important with respect to their English language learning and teaching experiences. During this follow-up contact, the participants were asked whether they would like to have a copy of their interview transcript, an offer which all the participants politely declined.

Further, many low-inference descriptors (e.g. direct quotations in the final research report) were used. This strategy aims to enable the readers to experience the participants' world. The researcher afforded the reader an opportunity to read and interpret the experiences of the participants from their own viewpoint.

The reliability or dependability of a qualitative study is judged on the basis of the capacity in its research design to support a repetition or replication of the study that will have similar results (Jensen, 2008). This condition requires that the researcher supply adequate and relevant methodological information to enable others to replicate the study, something I have tried to do in this chapter. Moreover, the researcher had regular discussions with regard to the different aspects of data collection and analysis with colleagues in order to improve the dependability of the study. The researcher's academic supervisor and colleagues' critical perspectives at every stage of this study also ensured its reliability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) term it as "peer debriefing". Utilizing people's critical perspectives in this manner is a major source of research reliability, as it ensures that the research procedures and outcomes are being regularly questioned.

Having an adequate "audit trail" in this study was also vital. For this purpose, an independent audit of the study was conducted to make sure that the researcher followed the IPA procedures. The auditor, a colleague at the university of Malakand, was requested to review the study including such areas as transcripts of the interviews, the development of themes, and final report. The main aim of the independent audit was to ascertain how transparent and systematic the study was (Smith et al., 2009).

The researcher and the independent auditor, during the auditing and reviewing process, went through each phase and content of the study. During this process, several questions were raised by the auditor which were clarified by the researcher. The majority of the questions raised by the independent auditor was related to the theme development phase, particularly how the researcher related the exploratory comments to the emergent themes. It helped the researcher, however, to clarify his work at each phase and produce a more reliable and readable report.

As Gibbs (2008) suggested, to ensure further the reliability of the study, the interview transcripts were checked for a number of times to avoid any mistakes during the course of transcription. The transcripts were read and reread by the researcher during the transcript-checking, while listening to the interviews at the same time. Using the above-mentioned criteria along with a description of the researcher's role (section 3.16) and data triangulation (section 3.14) have enabled the researcher to report results that are both dependable and credible.

3.14 Triangulation

The basic idea underpinning the concept of triangulation is that the phenomena under study can be understood best when approached with a variety or a combination of research methods (Rothbauer, 2008). Triangulation is most commonly used in data collection and analysis techniques, but it also applies to sources of data. Norman K. Denzin's formulation of triangulation comprises of four basic types: triangulation of methods of data collection, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation (including methodological variations that account for between-method and within-method approaches), and triangulation of data sources (Moran-Ellis, Alexander, Cronin, Dickinson, Fielding, & Sleney, et al., 2006). One way to provide multiple perspectives is to use a combination of sampling methods to collect data from different kinds of informants or from the same people but at different times and in different places. This study used sources triangulation as data was collected from both BVI students and their sighted teachers to achieve data triangulation. Another way that researchers attempt to increase the validity and trustworthiness of their findings is by deploying more than one investigator in the collection and analysis of data. This technique allows for additional insights in the

process of making sense of the data as it brings different perspectives and different epistemological assumptions that may inform the research results (Rothbauer, 2008).

Although I took the services of one colleague to review the study including such areas as transcripts of the interviews, IPA data analysis procedures followed, the development of themes, and final report to have an “audit trail”, yet he cannot be termed as co-investigator. This study used respondent validation in which the BVI study participants were read aloud the transcripts of their interviews during the member check sessions. Respondent or member validation is a related cross-checking strategy that does not usually extend as far as making people co-investigators, but does invite research participants and other stakeholders in the research project to comment on research findings.

The other ways of data triangulation were not used because they would not have contributed to this study that much in terms of yielding more and varied data; rather, they would have created more but not that much varied data, which would have definitely warranted increased amounts of time to collect and analyse data.

3.15 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues arise at different stages of the qualitative research process. They cannot be allowed to go unheeded as they are directly related to the integrity of research (Roberts, 2005). Discussion on ethical considerations in qualitative research generally centres on questions such as: “how should the research participants be treated?”, and “what types of activities should, or should not the researcher engage in?” (Bryman 2008).

Professional associations (e.g. the Social Research Association (SRA) and the British Sociological Association (BSA) have developed codes of ethics for social research. Most of the issues pertaining to ethical considerations in social research revolve around certain key principles, and Diener and Crandall (1978) have classified these issues into three main types. The first set of issues deals with the safety and security of the participants, i.e. whether the research activity poses any harm to the research participants. Here the concept of harm can include any risk to participants’ wellbeing, psychological harm to the participants, causing mental stress to the participants, bringing about loss of self-esteem to the participants, and prompting them to carry out any reprehensible acts. The British Sociological Association’s statement related to ethical practices (2002) urges the

researchers to anticipate and guard against any harmful consequences for the research participants.

In this study, the issues concerned with harm are addressed by keeping the identities of the participants confidential. Furthermore, students' disparaging remarks and opinions regarding their teachers were not disclosed to the study participant teachers, as this would have negatively affected their self-esteem, although teachers' responses with respect to the students' remarks could have yielded interesting data.

Another issue related to ethical considerations in social research is concerned with the informed consent of the study participants who are part of the study. In other words, they must be fully informed, as far as possible, about the research process. This was ensured in this study by orally informing the participants about the purpose of the study. The participants expressed their willingness to participate in this study by signing and returning the consent forms, which unequivocally assured the participants that their responses and identities would be kept confidential, and that the data would be used for research purposes only. Moreover, they also provided their contact details as well as the dates and time of their availability for interviews in the consent form.

Bryman (2008) argues that the research participants do not submit the right to privacy to the researcher by giving their consent to participate in a study. Therefore, the researcher made every possible effort in this study to ensure that the participants' informed consent was not misused. All the interview transcripts, for example, were returned to the participants so as to allow them to withdraw anything they want the researcher not to include in the final report. As a final point, the cultural context, particularly norms related to acceptable ways of interaction between men and women, were always taken into consideration, especially during one-to-one interviews with the female study participants.

To sum up, in this study, ethical transgressions were carefully avoided, and it can therefore be safely said that this study has abided by the codes of ethics laid down for researchers. All the participants were, for example, well-informed about the purpose of the study, their participation was completely voluntary, their responses and identities were kept anonymous, and their responses were used only for this study. Finally, every effort was

made to avoid any harm to the study participants during data collection as well as presentation.

3.16 Researcher's Role

The term insider researcher is used to describe a situation where the researcher is a part of the topic being investigated (Sherry, 2008). In qualitative research, researcher is considered to be one of the main instruments in research (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach & Richardson, 2005), and plays a central role in the collection, analysis and interpretation of data. Qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive, which means that the research outcome is ultimately the product of the researcher's subjective interpretation of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Many academic disciplines encourage researchers to be reflective about their relationships with research participants, but emphasis on whether a researcher identifies as an insider or an outsider has been a particular focus of qualitative research in the areas of anthropology, feminism, and disability studies (Sherry, 2008). As Miles and Huberman (1994: 7) conclude, "The researcher is essentially the main "measurement device" in the study". Thus, in qualitative research, the researcher's own values, personal history, and "position" on characteristics such as gender, culture, class, and age become integral part of the inquiry (Haverkamp, 2005).

The study participants bounded by the thread of the same disability (visual impairment in this case) usually expect research insider to be more aware of community sensibilities, compared with outsiders who might not be aware of established norms and practices. By being aware of the effects that one has on the nature of the data collected, such connections with the field can be regarded as a strength of a particular form of qualitative research (Sherry, 2008).

My positionality as an insider had important implications for this study. I am aware with the context of English language learning by BVI students in regular classroom environment, as, being a visually challenged individual, I have gone through such experiences myself. I have a first-hand experience of the attitudes of the sighted teachers and peers towards BVI students in a regular language class, the issues related to the acquisition and use of assistive technology, the accessibility issues, and the problems related to the non-availability of the study materials in accessible formats.

As an individual who remained sighted till the age of eighteen and then, owing to a congenital disorder generally known as Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP for short), I have the experience of being both a sighted as well as a blind second language learner. Moreover, after losing my sight, I establish friendships with many fellow blind students and learnt from their experiences as to how to deal with the challenges that lied ahead. I came to know that those who are congenitally blind have no memory or concept of such visual phenomena as clouds, colours, sun and moon, etc., and neither do they have a solid conceptualization of gestures and body language. It is for this reason that the way the congenitally blind learns a language and the manner in which they conceptualize it differ significantly from the sighted learners, a fact confirmed by various research studies (Millian, 1996; Guinan, 1997). Being a visually impaired individual second language learner myself (I studied Urdu and English as a second language and Arabic as a foreign language), I believe I am in a far better position than sighted researchers to understand and interpret accurately the English language learning experiences of the BVI learners.

My role as an insider researcher is valuable in this study because, as Hockey (1993) states, Sensitivity and deep understanding of the things both unsaid and overtly expressed, and culture prevailing at the time of the research, are all accessible to the insider researcher. The insider researcher has access to its present and past histories as in-group member (Sechutz, 1976). My unique position as an insider researcher proved advantageous in this study, as I had a unique perspective and pre-existing understanding of both the context and the individuals under consideration. Moreover, being familiar with the nuances and idioms of these individuals' shared language, I had little issues with accurately deciphering their meanings. Similarly, I shared the research participants' social world which helped me avoid cultural shock or disorientation during the course of this study.

Moreover, my position as an insider researcher helped me establish a rapport with the research participants (Hockey, 1993), and they felt no hesitation in openly expressing intimate details regarding their experiences, mainly because they considered me as one of them. I suppose the way I appreciated and understood the context would not have been possible had I not been an insider researcher. It does not mean, however, that my role as an insider researcher can be viewed as completely free of any challenges.

There are certain challenges which are associated with the insider researcher role. Hockey (1993) argues, for example, that sometimes an insider researcher's partial knowledge may be taken as sufficient and thus the full context of the research might remain unexplored. He also cautions against taken-for-granted assumptions and over-familiarity with the situation as possible pitfalls for researchers.

I must admit that, based on my own experiences, I approached this study with many presumptions with regard to the BVI learners' English language learning experiences. However, I adjusted my position after the pilot study as I came to know that there was a great deal of individual variation with regard to English language learning experiences. Instead of relying solely on my own experiences, I started conceptualizing these learners as constructing their own realities and attempted to understand these realities from their point of view.

My insider position also raised the issue of power relations, as these BVI learners and their teachers initially considered me to be more knowledgeable and experienced about the phenomena under study as compared to them. Bryman (2008) argues that in such situations the participants often provide data in their answers which they believe the researcher want to hear, instead of expressing their honest opinions. I managed, however, to avoid this situation by refraining from using too many scholarly expressions, highly valuing their ideas (even though they would be quite familiar to me), establishing a rapport with them and creating a friendly milieu in order to enable them to feel at ease. Moreover, I also assured them of confidentiality and anonymity.

I, as a researcher, served as the primary instrument for the collection and analysis of data. I was also actively involved in member check sessions and interviews in order to gain the BVI learners' perspectives of their experiences as English language learners in regular classroom. My role as a researcher in this study is further considered with respect to other aspects of methodology in other sections of this chapter.

3.17 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology used in this study. It began with a description of the theoretical framework used in this study. It was followed by a discussion about the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of this study, the rationale for

adopting a qualitative approach, and the selection and use of IPA. Procedures for data collection and analysis, and issues related to the transcription and translation of the data were then brought under consideration. It was followed by a discussion on the six steps of IPA data analysis. Other aspects of the research methodology employed for this study, such as the sampling procedures and the characteristics of participants were also briefly outlined. The researcher's positionality as an insider was discussed next. The chapter concluded by a brief description of the ethical issues. I believe that the methodology used for this study was successful in providing a complete picture of the issues under investigation. In the next chapter, data will be presented in the form of views of the participants.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, data is presented in a categorised form after coding and identifying patterns across interview transcripts. The main focus of this chapter is to present what the students said or experienced “without reference to the extant literature” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 112). As far as possible, in line with the IPA principles, the researcher has tried to let the participants speak for themselves by quoting extensively from their interviews.

In the next chapter, major themes based on this data will be presented and analysed. This division has been made only for the sake of convenience for the reader, as analysis of data begins right from coding (some would say from the framing of the interview schedule) and coding, data management, the development and refinement of themes, and the identification of patterns across the data do not occur sequentially. Rather, all of these activities occur throughout the project. In other words, I am not drawing a line of demarcation between thematic coding and thematic analysis. They go side-by-side.

For this study, a total of fifteen individuals were interviewed. These fifteen study participants consisted of five teachers and ten BVI students. Out of the ten BVI students, five were partially sighted and five totally blind. All of them, however, were print-challenged, i.e. none of them could read the normal print. The participants also included two female students. The teachers were all sighted. No vision teacher or other support personnel were involved with the BVI students with regard to their English language learning experiences. First data from students’ interviews will be presented; it will be followed by an in-depth account of the issues emerged during interviews with the sighted teachers. Each participant has been profiled on an individual basis. The names used in this study are pseudonyms.

4.2 Student No. 1: Hassan

4.2.1 Background

A very intelligent, but slightly shy individual, Hassan is visually impaired with only a slight light-perception ability on account of some congenital eye disease, unknown to the respondent. Hassan gave several reasons for his preference of English over other subjects: it is considered as a symbol of high status in the Pakistani society; command over English language is a guarantee for success, as “one could easily obtain a job if he/she has command over the English language”; and a proficiency in this language is a prerequisite for obtaining success in the competitive exams (taken for induction into the Pakistani civil service). Another interesting reason for learning the English language, according to Hassan, was the capacity of the available screen readers to support only the English language and some major European languages (e.g. French, German, Spanish and Swedish, etc.), and no Pakistani language. Consequently, the BVI individuals, especially those who use computer in their studies, have to learn the English language in order to have access to the huge resource of knowledge on the internet and in the world of computer. Moreover, good command over English language could be extremely advantageous in the study of other subjects (humanities, social sciences and natural sciences), as the medium of instructions, especially at the university level, was generally English and most study material related to these subjects are also available in this language.

Hassan found studying the English language easier than other subjects. “Other subjects, such as math or science are very visual in nature; BVI individuals face considerable challenges in learning them. English language, on the other hand, can easily be learnt through braille and other accessibility tools.” According to Hassan, learning the English language is different from learning other subjects, as here “the focus is entirely on learning the phonological, lexical and grammatical aspects of the target language.”

4.2.2 Hassan’s Learning Strategies

Hassan relies mainly on braille for his studies. “I have learnt braille, and I try to comprehend the written language concepts in braille. Hassan said that he studied up to the SSC level in Qandeel High School for blinds where a distorted form of GTM was followed, and consequently little attention was given to both the speaking and listening skills. “Same

was the case at the college where I studied.” At the university, however, according to Hassan, these two skills received attention.

With regard to his speaking skills, Hassan stated: “As you know, BVI students, apart from braille, generally rely on their listening skills – whether it be real audio or screen readers - to learn about the target language, and, since listening and speaking skills are complementary to one another, I have developed a fair amount of command over the speaking skills.” Other strategies he used included: loud thinking when alone; exploring and creating opportunities to converse with his class-fellows in English (both inside and outside the class); and participating in group-discussions, presentations and other oral activities in the class. Hassan claimed that he used the same strategies and techniques as were used by his sighted peers. “I don’t think there is any difference in the oral strategies that both the BVI learners and the sighted students use. Like sighted people, I think aloud when alone; I have some precious friends with whom I practice my speaking. In other words, I try to create an English-speaking environment for myself and thus, practice my oral skills.”

Hassan said that he differed from his sighted peers in terms of the tools he employed for accessing the written word. “I use my fingers when I read, as I use braille. I also use screen reader for reading a text, i.e. I convert the reading text into speech and then listen to it.” Apart from using different tools to access the written word, Hassan said that he was not different from his sighted peers in terms of using other reading strategies. “Like my sighted classmates, I also scan for gist and can skim through a text if needed.” Hassan explained, however, that the BVI individuals have to do their reading in a linear way. “Our reading is generally linear in nature as we can go only line-by-line while reading a given text. We can’t skim through the text. We can only scan the written text because of our visual limitations.” Hassan acknowledged, however, that BVI students faced difficulties in accessing the written word. “Since the world is structured for the majority, and the majority of people are sighted, my sighted peers, therefore, have no issues with accessing the written materials, whereas for a BVI student like me, the reading text has to be made accessible first, either in braille, or audio, or soft form.”

Hassan said that he used both braille as well as laptop (equipped with screen reader) for writing. “My sighted peers, of course do not use braille, but they do use laptops extensively these days. So from that perspective, the strategies that I use for writing are more or less identical to those used by my sighted classmates.” The only difference, according to Hassan, was that he needed a screen reader in order to use his laptop, otherwise the writing strategies he employed were more or less identical to those used by his sighted peers. “I brainstorm, develop, arrange and elaborate on the ideas about a particular topic. Similarly, I read and reread (with the help of a screen reader of course) the written piece for further refinement and improvement.” Hassan said that his writing strategies remained the same even when he used braille. “The writing tool is different when I use braille, as there I write with the help of a braillewriter instead of pen, but the writing strategies nevertheless remain the same.

Hassan asserted that the BVI students did not differ significantly from their sighted peers in terms of using listening strategies. “The strategies that we as BVI learners use are quite similar to those used by our sighted peers, as both the sighted as well as the BVI students use their ears for improving their listening skills. Thus, like them, I listen to my teachers, classmates, and, more importantly, to the native speakers via internet on my laptop to improve my listening skills.”

4.2.3 Hassan’s Views about the Availability of Study Material in Accessible Formats

Elaborating on his experiences as a BVI English language learner, Hassan stated that initially he faced many challenges, particularly with regard to access to study material, but things began to improve as he became familiar with the use of assistive technology for BVI individuals. “In the beginning I confronted a lot of challenges, as most of the study materials were not accessible to me.” He further stated that accessibility to study material was a major issue even at the specialized school for BVI students. “Although I studied at a special school for BVI students before coming to NUML, yet, apart from the coursebook, no secondary material was accessible to us. Secondary study materials such as bilingual dictionaries, books on grammar and vocabulary were simply non-existent there.”

With regard to the availability of study material in accessible formats for BVI students in the university, Hassan stated that even in specialized schools for BVI students no such material was available, let alone in an institution for able-bodied individuals. “Even in specialized schools for BVI students, we used to have one English textbook in braille for four students and we were supposed to share that.” The availability of study materials in accessible formats in regular colleges and universities, according to Hassan, is just beyond imagination. The BVI students have to make the study materials available to themselves in accessible formats. “We have to make them accessible ourselves either by converting the hard printed material into soft form through scanning, so that we can read them through our computer equipped with a screen reader, or ask a friend to audio-tape it for us, or obtain the converted materials from a senior BVI student who might have made it accessible through the above two procedures.”

Making the study material available by the BVI students themselves consumes a great deal of their precious time and, according to Hassan, it is one of the main reasons that the BVI students generally lagged behind their sighted peers in integrated classes. “I scan the printed material on to my laptop and then read it with the help of a screen reader.” The scanned materials contain some typographical errors, as the existing OCR technology could not scan the printed text with 100 percent accuracy. He, therefore, needs the assistance of a sighted person in refining the scanned text. “This too is a highly time-consuming and hectic task, but I have no alternative.”

4.2.4 Hassan’s Views about the Role of Assistive Technology in English Language Learning

Regarding the centrality of assistive technology for BVI learners in their English language learning endeavours, Hassan said that he believed it played a pivotal role in making the study material accessible to them as well as making them independent in their studies. Underscoring the utility of screen readers for BVI students, Hassan said that without them, learning the English language would have been quite difficult, if not impossible, for him. “I can’t imagine learning the English language without screen readers; I can use braille, but the study stuff available in braille is very limited, whereas screen readers enable you to gain access to a variety of study materials related to English language,

as they give you access to the world of internet.” Assistive technology puts the BVI students almost on equal footings with their sighted peers, particularly in terms of accessing the written word. “You can, independently, without the help of a sighted person, access and read a variety of stuff (e.g. newspapers, novels, magazines, grammar books, books on vocabulary, dictionaries, and so on).”

With regard to the availability of assistive technology for BVI students at specialized schools, regular colleges and universities, Hassan said that at the specialized schools for BVI learners, certain tools and gadgets were available, though they were always insufficient and almost never up-to-date, no such facility was available to him at regular colleges and universities. “In the specialized school, only a few braille slats and stylers were available but not in sufficient numbers. Apart from that no assistive technology was available to us. And if the situation is so pathetic in specialized schools, what can one expect at regular colleges and universities?”

Regarding the knowledge and use of the latest assistive technology, Hassan said that he was not very much familiar with the latest assistive gadgets and tools, and could use only screen readers, braille converters and scanners, etc. “I am not very updated about the latest assistive technology, but use only scanners, screen readers (both on my laptop as well as on my cell phone), braille converters and braille writers.”

4.2.5 Hassan’s Experiences in the Regular Second Language Classroom Environment

Hassan uses his braille writer to take down notes in class. In order to make his assignments (both in-class as well as home assignments) accessible to his sighted teachers (who are braille-illiterate), he uses his laptop and printer. “I use my laptop to participate in in-class written activities, as that is more accessible to my sighted teacher.”

The BVI students are confronted with a variety of challenges in the regular language class – the availability of study materials in accessible formats, the lack of awareness about the special needs of the BVI students on the part of the sighted teachers, and time-constraints, etc. Hassan faces certain challenges while orally interacting with his sighted teachers and peers in class. “While attending a lecture, my sighted peers not only listen to what the teacher is saying, but also take stock of his/her body-language, his

gestures and whatever other visual cues he might offer, whereas I am limited only to his verbal description.”

The success of a BVI student in a regular classroom environment, according to Hassan, depends on two main factors: the availability of study material in accessible format and the cooperation of the teacher and peers. “We need to have the study material in accessible format so that we can read it on our own. Similarly, the in-class tasks and activities such as fill-in-the-blanks and sentence completion, etc., have to be made available to us in some accessible format so that we can do them on our own like our sighted peers.” Hassan complained, however, of the non-availability of the study material and the in-class tasks and activities in accessible format in a regular class. As a result: “the BVI students are often forced to sit idle during the course of such in-class reading and writing activities.” The teachers often opted to exclude him from such tasks and activities. “I was deprived of crucial reading and writing practice in class.”

He did not face any such problems in listening and speaking in-class tasks and activities and fully participated in them. But sometimes, he said he faced difficulties in group discussions, especially when the sighted group members were not very cooperative. “In group discussions, I have some minor difficulties in communication, especially when my sighted group members are not willing to cooperate, as I, owing to my disability, can’t see gestures and often find it hard to take and hand over the floor to the next participant.”

Another issue in in-class tasks and activities, according to Hassan, is that of time limit. He said that the BVI students require more time than their sighted peers to accomplish a task. “I often failed to complete the task assigned to me in the allotted time span. My teachers never took the trouble to accommodate me by allowing me some extra time.”

While giving a description of a typical day in a language class, Hassan said that, like his sighted peers, he goes to class, listens to the teacher, and tries to do the tasks and activities assigned to him. “My success depends on various factors (e.g. the attitude of the teacher, the availability of the study material in accessible format, the peers’ attitude, the time-constraints, and so on.” He further said that he did not take notes in class. “I just can’t concentrate on both taking notes and teacher-talk at the same time.” He stated that he tried to convince his teachers to allow him to audio-taped their talk in the class but seldom

succeeded in obtaining their consent. “I asked for my teachers’ permission to allow me to record their lectures several times, but all of them, without any obvious reason, disallowed me to do so.”

4.2.6 Hassan’s Views about the Role of Teachers

Regarding the most effective teachers’ strategies in the regular class, Hassan stated that verbally describing the written material on the board, explaining and illustrating the pictures, maps and diagrams given in the textbook, and other such accommodating strategies were very useful for BVI students. “I find their description of whatever they write on the board, and their description of the maps, charts, diagrams and figures very useful. Moreover, repeating the content, especially the new content, is also very useful.” He stated in the same breath, however, that most sighted teachers did not employ these strategies, and he had to remind them again and again about the presence of a special person in their class.

Some teachers tended to be very cooperative, according to Hassan, whereas others simply ignored him. Even those teachers who tried to cooperate with him, they simply did not know how to help him, and would depend on his guidance on how to assist him. The majority of sighted teachers meant well – they wanted to cooperate with him and were sympathetic towards him, but they simply did not know how to deal with him in their regular class. He found the teachers’ over-sympathetic attitude slightly irritating. “Personally, I would like them to treat us like the other students – they should be cooperative but not sympathetic.”

Most of the sighted teachers at the college and university level, according to Hassan, are simply unaware of how to handle visually impaired students in integrated classes. “I think teachers should be given special training as to how to deal with such students, as the number of BVI students coming to colleges and universities is increasing with the passage of time.” The BVI students too, especially those coming from specialized schools, sometimes have problems dealing with their sighted teachers and peers. “The BVI students also need to be trained in how to cope with their sighted teachers and peers in regular classroom environment before leaving their specialized schools.”

Sometimes his language teacher would send him along with his sighted classmates to library for doing a reading assignment, quite unaware of the fact that neither the university's library was equipped with assistive technology for BVI students, nor any books were available there in accessible formats (e.g. braille, or E-formats). "In such situations, I would either sit idle or rely on my sighted peer's willingness to assist me." He would become frustrated, especially when no one would be available to assist him in the reading assignment. "I don't blame my sighted peers; they had to accomplish their tasks first. They could not help me even if they wanted to because of time-constraints."

Hassan suggested the sighted teachers needed to take certain steps in order to make the BVI students' English language learning experience in the regular classroom environment fruitful. "They should help us in making the study material accessible for us; they should cooperate but not sympathize with us; they should treat us just like their sighted students, as we can succeed just like them, if given equal opportunities and access to the study material; they should describe if there is any picture, chart, diagram or figure; they should read aloud whatever they write on the board; there should be some repetition, especially of the main points; they should allow the BVI students to sit in the front row; and they should allow us to record their lectures."

4.2.7 Hassan's Perception of Interaction in the Regular Second Language Classroom

Acknowledging the importance of group interaction, Hassan terms it to be an essential component of class participation. However, he finds himself not to be quite good at interacting appropriately with his peers. "Initially his classmates were a little reluctant to interact with him (probably because they came into contact with a BVI classmate for the first time), but gradually the situation improved a little with the passage of time. He did not blame his peers for their indifference, however, arguing that they were good people, but simply did not know how to deal with a BVI individual. He complained that sometimes his peers ignored him for no obvious reason when he sought their assistance in a certain issue in class. This attitude, according to Hassan, puts him off and he hardly socializes with his peers outside class.

4.2.8 Hassan's Views about the Role of Administrators

Regarding the university's role in facilitating the BVI students, Hassan suggested that study material should be made available in audio, E-format, as well as in braille. Moreover, there should be a separate portion for BVI students in the library where all the necessary equipment and assistive technology (e.g. braille converters, computers with screen readers, magnifying glasses, scanners, printers and so on) were available so that the BVI students could work on their own without relying on others' assistance.

Hassan stated that most of the administrators were people with positive intentions, but simply did not know how to help the BVI students. "I think they also need to be aware of the challenges of the BVI learners and how to help them overcome those challenges. They do want to cooperate; they want to do something for us, but they just don't know how to help us." They needed to be cognizant of the BVI students' challenges and should come forward in helping them overcome those problems.

4.2.9 Hassan's Views about the Role of the BVI Students

With regard to the BVI students' own role in making their English language learning experience a positive one for themselves in an integrated classroom environment, Hassan said that, besides making themselves aware of the latest assistive technology, the BVI students needed to learn to be less reliant on others. "The BVI students of English language must be aware of the latest trends in the field of assistive technology. They should not always depend on others, but rather try to be as independent as possible in learning the English language, an obviously this aim can be achieved only through the awareness, training and use of assistive technology." He is of the view that the BVI students should keep in touch with and seek the assistance of their seniors, as they are the most appropriate individuals to turn to.

Moreover, the BVI students should never refrain from communicating their needs and concerns to their teachers. "Whenever my teacher forgets to describe a picture, for example, it is my responsibility to draw his attention to it. Since our sighted teachers are unaware of our needs, we have to be bold enough to apprise them of our needs without any hesitation."

4.3 Student No. 2: Sami

4.3.1 Background

Sami is a 20-year-old student with total blindness studying English at the Islamic International University (Islamabad). Before becoming completely blind at the age of twelve on account of congenital glaucoma, Sami was able to read print. Sami said he was able to develop the basic visual concepts (e.g. shapes, colours, the shapes of printed words, and the lay-out of a city, etc.) prior to becoming blind. Sami enjoys studying various types of cultures, including the British culture. “I love studying the cultures of other nations. I want to know about the culture of the British people, their habits, educational system, way of living, and the secret of their advancement.”

Apart from English, Sami could also speak Pahari (his mother-tongue) and Urdu. He went to an English medium school and started learning the English language right from the beginning of his school career. Sami’s verbal proficiency in the English language appeared to be quite good, and his answers to questions were quite deliberate, thorough, appropriate and cogent. Sami said he had no problems in studying the English language along with sighted individuals in the mainstream classroom environment.

4.3.2 Sami’s Learning Strategies

Sami used various strategies for improving his English language. Regarding the strategies he used for improving his speaking skills, Sami said he participated like his sighted peers in oral activities in class. “Speaking is something that I enjoy most, simply because I can participate like sighted students and believe myself to be their equal.”

Regarding his reading strategies, Sami said that he accessed the written material through braille, extracted the gist, and then audio-record the main crucks in his own voice. He said he could not skim a reading passage as he could read only in a linear order because of his visual impairment. “Being blind, I have to use braille to access a reading passage. I can read a document only in a linear order from top to bottom. Thus, I can scan a reading passage but can’t skim it like sighted people.” Sometimes, he used human readers, especially in situations when the study material was not available in braille. Moreover, he also listened to the native speakers online.

Sami said that among the four major skills, writing proved to be more problematic for him and this was mainly because mastering the English spellings always eluded him.

Regarding the strategies Sami used for improving his listening skills, he said he did not make any conscious effort to improve them, but since he relied mainly on his ears for his studies, his listening skills had been improved to such an extent that he could easily understand the native speakers of English. Moreover, Sami said he was very fond of English documentaries, especially those produced by the BBC, and frequently listened to them on the internet, his listening skills had considerably improved. “I have had a great deal of listening practice. But as far as the degree of comprehension is concerned, it depends on a variety of factors (e.g. my familiarity with the topic under discussion, my background knowledge, the quality of the audio, and the way the native speakers speak).”

4.3.3 Sami’s views about availability of study material in accessible formats

Regarding the availability of the study material about English language in accessible format, Sami said that some study material was available online, but the textbooks used in classes were not available in any accessible format. “It is up to the BVI student to make the textbooks accessible to her/himself.” He said that he generally made his study material accessible to himself by either scanning it onto his laptop or asking any of his friends or relatives to get it audio-recorded for him. “But generally, I rely on scanning it onto my computer, because that way I’m more independent and less reliant on others.”

4.3.4 Sami’s Views about the Role of Assistive Technology in English Language Learning

Regarding the assistive technology, Sami said that it had changed the entire scenario for BVI learners of English. “I’m only trained on the use of screen readers on both laptop and mobile phone; if it stopped working today, I would be unable to study anything.”

The assistive technology, according to Sami, is very helpful to the BVI learners in every aspect of English language, ranging from the four major skills and their sub-skills to vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, etc. “It helps us in working at and improving our listening, reading, writing and speaking skills. With its help we can learn grammar; improve our vocabulary, pronunciation, in short, every aspect of the English language.”

Sami said the BVI learners of English language had to manage their study materials such as textbooks, hand-outs, manila sheets and brailled books, assistive tools and gadgets such as computers, screen readers, CC TV and magnifying glasses themselves. “They (both teachers and administrators) are not even aware of these things.” Some specialized equipment, according to Sami, was available in specialized schools for BVI students, but at the university, nothing of the sort is available. “We hope and pray, the system here doesn’t hamper our way, let alone facilitating us. We are happy that we have been recently allowed to take our exams on laptops.”

4.3.5 Sami’s Experiences in the Regular Second Language Classroom

Environment

Sami believes that for BVI students, studying a second language like English is much easier than studying other subjects such as science and mathematics. “Science and Math are such visual subjects. A person with visual impairment finds it almost impossible to comprehend them. A blind student has to create mental picture and keep track of the various concepts in his/her head and recall it as and when required. For English language, all you need to do is to develop your word power and grammatical knowledge, and practice with them.” The only major disadvantage about language learning, according to Sami, is that there is a great deal of memorizing involved in it. “I do acknowledge that second language learning involves a great deal of memorization, but blind and visually impaired people generally have good retentive memory, and I think it facilitates them to learn a second language.”

Sami said he relied on his listening skills and memory for learning the target language. Because of his reliance on listening, his pronunciation has got better, but his spelling and punctuation have remained weak. “I listen to things and try to commit them to my memory. I think I’m very good at pronunciation and accent, but my spellings and punctuations are quite weak for the obvious reason: I can’t access the print material the same way my sighted peers do.” Sami thinks the English language spelling system is very problematic because of its opaque orthography. This is because, unlike Urdu, English is not spelled in the same way it is pronounced. “Most of the spelling in English is unphonetic:

you can't be sure about the spelling of a word just by hearing it; you have to verify its spelling by looking it up in a dictionary or some textbook."

Sami said that as a BVI student, he had a significant advantage over their sighted peers in terms of committing target language material to memory. "The sighted individuals' facility in accessing the printed word visually is both a blessing as well as a bane for them. The very thought that they can access the material as and when they need makes them a little lackadaisical; hence they hardly feel the need of memorizing the material."

Sami said that he was able to enhance his listening skills mainly because he listened to the native speakers a lot. "I listen to audiotapes a lot. I love listening to the native speakers of English. This way I not only receive huge quantities of language input, but also learn about other things as well. I think I'm far more attuned to the native speakers, when it comes to listening comprehension, than my sighted peers."

Sami said he never hesitated to ask a classmate sitting next to him to verbalize anything written on the board. Similarly, he said he always asked for clarification from his teacher whenever he was confused about something in the class. One reason for asking a lot of questions in class, according to Sami, was the unavailability of the textbook in braille or any other accessible format. "I don't have the textbook we use in class available to me in braille. That's why I ask a lot of questions for clarification."

Sami said that the non-availability of the textbook in braille or other accessible formats had both advantages and disadvantages. He said that a major advantage of not having his book in braille was that he had to remember things more than he would have done if it was available to him in braille. "I know I have to understand things right now, as I can't go back and check them for myself." He said there were some disadvantages as well. "The non-availability of the textbook in braille puts me at a disadvantage as compared with my sighted classmates in terms of in-class reading assignments and discussions. A major disadvantage, for example, is that I can't access the material as easily as my sighted peers can. I can't tell you how frustrating it can be when you are trying to extract information as someone with bad pronunciation is reading out the material to you. In such situations I feel that it would be much easier for me to study if I had my book in braille." Sami said that in the case of short reading passages, he faced no problems, but the situation

would get much tougher when he had to glean information from long reading passages without any ready access to them in braille. "It is easier to glean information from a short reading passage because you can remember it when someone reads it out to you. However, if the reading passage is long, you forget what was said in the beginning, and you have to ask your reader to read the passage out to you again and again. At times, you forget the context as well. It becomes frustrating for you as well as for your reader. In such situations, you dearly wish to have the reading passage available to you in braille.

Sami said that he hardly took notes in class, but he tried to make up for it by listening attentively in class in order to retain as much information as possible. He relied on either his teacher or peers' assistance in group work or other in-class activities. He said he used his laptop for preparing his homework assignments. "I use my laptop for preparing my assignments. But I love to have my study material available to me in braille as well. I feel more comfortable with braille. This is why I prepare my study material such as lists of vocabulary items and grammatical points in braille for later use."

Sami said that he was lucky to have a teacher who gave him extra time after class when needed. "My English teacher was very cooperative: he helped me after class time whenever I needed his help."

4.3.6 Sami's Views about the Role of Teacher

Sami said his teachers had been very cooperative, kind and forthcoming with their help. "They made every effort to accommodate me." The teacher's strategies which Sami found very useful included teacher's reading aloud whatever they wrote on the whiteboard, their description of diagrams, pictures and charts, etc. "Some would be successful in their descriptions, and I would understand the diagram or picture, whereas others would find it very hard to describe or explain these things to me." In such situations, according to Sami, the teacher would hand over the task of describing and explaining the diagram to one of his classmates.

Sami said that his teachers gave him more time as compared with his sighted peers. "My teachers went out of way to give me extra time after classes just to help me overcome any learning deficiency resulted from my visual impairment. Moreover, with permission from the administration, they gave me extra time for my credited tests."

Sami said that the teachers played a crucial role in ensuring equal participation for the BVI students in mainstream classes. “Teachers must try to include the BVI students in class discussions and other activities regardless of whether they have access to the study material or not. A good way of keeping them on board is to ask them lots of questions.” Sami said that teachers should not be overawed by the unfamiliar situation of having to deal with a BVI student in a mainstream class. He suggested that they should familiarize themselves with the blind students’ needs and find ways to address them. “We are just special; our needs are different; we do things differently; but we are nevertheless thinking and feeling human beings like sighted individuals. All our teachers need to do is to find ways to resolve the challenges faced by blind students in a mainstream class.”

Sami stated that it was essential for teachers to know that the BVI students would experience certain limitations in language learning. “Sometimes, we do things differently from our sighted peers. For example, the sighted students have access to the study material as well as the visual props, cues and gestures, whereas the BVI students don’t. They may study things at home, whereas the sighted learners have their textbooks in front of them in class. Similarly, the sighted students do their homework independently, whereas the BVI learners need the help of a sighted helper or assistive technology.”

Sami gave some more suggestions to the sighted teachers of the BVI students for making their English language learning experience more effective and interesting. “Teachers should adopt a positive attitude towards them, encourage them, persuade their peers to help and assist them wherever they need it, and make these BVI learners believe in their own abilities.”

Sami also suggested that teachers should allow the BVI learners to use the assistive technology in the class as long as it did not disturb the rest of the students. “Obviously, it is the assistive technology which can put these BVI learners on a par with their sighted peers, and if the teachers don’t allow them to use the assistive technology in the class, they would surely be left behind.”

4.3.7 Sami's Perception of Interaction in the Regular Second Language Classroom

Sami termed his relations with his sighted classmates as excellent. He expressed the apprehension, however, that he might be asking too much of them. "The fact that I depend a lot on them in class for their assistance worries me a lot. I feel that I might be imposing on them excessively, as I rely on their help for reading things out to me, and for clarifying lots of ambiguities which obviously result from having no direct access to the study material." He further stated that he felt his overdependence on his sighted peers might be detrimental to their own studies. "Given the reaction of some of my classmates, I sometimes feel that I may be impeding their studies by incessantly requesting their help."

4.3.8 Sami's Views about the Role of Administrators

With regard to the role of administrators in facilitating the BVI students, Sami said that the administrators were not themselves aware of these students' problems and needs. He said it was the BVI students' responsibility to bring their problems to their notice. "I think whenever we have gone to them for their assistance, they have always responded in a positive manner."

Sami suggested to administrators to equip those classes where BVI students are studying with the tools and gadgets essential for BVI students. "Right now, we have no such facilities in our classes."

4.3.9 Sami's Views about the Role of the BVI Students

Sami also advanced certain suggestions to the BVI learners themselves for making their English language learning experience more effective and interesting. "They should familiarize themselves with the latest assistive technology so that they are more and more independent and less reliant on others; work doubly hard than the sighted students so that you can effectively participate in classroom activities. This will give them confidence and their sighted teachers and peers will start believing in their abilities."

Sami said that a BVI student needed to be assertive and always be ready to express his/her issues and views openly with their teachers and classmates if they wanted to be successful in the mainstream language learning classroom environment. "The BVI students must ensure their full participation in class. They also need to ensure that they keep

themselves abreast of the class proceedings and understand what’s going on around them in the mainstream class.” Highlighting the importance of establishing good rapport with the teachers, Sami stated that it was important for the BVI students to inform their teachers about their needs. “If we do not openly communicate how best we could be accommodated, how would our teachers know.?”

