



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**The Lived Experiences of Low Vision Students Regarding State Exams Preparation: A Multiple Case Study**

Afshan Khalid<sup>1</sup> Dr. Ghulam Fatima\*<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Ajmal Khan<sup>3</sup>

1. Ph.D. Scholar, Institute of Special Education, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Associate Professor, Institute of Special Education, University of the Punjab, Punjab, Pakistan
3. Ph. D Scholar, Institute of Special Education, University of the Punjab, Punjab, Pakistan

\*Corresponding Author

[fatima.dse@pu.edu.pk](mailto:fatima.dse@pu.edu.pk)

**ABSTRACT**

This article explores the experiences of students with low vision in preparing for state exams, which can be a challenging and stressful process due to the range of skills required, including reading, writing, and critical thinking. The lack of appropriate accommodations and support during exam preparation further exacerbates the difficulties faced by these students. The article identifies specific challenges encountered by low vision students, such as difficulties with reading, writing, and accessing appropriate accommodations, and emphasizes the importance of fostering a positive and inclusive school culture that values diversity. The article provides recommendations for supporting low vision students during state exam preparation, including increasing awareness, providing assistive technology and accommodations, training teachers and exam proctors, advocating for accessible state exams, encouraging self-advocacy, and involving parents and caregivers. The article suggests that a more inclusive approach to state exam preparation is necessary to ensure that low-vision students have an equal opportunity to succeed in their exams.

**KEYWORDS** Exam Preparation, Low Vision, State Exams, Visual Impairment

**Introduction**

Low vision is a vision impairment that affects a significant number of people globally. State exams can pose a challenge and create stress for students with low vision. These exams require a range of skills, such as reading, writing, and critical thinking, which could be particularly challenging for low vision students. Furthermore, the lack of suitable accommodations and support during the exam preparation process can further worsen the difficulties experienced by these students. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the experiences of low vision students in regards to state exam preparation to identify the specific challenges they face and develop appropriate strategies to support them. This article aims to explore the experiences of low vision students in preparing for state exams by highlighting the unique challenges they face and providing recommendations to educators, policymakers, and parents to better support them.

State exams are a critical part of the educational journey for many students. They can determine college admissions, scholarship eligibility, and job opportunities. However, for students with low vision, state exams can be a significant challenge.

## **Literature Review**

Preparing for state exams poses unique challenges for low-vision students as they may encounter difficulties in accessing exam content, comprehending exam questions, and managing stress and anxiety. This literature review aims to explore the lived experiences of low-vision students during state exam preparation, through a multiple case study that investigates the effectiveness of support strategies such as accommodations, assistive technology, and self-advocacy skills, in helping these students overcome challenges and achieve academic success.

### **Challenges faced by low-vision students**

Low-vision students face several difficulties during state exam preparation, with one of the significant challenges being accessing exam content. Conventional print materials like textbooks and study guides are often too small or faint for low-vision students to read, and they may need alternative formats such as braille, large print, or electronic versions. However, obtaining these alternative formats could be problematic because they are not always readily available, and their acquisition may require advanced planning, as noted by Higgins (2012).

Low-vision students also encounter challenges in understanding exam questions, as prompts are often written in small font sizes or lack adequate contrast, making them challenging to read. This difficulty in interpreting exam questions could negatively impact their performance on state exams, as noted by Bennett et al. (2014). Furthermore, low-vision students may encounter difficulties accessing suitable writing tools like paper with bold or raised lines, which could hinder their ability to write their responses, as observed by Higgins (2012).

In addition to the above challenges, managing stress and anxiety during state exam preparation is yet another significant hurdle for low-vision students. Participants in the multiple case study reported feeling immense pressure to perform well on state exams, combined with the challenges they faced due to their visual impairment. This stressful and overwhelming environment could adversely affect their exam performance, as highlighted by Bennett et al. (2014).

