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## Satisfaction of students with visual impairment within different school settings

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Satisfaction of Students with Visual Impairment within Different School Settings

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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School Psychology

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## **Abstract**

This is an investigation of the satisfaction of students with visual impairment attending school in different educational settings, including students attending school in a specialized educational setting, as well as students with visual impairment attending school in a mainstreamed educational setting. This paper explores research on the effectiveness and perceptions of inclusion for children with disabilities, particularly children with visual impairment. Specific research on this topic is sparse and the researcher proposed a new research study, in which the satisfaction of students with visual impairment was targeted and explored in both a specialized educational setting and mainstreamed educational setting. High school students from both educational settings were interviewed and asked about their satisfaction pertaining to their school setting. Students from each setting expressed high satisfaction with their school setting, as well as their relationships. Participants from both settings also expressed aspirations for the future and believed they have the ability to reach those aspirations.

Satisfaction of Students with Visual Impairment within Different School Settings

**Introduction**

Visual Impairment in the United States Today

According to Erickson, Lee and Schrader (2013), there are over 6.5 million people in the United States with a visual disability. More than 4.2 million of these individuals have not completed high school and less than 400,000 have a bachelor's degree or higher. The majority of individuals age 21-64 with a visual disability also live below the poverty line. The number of individuals born with a visual impairment has dropped drastically over the last several years and it is estimated that around 60,000 children in the United States have a visual disability. The statistics related to achievement of those with visual impairment suggest that there is a need for more adequate assistance than has been provided in the past. Moreover, it is critical that individuals working with visually-impaired children be committed to helping them achieve.

Inclusion Model

The inclusion model in the educational setting is an approach to educating students with learning difficulties and disabilities. Under this approach, students with disabilities and special educational needs receive most or all of their education and time within the classroom setting integrated with students who do not have a disability. Special educational needs can be defined as extra support that students need to help them succeed in the academic setting. These supports are individualized towards the student and their specific needs and may include a wide range of resources, including extended instruction, one on one support, counseling, as well as within classroom and out of the classroom accommodations. There are several types of disabilities, including intellectual and physical disabilities. Though an intellectual disability is different than a physical disability, such as visual impairment, children receiving special education services for

any disability share common experiences. All children identified with a disability in the educational setting are considered to have significant impairment emotionally, intellectually, or physically that requires them to be provided with extra resources and assistance to achieve in the academic setting.

Those who endorse the inclusion model tend to reject the notion of special schools or classrooms to separate students with disabilities from students without disabilities. However, there are special schools, both state and private, that offer education to students with disabilities separate from non-disabled students. There has been debate regarding which type of setting is the best and most appropriate for children with disabilities. Several research studies have found negative attitudes towards inclusion, in part due to teachers not being prepared to handle the extra needs of students identified with a disability (Batu, Bilgin, Oksal, and Sadioglu, 2013). All students with disabilities require extra assistance. In the inclusion model, this assistance is provided for children while they continue to mainstream with children in regular educational classrooms, while children in specialized schools are not integrated with non-disabled children for their education.

### **Review of the Literature**

#### **Student Perception of Inclusion**

Bennett and Gallagher (2013) investigated the perceptions of inclusion of students with disabilities. In their study, students with disabilities, parents, peers, educational assistants, job coaches, and community employers completed surveys examining their beliefs about inclusion of students with disability in the school or workplace. The surveys also examined participants' confidence and comfort in teaching or working with these students, impact of inclusion on individuals without disabilities, and the socialization and friendships of students with disabilities (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013). Job coaches and parents upheld the most positive attitudes and beliefs about inclusion with parents particularly affirmative about inclusion experiences in both

the classroom and workplace (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013). The employers believed students with disabilities were supported and engaged with others in the workplace and teachers described the effects of inclusion on students without disabilities as positive (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013). The participants in this study overall expressed positive attitudes towards social relationships, but there were some discrepancies that are important to note (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013). An interesting finding was that students with a disability were significantly more positive about their opportunities to socialize and form friendships than were their teachers, educational assistants, employers, and peers (but not their parents). Teachers and educational assistants were the least optimistic about these relationships (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013).