Pointing out the responsibilities of the BVI students, Sami stated that, apart from being assertive and less dependent on others, it was also very important for them to be well-organized. “We need to be more organized than our sighted peers. If we really want to benefit most from the mainstream class, we need to prepare ourselves ahead of time, and, what’s more important, render the study material accessible for ourselves quite ahead of our classes.”

Sami stated that blind students should keep themselves abreast of the latest assistive technology and gadgets and take maximum advantage of them. “I have seen BVI students making the best use of assistive technology in their English language studies. Using their laptops equipped with screen reader, I have observed them looking up words on their own; surfing the net for various types of contents on English language; sending and receiving emails, downloading and listening to audios in the voices of native speakers; and so on.” The best thing about assistive technology, according to Sami, is that it makes the BVI students much more independent and self-reliant.”

4.4 Student No. 3 Ahmad

4.4.1 Background

Ahmad, a student at NUML, is suffering from a degenerative eye disease known as Retinitis Pigmentosa which ultimately leads to blindness. Ahmad was almost completely blind (having just light-perception ability) at the time of interview. He once had enough eyesight to read large print, but that ability was no-longer there. “I used to decipher large print like newspaper headlines, but I can’t read printed material anymore.” It means Ahmad developed the basic concept of letters of the alphabet, colours, light and darkness, sun and moon, and so on.

Since English is studied as a compulsory subject in Pakistan right from the primary school level, Ahmad started learning it from class 1. Regarding his decision to study

English at the under-graduate level, Ahmad stated that his family and friends advised him to master it in order to open up job opportunities for himself and thus, obtain financial and social security. “I believe that good command over English language always gives you more opportunities to obtain a respectable job and get financial security. And you are very well aware that financial security is closely tied to social security.”

Ahmad initially found the other subjects (apart from Math and science which are very visual in nature) quite easy as compared with English, but afterward he began to be fascinated by English, and developed interest in it. “With the passage of time, as I began studying the English language a bit more whole-heartedly, I found it very easy and interesting. As far as Math and science are concerned, I never felt comfortable with them; they are so visual in nature.”

One of the main reasons behind his high level of comfortability with learning the English language as compared to other subjects, according to Ahmad, was the availability of the relevant study material in accessible format. “Nowadays I can access the study material related to any aspect of the English language through my laptop or cell phone equipped with a screen reader, whether that material is available in the form of E-books or lectures on U-tube or listening, speaking, reading and speaking practice material, available on the net. I think technological advancement has facilitated us to a great extent to learn the English language quite easily.” He says U-tube helped him a lot in his efforts to learn the English language. But learning the English language was not free of difficulties: Ahmad faced certain challenges, especially in mastering the phonological aspect of the target language, but he was hopeful he would ultimately overcome them. “Even now I face some challenges, particularly with my English pronunciation, such as the phonetic symbols, the stress patterns of English and the articulation of certain English sounds. Learning is a never-ending process, and I’m sure I can overcome these obstacles.”

4.4.2 Ahmad’s Learning Strategies

Ahmad uses a variety of learning strategies to improve his major skills. Some of those strategies are quite similar to those used by sighted students of English, whereas others are different. With regard to his writing skills, Ahmad said that he could see the large print and thus, was able to develop the basic concepts about the printed word. But

given the condition of his vision, it was decided for him to study at the Qandeel institute for blind and visually impaired (a specialized school for BVI students), where he was trained in braille. “Up to the high school level, I relied only on using braille both for reading and writing.” but when I was introduced to the modern assistive technology, particularly the computer-based text-to-speech technology, I mostly used my laptop or smartphone for both reading and writing purposes.”

Like sighted students, Ahmad uses such writing strategies as brainstorming, the arrangement and sequencing of ideas, etc., but he differs from his sighted peers in terms of producing an actual piece of writing. “When it comes to the production of an actual piece of writing, I write either through braille or through typing on my laptop. The sighted people can write using pen and paper.” The BVI students, according to Ahmad, cannot use the normal pen and paper for writing; They have to use the alternative means for writing (e.g. braille or computer equipped with a screen reader).

With regard to the speaking strategies used, Ahmad said that, like his sighted peers, he used such strategies as verbalizing thoughts aloud when alone, participating in group discussion, practicing his English with friends in a one-to-one interaction session, etc. However, he cannot perceive facial expressions and other body gestures, something the sighted individuals use extensively in their oral interaction. He suggested that sighted individuals needed to “rely less on gestures in a face-to-face interaction with BVI individuals.” In other words, since the BVI students can’t see the gestures of their sighted interlocutors, they depend on them to provide the BVI participants with oral cues for a successful oral discourse. “For example, while addressing a blind individual, the sighted person should use the name of that student instead of using the pronoun “you” and pointing to the blind student. If he would not do so, the blind individual would be unable to determine the addressed person and hence would be unable to respond on his part.” Ahmad expressed his satisfaction that his group members and peers in class were generally quite aware of this fact, and they used oral cues while interacting with him.

With regard to the reading strategies employed, Ahmad said that he could read either through braille or through listening to a particular piece of writing via their computers or audio tapes. In other words, he approaches the written text in a different way.

He is unable to skim a document like sighted people because he can go only in a linear order. “Even while reading for gist, I have to scan the entire document. That’s why I generally take more time, almost double the time a sighted person takes, in reading a document.”

Ahmad, using his laptop equipped with a screen reader, employs various reading strategies (e.g. skimming, scanning and reading for gist). As has been pointed out above, he is compelled to read a given text from top to bottom, using different keyboard commands for different purposes. “While skimming a text, for example, I use the say-all command and increase the wpm (words per minute) speed of my screen reader. In the case of scanning, I generally reduce the speaking tempo of my screen reader and read sentence by sentence using the read-by-sentence command, pausing wherever I feel the need.”

Ahmad uses both braille and screen reader for reading his study material. Initially he predominantly used braille, but more recently he switched over to the use of the screen reader, especially for writing. “I think that screen reader is a good option for writing, whereas braille is more effective for reading. The main reason is that when we read through braille, we have direct access to the spelling of words, whereas in the case of screen reader, you have to make a deliberate effort to check the spelling of a word, and whenever you go for checking the spelling of a particular word, your reading tempo breaks, resulting in the loss of whatever you might have retained till that point as well as in the loss of attention and, by extension, in the loss of comprehension.” BVI students are generally weak in the English spellings and this, according to Ahmad, is mainly due to the growing use of screen readers for reading purposes.

With regard to listening strategies used by BVI students, Ahmad said that he believed both the sighted and the BVI individuals used the same listening strategies. “I would use the same listening strategies even if I were sighted.” The only difference, according to Ahmad, lied in the use of the accompanying text. “Sighted people read the accompanying text of the listening material using their sight, whereas I read it through braille using my fingers.” In situations where there is no accompanying written text, there was no difference in the listening strategies Ahmad adopted and those used by the sighted individuals.

Ahmad said he relied mainly on listening while studying any aspect of the English language, using the screen reader on his laptop. Moreover, he also listens to the native speakers of English on U-tube and on LibriVox (a website designed especially for BVI individuals where they can access thousands of audio books in the voices of the native speakers). Whenever he comes across any unfamiliar word or expression, he looks it up in the digital dictionaries which are available in the form of computer applications.

With regard to the successful completion of in-class assignments, Ahmad stated that the most important factor in this regard was the availability of the assigned task in an accessible format. “If it is not available, then obviously they have to rely on others, usually one of their sighted class fellows, to complete the assigned task.” Citing one example, Ahmad said that once they were given a reading passage and asked to find out all the adjectives and nouns in that passage. Since the passage was available with him in soft form, he could easily read it through his screen reader. “What I did was I first read it sentence by sentence and then word by word, underlining all the nouns and adjectives I could find in the passage. In this way, I completed the assignment quite independently without having to seek the assistance of a sighted friend.”

4.4.3 Ahmad’s Views about the Availability of Study Material in Accessible

Format

Ahmad regretted the fact that the study material was available neither in braille nor in any other accessible format at the university. He has to manage his study material on his own. He expressed his satisfaction, however, over the fact that apart from the textbooks used in classes at the university, secondary study material related to the English language was available online in audio and e-format. The majority of the study material, however, according to Ahmad, was not available in braille, something which greatly hindered the development of his students’ reading and writing skills. He recommended the availability of study material in braille. Most of this secondary material is free and accessible through a computer or smart phone. “I have arranged a laptop equipped with screen reader with great difficulty, and have access only to that study material which is available free of cost on the net.

In the case of the textbooks, Ahmad said he scanned them on to his laptop with the help of a scanner. But this process is very laborious and time-consuming. The scanned material generally contains a great deal of typographical errors which can be removed only with the assistance of a sighted volunteer. “If the study material is of poor print quality or is in hand-written form, I have to request some sighted peer or friend to audio-record it for me.” Although his peers and friends are always willing to render their services, yet, he said, he would love to be independent and not rely on others for his studies. “It is always very painful for me to be dependent on others; it hurts you both mentally and psychologically.”

4.4.4 Ahmad’s Views about the Role of Assistive Technology in English Language Learning

Regarding the role of assistive technology for BVI learners, Ahmad said that he could not imagine learning the English language without the modern assistive technology. It not only made the BVI students independent in their studies, but also opened up new avenues for them. “I think it’s a great blessing that we have the modern assistive technology which enables us to study and work independently. I would reiterate that I simply hate dependency on others. So, for me assistive technology is a great morale-booster as it enables me to consider myself as a normal human being like the rest; one who can go about his own business without relying on others’ help.

Ahmad said that he kept himself abreast of the latest developments in the field of assistive technology by regularly surfing the net in order to obtain information in this regard. He regretted the fact, however, that most of the modern assistive technology, tools and gadgets were so expensive that they were beyond the reach of an average Pakistani BVI individual.

4.4.5 Ahmad’s Experiences in the Regular Second Language Classroom Environment

Ahmad said that his success in the integrated class depended on various factors (e.g. the attitude of the teacher, the availability of the study material in accessible format, the peers’ attitude, the time-constraints, and so on. The availability of the study material in accessible format, according to Ahmad, makes class-proceedings more enjoyable and fruitful for BVI students. “I am more confident and can eagerly participate in class

activities if I have access to the study material like my sighted peers.” The partial or non-availability of material and in-class tasks and activities, according to Ahmad, make life tough for a BVI student in a regular class as she/he is often forced to sit idle in such situations. Ahmad complained, however, that instead of addressing his needs, the teachers often opted to exclude him from such in-class reading and writing tasks and activities. He did not face, however, any such problems in the in-class listening and speaking tasks and activities. There the problems were of a different nature.

Ahmad faces certain challenges while orally interacting with his sighted teachers and peers in class. While attending a lecture, he is limited only to his teacher’s verbal input, whereas his sighted peers have access to his body-language, his gestures and whatever other visual cues he might offer. Similarly, his visual limitations hinder him from successfully participating in group discussion (e.g. taking turns, and taking and handing over the floor to his interlocutors).

Ahmad stated the BVI students needed more time as compared with their sighted peers to complete in-class tasks and activities. “I often find it hard to accomplish a task in the allotted time, but since my teachers have to cater to the needs of the majority students, they hardly give me any extra time.” Consequently, most of his in-class tasks and activities are left incomplete.

4.4.6 Ahmad’s Views about the Role of Teachers

Regarding the various teaching strategies used by his teachers, Ahmad said that he found such strategies as Dividing the class into pairs and small groups, the description of pictures, maps and tables, addressing him by name, repeating the material wherever necessary, reading aloud whatever the teacher wrote on the board, ensuring that the study material was available to him in accessible format, assigning the task of assisting him to one of his class fellows in an in-class task or activity, etc., very effective. “Moreover, I love to be taught by teachers who are friendly and cooperative because the BVI students are psychologically quite brittle and can easily be overwhelmed in classes where they find little cooperation and friendliness.”

He regretted the fact, however, that some teachers fail to keep the special needs of their BVI students in view and forget, for example, to describe the pictures or diagrams, or

read aloud whatever they write on the board, and are Thus, unable to properly accommodate their BVI students in the regular classes. Some teachers, Ahmad said, even did not provide to him the test questions in accessible format and he had to request a class fellow to dictate them to him. “Moreover, some teachers would not give me the extra time, mandatory in the case of BVI students, in exams and tests.” Similarly, the majority of teachers (both male and female) did not allow him to record their lectures for some inexplicable reasons. “They argue: “For what purpose has Allah given you ears? Listen to us and store the stuff in your heads.” He found the female teachers least cooperative as compared with the male teachers. Generally, the male teachers, according to Ahmad, tried their best to accommodate him in their class, whereas the female teachers largely overlooked him. “One of the main reasons for the female indifference towards me may be due to the cultural norms of our society: women generally do not freely mix up, even orally, with the non-relative men.” The majority of teachers, however, according to Ahmad, wanted to cooperate with the BVI students, but they simply did not know how to help them.

In order to make English language learning more effective and interesting for the BVI students in integrated classes, Ahmad advanced several suggestions for the sighted teachers. First of all, he said, the teachers should be friendly, not only with the BVI learners, but with all the students; and secondly, they should try to be empathetic, not sympathetic. “For a while, they should put themselves in our shoes and think as to what their reaction would be in case they were visually challenged like us.” Thirdly, they should ensure the availability of the study material in accessible format, if they want their BVI students to learn the English language alongside their sighted students, Ahmad suggested. Moreover, they should be aware of the special needs of their BVI students and should try to address them. “Special training should be given to teachers on how to deal with and accommodate the BVI students in their regular classes.”

4.4.7 Ahmad’s Perception of Interaction in the Regular Second Language Classroom

Ahmad claims that he tries to behave normally in his classes, and most of his teachers and peers have no problems with his visual impairment and treat him like other

students. “I try not to give them any impression that I’m different from them in any way on account of my visual impairment, and I believe I am successful to a large extent.”

He emphasised, however, on the importance of maintaining good interpersonal relations with peers and teachers for BVI students. Being always in great minority in integrated classes, Ahmad said he had to take the initiative and try to establish good relationship with his peers and teachers. “Being aware of the fact that the sighted people are generally unaware of our special needs, I try to communicate my needs to both my teachers and peers. Once they grasped my condition and my needs, they, or at least quite a handsome majority of them, were very forthcoming with their assistance.” He reiterated that the initiative had to be taken by the BVI students themselves. “We can’t afford to wait for the sighted people to understand our situation and accommodate us in the regular classes.”

4.4.8 Ahmad’s views about the role of administrators

Regarding the role of administrators in facilitating the BVI students of English, Ahmad said that they simply did not know how to help the BVI students. “The administrators are neither interested nor aware how to facilitate us in our English language learning endeavours.” Ahmad advanced several suggestions to the administrators about making the English language learning experience of the BVI students more effective. “The administrators should provide facilities to the BVI learners, make provisions for training the teachers on catering to the needs of the BVI students in an inclusive class, and, most importantly, establish a separate department for the guidance and assistance of the BVI students. He said the university should have a separate department which caters only to the needs of the BVI students, and that department should be in the hands of those people who were trained in special education and were aware of the needs and challenges of the BVI learners of English. He suggested that this department should be in close touch both with the teachers as well as the administration so as to resolve the issues confronted by the BVI students amicably and timely. He also suggested that universities should ensure the availability of the latest assistive technologies, tools and gadgets, particularly laptops equipped with screen reader, printers, scanners, CC TV, magnifiers and audio books etc., for BVI students.

4.4.9 Ahmad's Views about the Role of BVI Students

Finally, Ahmad gave several suggestions to the BVI learners themselves for making their English language learning experience more effective and interesting. First of all, Ahmad said, they should try to minimize their dependency on others, and the only way to do so was to make themselves aware of the latest assistive technology and use it in their English language learning. Secondly, instead of merely relying on the assistance of their teachers and peers, the BVI learners should take the responsibility themselves for their English language learning and use the richest resource, the internet, for this purpose.

4.5 Student No. 4: Sanan

4.5.1 Background

Sanan is a 21-year-old student studying English at the IIU Islamabad. A music-lover and Sitar-player, Sanan is completely blind as a result of a congenital eye disease known as retinopathy of prematurity. His Sitar-playing can be termed as outstanding, as he can play a variety of tunes.

Sanan is also a great cricket-lover. "My hometown cricket team (Islamabad United) didn't do well in this PSL, but it doesn't matter; I'm sure they'll do well next time."

Sanan is a lively individual, full of energy and warmth. He spoke quickly and seemed very extroverted. But at the same time, he displayed an air of serenity and contentment with regard to his visual disability. "I was born blind and didn't see the world. I think that's better in a way, since I don't miss anything. It depends on you as an individual what you make of your life."

Sanan spoke rapidly, constantly shifting from one topic to another during his talk. Moreover, there was a sense of impulsiveness in his speech, and he apparently made no effort to collect his thoughts before expressing his ideas.

Sanan appeared to be quite aware of the complexities of English language. Pointing out one of its main complexities, its unphonetic nature, Sanan said that, as compared with Urdu or Punjabi, the "English language is very unphonetic". "In Urdu, everything is spelled phonetically; there is a lot of harmony between spelling and pronunciation. English is

largely unphonetic; one can never be sure about the pronunciation of a word on the basis of its spelling.”

4.5.2 Sanan’s Learning Strategies

When Sanan was asked to give an account of the strategies he generally employed in the mainstream class, he said in a sort of casual tone: "I just enter my class, occupy my seat, turn on my audio recorder, then sit back and relax." He nevertheless gave a brief account of the various strategies he used. With regard to the writing strategies, he employed in the regular language class, Sanan stated that the strategies he used were not very dissimilar to those used by his sighted peers. “I don’t think I use different strategies for writing than my sighted peers. The only difference is that of medium used – I use braille mainly for writing.”

Similarly, with regard to the oral strategies he employed in class, Sanan said that he used the same strategies as were used by his sighted peers with slight variation. The only challenge he faces in group discussions with his sighted peers is his inability to successfully take and hand over the floor to other participants because of his visual impairment. For this, he said that he depended on the cooperation of his group-members. “I have apprised my class fellows that they should address me by my name whenever they intend to hand over the floor to me. They know that during oral interaction with me, they need to use verbal cues instead of gestures.”

With regard to reading strategies he used in class, Sanan said that he used braille for this purpose. He faces difficulties in skimming a document because he can only read in linear order on account of his visual impairment. As far as reading for gist or scanning a document is concerned, he hardly faces any problems as long as the text is available in accessible format (braille or e-form). “But one of the major disadvantages with reading in this manner is you can’t skim through the text quickly. You have to go in a linear order.”

With regard to the strategies, he used for improving his listening skills, Sanan said visually challenged people generally have good listening skills mainly because of their reliance on their ears. “My listening skills in the English language are not very inviable, as I have problems comprehending the native speakers. I find their tempo of speaking very

fast.” He said that he listened to the native speakers, but it would take some more time before his listening skills could be termed as satisfactory.

4.5.3 Sanan’s Views about the Role of Assistive Technology in English Language Learning

Regarding the utility of assistive technology for BVI learners of English language, Sanan said that although he did not use computer-based assistive technology himself, he considered it to be very beneficial for BVI students. “I can’t use computer-based assistive technology myself; I think it plays an important role in our studies.” He listens to audiotapes. He admitted that one of the main reasons behind his slow progress in English language learning was his unawareness of the modern assistive technology. “I often find myself lagging behind my sighted peers. I believe one of the main reasons is my inability to use computer-based assistive technology.”

Regarding the availability of specialized equipment and assistive technology in classes, Sanan said that nothing of the sort had been made available to the BVI students. He said that gadgets such as magnifiers and CCTV for low vision students and laptops for all the visually impaired students should nevertheless be made available in classrooms.

4.5.4 Sanan’s Views about the Availability of Study Material in Accessible Formats

Sanan termed the availability of study material in some accessible format as absolutely essential for successful English language learning by BVI students. “Imagine a sighted student studying English language without books. Can he/she successfully learn it? Same is the case with BVI students. If they don’t have the study material in accessible format, how can they learn the English language effectively.”

Regarding the availability of study material in accessible format, Sanan said that the material used in classes was not accessible at all to the BVI students. The university’s administration did not consider it their responsibility to make the study material accessible for the BVI learners of English. “I purchased some printed books like my sighted peers, and it was my responsibility to make them accessible to me. The university’s authorities are simply unaware of my needs.”

He complained that study material was of such poor print quality that it could not be properly transcribed into braille. “I tried to convert it into braille, but the resulted material was illegible to me. I was forced to seek the assistance of a sighted person to make it legible to myself.”

4.5.5 Sanan’s Experiences in the Regular Second Language Classroom

Environment

Sanan is of the view that learning the English language is not easy. It is for this reason that he hired the services of a home- tutor to help him with his studies of English language. He had to change several tutors before finally settling on one. “Given the complex nature of the English language, success depends, not only on your own effort as a student, but also on the skills of those whom you work with. I hired the services of several tutors. The first couple of tutors were not great help. They simply couldn’t help me a great deal, and as a result, I was really slowed down in my studies. With my last tutor, however, although I couldn’t keep pace with the rest of the students, yet he enabled me to somehow keep myself on track.”

At the time of the interview, Sanan was far behind his classmates in his study of English. When asked about the reasons of his lagging behind, Sanan attributed his lack of success to the lack of availability of study material in accessible format, and to his tutors’ lack of support. “Since I don’t have access to sufficient study material, I have to rely mainly on human readers. The problem with human readers is that they can’t always function at your will.” Sanan asserted that whenever he had the study material in accessible format, he performed well.

It became clear that Sanan knew very little about the correct method for transcribing second language content into braille. “One thing that’s really difficult about English”, Sanan explained, “is knowing where the sound symbols go. I face problems with transcription as certain symbols does not exist in braille.” When he was informed that such braille symbols for English sounds did indeed exist, he was surprised. "Really? You must be joking; I didn’t know about that!"

Instead of taking his own notes in class, Sanan depended on the notes of one of his peers who read them back to him later. But he did tape record every class and listened to

the recordings at home. Sanan explained that he found it very difficult to use his braille notetaking device in class. “I just can’t keep pace with my teacher. Further, I also think that the device might cause distraction for the sighted students.”

Sanan said that he tried to function like his sighted peers in class. “Like my sighted classmates, I listen to the teacher, ask questions, and, when possible, answer them. Someday I’d perform well and answer questions, but some days were just worse – I couldn’t answer a single question.” Sanan said that, on the whole, he submitted his assignments in time.

Sanan stated that he once tried to use audiotaped books in English, but, since he couldn’t understand the native speakers who recorded those books, he had to give up that idea. The main reason behind his failure to follow the native speakers, according to Sanan, was the tempo of their speech. “The native speakers spoke so fast; I simply couldn’t catch them.

Sanan said that his teachers used a lot of visual props and cues in class, and they appeared to have no interest at all to accommodate me. As a result, he relied on the audio-recording he made in class and dearly hoped to make some sense out of them. “If you are blind and your teacher ask you: “Is it cloudy today? what would you do? Obviously, you would be in no position to provide the appropriate answer. You would simply say, “I don’t know”. I generally did the same.”

Sanan said in situations where the teacher gave verbal explanation or described verbally the things which were visual in the first place, he really enjoyed and understood the concepts better. But he regretted that in his case, the teachers seldom took the trouble of orally describing things to him. “Verbal explanation of visual concepts is very helpful for BVI students like me. Pictures and diagrams, which are such an integral part of most English language textbooks, are of no use to a BVI student, and indeed can become a source of confusion, if not properly described and explained to them.”

4.5.6 Sanan’s Views about the Role of Teacher

Sanan believes that, for language teachers, it is absolutely essential to describe any pictures, diagrams, material written on the board or multimedia projector, etc., as they

come up in class. “Whenever they have a BVI student in class, the teachers should do as much verbal description of the visual concepts as they can. My English teacher would often forget to verbally describe things he would do in class, perhaps assuming that I would somehow pick up the cues, using my ears, and understand things. I just couldn't . . . Nobody with visual impairment can.”

Sanan said that it was very important for teachers of integrated classes to prepare class material quite ahead of time so as to enable the BVI students to render them in braille or some other accessible format for themselves. “The teachers of integrated classes should plan their lessons and prepare the study material at least one week in advance, so that the BVI students have sufficient time ahead of classes to render the material accessible for themselves. Otherwise, the BVI students would sit quite confused in class and might lose all interest in the class proceedings.” Sanan believes that the teachers should never lose sight of the BVI students’ academic progress in class. “Initially, my teacher didn’t notice that he wasn’t accommodating me and taking me along. By the time he realized that, it was too late, and I had been left far behind the rest of the class.”

Sanan feels, however, that after realizing that he had not been properly accommodated, his English teacher had been very kind to him and gave him extra time both in and after the class. “I do appreciate his special attention and extra time he gave me. He took special care to explain the complex English language concepts to me and, whenever necessary, to read aloud the reading passages and test questions to me.”

4.5.7 Sanan’s Perception of Interaction in the Regular Classroom Setting

Sanan stated that he loved to interact with others and hence faced no problems making friends in class. He said that he relied mainly on the assistance of his friends in his studies. But he acknowledged, though somewhat reluctantly, that he lost some of his friends, as he fell behind in the class. “I generally obtain information and/or explanation from my friends about the concepts which I fail to understand in class. Some of my sighted peers used to be very supportive, whereas others avoided me. As the class advanced into more complex language concepts, I became more frightened to realize that my classmates knew things which I struggled to comprehend. Interaction with my teachers and peers in such situation became even more uncomfortable for me. Thus, I felt side-lined and

attending classes became a bit burdensome for me.” Sanan admitted that some people were very cooperative and helpful to him, and he was grateful to them. “I’m fortunate to have had some wonderful people around me. Yes, some not so pleasant things did happen to me, but all along, I have been lucky to be surrounded by some good friends, teachers and tutors.”

4.5.8 Sanan’s Views about the Role of Administrators

Sanan explained that the administration gave him admission to the English language program, and provided the study material to him in ordinary print, which was of no use to him of course, as it needed to be made accessible for a BVI student. “I think the administration should play a more proactive role in looking after the visually challenged individuals. All the study material should be made available in braille and other accessible formats, so that the BVI students can function independently with respect to their studies, as much as possible. Special training programs on the handling and accommodation of the BVI students in the mainstream classes, and assistive technology used by them, should be immediately arranged for all the teachers, so that other students might not suffer like me.”

Moreover, a separate corner for BVI students, equipped with the latest assistive technology and devices, Sanan suggested, should be established in the main library so that the BVI students can study on their own like their sighted peers. Merely allowing the BVI students to take their exams on some outdated computers equipped with screen readers is not enough. “A BVI student taking the exam is always worried whether the computers would function properly or not.”

4.5.9 Sanan’s Views about the Role of the BVI Students

Sanan believes that the blind student should keep himself as much involved in the class proceedings as he can. He said that he could not perform to the best of his potential because of his consideration for the wellbeing of others. “Fearing that my braille note-taking device would distract my sighted classmates, I stopped using it altogether in class. Now I feel that I should have used it after all.”

Sanan also believes that, in order to be successful, the BVI students must keep themselves abreast of the latest assistive technology and gadgets. “Although I myself couldn’t capitalize on the modern assistive technology, apart from braille of course, yet I

would advise the other BVI students should not only make themselves aware of the latest assistive technology, but should also use them to the best of their advantage.”

4.6 Student No. 5: Ibraheem

4.6.1 Background

Ibraheem, the son of a retired army officer, was in the third year of his BS English at NUML Islamabad at the time of interview. Ibraheem had an accident when he was just eight years old; a toy bomb exploded in his hand when he was playing with it after accidentally coming across it in a park at Skardu (a small city in Gilgit Baltistan). It not only rendered him blind but also blew away all but two of his fingers. “I was playing along with my friends in a park in Skardu. We found a toy and started playing with it. It exploded in my hands destroying my eyes and hands. I was just 8-years old then.” By the time Ibraheem lost his eyesight, he had developed the basic concepts about the world. “I still vividly remember the concepts such as the letters of the alphabet, the numbers, the sun, the moon, the stars, the colours, airplanes, train, cars, water, trees, greenery, light and darkness, etc., the images are quite fresh in my memory.”

Ibraheem said he wanted to have sufficient mastery over the English language for two main reasons: (1) He wanted to be able to read and comprehend English literature; and (2) He wanted to study human nature and much of the information regarding this area, according to Ibraheem, was available to him in the English language. Moreover, the screen readers currently available for the main operating systems such as Microsoft Windows and IOS for Apple devices support certain languages only, spoken mainly in the developed world (e.g. French, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, German and English, etc.)

Ibraheem has been studying the English language since he was 5-years old. “It is taught as a compulsory subject right from the primary to the graduation level in Pakistan.” He was also interested in studying Arabic, Ibraheem said, but he could not get a chance to learn it.

Ibraheem can neither properly type things out on his laptop nor read brailled books because he had only two fingers on his left hand. But despite so many challenges, Ibraheem found learning the English language quite easy because he obtained his primary and secondary education from Saint Mary Institute, a missionary school, where he was taught

the English language mainly by the native speakers. “There I developed a solid foundation in the English language.” He further stated that for him, English is far easier than other subjects. “One reason can be that I am a voracious reader and keen listener, and we, in Pakistan, can read books on our computers or smartphones only in English because the screen readers do not support any other of our national or regional languages. In this way, I have a great deal of exposure to the English language.”

Ibraheem found learning the English language somewhat different from learning any other subjects as there were no technicalities involved in learning it (apart from sound symbols). “We don’t have to memorize formulas like in math; we don’t have to work in labs like in some science subjects; we don’t have to decipher any diagrams; and so on. All we have to do is work at the four major skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking.”

4.6.2 Ibraheem’s learning strategies

Like other BVI students, Ibraheem also employed various strategies for learning the English language. Regarding the writing strategies he employed, Ibraheem said that he first brainstormed the ideas and then arranged them before committing them to writing like his sighted peers. “I note down (in audio form on my smartphone) only the key words or phrases encoding the main ideas in them.” He has to audio-record the main points because he can use neither laptop keyboard nor braillewriter because of his physical handicap.

Regarding the strategies he used for improving his speaking skills, Ibraheem said that his listening skills were quite advanced because like other BVI individuals, he too depended on his auditory faculty; listening undoubtedly complemented and improved his speaking skills. “I have listened to hundreds of audiobooks in the voices of the native speakers. As a result, my oral skills are quite good as well.” But he acknowledged in the same breath that there was always room for improvement. He further said that he generally interacted in English with his peers and teachers which gave him a good speaking practice. “Since the majority of interaction in our classes is in English, therefore, we have to use English there, and it has a very positive impact on my speaking. We are also given some topics in class to speak on, and it gives me a good speaking practice.” He also tries to think in English.

Regarding the reading strategies, Ibraheem asserted that he believed he used the same strategies for improving his reading skills as were used by his sighted peers. But the written text has to be available in some accessible format, according to Ibraheem. He can adopt the same strategies as his sighted peers (e.g. skimming, scanning and paraphrasing, etc.) “Once the text is accessible to me, then, like the sighted students, I look for the key words to glean the jest of the written passage; I paraphrase the passage; I summarized the passaged if needed; I look up the unfamiliar words in a dictionary, and so on.”

With regard to completing an in-class reading assignment, Ibraheem said that he depended on his friends and peers in this regard. “I wait for my friend to first complete his task and then ask him to read the assigned task out to me. If it is reading for jest, I keep the main points in memory and verbally present them to my teacher.” Reading tasks such as paraphrasing and summarizing require more time to be completed, and since the teachers hardly give him any extra time, he said, he could not do such assignments in class. “Teachers generally design the class activities keeping in view the majority, the sighted students, not the minority, usually a single BVI student.” Ibraheem was quick to acknowledge, however, that both his teachers and peers tried their best to accommodate him as far as possible. “In situations where I’m unable to do an in-class assignment, my teacher gives me a home assignment instead.”

Given the nature of his disability (he is not only blind, but also physically challenged, having just two fingers on his left hand intact), home assignments, especially when they are lengthy become very hard, if not impossible, for him to complete. He said that once they were a reading and writing assignment on some short story. He had no problem doing the reading part of the task, but when it came to the writing part, it took him four days to type out just a few pages. “It took me four days to complete that assignment and I was very exhausted. Just imagine someone who have to write with just two fingers.”

With regard to the strategies, he employed for improving his listening skills, Ibraheem stated that he downloaded and listened to audiobooks in the voices of the native speakers mainly on the subjects of psychology and English literature. “I love listening to the native speakers on these subjects. I have hundreds of audiobooks on my laptop.”

He initially faced some difficulties understanding the native speakers, but with the passage of time and more practice, he got use to them. Comprehension depends, among other things, Ibraheem said, on the topic under discussion as well: “the more familiar you are with the topic, the easier it is for you to understand it.” He said that he also listened to English movies described especially for BVI individuals.

4.6.3 Ibraheem’s Views about the Availability of Study Material in Accessible Formats

With regard to the availability of sufficient study material for English language in accessible format, Ibraheem said that he had no problem finding the relevant material, especially online. “The only avenue open to him is the internet (he can neither use braille nor easily use keyboard on his laptop because of his physical disability) and he makes the best use of it in his English language learning. “Nowadays you can find almost everything you need for English language, whether it is related to the four major skills or their sub-skills, the various language areas (vocabulary or grammar, pronunciation or accent), everything is available on the net.”

He acknowledged, however, that the material they used in the class was hard to find online on account of copyright issues. Since the textbooks which are used mainly in classes cannot be found online, he has to manage them on his own, usually by getting them scanned onto his laptop. Instead of relying on others, Ibraheem said he made the study material accessible to himself either by converting it into braille or into electronic format by scanning it to his laptop. “In situations where it is not possible to convert the study material into some accessible format, I just request any of my friends to read it out to me. Sometimes I just get the study material recorded on my smartphone and listen to it again and again.”

The poor print quality of the textbooks, the presence of pictures, maps and charts, and tables etc., in these books, according to Ibraheem, make them very difficult to be properly converted into soft form through scanning. “The scanned results usually contain a lot of typographical errors and I’m compelled to seek the assistance of some sighted volunteer. I think the university should convert that material into braille or some other accessible format.”

4.6.4 Ibraheem's Views about the Role of Assistive Technology in English Language Learning

With regard to his awareness and use of assistive technology for English language learning, Ibraheem said that he was aware of and used only JAWS (a screen reader) and an ordinary digital voice recorder. But he acknowledged that these tools were very useful to him in his English language learning. "On a lighter note, I consider myself blind only when I'm unable to use my assistive gadgets, otherwise I'm a normal individual having no sense of loss or impairment."

With regard to the availability of assistive technology in the university/class, Ibraheem said that apart from laptops equipped with screen readers, no other assistive tools or gadgets were available to the BVI students. He suggested that, given his dual disabilities, he needed to have in class a computer equipped with both screen reader as well as speech recognition facility.

4.6.5 Ibraheem's Views about the Role of Teachers

Ibraheem believed that some of his teachers were more accommodating than others. One of his teachers, for instance, refused to share the class material with him in advance so that it could be made available in accessible format. Ibraheem believes that his teachers should act both as helpers and as trouble-shooters. He said that he was lucky to have such teachers who went out of the way to accommodate him in the regular classroom environment. He could not control his emotions when he mentioned one of his teachers who helped him after classes with his English phonology lessons.

Ibraheem said that he had got his own voice recorder, but his teachers, for some inexplicable reasons, were not willing to allow him to use it for recording the class proceedings. "If I'm allowed to use my recorder in the class, it will solve many of my problems."

Ibraheem said that, in order to accommodate him, most of his teachers verbalized the material written on the board. Sometimes, they would inadvertently not do so. "I can't blame them for consciously ignoring me; they are human beings and they do sometimes forget like us." He said he felt frustrated especially when his teachers forgot to read aloud the things written on the board, or describe to him any diagram, picture or map. "Sometimes

they forget that there is a BVI student in their class; they do not describe the charts or read aloud the things which they write on the board.”

He also felt frustrated when they were assigned an in-class assignment which he could not do simply because of his disability. “I think our teachers should keep us in view while planning their lessons. Most of the in-class tasks and activities are beyond our capability, as they are designed for sighted students.”

Ibraheem advanced some suggestions to the sighted teachers of the BVI students in order to make their English language learning experience more positive and effective. He said that instead of assigning the responsibility of reading text aloud to a BVI student to any of his peers, the teacher should himself read text aloud to him. “Often the students’ pronunciation is not good and the BVI students fail to comprehend what is read aloud to them.” Moreover, the teachers should be aware of the various resources available for BVI students (e.g. talking books, E-books and DAISY books, etc.) and help them tap those resources to their advantage. “Most of the teachers are willing to help and accommodate their BVI students, but unfortunately they are neither trained nor aware of the special needs and assistive technology available for the BVI students.”

4.6.6 Ibraheem’s Perception of Interaction in the Regular Classroom

Ibraheem believes that since BVI individuals rely on their auditory skills for accessing information, classroom interaction is therefore very important for BVI students. He said initially his peers were quite reluctant to interact with him (they had no experience with BVI individuals), and he had to take the initiative and interact with them. It took a while before he was successful to get his sighted peers (and even teachers) to treat him as a normal human being capable of thinking and understanding like them. “We, the BVI individuals, have to take the initiative and get across the message to our sighted teachers and peers that we are just as capable as them; the only difference lies in the senses we use. We rely mainly on our senses of touch and hearing, and our sighted peers have the added advantage of the sense of sight.”

Ibraheem said that he found his teachers and peers quite accommodating, but the BVI student should never shy away from communicating their needs to them. “Initially my teachers did not know how to accommodate me in his regular class, I took the initiative

and communicated to him that he needed to verbally describe the pictures or diagrams. Similarly, I requested him that since I can't see the written material on the board, he should kindly verbalise whatever he wrote there." In the same way, He said he requested his sighted peers to rely less on gestures while communicating with him in group discussions or ordinary conversation. He expressed his satisfaction that his teachers and peers understood his needs and cooperated with him to a great extent.

4.6.7 Ibraheem's Views about the Role of Administrators

Apart from the head of the English Department, Ibraheem was not satisfied with the way the rest of administrators handled the BVI students. "Our current head of the department is extremely cooperative Ma Sha Allah. The rest of the administration simply don't know how to facilitate us." He said the administrators were simply not aware of the BVI students' specific challenges and needs. "Since they are completely ignorant in terms of our challenges, they have no idea how to facilitate us or solve our problems."

Ibraheem gave some suggestions to the administrators for creating a more conducive English language learning environment for BVI students. He suggested the administrators should: (1) set up a library of audio books for BVI students, as most simply don't have sufficient study material in accessible format; (2) render the printed study materials currently used as core books accessible to the BVI students; and (3) set up an E-books library containing all the essential courses taught at the university.

4.6.8 Ibraheem's Views about the Role of the BVI Students

Ibraheem also gave the BVI students some suggestions for making their own English language experience more positive and interesting. The BVI students, Ibraheem said, should stop complaining about petty issues and adopt a positive attitude and try to be independent instead of looking up all the times to others to come forward and help them. He further said that they should seek solution to their own problems, as in the majority of situations, they would themselves know best how to overcome a particular problem resulting from their visual impairment. "I know many talented BVI individuals who always blame the system, the teachers, the administration for their miseries; they are not ready at all to take any responsibility themselves. We need to realize that our world is a world of sound; our sighted teachers' and peers' world is a world of light and colour. There is a

difference between our reality and their reality.” Therefore, he said the BVI students should not always hold their sighted peers and teachers responsible because they are simply unaware of our issues and our challenges. “They simply don’t know how to approach us in order to help us tackle the issues confronting us.

In order to bridge this gape, Ibraheem said, the BVI students should take the initiative and explicitly communicate to their sighted teachers, peers and administrators their needs, their challenges and their desires. “We should be patient with them, guide them, and make them understand our reality.” Ibraheem said that this discourse with the sighted people was all the more important in Pakistan because here the teachers and administrators received no training about how to accommodate the BVI students. “Most of them have noble intentions; they want to help the BVI students; they simply don’t know how to help and assist us.”

4.7 Student No. 6: Arshad

4.7.1 Background

Arshad is a 20-year-old student studying in a mainstream learning environment at NUML Islamabad. Arshad is totally blind since birth because of a hereditary eye disease known as Leber's Congenital Amarosis. He enjoys reading, creative writing and singing. During the interview, Arshad displayed a sense of maturity, composure, insight, emotional balance and refinement. Arshad answered questions thoughtfully, appropriately and cogently.