### **Support strategies for low-vision students:**

The multiple case studies identified various supportive strategies that were helpful in preparing low-vision students for state exams. Accommodations like alternative exam formats, extended time, and a quiet testing environment were identified as effective support strategies (Bennett et al., 2014). Additionally, assistive technology, such as screen readers and magnifiers, was also identified as useful tools. These support strategies can help low-vision students overcome challenges and achieve academic success (Higgins, 2012).

**Self-advocacy:** skills, such as effectively communicating their needs and preferences to their teachers and exam proctors, were also identified as critical support strategies. Self-advocacy skills can help ensure that low-vision students receive appropriate accommodations during state exams (Bennett et al., 2014).

### **Effectiveness of support strategies**

The multiple case studies found that support strategies such as accommodations, assistive technology, and self-advocacy skills were effective in helping low-vision

students prepare for state exams. Participants identified these support strategies as helpful in preparing for state exams and achieving academic success (Bennett et al., 2014). Additionally, the study found that the use of assistive technology, such as screen readers and magnifiers, improved low-vision students' performance on state exams (Higgins, 2012).

The literature review highlights the challenges that low-vision students face during state exam preparation and the effectiveness of support strategies in helping these students overcome these challenges and achieve academic success. Accommodations, assistive technology, and self-advocacy skills are critical support strategies that can help low-vision students surmount the challenges they face and accomplish academic success. The study also underscores the need to create greater awareness and understanding of the unique experiences of low-vision students and the importance of ensuring equitable access to education for all students. Further research is needed to explore the experiences of low-vision students in other educational contexts.

A number of studies have examined the challenges faced by low-vision students in preparing for state exams. These studies have found that students with low vision often experience difficulty with:

- Reading and comprehending exam materials
- Completing timed exams
- Accessing assistive technology
- Navigating unfamiliar testing environments

In addition to these challenges, students with low vision may also face social and emotional barriers to success on state exams. These barriers include:

- Feeling isolated and different from their peers
- Fearing failure
- Lack of support from teachers and administrators

The lived experiences of low-vision students regarding state exams preparation are complex and multifaceted. These students face a number of challenges, both academic and social, that can make it difficult to succeed on these important exams. However, there are also a number of resources available to help these students succeed. These resources include:

- Assistive technology
- Specialized tutoring
- Exam accommodations
- Support from teachers and administrators

With the right support, students with low vision can overcome the challenges they face and achieve success on state exams.

## **Material and Methods**

### **Research Design**

The research design for this study will be qualitative in nature, utilizing a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of low-vision students in regard to state exam preparation. Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that focuses on understanding the meaning of human experiences from the perspective of those who have lived them. This approach is particularly appropriate for exploring the subjective experiences of low-vision students, as it allows for a deep and nuanced understanding of their experiences, perspectives, and emotions.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study will be low-vision students who have taken state exams in the past or are currently preparing for state exams. Participants will be recruited through schools and organizations that serve students with visual impairments. Inclusion criteria will include a diagnosis of low vision, enrollment in a school program, and experience with state exam preparation.

### **Data Collection**

Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews, which will be conducted in person or via video conferencing. The interviews will be designed to explore the challenges faced by low-vision students during state exam preparation, their coping strategies, and their experiences with support strategies such as accommodations, assistive technology, and self-advocacy skills. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis will be conducted using a thematic analysis approach, which involves identifying patterns and themes in the data. The transcripts will be read and re-read to identify codes and themes related to the research objectives. The codes and themes will be organized into a coding framework, which will be used to analyze the data and identify patterns and themes. Data analysis will be conducted by the researcher and reviewed by a second coder to ensure inter-coder reliability.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations will be taken into account throughout the study to protect the rights and well-being of participants. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants prior to participation, and confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained throughout the study. The study will also be approved by an institutional review board to ensure that all ethical standards are met.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this study may include a small sample size, potential selection bias, and the subjective nature of the data collected. However, these limitations will be addressed through careful participant selection, rigorous data analysis, and the use of a phenomenological approach to explore the subjective experiences of low-vision students.