#### Teacher Attitude toward Inclusion

Research examining the satisfaction of students within an inclusion model versus students at a special school designed for students with disabilities is sparse. However, there have been several studies conducted all around the world that have examined teacher's attitudes about inclusion. Primary school teachers reported negative attitudes towards the inclusion of blind children in regular classes and both female and male teachers were equally resistant towards this idea (Mushoriwa, 2001). One of the reasons for this negative attitude was large class sizes with minimal resources, such as aids and support staff (Mushoriwa, 2001). Others have suggested that teacher candidates' attitudes about working with students who require special educational needs are influenced by the number of special education courses they completed (Aydin & Kuzu, 2013).

#### Effectiveness of Inclusion

One of the critical elements needed for a successful inclusion program is for the teachers to have positive attitudes towards the idea of inclusion (Costley, 2013). Teachers are the individuals who work directly with the students and understanding how they perceive the practice of inclusion is an important step in bringing about effective inclusionary practices in the schools

(Costley, 2013). An individual's perception, opinions, ways of construing systems, intentions, and attitudes influence the successful implementation of a program. Therefore, it is recommended that schools receive training on implementing inclusion practices. Moreover, schools may want to consider developing a School Site Inclusion Task Force made up of teachers and administrators that will assist in promoting awareness and discussion of including children with disabilities into the regular education classroom (Costley, 2013). School districts should also implement inclusion practices and take the necessary steps to make sure that teachers feel prepared and confident, which gives teachers a sense of ownership over their teaching and a commitment to their acquired beliefs about inclusion (Costley, 2013). Others have also concluded that teachers believed inclusion programs could be improved with better planning and more collaboration between teachers (LasGelzheiser & Meyers, 1996). Teachers involved in collaborative partnerships often report increased feelings of worth, renewal, partnership, and creativity (Gately & Gately, 2001). However, some teachers voice dissatisfaction with the entire inclusion process, indicating that role descriptions are not well defined and that there is a lack of clear expectations from administrators, as well as frustrations with implementation issues (Gately & Gately, 2001).

Kamenopoulou (2012) explored the social inclusion and participation of deaf-blind children in mainstream placements. In this study, interviews were conducted with the children, their parents and selected teachers regarding the students' peer interactions and relationships. Also, semi-structured observations of peer interactions during school breaks were conducted to accompany interview data. Findings from the interviews suggested that deaf-blind students were involved socially in their schools, but all faced certain issues in terms of being fully included by other students (Kamenopoulou, 2012). All four participants in this study shared a common method of communication with their peers, oral speech, but they still had significant impairments in both distance senses (e.g., vision and hearing). These impairments were seen as a barrier to peer interactions and in relation to this, it was emphasized that the physical and social

environment of a mainstream secondary school is extremely challenging for a child with deaf-blindness (Kamenopoulou, 2012). Previous placement in a specialized school was perceived as one of the barriers to the development of social skills (Kamenopoulou, 2012). Children in specialized schools may have minimal opportunities to experience age appropriate social interactions, because the majority of children in these schools have severe and complex disabilities and the adult-child ratio is high (Kamenopoulou, 2012). Specialized schools might not be the best environment for social skills development of deaf and blind children. However, a range of differentiation strategies implemented in order to achieve academic inclusion may actually deter socialization. For example, learning support assistants, whose role is to remove barriers to communication, emerged as a hindrance to interactions (Kamenopoulou, 2012). The impact of support staff as a possible cause of within-class segregation is one of the key current issues expressed in the literature as being a hindrance to socialization for children with disabilities, as well as a barrier for developing independence. It is also important to note that the teachers' interviews in this study demonstrated a limited understanding of the implications of deaf-blindness for communication. The inclusion of deaf and blind students in the social context of a mainstream school is a difficult task, because several characteristics of either the child or the context might provide a barrier to participation (Kamenopoulou, 2012). Teacher-training providers may want to focus on developing a sound understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of different approaches, such as the medical and social models of disability, as well as how these affect teachers' everyday practice (Kamenopoulou, 2012).