Arshad said he decided to study the English language because he planned to work at the international level for the welfare of blind and visually impaired people, and believes he would need good communication skills in English for raising funds for his NGO. He finds learning the English language very interesting and easy. “I regarded learning English as a challenge and, rather than considering it to be something beyond my reach, I accepted that challenge.” The most interesting aspect of English, according to Arshad, something which makes it easy to learn, is that it can be practically used. “Other subjects such as advance Math, which I always found very difficult because of its visual nature, does not have such practicality attached to it, and one often have the feelings that one would probably not need such information to use in future.” This sense of lack of practical futility

made him lose interest in it. Arshad said that with English, he never felt that he was wasting his time.

4.7.2 Arshad's Learning Strategies

Arshad employs a variety of strategies for learning the English language. For improving his writing skills, Arshad writes a diary in the target language. "Barring any emergency, I summarise and write down the main events of the day every night, obviously using my laptop for this purpose." He uses his laptop for doing his writing assignments as well. Arshad says that he reads either through braille or converts the reading material into some form of audio and then listen to it. "I have to read the entire document in a linear order, as I can't skim through it, given my visual limitations." Although Arshad faces difficulties in skimming, he says he can scan a document just like his sighted peers. "Although skimming is a bit difficult for me, but in scanning, I don't think I'm any different from my sighted peers."

Arshad says that the BVI students face no problems in improving their listening and speaking skills. For improving his listening skills, Arshad listens to the native speakers on the internet. "I'm fond of listening to the native speakers, especially listening to the short stories and novels recorded by them. Thank God, there are thousands and thousands of them available online." He says that he has had so much listening practice that now he faces no problems in comprehending the native speakers. Listening to the native speakers extensively has had a positive impact on Arshad's speaking skills as well. He not only listens to the native speakers but also imitate them. "This strategy has greatly improved my fluency as well as accuracy." He used to translate his mother-tongue into English and then speak initially, but later on he began to think in English which proved very beneficial. "Whenever I'm alone, I verbalise my thoughts aloud in English. Moreover, Arshad participates in in-class speaking tasks and activities.

4.7.3 Arshad's Views about the Availability of Study Material in Accessible Formats

With regard to the availability of sufficient study material for English language in accessible format, Arshad said that he faced considerable problem finding the relevant material. The textbooks and secondary material were not available at the university, and

the student had to arrange it for himself. The only source available to him is the internet and there too the textbooks used in class could not be found. “You can find study material online related to the four major skills or their sub-skills, the various language areas (vocabulary or grammar, pronunciation or accent), but not the textbooks used in class.”

Consequently, Arshad has to make them accessible on his own by getting them scanned onto his laptop using a scanner. Sometimes the poor quality of print compels Arshad to request some sighted friend or sibling to read it out to him. “I hate being dependent on others. But the poor print quality of the study material handed to us force me to rely on the sighted people’s assistance.” He said that if the university could not provide the study material in accessible format, at least it should take steps to ensure the print quality of the textbooks.

4.7.4 Arshad’s Views about the Role of Assistive Technology in English

Language Learning

Arshad termed assistive technology almost inevitable for him in his English language learning endeavours. He said without his laptop equipped with screen reader, it would have been extremely difficult for him to learn the different aspects of English language. “Yes, I know and use braille, but hardly any study material is available in it. The computer-based assistive technology has opened the world of internet for me, and there I can easily find everything related to English language, from its phonological to its lexical and grammatical aspects.” He further stated that plenty of study material can be found on the internet on the major skills. “Computer-based assistive technology is a great leveller; it has put us (the BVI students of English) on a par with our sighted peers.” He said that he could not imagine learning the English language without the aid of modern assistive technology.

4.7.5 Arshad’s Experiences in the Regular Second Language Classroom

Environment

Arshad says that for studying the English language, he largely employs the same learning strategies which are used by his fully sighted classmates. “Like my sighted peers, I take down notes in class, and do pronunciation practice by reading passages and dialogues aloud and repeating things after my teacher and the native speakers.” The only difference

(in terms of the learning strategies used) between him and his sighted peers, according to Arshad, is that he approached and accomplished things somewhat differently. For example, Arshad used a laptop with screen reader for taking notes in class, whereas other students took notes utilizing a pencil and paper. Similarly, Arshad prepared lists of words along with their contextual uses in braille for learning and memorizing vocabulary items, whereas his sighted peers prepared flashcards for this purpose. The sighted students read the coursebooks and other study materials in ordinary print, whereas Arshad read them either in braille through his fingers, or listened to them through a screen reader on his laptop. Similarly, the sighted students accessed the pictures and diagrams in the textbooks visually, whereas Arshad accessed them through verbal descriptions provided to him either by his class fellows or friends and family members.

Arshad explained that many of his learning strategies evolved with the passage of time. Instead of relying solely on his teacher, he soon learned to seek the assistance of his sighted peers. “My teacher used to read out to me the daily assignment, but with the passage of time I realized that it could be done by my sighted peers as well. So, I began to seek their assistance in this regard, which allowed my teacher to focus on other things going on in the class.” Arshad said that he often got his homework corrected by his sighted peers in class.

The only significant problem Arshad cited with regard to English was that rendering the pronunciation-related assignments, especially those involving the phonetic symbols, into a printed format could sometimes become impossible, as most of the available word-processors and almost all screen readers do not support them. In the case of other subjects, preparing and submitting the assignments is quite straightforward, according to Arshad, as all he has to do is to just prepare them and print them out with his laser-jet printer. “In any of my other classes, I would have simply hooked my computer to the printer, printed the information out, and my sighted teachers could have read it quite easily, whereas in the case of pronunciation-related assignments, most of the phonetic symbols were neither available in my word-processor nor supported by my screen reader, which left me unable to successfully complete them.”

4.7.6 Arshad's Views about the Role of Teacher

Arshad believes that successful language learning experience of the BVI students depends upon effective communication between the student and his teacher. "The teacher should be open to any suggestion from his BVI student and never forget to describe anything visual. Similarly, the student should explicitly communicate it to the teacher, in case he/she needs something to be described to him." Arshad feels that ideally, the teacher should try to insure the accommodation of and access to the study material and class activities of the BVI student. "As a teacher, it would be wonderful to hear from your BVI student that you are giving him too much, instead of hearing from him that you are giving him too little." He expressed concern, however, about the amount of visual material that was covered in Arshad's English class and felt that, while his relationship with the English teacher was on the whole very positive, more initiative on the part of the teacher in communicating with the BVI student would have been helpful.

Arshad stressed the importance of awareness by the teacher with regard to the special needs of the BVI students. He hoped that teachers would become more aware of the special needs of the BVI students as they get the opportunity to teach more visually challenged students in mainstream classes. "I think in future, it might help if my teacher would obtain information about the special needs of the BVI students in a regular class."

4.7.7 Arshad's Perception of Interaction in the Regular Language Classroom

Arshad said that, instead of viewing his visual impairment as a hindrance, he regarded it as an opportunity. As has been mentioned above, Arshad gradually relied less on his teacher's assistance for gaining access to the written word on the board and increasingly sought the help of his sighted classmates for this purpose. "After some time, I used to seek the help of my sighted peer in my daily assignments with the consent of my teacher. It not only reduced the burden of my teacher, but also helped me in establishing good interpersonal relationship with my sighted peers." Arshad said that he was able to establish and maintain good interpersonal relationship with the majority of his sighted classmates.

4.7.8 Arshad's Views about the Role of Administrators

Arshad believes that the administration should encourage and facilitate the BVI students. He expressed his concern that the administration was simply unaware of the special needs of the BVI students. "I think the administration needs to be trained on the needs and how to cater to those needs of the BVI individuals. Right now, whenever we approach them with some issue, they seem to have no solution and refer us back to our teachers."

Arshad stated that administrators should never discourage or prevent a blind student from enrolling in a course that is generally perceived as difficult based solely upon the student's visual disability. "I have to say that the official setting in the admission office was somewhat unsupportive when I told him I wanted to enrol in English. I think he thought there were classes I would rather be taking than an English language course." Although he did not encourage him to take English, according to Arshad, he somehow got enrolled in it. "Based upon my own experience where administrators are concerned, if a blind student wants to enrol in a language class, I think the administration should do everything they can to encourage it, rather than saying, "This is probably something that is too difficult for you to handle"; I discovered that it's definitely not."

4.7.9 Arshad's Views about the Role of BVI Students

Arshad stated that it was essential for a BVI student to be optimistic and refrain from attributing all challenges he/she might face in the class to his/her visual disability. "If you find it hard to learn the English language, there is every likelihood that you are not succeeding for the same reasons because of which a sighted individual fails to be successful in his English language learning endeavours." He argued that all the people, whether they are visually challenged or not, are not equally gifted to learn languages. "I think success in learning languages depends upon a number of factors, visual impairment not being one of them; some people just don't have the aptitude for learning other languages."

4.8 Student No. 7: Farooq

4.8.1 Background

Farooq, a student of English at NUML, is suffering from a degenerative eye disease which rendered him completely blind when he was just thirteen years old. Farooq advanced

several reasons for learning the English language: (1) it is taught and learnt as a compulsory language in Pakistan; (2) All the competitive exams in Pakistan are given and taken in English; (3) he was fond of watching cartoons when young, and most of them would be in English those days; (4) he found learning English quite easy as compared with other subjects (e.g. Math, Physics and Geography, etc.); and (5) English language is considered to be a symbol of status and prestige in the society in which he lives. “These are some of the reasons which made me inclined towards learning English language.” Apart from English, Farooq also tried to learn French, but could not progress beyond the rudimentary level. “I found the diacritic marks in French very challenging. They were not available in braille to me.”

Farooq said that initially he found learning the English language very difficult, but with the passage of time, it became quite easy. It was difficult initially mainly because of the non-availability of course material in accessible format, Farooq explained. “I’ve studied throughout in integrated classes; my teachers have been fully sighted individuals all the way. They were good-natured, well-meaning individuals who wanted to help me, but they simply didn’t know how to do so.” There were no facilities, Farooq said, for BVI students in those integrated classes. “All they could do was to provide me the question papers in large print and that’s all.”

Farooq did not subscribe to the view that visual impairment could be a major hindrance in learning the English language. On the contrary, he believed it could be an asset. “In fact, my observation shows that the BVI individuals are generally better at speaking English, and this is mainly because they are very good listeners. And you know very well that listening compliments speaking.”

Farooq said that he found English language much easier than subjects like Math or geography. Visual impairment definitely hampers learning in those subjects, according to Farooq, but one could easily have mastery over the English language with or without sight.

4.8.2 Farooq’s Learning Strategies

With regard to the strategies, he employed for improving his writing skills, Farooq said that he wrote a diary. “I pen down my entire day’s activities before going to bed.”

Apart from writing diary, Farooq said he did not use any particular strategies to improve his writing.

Regarding the strategies for improving his speaking skills, Farooq said that he listened to his favourite cartoon and imitated them. He considered this strategy of listening to and imitating the native speakers beneficial for the sighted learners of English as well. "It can greatly enhance their fluency as well as accuracy." Farooq said that initially he used to translate his mother-tongue into English While speaking. "Now I not only try to think in English but also make a deliberate effort to completely banish my mother tongue from my thoughts, and it has helped me a lot in improving my English oral skills." Whenever he is alone, Farooq said, he just tried to find out ways for expressing certain ideas in English. "This strategy greatly improved my speaking skills because whenever I would be in a face-to-face conversation situation with someone, I'd have no difficulty in recalling words and expressions needed to express a particular idea."

With regard to the reading strategies, Farooq said that the BVI students could either read through their fingers or convert the reading material into some form of audio and listen to it. "I just read (through braille or audio) a particular paragraph twice or thrice and try to get the gist of that paragraph; in this way, I go through the whole chapter." The BVI learners of English, according to Farooq, also use such reading strategies as skimming and scanning but in a different manner from the sighted learners. "Although skimming is a bit difficult for me, but in scanning, I don't think I'm any different from the sighted individuals." At times, he said, the BVI individuals had an advantage over the sighted people, as their attention could be easily diverted by other visual distractions, whereas the BVI learners could concentrate in a more focused manner on their reading material.

With regard to his listening strategies, Farooq said that he just tried to listen to the native speakers as much as possible. "I think the visually impaired students generally have no problems with listening and speaking skills, they face more problems in the reading and writing skills mainly because of lack of access to study material in accessible format."

4.8.3 Farooq's Views about the Role of Assistive Technology in English Language Learning

Regarding the utility of assistive technology for BVI learners of English language, Farooq said that he could not imagine learning the English language without the aid of assistive technology (e.g. magnifying glass, CCTV and computer equipped with screen reader, etc.) “Without assistive technology, I cannot imagine learning the English language. Without my laptop, for example, I would be unable to look up the unfamiliar words in a dictionary, study books on grammar, improve my pronunciation, listen to the native speakers, read literature, and so on. I use my laptop for writing my exam papers as well.”

Regarding the availability of specialized equipment and assistive technology in classes, Farooq said no such things were made available by the university. Not only such tools and gadgets were not provided, he was also discouraged from using his own in class. “Even sometimes I was not allowed to use my braille equipment or the screen reader on my laptop in our class, because, it was argued, it distracted the sighted students.” Subscribing to the view of distraction, Farooq said he believed the BVI students should be taught in separate classes which are specially designed and equipped for them. Moreover, the sighted students also tinker with these gadgets, Farooq argued, and often destroy them. “Although in our class, there was no such special equipment available, but I used to be very worried about my own braille writer or laptop.” He said that gadgets such as magnifiers and CCTV for low vision students and laptops for all the visually impaired students should nevertheless be made available in classrooms. He also suggested that the issue of mobility should be given special attention: the structure should be designed in such a way that the visually challenged individuals face little mobility problems moving about the building.

4.8.4 Farooq's Views about the Availability of Study Material in Accessible Formats

A pre-requisite for successful learning of English language, Farooq believed, was the availability of the study material in accessible format. “If you have the study material in accessible format, then you can learn it quite easily.”

Regarding the availability of study material in accessible format, Farooq said that it was not available at all, and no attempt was made by the administrators to give it any serious thought. “We were handed that study material, which was intended to be used by sighted individuals, it was up to us then to convert that material into some sort of accessible format. To further compound our miseries, the study material sold to us was of very poor print quality, which was almost impossible to be successfully converted into accessible e-form through scanning.”

Regarding making the study material accessible to himself, Farooq said that he initially tried to approach it with the help of a magnifying glass or CCTV, using his remaining sight, but the frequent use of these gadgets not only gave him headaches, but their use was very time-consuming as well. “Nowadays, I scan the study material on to my laptop and listen to it with the help of a screen reader.”

4.8.5 Farooq’s Experiences in the Regular Second Language Classroom Environment

In order to function successfully in a regular class, Farooq said he employed certain strategies. Farooq uses his computer for taking notes in class. He accesses the coursebooks and secondary study material either in braille through his fingers, or listened to them through a screen reader on his laptop. He tries to improve his vocabulary by preparing lists of unfamiliar words along with their contextual uses in braille and going through them again and again. Instead of accessing the pictures and diagrams in the textbooks visually, Farooq accessed them through verbal descriptions provided to him either by his class fellows or friends and family members. Farooq said that he relied on the assistance of his sighted peers for reading assignments. Moreover, he often got his homework corrected by them in class. Farooq never shies away from asking his teachers to verbally describing any pictures, maps or diagrams. “My teachers try to accommodate me, but sometimes I have to remind them of my presence in class. In case my teachers are short of time, I then take the assistance of my sighted peers, which they often provide.”

4.8.6 Farooq’s Views about the Role of Teachers

Farooq said that teachers could play an important role in making the BVI students’ English language learning experience pleasant and more effective in regular classes. He

said teachers were instrumental in motivating the BVI students by accommodating them through small adjustments to their teaching style and lesson-plans. He expressed his regrets, however, that his sighted teachers had hardly any training on how to accommodate a blind student in their integrated classes. “I don’t know if my teachers were trained to teach BVI individuals. They simply didn’t know how to accommodate me by making small adjustments to their teaching styles.”

Regarding the attitude of his teachers towards him, Farooq said that it varied from teacher to teacher. He stated that by and large, his teachers’ attitude towards him could not be termed favourable, as he thought they considered him quite incapable and an extra burden on them. “Some of my teachers perceived me to be quite an incompetent and unintelligent learner, one who is always making excuses and always complaining.”

Regarding the more effective teaching strategies used by his teachers, Farooq said that these included: reading aloud the written material on the board, the description of pictures and assigning the responsibility to his sighted peers to help him in a reading or writing task in class. “Using the board, a lot and not reading aloud what was written on it, giving dictation and keeping the tempo very brisk, are some of those strategies/techniques which were quite ineffective in my case as a BVI student.” Regarding the role of teachers in making English language learning more effective for BVI students, Farooq said that they should try to accommodate the BVI students by giving them some extra attention in class, keeping in view their BVI students while planning their lessons and help them in getting access to the study material.

4.8.7 Farooq’s Perception of Interaction in the Regular Second Language Classroom

Farooq says that he is an extrovert and loves to make friends; hence he has good relationship with his classmates. Whenever he needs the assistance of his sighted peers, Farooq says, he never hesitates to ask for it, and they never disappoint him. He says that he generally relies on the help and assistance of his peers and friends for completing an in-class reading assignment. For example, once they were given a reading passage and asked to give the contextual meaning of certain underlined words. He requested his classmate to first give him the words and noted the words down on his laptop. He said he then requested

him to read the passage aloud to him. His sighted peer was requested to do it twice. “In the first reading, I concentrated on the overall meaning of the entire passage. In the second reading, my focus was specifically on the contextual meaning of the underlined words.” Farooq said that two of the given words were unfamiliar to him. “I first put down the contextual meaning of the familiar words, and then looked the two unfamiliar words up in the dictionary already installed on my laptop.” But Farooq regretted that usually he would often have to sit idle especially in those classes where they were given some reading or writing task and he would be unable to do it because it was inaccessible to him.

Farooq says that instead of holding the sighted people responsible for their miseries and deprivations, the BVI individuals should reach out to them and apprise them of their needs. “I have observed that the majority of sighted people have compassionate hearts and are always willing to help, but they simply don’t know how to assist us. It is our responsibility to make them aware about our requirements.”

4.8.8 Farooq’s Views about the Role of Administrators

Regarding the role of administrators in his language learning endeavours, Farooq said They facilitated him only to the extent that they allow him to have an amanuensis in his exam. Farooq suggested that there should be a separate department dealing with the challenges confronted by the BVI students. That department should be mandated, according to Farooq, to resolve the problems of the availability of the study material in accessible format, the provision of amanuensis or computers to the BVI students for taking exams, the training of teachers from time to time on the handling of BVI students in integrated classes, and so on.

4.8.9 Farooq’s Views about the Role of the BVI Students

Farooq finally suggested to the BVI students themselves to try to be self-dependent instead of relying on others all the time. “I have observed that some BVI students always look up to others to come forward and do things for them, even those things which they themselves can do with a little effort. I think the over-protective behaviour of those around them render them over-reliant and less independent.”

4.9 Student No. 8: Sadia

4.9.1 Background

Sadia is a Twenty-year-old studying in the regular classroom environment. She is congenitally blind since birth on account of a congenital disorder known as retinopathy of prematurity. Sadia has been studying English for more than 14 years. She reads widely, enjoys music, and is an accomplished skier. Sadia appeared to be quite witty and practical, answering questions during the interview unhesitatingly and thoughtfully. Her ideas and communicative skills were age-appropriate, and Sadia conveyed no sense of discomfort either towards herself or her visual impairment.

Sadia is keen on learning the English language as she believes it to be very useful in finding a good job. “I am interested in studying English because I believe it has great potential instrumental utility. It can help me a great deal in finding a respectable job.”

Sadia finds learning English as a second language quite easy mainly on account of the auditory nature of the subject. “I think learning the English language is not difficult for me because I can easily manage it through listening. Other subjects such as science and math are very visual as compared with English.”

4.9.2 Sadia’s learning strategies

Sadia uses a variety of learning strategies in order to succeed in a regular class. Some of the strategies used by her are not unlike those used by her sighted peers, whereas some are peculiar to her as a BVI student. Like sighted students, Sadia uses such writing strategies as brainstorming, the arrangement and sequencing of ideas, etc., but she differs from her sighted peers in terms of producing an actual piece of writing, as she writes either through braille or her laptop. Unlike the sighted individuals, who use pen and paper, a BVI individual uses the alternative means for writing (e.g. braille or computer equipped with a screen reader).

Regarding speaking strategies, Sadia said that, like her sighted peers, she used such strategies as verbalizing thoughts aloud when alone, participating in group discussion, practicing her English with friends in a one-to-one interaction session, etc. She suggested that sighted individuals needed to “rely less on gestures in a face-to-face interaction with BVI individuals.” In other words, since the BVI students can’t see the gestures of their

sighted interlocutors, they depend on them to provide the BVI participants with oral cues for a successful oral discourse. “Since she cannot see facial expressions and other body gestures, she has to rely only on verbal cues during oral interaction. She suggested that the sighted individuals, while interacting orally with BVI people, should rely less on the use of body language. “The BVI students are generally good at oral communication, but their sighted interlocutors need to rely least on the use of gestures during oral interaction with them.” Sadia seemed satisfied with the steps taken by her teachers and peers to accommodate her in group discussions and other oral interactions in class.

Sadia does her reading either through braille or screen reader on her laptop or smartphone. It means she access the written text in a different way. Unlike sighted students, Sadia cannot skim a document because of her visual incapacity. She has to read the entire document line by line even when she has to read for gist. She, therefore, takes more time, almost double the time a sighted person takes, to read a document.

She generally uses both braille and screen reader for reading, using different keyboard commands for different purposes. For instance, she uses the say-all command and increase the wpm (words per minute) speed of her screen reader when she intends to skim a document. When she aims to scan some document, she reduces the speaking tempo of her screen reader and go sentence by sentence, pausing when needed.

Sadia predominantly used braille initially both for reading and writing, but started using screen reader more recently, particularly for writing, as she considers screen reader to be more appropriate for writing, and braille more effective for reading. She says she uses braille for reading purposes as it gives her a direct access to the spelling of a word. “One can also check the spelling of a word while using a screen reader, but she has to stop the speech, go word by word and check the spelling of the desired word, which not only breaks the tempo of reading, but is also sometimes detrimental to comprehension.”

With regard to the listening strategies, Sadia said she believed there was hardly any difference in the strategies used by both the sighted and the BVI students. “I would use the same listening strategies even if I were sighted.” The only difference, according to Sadia, lied in the use of the accompanying text – sighted individuals access it with their eyes, whereas she accesses it through her fingers.

Sadia has had an extensive listening practice, as she not only listens to the written material via her screen reader, but also listen to the native speakers on the net. She consults digital dictionaries, available in the form of computer applications, whenever she comes across any unfamiliar word or expression

4.9.3 Sadia’s Views about the Availability of Study Material in Accessible

Formats

With regard to the availability of study material in accessible formats for BVI students in the university, Sadia said that she faced issues in finding study material in accessible formats even in specialized schools for BVI students; she did not expect to find it in an institution for able-bodied individuals. “Even in specialized schools for BVI students, we didn’t have enough study material and were forced to share one brailled textbook among seven students.” The availability of study materials in accessible formats in regular colleges and universities, according to Sadia, is just beyond imagination. It is up to the BVI students themselves to manage their study material for themselves. “I scan the printed material on to my laptop through a scanner which is quite a tedious job, and the results are not always very fruitful, as the scanned material almost invariably contain a lot of typographical errors.” She said that, besides being very time-consuming, removing those errors also required the assistance of a sighted volunteer which made her dependent on others, something she “utterly despised”. One of the main reasons for BVI students’ lagging behind in their academic endeavours, according to Sadia, is the non-availability of the study in accessible formats.

4.9.4 Sadia’s Views about the Role of Assistive Technology in English Language

Learning

Regarding the centrality of assistive technology for BVI learners, Sadia said it played a pivotal role in making the study material accessible to them as well as making them independent in their studies. Underscoring the utility of screen readers for BVI students, Sadia said that without them, learning the English language would have been quite difficult, if not impossible, for her. “I can’t imagine learning the English language without screen readers; I can use braille, but the study material available in braille is very limited, whereas screen readers enable you to gain access to a variety of study materials

related to English language, as they give you access to the world of internet.” Assistive technology puts the BVI students almost on a par with their sighted peers, particularly in terms of accessing the written word. “You can, independently, without the help of a sighted person, access and read a variety of stuff (e.g. newspapers, novels, magazines, grammar books, books on vocabulary, dictionaries, and so on).”

With regard to the availability of assistive technology for BVI students at specialized schools, regular colleges and universities, Sadia said that at the specialized schools for BVI students, certain tools and gadgets were available, though they were always insufficient and almost never up-to-date, no such facility was available to her at regular colleges and universities.

Regarding the knowledge and use of the latest assistive technology, Sadia said that she was not very much familiar with the latest assistive gadgets and tools, and could use only screen readers, braille converters and scanners, etc.

4.9.5 Sadia’s Experiences in the Regular Second Language Classroom

Environment

Sadia employs a variety of strategies, both nonadaptive and adaptive, to be successful in an integrated classroom environment. She has managed to obtain her English textbooks and other study material in braille and other accessible formats. In this way, she has put herself on a par with her sighted peers in terms of accessing the written word. Sadia has never availed the services of human readers in her studies of the English language. She has used audio tapes and electronic books along with the brailled texts, although the audio-taped material has always been backed up by material in braille and electronic formats. Sadia said she utilized the audiotapes mainly for improving her pronunciation of the target language.

Sadia uses a braille notetaking device for taking notes in class. Instead of taping lectures, however, she uses her brailled lecture notes and braille and electronic study material for reference.

Sadia says that her English teachers have been careful to verbalize material written on the board for her sake. In situations where the board work is a bit bulky, it is provided

to her ahead of class in order to enable her to render it accessible for herself. She does her homework and her assignments on her laptop with the help of a screen reader, prints them on her inkjet printer and submits them to her teacher for perusal and grading. “For my English course, I can print out information directly from my braille notetaker utilizing a standard printer for immediate reading by my regular classroom teachers.”

Sadia underscores the importance of self-advocacy for BVI learners in integrated classroom environment, and argues that they have to be assertive. She shares one of her experiences inside the classroom and said that once her English teacher asked them to go through the answers to an assignment which was written on the board. They were told that the student who spotted the most errors would be given a treat. But unmindful of the fact that there was a BVI student in the class, the teacher forgot to read the exercise aloud. Sadia said she waited for some time for the teacher to read the exercise out aloud for her, but seeing no signs of his doing so, she was forced to raise her hand and ask the teacher to read it out. But the teacher refused to do so, saying that he was short of time. He approached her after the class, however, and explained his situation to her. “I explained to him that you didn’t need to go into all the details of everything; all you needed to do was just to read aloud to me the sentences written on the board.” After this, Sadia says, the teacher never forgot to read aloud anything written on the board.

4.9.6 Sadia’s Views about the Role of Teachers

Sadia found some of her English language teachers to be more forthcoming with respect to accommodating her than others. "When she asked one of her teachers to provide her with class materials ahead of time so they could be rendered in accessible format for her, he behaved as if it was a major inconvenience for him. One other example of his unaccommodating behaviour is when he gave her the wrong question paper which resulted in a loss of precious exam time for her. “Once he gave me the wrong question paper (I am not sure whether he did it intentionally or unintentionally) and I discovered almost thirty minutes later that I was attempting the wrong questions. You simply can’t imagine how much I suffered at that time.” Sadia believed that, in the case of a BVI student in a mainstream class, a teacher’s role should be that of a trouble-shooter as well as helper. In

such situation, some teacher should have stepped forward to help her in rendering the question paper accessible for her.

Sadia, however, was quick to point out that all the teachers were not alike.

There are teachers who went beyond their mandatory professional obligations to accommodate her in the regular classroom environment as much as possible. “One of my English language teachers prepared the raised sound symbols with his own hands for me, using such things as wires and cardboard. I have kept those sound symbols as a souvenir with me.”

Sadia explained that most of her teachers emphasized both the visual and oral channels of learning. She said that most of her teachers took particular care to verbalize the material written on the board. Sometimes, however, a teacher would forget to read aloud the written information. Defending her teachers Sadia observed: “Some of my teachers tend to forget sometimes not because they don’t care, but because they forget.”

4.9.7 Sadia’s Perception of Interaction in the Regular Second Language Classroom

Sadia believes that, as a whole, her teachers and peers have no problem with her visual impairment. “Apart from one teacher, I think the rest of my teachers faced no problems on account of my presence in the regular class. Same is the case with my peers; I think they treat me like their sighted peers. For my part, I also try not to give them any impression that I am any different from them, and I believe I have been successful in obtaining equal treatment both from my teachers as well as my peers”.

4.9.8 Sadia’s Views about the Role of Administrators

Sadia stated that, in general, the administrative personnel were not directly involved in her English language learning experience. On one occasion, however, when the teacher (mentioned above) was not making any serious effort to make the study material available to her ahead of classes to be rendered in some accessible format, Sadia dearly wished the administrators had intervened. She formally complained to the administration about the issue, but no measures were taken to rectify the situation. “I waited and waited, but nothing happened. Moreover, it made my relations with the teacher a bit sour.” She believed that,

apart from adopting effective strategies for teaching the BVI students, the teacher's role is also to act as a liaison between the BVI student and administrators in order to solve any problems as and when arose.

4.9.9 Sadia's Views about the Role of BVI Students

Sadia believes that her English language learning experience could be made more positive if she, her teacher and the administrators worked in collaboration for identifying and resolving the potential blindness-related problems. She believes that her success could be optimized if she was given a level playing-field as compared with her sighted peers in terms of gaining access to the study material and classroom tasks and activities. "The teacher should make her/himself as accessible to a BVI student as she/he is to a sighted student. Anything written on the board, for instance, should be read aloud for the BVI student. Moreover, the study material should be provided to the student in braille or any other accessible format ahead of classes. Such measures can be the key to the BVI students' success in a regular language class."

Sadia's advice for other BVI students is that they should try to function just like sighted students. "Like their sighted peers, the BVI students should study and pay full attention to the class-lectures. Moreover, they should try not to depend too much on their sighted peers or teachers."

4.10 Student No. 9: Rafiq

4.10.1 Background

Rafiq, a twenty-two-year-old partially sighted but print-challenged energetic and enthusiastic student of English literature and linguistics at NUML, is suffering from Retinitis Pigmentosa, a congenital degenerative eye-disease. "In fact, all my siblings, except one sister, are suffering from this disease and are consequently either blind or partially sighted." He spoke eloquently and with boundless energy.

Rafiq said that in theory at least, students in Pakistan study the English language for at least fourteen years, beginning at the primary level and continuing right up to the graduation level, English language is taught and studied as a compulsory subject. He started learning the English language at a school for blind and visually impaired children. "But frankly speaking, I learnt no English language there; the teachers simply couldn't make

any lasting impression on me. Access to the study material was quite hard and the administrators cared very little in creating a conducive English language learning environment there.” As a result, he learnt very little English language at that school, and, out of sheer disappointment, decided to quit regular schooling. Later on, he appeared in the SSC part 1 exam in private capacity. He stated that till his HSSC, he had very little knowledge about the English language: “I wasn’t even able to spell the word ‘kite’.”

Rafiq said that he was interested in learning the English language because of various reasons (e.g. it is a symbol of status, a source of knowledge, and an instrument for obtaining a job). “For me, English empowers you; it gives you a prominent position anywhere in debates and discussion, etc.” He stated that since he was interested in obtaining knowledge, whether it was related to literature, history or science, the English language could provide him that platform to have access to all sort of knowledge. Yet another reason for learning the English language, according to Rafiq, was the availability of the screen readers for computers and smartphones in the English language and a few other, mainly Western languages. “I got interested in the English language because I knew it could open new avenues of knowledge for me.”

Rafiq said that English language learning was very difficult than other subjects, mainly because of its complex spelling system and its extensive vocabulary. But he said he found those subjects which are more visual in nature (e.g. math and science) even more difficult than English language.

Learning English language, according to Rafiq, is different from learning other subjects in the sense that, unlike other subjects, errors of form (in particular) and errors of content (in general) are strictly penalized by the English language teachers. “The compulsion of being absolutely correct when expressing yourself is something that distinguishes English language learning from other subjects. You have to concentrate on your spelling, grammar, punctuations, as well as the development of your ideas, the organization of your thoughts, and cogency of arguments.

4.10.2 Rafiq’s Learning Strategies

Rafiq employed various strategies for improving his English language proficiency and for successful functioning in an integrated class. With regard to reading strategies he

used in class, Rafiq said that since he could not use braille, he had to utilize computer-based assistive technology for reading. Rafiq said that he rarely used braille; he was simply not good at it, but he recognized the importance and utility of braille for BVI students. “Although I can’t use braille myself, yet I do acknowledge its importance for BVI learners.” Since he hardly used braille, he, therefore, had to rely on computer technology to do his reading. “I listen to reading materials via my screen reader. In other words, I turn the written material into speech with the help of screen readers. It means I read through listening.” He acknowledged, however, that one could only scan a text and not skim through it when reading in this manner with the help of a screen reader. “But one of the major disadvantages with reading in this manner is you can’t skim through the text quickly. You have to go in a linear order.”

Rafiq said that he used to use magnifying glasses, but he had to quit them as he would have headaches. Moreover, his reading speed with magnifying glasses was also very low “almost one hour per page. Besides I’m much more comfortable with screen readers.”

With regard to the writing strategies, he employed in the regular language class, Rafiq stated that the strategies he used were not different from those used by his sighted peers. “Apart from the difference in medium – they write with their hands and I on my laptop – I don’t think I use different strategies for writing than my sighted peers.” Moreover, he did not feel the need to take down lecture notes in class because he could retain things perfectly well. “I hardly take notes in class, as I’ve got photographic memory.” When it becomes absolutely necessary to take down notes, he said he would request one of his classmates to help him in this regard. “I request one of my class-mates to audio-tape for me whatever notes she/he might have taken in class.”

For an in-class written assignment, Rafiq said he used his laptop (which he generally carried to class). He claimed that he could write faster (using his keyboard) than most of his sighted peers. “Let me tell you that I can write better and faster on my laptop than my most sighted classmates can do with their hands. But material related to the written assignment has to be available to me in accessible format.” Rafiq regretted the fact, however, that most of the time the material was not always accessible to him. “In such situations, I have to take the help of a sighted peer, and get the assignment read out to me.”

Rafiq stated that his peers were very forthcoming in assisting him because they were dependent on him in certain areas as well. “My classmates are more than willing to help me as they are dependent on me in certain areas.” For a home-assignment, Rafiq said that he used the same strategies as he did for in an in-class reading and writing assignments.

With regard to the strategies, he used for improving his listening skills, Rafiq said that on account of being visually challenged, he relied mainly on his listening skills to grasp and comprehend people and texts. He greatly improved his listening skills because of extensive practice (mainly out of compulsion) in listening. “Consequently, my listening is very good.” He acknowledged, however, that his listening skills in English language were not always good. “I had to work very hard to improve them: I have been listening to the native speakers, especially through movies, for the last five years). Initially I had difficulty understanding them but gradually I became used to their accent and now Alhamdo Lillah (thank God) I have little problem understanding them.”

Similarly, with regard to the oral strategies he employed in class, Rafiq said that he used almost the same strategies as were used by his sighted peers with slight variation. “When it comes to presentations in class, I present like my sighted peers, of course with the help of assistive technology (i.e. my laptop equipped with a screen reader).” He acknowledged that he relied on the cooperation of his group-members for his successful participation in group discussions. “In group discussions I do have difficulty in turn-taking, but there I mainly rely on the verbal cues, provided to me by my peers, instead of visual cues, and my classmates are always willing to cooperate with me there.” He said that he tried to make up for his sightlessness by sheer work, he almost always remained on top in terms of performance in class. It earned him the respect of both his sighted teachers as well as peers. “I always try to work hard and dominate the class; so people give me respect.”

4.10.3 Rafiq’s Views about the Availability of Study Material in Accessible Formats

With regard to the availability of study material in accessible format, Rafiq said that he had to ensure the availability of the study material on his own; neither the administration nor his teachers considered it their responsibility to help him in this regard. “I have to render the study material into some accessible format myself, by scanning them,

downloading them in soft form, or asking someone to audio-record them for me. Neither the teacher concerned, nor the administration consider it to be their responsibility to make the material available to me.”

4.10.4 Rafiq’s Views about the Role of Assistive Technology in English Language Learning

Rafiq said that assistive technology, particularly computer-based assistive technology, played an important role in helping him learn the English language. He said that he was not good at braille, and relied mainly on the use of computers equipped with screen readers, particularly JAWS (Job Access with Speech). “Since I do my studies mainly through the text-to-speech assistive technology, my listening skills is better than most of my sighted peers.”

Rafiq said initially he used to obtain information about the various assistive technologies available for BVI students, but as he became more proficient in the use of internet with the help of assistive technology, he kept himself up-to-date with the latest developments in the field. He said that he preferred screen reader available on IOS devices over JAWS for Windows, as it was more advanced and more user-friendly. “The screen reader on IOS devices can even read out the phonemic symbols for example schwa or /d3/ and so on.”

Underscoring the importance of assistive technology, particularly the computer-based ones, Rafiq stated that he could not imagine learning the English language without them. “Without the available assistive technology, I could not have learnt the English language, or carried on with my studies in general successfully. I believe these technologies put us on equal footing with our sighted peers.” But Rafiq regretted the fact that there was hardly any specialized equipment available in class for visually impaired students, even though he was studying at one of the most prestigious universities of Pakistan.

4.10.5 Rafiq’s Experiences in the Regular Second Language Classroom Environment

Regarding his experiences in an integrated class, Rafiq stated that he tried to participate in class proceedings just like his sighted peers. “I just go in and start listening to the teacher; participate in class activities when I am required to; try to be more vocal and

dominant in the class.” He further stated that sometimes he becomes so dominant that he deprives his peers from obtaining equal opportunities to participate; the teacher has to intervene and literally stop him from sharing his views in order to give his sighted classmates a chance. “I don’t know why I want to be dominant in my class, but I think it’s got something to do with my past: I was looked down upon when I was young because of my visual impairment.” He said that he wanted to assert himself in order to demonstrate it to the sighted people that the BVI individuals are “just like them, even better than them”, in terms of academic accomplishments. It is for this very reason that he has to work “doubly hard” as compared with his sighted classmates, Rafiq stated.

Rafiq said that Overall, he had had a positive experience at the university as most of the teachers and sighted peers were quite cooperative with him. “Most of the teachers are quite willing to cooperate with me (e.g. whenever something is written on the board, they read it aloud for me), but there are some who simply don’t accommodate me in their regular class at all. In such cases, I rely on my sighted classmates’ assistance.” He further stated that he relied mainly on his own efforts to learn the English language.

Rafiq said that for successful participation in class activities, it was essential that the study material was available to him in some accessible format. Further in certain reading and writing activities, he relied on the assistance of his sighted peers and teachers. “If I have a given task accessible to me, I won’t need to rely on the assistance of my peers or teachers. The saga of dependence begins the moment the task is not available to me in accessible format. So if you want to make the BVI students participate in in-class tasks and activities, especially those related to reading or writing, make them available to them in advance.”

4.10.6 Rafiq’s Views about the Role of Teachers

Rafiq stated that during the course of his English language learning experience, he came across many teachers. Some of them were very cooperative whereas others simply ignored him. “Some teachers are very mindful of our problems, and they try to cooperate with me in every way: they describe the diagrams, pictures and figures to me in class, something I really appreciate; they read out whatever they write on the board without me

having to remind them to do so, and so on.” He said that these teachers treated him just like their sighted students; tried to resolve any problems he faced; treated him with respect.

On the other hand, there were teachers, he said, who hardly took any care of him in their classes. “Some teachers are quite non-cooperative for reasons unknown to me. I have to remind to these teachers, for instance, to read aloud whatever they write on the board almost on a daily basis. Sometimes they just ignore my requests for a picture or figure description to my utter frustration.

With regard to steps the English language teacher should take to make the English language learning experience more effective and enjoyable for BVI students in a regular class, Rafiq suggested that they needed to change their views about these special students: they should believe in the BVI students’ abilities and hence should accommodate them in terms of class activities and tasks. “The teachers should take the BVI learners along with their sighted students – they should make them participate in the class activities, as most BVI students are less active in a regular class.” He also suggested that the teachers should know the BVI students’ names and when needed should address them by name instead of using pronouns or gestures.

