

# Seeing the Silver Lining: A Phenomenological Study of Students with Visual Impairment in Philippine Higher Education

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## ABSTRACT

Students with visual impairments in higher education face unique challenges while pursuing their academic goals. This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of College of Education students with blindness in Bacolod City. Three participants were identified through purposive sampling based on specific inclusion criteria. The findings revealed that, in essence, their experiences in higher education were shaped by a complex interplay of four major themes: motivation, challenges, coping strategies, and resilience. Motivation reflected the influence of friends, family support, personal goals and aspirations, and past experiences. Challenges encompassed academic challenges, social barriers, and physical and environmental accessibility. Coping strategies involved the use of assistive technology, support from friends and family, and personal stress-relief activities. Resilience manifested through perseverance through difficulties, pride and achievement, learning from life experiences, and emotional strength, highlighting their persistence, adaptability, and determination to succeed academically. These experiences highlight a profound journey of self-discovery, intellectual engagement, and personal growth, emphasizing the capacity of students with blindness to navigate higher education successfully. The study offers valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers, informing efforts to create more inclusive, accessible, and supportive learning environments for students with visual impairments.

**Keywords:** Inclusive Education, Students with Blindness, Phenomenology, Philippines, Bacolod City

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## Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right and an important part of personal and social development (Shavkidinova et al., 2023). Around the world, efforts are being made to make schools and universities more inclusive in line with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Quality Education (Smith & Heyward, 2024). This goal promotes accessible and supportive learning environments for all students, including those with disabilities such as blindness (Cerna et al., 2021). Over the past two decades, attitudes toward including visually impaired students in regular classes have improved, leading to changes in

teaching and school systems (Boza-Chua et al., 2021). The number of students with visual impairments in general education continues to grow worldwide (Miyachi, 2020). Cerna et al. (2021) emphasize that by promoting accessibility, fairness, and belonging, education systems help build a more just and inclusive society. In this way, education becomes a force that empowers individuals and also strengthens communities (Roshan & Rahman, 2025).

Faragher et al. (2021), based on case studies in several Asian countries, show that inclusive education is being strengthened through efforts like providing accessible learning materials, improving teacher training, and

implementing supportive policies in place to meet diverse student needs. This progress can be seen in countries like Japan, South Korea, and India. In Japan, Cho and Park (2024) describe how inclusive education even extends to international cooperation projects. In South Korea, Kim et al. (2024) highlight national efforts supporting inclusion, while in India, Ramchand (2025) stresses the need to move from general guidelines to more hands-on, context-based approaches. These efforts show the growing recognition of the skills and potential of learners with disabilities and help create learning environments that are more supportive and inclusive.

At the national level, the Philippine government has made efforts to support inclusive education by passing laws and creating programs that respond to the needs of learners with disabilities across all grade levels (Lisette, 2023b). According to Symaco and Bustos (2022) and Chao Jr. (2021), agencies such as the Department of Education and the Commission on Higher Education have introduced initiatives to improve accessibility, provide support, and address both academic and social needs. However, students with disabilities in higher education continue to experience challenges, including limited access to learning materials, a lack of strong institutional support, and social barriers (Chao Jr., 2021). This highlights the importance of listening to their experiences and finding solutions that are suited to their context.

In Bacolod City, Negros Occidental, Philippines, the researchers have observed the motivation and determination of College of Education students with blindness as they strive to finish their studies and graduate from a private university. Every day, they persevere to attend their class and accomplish their school tasks. Even when they face delays and difficulties in getting accessible materials or sometimes need extra help to participate fully in class, they continue to move forward. This is the phenomenon that fascinated the researchers, leading them to conduct this study to explore the essence of the participants' experiences.

Although there are existing studies on inclusive education in the Philippines, many of these focus on broad policies or the perspectives of schools and teachers (Tagyamon et al., 2025; Tenerife et al., 2022; Español et al., 2025; Dayso et al., 2025). Moreover, there is still very little research that highlights the personal voices and lived experiences of college students with blindness. In particular, no study has been published in Bacolod City that shows how students with blindness are motivated, how they cope with the challenges they encounter, and how they remain resilient while navigating their college life. Thus, there is a need to fill this gap because without their stories, schools and the