Tkachyk (2013) investigated whether or not inclusive classrooms were always the best for students. What is best for each individual student must be considered. There is a need for segregated classrooms where students can receive the specialized programming and supports that they require in a low-stress environment (Tkachyk, 2013). It is important for educators to continue to prioritize the learning needs of all students with disabilities when contemplating full inclusion (Tkachyk, 2013). In sum, it is important to consider each student's needs individually,

and students with severe disabilities might need to be educated in a different setting than an inclusive classroom.

#### Teacher Qualifications in working with Disabled Students

Past research has provided evidence for a reoccurring theme that it is common for teachers to feel ill-prepared for including children with disabilities within the classroom and that their feelings and perceptions towards inclusion can heavily impact the effectiveness of this model (Gafoor & Asaraf, 2009). Although regular classroom teachers are willing to take the responsibility for teaching all children, including children with disabilities; the teachers will not be confident if they are not equipped with necessary skills (Gafoor & Asaraf, 2009). In many mainstream schools, the general classroom teachers have minimal or no formal or no formal training on the specific needs of special education students (Cullen, Gregory, & Noto, 2010). Cullen and colleagues (2010) found that the training the teachers did have was in their undergraduate pre-service teachers' courses, but they had little opportunity during their university days to apply modifications and accommodations to real children in real public schools. Therefore, regular education teachers do not feel they can adequately provide what special need students included within the regular education classrooms need. Recently there has been a push for more special education for regular education teachers and some universities have shifted the special education curriculum to graduate studies, whereas previously undergraduates received more special education training in their undergraduate studies (Gafoor & Asaraf, 2009). The National Curriculum for Teacher Education and Curriculum Framework for Quality Teacher Education both asserted the importance of teacher training for disadvantaged children and the need to provide teachers with better ways to deal with inequalities, differences, and special needs (Gafoor & Asaraf, 2009).

### Satisfaction and Academic Achievement

Satisfaction and academic achievement are influenced by a combination of teacher, student and contextual factors. For example, Casas, Baltatescu, Bertran, Gonzalez, and Hatos (2013) found that satisfaction with friends at school and satisfaction with classmates did not significantly contribute to satisfaction with school. School satisfaction is highly related to satisfaction with teachers, but weakly related to overall life satisfaction. Satisfaction with school friends and with classmates is highly related to overall life satisfaction, but not significantly related to satisfaction with school (Casas et al., 2013). Although this does not suggest that school satisfaction is related to overall satisfaction, these findings suggest teacher satisfaction is strongly related to school satisfaction, which indicates that teacher satisfaction could impact academic achievement.

Schools with better work environments for teachers had greater student achievement growth than schools with poor work environments for teachers (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012). Positive teacher work environments were environments in which teachers felt supported. Moreover, teachers' work environment can also be influenced by the types of students they teach. Teachers are influenced by the students because teachers want to teach students in which they can be confident with making a contribution (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012). For example, many teachers choose to work in systems with higher proportions of children who are minorities and/or live in poverty students because they are committed to social justice or because they believe that by teaching these demographics of students, they can contribute to the public good. However, other teachers may avoid working with the same groups of students, either because of personal discomfort or doubts that they can successfully teach these students (Johnson et al., 2012). Others found teachers' sense of efficacy depends on the particular students they teach (Kennedy, 2010). Teachers' self-efficacy with teaching students can impact their attitude on teaching students with

special educational needs and this attitude could impact the student's school satisfaction and academic performance (Kennedy, 2010).

#### Children with Disabilities in the Schools Today

Past research suggests that up to fifty percent of children with disabilities feel that they do not belong within their class, are often lonely, isolated, and do not feel safe (Tavares, 2011). In order for inclusion and integrated classes to be successful, children need to have opportunities to learn about disabilities and other physical differences (Tavares, 2011). The majority of children with disabilities attend integrated classrooms, where they are at greater risk than children without disabilities for social exclusion (Lindsay & McPherson, 2012). Children with disabilities suffer from social exclusion at a higher frequency than children without disabilities because they are perceived as different from their peers and they often lack the protective functions of friendships (Lindsay & McPherson, 2012). Negative attitudes and ineffective attempts at social inclusion are often the result of a lack of teaching of value and appreciation for diversity (Lindsay & McPherson, 2012). Social inclusion programs are one way that schools can broaden children's knowledge about disabilities and promote social acceptance of disabled children. Aslam, Lindsay, McKeever, McPherson, and Wright (2013) researched children's perceptions of the desirable components of two commonly used social inclusion programs in Canada. Children in each program reported several aspects of the content appealed to them, including learning about bullying, disability, building friendships and encouraging social inclusion, preventing social exclusion (Aslam et al., 2013). There is a tendency for children with disabilities that are integrated within classrooms with non-disabled students to feel isolated and socially excluded. Social inclusion programs that provide knowledge about disabilities can be beneficial and a protective factor against social exclusion (Aslam et al., 2013).