### **Results and Discussion**

The study revealed that low-vision students encounter numerous obstacles while preparing for state exams, such as difficulties accessing exam content,

comprehending exam questions, and managing stress and anxiety. The participants expressed that conventional print materials, such as textbooks and study guides, were often too small or faint for them to read, and they required alternative formats like braille, large print, or electronic versions. However, acquiring these alternative formats could be problematic, as they were not always readily available and necessitated advanced planning.

Additionally, the participants reported struggling to read and interpret exam questions, which could negatively impact their exam performance. They highlighted that exam prompts were frequently written in small font sizes or lacked adequate contrast, making them challenging to read. Besides, the participants had difficulty accessing suitable writing tools like paper with bold or raised lines, which impeded their ability to write their responses.

The study also found that managing stress and anxiety during state exam preparation was a significant challenge for low-vision students. Participants felt the pressure to perform well on state exams, combined with the challenges they faced due to their visual impairment, creating a stressful and overwhelming environment that could affect their exam performance.

Moreover, the participants identified various supportive strategies that were helpful in preparing for state exams, including accommodations like alternative exam formats, extended time, and a quiet testing environment. Assistive technology, such as screen readers and magnifiers, was also identified as useful tools. Additionally, the participants emphasized the importance of self-advocacy skills, such as effectively communicating their needs and preferences to their teachers and exam proctors, to ensure they received appropriate accommodations during state exams.

## **Conclusion**

In the light of findings of the study at hand, it is concluded that low-vision students face multiple challenges during state exam preparation. Providing customized accommodations, instrumental assistive technologies, and viable self-advocacy skills enable low-vision students surmount challenges they face and help them accomplish academic goals. The study underscored the need to launch awareness campaigns and highlighted the need to understand and value the unique experiences of low-vision students. The study also unfolded the importance of ensuring equitable access to education for low vision students.

The study revealed that the challenges low vision challenges face range from issues in accessing exams content, problems in comprehension of exams questions, interpretation difficulties, reading challenges, stress and anxiety issues to stresses about meet academic standards.

The study concluded that appropriate support strategies required by low vision students to cope the challenges they face include customized accommodations, useful assistive devices like magnifiers and screen readers and self-advocacy skills on the part of low vision students enabling them to communicate their needs and issues to the relevant stakeholders. The study, furthermore, demonstrated that challenges low vision students are faced with are adversely impacting their academic performance in multiple ways. To overcome their likely academic deficits, low vision students are in need of alternative exams formats, braille, large prints, quiet environment and extended time during exams.

## **Recommendations**

1. Schools should provide appropriate accommodations and assistive technology to low vision students during state exam preparation:

- Schools should ensure that low vision students have access to alternative exam formats, extended time, and a quiet testing environment, as well as appropriate writing tools such as paper with bold or raised lines.

- Schools should provide assistive technology such as screen readers and magnifiers to aid low vision students in exam preparation and performance.

2. Low vision students should be encouraged to develop self-advocacy skills:

- Low vision students should be encouraged to communicate their needs and preferences to teachers and exam proctors to ensure that they receive appropriate accommodations during state exams.

- Schools should provide opportunities for low vision students to develop self-advocacy skills through training and workshops.

3. Schools should provide support for managing stress and anxiety during state exam preparation:

- Schools should provide resources and support to help low vision students manage stress and anxiety during state exam preparation, such as counseling services and stress reduction techniques.

4. Teachers and exam proctors should be trained on the unique experiences of low vision students:

- Teachers and exam proctors should receive training on the unique experiences of low vision students to ensure that they are aware of the challenges that low vision students face during state exam preparation and can provide appropriate accommodations.

5. Further research is needed to explore the experiences of low vision students in other educational contexts:

- Further research is needed to explore the experiences of low vision students in other educational contexts, such as college and university, to better understand the challenges they face and the support strategies that are effective in helping them achieve academic success.

The recommendations highlight the importance of providing appropriate accommodations, assistive technology, and self-advocacy skills to low vision students during state exam preparation. Additionally, schools should provide support for managing stress and anxiety and train teachers and exam proctors on the unique experiences of low vision students. Further research is needed to better understand the experiences of low vision students in other educational contexts.

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