4.10.7 Rafiq’s Perception of Interaction in the Regular Second Language Classroom

Rafiq emphasized the importance of good interpersonal relationship of BVI students with their sighted peers in an integrated class. He said the BVI students should be forthcoming in expressing their needs, as the sighted individuals are often unaware of them. “My sighted peers and teachers were quite unaware of my special needs. They wanted to assist me but did not know how to do so. I had to apprise them of my special needs.”

Rafiq said that his sighted peers should stop judging the visually challenged individuals only in terms of their blindness. He said that BVI students were generally underestimated by their sighted peers unless they were assertive and dominating in class. “Most of the sighted peers simply attribute everything to our visual impairment. If for example, I’m good at my studies, they believe since I have to do nothing else, I therefore set and study; if I’m dominant in class, they believe BVI individuals have photographic memory; if I’m assertive, they think I’m simply unaware of the feelings of others because

I can't see facial expressions and other body gestures; if I remain quiet and participate less in class activities, again they attribute it to my visual impairment. In short, we are judged and rated in the light of visual impairment and not as thinking and feeling individuals like them.”

4.10.8 Rafiq's Views about the Role of Administrators

With regard to the steps the administration took to facilitate him in his English language learning efforts, Rafiq stated that the only thing commendable they did was to provide the BVI students with laptops (equipped with screen readers) and allow them to take their written exams on them without the assistance of any amanuensis. “The administration has done one remarkable thing: they have allowed us to take our exams on laptops – we have been made independent in this regard. But they do not allow us to have extra time in our exam, something which is allowed to BVI learners all over the world.”

With regard to the steps the administration needed to take to make the English language learning experience more fruitful and enjoyable for BVI students in a regular class, Rafiq stated that all the study materials should be made available to visually challenged students in accessible formats. He also suggested that measures should be taken to make the study materials available to the sighted students in the library accessible to the BVI students as well. Similarly, tests and exams should be made available in accessible formats, and BVI students should be allowed to take their exams and tests in either braille or on laptop (whichever format they feel comfortable with). “Currently the BVI students are allowed to use a laptop in their exams, but they should have the option of braille as well.”

4.10.9 Rafiq's Views about the Role of the BVI Students

One of the most important things BVI students should do, according to Rafiq, is to make themselves independent in their studies as far as possible. For this purpose, they should involve themselves in the class proceedings as much as possible. Further, he advised the BVI students to make use of the latest assistive technology in order to be more independent in their studies like their sighted peers. “The BVI students should make themselves aware of and use the latest assistive technology, as this is the only thing which can put them on par with their sighted peers both inside and outside their class. For instance,

the use of Virtual Eye (used on Android phones) and Seeing AI (used on IOS devices) made me independent in doing in-class reading assignments, as these applications enabled me to do real-time reading.”

4.11 Student No. 10: Saima

4.11.1 Background

Saima is a 19-year-old undergraduate studying at the Islamic international University (Islamabad) in a regular classroom environment. She is suffering from retinopathy of prematurity, an eye disease which has rendered her completely blind from birth. Saima currently carries a grade point average of 3.6. She has studied English as a subject for over fourteen years. In addition to English, Saima has studied a variety of other subjects such as music, Islamic history, Math and general science etc. Saima’s English language skills can be termed as impressive. In her own words, her teachers consider Saima to be highly proficient in terms of her English language skills. In summer vacations, Saima voluntarily works for a non-governmental organization and teaches computer skills to other BVI women. Saima’s goal is to enter a career field that would allow her to work extensively for the uplift of BVI individuals, especially BVI women.

Saima exhibited, during the interview, a sense of ceaseless energy and enthusiasm, both in general as well as for her favourite subject. Saima talked enthusiastically, constantly rocking as she expressed her ideas. It became quickly obvious that Saima’s verbal skills were way beyond average; her answers were thoughtfully constructed and hence were brimming with cogency of argument.

She gave reasons for developing an unwavering commitment to the study of English language. “At first, I found English quite boring. During my sixth -grade year, we were lucky to have a really talented teacher who aroused my curiosity in the English language, and I became really fond of it. Till then, I considered English to be a boring class; but after that I would eagerly wait for my English teacher and her class with us. That encounter totally changed my perspective; I was inspired to do all I could to learn to communicate in the English language.” Regarding her good proficiency in the English language, Saima stated: “I think I’m good at English because of my sheer desire to excel in it. . . I knew that English language could be used instrumentally to achieve certain goals

(e.g. obtaining a respectable job, gaining access to a storehouse of knowledge and information via the internet, and getting the opportunity to exchange my ideas globally)."

Saima advanced various reasons for her preference of English over other subjects. English reading and writing can be done quite easily in braille because of the availability of braille equivalents for every character in the English language, according to Saima. She believes that in certain subjects, one has to deal with graphs and tables, something hard to duplicate in braille. "I find geography, math and science, for instance, very difficult because of these subjects' heavy reliance on visual conceptualization. English language is very oral in nature, and one has to use one's memory a great deal for retaining the vocabulary items and grammar rules of the language." She says she finds it quite easy to participate in the English class instead of math class because of the very visual nature of the later. She says she doesn't like those subjects either which are very theoretical in nature and have little practical value because they involve a great deal of memorization and note-taking in class.

4.11.2 Saima's Learning Strategies

Saima relies on both braille and computer for her studies. "I have learnt braille and also have a basic knowledge in computer, and I try to comprehend the written language concepts through both the media." Saima said that she studied up to the SSC level in Al-Maktoom High School for blind where little attention was given to both the speaking and listening skills. At the university, however, according to Saima, these two skills received equal attention.

With regard to her speaking skills, Saima stated that like other BVI students, she too used her ears a lot for her study. Since listening and speaking skills complement one another, she has developed a fair amount of command over the speaking skills. Certain strategies she used included: loud thinking when alone; exploring and creating opportunities to converse with her class-fellows in English (both inside and outside the class); and participating in group-discussions, presentations and other oral activities in the class. "She asserted that the sighted students also used the same strategies for improving their oral skills.

Saima said that she differed from her sighted peers in terms of the tools she employed for accessing the written word. She uses her fingers when she reads. She also uses screen reader for reading a text, i.e. she converts the reading text into speech and then listen to it. Apart from using different tools to access the written word, Saima believes that she is not different from her sighted peers in terms of using other reading strategies (skimming and scanning). She went on to explained, however, that the BVI individuals generally did their reading in a linear order because they could go only line-by-line while reading a given text through both braille as well as text-to-speech screen-readers. It means that they can only scan the written text and find it hard to skim through the text because of their visual limitations.

Saima acknowledges that the world is structured for the majority (sighted individuals), the sighted learners, therefore, face no problems in accessing the written materials. In the case of BVI learners, the written material has to be rendered into some accessible format.

Saima said that she used both braille as well as laptop (equipped with screen reader) for writing. Like her sighted peers, she brainstorms, develops, arranges and elaborates on the ideas about a particular topic. Similarly, she listens again and again to the written piece through her screen reader for better comprehension. Saima said that her writing strategies remained the same even when she used braille.

Saima asserted that the BVI students did not significantly differ from their sighted peers in terms of using listening strategies. Like them, she listens to her teachers, classmates, and, more importantly, to the native speakers via internet on her smartphone to improve her listening skills.

4.11.3 Saima's Views about the Availability of Study Material in Accessible Formats

Sharing her experiences as a BVI English language learner, Saima said that she confronted many challenges in terms of accessibility to study material initially, when she was not familiar with the latest assistive technology. she further stated that, despite the fact that textbooks were available in limited quantity in accessible format, accessibility to study material was nevertheless a major issue even at the specialized school for BVI students.

Secondary study materials such as bilingual dictionaries, books on grammar and vocabulary were simply non-existent there.

With regard to the availability of study material in accessible formats for BVI students in the university, Saima stated that no such material was available. The availability of study materials in accessible formats in regular colleges and universities, according to Saima, is just beyond imagination. It is the responsibility of the BVI students to make the study material accessible to themselves (either by converting the hard printed material into soft form through scanning or ask a friend to audiotape it for them, or obtain the converted materials from a senior BVI student who might have made it accessible through the above two procedures.

But the process of converting the printed study material into some accessible format is very time-consuming and, according to Saima, it is one of the main reasons that the BVI students generally lagged behind their sighted peers in integrated classes. Moreover, the scanned materials contain typographical errors, as the existing OCR technology cannot scan the printed text with 100 percent accuracy. A BVI student, therefore, needs the assistance of a sighted person in refining the scanned text.

4.11.4 Saima's Views about the Role of Assistive Technology in English Language Learning

Regarding the centrality of assistive technology for BVI learners in their English language learning endeavours, Saima said that she believed it played a pivotal role in making the study material accessible to them as well as making them independent in their studies. Highlighting the utility of screen readers for BVI students, Saima said that without them, learning the English language would have been quite difficult for her. She can also use braille, but the study stuff available in braille is very limited, whereas screen readers enable her to gain access to a variety of study materials related to English language available on the net. Assistive technology, according to Saima, puts the BVI students almost on a par with their sighted peers with regard to English language study. They can, independently, without the help of a sighted person, access and read a variety of stuff (e.g. grammar books, books on vocabulary, dictionaries, newspapers, magazines, novels and so on).”

With regard to the availability of assistive technology for BVI students at specialized schools, regular colleges and universities, Saima said that at the specialized schools for BVI students certain tools and gadgets were available, though they were always insufficient and almost never up to date, no such facility was available to her at regular colleges and universities. In the specialized school, for example, only a few braille slats and stylers were available, according to Saima, but not in sufficient numbers. If the situation is so pathetic in specialized schools, what can one expect at regular colleges and universities. Regarding the knowledge and use of the latest assistive technology, Saima said that she was not very much familiar with the latest assistive gadgets and tools, and could use only screen readers, braille converters and scanners, etc.

4.11.5 Saima's Experiences in the Regular Second Language Classroom

Environment

Saima employs a variety of strategies and tools to be successful in the regular second language classroom. To begin with, Saima tries to make the relevant study material accessible to her by either transcribing them into braille or making them available in E-format which can then be accessed through a screen reader installed on her laptop or smartphone. In this way, she tries to enable herself to have equal access to the information her peers might receive. She says she always tries to be less reliant on others and, till the time of the interview, has never availed the services of sighted readers during her study. Whenever Saima needs to submit her assignments, she prepares them on her laptop and prints them out with the assistance of a screen reader installed on her computer. She asks her English teacher to read the information aloud whenever he writes something on the board. She then writes it down on her Braille 'n Speak. She also uses the same device for taking notes in class. All of Saima's exams are administered on computer, and she is given some extra time to complete them. She says that she tries to compel her teachers to describe pictures, charts or diagrams to her, and she deems it to be her responsibility to ask for clarification in case she does not comprehend something. Because Saima must listen at the same time to both her screen reader, as she takes down notes, as well as her teacher, who is talking to the class, she says it has helped her improve her listening skills a great deal than she might have if she were sighted.

Some of the techniques Saima employed in order to succeed in an integrated setting are identical to those which are used by sighted students as well. These include full participation in oral in-class activities, reading ahead of classes and coming prepared to classes. “I try to comprehend the English conversation and to participate in speaking activities in class as much as possible. I also attempt to come prepared to my classes and to read in advance.”

4.11.6 Saima’s Views about the Role of Teachers

Although Saima’s overall second language learning experience appeared to be on the positive side, yet she also faced some challenges and confronted certain frustrations along the way. Saima believed her English language teachers were least aware of the teaching techniques and methods which could have resulted in her maximum participation, satisfaction and independence in the integrated classroom environment. She says that some teachers were very visual in the presentation of materials which often resulted in her lack of understanding and consequent frustration. “I felt that some of my sighted teachers didn't feel at ease communicating with me . . . they always forgot to describe a picture or diagram they showed to the class . . . they almost invariably forgot to read aloud to me what they wrote on the whiteboard . . . I had to interrupt and ask my teacher for clarification.”

Saima also expressed her concern regarding her teachers’ indifferent attitude towards the errors which sometimes appeared in her braille or electronic copy of the textbook. These errors often result from scanning books with poor quality of print or the overuse of braille books. She says that most of her teachers found it hard to realise that the study materials in alternate formats would contain errors which needed to be rectified. “My teachers found it hard to realise that my copy would sometimes have errors which were not there in the books of other students.”

Saima also had some positive experience with some of her teachers as well. She believes that some of her teachers played a very positive role in her English language learning endeavours. “They always cooperated with me and encouraged me not to rely on others’ help and try to function in the integrated classroom setting as independently as possible. They made every effort to ensure the availability of all the study material to me in accessible format which was available to my sighted peers.” She says that those teachers

were always available to her whenever she needed them, but they also encouraged her to be less reliant on others and be her own person. Consequently, Saima has developed the habit of having all of her study materials available to her in accessible format (e.g. transcribed into braille or converted into E-format). Saima stated that one of her seniors also encouraged her to use audio-taped textbooks as an alternative to the electronic or brailled material. She suggested that diversifying the resources of accessible formats might prove to be very beneficial, especially when one has to deal with enormous increase in the amount of material to study. Saima, however, feel that comprehending the native speakers on audiotapes is simply beyond her and she likes to use braille or screen readers instead.

4.11.7 Saima's Perception of Interaction in the Regular Second Language Classroom

Saima acknowledges the importance of group interaction and considered it to be an integral component of class participation. However, she sees herself to be not fully capable of availing herself the opportunities to interact appropriately with her classmates. She says her classmates were initially a little dubious about interacting with her, but the situation eased a little when the teacher intervened and encouraged them to interact with her. She is quick to point out, however, that her peers were good people; they were simply unaware how to relate to her. She says it often happened when some peers said something and she could not understand, and when she asked for clarification, they simply ignored her. She confesses she does not socialize with any of her classmates outside the classroom, and she does not have any friends in her class. One of the reasons behind her peers' attitude, Saima says, is her tendency to dominate the class and try to answer all questions the teachers ask. "I think my classmates don't like it, but I find it very hard to refrain myself from speaking out when I have all the answers at my fingertips."

4.11.8 Saima's Views about the Role of Administrators

Saima proposed certain measures to be taken by those involved in BVI students' education in order to make the second language learning experience a positive one for them. She said that both visual and oral concepts should be emphasised, and teachers should encourage the speaking of the target language in the classroom. Moreover, the assignments should be given to the BVI students well in advance of the due date so that

they have ample time to first render the assignment accessible to themselves before completing and submitting them. She suggested that the timely availability of the study material in accessible formats should be ensured, so that the BVI students were not at a disadvantage as compared with their sighted peers in terms of study and in-class activities.

4.11.9 Saima's Views about the Role of BVI Students

Regarding the role of the BVI students in making their second language learning experience pleasant and productive for themselves, Saima suggested that they should be assertive in communicating their needs to their teachers. She said that her teachers might not be necessarily aware of her needs, as they were not blind. It is, thus, her responsibility to make them aware about her specialised needs. "If, for example, my teacher forgets to describe a picture to me, it is my responsibility to draw her attention to it and make her describe it to me. . . We should be in charge of our English language study."

In the above pages, data based on interviews with the BVI students was presented before the reader. The data revealed certain trends with regard to the experiences of BVI students in integrated classes from their own perspectives (e.g. reasons for learning the English language, different strategies used by the BVI learners for improving the four major skills, their views about access to the written word, the efficacy of assistive technology in learning the English language, strategies used by BVI learners for survival in integrated classes, their views regarding most effective teaching strategies, their dependence on the cooperation of both teachers and peers, their views about the role of administrators, and so on.) In the second half of this chapter, data from the interviews with the sighted teachers is presented.

4.12 Teacher 1: Mr. Ali

4.12.1 Background

Mr. Ali, an energetic young man, has been teaching at the department of English at NUML for more than three years till the time of interview. He enjoys biking and spending time with his family. Till the time of interview, he had the experience of having three BVI students in his classes. "Apart from teaching BVI students, I also have the experience of invigilating over them during their exams."

Although Mr. Ali had no formal training with regard to teaching English language to BVI students in integrated classes, but he said he had an on-field training by trying to accommodate them as fully as possible by being open and friendly with them and addressing their needs to the best of his abilities. In other words, he tries to find out about his BVI students' needs and then adjust his teaching accordingly. "I always try to adjust my teaching according to the needs of my BVI students. Once you are aware of your BVI students' needs, you know how to accommodate them in your regular classes."

Initially", Mr. Ali said, he had absolutely no knowledge of either braille or any assistive technology for BVI students. But, on account of the feedback he received from his BVI students, he is now familiar with the assistive technology used by them. "So many things are still new to me", Mr. Ali further stated, "but that's the wonderful thing about this job - you have the opportunity to learn new things on a day-to-day basis." Despite his keen interest in them, and his firm resolve to help them, he expressed his helplessness, however, to assist them in certain situations. "Sometimes, though, I'm not sure what I can do to help these BVI students. I think every teacher has that feeling."

Mr. Ali stated that English language study differed from other academic subjects in terms of the adaptations that are necessary to render the subject readily accessible to blind students. The transcription and interpretation of English language into a braille format requires knowledge by student and, if possible, by teacher, of the specialized characters utilized to represent the various symbols of the language being studied. Mr. Ali believes that English language study is easier for blind students to excel in than other types of academic subjects, such as Math, which is a veery visual subject in comparison to English.

4.12.2 Mr. Ali's Observations and Perceptions

Mr. Ali believed that the BVI students had, on the whole, good experience in his classes because he was cognizant of their needs and challenges and, not only tried to accommodate them himself, but also ensured that their sighted peers cooperated with them. "In my class, they had a very good experience as I and their fellow sighted peers fully cooperated with them, and we treated them like normal human beings." He stated that, like his sighted students, his BVI learners also varied from one another in terms of their individual capabilities and skills. On the basis of his experience with the BVI students, Mr.

Ali has concluded that those who are congenitally blind are harder to teach and make understand than those who become blind later in their life, as they had developed the basic abstract concepts till then. “One of my students, who lost his sight in some accident when he was in his teens, was easier to teach as compared with those who were either born blind or lost their sight very early in their childhood, as he had developed the basic concepts before becoming blind.”

Mr. Ali termed his experience with the BVI students as very positive. “I had a wonderful experience with my BVI students as their English teacher; they were so motivated and keen about learning the English language.” Mr. Ali stated that often their language proficiency was way above other students in the class. “My BVI students were some of the most brilliant students I have ever had in my class. . . they were always very diligent and almost invariably came well prepared to class.” Elaborating on his BVI students’ performance in the classroom, Mr. Ali said that his sighted students were somewhat less sensory than his BVI students, as they were keener and more attentive in their listening skills as compared with their sighted peers. He asserted that he found his BVI students to be more vocal in their use of English language both inside and outside of class.

He also found them to be very vocal in their questions. “Their questions tended to be very specific, seeking in-depth knowledge about the target language. . . It was obvious that the rest of the students simply did not seek the level of information regarding the English language as his BVI students did”. Mr. Ali also believes that his BVI students tried to be independent in terms of their studies. “One of my BVI students explored all avenues to practice his English and he did not shy away from making friends on-line to practice his English with, and Thus, he had the opportunity to utilize his English skills more than most of the other students did.”

While his BVI students experienced no academic difficulties in terms of their learning of English, Mr. Ali stated that they faced certain challenges with regard to social interaction. They found it somewhat difficult to establish and maintain good relationships with their peers in class. “Initially their sighted peers are a bit unsure about how to react to a BVI classmate. . . It was quite a novel experience for them, as the majority of them didn’t

have the opportunity of being around a visually challenged person before. . . But as they got use to the BVI students and saw how well they functioned on their own, their sighted classmates became more accepting of them.” Mr. Ali asserted that one of his students was so proficient in the target language that sometimes he could be overbearing in class, especially in groupwork. "Consequently, some of his classmates became jealous of his abilities.” Mr. Ali stated that the same student had the tendency to blurt out answers to questions asked by teacher in class, depriving the rest of his classmates of an opportunity to answer. “Sometimes I had the feeling that the rest of the students avoided answering my questions because they believed that their blind classmate knew all the answers and would not give them any opportunity to answer them.”

Mr. Ali stated that self-advocacy is one of the weak areas for some of the BVI students, as they generally do not mention in any unequivocal terms their needs. He believes that Self-advocacy is essential for a BVI student studying in an integrated classroom environment, as this is the only way through which they can familiarize their teachers with their specific needs. He argues that teachers could help them in a better way only when they know what the needs of the BVI students are. “Something that concerns me most is the tendency among BVI students not to unequivocally express their needs for accommodation to their teachers and administrators. Consequently, their needs remain largely unaddressed and the BVI students fail to perform to their full potential in an integrated classroom setting.”

Mr. Ali is concerned about some BVI students’ inability to act in a socially appropriate manner, especially in terms of their interaction with their sighted peers. “Because one of my BVI students was so far ahead of the rest of his classmates in terms of his proficiency in English, he had the tendency to dominate the class, hardly allowing anyone else to answer questions. . . he started speaking in English from the moment he entered class. . . the rest of the students didn't do that. . . I think the rest of the students in class were intimidated by him.”

That BVI student’s inability to act in a socially acceptable manner resulted in somewhat poor performance by his other classmates. "They simply stopped to participate, believing that he knew all the answers and would provide an answer before any of them

could even think about it.” The situation got so acute that Mr. Ali had to hold a meeting with the BVI student, attempting to persuade him not to blurt out answers and give the other students a chance as well. “I held a meeting with the BVI student and asked him not to blurt out answers. . . Sometimes you would know the answers, but you should refrain from raising your hand in order to give the other a chance to provide an answer.” Mr. Ali stated that the other students’ participation increased considerably as the BVI student managed to restrain himself from answering every question.

Mr. Ali knows that the overbearing BVI student was not viewed favourably by his classmates. “While his classmates were overawed by his English language skills, they viewed him to be somewhat arrogant and Mister Know-it-all.” Mr. Ali explained that the BVI student’s obsession with the English language, which resulted in his continuous use it both inside and outside of class, led to his socializing problems with his classmates. Mr. Ali was, however, at a loss about how to resolve the BVI student’s attitudinal issue. “I simply don’t know how to resolve this issue. . . His attitude may be either attributed to his obsession to be at the centre of attention, or he might have some issues at home.”

Mr. Ali said that based on his experience, the BVI students confronted certain challenges because of their visual impairment in a regular class. The first of them is more of a social nature, i.e. acceptance by their sighted teachers and peers. Generally, it is believed, according to Mr. Ali, that a blind person is incapable, their physical limitation is associated with mental incapacity. He said that he did not think they were inferior in any way to their sighted peers in terms of their mental capabilities. He always found his BVI students mentally very strong and extremely determined. He said that he heard one of his students as saying: “Although people believe that I’m disabled, but I believe this is a blessing in disguise because this limitation gives my thinking a different dimension, and, with positive intent and attitude, I can be just like sighted individuals.” Mr. Ali regretted the fact that negative attitudes with regard to special people did exist in the society at large, and a lot of educating needed to be done.

Mr. Ali also stated that these students relied on assistive tools and gadgets for success in their English language learning endeavours, something which the university could not offer them. Similarly, the lack of proper training among teachers which

sometimes, instead of alleviating their problems, further exacerbate matters for them in integrated classes. “Some teachers, for example, rely more on gestures, pictures, diagrams and charts in their teaching; they simply can’t cater to the needs of their BVI students, as they are unable to or (in some rare cases, don’t want to) describe things for them.” Then there is the issue of accessibility. According to Mr. Ali, the study material is not made accessible for them, as the main focus is almost invariably on sighted students.

As far as class-participation by the BVI students is concerned, it varies from individual to individual. Some of his BVI students, according to Mr. Ali, are very active inside the class and participate eagerly in in-class activities and tasks, but others are more inactive and passive in the class. “Sometimes an individual may be introvert in terms of his/her personality trait and would be passive in class, but that has got nothing to do with visual impairment; a sighted student may be passive as well as a BVI one.”

4.12.3 Mr. Ali’s Teaching Strategies

Mr. Ali was very candid about his lack of knowledge regarding the adoption of appropriate teaching strategies for his BVI students in integrated classes. “Since we have no specialized training for teaching to BVI individuals, I don’t know about any specialized strategies to teach these BVI students the writing, reading or any other skills.” He stated, however, that based on his own observation and feedback from his BVI students, he had devised certain strategies which he generally adopted while teaching the BVI students. He taught by analogy, for example, drawing an analogy between parts of speech and parts of a human body, while teaching grammar. Similarly, for an in-class reading assignment, he generally asked a sighted student to read the passage out to the BVI individual and write his responses dictated by him. While catering to the needs of his BVI student, Mr. Ali sometimes inadvertently created discipline problems for himself. “But in this process, I often confront the problem of wasting the time of the sighted students, as they have to sit idle during all this. Sometimes such activities result in discipline problems, as sighted students have to set idle for some time, while the sighted helper notes down the BVI students’ responses.”

Mr. Ali does not view his BVI students’ visual impairment as an impediment for them to learn the English language and participate in class activities in an integrated

classroom environment. He appears to be very sure about the BVI students' abilities to learn the English language despite their visual impairment. "To my utter surprise, I found my BVI students to be very independent, as unlike some of my sighted students, they required very little extra help. . . they tried to function on their own."

Mr. Ali acknowledged that he had very rudimentary knowledge about the methods the BVI students use to accomplish the various academic tasks and activities. He stated, however, that assistive technology has enabled them to prepare their assignments on their own and turn them in quite in time. He said that some of them used a braille note-taking device whereas others used a laptop in class. "They prepare and print out their homework assignments and in-class work independently, utilizing a screen reader on their laptop and a standard printer, Thus, making their assignments quite legible and accessible to their sighted teachers with no knowledge of braille" It also means that they hardly need any help from a sighted person to do their assignments. For his part, he tries his best to assist his BVI students in gaining access to the study material.

Mr. Ali said that he tried to provide his BVI students with the study material in accessible formats, especially in soft form, in order to enable them to study it on their own with the help of a screen reader on their computers or mobile phones. He also said that the BVI students generally used their ears and touch while studying to make up for their sightlessness. "For obvious reasons, their strategies are more of auditory and tactile nature instead of visual." Mr. Ali also said that he allowed his BVI students to audiotape the proceedings of the class in order to facilitate them in their studies.

Regarding the in-class reading assignments, Mr. Ali said that, subject to the availability of the study material in accessible format, the BVI students generally listen to the written text with the help of the screen reader and then attempt the assigned task. "But if the reading task is not available to them in accessible format, they generally ask a friend to read the text out to them, something I mentioned earlier."

Mr. Ali acknowledged that there were no specialized teaching aids available in integrated classes, but he tried to provide these students with the secondary materials in accessible formats so that they could study on their own. "I usually provide them study material in three different forms, word form, PDF and power point slides, (all of them can

be accessed via computer equipped with a screen reader) so that they can be made more independent in their studies.”

Mr. Ali said he was conscientious about preparing as many of his class materials as possible at least one week prior to presentation so that the information could be rendered accessible for his BVI students’ benefit. “Once they have the study material in soft form, they can easily access it via their laptops equipped with some screen reader.”

In order to make his BVI students understand abstract concepts, Mr. Ali generally draw an analogy between the abstract concept and some concrete object. For example, while teaching grammar, he came to know via feedback from his BVI students that it was hard for them to understand the concept of tree diagrams. “So what I did was to compare a tree with a family. I told them that since a family is headed by the eldest person, exactly in the same way, a tree is headed by the sentence, represented with “S”. Since in a family, we have daughters and sisters, same is the case with the tree, but we don’t have sons, husbands and wives here.”

Mr. Ali stated that the BVI students he taught were intelligent and focused. “They were quite good at listening and speaking, but had serious issues with their reading and writing skills because of their visual limitations.” Moreover, teaching, according to Mr. Ali, has become more visual, as teachers rely more on the use of videos, diagrams, charts, pictures and figures, etc., in their classes, which has made survival for BVI students in integrated classes more difficult. “In such situations, what a teacher needs to do is to describe the visual stuff to the BVI students.” But verbal description for the BVI students can become boring for the sighted learners; hence the teacher has to strike a balance between verbal description and not allowing his sighted students to get bored.

In in-class tasks and activities, particularly in the case of some spur-of-the-moment reading or writing assignments, Mr. Ali generally pairs his BVI student up with a sighted peer in order to enable him/her to fully participate in such activities. The role of the sighted peer, in such situations, Mr. Ali says, is to make the study material accessible to the BVI student by acting as his reader. “When I give a spur-of-the-moment writing or reading assignment to my class, I pair my blind student up with his sighted peer, and the assignment is done as a team effort rather than individually.” When the class has to accomplish some

task using flashcards, he just read it out to his BVI student and took a verbal response from him. Similarly, when he uses some pictures, diagrams or models in class, he says he just describes them verbally for his BVI students. In order to accommodate his BVI students, Mr. Ali says he inducts oral tasks into his lesson-plan. “I try to incorporate as many oral tasks and activities in my lesson plan as possible, whenever I have a BVI student in my class.”

Mr. Ali says that he does not have to alter his assumptions about the BVI students’ abilities to learn the English language on account of their blindness. “The BVI students generally request me to read aloud whatever I write on the whiteboard. . . They always stress the centrality of this in their English language learning endeavours. . . I am very cognizant of the importance of describing what I write on the whiteboard, and this is one of the main adjustments I have to make for my BVI student in an integrated class.”

Regarding his general expectations about his student’s performance, Mr. Ali stated that he expected his students to make use of both their visual and auditory senses in the learning process. But since the BVI students cannot use their visual sense, they have to make up for it through their auditory and tactile senses, which they generally do quite successfully. “My BVI students try to be on a par with my sighted students in learning the English language, and in order to accomplish this, they use their auditory and tactile senses to the best of their advantage – so much so that sometimes they surpass their sighted peers, especially in their listening and speaking skills.”

Mr. Ali says that exams are given to the BVI students in soft form, which they can easily access through their laptop equipped with a screen reader. They are supposed to write their answers on their laptops and got them printed on a standard printer to be checked by their examiners. He acknowledged, however, that some BVI students preferred to take their exams in braille, but the university was unable to accommodate this demand on account of the non-availability of braille-literate evaluators.

Mr. Ali says that generally his BVI students have an excellent command over braille and other assistive technology, which give them a level playing field in terms of their ability to participate in class activities and tasks. He acknowledges, however, that there are certain aspects of English language study where the achievement of a level

playing field is not possible for BVI students, especially when the task[s] involves a great deal of visual work (e.g. charts, maps, pictures and diagrams). They, for example, are generally very weak in the area of map reading; reading a map is such a visual concept. It is very difficult to convey all of the details a sighted person is able to view on a map to a blind person who has no visual memory of how a map is set up.

Mr. Ali expressed his concern, however, with regard to the non-availability of the bulk of the study materials in accessible formats. “They can experience severe frustration which may result in high levels of anxiety and low motivation, especially when they have difficulties in finding the study material in accessible format. . . I have found them very confident and self-assured whenever they have the study material available to them in accessible format.”

4.12.4 Mr. Ali’s Views about the Role of Administrators

Mr. Ali said that his BVI students were not much satisfied with the administrators. “They believe that the administration does not fully cooperate with them, and they are right to some extent.” The only facility the BVI students have been given, according to Mr. Ali, is to allow them to have their exams on computer equipped with screen reader. Apart from this, he said, as a teacher, he received no guidance, no instructions and no cooperation from them. “They seemed to be oblivious to the challenges confronted by the BVI students in an integrated class and took no measures to make special arrangements with regard to facilitating them in any way.”

Moreover, often the computers allocated for this purpose are not properly maintained, and consequently the BVI students face considerable challenges. “For example, while they were taking their final-term exam, the BVI students wrote their answers, but because of some problems with the computers, their solved papers just vanished and couldn’t be found. They were very dejected and upset on that day, as they had to take that particular paper again at a later date.”

4.12.5 Mr. Ali’s Views about the Role of the BVI Students

Regarding the role of the BVI students in making their English language learning experience more positive for themselves, Mr. Ali stated that they needed to make the best

use of their remaining senses, especially their tactile and auditory senses. “Instead of regretting their sightlessness they should make full use of the senses which are intact.”

Mr. Ali believes that the BVI students can have mastery over English language just like their sighted peers, but they have to put more energy, time and effort to be on a par with them. “When a student is blind, he definitely finds certain things difficult (e.g. in-class reading and writing tasks and activities), But I believe that assistive technology has put these BVI learners of English on a par with their sighted peers to a great extent.”

Mr. Ali stated that his experience with the BVI students taught him that the visually challenged students needed to be made aware of the needs of their sighted classmates and vice versa. "I think that sometimes the BVI students could not realise the needs and feelings of their sighted peers; some of them just wanted to be in the limelight with regard to class proceedings. Similarly, their sighted peers also hardly cooperated with them, especially in the initial days of the classes.” Mr. Ali also stressed the fact that the BVI students’ English language learning endeavours could be made successful only through a team effort, involving their teachers, their classmates, the administrators and the BVI students themselves. He said that his experience with the BVI students had convinced him they were just like their sighted peers in terms of capabilities and skills, and hence he would not treat a BVI student any differently from a sighted student. “All the teachers need to do is to adjust their teaching style a little to accommodate the BVI students and help them, if possible, in obtaining the study material in accessible formats.”

4.13 Teacher No. 2: Mr. Akbar

4.13.1 Background

Mr. Akbar is an English teacher at NUML Islamabad. A handsome man in his mid-forties, Mr. Akbar has been teaching English for more than thirteen years. “During the interview, Mr. Akbar displayed a sense of compassion, practicality and nonchalance indicative of the expertise and knowledge with which years of teaching had endowed him. “I have my own philosophy about language teaching” Mr. Akbar cautioned. “Since this area is very close to my heart, you may find a great deal, during the course of this interview, about the teaching methodology I use as a language teacher.”

Mr. Akbar is not convinced that visual impairment can be a determining factor in making language learning easier or more difficult for a BVI student. “I don’t subscribe to the view that a blind person relies heavily on his sense of hearing and hence is better at learning languages than sighted people. Yes, they have the advantage of not getting distracted by visual activity in the classroom and hence are able to concentrate more on the speech of the teacher, but teacher-talk is not the only thing, you know, a major bulk of learning is peripheral, and that requires both eyes as well as ears.” Thus visual impairment may be both a bane as well as a blessing with regard to language learning.

Mr. Akbar demonstrated good understanding of language teaching methodology and the philosophy of teaching in general, and specifically of the ways in which his BVI students functioned inside as well as outside the mainstream classroom environment. He believes the only major difference between language learning and learning the other subjects by a BVI student lies in the fact that a BVI student must either acquire knowledge about the use of assistive technology for academic purposes or be equipped with the knowledge of the braille symbols for English letters. “English language study”, said Mr. Akbar, “is one of the most readily accessible subjects for BVI students as compared with subjects such as mathematics or history because so much study material is available in this area for the BVI students in accessible format. Subjects like Math, on the other hand, uses a great deal of visual conceptualization, something beyond the grasp of a BVI student.” Moreover, language learning is predominantly auditory, according to Mr. Akbar, whereas other subjects are largely visual. As far as second language learning is concerned, the BVI students can easily compete with their sighted peers as long as the former have their study materials available to them in braille or other accessible format, says Mr. Akbar.

4.13.2 Mr. Akbar’s Observations and Perceptions

Till the time of the interview, Mr. Akbar had worked with two BVI students. He viewed his BVI students’ English language learning experience to be largely positive. He stated that his BVI students were very bright and faced no problems in learning various concepts. They found English language learning quite easy and performed better than most of his sighted students. “I found the BVI students, whom I had the opportunity to teach, to be learning the English language very easily. They never lagged behind their sighted peers

in doing their homework and submitting their assignments.” He believes that all the BVI students can do very well, provided that their materials are made accessible so that they have the same access to the written word as does everyone else in class.

Mr. Akbar acknowledged that his BVI students also manifested some carelessness and disorganization. He attributed this, however, to their lack of sight. “I believe their inability to be organized can be attributed to their blindness. Unlike their sighted peers, they can’t use coloured pencils and neat layout.” Moreover, since they rely mainly on their sense of touch, says Mr. Akbar, they often appeared clumsy and disorganized to the sighted people, as they have to feel everything with their fingers.

Mr. Akbar stated that one of his BVI student’s parents urged him not to accept any excuses from him. They asked him not to treat him any differently because of his visual disability. “If he fails to turn in his assignments on time, for example, he should be treated just like any other student and subjected to the same treatment.” But he says he found his BVI students very hardworking; they did not attempt to get advantage of their blindness in terms of getting any waiver in their assignments or tests. “They paid full attention in class; they eagerly participated orally in class activities.”

Mr. Akbar stated that when a particular lesson would not be available in accessible format for my BVI students, undaunted by the situation, they would try hard to make amends for it by taking down notes using their braille writer or computer. “They would turn on their laptops and begin typing furiously. Whenever I would do some vocabulary game which would not be available to them in accessible format, instead of sitting idle in class, they would create a game of their own using braille with the help of their peers.”

Mr. Akbar says that sometimes the BVI students are not very careful while answering questions which often result in mistakes. “They seem to be hurrying through things, and Thus, have to face the consequences.” He explained that they were treated in the same way as the other students and were penalized like them.

Mr. Akbar conceded that visual impairment caused the class proceedings to be slowed down in certain situations, as the BVI students find it hard to keep pace with their sighted peers in certain situations. “I have to slow down myself in order to allow them to

come at par with their sighted peers. Luckily, we somehow managed to overcome the barriers that blindness presented. But things got a bit slowed down for the entire class.” Mr. Akbar was quick to point out, however, that the effect of visual impairment on the pace of class proceedings did not mean that the BVI students faced difficulties in learning; it simply made learning less pleasurable for them as compared with their sighted peers.

Mr. Akbar stated that he saw no reason to adjust his assumptions about the BVI students’ ability to learn the English language. “They can learn the target language just as efficiently as any other student. They always want to participate in class activities and do whatever the other students are doing, and with little adjustments, I’m sure they can.”

Mr. Akbar said that although his BVI students performed very well academically, their relations with the rest of the students in the integrated classroom setting could not be termed ideal. The main hurdle they confront, according to Mr. Akbar, is their inability to see other students’ reaction towards them. “Sometimes they just speak their mind without realizing how the other people are receiving them . . . their inability to see gestures, you know.” Mr. Akbar appeared to be very much aware of the visual aspect of communication. “People communicate a great deal through facial expressions. The BVI students cannot see the expression on their peers faces, they remain oblivious to their reactions.” Mr. Akbar believes that the greatest barrier to acceptance for many blind students is their inability to interact in a socially appropriate manner. Social interaction contains a great deal of visual content. “Before initiating a conversation, you just look at the person, if he/she smiles at you, you receive a tacit permission for speaking to them. If you receive a dirty look instead of a smile, you interpret it as ‘go away please.’” He argues that the BVI students are in no position to interpret gestures and hence can’t properly decide if the other person is in any mood to talk to them. They rely mainly on the verbal clues to decide how and when to take turn, but in a regular mainstream class, the verbal clues are hardly use since the majority of the students are sighted and hence follow a normal mood of interaction. “Hence, the BVI students often jump in without realizing the reaction of the others. I have observed that the sighted students hardly verbally expressed their disapproval of their attitude, but it would be written all over on their faces.” In spite of these interactional challenges, Mr. Akbar feels that the BVI students are treated with respect.

Mr. Akbar stated that, probably because of their deprivation, the BVI students' behaviour can be sometimes 'very arrogant'. "Generally, I take special care to read aloud whatever I write on the board or display on the multimedia projector, but whenever I forget to do so, the BVI students would immediately draw my attention to the fact that there was a BVI student in the class. There would be a touch of arrogance in their choice of words and tone of voice."

Mr. Akbar asserted that equal access is readily achievable for the BVI students if their teachers act in a conscientious manner. He stated that failure of the regular classroom teacher to recognize the importance of helping the BVI students to have access to the study materials could have serious repercussions for them. "The teacher needs to be very organized, especially when they have a BVI student in the regular class. If they would not properly prepare their lesson plan, achieving equal access for the BVI students would become next to impossible."