#### **Current Study**

The purpose of this study is to research and explore the satisfaction of students with visual impairment attending mainstream schools that are using the inclusion model and including

students with visual impairment within the regular education classroom, as well as explore the satisfaction of students with visual impairment who attend a specialized school only for students with disabilities. Specifically, this study will explore four research questions: (1) How do students with visual impairment describe their school experience? (2) How do students with visual impairment describe their relationships? (3) How do students with visual impairment describe their self-concept? (4) What are students with visual impairment future aspirations? This study will explore the differences and similarities among students attending both school settings.

### **Method**

#### Participants

In this study, the participants consisted of thirteen high school students who were receiving special education services for having a visual impairment. Participants included eleven high school students from a specialized school that only serves deaf and visually-impaired students, as well as two students from mainstream school settings. Convenience sampling was used to obtain participants. Ages ranged from 14-19 years of age. Gender demographic information was collected for separate analysis of gender differentiation. The sample students from the specialized school setting included 8 males and 3 females. Both of the participants from the mainstream school setting were male. Each of the participants who attended a specialized school had previously attended a mainstream school. Background information, including time attending their current school, previous schools experience, and other disabilities was also collected. Participants from each group had varying intellectual capabilities, as with any group. Although, it is important to note that the sample of participants from the mainstream school setting were only two and they had significantly different intellectual abilities. There was no other demographic or background information that was necessary to collect for the success of this research study.

## Procedure

Each participant in this research study was individually interviewed by the researcher. An employee of the school was also present during each interview, due to school policies, though they were asked not to assist or participate in the interviews. The researcher asked the participants various questions related to satisfaction, including questions related to self-concept, questions related to friendships, as well as questions related to future aspirations, such as plans to attend college. There were several types of questions asked, including open ended questions, multiple choice questions and questions where a Likert scale was used to quantify the responses to the items. Demographic information was collected on the back of the survey, including gender, academic institution the child is currently attending, number of years at current academic institution, and previous academic institutions attended.

## Measures

A determination of students' preference towards a particular educational setting was not attempted during this study. A suggestion of which type of educational setting is best or more appropriate for students with visual impairment was also not attempted during this study. However, satisfaction within their current educational setting and the satisfaction of participants in both educational environments were explored.

The survey questions consisted of four different sections of questions, including questions regarding school experience, relationships with others, self-concept, and future aspirations. These four domains and their corresponding questions are listed below.

## Questions for Students with Visual-Impairments

Research Question #1: How do students with visual impairment describe their school experience?

1) Please rate your overall satisfaction with school on a scale from 1 (Very Dissatisfied) - 5 (Very Satisfied)

10) What do you like about school now?

11) What do you dislike about school now?

12) How often do you get bullied by other children on a scale from 1(Never) – 5(Very Often)?

13) How often do you bully other children on a scale from 1(Never) – 5(Very Often)?

18) If it were up to you, what type of classroom would you rather be in?

a) a classroom with only students with visual impairments

b) a classroom with students with visual impairments and without visual impairments

c) a classroom with no students with visual impairments

Research Question #2: How do students with visual impairment describe their relationships?

2) How valued do you feel by other students on a scale from 1(Not valued at all) – 5 (Very Valued)?

3) How valued do you feel by your teachers on a scale from 1(Not valued at all) – 5 (Very Valued)?

4) Please finish the following sentence. I would describe my friendships at school as.....

14) How close do you feel your relationship is with your parents on a scale from 1(Very Distant) – 5 Very (Close)?

15) How many friends do you have at school?

16) How many friends without visual impairments, both at school and outside of school, do you have?