government may not fully understand the kind of support these students truly need. Studying their lived experiences can also reveal how they face challenges and draw strength from motivation and resilience.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the lived experiences of College of Education students with blindness at a private university in Bacolod City. These include their motivations, the challenges they encounter, the coping strategies they use, and the values they attach to their social and academic journey. By focusing on the context of Bacolod City, this study seeks to provide a platform and space for these students' voices and bring forward their perspectives, which are often overlooked. The findings are expected to provide practical insights that can guide educators, administrators, and policymakers in strengthening and improving inclusive education practices, building more effective support systems, and creating learning environments that foster not only academic achievement but also personal growth and resilience in inclusive higher education settings.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design utilizing a phenomenological method. As a qualitative approach, it seeks to understand how people experience certain moments in their lives and how they give meaning to those experiences (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This design was appropriate as it examined the real-life experiences of College of Education students with blindness in Bacolod City, focusing on their academic experiences. In the context of phenomenological research, a phenomenon is something that draws human awareness: an experience that invites reflection and personal meaning (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenon in this study focused on how students with blindness engaged in learning, their motivations, challenges, and coping strategies in college life. Through this design, the researchers sought to understand the meaning of their lived experiences by listening to their narratives.

### Participants

The participants of this study were three College of Education students with blindness who were enrolled in a private university in Bacolod City. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, wherein the researchers intentionally chose individuals who could provide meaningful and relevant insights into the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

Participants were required to meet the following inclusion criteria: (1) official enrollment in the College of Education at a private university in Bacolod City; (2) a medically

confirmed condition of blindness or severe visual impairment; and (3) willingness to provide informed consent. These criteria ensured that participants had relevant first-hand experiences of the phenomenon. A small number of participants were selected to allow in-depth interviews and a more authentic understanding of their university experiences. Despite the limited sample, rich and detailed data were obtained, with recurring themes indicating data saturation and supporting the credibility and rigor of the findings.

### **Instruments**

Two main instruments were used in this study: semi-structured interviews and observation notes. The interviews served as the primary data source, allowing participants to express their experiences openly while remaining aligned with the research focus (Moustakas, 1994). Open-ended questions encouraged participants to share their motivations, challenges, and coping strategies in their own words. In addition, observation notes documented nonverbal cues such as tone of voice, facial expressions, and pauses, which provided deeper insight into participants' emotions and interactions. The combined use of interviews and observations allowed for a richer and more nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of students with blindness in inclusive higher education settings.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The data collection process was conducted in three stages: before, during, and after the interviews. Prior to data collection, formal approval was obtained from the university. Eligible participants were then provided with invitation letters and informed consent forms explaining the study's purpose, their rights, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality. Before each interview, participants granted permission for audio recording. During the interviews, observation notes were taken to capture nonverbal cues such as tone, reactions, and gestures. After each session, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and participants were invited to review their transcripts to ensure accuracy. All verified data were securely stored in a password-protected folder accessible only to the researcher to maintain confidentiality and data privacy.

### **Data Analysis Framework**

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify meaningful patterns from the participants' lived experiences, guided by Lichtman's (2013) Three Cs Framework: coding, categorizing, and conceptualizing. During the coding stage, interview transcripts were reviewed multiple times to identify significant words and phrases, which were assigned descriptive codes. In the categorizing

stage, related codes were clustered into broader categories representing shared experiences, challenges, motivations, and coping strategies. Finally, in the conceptualizing stage, connections among categories were examined, leading to the emergence of major themes that reflected how students made sense of their learning experiences, sustained motivation, and developed resilience within an inclusive academic environment.

### **Data Trustworthiness**

To establish trustworthiness, the study followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through participant validation, data triangulation between interviews and observations, and prolonged engagement. Transferability was supported by providing rich descriptions of the participants, setting, and research procedures. Dependability was ensured by maintaining a detailed audit trail of the research process. Finally, confirmability was achieved through systematic checking of transcripts and interpretations to ensure that the findings reflected the participants' experiences rather than the researcher's assumptions.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained after ensuring that participants fully understood the purpose of the research, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Participant anonymity was protected through the use of coded identifiers, and all data were securely stored in files accessible only to the researcher. The researcher demonstrated respect and sensitivity to participants' comfort and well-being and adhered to the principles of honesty, transparency, and integrity (Leavy, 2022). After each interview, a brief debriefing was conducted to thank participants and ensure they felt comfortable and supported.

### **Results**

Several themes emerged in the detailed experiences of the participants. The four major themes were Motivation, Challenges, Coping Strategies, and Resilience. Under Motivation, the subthemes included influence of friends, family support, personal goals and aspirations, and past experiences. Under Challenges, the subthemes were academic challenges, social barriers, and physical and environmental accessibility. Lastly, the subthemes under Coping Strategies were use of assistive technology, support from friends and family, and personal stress-relief activities. Under Resilience, the subthemes were perseverance through difficulties, pride and achievement, learning from life experiences, and emotional strength.