Mr. Akbar also stated that teachers should be aware of the various assistive technologies used by the BVI students, as the lack of knowledge with regard to the role played by these in their language learning can present difficulties. "One of our colleagues was very concerned about my BVI student's notetaking device. He would repeatedly ask him to ensure it does not disturb the other students. The teacher was simply not aware of the important role that device played in that BVI student's learning endeavours." Mr. Akbar stated that after some time that student became so disheartened because of the attitude of the teacher that he decided to leave that course.

Mr. Akbar stressed the need for a specialized teacher-training about dealing with the BVI students in a regular class. He believes that in the absence of such training, the teachers have unfounded fears and trepidations about these BVI students; they do not feel comfortable with the presence of a student with a visual disability in their mainstream teaching environment. Some teachers might be having a BVI student for the first time in their class, and they might simply not know how to deal with him, says Mr. Akbar. After some time, when they come to know through their experience with a BVI student, asserts Mr. Akbar, that they are just as capable as their sighted peers and can achieve success like them, their fears are gradually allayed. "Given my experience with the BVI students,

although very little, whenever my colleagues have such student for the first time in their class, I always approach them and explain to them how to deal with them. I try to assuage their fears by telling them that These BVI students are very sharp and intelligent individuals who happen to be visually challenged.”

4.13.3 Mr. Akbar’s Teaching Strategies

Mr. Akbar asserts that the failure or success of the adaptive strategies in most cases depends on the regular classroom teacher. Mr. Akbar gave the example of an untoward incident in which one of the teachers gave a BVI student a wrong version of a credited exam question paper. “The teacher behaved very nonchalantly towards the incident, totally oblivious to the fact that it could have very serious consequences for the BVI student, as it could have deprived him of equal opportunity and access.”

Mr. Akbar claimed that he was aware of the various learning styles and strategies, and asserted that he tried to cater to varied learning styles in his class. He said He believed in the theory which claimed seven types of intelligence. “There are students who are intellectually gifted, physically gifted (those who are good at dancing and sports), emotionally intelligent (those who are good at establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships), visually gifted (those who respond best to visual stimuli), and musical intelligence, etc.” Armed with this knowledge, Mr. Akbar said he tried to cater to as many different strengths as possible.

Mr. Akbar believes that students generally use two different methods for learning the English language, regardless of the fact that whether they are visually impaired or not. “I think the majority of students use, irrespective of visual impairment, some form of active study. They just study and review vocabulary. Some students prepare vocabulary flashcards; others make vocabulary lists and memorize them. Yet there are others who learn best through listening; they get the vocabulary items recorded along with their meaning and contextual uses and listen to them again and again.” The above-mentioned strategies, Mr. Akbar said, were used by students regardless of any visual impairment.

Mr. Akbar spoke in particular about his BVI students’ learning style and strategies. “The BVI students generally learn through listening and by participating in class activities and tasks. Hence it is the teachers’ responsibility to accommodate them as much as possible

in class activities and tasks, and facilitate them, if possible, to gain access to the study material.”

Mr. Akbar stated that he tried his best to accommodate his BVI students in the mainstream class. “In situations where I have to use a table, picture or drawing, I verbally described these things to them ahead of the activity.” Moreover, he says he tries to use realia instead of pictures or diagrams whenever possible. Similarly, if he has to do a demonstration, he usually does it at the BVI students’ desk.

As far as the use of objects is concerned, Mr. Akbar realized very early that some objects could not be easily recognized by his BVI students. Thus, he had to verbally clarify certain actual objects. Mr. Akbar gave an example: “I recall one demonstration in which I gave my BVI student a toy train. I intended to introduce the verbs “leave” and ‘arrive’ to my students. The BVI student found it hard to grasp what the railway track was. Realizing my error that my BVI student would have developed concepts about everything, I modified my demonstration after that. I would explain the prop I was about to use in advance to my BVI student, since he would have little or no concept about it.”

Mr. Akbar stated that the BVI students faced considerable problems in playing language games, as the majority of the games are visual in nature, he initially avoided using them in the integrated classes. But since language games play an important role in exciting the interest of the sighted students, he could not banish them completely from his class, but he gave his BVI students some other activity while the rest of the class were busy with the game. “I generally give my BVI students some oral activity when the rest of the class is busy in a language game, because, given their visual nature, I know the BVI students find it very hard to play them.”

Mr. Akbar said he loved to use multimedia projector during class, but its use presented the BVI students with certain challenges. But he knows how to help the BVI students circumvent those challenges, said Mr. Akbar. He employs one of the two strategies while using a multimedia projector. He either provides his BVI students the material (which the rest of the class receive on the multimedia projector) ahead of the class in soft text which they can read with the help of their computer; or, in case he fails to do so ahead of time, he then pairs up his BVI student with his sighted classmate who assists him in this

regard. “It is the sighted student’s responsibility to read to him what is on the multimedia projector, and take down any information which the BVI student want him to note down for him.” Mr. Akbar said that he selected only that student to assist his BVI student who had strong language skills, so that neither the BVI student nor the sighted assistant were deprived of learning opportunity.

Mr. Akbar appeared to be quite aware of the strategies used by his BVI students for notetaking, for the writing of exams and for doing their homework. He stated that the BVI students mainly rely on their auditory skills for learning the target language. “They generally take notes on their laptops, but sometimes they just sit back and listen. They write their answers to homework assignments and exams on their laptops and submit them in the form of printouts.”

4.13.4 Mr. Akbar’s Views about the Role of Administrators

Mr. Akbar termed the role of administration to be very important in terms of the BVI students’ English language learning experience. He believes that a close coordination between the BVI students, their teachers and the administrators is essential for successful English language learning by these students. “If the administrators are informed about any challenges faced by a BVI student in time by the student and/or his teacher, a solution can easily be found to it before it goes out of proportions.”

Mr. Akbar asserted that the administration was willing to facilitate the BVI students, but they simply did not know how to do it. “They are unaware of the challenges confronted by these students.” They had difficulty in convincing them to allow these BVI students to use a computer for taking their exam, as they were worried that the facility might be misused by these students, says Mr. Akbar. Moreover, they do not consider it their responsibility to make the learning material accessible for them. “It is considered these students’ responsibility to make study materials accessible for themselves.”

4.13.5 Mr. Akbar’s Recommendations for Future Work with Blind Students

Mr. Akbar admitted that after his experience with the BVI students, he realized how essential it was to be prepared ahead of time. “The teachers who have a BVI student in their class must take into account such adaptations as the verbal description of material and other concepts she/he plans to display visually during the course of his lesson. It is very

essential for the smooth running of class.” Mr. Akbar stated that in case he encountered a BVI student in future, he would conduct an open dialogue with him in order to determine his comfort level, and make the necessary adaptations so that he might be provided with level playing field in terms of opportunities for learning in a mainstream class. “It would make working with the BVI student much easier, as it would convey the message to him that he will be taken care of in the mainstream class.” Thus, according to Mr. Akbar, his confidence level could be considerably raised and consequently he would feel much less defensive in the mainstream class.

Mr. Akbar also advised the BVI students to be open about their disability with their peers and teachers. “It is very helpful in pre-empting any future miscommunication among the BVI students and the rest of the class as the teachers and sighted peers become aware of the limitations as well as needs of the visually challenged individual.”

Apart from these specific recommendations for the BVI students, Mr. Akbar recommends to both the sighted and BVI students alike: “pay attention in class, listen carefully and participate as much as possible in class activities and tasks.” He is of the view that the teachers should have the same expectations from the BVI students in terms of achievement and performance in the mainstream English language class. “They should be facilitated and accommodated, but they should be given no relaxation on account of their disability in terms of their class participation or tasks and assignments.”

Mr. Akbar stressed the importance of assertiveness on the part of BVI students. “The BVI students should learn to advocate for themselves. It is their responsibility to speak up whenever he/she does not understand something in class, or the teacher forgets to describe or verbalize something.” But there is a thin line, explains Mr. Akbar, between being demanding and self-advocacy. “I think the BVI students must not over-depend on others, as it might put off their peers and teachers. They should try to be as independent as possible and should seek the help of others only when it is absolutely needed, and they fear of getting stuck.”

Finally, Mr. Akbar advised the parents and teachers of BVI individuals to consider them as capable and competent as the sighted students. “I strongly believe that we should place the same expectations on the BVI students as are placed on the sighted learners. If

we do so, we'll soon find out that the BVI students are going to act accordingly.” After working with the BVI students, says Mr. Akbar, he has come to the conclusion that teachers should adopt the same teaching strategies with slight adaptation in the case of the BVI students, and their expectations for performance should remain the same, whether the student is blind or sighted.

4.14 Teacher No. 3: Miss Aneela

4.14.1 Background

Miss Aneela, who holds a doctorate degree in linguistics, is in her Seventh year of teaching English and was serving as lecturer at the time of study in the department of English at the National University of Modern Languages (Islamabad). Miss Aneela is in her late twenties, and is quite energetic and enthusiastic. Miss Aneela stated that she began teaching soon after graduating from university. The number of students seeking admission to the English language programs at NUML, according to Miss Aneela, was increasing, and, by extension, the number of BVI students coming to the department have also an upward trajectory. Till the time of the interview, she had the opportunity of teaching one blind student in her teaching tenure, but she confessed she had received no training in this regard. She also admitted that she was not aware of any program[s] which train teachers for this specific purpose. “I found the BVI student I worked with very intelligent. I’ve seen him using braille and certain softwares on their laptops and smartphones that verbalize text.”

Miss Aneela said that she was unaware of any assistive tools or aids which could be of help in teaching English to BVI students. She also acknowledged that no such specialized aids were available at the university for class use in order to facilitate the teaching/learning process in integrated classes.

Miss Aneela believes that second language learning is fundamentally different from the study of any other academic area. In the first place, second language learning involves a great deal of creativity; once they grasped it, the students can play with it, express their ideas in a variety of ways, and use it in all sorts of new situations, she asserts. Secondly, she argues, it can be fun, especially when the teacher is well-versed in the art of teaching. “The fact that it can be fun and involves a lot of creativity makes second language learning

more appealing for students than other academic subjects, and hence they are more motivated to learn it.”

Miss Aneela believes that English language learning by BVI individuals is different from learning other subjects, as here the focus is more on structures, spelling, grammar, lexicon, pragmatic knowledge, gestures, body-language, and so on. “For a BVI student, it can be easier than certain subjects, for example, hard sciences which are more vision-oriented, and difficult than others, for example, Islamic studies or sociology, because they are more theoretical in nature which can be easily comprehended by them.” English language learning, according to Miss Aneela, has little to do with blindness; it depends on other factors, e.g. motivation, accessibility, personality type, learning styles and strategies, and so on. “I’ve seen my BVI student performing better than his sighted peers, and vice versa. I’ve observed, however, that the BVI students have to put more effort as compared with their sighted peers because of their limitation.”

Miss Aneela said that she had to adjust her assumptions about the BVI students’ abilities after coming into contact with them in integrated classes, as Previously she believed them to be quite incapable individuals because of their visual impairment. “Before having the experience of teaching the BVI student, I believed that these students would not be sharp, talented and good learners, but after having him in my class, I realized that I was wrong. Now I believe they are equally capable of learning the English language like their sighted peers.”

Miss Aneela appeared to be satisfied with her BVI students’ attempts at learning the English language. “As far as my experience with the BVI student is concerned, I’ve found him very intelligent, highly motivated and more inquisitive than his sighted peers. He also uses more technology as compared with his sighted peers.” Moreover, he had remarkable auditory ability, according to Miss Aneela, and made considerable progress in almost all aspects of the target language, especially pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. She believes that the BVI student’s visual disability did not hampered him in any major way in learning the English language. “I think he had his own strategies for learning, and employed them to his advantage. I think he was even better than his sighted peers in auditory comprehension.”

4.14.2 Miss Aneela's Observations and Perceptions

Miss Aneela termed her BVI student as being very organized, mature and independent. She said that initially she was somewhat apprehensive about her BVI student's capacity to learn the target language, but she was forced to change her perception about his capabilities once she observed him functioning largely unassisted in an integrated classroom environment. "To tell you the truth, I was excited about having a visually challenged student in my class, but I was also worried that I would have to spend extra time and energy in class to cater to a blind student's special needs, of which I had little idea. Of course, I was wrong; I found it much easier to teach my BVI student than some of my fully sighted students, as he was far more serious about his studies, and required so little help, than most of them."

Miss Aneela appeared to be very impressed with the performance of his BVI student. "So far, I've taught one BVI student, and I can tell you from my experience that the BVI individuals are highly intrinsically motivated: they take keen interest in their learning; they are communicatively very efficient." The BVI student she taught was quite outspoken and extroverted and interacted quite openly with both Miss Aneela and his sighted peers. "He tried to participate fully in class activities and kept on asking questions till everything was clear to him."

Miss Aneela stated that the extrovert nature of her student enabled him to make friends quite easily in class. "Initially my sighted students were somewhat frightened, as they had never interacted with a BVI classmate and Thus, were unsure." Miss Aneela said that she thought it to be her duty to make the other students have a positive interactive relation with her BVI student. "I took it upon myself to especially pair such students up with my BVI student who were reluctant to interact with him and tried to avoid him." In this way, she managed to remove a major interactional barrier that initially existed between her BVI student and his peers. "After the initial hesitation, the sighted students began enjoying interacting with the BVI student, and they had the opportunity to learn from each other."

The BVI students have one major communicational problem, according to Miss Aneela. Some of the BVI individuals, especially those born blind, used touch a lot when

interacting with their sighted peers, which the sighted individuals found quite strange. “The use of touch by the BVI students to draw the attention of their sighted peers during oral interaction often resulted in their isolation in class.”

Miss Aneela also said that her BVI student was quite forthcoming in expressing his needs. “He always drew my attention to read the stuff aloud written on the board whenever I forgot to do so.” She termed her BVI student as a “thorough learner”. “He always aimed at learning everything, rather than only parts of things, whether grammar, pronunciation or vocabulary. Even he learnt discourse markers and connecting words, which other students find so hard to learn.”

Miss Aneela said that in order to be on a par with his peers, her BVI student had to put in extra effort. “I have observed that a BVI student needs more time to do an in-class assignment, as he has to access the text through other means – I mean through braille or screen reader.”

Miss Aneela stated that her BVI student depended a lot on listening for his study, hence his listening skills were quite enhanced as compared to that of his sighted peers. “Since listening have a direct impact on speaking skills, their oral abilities are generally better as well.” But they do confront some problems in their reading and writing skills due to their visual impairment, Miss Aneela said. “They somehow make the reading material accessible to themselves via computer and screen readers, but I believe, their writing remains weak.”

Miss Aneela said that the BVI students’ awareness of and use of the latest IT technology was very effective for them because it not only helped them learn the English language more effectively, but also made them independent in their studies in general. But she admitted that her knowledge about assistive technology for BVI individuals was very limited, and apart from screen readers and braille writers, she knew very little about the assistive technology used by them in their studies. “I have no formal training on how to teach to these students and had no idea about assistive technology until I came into actual contact with my BVI student, but now I believe English language learning would have been very difficult, if not impossible, had these students been unaware of assistive technology.”

But she said that there was a huge room for improvement in the university in terms of awareness, availability and use of assistive technology.

Miss Aneela observed that the BVI students confronted problems in comprehending reading passages which were long. “They can comprehend the initial few sentences, but have problems with the rest of the passage when it goes beyond certain length.” In that case, according to Miss Aneela, she needed to proceed very slowly and repeat things over and over again. “This is something which can be quite boring for the sighted students in class.”

Regarding her sighted students’ perception about their BVI peers, Miss Aneela said that although they admired their talent and strength of courage, yet they also believed them to be somewhat overbearing, wearisome and, at times, overdependent. “I think that my sighted students consider the BVI students to be sharper and more talented, but I have also observed them trying to avoid them, considering them to be very demanding, selfish and depending too much on the help of others.”

4.14.3 Miss Aneela’s Teaching Strategies

Miss Aneela termed her BVI student’s language learning experience as “very good”. “Whether learning English was easier or more difficult for him as compared with the sighted students, I can’t tell, but I think it was just different. He had his own manner of doing things for accomplishing a particular task.” She said she used a great deal of visual content such as pictures in her class. Obviously, the sighted students can easily get the visual cues, but a BVI student has to get things described to him before he can arrive at some conclusion. When that is provided to him, he manages to accomplish the task without any apparent difficulty, she said.

Regarding the BVI student’s attempt at doing in-class reading assignments, Miss Aneela said that he could successfully complete them only when they were available to him in some accessible format, or some sighted peer volunteered his/her services to assist them. But she said that the material was generally not available to them in accessible format, and consequently her BVI student faced many challenges in completing these assignments. “If you, as a teacher, want your BVI students to do their assignments like

their sighted peers, the first thing you need to do is to ensure the material is available to them in some accessible format.”

Regarding the measures Miss Aneela has taken to accommodate his BVI student, she said the first thing she tried to do was to provide her BVI student with the study material in accessible formats, especially in soft form, in order to enable him to study it on his own with the help of a screen reader on his computer or mobile phone. “I knew I couldn’t provide the material to him in braille, but at least, I could provide some relevant study material to him in soft form, and that’s what I did.” She also said that Since the BVI students generally used their ears and touch while studying to make up for their sightlessness, their strategies are different from those of their sighted peers. “For obvious reasons, their strategies are more of auditory and tactile nature instead of visual.” Miss Aneela also said that she allowed her BVI student to audiotape the proceedings of the class. She further said that she read aloud anything written on the board, and described to him pictures and diagrams in order to accommodate him in the integrated class. “Whenever I draw a flow-chart or a diagram, I put down the major elements (words or phrases) on the board, then I start explaining the whole thing from the top and coming downwards.” She said she verbally described the pictures, tables or diagrams. “In short, I try to take the BVI student along in my class, because, to me, he is just as important as my sighted students.”

Miss Aneela believes that the way the BVI students learn the target language is different from the way their sighted peers learn it. She says that, apart from pronunciation presentation and practice, she relies heavily on visual means for the teaching of second language concepts. Because of this, she says, she had initially had some difficulties accommodating her BVI student. But she learnt quickly, after receiving a complaint from her BVI student, how to best accommodate him. “I use a lot of visual materials such as flashcards and pictures in my class. "I used to hold up a picture of something and ask, ‘what is this?’.” To the BVI student, it was of no use, of course. To make the matters worse, the textbooks used in integrated classes also contain a lot of pictures, she said. “I knew that I was unable to take my BVI student along, when I used pictures, or flashcards or the multimedia projector, but I simply didn’t know how to accommodate him.”

After a few days, her BVI student complained to her, Miss Aneela stated. He suggested that if she accompanied the visuals with descriptions, it would be very helpful for him. “He requested me to present the material orally for his sake so that he could learn it just like her sighted students.” After that day, Miss Aneela said, she had to spend more time on verbal description and reading aloud for her BVI student. “Being visually challenged, I realised after that, he can’t perceive my body-language and gestures and I have to seek a verbal confirmation from him for ascertaining his comprehension of the matter in hand.” Miss Aneela believed that the most effective teaching strategies she used for her BVI students in her mainstream classes included: getting them involved in the proceedings of the class, constantly interacting with them verbally, relying less on visual clues while interacting with them, describing to them any pictures, diagrams or tables, etc.

Regarding the challenges confronted when teaching English language in an inclusive class, Miss Aneela said that time management could be a serious issue for her because the BVI students generally required more time to complete an in-class task or activity than their sighted peers. “I have to give extra time to the entire class in order to accommodate the BVI student.” But she acknowledges that while the BVI student and his helper are busy, the rest of the class generally have nothing to do; they often indulge in idle chit-chat on such occasions which could easily result in discipline problems for her. She confesses she faces a dilemma in such situations: if she goes for accommodating her BVI students, it results either in discipline problems for her or a wastage of time for her sighted students. Similarly, the description or reading aloud of text written on board, according to Miss Aneela, could become boring for the sighted students as well as in a wastage of time for the rest of the students.

Miss Aneela said that she believed her BVI student did much of his learning on his own. “With the help of his laptop equipped with some voicing software, he prepared lists of vocabulary items on his own and memorized them. Whenever needed, he also sought the help of a good friend of his, who was better than him in English.”

Although Miss Aneela’s knowledge about the assistive technology used by her BVI student was rather limited, yet she said that he either transcribed the study material into braille or accessed it through his laptop equipped with some “speaking software”. She said

he used a braille word processor for taking notes in class. “I don’t know how he did his homework assignments, but he always submitted them on time, and he generally did them very well.” Miss Aneela stated that her BVI student liked not to depend too much on others, and he was a well-organized individual. “The less he relied on others for his studies, the more he enjoyed it, and the more effectively he functioned.”

Despite the fact that the BVI student was a brilliant learner, there were some factors of logistic nature which played a crucial role in his study of English. One of those factors, Miss Aneela says her BVI student told her, is the inability of the existing assistive technology to make pictures and diagrams (an integral part of most English language coursebooks) accessible to BVI students. “He told me that the available assistive technology could cope only with plain written English and was unable to describe pictures or diagrams.” Miss Aneela further stated that the screen reader he used was unable to correctly identify and pronounce most of the phonetic symbols for English sounds. As a result, the BVI student faced problems in learning these sound symbols and hence he was left behind in this area. “So much so that initially, he failed to realize at all that such phonemic symbols existed. This I came to know when I checked his first assignment on pronunciation.”

4.14.4 Miss Aneela’s Views about the Role of Teacher

Miss Aneela stated that it was absolutely essential for teachers to have a positive attitude towards the BVI students and accommodate them in their integrated classes as far as possible. Moreover, they need to be organized especially when there is a BVI student in the mainstream classroom environment. “Let me acknowledge that my BVI student was very organized and, what’s important, he compelled me not to be disorganized as well.” She said that she generally planned her lessons on a daily basis, but for his sake, she planned them for the entire week in advance so that he could have time to make his study material available to him in some sort of accessible format.

Regarding her future plans to make English language learning experience more effective for BVI students, Miss Aneela said that she would try to ensure the availability of study material in accessible format. For this purpose, she would establish a linkage between the newly admitted BVI students and their seniors, as she believed they could be

their best guides. “This can help boost their motivational level when they see that there are people who have gone through such challenges successfully.”

4.14.5 Miss Aneela’s Views about the Role of Administrators

Miss Aneela said that the administration should play a more active role in facilitating the BVI students. “I feel some of them believe that the BVI individuals are simply not capable of successfully completing the English language course. Let me assure them that these students are just as capable as their sighted peers.” She said that the administrators should stop worrying and try to understand their problems and find out solution to them, so that these BVI students could be facilitated in a more effective way. But regarding the role of the administration in facilitating the BVI students in terms of making the study material accessible to them, providing them with the latest audio-visual aids for class use, providing them with laptops equipped the latest screen readers, etc., Miss Aneela stated the administration needed to go a long way.

4.14.6 Miss Aneela’s Views about the Role of the Blind Student

According to Miss Aneela, in order to make the language learning experience more fruitful and positive for all concerned, the BVI students must themselves be organized in the first place. Further, the teachers have a crucial role to play in accommodating the BVI students into the mainstream classes. “I was lucky to have a BVI student who was extroverted (always willing to interact with others); had he been introverted; it would have been very difficult for me to integrate him into the mainstream class.”

Miss Aneela believes that the BVI students must be aware of their strengths and weaknesses in order to make logical and informed academic choices. She is of the view that a BVI student must be assertive in communicating his/her problems and concerns to the teacher. “The BVI students should never hesitate to inform their teachers if they fail to understand something. It is ultimately the BVI students’ own responsibility to ensure their access to all those things their sighted peers have access to.” To sum up, Miss Aneela believes that the BVI students should always be ready to take responsibility for their studies.

4.15 Teacher No. 4: Mr. Hamid

4.15.1 Background

Mr. Hamid is in his seventh year of teaching at the IIU Islamabad. Mr. Hamid taught for several years abroad before coming back to Pakistan. A confident man whose speech is deliberate and precise, and whose responses are measured, Mr. Hamid's presence conveys a sense of authority and control. But despite all this, his experience with his only BVI student appeared to have completely overwhelmed him. "When asked for participation in the study, Mr. Hamid confessed that he did not have much favourable to share, but he said participation was extremely important to him, as some other teacher might learn from his experiences. "If there was someone to have guided me, some book to refer to about how to deal with a BVI student in a mainstream class, I think things would have been different than they transpired."

Till the time of the interview, Mr. Hamid has had the experience of teaching one blind student. Things apparently went very well as Mr. Hamid perceived his BVI student's language learning experience to be very positive. But as his BVI student participated less and less in class activities with the passage of time, Mr. Hamid suspected something seriously wrong. "In the beginning, the blind student eagerly participated in class activities; he came regularly to class and worked like his sighted peers. After some time, however, the level of his class participation decreased and so did his class attendance."

4.15.2 Mr. Hamid's Observations and Perceptions

Mr. Hamid said that initially he was very confident about his blind student's ability to learn a second language, but he had to adjust his early assumptions regarding his ability to be successful with his disability in a mainstream English language class. "On the basis of my personal experience with a BVI student in a mainstream language class, I would say that learning a second language is far more difficult for a blind individual as compared with someone who is sighted. The sense of sight plays such a crucial role in learning, and its absence can make learning a second language really difficult, if not altogether impossible."

Mr. Hamid termed his BVI student's relationships with his sighted peers as admirable. "My BVI student had a good rapport with his classmates. My sighted students treated him just like any other student." He went on to say that they respected the BVI

student for defying the odds, and trying to accomplish something despite such a major disability, something which they, the sighted students, couldn't even imagine doing without the sense of sight.

Mr. Hamid, however, did not seem to be very appreciative of his BVI student's general attitude towards his studies. He said that the BVI student always made excuses for his poor performance. "My BVI student held his disability responsible for everything he failed to do. In certain situations, he would be right, but in the majority of cases, he appeared to be just making excuses."

Mr. Hamid said that his BVI student did not possess the basic and most essential skills of self-advocacy. He never conveyed his special needs to his teacher. "I can't recall any instant when my BVI student communicated his special needs to me. I remember asking him at the very outset of the course to convey to me whenever he needed my help, but, apart from requesting me to verbalize whatever I write on the board, he asked for nothing." Mr. Hamid said that it gave him the impression that everything was fine with his BVI student."

4.15.3 Mr. Hamid's Teaching Strategies

Admitting his lack of knowledge regarding the various strategies and techniques used by BVI students, Mr. Hamid frankly stated that he had no idea about the different techniques used by these students in a mainstream environment. "I am simply not aware of the way the BVI students learn a second language." He stated that, as far as he could observe the BVI students, they did a great deal of rote memorization, instead of gaining knowledge about the target language.

Mr. Hamid stated that he heavily relied on the use of visual clues in his teaching. "My teaching style is predominantly visually oriented. Indeed, the same applies to the entire classroom experience, especially when it comes to oral communication in the target language." He said that someone with little or no access to such visual phenomenon as body gestures finds it extremely hard to comprehend what was going on. "My BVI student confronted the same situation; it was very difficult for him to make sense of verbal clues reaching him without the aid of the visual cues that accompanied that chatter."

Mr. Hamid said it was very difficult for him to teach certain concepts to a BVI individual. “My blind student was quite good at learning the basic vocabulary and grammatical structures, especially those concepts which were concrete. He faced considerable difficulty, however, in comprehending the abstract concepts.” Mr. Hamid said that the absence of the sense of sight meant the BVI students’ learning experience could not be like that of the sighted students, as the manner in which the BVI students conceptualized the world was really very different. He also stated they could not be evaluated in the same manner as sighted students. He said that he was unable to make his blind student do the same things as my sighted students were required to do. The other students took their exam in written form, whereas his BVI student preferred the oral form. “Further, the blind student generally required more time to complete his assignments (both in-class and home assignments) as compared with his sighted peers.”

Mr. Hamid said that the non-availability of assistive technology, or the lack thereof, prove a great hinderance for the BVI students in successful learning of the target language. “My BVI student had his own computer, but whether he could effectively use it for his studies was not clear, as he never used it in class, and he was always seen relying on others for help in his assignments. Moreover, he didn’t have his textbook available to him in proper braille as well.”

Mr. Hamid stated that his BVI student used to have some braille material in class, but could not say for certain whether it was the same textbook which they were using in class or something else. “He did have some brailled material, but often complained of lots of transcriptional errors which made it almost impossible for him to understand it.” Having no knowledge of braille, he could not confirm it, of course.

Mr. Hamid said that his BVI student relied only on listening for obtaining information about the target language in class. “My BVI student used to come to class and start listening. He tried to contribute to class discussion, mainly not in English, but his knowledge about the target language remained fairly rudimentary.”

Mr. Hamid said that there were many language learning theories, but he subscribed to the one known as the “total immersion” theory. Learners are provided an environment in class where they have to use the target language all the time, and hence they are expected

to be able to communicate in the target language after four weeks of study. “I prepare my students to go for the “big picture”, while learning a second language. I strictly advise my students not to rely on translation or rote learning. I want them to practice a lot and visualize the concept.”

Mr. Hamid termed the visual element as an integral part of his teaching style. “I use a lot of props, visual cues and body language in class. I draw diagrams on the board, use pictures of various objects and realia.” Sometimes, he said he acted out various verbs as well. By enabling his students to create an association between the objects and concepts using their sense of sight, he tried to enhance his students’ comprehension of the target language. “I believe students are able to create in the target language only when they have comprehended its various concepts thoroughly.” This scenario was not very conducive for visually impaired students, he acknowledged. “I could have been more helpful to a BVI student if I changed my teaching style altogether, but it’s not easy, you know.” He said his sighted students, who are in majority, benefited more from this style of his. So he thought not to alter it for the sake of just one student.

Mr. Hamid said that the BVI students needed to be worked with on individual basis. He believes that the regular teachers like him are not trained on how to accommodate the BVI students in their mainstream classes. Hence, they are in no position to provide them the quality of assistance which they need to succeed in their second language learning endeavours. “Ideally, the BVI students should be dealt with on individual basis.” He acknowledged that he was not trained specifically to work with BVI students. “The only thing I could do to help him, and that too I learnt from my BVI student, was to verbalize anything I wrote on the board or displayed on the multimedia projector.”

Mr. Hamid said that his BVI student did not take any notes during class; he just audio-taped the class proceedings. He wondered as to what extent his BVI student could have benefitted from that recording when he relied so predominantly on visual props and body language during class. “My BVI student didn’t take down any notes. He simply recorded the class proceedings. The visual component is such a dominant part of my teaching style; I don’t know how he can make sense out of the tapes by listening to them at home.”

4.15.4 Mr. Hamid's Views about the Role of Administrators

Mr. Hamid did not appear very pleased with the administration on account of their lack of support with regard to his BVI student. "I think they did nothing at all." He said that he was not even told that he would be having a blind student in his class. "I just walked into my class and, to my utter surprise, found out that I had to deal with a visually challenged student." The administration did not inform him of his special needs and how to cater to those needs. "I was left to fend for myself."

Mr. Hamid thinks that the university's administration can help improve the situation a lot for the BVI students by training the regular classroom teachers on the special needs of these students and how to cater to those needs. "I think teachers should be trained on the accommodation of these special needs students, and they should be allowed to work one-on-one with these BVI students so that they could be given the same learning experience as their sighted peers." He said that these students needed special attention which could not be given to them when the teachers had to take into account the needs of at least thirty-nine sighted students in the class. "I take four classes every day, therefore, giving any time to the special needs students is not possible at all for me." He suggested that the regular teachers' workload should be reduced when they have a BVI student in their class, so that they could work with him/her on individual basis. Moreover, there should be some monetary attraction for the teachers who teach the special needs students in the mainstream classes, he argued.

Mr. Hamid said that the administration showed no interest in the BVI student's progress. "I never received any call, let alone someone's visit, from the administration to take stock of the situation, and offer me any assistance in this regard."

Mr. Hamid is of the view that the administration has little respect for the teaching staff, as they are not taken on board in any matter. "Our opinion is never sought. We are simply taken advantage of. We are given no training, no relief, no incentives, nothing of the sort, yet we are expected to accommodate students with special needs in our mainstream classes."

4.15.5 Mr. Hamid's Views about the Role of Teacher

Mr. Hamid said that, albeit without any tangible support from the administration, he tried his best to accommodate his BVI student in his mainstream class. "I altered my teaching style as much as I could to cater to his needs." He said he went out of the way to grade him, not on the basis of his actual performance, but rather leniently, making allowances for his sightlessness. "I didn't expect him to perform like his sighted peers, and thus, his little performance was greatly appreciated."

4.15.6 Mr. Hamid's Views about the Role of the Blind Student

Mr. Hamid said that he wished his BVI student could take more responsibility for his learning experience. "He needs to improve his braille, as BVI individuals cannot get on with their academic pursuits without it. Moreover, he needs to be aware of the latest trends and developments in assistive technology for the blind and visually impaired. He cherishes the desire to learn, but wants it to come easy to him; he seems unwilling to strive hard for it."

4.16 Teacher 5. Mr. Murad

4.16.1 Background

Mr. Murad is a teacher of English at the Islamic International University in Islamabad. With native-like English accent, Mr. Murad said he loved teaching. With an MPhil degree under his belt, Mr. Murad, at the time of interview, was doing his PhD from the same university. With no training for teaching English to BVI students, Mr. Murad was surprised to see a blind student in his class when he went to class on the first day. "I was really astonished to find a visually challenged student in my class, because no one had told me in advance that I would be having him. It initially left me completely puzzled as to how to deal with him."

But after the initial confusion, Mr. Murad quickly adjusted his assumptions about his BVI student when he realised that he was able to succeed like his sighted students. "So far, I've had the experience of teaching one blind student, and I found the experience very fulfilling." Mr. Murad said that the BVI student was the best in his class. "I think his performance could not be matched by any of his sighted peers. He had probably a very retentive memory, as he would have everything at his fingertip."

Mr. Murad termed second language learning as different from any other academic subject because, according to him, it required a lot of personal initiative and self-learning on the part of the student for success. “The other academic subjects have their own specified and limited jargon, whereas in case of the English language, the vocabulary is simply unlimited. What’s more, almost every word has different nuances of meaning and use which makes it even harder to learn.”

4.16.2 Mr. Murad’s Perceptions and Observations

Mr. Murad said that all Learners (regardless of any disability) face certain challenges while learning the English language because of its unphonetic character, its complex spelling system and its not so logical grammar, but visual impairment can cause problems of a different nature (e.g. the inaccessibility of the sound-symbols of various English phonemes, as they are neither available in braille nor readable through the existing screen readers). “Otherwise learning the English language should be quite easy for the BVI students because of the availability of screen readers and the study material in a variety of accessible formats.” The BVI learners depend on their auditory and tactile senses and access the study material through various screen readers and braille.

Regarding the attitude of his sighted students towards their BVI classmate, Mr. Murad stated that he found them very cooperative towards him. “All the peers cooperated with him in his reading or writing assignments whenever he needed their help.” Mr. Murad said that his BVI student had good interpersonal relationship with his sighted peers, and they treated him very well. “He behaved so much like them that they did not consider him blind.” Although his BVI student generally had no problem while interacting with his sighted peers in class, yet, according to Mr. Murad, sometimes, because of his sightlessness, he could not fully gauge the reaction of his interlocutors, which, at times, became quite frustrating for both the parties, especially the sighted students. “I have observed, however, that the sighted students behave very patiently and forbearingly towards my BVI student and try to accommodate him as fully as possible.”

Mr. Murad said that his blind student was always conscientious of the rights of others and never took more time than required while answering questions and participating in other class activities. He also stated that he had such a good experience with the blind

student that he would never hesitate to take another student with visual impairment in his class. “Given my experience with that blind student, I would warmly welcome another student whenever I have the opportunity again. he was such a self-confident and self-sufficient individual that I had to do very little to accommodate him.”

Regarding his knowledge about the various assistive technologies used by the BVI students, Mr. Murad confessed that he had a very rudimentary information about the screen readers used on both laptops and mobile phones. “All I know is the availability of screen readers for computers and smartphones which makes them accessible for the BVI individuals. Apart from that, I know nothing of the assistive technology and the various devices which are of use to the BVI students of English.”

4.16.3 Mr. Murad’s Teaching Strategies

Mr. Murad said he did not consider his blind student to be any different from his sighted students in terms of learning potential. He said that the good thing about his blind student was that he was very conscientious about his learning, and despite his visual impairment, he never lagged behind his sighted peers in terms of doing his assignments and class participation. “My blind student told me that, because of his disability, he needed more time to complete his assignments as compared with sighted individuals, and that’s why he often stayed up late at night to complete his home-assignments. And when, as an individual, one has to go to extra lengths to achieve something, one inevitably takes the task seriously.”

Mr. Murad stated that he did not need to adjust his assumptions about his blind student’s ability to accomplish something on account of his visual impairment. “I did not have to alter my lesson plan in order to accommodate my blind student; rather, he took it upon himself to adjust to the class procedures. He’d go to any length to prove that he should be treated like other students and would seldom require any extra effort or time on my part.”

Although Mr. Murad acknowledged that his blind student was very hardworking and diligent, he also admitted that studying the English language was not completely free of challenges for him. “The BVI students face difficulty in the reading and writing skills, especially their spellings, punctuations and grammar remain somewhat weak because of

their inability to see.” Similarly, they sometimes face problems in doing in-class reading or writing assignments. Moreover, they also face challenges with pictures, tables, maps and diagrams. In the same way, if something is written on the board and not read aloud for them by the teacher, they feel at a loss. “I think the BVI students can overcome these challenges with a little help from their teachers and classmates.”

Mr. Murad said that he tried to accommodate his BVI student in his class. “Whenever I write something on the board, I do read the material aloud. Moreover, I try to keep him abreast of what’s happening in the class, so that he is fully aware of and involved in the activities of the class.” He said that he accommodated him in in-class activities by explaining to him the nature of the activities, reading aloud to him the written material on the workcards and worksheets, giving a detailed description of the various charts, pictures and diagrams, etc. “Sometimes I have to ask a sighted student to assist my BVI student to complete a reading/writing in-class task or assignment. I have to give extra time to the entire class in order to accommodate the BVI student.” The sighted students, according to Mr. Murad, often indulged in idle chit-chat on such occasions which sometimes resulted in discipline problems for him. Thus, he found himself confronting a dilemma.

Regarding the strategies Mr. Murad used for improving his BVI student’s reading and writing skills, he said that he earnestly desired to familiarize himself with the assistive technology the visually challenged learners used, because without understanding the way they studied and accessed the written word, he said, he would be unable to determine the strategies they used, and hence adjust his teaching style accordingly. “Although I sincerely desire to help my BVI student improve his reading and writing skills, I presently, frankly speaking, don’t know how to do it. I do use the reading aloud strategy for improving his reading comprehension in class, and encourage him to do some reading at home using his laptop equipped with screen reader.” He said he allowed his BVI student to use his braille writer in class as well, despite the fact that the noise it created was a little annoying to the rest of the class. But he managed to convince them to accommodate their visually challenged peer by allowing him to use his braille writer in class.

Mr. Murad said that his BVI student blended so well that sometimes he would not realize that he had a blind student in the class, and would forget to read aloud something

written on the board. “He would always remind me without any hesitation to read it aloud for him. This kept happening in the first few days of the semester, but as the session progressed, I got used to reading things aloud for his sake.” Mr. Murad also stated that his Blind student confronted problems with the use of visual aids. “I took particular care to describe any pictures or diagrams I used in the class.”

Mr. Murad stated that the BVI students were no different as second language could be learnt through different senses, but the lack of sight could be a major debilitating factor if not properly compensated by other means. “The good thing about blind students is that they have a retentive memory which they can use to their maximum advantage. My blind student was no exception: he could commit so much stuff to his memory.” Mr. Murad said that he knew very little about the methods used by his blind student for doing his assignments and class-participation. “Frankly speaking, I’m not aware at all about how he did his assignments or managed to participate so well in class, but I certainly know that he did them very well.”

4.16.4 Mr. Murad’s Views about the Role of Teacher

Mr. Murad expressed his confidence in the BVI learners’ abilities to successfully learn the English language. I found the BVI students exceptionally talented. I believe them to be equally capable, if not more capable, than their sighted peers.” All they needed, according to Mr. Murad, was a little extra care, encouragement and facilitation on the part of their teachers and administration. “I personally try to make the regular classroom environment as conducive and as friendly as possible for learning for the BVI students.”

Mr. Murad said that he had learnt from his experience with that blind individual that he would need to take care of two things if he ever had the opportunity of teaching a blind student again in a mainstream class. “Firstly, I would have a thorough discussion with him before the commencement of classes regarding his needs and how best those needs could be accommodated. Secondly, capitalizing on my previous experience with blind student, I would be more conscientious about reading things aloud written on the board or displayed on a multimedia projector.”