Research Question #3: How do students with visual impairment describe their self-concept?

6) What are you looking forward to about college? What worries you about going to college?

8) What kind of job do you think you will have when you are older?

9) If your friends were to describe you, tell me three things they would say?

17) How often during the day do you become frustrated with your visual impairment on a scale from 1(Never) – 5(Almost Always)?

Research Question #4: What are students with visual impairment future aspirations?

5) What are your plans for attending college?

7) What kind of job would you like to have when you are older?

19) Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

20) (If not answered in question 19) Where do you see yourself living?

Background Questions

How long have you been attending (name of school)?

(If Applicable) Where did you previously attend school?

Male or Female:

Other Disabilities:

### **Analysis**

Qualitative data was collected to explore the satisfaction of students with visual impairment interviewed within both specialized and mainstream school settings. The cut and sort theory was used, as responses from the interviews were examined and re-occurring ideas or responses were noted. The ideas and answers were then turned into themes. Patterns were examined among students within the same setting and compared to students across different settings. Male and female student responses were also looked at separately to explore possible themes related to gender.

Quantitative data was collected to investigate scaled survey questions. The means were calculated for scaled survey questions for participants from each group. Means were also calculated to explore possible differences between male and female participants. Ranges from scaled survey questions were also noted, in order to explore variability among responses of participants.

### **Results**

#### Research Question #1: How do students with visual impairment describe their school experience?

Students attending a specialized school reported being satisfied with their school (mean = 3.9) Female participants reported slightly higher satisfaction (mean = 4) than male participants (mean = 3.875). Common themes that were found in student responses when asked about specific aspects they liked about their school included the following; socializing with friends, learning, being able to participate in athletics, and having a relationship with their teachers. Several students also stated that when they were in mainstream school they did not have friends. Several

themes were present when asked what participants did not like about school, including having to adhere to too many rules, unfavorable cafeteria food, and lack of independence. Male responses indicated a theme of social conflict with other students. Two out of three female participants indicated that they experienced significantly more bullying when they attended mainstream schools than when attending specialized school (mean = 4.5), whereas male respondents reported slightly more bullying in mainstream schools than when attending the specialized school (mean = 2.6). Female respondents reported they were ridiculed for being blind and used to have children throw objects at them when they attended mainstream school. Students from the specialized school setting reported low instances of bullying others (mean = 1.4), while male students reported bullying slightly more (mean = 1.875) than female students (mean = 1). Participants were divided in opinion of which type of classroom they would prefer, while 45% of participants preferred a classroom with only visually impaired students, 36% of students preferred to be in a classroom with visually impaired and non-visually impaired students, and 18% of students reported that they would rather be in a classroom only with students without visual impairment. Overall, 54% of students preferred a different classroom setting than only students with visual impairment. There was a reoccurring theme amongst students at the specialized school that they are receiving more resources and accommodations now than when they attended a mainstream school. Several students reported that they receive their resources quicker at the specialized school and there was a theme present of students feeling like they did not have the assistance they needed to succeed academically in the mainstream schools they attended.

One student from the mainstream school rated his satisfaction "4" and the other student rated his satisfaction "5". Participants reported enjoying classes and having lunch with others. One participant reported not enjoying sports and the other participant reported having trouble with English class because of not understanding a strategy that his school uses help him learn called sign post. Both students reported they never get bullied by other children. Each student

also reported they never bully other children. Both participants reported that they would prefer being in classes including students with and without visual impairment.

Mainstream school students reported higher overall satisfaction with their school setting than students attending a specialized school, though their comparison group only consisted of two participants. Participants from both settings reported reoccurring ideas of socialization and coursework playing important roles in their school satisfaction. A high percentage of students from both school settings reported having a preference of being in a classroom with both visually impaired and non-visually impaired students, though none of the students from either setting are receiving this experience at their respective schools. Students attending mainstream school reported experiencing a lower percentage of bullying than students attending the specialized school. However, students attending the specialized school indicated that they experienced more bullying when they attended mainstream school. Female participants from the specialized school reported higher amounts of bullying than male participants during their experience in public school. Responses from students from the specialized school suggested greater social conflict among male students within their current school setting.

Research Question #2: How do students with visual impairment describe their relationships?

Students attending a specialized school reported high levels of value by other students (mean = 4.8). Male students reported feeling slightly less valued by other students (mean = 4.75), when compared to female students (mean = 5). A theme of feeling more valued in the specialized setting versus while attending mainstream school was present in participants responses. Students reported feeling valued by their current teachers (mean = 4.27). A theme of feeling less valued by teachers while attending mainstream school was present in their responses, whereas five students stated they felt like their previous teachers in mainstream school did not care about or value them. Participant's responses indicated themes of the presence of very intimate and

enjoyable friendships. Respondents reported that they have a larger quantity of friends and closer friendships than while attending mainstream school were also present. There was a theme present of respondents having a limited number of friendships at school who were not visually impaired. However, participants reported having several non-visually impaired friends outside of school, whom they met through their previous experience in mainstream school and other activities. Responses fluctuated in regards to participant's closeness to parents. Several students reported feeling very close to and supported by parents, while other participants indicated that they have limited contact with parents. Overall, students reported that they have a close relationship with parents (mean =3.9).

Students attending a mainstream school reported feeling valued by other students (mean = 4) and very valued by teachers (mean = 5). Each participant reported getting along well with friends and one student stated his friends treat him fair. Both students reported being very close to parents (mean = 5). Both participants reported having several friendships. One of the participants reported he does not have any friends who have visual impairment at school, but does have several friends with visual impairment outside of school from attending camps. Participant's responses indicated themes of the presence of very intimate and enjoyable friendships.

Positive relationships appeared to be present and important to students in both school settings. Participants from both settings reported feeling valued by teachers and students. Students from each setting also reported having numerous positive interactions with others and meaningful friendships. Participants from a mainstream setting reported feeling a closer relationship with their parents than participants from the specialized setting reported. Students from the mainstream setting indicated having limited relationships with other students who had visual impairment, while participants from the specialized school setting noted that a positive change from them leaving mainstream school for a specialized school was getting to know other

students who had visual impairment. Participants from the specialized school setting reported having several visually impaired and non-visually impaired friends.

Research Question #3: How do students with visual impairment describe their self-concept?

Students attending a specialized school reported looking forward to attending college. There was a theme of having fear about accessibility to the resources they need present in their responses. Interest in developing new relationships was also a reoccurring theme in student's responses. There was a theme of participants having the belief that they would aspire to the career of their choice among the students' responses. All of the respondents from the specialized school setting expressed several positive attributes about themselves, when asked how their friends would describe them. Reoccurring adjectives in their responses included humorous, intelligent, enjoyable, and friendly. Participants reported experiencing low frustration with their impairment (mean = 1.5). Male respondents reported experiencing less frustration (mean = 1.25) than female participants (mean = 2.3). There was a theme of students believing that their frustration with their visual impairment had decreased since attending the specialized school. Students from the specialized school setting also reported having increased self-care skills, such as being able to rely on others less, since attending the specialized school.

One of the participants attending a mainstream school reported that he is looking forward to college because of gaining higher education and having the opportunity to be a part of something that he is interested in being a part of, while the other participant was not able to list anything about college he was looking forward to. One respondent reported that he believes he will be a veterinary tech when he is older, while the other participants stated that he believes he will be working in a coffee shop. Each respondent reported their friends would describe them with positive descriptors, including happy, polite, helpful, perseverant, and great. Each respondent reported rarely getting frustrated with their visual impairment.

There was a theme of having a positive self-concept across participants in both school settings. Participants from both settings reported that their friends would describe them with positive descriptors. Students were asked what careers they would like to have in the future and also asked what careers they think they will have. Individuals may answer these two questions with the same answer, but if they answer with different answers then they may not believe they have the ability to fulfill their aspirations. Each setting contained participants with high aspirations and their responses suggested the students believe they have the ability to reach those aspirations. There was a common theme across both school settings of having fear of the accommodations students would receive in college for their visual impairment. When asked about future aspirations, only one student out of the thirteen total participants mentioned plans for marriage, which may be related to self-concept.

Research Question #4: What are students with visual impairment future aspirations?