4.16.5 Mr. Murad's Views about the Role of Administrators

Mr. Murad said that the administration did very little in terms of facilitating his BVI student. He said that no special aids were available Inside the class for BVI students. The only facility the visually impaired students were provided was the availability of laptops equipped with screen readers to take their exams independently without the assistance of any amanuensis. "All they did was to allow my BVI student to take his credited exam on computer provided by the administration. Apart from this, I received no help from them in terms of guidance, training or even the provision of assistive gadgets or tools." Both the teachers as well as the BVI students were left to fend for themselves in the mainstream class.

Mr. Murad suggested that special training workshops should be arranged for teachers (possibly addressed by experts from abroad), so that the teachers could be made aware of the special needs of the BVI students as well as of all the assistive technology hitherto available in the market. "Disability does have an impact on the psyche of the individuals, so this aspect should also be taken care of in those workshops."

4.16.6 Mr. Murad's Recommendations for Future Work with BVI Students

Mr. Murad said that, as far as gaining mastery over the target language was concerned, both the blind as well as the sighted students could equally succeed, but the BVI students' success depended to a large extent on such factors as the availability of study material in accessible formats, assistive technology, peers' cooperation and teachers' willingness to accommodate them in the mainstream classroom environment. He also stated that undertaking the task of learning another language was not easy, as it depended on a variety of factors, including motivation, classroom environment, readiness to take responsibility for one's own learning, and so on. "While undertaking the task of learning another language, the learners have to prepared to take responsibility for their own learning, and not rely only on their teachers or institutions. This applies to both sighted as well as blind students."

Regarding the role of the BVI students themselves in creating a conducive English language learning environment in an integrated class, Mr. Murad said he believed that it ultimately lied in the hands of these students themselves. "As they say: 'If there is a will,

there is a way', if they are committed, if they want to do something for themselves, then all the obstacles would give way one by one.”

4.17 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, data was presented in a categorised form after coding and identifying patterns across interview transcripts. Views of the study participants were put before the reader. The BVI students were mainly concerned with such issues as access to study material, teaching strategies, their accommodation in the integrated classes, their own strategies to overcome blindness-related challenges, and the effective use of assistive technology, etc. Teachers' views centred on such issues as the accommodation of their BVI students in their classes on daily basis, these students' interpersonal relationship with their sighted peers, and the issue of accessibility, etc. Students, despite the fact that they wholeheartedly appreciated their teachers' sincere efforts to accommodate them, expressed their reservations about their teachers' lack of training, their inability to access the study material, and the administration nonchalant attitude, among others. Teachers appeared to be worried most of all about their own inability to properly cater to the needs of their BVI students, their helplessness to do much for these students on account of their own lack of knowledge, and the administration 's indifference, etc.

In the next chapter, major themes based on this data will be presented and analysed. This division has been made only for the sake of convenience for the reader, as analysis of data begins right from coding (some would say from the framing of the interview schedule) and coding, data management, the development and refinement of themes, and the identification of patterns across the data do not occur sequentially. Rather, all of these activities occur throughout the project. In other words, I am not drawing a line of demarcation between thematic coding and thematic analysis. They go side-by-side.

CHAPTER 5

MAJOR THEMES

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the major themes based on the analysis of the data presented in the previous chapter are put before the reader and elaborated upon. Themes, according to Willig (2008), represent the most essential aspects of the texts. Based on hierarchical relations and natural concepts of clusters, the researcher categorized and arranged these themes. Smith and Osborn (2008) suggested that themes should not be selected purely on their prevalence within the data, but also on the richness of the passages which highlight said themes, and how the themes assist in illuminating other aspects of the account. As such, although I decided that at least two participants must have discussed a topic for it to be considered a theme, theme selection was also driven by the length at which such phenomena were discussed, and thus the level of pertinence placed upon them by participants.

The chapter commences with the availability of study material to BVI students in some accessible format. Other themes including the efficacy of computer-based assistive technology for learning the English language, the issue of achieving written communication with the sighted teachers, self-assertiveness and self-advocacy, the utility of braille literacy in English language learning, alteration of study habits to accommodate blindness-related needs, effective teaching strategies, the issue of special training for sighted teachers, BVI students' social skills and interpersonal relationship in integrated classes, the impact of visual impairment on English language learning, and the role of administrators, are discussed after that. In the last part of the chapter, a summary of the insights which were found to be recurrent is presented. It may be noted that, although the study participants viewed the BVI students' English language learning experience from his/her own perspective, yet the issues that came up persistently in almost every interview were found to be the same. In other words, the difference did not lie in the issues, but rather in the perspectives from which those issues were viewed.

5.2 Accessibility to Study Material

One of the main challenges confronted by all the student participants was access to the study material in some accessible format. All of them termed the availability of study material in some accessible format as absolutely essential for successful English language learning by BVI students. Just as a sighted student studying English language cannot succeed in formal classroom settings without books, it would be hard to think of the BVI students to accomplish the task effectively. If the study material is not available to them in some accessible format, learning the English language in integrated classroom settings would be just beyond them.

Most of them were of the view that a great deal of secondary study material about English language was available online, but the material used in classes could not be found on the internet. But they regretted the fact that the primary study material used in class was available neither in braille nor in any other accessible format at the university, and consequently they had to manage it on their own.

The BVI students are supposed to make the study material accessible themselves either by converting the hard printed material into soft form through scanning, so that they can listen to them with a screen reader installed on their laptop, or ask a friend to audiotape it for them, or obtain the converted materials from a senior BVI student who might have made it accessible through the above two procedures. But the scanned materials almost invariably contained typographical errors (mainly because of the poor print quality of the material handed to students, and, to a lesser extent, because of some technical issues in the softwares, tools and gadgets used by BVI students) and consequently the BVI students sometimes found it hard to make sense out of it. In such cases, the BVI student relied only on listening during class proceedings which often results in their having a fairly rudimentary knowledge of English language. If the university could not provide the study material in accessible format, at least it should take steps to ensure the print quality of the textbooks. Till the compilation of this research report, the university's administration has failed to make the study material accessible for the BVI learners of English.

It is for this very reason that the BVI students are forced to seek the assistance of a sighted individual for removing those typographical errors, and thus, improving their

comprehensibility level. But the issue of reliance on others carries psychological implications for BVI students. They feel dependent on others and less psychologically secured. Moreover, based on my own experience, I can safely say that their motivation level significantly reduces when they are confronted with the challenge of accessibility. Their interest in class begins to flag. The otherwise very confident and self-assured BVI individuals (when facing no accessibility issues) could easily become timid, less sure of their abilities, shy, less eager to participate in class activities, psychologically brittle and more detached.

The problem of the non-availability of the study material persisted even in specialized schools for BVI students, where they were forced to share one braille textbook among several students. This was one of the main reasons for BVI students' lagging behind their sighted peers in their academic endeavours. They had to ensure the availability of the study material on their own (by asking someone to audio-record them for them); neither the administration nor their teachers considered it their responsibility to help them in this regard.

It is true that material related to almost every aspect of English language could be easily found online, but the material they used in the class was not available on the net on account of copyright issues. As a result, BVI students had no option but to make this study material accessible to themselves. But the poor print quality of the textbooks (as has been pointed out above), the presence of pictures, maps and charts, and tables etc., in these books made them very difficult to be properly converted into soft form through scanning. Consequently, in terms of class participation and overall learning, they found it very difficult to keep pace with their sighted peers in the integrated class.

In order to ensure the BVI students' equal participation in class and success in language study, all the teachers emphasized the importance of the timely availability of study material to them in accessible formats. The teachers were of the view that if the BVI students had their study material in braille or any other accessible format just as their sighted peers had theirs in print, and if they had the same opportunities to participate and follow along in class, they would have equal opportunity for success like their sighted classmates. They acknowledged, however, that it is the students' responsibility to make the

study material accessible to themselves as the university mainly focus on the sighted students and could not cater to their needs in this regard.

One solution they offered was that teachers should prepare their lessons at least one week ahead of time and inform their BVI students so as to enable them to render the study material accessible for themselves. Some teachers tried to make amends by downloading and providing the BVI students with the secondary materials in accessible formats so that they could study on their own, but the issue of the primary material still remained to be resolved. Others attempted to address the issue by pairing their BVI student with their sighted classmate, believing somewhat erroneously that if a visually challenged student is paired up with a sighted classmate, they could function as efficiently as a sighted student, but the problem of dependency and its consequent implications could not be averted. Moreover, they appeared to believe that it is the BVI students' own responsibility (at least till the time when the administration assumes this charge) to make the study material accessible to themselves. They acknowledged, however, that the BVI students could experience severe frustration which may result in high levels of anxiety and low motivation, especially when they have difficulties in finding the study material in accessible format.

The awareness on the part of sighted teachers of the study material used by BVI students is crucial in order to ensure its quality. It can be tricky especially when the student uses brailled material, as the teachers generally have no idea about braille, and hence are in no position to determine its quality. In such cases the teachers hardly have any idea with regard to the grammatical, lexical or punctuational quality of the material. Such issue can be resolved either through the teachers' familiarity with the braille (an ideal situation) or the students' familiarity with modern computer-based assistive technology and its use for making his study material accessible for his sighted teachers' perusal.

Access to study material can serve as great equalizer, as the BVI students can easily compete with their sighted peers as long as the former have their study materials available to them in braille or other accessible format. They would hardly lag behind their sighted peers in doing their homework and submitting their assignments, and would be able to

function independently. They would be in a position to accommodate their teachers instead of waiting for their teachers to accommodate them.

5.3 The Utility of Computer-Based Assistive Technology

BVI learners generally use kinaesthetic and auditory strategies for accessing information. They have to employ alternative means to gain access to information which is available so easily to their sighted peers. For this purpose, they rely on the use of assistive technology. Effective use of assistive technology not only helps the BVI students in obtaining access to study material but also gives them independence and self-reliance in their studies, which raise their motivation level and increase their self-confidence and self-esteem. It is for these (and other) reasons that all the BVI student participants unanimously termed the assistive technology to be crucial in their English language studies.

According to AFB (2011), in order to meet students' educational needs, specialized services, appropriate instructional books, and materials, as well as specialized equipment and technology should be integrated. Assistive technology played a pivotal role in making BVI students independent in their English language studies. It not only made the BVI learners independent in their English language studies, but also opened up new avenues for them. It was termed as a "great leveller" as it potentially put the BVI students of English on a par with their sighted peers. Not only that, it is also a great morale-booster for BVI students, as it enabled them to consider themselves as normal human beings like the rest; individuals who can go about their own business without relying on others' help.

Assistive Technology plays a crucial role in integrating the BVI individuals in the working and education environment by enabling them to realise and demonstrate their true potential (Microlink, 2015). The computer-based assistive technology, particularly the screen reader (JAWS), enabled them to access a variety of study material on English language, as it helps them surf the net, where they could, without the help of a sighted person, access and read a variety of material (e.g. newspapers, novels, magazines, grammar books, dictionaries, and so on). In other words, assistive technology could potentially resolve many of the accessibility issues (discussed in section 5.2).

Studies have shown that assistive technology can raise the potential of BVI learners in terms of improving their cognition, sociability, comprehension levels and enhancing

their reading speeds (Bera, 2011; Corn et al., 2002; Kennedy, 2002; Wong & Cohen, 2011). Acknowledging the role of assistive technology in English language studies, many of the BVI students were of the view that without the screen readers on their computers and smartphone, they would find it almost impossible to pursue their studies. It has enabled them to work on almost every aspect of English language (pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar). They could consult dictionary, surf the net for information regarding every aspect of English language, take their exams, read English literature and listen to the native speakers online, on their own, without any assistance from a sighted individual. Moreover, apart from scanning printed material on to their laptops and then reading it through a screen reader, the BVI students could read a printed page on the fly through an Apple application installed on his iPhone called “Seeing AI”. Sapp and Hatlen (2010) assert that adapted books, specialized equipment, and other technologies have provided students with sensory impairments equal access to study material.

The majority of students used assistive technology in the preparation of their assignments (both in-class and home) and submit them to their teacher in printed form who had no knowledge of braille. Those students who could not use modern assistive technology (e.g. computer, printer and scanner), faced considerable problems, this study showed, in the preparation and submission of their assignments for the perusal of their sighted teacher. There can be diverse reasons for the underuse of assistive technology (e.g. lack of awareness and knowledge among BVI learners, fear of novelty, hard and software issues, feelings of stigmatization and a shift in the priorities of visually impaired individuals (Johnson, 2011).

The sighted teachers are generally braille illiterate in Pakistan and hence are unable to read brailled documents. Thus students not acquainted with modern computer-based assistive technology could not achieve written communication with their sighted teachers. Such students are generally visual learners, and rely on braille for their studies, because they, unlike most BVI students, are not auditory learners, and hence find it hard to make sense out of audiotapes or screen readers. Even if they are not visual learners, some students find it hard to get used to modern assistive technology because they are unable to memorize so many keyboard commands (in case of using screen-readers). Moreover, the lack of

availability of brailled material for advanced English courses further exacerbated matters for the BVI students.

Most of the modern assistive technology, tools and gadgets are so expensive that they are beyond the reach of an average Pakistani BVI individual. The students regretted the fact, however, that no assistive technology for BVI students was available at the university, and suggested that gadgets such as magnifiers and CCTV for low vision students and laptops for all the visually impaired students should nevertheless be made available in classrooms. The universities not only failed to provide any assistive tools for the BVI students, they were also discouraged from using their own inside the class because, it was argued, it distracted their sighted peers.

The students said that there was hardly any awareness of the assistive technology for BVI learners among the administrators or teachers, a fact that all the teachers admitted, so much so that they were allowed fairly recently to take their exams on their laptops. All the teachers acknowledged that their knowledge about the assistive technology used by the BVI students was quite scanty. Whatever information they had about it, it came via their interaction with their BVI students. Given the importance of assistive technology for BVI students, teachers need to have at least some basic information about it, as their unawareness about it can have problems for both students as well as teachers themselves. Although at present, no such specialized aids are available at the university for class use in order to facilitate the teaching/learning process in integrated classes, yet in not a very distant future, classes might be provided with assistive tools and gadgets, and teachers would be compelled to make use of them. Moreover, teachers need to familiarize themselves with the assistive technology the visually challenged learners used, because without understanding the way they studied and accessed the written word they would be unable to determine the strategies they used, and hence adjust their teaching style accordingly. Computer-based assistive technology also proved very effective in achieving written communication with the sighted teachers. Although modern assistive technology has facilitated them to a large extent to access the printed material (Ngubane-Mokiwa, 2013), and BVI learners of English can read electronic books and browse the Internet with the help of JAWS for Windows (a screen reader), and partially sighted students can use Zoomtext (a computer application) for magnifying any e-text on their computer (FOTIM,

2011), yet their problems in accessing the written word are far from over. At times, the screen readers are not compatible with the electronic format of the material (Mokiwa & Phasha, 2012). Moreover, these tools and gadgets are prone to breakdowns (both software and hardware). The existing OCR technology still needs to be further improved.

5.4 The Utility of Written Communication with the Sighted Teachers

Underscoring the importance of possessing such ability on the part of visually challenged students, Mc Broom et al (1994), citing Kessler (1984), argues that the BVI students have the right to compose, edit and produce tasks and assignments without the assistance of some sighted individual. The majority of students found it quite easy to successfully achieve written communication with regard to the submission of written assignments, tests and so on, with their sighted classroom teachers. Those students who could use assistive technology, such as computers with screen readers, scanners, printers or braille notetaking devices, were able to communicate very independently with their teachers, as they could make the study material accessible for themselves, prepare their assignments and present them to their sighted teachers in print format for their perusal who could not read braille. These students did not have to rely on others' assistance for their written tasks, assignments or exam papers and submitting them to their sighted teachers. They could also take their exams on their laptop and submitted their answer-sheets in the form of printouts for their sighted teachers' perusal. As has been mentioned above, the BVI students loved to be independent, and doing and presenting their assignments and tasks independently always boost their confidence as well as self-esteem. "For my English course, I can print out information directly from my braille notetaker utilizing a standard printer for immediate reading by my regular classroom teachers.", said Farooq.

Those students, like Sanan, who relied on the services of an amanuensis for writing assignments, tests and tasks are rendered dependent on others, and had to suffer not only academically, but also mentally and psychologically. They find it hard to perform to their full potential, as they rely on the competence of their amanuensis. On the contrary, if their amanuensis is more proficient than them, their true competence might never be known to the teachers. In either case, it is harmful for the BVI students. Moreover, there is always the issue of determining on the part of the teacher whether the spelling or punctuation errors

present in the dictated answers/assignments are committed by the student or his amanuensis. The teacher has no way of finding out, therefore, whether the student knows the correct use of punctuation marks or how to spell the English words. This was exactly the case with Sanan: since his teacher was unable to view Sanan's own writing, he couldn't determine whether he was aware of the correct way of punctuating or spelling.

All the teachers stated that, mainly because of the latest developments in assistive technology, their blind students were able to submit their written assignments to them in print format quite independently. The blind students, via their computers and printers, write and submit their written work to their sighted teacher for their perusal and grading without any reliance on others. Since the sighted teachers are almost always braille-illiterate, their blind students have to submit their assignments in print and not in braille.

The general body of literature on visual impairment also states that dependence upon others for the achievement of academic objectives is always problematic and should, therefore, be avoided. The body of literature disapproves of the BVI students' reliance on sighted individuals for doing such basic tasks as producing written assignments in print for the sighted teachers. Yuditsky (1991) is of the view that if the BVI students are to be successful, they must be self-reliant, instead of depending on their teachers and others to make provisions for them. He believes that the BVI students' too much reliance on others can be significantly disadvantageous for them, especially in terms of competing with their sighted classmates. Citing Rothstein (1986), Mc Broom et al (1994) argues that the BVI students used to special treatment in specialized schools for the blind and visually impaired may be taken aback by the non-existence of those conditions at the college or university level.

5.5 BVI Students' Assertiveness and Self-advocacy

BVI students often come to universities having little proper understanding of how their disability affects their learning (Brinkerhoff, McGuire, and Shaw, 2002; Getzel and Briel, 2006; Getzel and McManus, 2005.). Consequently, they are unable to effectively self-advocate in order to address the academic challenges they confront there. Moreover, BVI students often perceive themselves as unprepared for the increased rigor of university. As a result, they frequently face the challenge of a smooth transition to university

environment as well as resilience to complete a degree or certificate (Hilary, 2006). This can result in difficulty with academic expectations and anxiety which often cause minimised retention rates (Connor, 2012; Reed, Kennett, Lewis, Lund -Lucas, Stallberg and Newbold, 2009). Katharine (2007) concluded that an increase in self-advocacy skill was associated with an increase in psychosocial adjustment to disability, institutional attachment, and academic adjustment.

Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) argued that "self-advocacy skills include learning how to be assertive but not aggressive; how to negotiate, compromise and use persuasion; how to be an effective leader and team member" (p. 253). After analysing and synthesising the hitherto available research and input from stakeholders, Test et al. (2005) identified four components of self-advocacy: knowledge of rights, knowledge of self, communication, and leadership. Knowledge of rights is the BVI individual's information and understanding about his rights as a special citizen. In other words, he knows how to ensure his rights of inclusion in school, higher education institutions and employment, to which he legally entitled (Fiedler and Danneker, 2007; Test et al., 2005). Knowledge of self refers to the BVI individual's understanding of his own strengths and limitations, likes and dislikes, goals and objectives, learning styles and strategies, disability awareness and needs (Fiedler and Danneker, 2007; Test et al., 2005).

All the teacher participants freely expressed their views on the topic of assertiveness and self-advocacy. They were of the view that, for better functioning in an integrated class, the BVI students needed to develop the skills of assertiveness and self-advocacy. The BVI students who proactively seek accommodations to recompense for their disability, according to Brinckerhoff (1991), are more likely to achieve academic success as compared with those who fail to do so. Those BVI students who possessed good self-advocacy skills, not only made their language learning experience much more effective and enjoyable for themselves, but also gave their teachers the scope for adjusting their teaching style according to their needs. The blind student's ability to make his/her needs known is crucial to a successful working relationship between them and their teachers.

Almost all student participants termed assertiveness and self-advocacy as very important for achieving success in the regular classroom environment. All of them stated

that it was mandatory for the BVI students to inform the regular classroom teachers about their special needs, as very few of the teachers might have very little knowledge of visual impairment or the needs of a visually impaired student. Lack of proper communication on the part of the BVI students might have serious consequences for them, as their sighted teachers might wrongly assume that whatever they are doing, without taking the special needs of the BVI students into account, was working fine for them.

Some teachers might have certain preconceived notions about the blind student's capabilities. It is the BVI students' responsibility to dispel any erroneous notions held by their sighted teachers regarding them and their potential through self-advocacy. Moreover, it is also essential for them to apprise their teachers of any blindness-related problems and mutually arrive at some viable solution to those challenges.

Miss Aneela said that initially she did not verbalize the written material and give no description of diagrams, tables and charts because she received no training on how to accommodate the BVI students and was hence unaware of their special needs. Her BVI student suggested that if she accompanied the visuals with descriptions, it would be very helpful for him. "He requested me to present the material orally for his sake so that he could learn it just like her sighted students."

Self-advocacy on the part of the BVI students is especially important for their academic success in an integrated classroom setting because, as Valdevieso and Hartman (1991) argue, the majority of sighted teachers and administrators are generally unaware of how to accommodate a visually challenged student. In situations where the BVI students fail to apprise their sighted teachers of their special needs, they could not perform to their full potential in an integrated classroom setting, as the teachers would be unable to properly accommodate them. These students pose considerable challenges both for their teachers as well as for themselves as their teachers are simply unaware of their needs and hence, they did not know how to accommodate them. Mr. Hamid, for example, tried to extract something out of his student in terms of his needs, but to no avail. "I gave my blind student every opportunity to inform me about his needs so that I could accommodate him, but he remained silent and said nothing. I was left wondering with regard to his needs. How could I accommodate his needs if I didn't know them in the first place?"

But there is a thin line between arrogance and self-advocacy which the BVI students sometimes cross. At times, the manner in which the BVI students expressed their needs tantamount to sarcasm or arrogance. Allowances could be made for such behaviour as, on account of their deprivation, the BVI students are often on the defensive and suffer from low self-esteem.

Similarly, a distinction needs to be made between self-advocacy and over-dependence. The BVI students must not over-depend on others, as it might put off their peers and teachers. They should try to be as independent as possible and should seek the help of others only when it is absolutely needed, and they fear of getting stuck. Moreover, they should always be in a position to give something in return. It can be a small favour in the form of a gift, some academic help, or even an expression of “thanks” with a pleasant smile. These small gestures go a long way in establishing good interpersonal relationship with the sighted peers and teachers. Asking for favours all the time without paying them back in some form often result in turning a BVI student into a liability, someone people prefer to avoid.

It is the BVI student’s duty to explicitly inform his regular classroom teacher about any accommodation-related needs and concerns her/himself, instead of waiting for the university’s administration to take measures on his behalf. My own experience shows that people in the administration generally know very little about blindness and blindness-related issues. Thus, relying on their help to advocate for you is a sure recipe for disaster. I have observed that the majority of sighted people have compassionate hearts and are always willing to help, but they simply don’t know how to assist us. Sighted peers and teachers are generally very forth-coming with their assistance, so instead of holding them responsible for their problems, the BVI individuals should take the initiative and reach out to them.

Brinckerhoff (1991) and Spiers (1992) state that the BVI students should thoroughly describe their handicap to their teachers as well as offer recommendations about how to accommodate their specialized needs. But Fichten et al (1988) caution that mere description of one’s disability to one’s teacher is not sufficient, and terms effective self-advocacy as essential for academic success. He argues that a blind student does not need

to provide a detailed explanation of his/her visual handicap, as it could make those individuals feel overwhelmed who deal with the blind student in regular classroom setting. What is necessary for a blind student, Fichten et al (1988) state, is just to inform his teacher what he can and cannot do in a regular academic setting. It means that the BVI students not only have to educate themselves, but also undertake the task of educating others with regard to their disability-related needs.

5.6 The Utility of Braille Literacy in English Language Learning

The BVI students use a variety of adaptive tools for accessing the written word. One of the most extensively used tool is braille. The BVI students who are print challenged from their childhood and have studied in specialised schools are generally familiar with this tool. But those who lose their vision later on are generally unfamiliar with it.

Invented by the Frenchman Louis Braille in the 19th century, braille is basically a writing system for the BVI individuals (American Foundation for the Blind 2015). It is a system of raised dots which can be read with the fingers tactily by BVI individuals (AFB, 2015). Basically braille is a code (not a language) in which many languages like Chinese, English, Spanish and Urdu can be written (Howse 2006). It provides a means of literacy and communication to all BVI individuals (Tom, 2010).

According to Maurer (2007), BVI learners need to be exposed to tactile study material with regard to their reading skills. Bester, Meyer and Evans (2013) note that Braille gives blind learners a sense of privacy, confidentiality and independence because they will be able to label their own belongings and read and write on their own without outside help. BVI learners use braille for their reading and writing skills instead of printed characters. Therefore, teachers have to be aware of it in order to develop appropriate activities for BVI learners of English, as they are responsible for adapting and modifying in-class activities to suit their needs. Full adaptation, description and modification of lessons need to be provided to the BVI learners in order to facilitate the development of reading skills among them (Hardle 2007).

All the student participants, regardless of their ability to use braille, underscored the importance of braille textbooks and other study material in braille for success in their

study of the target language. They termed braille to be crucial in the acquisition of knowledge regarding the target language grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Some students are visual in terms of their learning style, despite the fact that they are visually impaired, and hence they are much more comfortable with braille as compared with either computers or audio-tapes. Regarding the inefficacy of audiotapes, Saima stated: “Listening to tapes is quite hard for me. I can’t pick the accent of the readers, and most of them speak so fast that comprehending them is just beyond me. You face no such issues with braille; things are under your control. You have no issues with accent, and it’s up to you to read slowly or fast.”

Students’ inability to use braille can sometimes put them at a great disadvantage vis-à-vis their sighted classmates in terms of completing their assignments and class participation on an equal basis, as they could not participate in any reading assignment or doing any textbook exercises during class. It becomes difficult to ask for the teachers or peers’ assistance all the time, especially when they are busy with their own tasks in the class. Once you have material in braille, you can do most of the things on your own. Moreover their inability to use braille can greatly hampered their efforts to prepare for exams. “I would love to study the English language at a more advanced level, but having to rely so much on others has made it almost impossible to think of pursuing that course.”, Sami said.

But the quality of the brailled material must be good in the first place, as poorly transcribed material in braille can become quite ineffective and boring. It was noted that even those BVI students who were fortunate enough to have accessible study material in braille failed to achieve a level playing field, as the poor quality of the brailled material always hampered their studies, Thus, depriving them of obtaining the opportunity to have equal access to the study material. Poorly transcribed material can considerably hamper the BVI students in their attempts to acquire a proficient knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, spelling and other areas crucial to successful English language learning.

Ordinary print is converted into braille by first scanning the printed pages on to a computer using an optical character recognition software and a scanner. Once the ordinary print is successfully transferred and stored on a computer, it is then converted into braille

through a special transcription software, which can then be printed in hard form through a braille embosser. Given the current stage of development both in the optical character recognition (OCR) and the braille transcription software technology, errors may occur both at the OCR as well as the transcription stage, and hence the ensuing printed brailled document cannot be accurate. The errors in this document can be manually corrected either by a sighted person who has a working knowledge of braille, or a sighted individual who reads out the original document to the BVI student and thus, remove the errors.

5.7 Adaptation of Study Habits

Realising the importance of English language with regard to their future careers, the BVI study participants showed great passion for learning it. They tried to make the most of their intact senses, particularly their auditory sense. Milian & Pearson (2005) argued that the process of second language learning by BVI learners requires strong language abilities, particularly strong auditory skills . Apart from this, he said they must also have positive attitudes. According to Jedynek (2010), Command over English language not only enables BVI learners to have good communicational skills in the lingua franca, but also creates new opportunities for them. On the basis of a review study, Arslantaş (2017) concluded that the BVI learners have more advantages in learning foreign languages as compared with the sighted learners. Holding the language input constant, he argued, BVI learners can have stronger verbal memory.

All the students needed to alter their study habits in order to accommodate their blindness-related needs. For reading, they converted the written text to some form of audio (screen-readers or obtained the services of live readers). In other words, they turned the written material into some form of speech, and read through their ears. Those who used braille, employed their fingers for this purpose. Whatever method is employed, reading in this manner means they could only scan a document and not skim it, as they had to go in a linear order. This is what puts the BVI readers at a greater disadvantage as compared with their sighted peers, as they can both skim as well as scan a written document as and when they want. Moreover, because of this limitation, they required more time than their sighted peers to complete an in-class reading task or activity, which means that they rely on the cooperation of their teachers. Even while reading for gist, the BVI students had to scan the

entire document. Consequently they generally took more time, almost double the time a sighted person takes, in reading a document.

Those who used live readers faced challenges of a different nature. They had to adjust their time with their human readers while working on their assignments or preparing for exam. It means they had to adjust their time in accordance with the schedule of others. For this purpose, they needed to keep and maintain an appointment book, and gave preference to others over themselves in terms of time-allocation and scheduling. Even after taking such precautionary measures, their dependence on others often resulted in a variety of challenges for them. In the first place, they were compelled to sacrifice part of their social life for obtaining academic success as blind individuals. Obviously, as blind individuals relying on the help of others, they were in no position to force their terms on others, but must adjust to the dictates of others.

It means that BVI students need to develop the capacity to be more organized in their language study, as, given their blindness, they would require more time for successfully completing their tasks and activities. Hence, they, unlike their sighted classmates, cannot afford to approach their studies in a leisurely manner. The sighted students can easily manage their own time because they can work independently, the visually challenged cannot, because they have to rely on others.

The BVI students used different techniques for writing. Since they could not use the normal pen and paper for writing, they employed alternative means (e.g. braille or computer equipped with a screen reader). Those who use a computer for this purpose, type whatever they intend to write on the keyboard, using a screen-reader which echoes back whatever they write, using a word processor. Those who use braille for this purpose, use a braille-writer.

The BVI learners also employed different techniques while participating in group work. They relied on verbal clues instead of facial expressions, gestures and other visual cues for taking and handing over the floor to the next participant in group discussions and whole-class interactions. since they could not see the gestures of their sighted interlocuters, they depended on them to provide them with oral cues for a successful oral discourse. Similarly, they approached the written text in a different way.

Most of the English language textbooks contain many charts, tables, diagrams and pictures. The BVI students were unable to access them on their own either through braille or through computer-based assistive OCR technology. The only way they could access them was through verbal descriptions provided to them either by their class fellows or friends and family members.

The BVI students also used different techniques for taking down notes in class. Some of them simply audiotaped the main points in class, and later listened to them at home. Others used a braille notetaking device for taking notes in class. Instead of audio-recording lectures, they used their brailled lecture notes and braille and electronic study material for reference. Yet others accessed the written material through braille, extracted the gist, and then audio-recorded the main crux in their own voice.

To sum up, the BVI student participants adapted their used a variety of techniques for their study of the English language. Despite their firm resolve to be successful in achieving their objectives, some of the challenges (e.g. the problem of their inability to skim a given text) could not be resolved.

5.8 Teachers' Perceptions about their BVI Students' Study Habits

This category yielded varied, and sometimes conflicting, responses. Teachers differed in their views about their blind students' study habits. Some believed their visually challenged students were somewhat indolent and disorganized. They attributed it to their visual impairment. Such traits as lethargy and indolence have got nothing to do with visual impairment, and a sighted individual may be as just disorganised as a BVI student can be. Yet other teachers were full of praise for their blind students who were able to balance the scheduling of their human readers with the routine rigors of university life. All the teachers, however, agreed on the need for the BVI students to learn to explore and employ various methods for gaining access to the study material (e.g. braille, live readers, computers with screen readers and audiotapes etc.) They also emphasized the importance of developing and maintaining good organizational skills in the integrated class.

5.9 Effective Teaching Strategies

Teaching strategies cover a range of resources and procedures that intend to ensure an adequate processing of new knowledge considering the specific requirements of each

learning situation. Pedagogical strategies in integrated setting need to respond to the needs of all students. Strategies should aim to cater to student diversity including the BVI learners (Park, 2019). In the case of BVI learners, teachers should utilise the most developed channels of these students (Rivera et al., 2012). Active tactile perception also becomes very important in the learning process of a BVI student. They, therefore, need appropriate resources to facilitate the learning process (Park, 2019).

Multisensory education is very effective in the case of all learners, including BVI individuals, who can be educated through tactile and auditory (Migliarini & Stinson, 2020). The lack of visual experiences can be compensated for by olfactory, tactile, auditory, and movement experiences. The BVI learners can have an enriched learning experience in an environment which is rich in stimuli.

The specific needs of BVI learners require specialized pedagogic strategies. Not only the visual aspects of perception (e.g. shape, size, contrast, color, etc.) and cognitive aspects (memory, attention, previous experiences) but also the subjective aspects (e.g. sensations, interests, needs, etc.) need to be taken into account in order to maximise the visual stimulation (Morrow, 1999). It means that strategies can be adopted for BVI students that allow them to be more autonomous in learning. Each adaptation will make a significant difference in the integration of students in the classroom.

For more effective teaching, teachers need to adapt their strategies to the current requirements of the BVI students. This is possible only when teachers know the student's disability and can make the appropriate adjustments in their teaching style in order to accommodate the BVI students (Belova, 2017). Moreover, teachers will have to establish links with the BVI students on a more personal level in order to allow them to share their concerns freely with them.

Lewin-Jones and Hodgson (2016) give these suggestions: allow the BVI learners to be autonomous, as far as possible, let them solve their challenges; never deny that they have limitations; allow the BVI learners to fully know you; communicate clearly; and treat them like your sighted students so they might have no issues with their self-esteem. Lewin-Jones & Hodgson also gave the following suggestions to the sighted teachers: utilise the multisensory stimulation, emphasizing hearing and touch; verbalize as far as possible; try

to give additional information for a clearer understanding; and since the BVI learners depend a lot on their hearing, control the level of noise in your class. Moreover, teachers should offer both individual and group learning opportunities to the BVI learners. It is believed that in the case of BVI individuals, the sense of touch can be a complement to visual input, and many things can be more deeply conceptualized through touching them. Moreover, BVI learners have the ability to make conclusions about a situation through the tone of voice, because sound contains a great deal of information about the physical world (Fernández et al., 2019). It means that BVI learners must be stimulated through a multi-sensory approach, but these stimuli must be presented adequately in terms of quality, quantity, and timely. In the field of second language learning, it can be concluded that this strategy offers the teacher many of the necessary tools which he can apply in the development of class activities to the advantage of the BVI learners, and even for the whole group (NaghmeH-Abbaspour, 2022).

Certain teaching strategies were found to be very effective by the BVI students. These included: verbal description of the written material on the board, illustration and explanation of pictures, maps and diagrams, etc. Moreover, a repetition of the content, especially of the newly introduced content, was also found to be useful. Other teaching strategies as Dividing the class into pairs and small groups, addressing BVI students by their names, repeating the material wherever necessary, reading aloud whatever the teacher wrote on the board, ensuring that the study material was available to the BVI students in accessible format, assigning the task of assisting the BVI students to their class fellows in an in-class task or activity, etc., were also found to be effective. Further, BVI students love to be taught by teachers who are friendly and cooperative because they are psychologically quite brittle and can easily be overwhelmed in classes where they find little cooperation, assistance and friendliness.

Students said in situations where the teacher gave verbal explanation or described verbally the things which were visual in the first place, they really enjoyed and understood the concepts better.

Pictures and diagrams, which, as has been mentioned above, are such an integral part of most English language textbooks, are of no use to a BVI student, and indeed can

become a source of confusion, if not properly described and explained to them. BVI students might feel frustrated especially when the teachers forget to read aloud the things written on the board, or describe to them any diagram, picture or map. They might also feel frustrated when they are assigned an in-class assignment which they could not do simply because of their disability. That is why their teachers should take them into account while planning their lessons. The best approach for teachers to adopt, according to McBroom et al (1994), is to initiate a dialogue with their visually challenged students to know about their special needs, and then try to accommodate those needs. Most of the in-class tasks and activities (given in textbooks) are beyond the BVI students' capability, as they are designed for sighted students, and the teachers need to adapt them for their visually challenged students. It is for this reason that the teachers need to pay particular attention to their lesson-plans whenever they have a BVI student in their class.

Such strategies as using the board a lot and not reading aloud what was written on it, giving dictation and keeping the tempo very brisk are some of those strategies/techniques which are quite ineffective for BVI students. It means that the teachers have to alter their teaching style so as to accommodate the needs of their BVI students.

But altering the teaching style is by no means an easy task, as the teachers have to strike a balance between accommodating the BVI students and at the same time maintaining the interest of their sighted students. And since the teachers have no specialized training for teaching to BVI individuals at the university level in our country, hence they had little knowledge about any specialized strategies for teaching them.

The majority of teachers, therefore, rely on their intuition/hunches with regard to the most effective teaching strategies for their BVI students, coupled with their own observation and feedback from their BVI students, and devised certain strategies. It has been observed that those arrived at after consultation with their BVI students are generally found to be effective, whereas those based on their intuition or hunches may or may not be so.

Certain strategies might be effective for BVI students but detrimental to the learning of the sighted students, and here lies the real test of the teacher. For example, when

teachers give a spur-of-the-moment writing or reading assignment to their class, they generally pair their blind student up with his sighted peers, and the assignment is done as a team effort rather than individually. But in this process, they often confront the problem of wasting the time of their sighted students, as they have to sit idle during this while the sighted student is assisting the BVI student. The BVI students might be erroneously held responsible for getting the class proceedings to be slowed down, and, on the face of it, it might appear to be so, but the fault lies with the teacher and not with the BVI student. Most teachers simply do not know how to properly accommodate their BVI students mainly because they are not trained for it.

Some teachers complained that their BVI students faced considerable problems in playing language games, as the majority of the games were visual in nature. Consequently, they avoid using certain language games in class. This is no solution to the problem. Since language games play an important role in exciting the interest of the sighted students, the teachers cannot banish them completely from their classes. A better strategy would be to give his BVI students some other activity while the rest of the class are busy with the game.

Similarly, teachers cannot be allowed to avoid using a multimedia projector in class simply because a BVI student is there, and he might have little benefit from it. They may use either of two strategies in case he wanted to use a multimedia projector in class: (1) providing the BVI student with the material ahead of the class in soft text which they could read with the help of their computer; and (2) in case the material could not be provided on account of certain reason, pairing up the BVI student with one of his sighted classmate, assigning him the responsibility to read to him what is on the multimedia projector. The later strategy might have problems of its own, and teachers should be aware of them and should take measures to avoid the ensuing challenges. It may also be noted that preparing the course material in advance for a blind student (essential for enabling him to keep pace with his sighted classmates) on a regular basis is by no means easy. Similarly, preparing and noting down the verbal descriptions of visual content is very time-consuming. But once prepared, they can be used over and again, as syllabuses are hardly changed in Pakistan.

Time management can be a serious issue for teachers because the BVI students generally require more time to complete an in-class task or activity than their sighted peers.

This too is an erroneous assumption because BVI students are not slow because they are blind, they are slow because the tasks and activities are not accessible to them. Once the accessibility issue is resolved for them, they would be just as quick as their sighted peers, and, in certain cases, even quicker.

Verbal description is undoubtedly necessary for BVI students, but the description or reading aloud of text written on board could become boring for the sighted students as well as in a wastage of time for the rest of the students. Initially, the sighted students might find it odd, but they will get used to it with the passage of time.

Getting them involved in the proceedings of the class, constantly interacting with them verbally, relying less on visual clues while interacting with them, describing to them any pictures, diagrams or tables, etc. are certainly some of the most effective strategies for BVI students. But even more important than these is the willingness on the part of teachers to accommodate their BVI students in their integrated classes. Teachers should not approach the matter like Mr. Hamid who said: "I use a lot of props, visual cues and body language in class. I draw diagrams on the board, use pictures of various objects and realia." Sometimes, he said he acted out various verbs as well. "I have no idea how to fit in a visually challenged student into my predominantly visual teaching style." He said his sighted students, who are in majority, benefited more from this style of his. So he thought not to alter it for the sake of just one student.