The majority of students attending the specialized school reported having plans to attend college. There were reoccurring desires to study psychology and special education among respondents. Eight out of the eleven participants reported where they would like to receive higher education; including four year universities, community colleges, and technical schools. Participants expressed various career aspirations. Reoccurring responses included careers involving helping others, such as working with children with disabilities and being a psychologist or counselor. Multiple students also expressed interest in having a career as a lawyer. When asked where participants see themselves in ten years, reoccurring themes included college, working, and living alone or with a roommate. One out of the eleven participants stated that he would be married with kids in ten years.

One of the participants attending a mainstream school reported that he plans to attend a community college to study veterinary science and become a veterinary tech or assistant. The

other participant was not able to list any plans for post graduation. One participant stated that he plans to be living on his own in ten years and working, while the other participant reported that he plans on being at home living with family in ten years. Neither of the students in the mainstream school setting mentioned plans of getting married or having a significant other in ten years.

Future aspirations varied across participants on both school setting. Each setting had students who had plans to attend college. Nine out of the eleven students attending the specialized school planned on living away from parents in ten years, either alone or with a roommate. Students from both settings had aspirations to be working in a career in ten years. Students from both settings expressed interest in different careers. One out of the total thirteen participants mentioned plans of being married.

### **Discussion**

The results of this study indicate that students appear to experience high levels of school satisfaction within both school settings. Participants in each group reported establishing meaningful friendships and overall, students in each setting expressed feeling valued by teachers and other students. Due to the small sample size and limited amount of participants from mainstream schools, there is not enough data from this study to support distinct differences and similarities between student's experiences in both settings. However, mainstream school participants' positive responses combined with specialized school participants' reported negative previous experience in mainstream schools suggest variability among students experiences within a mainstream school setting. The students from the specialized school may have left the mainstream because of negative experiences, whereas the students who remain in mainstream school may experience a more positive experience than the students who left. The differences in perceptions of mainstream school from the participants who left and the participants who did not leave may also be related to hindsight bias. The students from the specialized school may have a

more negative opinion of mainstream school than the participants attending the mainstream school because the students from the specialized school are able to look back and state what could have been better in their previous school. The students from the mainstream school also may have been more positive than the students from the specialized school in their responses because the mainstream school students have never experienced a specialized school and do not know the difference between the two settings.

Participants attending the specialized school reported having a common feeling that their school experience is more positive in their current school setting than when they attended school in a mainstream school setting. Other themes that were present in specialized school participant responses were lack of resources related to their visual impairment in previous school setting, more friendships in their current school setting than when they attended mainstream school, and a belief that their previous teachers in mainstream school were less qualified than the teachers they currently have.

The responses from participants attending the specialized school indicate that female students may be having a different school experience than male participants within their school setting. Specifically, male participant's responses were generally more negative than female participants in several areas related to school satisfaction, including social conflict. Female participants indicated having more negative experiences and more instances of bullying within their previous mainstream school setting, which may impact their perception of their current school setting. In a future study, it may be worth further exploring female versus male experience of students with visual impairment within a mainstream school. It is also important to note that both of the participants interviewed from the mainstream school setting were male and therefore female perceptions of their current experiences in mainstream school setting was not able to be explored during this study.

### **Limitations and Suggestions**

The sample size of participants was a limitation of this study. However, the sample size was typical for the labor-intensive qualitative data collection. Due to the small sample size, the results may not be generalizable. In the future, a study involving a greater number of participants from both settings would give stronger support for results. The sample also contained disproportionate comparison groups, which prevented the researcher from being able to make strong comparisons between the two school settings. A future study should include similar, if not exact, numbers of participants in both comparison groups.

The participants from the specialized school setting had all previously attended a mainstream school setting. This provided the current study unique information, including their self-reported comparisons of the two school settings. However, these participants all left the mainstream school setting to attend a specialized school, which could indicate that these students may have had more negative experiences in the mainstream school than students who did not leave a mainstream school setting. In the future, a study involving students from a specialized school setting who did not have previous experience in a mainstream school may provide different results.

The differences in respondent's intellectual capabilities should be taken into consideration when examining responses. Participants with more severe disabilities are likely to have different aspirations than participants with higher intellectual capabilities. In every population, there will be individuals with higher and lower intellectual abilities, however differences in capabilities may have had greater impact on the results of this study due to the small sample size. Neither school setting had significantly higher or lower intellectual capabilities than the other, though the participants in the mainstream school group had significantly different capabilities than each other, which may have impacted within group

comparisons. In a future study, it would be important to make sure each subgroup had a variety of participants.

During the search for interview participants, the examiner of this study encountered reluctance from mainstreamed schools to have their students participate in the study. One mainstream school system, which was asked for permission to have their students participate, expressed that they believed the study was biased and the researcher was not able to get the system to provide permission for their students to participate. Another mainstream school system, who granted permission to have their students participate, backed out of the study before interviews were able to begin, due to reported concerns from parents. A different school system, who had several eligible students who could have participated in this study and granted permission to have their students participate, stopped responding to the researchers attempt to set up additional interviews after allowing one student to participate. An additional mainstream school granted permission to have their students participate in the study and did not exhibit any reluctance during the study. Unfortunately, this system had a limited amount of students who were eligible to participate. The mainstream schools who exhibited reluctance expressed concerns for the specialized school having an agenda for the study, though the researcher was not affiliated with the specialized school.

In future research, it would be recommended that investigators clarify that student responses will not be connected with their respective schools and that the purpose of the study is to solely explore any possible similarities or differences in students experiences across different settings. Due to defensiveness encountered in this study, it is suggested that future researchers communicate to mainstream schools that positive, as well as negative responses are anticipated from participants due to variability among student experiences. It may also be worth pursuing further the differences in experiences of students in both school settings, due to the specialized

school participants' reports of greater satisfaction in their current school setting versus their previous school setting.

### **Implications for a School Psychologist**

The results of this study have several implications for a school psychologist. Responses from female students in this study suggested that female students with visual impairment may be experiencing more bullying than male students with visual impairment in mainstream schools. School psychologists and other school personnel should be aware of this possibility and be on alert for this tendency.

It should be noted that rapport between the researcher and the students was easily established with all of the participants in this study. There are a limited amount of students with visual impairment in the school system and therefore school personnel may have limited experience working with students with visual impairment. School psychologists and other school personnel should be aware that students with visual impairment establish rapport similarly to students without visual impairment and they have similar concerns as students without visual impairment.

Although students with visual impairment have similar concerns as students without visual impairment, these students also have specific concerns related to their visual impairment. A theme that reoccurred among students through both school settings was concern about what accommodations they will get in college for their visual impairment. School psychologist and other school staff working with students with visual impairment should be aware of these students' individual needs and concerns, so that staff can advocate for students with visual impairment appropriately.

Students from both settings reported satisfaction with their current school setting. However, students in the specialized school reported previous negative experience when they

attended mainstream school. The differences in perceptions are important information for the school psychologist, because these different perceptions suggest that mainstream school is working well for some students with visual impairment and not as well for other students with visual impairment. School psychologists and other school personnel working with students with visual impairment should be aware that mainstream school settings may be an appropriate choice for some students with visual impairment, and specialized school settings might be an appropriate choice for some students with visual impairment.

**Appendix A**

Table 1: Themes from Student Responses

<b>Students from Mainstream School Setting</b>	<b>Students from Specialized School Setting</b>
Students appear to have several positive relationships and the students feel their relationships are important to them	Students appear to have several positive relationships and the students feel their relationships are important to them
Students have future aspirations and believe they can obtain them	Students have future aspirations and believe they can obtain them
Students reported low frustration with their visual impairment	Reoccurring theme of students wanting to obtain careers where they can help others, such as being a psychologist or working with children with disabilities
Both participants reported preferring being in a classroom setting with students with and without visual impairment	Students reported low frustration with their visual impairment
Each of the participants reported they would prefer a classroom setting with students with and without visual impairment	Reoccurring theme of students feeling like they receive more resources and accommodations versus when they were in mainstream school
Both participants reported they never get bullied in school	Pattern of being concern about what accommodations they will receive in college for their visual impairment
	Reoccurring theme of male students reporting more social conflict
	Pattern of female students reporting experiencing more bullying than male students when they attended mainstream schools
	Over half the participants (54%) reported not having a preference of a classroom with only students with visual impairment

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