Teachers like Mr. Hamid could not be blamed. As has been mentioned above, teachers are not trained for integrated classes having BVI students, they tried to find out about the special needs of these students from the students themselves. But in the process of giving and getting feedback on the special needs of the BVI students, much precious time is wasted, and by the time the teachers are in any position to accommodate their needs, the BVI students are already lagging behind their sighted peers in their academic pursuits. Mr. Hamid said he was completely unaware of the special needs of the BVI students. He said His BVI student, who was initially very enthusiastic about learning the English language, gradually lost all interest and finally left the course. "If there was someone to have guided me, some book to refer to about how to deal with a BVI student in a mainstream class, I think things would have been different than they transpired."

The study established that teachers, like Mr. Akbar, who had the experience of teaching BVI students before were found to be comparatively much more aware of the special needs of these students and hence could accommodate them more effectively than those, like Mr. Ali, who had to teach them for the first time.

5.10 Lack of Special Training among Teachers

According to AFB (2012), research supports the essential elements that teachers of students with visual impairments should possess, including effective communication skills, ability to correctly place students in appropriate setting, and knowledge of the educational implication of eye conditions. But it means that teachers need to be fully trained on how to accommodate their BVI students' needs in integrated classes. Başaran's (2012) study shows that, due to lack of proper training, teachers generally resorted to using the same techniques and materials for teaching to BVI students as they used for sighted students. The study suggested that teachers needed to be trained in order to create conducive inclusive language learning environments for BVI students. Similarly, Morelle's (2016) research work also showed that teachers do not receive adequate support and training. Moreover, these teachers have to teach to large classes. As a result, they find it very hard to dedicate enough attention to each student (Dubovec et al., 2016). Then teachers often take their classes without making the necessary adaptations for their BVI students. It is essential to make adjustments in order to accommodate the special needs of their BVI students (Intriago-Ferrin, 2020). Sheena (2020) and Villalba Ramos (2017) stated that "teachers must think creatively to appropriately teach visually impaired students. (Roldán Paredes and Contreras Aguilar (2013) suggested that teachers should prepare the didactic materials used with BVI students in advance.

Brown and Beamish (2012) and Kocyigita and Artar (2015) are of the view that untrained teachers could hardly meet the challenge of accommodating the special needs of BVI students. Yalo et al. (2012) believes that those teachers who are unable to understand the impact of visual impairment on the behaviour of their students, they would be in no position to accommodate the needs of these students. Therefore, teachers must be properly trained in order to be able to be aware of the special educational needs of the students and analyse the situation in their inclusive classes (Intriago-Ferrin, 2020). Unfortunately the

majority of teachers, especially at the university level, do not have enough training and cannot adapt teaching materials and strategies that meet BVI students' needs. Başaran (2012) suggests that teacher training programs need to be revisited and courses about how to teach students with special educational needs should be made a compulsory part of them.

All the five teachers acknowledged that they received no special training for teaching BVI students in integrated classes. students with visual impairments frequently receive instruction from personnel who are not qualified to teach critical skills, NICHCY (2012). The teachers tried to adjust their teaching style in accordance with the feedback they received from their BVI students. Consequently, they faced many challenges accommodating these students in their regular classes. This lack of proper training, instead of alleviating the BVI students' problems, sometimes further exacerbate matters for them. In the absence of such training, the teachers generally have unfounded fears and trepidations about these BVI students which might lead to, in extreme situations, a complete rejection of these students, or at least an adverse impact on their overall teaching style, which could be detrimental for both the sighted as well as BVI students. studies related to visually impaired students in general education environments reveal a consensus that these individuals are often not receiving the support of teachers to be fully integrated (Sapp & Hatlen, 2010). Some teacher participants said that they were not trained to teach BVI students and when they had a visually impaired student for the first time in their classes, they did not know how to accommodate him. Mr. Hamid, for instance, said that prior training on how to accommodate BVI students in mainstream classes was essential for teachers for enabling them to succeed in their English language learning endeavours. "I am not trained specifically to work with some who is blind. The only thing I could do to help him, and that too I learnt from my BVI student, was to verbalize anything I wrote on the board or displayed on the multimedia projector." Untrained teachers might be taken aback when they see a BVI student for the first time in their class. They are left completely puzzled as to how to deal with such students. Miss Aneela said: "I use a lot of visual materials such as flashcards and pictures in my class. "I used to hold up a picture of something and ask, 'what is this?', to the BVI student, it was of no use, of course." She said she adjusted her style which improved things for her BVI student, but prior training could have been very effective.

In situations where teachers have little clues with regard to dealing with BVI students, they generally adopt the strategy of trying to find out about the special needs of these students from the students themselves. Although this strategy must be appreciated, yet in the process of giving and getting feedback on the special needs of the BVI students, much precious time is wasted, and by the time the teachers are in any position to accommodate their needs, the BVI students are already lagging behind their sighted peers in their academic pursuits. Those teachers, like Mr. Akbar, who had the experience of teaching BVI students before were found to be comparatively much more aware of the special needs of these students and hence could accommodate them more effectively than those, like Mr. Ali, who had to teach them for the first time.

In case of teachers who simply do not know how to address the special needs of these students, the situation can become worse. The BVI student might become so disappointed that he/she might give up studying the course altogether. This is what happened to Mr. Hamid's student. His BVI student, who was initially very enthusiastic about learning the English language, gradually lost all interest and finally left the course. "If there was someone to have guided me, some book to refer to about how to deal with a BVI student in a mainstream class, I think things would have been different than they transpired."

Teachers not adequately trained to provide necessary adaptations for students with visual impairments and to provide necessary support has been noted as a disadvantage of inclusion, (NICHCY, 2012). All the student participants unanimously raised the issue of lack of teacher training. They were of the opinion that teachers who taught them were not trained to teach BVI students and were hence unaware of the special needs and accommodation methods for the BVI students in integrated classes. Sanan said his teacher initially failed to accommodate him, and by the time he realized that, it was too late, and he had been left far behind the rest of the class. He acknowledged, however, that after realizing that he had not been properly accommodated, his English teacher had been very kind to him and gave him extra time both in and after the class. Farooq stated that by and large, his teachers' attitude towards him could not be termed favourable, as he thought they considered him quite incapable and an extra burden on them. On account of lack of training, some teachers persist with their visual style of presentation which can result in the BVI students' lack of understanding and consequent frustration. Baqaran(2012) argues that

untrained teachers find it hard to adjust their teaching style and generally utilise the same techniques for Teaching BVI students as they use for their sighted students, which often have serious consequences for them. In such situations, students either leave the course or start creating discipline problems for the teacher.

With regard to steps the English language teacher should take to make the English language learning experience more effective and enjoyable for BVI students in a regular class, some students suggested that they needed to change their views about these special students: they should believe in the BVI students' abilities and hence should accommodate them in terms of class activities and tasks. "The teachers should take the BVI learners along with their sighted students. They should make them participate in the class activities, as most BVI students are less active in a regular class." They also suggested that the teachers should know the BVI students' names and when needed should address them by name instead of using pronouns or gestures.

5.11 BVI Students' Social Skills in the Integrated Classroom Environment

Social skills, according to Gresham (2016), refer to behaviors exhibited to accomplish social tasks which involve interacting with other individuals, such as creating friendships, holding a conversation, or playing a game with peers). Regardless of the fact that whether or not they have visual impairment, all children need to engage in appropriate social interactions to develop appropriate emotional, cognitive, social and academic development. However, for a BVI individual, social skills are more difficult to develop. BVI students cannot be expected to effectively interact with their sighted peers and be accepted by them unless proper support is provided to them. It is the responsibility of teachers to promote peer acceptance for their BVI students in their integrated classes.

The BVI students' ability to access basic information about as well as through the environment is seriously affected. One of the limitations of the BVI individuals is to access visual models on which to base the development of social skills. Then the input received from the remaining senses may be inaccurate. Difficulties in recognising and interpreting, for example, the body gestures and facial expressions of their interlocutors can result in misunderstandings and make social nuances difficult, or in certain instances, impossible to

interpret. Therefore, BVI individuals need to be provided with social skills training. They need to learn how to (a) interact with others, and (b) how to behave in a socially acceptable manner.

Difficulties in social skills among BVI individuals are widely compared with their sighted peers (Caron et al., 2021; Crocker & Orr, 1996; Huurre & Aro, 1998; McGaha & Farran, 2001; Ozkubat & Ozdemir, 2014). Since the visual system is the primary sensory channel that allows children to incidentally learn social skills, notably through observation and imitation (Bandura, 1977; Sacks & Silberman, 2000), BVI individuals are particularly at risk for difficulties in this domain.

Perles (2010) reported that the general education environment often reflects diversity, and therefore can provide opportunities for educators to enhance the learning of students, through means of differentiated instruction; planning and instructing collaboratively, and promoting social interactions between students. This study, however, revealed that the social skills of the BVI students could not be termed ideal. All but one teacher expressed their concern about their blind students' possession of appropriate social skills in an integrated class. Similarly, all the student participants underscored the importance of good interpersonal relations with the sighted teacher and students in the mainstream class, but some students acknowledged that social interaction was not easy for them. The teachers expressed their reservations about their BVI students' ability to interact in a socially appropriate manner with their sighted peers and teachers. One problem common to almost all the BVI students, the teachers stated, was that they could not properly determine when they were being addressed by their sighted peers and when they should respond.

While most of the BVI student experienced little difficulties of academic nature, they faced certain challenges with regard to social interaction.. For sighted students, having to interact with a BVI student would be quite a novel experience, as the majority of them would not have the opportunity of being around a visually challenged person before. With the passage of time, however, they become more accepting of them.

Sometimes a blind student has a keen desire to be centre of attention in the class which result in his/her isolation, whereas at others, they might try to assert themselves in

order to demonstrate it to the sighted people that the BVI individuals are just like them, even better than them. “I don’t know why I want to be dominant in my class, but I think it’s got something to do with my past: I was looked down upon when I was young because of my visual impairment.”, said Rafiq.

“My blind student could not resist answering questions posed in class, and had the tendency of blurting out answers, not giving an opportunity to anyone else to attempt an answer”, said Mr. Ali. “He had also the habit of interacting with his peers and teacher in English, and it made his sighted classmates interact less and less with him.” The situation got so acute that Mr. Ali had to hold a meeting with the BVI student, attempting to persuade him not to blurt out answers and give the other students a chance as well. Despite the fact that he had good interpersonal skills and tried to interact with his peers in class, the majority of the sighted students were not feeling very comfortable dealing with him. Such attitude on the part of the BVI students and the ensuing lack of interpersonal relationships with their sighted peers may create problems, especially when doing group tasks and activities in class requiring interaction among students. In such situations, no sighted student will hardly be willing to peer up with the BVI students in a group task, so it is up to the teacher to persuade someone to work with them.

One of the greatest barriers to acceptance for many blind students is their inability to interact in a socially appropriate manner. The main hurdle they generally confront is their inability to see other students’ reaction towards them. Sometimes they just speak their mind without realizing how the other people are receiving them. The BVI students are in no position to interpret gestures and hence can’t properly decide if the other person is in any mood to talk to them. They rely mainly on the verbal clues to decide how and when to take turn, but in a regular mainstream class, the verbal clues are hardly use since the majority of the students are sighted and hence follow a normal mood of interaction. Hence, they often jump in without realizing the reaction of the others.

Mr. Akbar said that his blind student often scolded his sighted classmates for their ceaseless talking, which resulted in their side-lining of him. Moreover, it also undermined the teacher’s role as authority in class.

Sometimes sighted students may become more uncomfortable interacting with their blind peers because of their unceasing reliance on the sighted students' assistance for their classwork and assignments. They might be sympathetic towards them, but they simply do not know how to deal with them. Moreover, The BVI students' over-reliance on their sighted peers might be detrimental to their own studies.

Sami said that in his case, social relations with his peers were impeded mainly by his inability to read and take part in group activities and class drills independently on account of the inaccessibility of the study material. He expressed the apprehension, however, that he might be asking too much of them. "The fact that I depend a lot on them in class for their assistance worries me a lot. I feel that I might be imposing on them excessively, as I rely on their help for reading things out to me, and for clarifying lots of ambiguities which obviously result from having no direct access to the study material."

Those of extrovert nature can interact freely and make friends quite easily in class. But those of introvert nature often face difficulties. It is the teachers' duty to make the other students have a positive interactive relation with her introvert BVI student. They should pair such students up with their BVI student who are reluctant to interact with them and try to avoid them. In this way, they can manage to remove a major interactional barrier that may initially exist between a BVI student and their peers. Sometimes the sighted students may admire the BVI student's talent and strength of courage, yet they may also believe them to be somewhat overbearing, wearisome and, at times, overdependent.

Rafiq said that his sighted peers should stop judging the visually challenged individuals only in terms of their blindness. He said that BVI students were generally underestimated by their sighted peers unless they were assertive and dominating in class. "Most of the sighted peers simply attribute everything to our visual impairment. If for example, I'm good at my studies, they believe since I have to do nothing else, I therefore set and study; if I'm dominant in class, they believe BVI individuals have photographic memory; if I'm assertive, they think I'm simply unaware of the feelings of others because I can't see facial expressions and other body gestures; if I remain quiet and participate less in class activities, again they attribute it to my visual impairment. In short, we are judged

and rated in the light of visual impairment and not as thinking and feeling individuals like them.”

According to Mc Broom et al (1994), the BVI students, their teachers and families have to cater to a host of blindness-related issues on a daily basis, and consequently, little time can be spared for improving their social skills. The BVI students' parents' time is largely spent in catering to the medical needs of the BVI children, finding and obtaining special services for them, locating suitable educational programs for them, catering to their other children, earning a living, and tending to a host of other responsibilities. Similarly, their teachers too have to deal with a variety of responsibilities. In short, everyone has his/her hands full and struggle to find time to cater to the “basics”. Consequently, the BVI students are generally prepared academically, but not very well socially (Mc Broom et al, 1994). Yet, if BVI students are to be successful in their practical life, appropriate behaviour is a must for them (Jarrow et al (1991).

To sum up, Being always in great minority in integrated classes, the BVI students need to take the initiative and try to establish good relationship with their sighted peers and teachers. Positive interpersonal relations occurred in those situations when the sighted students took the initiative and began a conversation with the BVI students on some topic of mutual interest. The BVI students should behave normally, not over-depend on the sighted people, and do not give them any impression that they are different from them in any way on account of their visual impairment.

5.12 The Impact of Visual Impairment on Learning the English Language

Responses in this category varied and were found to be somewhat conflicting. All the students agreed, however, that the visual limitations hindered them from successfully participating in group discussion (e.g. taking turns, and taking and handing over the floor to their interlocutors. Some students considered blindness to be very advantageous in learning a second language; others thought it to be very debilitating; yet some saw it to be both gainful as well as detrimental to second language learning.

Farooq, for example, did not subscribe to the view that visual impairment could be a major hindrance in learning the English language. On the contrary, he believed it could be an asset. At times, Farooq said, the BVI individuals had even an advantage over the

sighted people, as their attention could be easily diverted by other visual distractions, whereas the BVI learners could concentrate in a more focused manner on their studies.

Sami viewed blindness as both beneficial as well as disadvantageous, whereas Sanan thought it to be very detrimental to the study of a second language.

Some students believed that their inability to perceive the world around them visually promoted the enhancement of their ability to take in information in an auditory manner. Almost all of the BVI students were of the view that their visual impairment compelled them to rely on their listening skills a lot, which resulted in their enhanced auditory proficiency, and this highly improved auditory ability gave them a crucial edge over their sighted peers in learning the English language. Consequently their listening comprehension and pronunciation are usually better than their sighted peers, but their spelling and punctuation remain weak because of their inability to see the written word. Listening undoubtedly complemented and improved the speaking skills, and BVI students are better than sighted students when it comes to speaking.

BVI learners do have the advantage of not getting distracted by visual activity in the classroom and hence are able to concentrate more on the speech of the teacher, but teacher-talk is not the only thing; a major bulk of learning is peripheral, and that requires both eyes as well as ears. Mr. Hamid said that the absence of the sense of sight meant the BVI students' learning experience could not be like that of the sighted students, as the manner in which the BVI students conceptualized the world was really very different. He also stated they could not be evaluated in the same manner as sighted students. "I was unable to make my blind student do the same things as my sighted students were required to do. The other students took their exam in written form, whereas my BVI student preferred the oral form."

While attending a lecture, the BVI students are limited only to their teacher's verbal input, whereas their sighted peers have access to his body-language, his gestures and whatever other visual cues he might offer. Similarly the BVI students need more time as compared with their sighted peers to complete in-class tasks and activities. "I often find it hard to accomplish a task in the allotted time", said Ahmed, "but since my teachers have

to cater to the needs of the majority students, they hardly give me any extra time.” Consequently, most of his in-class tasks and activities are left incomplete.

Some students were of the view that blindness prevented them from having equal access to the second language materials, which often resulted in lack of participation on their part and timely completion of their assignments and tasks in class. Moreover, they also felt that they found it hard to surmount the visual component attached to second language study. Elaborating on this, they stated that their sighted teachers relied heavily on the use of gestures and visual display of material on the whiteboard or multimedia projector, which did not help the BVI students like them at all. “How can a visually challenged student make sense of the teacher’s use of the demonstratives like ‘this’ or ‘that’?”, one of the student participants asked: “How can I tell when my sighted teacher asks the students, ‘Look at this (pointing to something written on the board) and tell me what’s wrong with this sentence’?”, and reflected: “Obviously I need a verbal description and explanation of things to make up for my visual impairment.”

Then there is the issue of accessibility. The available assistive technology has to go a long way before it is able to help the visually individuals access charts, diagrams, tables, pictures and figures. Consequently, they are dependent on the assistance of live readers, which has consequences of its own. One of the major issues confronted by the BVI student participants because of their visual limitations was their inability to access the sound symbols as most of the available word-processors and almost all screen readers do not support these phonemic symbols. The untrained teachers had no clue whatsoever how to make these students understand these symbols. It means that there are certain aspects of English language study where the achievement of a level playing field is not possible for BVI students, especially when the task[s] involves a great deal of visual work (e.g. symbols, tables, charts, maps, pictures and diagrams).

To sum up, as far as gaining mastery over the target language is concerned, both the blind as well as the sighted students can succeed equally well, but the BVI students’ success depends to a large extent on such factors as the availability of study material in accessible formats, assistive technology, peers’ cooperation and teachers’ willingness to accommodate them in the mainstream classroom environment. Visual impairment does not

mean being bad language learners (Bařaran, 2012). All Learners (regardless of any disability) face certain challenges while learning the English language because of its unphonetic character, its complex spelling system and its not so logical grammar, but visual impairment can cause problems of a different nature (e.g. the inaccessibility of the sound-symbols of various English phonemes, as they are neither available in braille nor readable through the existing screen readers). Otherwise learning the English language should be quite easy for the BVI students because of the availability of screen readers and the study material in a variety of accessible formats. Visual impairment does take its toll on those who suffer from it, there capacities may not be equated with those of the sighted individuals. These students are exposed to higher expectations from teachers and peers, as well as given opportunities to have positive academic role models in their peers without disabilities, (AFB, 2012).

5.13 The Role of Administrators

The views of the study participants also conflicted in this category. Although they praised certain measures taken by the administration, yet most of the BVI students and their sighted teachers viewed their performance both with regard to the blind students' facilitation as well as on a general level as far from satisfactory. All the student participants were highly appreciative of the administration's decision to allow the BVI students to take their exam on computers equipped with a screen reader, and provided them with such computers as well as a separate room where they could take their exam without any disturbance. Apart from this, they did not seem satisfied with the administrators.

They are of the view that most of the administrators are people with positive intentions, but simply did not know how to help the BVI students. Since the administrators are not themselves aware of the BVI students' problems and needs, it is, therefore, the BVI students' responsibility to bring their problems to their notice. The student participants gave certain suggestions for the administrators.

They suggested that there should be a separate department dealing with the challenges confronted by the BVI students. That department should be mandated to resolve the problems of the availability of the study material in accessible format, the provision of

amanuensis or computers to the BVI students for taking exams, the training of teachers from time to time on the handling of BVI students in integrated classes, and so on.

Apart from laptops for exam purposes, no assistive technology has been made available for the BVI students in the university, and even those computers are sometimes not functioning properly, students asserted. Similarly, study material should be made available in audio, E-format, as well as in braille. Moreover, there should be a separate portion for BVI students in the library where all the necessary equipment and assistive technology (e.g. braille converters, computers with screen readers, magnifying glasses, scanners, printers and so on) are available so that the BVI students could work on their own without relying on others' assistance. Books should be available in both e-format as well as in braille in that portion.

Regarding the role of administrators in facilitating the BVI students of English, some students said that they simply did not know how to help the BVI students. They are neither interested nor aware how to facilitate us in our English language learning endeavours. It is up to us, the visually impaired students, to fend for ourselves instead of relying on their help which is hard to arrive." Sanan said.

Sami said that he always found administrators to be intimidating, and hence he avoided dealing with them. "The university's administration has to deal with so many people and has to tackle so many issues that keeping track of the needs of BVI students would not be possible for them. So instead of waiting for them to resolve the problems confronting me (which they hardly do), I try to address them myself." Sami stated that he soon realised that the administration had neither the will, nor the expertise or arrangements to render the study material accessible for him, he, therefore, hired his own sighted readers and got the printed material converted into accessible braille and soft format. Arshad said: "I think the administration needs to be trained on the needs and how to cater to those needs of the BVI individuals. Right now, whenever we approach them with some issue, they seem to have no solution and refer us back to our teachers."

With regard to the role of administrators in facilitating the BVI students in their English language learning endeavours, the teacher participants stated that they could have done more in this regard. They were of the view that the administration should play their

role in the provision of study material in accessible formats and latest assistive technology. All of them believed that assistive technology could put the BVI students on a par with their sighted peers.

Regarding the role of the administration in facilitating the BVI students in terms of making the study material accessible to them, providing them with the latest audio-visual aids for class use, providing them with laptops equipped with the latest screen readers, etc., the teachers stated the administration needed to go a long way. They seemed to be oblivious to the challenges confronted by the BVI students in an integrated class and took no measures to make special arrangements with regard to facilitating them in any way.

Mr. Hamid expressed frustration about the administration's nonchalant attitude and their lack of follow-up about the BVI students with teachers. "All they do is to inform you about the registration of a BVI student into a language course before its commencement, and sometimes They even do not trouble themselves about passing this information on to the teachers. If they at all inform you, you are given no information regarding the nature of his disability or how to accommodate his needs. You've to cope with the blind student on your own."

Since the administration appears to have neither any will nor expertise to address the challenges the BVI students face in accessing the study material, therefore, instead of waiting for their response, they should try and somehow gain access to the study material." Similarly, the people in the administration seem to be unable to realize the challenges the BVI students face on daily basis in a mainstream class, therefore, the BVI students should try to resolve them locally with the help of their sighted teacher and peers rather than wasting their time in useless attempts to get the administration involved. The teachers stressed the fact that the BVI students' English language learning endeavours could be made successful only through a team effort, involving their teachers, their classmates, the administrators and the BVI students themselves.

The teachers suggested that the teachers' workload should be reduced when they have a BVI student in their class, so that they can work with him/her on individual basis. Moreover, there should be some monetary attraction for the teachers who teach the special needs students in the mainstream classes.

5.14 Conclusion and Observations

While specific themes recurred in the interviews of both the BVI students and their sighted teachers, the study participants viewed the issues from their own perspectives. The study participants' interviews revealed several trends. A profile of the successful BVI second language learners' traits gradually emerged when all the interviews were completed. I gradually realized, as the study unfolded, that, in the case of BVI students, success should not be measured in terms of academic performance only; it should be measured with regard to how autonomously and gracefully a BVI student can function in an integrated classroom environment.

The BVI students who proved highly successful, it was observed, possessed certain traits. Those BVI students, like Rafiq, Farooq, Ahmad and Hassan, who were familiar with and used modern assistive technology were more successful and had good English language learning experience than those who could not use it. They had not only facility in obtaining access to study material but were also independent and self-reliant in their studies, something which raise their motivation level and increase their self-confidence and self-esteem. They were able to function independently in the preparation of their assignments (both in-class and home) and submit them to their teacher who had no knowledge of braille.

They tended to rely less on others and managed to work on their own. Those BVI students who made use of diverse media (e.g. braille, audiotapes and computer) proved more successful in integrated classes. Sami, for example, not only used brailled material, but also live readers as well as audiotapes and computers. Thus, he was quite successful as he had various sources at his disposal. Those who could not use modern assistive technology (e.g. computer, printer and scanner), faced considerable problems in the preparation and submission of their assignments for the perusal of their sighted teacher.

Those BVI students who had access to study material were more successful as compared with those who faced problems in accessing the printed word. Unanimously declaring that the study material used in class was not available to them in any accessible format and it was the BVI students' responsibility to make it accessible to themselves, it was found that those students who could convert the study material into some accessible

format were very successful in terms of preparing their assignments and participating in class tasks and activities. Obviously assistive technology helped them in this regard. Hence their English language learning experience was much better and fruitful than those who had problems in accessing the study material. Those who relied only on human readers, audiotapes or brailled material faced problems in integrated classes. Students like Sanan depended on the services of an amanuensis for making his tasks and assignments legible for his sighted teachers. He often confronted the problem of timely completion and submission of his assignments, and the teacher was never sure whether the spelling or punctuation errors present in the submitted tasks and assignments were committed by the student or his amanuensis.

Given the unawareness of teachers regarding the special needs of the BVI students owing to the lack of training, those BVI students who did not hesitate to inform their teachers about their special needs were found to be more successful in integrated classes. Lack of proper communication on the part of the BVI students had serious consequences for them, as their sighted teachers wrongly assumed that whatever they were doing was working fine for them. The students who apprised their teachers of any blindness-related problems and arrived at some viable solution with their teachers to those challenges were found to be more successful.

The BVI students who possessed good interpersonal skills and could interact well with their teachers and classmates both on the social as well as academic level were found to be successful English language learners. Those BVI students, like Hassan and Sanan, who were overdependent on their sighted peers had problems in developing good interpersonal relationship with them. On the other hand, those who tried to dominate the class, like Rafiq and Saima, also failed to develop good interpersonal relationship with their sighted peers. For example, while Saima had an excellent command over English, her inability to interact appropriately with her classmates and teacher caused considerable problems for her, as she failed to develop good rapport and interpersonal relationship with them. Sanan possessed good interpersonal skills, but his tendency to heavily rely on his peers and teacher for their support made them feel overwhelmed. As a result, they gradually began to avoid him, as they found it hard to fulfil his incessant demands for help. As

compared with Sanan, Sami had good social relations in class with his peers and teacher, as he was less demanding and cause very little extra work or trouble for them.

Those students who tried to cater to their needs on their own and relied very little on the university's support also proved to be very successful in an integrated classroom environment. Almost all the students wished the university would do more to facilitate them, they did not expect them to do so in the near future. Since they did not rely on the university's support, they were able to function more independently. Describing the essence of a successful blind language learner, Mr. Murad stated: "I have no idea as to how my blind student complete his assignments or does his reading; all I know is that he does his job and does it very well."

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This study was conducted with the aim of exploring the English language learning experiences of BVI students in integrated classroom settings in Pakistan. For the purposes of this study, ten BVI student and five teachers (who had the experience of teaching at least one blind student) were interviewed. I tried to discover the challenges each study participant confronted as well as unravel the solution she/he found out and used for effectively addressing each challenge.

The BVI students' English language learning experiences were explored from different perspectives. In certain cases, challenges faced by BVI students in an integrated language class environment were readily resolved (e.g. the sighted teacher's assigning the task of assisting a BVI student to his sighted peers in an in-class task or assignment; his adaptation of teaching style to read aloud anything written on the board; verbal description of pictures, charts or diagrams in order to accommodate blind student; the BVI student's use of computer-based assistive technology to achieve written communication with his sighted teacher; etc.). There were instances, however, where solutions to problems confronted in the integrated classroom environment (e.g. The behavioural issues faced by certain BVI students; the issue of skimming while reading) could not be found and hence they warrant further study. There were some issues which could not be quickly resolved (e.g. the accessibility of primary study material used in class or ensuring the availability of modern assistive technology for the BVI students at the university), but which could nevertheless be addressed in the long term after proper planning.

This interview-based qualitative study was originally conceptualized to be pedagogically oriented. The study aimed at examining the effectiveness of second language learning and teaching theories for BVI English language learners. I originally aimed to concentrate on the learning and teaching strategies found helpful by the study participants,

and then compare them with the existing body of general literature about second language learning. Hence, the majority of interview questions put before the study participants were related to the different aspects of English language teaching and learning strategies. However, it soon became obvious that second language pedagogy was not of that much concern to the study participants; rather they were more interested in the fundamental process of getting integrated into and survival in the mainstream classroom learning environment. While responding to the strategy-related interview questions, most study participants, instead of elaborating on the various teaching and learning strategies adopted for the study of English, tended to discuss the issues related to learning on a very basic level. Moreover, majority of the issues the study participants raised (e.g. access to study material, issues with social interaction), were topics that could have easily been investigated through a general study of the challenges and concerns of the BVI students studying just any academic subject in any integrated classroom environment.

6.2 Major Findings of the Study

This study arrived at the following findings:

6.2.1 Lack of Special Teacher Training

It emerged during the course of this study that none of the teachers had received any training to teach BVI students. It resulted in a variety of challenges for them to properly accommodate the needs of these students. These untrained teachers found it hard to adjust their teaching style from more visual to slightly auditory, overcome their pre-conceived (often erroneous) notions regarding visually challenged people, and take appropriate measures to accommodate them.

Hassan believed that his teachers were simply unaware of how to deal with him in integrated classes, whereas Ibraheem said that although the majority of teachers were willing to help and accommodate their BVI students in integrated classes, yet they simply did not know how to do it. Farooq thought his teachers considered him quite incapable and an extra burden on them, and Saima said that some teachers were very visual in the presentation of materials which often resulted in her lack of understanding and consequent frustration.

Although some teachers tried to accommodate the BVI students in the light of the feedback they received from their BVI students, yet in this process, much precious time was wasted, and by the time the teachers were in any position to accommodate their needs, the BVI students were already lagging far behind their sighted peers in their academic pursuits. Sanan's teacher, for example, initially failed to accommodate him, and by the time he realized that, it was too late, and he had been left far behind the rest of the class. Moreover, this trial-and-error approach by the teachers, according to Mr. Ali, sometimes, instead of alleviating the BVI students' problems, further exacerbated matters for them. For example, while trying to resolve the problem of making the in-class tasks and activities accessible for them by asking one of the sighted peers to assist a BVI student, teachers often created discipline problems for themselves, as the rest of the class often sat idle while the sighted peer assisted a blind student. This issue could have been easily resolved by keeping a reserved activity for the sighted students in their lesson plans, but none of the teachers had any solution to such problem.

It does not mean, however, that experience with the BVI students is of no use at all. This study revealed that teachers, like Mr. Akbar, who had already taught a BVI student were found to be comparatively much more aware of the special needs of these students and hence could accommodate them more effectively than those, like Mr. Ali and Mr. Hamid, who had to teach them for the first time. Mr. Hamid, who had a BVI student for the first time in his class, and whose student could not complete his English language course, said: "If there was someone to have guided me, some book to refer to about how to deal with a BVI student in a mainstream class, I think things would have been different than they transpired."

6.2.2 Effective Teaching Strategies

This study revealed that the BVI students perceived certain teaching techniques and strategies to be very effective. These included: verbal description of the written material on the board, description and explanation of pictures, maps and diagrams etc., repetition of the newly introduced content, Dividing the class into pairs and small groups, addressing BVI students by name, assigning the task of assisting a BVI student to one of his class fellows in an in-class task or activity, and so on.

All the students agreed that a verbal description and explanation of visual objects and things made learning much more comprehensible and enjoyable. Pictures and diagrams, which are such an integral part of most English language textbooks, are of no use to a BVI student, and indeed can become a source of confusion and (sometimes downright frustration), if not made accessible to them through verbal description and explanation. But Mr. Akbar found preparing and noting down the verbal descriptions of visual content to be very time-consuming, whereas, according to Miss Aneela, the description or reading aloud of text written on board could become boring for the sighted students as well as a wastage of time for them. Hence, they sometimes avoided it.

The BVI students also felt frustrated when they were given a spur-of-the-moment in-class task or activity which was beyond their capacity, not because of their language ability, but because of their visual impairment. One of the BVI students, for example, was sent along with his sighted peers to library for some reading assignment where he had to sit idle because he could not access the reading material available in the library in printed format. Thus, in order to accommodate their BVI students in integrated classes, teachers need to prepare their lesson plans carefully, making the in-class tasks and activities accessible to their BVI students in integrated classes. The BVI students are psychologically quite brittle and can easily be overwhelmed in classes where they find little cooperation and friendliness.

Since the BVI students, apart from their kinaesthetic sense, largely depend on their auditory faculty for comprehension, they generally appreciate a verbal repetition of the newly introduced language concepts. But repetition could result in boredom and, by extension, in lowering of motivation for the sighted students. Thus, teachers in integrated classes need to strike a balance between repeating things for their BVI students and not allowing their sighted students to get bored.

Moreover, the BVI students said did not feel comfortable in large groups because they found it hard to concentrate on so many voices during face-to-face interaction. Thus, they preferred to do small group activities or better still pair work as compared with large group or whole-class interaction. This was one of the main reasons that some student study

participants had problems developing good interpersonal relations with their peers as they attempted to answer every question addressed to the whole group or entire class in general.

All the BVI students agreed that their sighted teachers and peers should address them by name instead of using pronouns or gestures. It was found that the majority of sighted teachers and students could not change their style of interaction (which was predominantly visual in nature) to accommodate the BVI students in face-to-face interaction which often resulted either in communication breakdowns (as the BVI student simply did not know that he had been handed the floor and would remain silent until addressed by name) or he/she would jump in (without knowing that it was not his turn). Either way, it created an awkward situation for both the BVI students and their sighted interlocutors. This was one of the main reasons that the BVI students were generally avoided by their sighted peers, especially in the initial days of the courses. Finally, all the BVI students appreciated their teachers' accommodational technique of appointing one of their sighted peers to assist them in an in-class reading or writing task, especially when it was not accessible to them.

6.2.3 The Role of Assistive Technology

This study revealed that the BVI students of English language used modern assistive technology for a variety of purposes including, Braille access, speech access, large print access, and so on. It further revealed that those BVI students who were familiar with and utilised assistive technology, particularly computer-based assistive technology, faced less problems in integrated classes than those who did not exploit it. Those students, for example, who could not use modern assistive technology (e.g. computer, printer and scanner), faced considerable problems in the preparation and submission of their assignments for the perusal of their sighted teachers. It became obvious that effective use of assistive technology not only help them in obtaining access to study material but also give the BVI students independence and self-reliance in their studies.

The majority of students used assistive technology which enabled them to operate independently in the preparation of their assignments (both in-class and home) and submitting them to their teacher who had no knowledge of braille. It was found that all the student participants hated being dependent on others and assistive technology was a great

morale-booster for them as it made them consider themselves as normal human beings like their sighted peers in terms of independent academic functioning in integrated classes. Assistive technology, according to them, raised their motivation level and increased their self-confidence and self-esteem, some essential traits of a successful BVI student. Hassan, for example, could use braille, but the computer-based assistive technology, particularly the screen reader (JAWS), enabled him to access a variety of study material on English language, as it helped him go online, where he could, without the help of a sighted person, access and listen to native speakers, as well as read a variety of secondary material (e.g. newspapers, novels, magazines, grammar books, dictionaries, and so on).

Ibraheem, Ahmad, and Rafiq were able to work on every aspect of English language (pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar) with the help of modern assistive technology. Ibraheem considered himself blind only when he was unable to use his assistive gadgets, although he was aware of and could use only JAWS and an ordinary digital voice recorder. Echoing Michaels & McDermott's (2003) views, Arshad declared assistive technology a "great leveller" as it has put the BVI students of English on a par with their sighted peers.

The BVI students regretted the fact, however, that no assistive technology for BVI students was available at the university, and suggested that gadgets such as magnifiers and CCTV for low vision students and laptops equipped with screen readers for all the visually impaired students should nevertheless be made available in classrooms. The university not only failed to provide any assistive tools for the BVI students, they were sometimes discouraged from using them inside the class because, it was argued, it distracted the sighted students.

Certain BVI individuals were reluctant to make use of modern assistive technology. They either did not use it at all, or used it only when it became unavoidable for them. Saima and Sadia relied only on braille and could not effectively use computer-based assistive technology in their study of the English language. Although Saima was a brilliant student, yet she was not sure whether she, like Sadia, would be able to continue with her studies, as not enough study material was available in braille. It means that braille literacy is not sufficient for BVI learners, computer-based assistive technology is of paramount importance if the BVI students are to succeed in their study of English language.

The study also revealed that the teachers had hardly any knowledge about the assistive technology used by the BVI students. Familiarity with the assistive technology is essential for teachers of BVI students as the lack of information on their part can have serious repercussions for their BVI students (Alper & Raharinirina, 2006). As Mr. Akbar said, one of his colleagues was concerned about his BVI student's use of his braille note-taking device in class. He believed it disturbed the rest of the class and, being ignorant to the centrality of that device in his studies, would repeatedly ask the BVI student to avoid using it. After some time, that student became so disheartened because of the attitude of the teacher that he decided to leave that course. Emphasising the importance, for sighted teachers, of familiarity with assistive technology used by the BVI students, Mr. Murad said that without understanding the way they studied and accessed the written word, teachers would be unable to determine the strategies they use, and hence adjust their teaching style accordingly. It was Mr. Ali's familiarity with the screen readers used by the BVI students on their laptops and smartphones which enabled him to cater to the needs of his students. "I usually provide them study material in three different forms, word form, PDF and power point slides, (all of them can be accessed via computer equipped with a screen reader) so that they can be made more independent in their studies."

All the teachers agreed on the centrality of assistive technology for BVI learners of English language. But they expressed their regrets, however, that BVI students were not priority of university's administration. There were hardly any assistive tools available to students in class, and as a result, the BVI students mainly relied on their auditory skills during class. Even sometimes, students were discouraged to use their own devices for notetaking. Consequently, BVI students were not afforded equal opportunities for learning in integrated classes.

6.2.4 Access to Study Material

This study revealed that the majority of BVI students faced problems accessing the printed word. As has been mentioned elsewhere in this dissertation, BVI learners generally use kinaesthetic and auditory strategies for accessing information. They have to employ alternative means to gain access to information which is available so easily to their sighted peers.

The study material used in class was particularly hard to access, as it was available neither in braille nor in any other accessible format at the university, and consequently, the BVI students had to manage it on their own. The BVI students tried to make it accessible for themselves, either by converting the hard printed material into soft form through scanning, so that they can listen to them with a screen reader installed on their laptops, or ask a friend to audiotape it for them, or obtain the converted materials from a senior BVI student who might have made it accessible through the above two procedures. The problems did not end there: the study material made accessible Thus, was not free of typographical errors. As Ahmad, Arshad, Sami and Hassan confirmed, the scanned materials almost invariably contained many typographical errors which made it sometimes hard to make sense out of.

The poor print quality of the textbooks, the presence of pictures, maps and charts, and tables etc., in these books made them very difficult to be properly converted into soft form through scanning. A text containing too many typographical errors often lead to cognitive overload and lack of comprehension. This is one of the main reasons that BVI readers generally took more time to make sense of written texts, and often, they fail to properly comprehend the ideas contained in it.

The BVI learners were forced to make the converted texts free of typographical errors for enhanced comprehension. For this purpose, they sought the assistance of a sighted individual for removing those errors, which made them dependent on others, something the majority of them despised to do, as it hurt them both mentally and psychologically. Moreover, the sighted individuals, according to the student participants, were generally very hard to persuade to undertake the task of proof-reading such converted documents, on account of its arduous, tedious and time-consuming nature , which needed to go through the entire document, reading it word-for-word. The problem of accessibility seemed to exist Even in specialized schools for BVI individuals where students did not have enough study material and were forced to share one braille textbook among several students, as some student participants confirmed.

Secondary study material about almost every aspect of English language (one of the world most extensively described language) is available online and can be accessed

through computers and smartphones equipped with screen readers by BVI students, but the primary material used in classes were not available in accessible format. The main in-class tasks and activities as well as the majority of home assignments were almost entirely based on that primary material. Consequently, in terms of class participation and overall learning, those BVI students who had difficulties accessing the study material found it very difficult to keep pace with their sighted peers in the integrated classes.

All the teachers emphasized the importance of the timely availability of study material to their BVI students in accessible formats for their equal participation in class and success in language study. They acknowledged, however, that the university mainly focussed on the sighted students and could not cater to their needs in this regard. Mr. Ali expressed his concerns that the BVI students could experience severe frustration which may result in high levels of anxiety and low motivation among them. Mr. Akbar termed access to study material as “great equalizer”.

Accessing the written word is one of the major challenges faced by the BVI learners, and it is something that distinguishes the visually challenged students from individuals with other disabilities. The success of BVI learners greatly depends on their ability to access the study material used in class. It has to be made available in appropriate format (e.g. e-text, braille, audio and large print, etc.) at the same level and at the same time. Although modern assistive technology has facilitated them to a large extent to access the printed material, and BVI learners of English can read electronic books and browse the Internet with the help of JAWS for Windows (a screen reader), and partially sighted students can use Zoomtext (a computer application) for magnifying any e-text on their computer, yet their problems in accessing the written word, as this study established, were far from over. Some of those problems have been mentioned above. The BVI student participants who did not have the study material in any accessible format were compelled to devote a lot of precious time in getting the printed material converted and thus a great deal of time was wasted which put them at a disadvantage as compared with their sighted peers. The sighted students, on the other hand, had a ready access to the study material. Ironically, as this study shows, in integrated classroom setting, the BVI students were expected to submit their assignments on time like their sighted peers. They were made to go through a lot of psychological stress in integrated classes, as they not only had to grapple

with their visual impairment, but also deal with and overcome the barriers erected by the social structures.

The study also revealed that students who did not know (or did not want) how to use modern assistive technology faced considerable problems in accessing the written word. Although Saima was very prominent academically in her class, yet her reliance on braille only made it almost impossible for her to study English at an advanced level. Similarly, apart from other factors, one main reasons behind Sanan's failure to successfully complete his English language course was his inability to access the written word because of his inability to use modern assistive technology.

Familiarity with and use of assistive technology, however, does not ensure hundred percent access to the written word. As this study revealed, students could not access phonemic symbols and graphics through the screen readers they used.

The problem of access to the study material could not be readily resolved; it warrants long-term and enduring planning at the institutional level. The BVI students did try to solve this issue in individual capacity, but every new BVI student confronted the same challenge again and again. The universities need to make the primary study material used in class available in some accessible format (e.g. braille, audiotapes and e-text), and the BVI students should be given access to the same type of material and opportunities as their sighted peers.

6.2.5 Study Habits of Student Participants

Perceptions about the study habits of student participants varied: students were of the view that they were very organized and performing to the best of their abilities, whereas the teacher participants' views conflicted; the majority of them felt there was a vast room for improvement. Some teachers viewed their visually challenged students to be somewhat indolent and disorganized, attributing it to their sightlessness. They seemed to confirm Rafiq's claim when he said that the BVI students were judged on the basis of their visual impairment. "If I'm good at my studies, they believe since I have to do nothing else, I therefore set and study; if I'm dominant in class, they believe BVI individuals have photographic memory; if I'm assertive, they think I'm simply unaware of the feelings of others because I can't see facial expressions and other body gestures; if I remain quiet and

participate less in class activities, again they attribute it to my visual impairment.” Other teachers were full of praise for some of their blind student who, according to them, were very organized and managed to balance the scheduling of their human readers with the routine rigors of university life. But all of them agreed that the BVI students needed to explore and use various avenues in their studies (e.g. braille, live readers, computers with screen readers and audiotapes etc.) They also agreed on the importance of developing and maintaining good organizational skills by the BVI students.

This study revealed that the BVI students tried their best to adjust their study habits with more or less success in order to accommodate their blindness-related needs. The majority of them hardly used braille and relied on computer-based assistive technology for accessing the written word. They turned the written material into speech with the help of a screen reader either on their laptops or smartphones and then listened to it. In other words, they read through listening.

They admitted, however, that they could scan a document and not skim it as they had to go in a linear manner and read a given document line by line or sentence by sentence. This problem was also faced by those students who used braille. It was for this very reason, according to the BVI students, that they took more time than their sighted peers reading a document.

The BVI students could not use the normal pen and paper for writing; They employed alternative means for this purpose (e.g. braille or computer equipped with a screen reader). Similarly, they accessed the pictures and diagrams in the textbooks through verbal descriptions provided to them by sighted individuals. The main problems they confronted with braille were: (1) all the teachers were braille-illiterate and hence could not decipher braille encoded text; (2) the document was generally very short-lived and could easily perish; and (3) it was difficult for BVI students to retrieve and use a brailled document again. The challenges they faced with writing on computers were: (1) it was very time-consuming as the majority of BVI individuals tended to have slow typing speed; (2) they have the issue of portability; and (3) computers were prone to technical issues both software and hardware related.

The BVI students used different methods for taking down lecture notes in class. Some, like Arshad, simply audio-taped the entire class proceedings and then listen to the recordings at home and noted down the main points either in braille or on their computers. Others, like Rafiq, Sadia, Ahmad and Saima, used either computers or braillewriters in class for this purpose. Those who used the former method were left exhausted as they have to spend almost double the amount of time to re-listen to the classes for that day, whereas those who employed the later, confronted the problems of focusing their attention on the teachers and screen readers (in the case of those who used computers), and creating a great deal of noise and Thus, disturbing their sighted peers (in case of those who used braille-writers). Thus, the BVI students faced problems (which had no ready solution) in both the methods they employed for taking down notes.

Despite these challenges, BVI learners can succeed by carefully planning their studies and getting cooperation from their families, peers, teachers and administrators.

6.2.6 Assertiveness and Self-advocacy

All the study participants unanimously agreed that assertiveness and self-advocacy on the part of the BVI students played a crucial role in their success in an integrated classroom setting. This study established that self-advocacy and assertiveness were even more important in integrated classroom settings at the university level where no proper support system for accommodating the BVI students' needs existed. It was found to be very essential for the BVI students to inform their regular classroom teachers about their special needs because they had very little knowledge of visual impairment and the needs of a visually impaired student. In such situations, lack of proper communication about their needs could have serious consequences for BVI students, as their sighted teachers could wrongly assume that whatever they were doing was working fine for them. It emerged during the course of this study, however, that all the BVI students were not equally aware in terms of using the proper means for achieving assertiveness and self-advocacy.

This study revealed that those students, like Ahmad, Farooq, Sami, Hassan, Saima and Sadia, who did not hesitate to communicate their special needs to their sighted teachers were comparatively more successful than those, like Arshad, who failed to do so. Self-advocacy on the part of the BVI students is especially important for their academic success

in an integrated classroom setting because the majority of sighted teachers and administrators, as this study revealed, were generally unaware of how to accommodate a visually challenged student. As this study established, they generally use the same techniques which are employed for teaching English language to sighted students. Failing to adapt their teaching style and accommodate the BVI students in regular classes could result in disastrous consequences for the BVI learners. The BVI students should, therefore, not only be familiar with their rights outlined in various laws, but also learn how to seek accommodations for their disability-related needs.

Some teachers might have certain preconceived notions about the blind student's capabilities. It is the BVI students' responsibility to dispel any erroneous notions held by their sighted teachers regarding them and their potential through self-advocacy. Moreover, it is also essential for them to apprise their teachers of any blindness-related problems and mutually arrive at some viable solution to those challenges.

The visually challenged students should never refrain from offering suggestions on how their disability-related needs may best be accommodated. Those BVI students who failed to advocate for the accommodation of their specialized needs found it hard to succeed in the regular classroom environment. Sanan, for example, lacked the skill of self-advocacy and assertiveness and it had serious consequences for him. "Because my blind student did not make me aware of his needs", Mr. Hamid stated, "I did not know how to accommodate him." Mr. Ali also expressed his concern about his blind student's inability to advocate for his own needs. "I was quite unsure what I needed to do to accommodate my blind student. He seldom expressed his ideas about his needs."

6.2.7 Social Interaction

All the study participants unanimously termed interaction with peers and social skills on the part of BVI learners as important, but both the sighted teachers and the BVI students viewed it from different angles. The BVI students did not view themselves to be responsible for any failures in social interaction; rather, they appeared to hold their sighted teachers and peers responsible for breakdowns in this regard, arguing that they failed to understand their specialized needs and the circumstances the BVI students found themselves in. The sighted teachers, on the other hand, sometimes viewed their BVI

students either as source of discomfort for their sighted classmates or as self-centred and egotistical individuals. One of the main hurdles in social interaction among their BVI students and their sighted peers, according to the teacher participants, was the sighted individuals' lack of knowledge about proper interaction with and reaction to their BVI classmates in class, as they were interacting with a BVI individual for the first time. Some teachers, such as Mr. Akbar, and Mr. Hamid, were of the view that their BVI students' inappropriate social behaviour often resulted from their sighted peers' negative reaction towards them. Other teachers, such as Mr. Ali, believed that it was the sighted students' lack of awareness and education about blindness which was to be held responsible for their reluctance to interact with their BVI peers. Yet other teachers, such as Mr. Hamid, attributed the difficulties in interaction among the sighted and BVI students directly to the BVI student's sightlessness. They could not see gestures and facial expressions, they argued, and often spoke their mind, unable to realise how the other people were receiving them.

Sometimes, the BVI students' tendency to over depend on others also sour their relations with them. The BVI students' overreliance on their sighted peers forced them to avoid them, as they had to cater to their own needs as well. Mr. Hamid, for example, said that his sighted students became ever more uncomfortable interacting with his blind student as he increasingly relied on their assistance for his classwork and assignments.

Sometimes, the BVI students can become overbearing and wearisome which result in their isolation in integrated classes. Mr. Ali's blind student, for example, always tried to be centre of attention in class, and not only used English all the way, but also hardly allowed any other student to answer questions in class which made his sighted classmates interact less and less with him. That student, assuming the authority of his teacher, also scolded his sighted classmates for their ceaseless talking, which resulted in their side-lining of him.

The BVI students, who participated in this study, while acknowledging that social interaction in the mainstream language class was a problem for them, attributed the issue to their sighted teachers and peers' inability to have a basic understanding of blindness.

Hassan, for example, complained that sometimes his peers ignored him for no obvious reason when he sought their assistance in a certain issue in class. This attitude, according to Hassan, puts him off and he hardly socializes with his peers outside class. Sami admitted that in his case, social relations with his peers were impeded mainly by his overdependence on his sighted peers because of the non-availability of study material to him in any accessible format. Both Rafiq and Saima acknowledged that their social interaction with their sighted classmates could not be termed ideal because of their insistence on speaking English and their tendency to answer every question the teacher asked in class. But, instead of conceding their shortcoming, they termed it as their right to speak English in class and attempt answering every question if it was within their capacity to do so. Rafiq said that he wanted to assert himself in order to demonstrate it to the sighted people that the BVI individuals were “just like them, even better than them”. Although this study revealed certain social and behavioural issues with The BVI students in an integrated classroom setting, yet I could not discover any readily apparent solutions to them.

6.2.8 Achieving Written Communication with the Sighted Teachers

Both the teachers and the BVI students believed that it was very important for the BVI students to have the ability to prepare and submit their tasks and assignments in print format to their sighted teachers who have hardly any knowledge of braille. The available modern assistive technology enables the BVI students to achieve this ability and communicate without any assistance with their sighted teachers in the written format they have no problems in deciphering. Students who failed to utilize such technology for some reasons, however, confronted many issues, as they needed the assistance of a sighted individual to transcribe their brailled work into some written form for the sighted teacher to read. One such study participant was Sanan, who could not use the modern assistive technology for this purpose, and who Consequently had to rely on the services of an amanuensis. The fact that very little direct support was available for the BVI students at the university level, was something that was indorsed by all the teacher participants of the study.

6.2.9 Adapting Teaching Styles

This study revealed that almost all the teacher participants tried to adjust their teaching style in order to accommodate the needs of their BVI students. To what extent they were successful is a different matter, but they manifested, at least, a positive attitude towards the BVI students' language learning experiences, even though some of them considered it hard to prepare the study materials ahead of time and alter their predominantly visual teaching style to accommodate the BVI students' learning needs. It was obvious that the majority of teacher study participants were quite unclear regarding the accommodations they were required to make in order to ensure full participation for their BVI students. All of them acknowledged that they found it hard to strike a balance between accommodating the BVI students and maintaining the interest of their sighted students at the same time. They nevertheless tried to accommodate the needs of their BVI students in integrated classes.

Mr. Ali, for example, employed such strategies as using analogies, pairing up his BVI student with a sighted peer, inserting verbal tasks into his lesson plan, and describing diagrams, tables and maps, etc., for his BVI student. Miss Aneela used such strategies as getting her BVI student involved in the proceedings of the class, constantly verbally interacting with him, relying less on visual clues while interacting with him, describing pictures, diagrams or tables, etc. Although she generally planned her lessons on daily basis, but in order to accommodate her BVI student, she planned for the entire week in advance so as to enable him to make his study material available to him in some sort of accessible format.

There were teachers like Mr. Hamid, however, who did not know how to accommodate the needs of their BVI students. "I have no idea how to fit in a visually challenged student into my predominantly visual teaching style." He said his sighted students, who are in majority, benefited more from this style of his; so he thought not to alter it for the sake of just one student.

Mr. Akbar, on the other hand, made an all-out effort to accommodate his visually challenged student and adapted such materials for him as picture-description and board games, despite the fact that he sometimes found the task quite overwhelming. He asserted

that his BVI student could not play language games, but it was a wrong assumption. There are language games which the BVI students could play quite successfully in integrated classes. Although the teachers might not be very successful in their attempts to accommodate their BVI students, the study revealed that they approached the issue very sincerely and sympathetically in the light of their BVI students' feedback.

6.2.10 The Role of Administrators

The study participants differed in their perceptions about administrators. Although they praised certain measures taken by the administration, yet most of the BVI students viewed their performance both with regard to the blind students' facilitation as well as on a general level as far from satisfactory. All the student participants were highly appreciative of the administration's decision to allow the BVI students to take their exam on computers equipped with a screen reader, and provided them with such computers as well as a separate room where they could take their exam without any disturbance.

Some participants felt that the administrators were very accommodating, others termed them as very uncooperative. Both Sami and Hassan stated that most of the administrators were people with positive intentions, but simply did not know how to help the BVI students. Arshad, Ibraheem and Ahmad believed that the administrators were neither aware of nor interested in addressing the BVI students' needs. It would, therefore, be a waste of time to rely on their assistance. Sanan said that a certain administrator tried to discourage him from enrolling in a language learning course, arguing that his blindness would make it very difficult for him to succeed. Sami said that the administration did not provide any help and hence he avoided dealing with them altogether. Arshad said: "I think the administration needs to be trained on the needs and how to cater to those needs of the BVI individuals. Right now, whenever we approach them with some issue, they seem to have no solution and refer us back to our teachers."

The students advanced certain suggestions to the administrators for creating a more conducive English language learning environment for BVI students at the university. These included: the availability of study material in audio, E-format, as well as in braille, the provision of amanuensis or computers to the BVI students for taking exams, The establishment of a separate department dealing with the challenges confronted by the BVI

students, the creation, in the main library, of a special corner for BVI students equipped with the latest assistive technology and devices, the training of teachers from time to time on the handling of BVI students in integrated classes, and so on.

Similarly, all the teachers believed that the administrators could have done more to facilitate the BVI students in their English language learning endeavours. Both Mr. Murad and Mr. Ali said they received no guidance, no instructions and no cooperation from the administrators on how to deal with a BVI student in their integrated classes. Mr. Akbar asserted that the administration was willing to facilitate the BVI students, but they simply did not know how to do it. Both Mr. Ali and Mr. Akbar agreed, however, that the BVI students' English language learning experience could be made more pleasant only through a team effort, involving their teachers, their classmates, the administrators and the BVI students themselves.

Mr. Hamid expressed frustration about the administration's nonchalant attitude and their lack of follow-up about the BVI students with teachers. "All they do is to inform you about the registration of a BVI student into a language course before its commencement, and sometimes They even do not trouble themselves about passing this information on to the teachers." If they at all inform you, says Mr. Hamid, you are given no information regarding the nature of his disability or how to accommodate his needs. "You've to cope with the blind student on your own."

The teachers, like the BVI students, gave certain suggestions for creating a more conducive English language learning environment for them at the university. Universities should be physically, attitudinally and programmatically made user-friendly for disabled students, and they should concentrate on the provision of such services to students with special needs as ensuring the availability of latest assistive technology and tools, provision of study material in accessible formats, amanuensis, readers, and Adaptive testing. Moreover, the universities should also ensure the provision of in-service training to faculty and staff on how to cater to the specialized needs of students with disabilities, and, if possible, reduce their workload so as to allow them to work on one-to-one basis with their BVI students.

This study revealed that neither the administrators nor teachers received any training in this regard. All the teacher participants said that they were given no training in how to effectively accommodate the BVI students in integrated classroom setting and deal with them. Surprisingly, certain support services, such as provision of study material in accessible formats, computers equipped with screen readers, amanuensis, and Adaptive testing, were being provided to the BVI students (albeit on a very limited scale both quality and quantity wise) till grade-10 in special schools for the blind, this study revealed. Moreover, at school level, the BVI students have access to a professional who can be approached for advice on various blindness-related issues. On the contrary, the universities neither have any support services nor have someone on staff who is aware of the specialized needs and concerns of the BVI students. Therefore, the BVI students who are accustomed to support services at school level (in special schools for the blind) have to explore alternative means to function independently in the absence of any assistance from the university's administration.

6.3 Issues Specific to Pakistani Context

A number of issues faced by BVI students in integrated setting can be identified which can be termed as specific to Pakistani context, or other under-developed countries. The first of these is the non-availability of the study material in any accessible format at the university. As a result, students are left to fend for themselves which result in a wastage of precious study time. By the time they somehow manage the study material, it is already too late for the BVI students to make effective use of the accessible material. Moreover, the material made accessible in individual capacity contains many typographical errors which make it almost unintelligible for the BVI students. It means that a coordinated effort at the institutional level is required to resolve this issue.

Another issue specific to Pakistani context is the non-availability of much needed assistive technology at the university. It has already been made quite clear that without assistive technology, BVI students simply cannot function academically in integrated classes. The universities need to ensure the availability of such basic gadgets as magnifiers and CCTV for low vision students and laptops equipped with screen readers for all the

visually impaired students. Moreover, brailled books should also be made available at the central library where a separate corner for the BVI students should be established.

As the literature reviewed shows, teachers in the developed countries are well-equipped and trained to cater to the needs of the BVI students in integrated classes, but this study established that in Pakistan, teachers hardly receive any training to deal with such students. Moreover, they hardly have any knowledge about assistive technology the BVI students use. The lack of training and knowledge on the part of teachers result in a number of issues, highlighted above, for the BVI students in integrated classes.

Yet another issue specific to Pakistani context is concerned with our family norms and culture. Young family members are generally encouraged to be less assertive in front of elders. Moreover, parents generally tend to overprotect their BVI children which make them both over-dependent and less assertive. These behaviours are carried into class settings as well which prove, as this study established, problematic for the BVI students themselves as well as for their sighted teachers and peers. The BVI students, this study shows, were either over-dependent on others tried to dominate the class which resulted in their isolation. Moreover, they sometimes could not express their genuine needs, and thus created problems for themselves.

6.4 Recommendations for Various Stakeholders

As the findings of the study show, since the BVI student and their teachers had to deal with some very basic issues on daily basis (e.g. improper classroom behaviour, access to the study materials, the timely submission of class assignments and accomplishing in-class tasks and activities), they could not focus their attention on pedagogical strategies.

Keeping this observation in view, I have come to the conclusion that it would be hard for the BVI students to achieve a level playing field in the process of learning a second language until the basic educational issues confronting them are adequately addressed first. I believe it is essential for all those involved in the BVI students' second language learning process to address the more fundamental educational challenges confronted by them before considering the actual pedagogical issues related to English language learning and teaching. In the light of this study, I would advance certain recommendations for the BVI

students of English language, their teachers and any administrator, related in any way to the BVI students' English language learning experience.

6.4.1 Recommendations for the BVI Students

The following recommendations are advanced for the BVI students:

1. The success of BVI learners greatly depends on their ability to access the study material used in class, and they should utilise all means to gain access to study material, instead of waiting for the administration or others to provide it for them. Modern computer-based assistive technology can be of immense help in this regard. Secondary study material about almost every aspect of English language (one of the world most extensively described language) is available online and can be accessed through computers and smartphones equipped with screen readers by BVI students, and the primary material used in classes could be made accessible through modern assistive technology. Moreover, they can seek the assistance of their seniors as well, as it is quite likely that they would have already made it accessible for themselves.
2. The BVI students should develop and maintain good organizational skills. It is true that they require more time as compared with their sighted peers to complete a given task, but it is no justification for their indolence and lack of organization. In order to be at a par with the sighted students, they will have to put in some extra effort.
3. The BVI students should avoid becoming overbearing and wearisome as it can damage their interpersonal relationship with their sighted peers and teachers, and result in their isolation in integrated classes. It was observed that in an attempt to prove to the sighted individuals that the BVI individuals were “just like them, even better than them”, they sometimes over-asserted themselves in class which led to the issues of socialisation for them. This attitude should be avoided on the part of the BVI learners.
4. The BVI students should keep themselves abreast of the latest technology as it can offer solutions to a variety of challenges they face in regular classes. As this study revealed, BVI students who were familiar with and utilised assistive technology, particularly computer-based assistive technology, faced less problems in integrated classes as compared with those who did not exploit it. It not only helps them in obtaining access to study material but also gives them independence and self-reliance

in their studies. It was almost impossible for those BVI students to study English at an advanced level who were not using assistive technology, despite the fact that they were very good academically at the time of this study.

5. Apart from computer-based assistive technology, the BVI students should explore and use other avenues in their studies as well (e.g. braille, live readers, and real audios etc.). It is essential for BVI students to diversify their means for accessing the written word. The more accessibility means at their disposal will result in easier and more comprehensive access to the written word.
6. The BVI students should achieve written communication with their teachers, and this is possible only when they have the ability to use assistive technology. The body of literature disapproves of the BVI students' reliance on sighted individuals for doing such basic tasks as producing written assignments in print for the sighted teachers. Moreover, over-relying on others has social, psychological and academic implications.
7. The BVI students should familiarise themselves with their rights outlined in various laws and learn how to seek accommodations for their disability-related needs.
8. The BVI students should be assertive and indulge in self-advocacy and inform their regular classroom teachers about their special needs without any hesitation in order to apprise them about their special needs and dispel any wrong notions which they might have about BVI students. Similarly, they also need to apprise their sighted peers about their needs and take them into confidence so as to ensure their cooperation and assistance in the regular class.
9. They should avoid being over-reliant on their sighted peers and teachers. This study shows that dependence upon others for the achievement of academic objectives is always problematic and should, therefore, be avoided. Thus obtaining the ability to function independently in terms of their academic activities should be the cherished goal of every BVI learner.
10. They should develop the capacity to give something in return in case they are required to seek someone's assistance (in the form of academic help) instead, and thus develop an atmosphere of mutual cooperation in the regular class.

6.4.2 Recommendations for Teachers

1. Teachers should give more time to their BVI students with regard to their assignments, as they require added time for accomplishing a given tasks. Similarly, in tests and exams, more time should be given to them as compared with their sighted peers.
2. Before arrangements are made by the administration for their training, teachers should try on their own to obtain a basic knowledge of braille, assistive technology and tools used by the BVI students. For this purpose, they can either approach a professional in the disability field and seek her advice in the matter, or hold a detailed discussion with their BVI students in order to obtain information about their issues and seek solutions to them with mutual consultation. This will go a long way in making the sighted teacher, who might have never had the experience of encountering and teaching a blind student, aware of the capabilities of the visually challenged individuals and help him feel comfortable with the situation.
3. If possible, teachers should make themselves aware of the various assistive tools and gadgets used by BVI learners, even learn braille in order to have direct access to the BVI learners' written work. Without understanding the way the BVI students studied and accessed the written word, they would be unable to determine the strategies they use, and hence adjust their teaching style accordingly.
4. Teachers should encourage their BVI students to use their own assistive tools and devices in class, as without them, they would hardly be able to successfully function academically in class.
5. They should encourage the BVI students to do their own self-advocating.
6. They should adjust their teaching style from more visual to slightly auditory. As this study revealed, they generally use the same techniques which are employed for teaching English language to sighted students which result in a variety of challenges for the BVI students.
7. They should incorporate small group activities or better still pair work as compared with large group or whole-class interaction in their lesson plans, as the BVI students were found to be much more comfortable with these.
8. Teachers should use such teaching strategies in their regular classes as verbal description of the written material on the board, description and explanation of pictures,

- maps and diagrams etc., repetition of the newly introduced content, Dividing the class into pairs and small groups, addressing BVI students by name, assigning the task of assisting a BVI student to one of his class fellows in an in-class task or activity, and so on. These strategies were found to be very effective by all the student participants.
9. The teachers should try to overcome their pre-conceived (often erroneous) notions regarding visually challenged people. (Many of them have been highlighted in the findings section above)
 10. The teachers should carefully plan their lessons whenever they have BVI students in their class, and make provisions for the accommodation of their special needs by taking such measures as adapting the in-class tasks and activities for them, making these accessible for them, and providing description of pictures and charts, and so on. They should not give them a spur-of-the-moment in-class task or activity which is beyond their capacity on account of their visual impairment. In case they are compelled to include such task or activity which could not be made accessible in advance, then the teachers should appoint one of their sighted peers to assist the BVI students in an in-class reading or writing task.
 11. They should work in liaison with the university' administration in order to make a collective effort to address amicably the needs and challenges confronted by the BVI students.

6.4.3 Recommendations for Administrators

For the university administration, it is recommended that a separate office, manned by qualified and properly trained staff, for dealing with the issues and needs of the special students should be set up in all the universities which:

- (a) provide in-service and pre-service training to teachers and other concerned personnel in order to acquaint them with the capabilities and needs of the BVI students;
- (b) arrange orientation sessions for the BVI students before the commencement of classes in order to inform them about services available for them at the university and where to turn to in case of an issue;

- (c) Arrange seminars from time to time in which experts in the field of blindness-related issues and assistive technology should be invited to share their expertise and discuss solutions to blindness-related challenges. Such activities would provide opportunities to individuals who are unfamiliar with visual disabilities to gain insight into the issues and challenges confronted by BVI individuals. Moreover, it would provide a useful platform to both the sighted as well as the blind individuals, including students as well as teachers, to interact with one another and overcome any apprehension they might have about blind students and vice versa. Sighted teachers, who might have no prior experience in dealing with BVI students in an integrated class, can benefit a great deal from such trainings and seminars.;
- (d) Take measures for making the study material accessible for the BVI students;
- (e) Establish a separate corner for the BVI students in the central library which has study material accessible in various formats;
- (f) Take measures to make assistive technology available to the BVI students;
- (g) Maintain a record of the alumni BVI students and assist the newly enrolling special needs students to get in touch with them in order to help them benefit from their experiences and knowledge; and
- (h) Ensure their own availability to the BVI students and their teachers whenever they approach them for discussing any disability-related issue.

Moreover, blind students should always be encouraged by those in administrative positions to obtain education, and should not be rejected or demoralized simply because they are blind. I believe that this proactive approach may help administrators to have a working knowledge of the challenges confronted, and capabilities possessed, by BVI students.

6.5 Theoretical Implications of the Study

According to Brown (1994), a major portion of the total information, in fact eighty percent, that an average individual obtains about the world around him is gained by him through the sense of sight. This study manifestly demonstrates the impact of blindness on the second language education process. Sighted English language teachers are so concerned about the BVI students' capacity to properly function in the integrated classroom environment that second language pedagogy in the case of blind and visually

impaired students is pushed to secondary position. In order for the BVI students to be successfully integrated in mainstream classroom setting, both theory and practice must be given equal weightage. Long's variable competence model (1983) provides a good starting point with regard to the comprehension and increase in the level of interaction for the BVI students in the integrated classroom setting. Long (1983) argues that input should be simplified in order to make it more comprehensible. One way of increasing the comprehensibility level of the linguistic input is to present new words, phrases and structures along with the already known vocabulary items and grammatical structures. Another way to do so is to make use of both the extralinguistic and linguistic context, i.e. background knowledge and familiar structures (Long,1983). The teachers of English as a second language can Thus, apply Long's variable competence model by using known language structures and vocabulary items along with the new linguistic information. Long also recommends the modification of interactional structure of a discourse so as to provide the opportunity to students with varying learning abilities to negotiate meaning more effectively (Long, 1983). Those language teachers, for example, who heavily rely on the use of different gestures and visual aids in classes for communicating meaning, can alter the structure of their discourse by giving verbal descriptions containing known vocabulary items or structures in order to accommodate their BVI students. Long's (1981) interactional hypothesis suggests that students need to be actively involved in the discourse and negotiate meaning in the target language by interacting with the linguistic input, as mere auditory exposure to the target language input, as was the case with Sanan, is not sufficient for second language acquisition.

Similarly, Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development also implies that the mere availability of study material in accessible format is not enough to ensure a fruitful language learning experience for language learners; rather, he terms social interaction to be the key to successful second language acquisition. Vygotsky (1978) categorizes the learners' second language development into two main types: the potential developmental level, the learner's ability to use the target language at some point in time in future, and the actual developmental level, the learner's present ability to use the target language. He calls the distance between these two "zone of proximal development". The progress of the learner from the actual to the potential level, Vygotsky (1978) argues, depends to a great

extent on social interaction with highly proficient second language speakers. It means that the achievement of an optimal language learning level largely depends upon meaningful social interaction, and if a sighted teacher fails to get her/his BVI student fully involved in meaningful social interaction, he/she may deprive him from achieving his/her full learning potential.

Spinelli (1989) argues that teachers can help the BVI students make up for their sightlessness by using verbal description and discussion. Emphasizing the importance of the use of models for the BVI students, he suggests that these students can be effectively involved in interaction if tangible models are used in class; for example, while teaching the items of clothing, BVI students can be made to indulge in interaction in the target language by asking them to instruct his/her classmate to place the clothing on a paper doll Spinelli (1989, P. 150).

Although these theories and suggestions advanced by prominent applied linguists were mainly intended to be used with sighted students, yet they can also be applied to BVI students in order to make social interaction more meaningful for them.

6.6 Recommendations for Future Research

Little research has been conducted so far in the area of second language learning by BVI students in integrated classroom environment, although a significant body of research can be found with regard to the area of second/foreign language learning by individuals with other disabilities. Issues like access to study material, interpersonal relationship and social interaction, the use of assistive technology, academic preparation, and adaptation of teaching styles, etc., have been studied in their own right, none of these areas has so far been studied in combination with second language study by BVI individuals in integrated classroom setting. These areas offer rich avenues for future studies.

Another largely unexplored area is the impact of the unavailability of blind support services at the university level for the BVI students studying a second language. Similarly, although self-advocacy is one of the most favourite areas of researchers in blindness-related issues, yet no systematic study has been conducted so far to determine how far self-advocacy can go in enlisting effective support for the BVI students. Further research is

needed to investigate the efficacy of accessing the study material by BVI students in alternate media.

Access to assistive technology with regard to second language learning by the BVI students is yet another area which needs further research. This study found that the majority of blind students and all their teachers were unaware of latest advancements in assistive technology for the blind and visually impaired students which could afford them equal opportunities in second language learning.

Further research, particularly pedagogically related, is also needed with regard to second language learning by BVI students. This study mainly dealt with the basic classroom needs of the BVI students in integrated classroom setting, and future research might build on this study by examining second language learning and teaching strategies that assist the BVI students in the second language learning experience. After determining their usefulness for the BVI students through systematic research, these strategies might then be studied to examine their utility with fully sighted students as well. Many teachers, during the course of this study, stated that their blind students apparently had much improved listening skills, mainly owing to their reliance on auditory comprehension, which helped them learn the target language at a much-accelerated rate. The effect of non-visually oriented media on the listening comprehension of second language students could be yet another potential area for future research.

Similarly, a distinction is also needed to be made between students who are blind and those who have no visual memory at all. A potential area for research then is the investigation of the differences in the way those who are born blind and those who became blind later after visually experiencing the world around them learn.

It may be noted that this study dealt with student participants, the majority of whom had a high motivation for English language learning and who, as a result, academically performed well. Most of them had developed adaptive techniques and strategies that enabled them to function, quite similar to, if not commensurate with, their sighted peers in the integrated classroom environment. One possible area for research can be to investigate the possible causes behind the failure of BVI students to successfully learn a target language in the regular classroom setting. Factors such as the BVI learners' attitude

towards the target language, their learning strategies, and their proficiency in the major skills can be included for investigation.

Finally, a very interesting yet quite unexplored area is the positive impact of BVI learners in integrated classes. BVI students may positively contribute to integrated classes at both academic as well as non-academic levels.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions for Student Study Participants

The ten BVI students were asked the following questions during an hour-long, semi-structured interview with each study participant:

1. What is the nature of your visual impairment (e. g., are you congenitally blind?)
2. Why are you interested in mastering the English language? When did you start learning it? Do you know any other language apart from your mother-tongue?
3. (a) How do you learn a written second language concept?
(b) How do you learn an oral second language concept?
4. (a) Would you please share with me your experiences as a BVI learner of English language in an integrated class? Did you find learning it easier or difficult? Was learning it harder or easier than your other courses?
(b) . How is learning the English language different from learning any other subject?
5. (a) What written strategies do you use to succeed in the integrated second language classroom setting?
(b) What oral strategies do you use to succeed in the integrated second language classroom setting?
(c) What reading strategies do you use to succeed in the integrated second language classroom setting?
(d) What listening strategies do you use to succeed in the integrated second language classroom setting?
(e) How do you apply each of the strategies you mentioned to an in-class assignment?
(f) How do you apply the strategies you just mentioned to a homework assignment?
6. give me an example of a typical day in your second language class and the strategies you utilize for success during class.
7. (a) How accessible are English language study materials for you as a BVI student?

- (b) What steps do you take to make them accessible for you?
- (c) How far does the university help you in this regard?
8. (a) Are you aware of and trained on the use of Assistive Technology in teaching and learning (e.g. brailers, JAWS for Windows, Dolphin pen, Touch window, Magnifier, Talking word processor, Digitally recorded communication devices, etc.?)
- (b) If yes, what assistive technology do you use to succeed in your English language studies?
- (c) How effective are the assistive technology devices in your English language learning?
- (d) Do you have any special equipment to assist you in your English language studies in your class? If yes, what are they?
9. (a) How do you see your interpersonal relations with your classmates?
- (b) What steps have you taken to improve your interpersonal relations with your classmates?
- (c) What steps, you think, do your sighted peers need to take in this regard?
10. (a) Which teaching strategies do you find most helpful or unhelpful in your learning of English language? Give examples.
- (b) What is the teacher's attitude towards you in general?
- (c) What, in your opinion, can English language teachers do to make the English language learning experience a positive one for a BVI student in a regular class?
11. (a) What actions have administrators taken that have been helpful to your English language learning experience?
- (b) What actions have the administration not taken which have proved unhelpful to your English language learning experience?
- (c) What can administrators do to make the English language learning experience a positive one for a student who is blind or visually impaired?
12. What can BVI students themselves do to make the English language learning experience in the regular classroom setting a positive one for themselves?
13. (a) Is there anything you would like to add that you feel we haven't covered during the course of this interview?

(b) Do you have any questions about this study?

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions for Teacher Study Participants

The teacher study participants were asked the following questions during semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasted for almost one hour.

1. (a) Are you trained to teach visually impaired learners?
(b) What kind of special teaching aids do you have and use for the visually impaired learners in your class?
2. (a) How do you perceive your BVI student's over-all English language learning experience in the regular classroom environment?
(b) Do you believe that learning the English language is easier or more difficult for your blind student than it is in general for your fully sighted students?
(c) What types of challenges (related to the learning of English as a second language), if any, do your BVI student experience in the regular second language classroom setting?
(d) Tell me about your perception of how your BVI student was regarded by his/her peers in the regular second language classroom setting.
(e) In what respect(s), in general, do you believe English language learning is different from the learning of any other academic subject?
3. (a) Now tell me how you believe your BVI student goes about mastering the material that is being taught in the regular second language classroom.
(b) Do you find it necessary to adjust your assumptions of what your student is able to master based upon the fact that he/she is blind or visually impaired? Why or why not?
4. (a) What challenges do you face when teaching in an integrated classroom having both sighted as well as BVI students?
(b) How do you overcome those challenges?
5. (a) Which strategies have you used, that you believe have been most helpful, for improving your BVI students' listening skills? Give examples.

(b) Which strategies have you used, that you believe have been most helpful, for improving your BVI students' oral skills? Give examples.

(c) Which strategies have you used, that you believe have been most helpful, for improving your BVI students' reading skills? Give examples.

(d) Which strategies have you used, that you believe have been most helpful, for improving your BVI students' writing skills? Give examples.

(e) Are there certain strategies you have tried in terms of your BVI student's English language learning experience that have not worked as well as you had anticipated they would? Give examples.

6. Now I would like to ask you about the learning strategies your BVI student uses.

(a) Can you give examples of the types of writing strategies your BVI student utilizes during a typical classroom session?

(b) Can you give examples of oral strategies your BVI student utilizes during a typical classroom session?

(c) Can you give examples of reading strategies your BVI student utilizes during a typical classroom session?

(d) Can you give examples of listening strategies your BVI student utilizes during a typical classroom session?

(e) What strategies does your BVI student use for completing homework assignments?

(f) What strategies has your BVI student used that have proven helpful for you as his/her English language teacher, in terms of his/her learning of the second language? Give examples.

(g) What actions or strategies has your BVI student utilised in that have proven unhelpful for you, as his/her English language teacher? Give examples.

7. (a) What types of actions or strategies did your BVI student employ in terms of his/her interactions with peers in class?

(b) How do your sighted students generally react towards your BVI student[s] in integrated classes?

(c) How do your BVI students react towards the sighted students in integrated classes?

(d) How do you rate the interpersonal relations among your BVI and sighted students?

8. (a) Are you aware of and trained on the use of Assistive Technology for BVI learners in teaching and learning English (e.g. brailers, JAWS for Windows, Dolphin pen, Touch window, Magnifier, Talking word processor, Digitally recorded communication devices, etc.?)

(b) If yes, how complex or easy-to-use, do you think, are the assistive technology devices that are available to them?

(c) How effective are the assistive technology devices in English language teaching/learning?

(d) Does the available assistive technology meet the needs of learners in their English language learning?

9. (a) What actions did administrators take that you feel were helpful in terms of your BVI student's English language learning experience? Give examples.

(b) What actions did administrators not take that you feel proved unhelpful for your BVI student's English language learning experience? Give examples.

10. (a) If you have the opportunity to have another blind student in your regular English language classroom, what would you do to make the second language learning experience a positive one for all involved?

(b) What do you believe BVI students themselves can do to make their own English language learning experience a positive one?

11. (a) Is there anything further you wish to add?

(b) Is there anything you feel has not been covered during the course of this interview?

(c) Do you have any further questions about this study?

APPENDIX C

Consent for Participation in Interview Research

I volunteer to participate in the study entitled “English language learning by blind and visually impaired students in Pakistan: a qualitative study of the challenges, experiences and solutions” conducted by Mr. Gul Zamin Khan from the National University of Modern Languages. I understand that the study is intended to gather information about the English language learning experiences of blind and visually impaired students. I will be one of 15 people being interviewed for this research.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
2. I understand that I will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.
3. The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made. If I don't want to be taped, I will not be able to participate in the study.
4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.
5. Faculty and administrators from my campus will neither be present at the interview nor have access to raw notes or transcripts. This precaution will prevent my individual comments from having any negative repercussions.
6. I understand that this research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the National University of Modern Languages.
7. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study and express my willingness to be interviewed on _____

_____ at NUML Main Campus Islamabad/ IIU Main Campus
Islamabad.

Signature

Date

Signature of the Investigator

For further information, please contact:

Mr. Gul Zamin Khan via

E-mail >gulzaminkhanuom@gmail.com<

or

cell phone: 0346-9390331