## Motivations

The participants shared a collective sentiment when asked, “*What inspired you to pursue a degree in Education despite your blindness?*” All of them were eager to express that their motivations were rooted from a blend of personal aspirations and social influences. Their motivations were shaped by significant relationships, their desire for self-improvement, and their commitment to serving others with visual impairment.

*Family Support.* Family emerged as one of the strongest pillars of motivation. Participants emphasized how constant check-ins, words of reassurance, and emotional encouragement from parents and siblings helped them move forward even during discouraging moments.

As participants describe:

“My inspiration is my supportive family. They often motivate me by telling me that I can do it. They always check on me and ask how I am doing. They also support me financially.” (Participant 1, personal communication, November 17, 2025)

“My family is my source of strength. They believe in me and never treated me as bedridden or overly dependent, so I learned to manage myself.” (Participant 2, personal communication, November 17, 2025)

“I am doing all of this for myself for my family. My family helps me overcome my difficulties and provides moral support... My aunt brings me to school and fetches me after class. Soon, I want to give back to them.” (Participant 3, personal communication, November 21, 2025)

*Influence of Friends.* Friends with similar experiences emerged as a strong source of motivation, especially because they understood the realities of studying with visual impairment. Seeing their peers succeed encouraged them to persevere and believe they could achieve the same. As recounted by the participants:

“What inspired me to pursue a degree in Education were my friends who are also studying in this school. They guide me and cheer me up. I often think that if they were able to do it, then I believe I can too.” (Participant 1, personal communication, November 17, 2025)

“My sources of motivation are my visually impaired friends. We stick together through every challenge, supporting and encouraging one another along the way. Sharing the same journey, we motivate each other not only to overcome obstacles but also to reach our shared goal of graduating.” (Participant 2, personal

communication, November 17, 2025)

“I enrolled in Education because my other friends who are blind also enrolled in this program, so I chose Education as well.” (Participant 3, personal communication, November 21, 2025)

*Personal Goals and Aspirations.* Personal ambition played a central role in keeping participants focused. They spoke passionately about their desire to graduate, pass the board exam, and eventually become teachers who could serve as role models for other learners with disabilities. As shared by the participants:

“I stay motivated because I love the teaching profession. I want to graduate and pass the board exam. I want to teach. I am not yet sure if I will teach in SPED or in a regular class, but either way, I want to teach.” (Participant 1, personal communication, November 17, 2025)

“I study not only to graduate and pass the board exam but also to become a role model to the youth and to other students with visual impairment.” (Participant 2, personal communication, November 17, 2025)

“I enrolled in the College of Education because I want to help my fellow blind individuals. I believe that someday I can help people who have the same situation as me.” (Participant 3, personal communication, November 21, 2025)

## Challenges

Despite their strong motivations, the participants’ narratives reveal the significant challenges they face in their academic and social environments. These obstacles highlight the gaps in accessibility and the need for more inclusive educational systems.

*Academic Challenges.* Participants described their academic struggles as recurring and often exhausting. Many courses relied heavily on visual materials, making learning more difficult without accessible alternatives. Simple tasks such as interpreting diagrams, reading printed handouts, or completing visually based activities required extra time and effort. As described in their experiences:

“One challenge is the format of our handouts. We can use text-to-speech if the file is a PDF, but if the teacher sends PowerPoint files, our phones cannot read them... I struggle when reviewing our notes since there is no Braille option.” (Participant 1, personal communication, November 17, 2025)

“One barrier for me is the lack of accessible materials. We don’t have Braille books in the library, and sometimes the notes our teachers send cannot be read by text-to-speech. There are times when notes are sent



late, leaving us little time to study... I also struggle with classroom activities involving drawing or graphic design and when the teachers play videos or show pictures with no audio descriptions... Teachers do not differentiate. I can do tasks in many ways if they will just adjust based on my strengths... There are also times when the class is noisy, making it hard for me to focus.” (Participant 2, personal communication, November 17, 2025)

“I find it challenging when we have visual activities, like when teachers show pictures or videos and ask us to accomplish tasks based on them. I need to look for cited descriptions so I can understand the material.” (Participant 3, personal communication, November 21, 2025)

*Social Barriers.* Participants recounted moments of subtle or direct exclusion. Some teachers hesitated to involve them in certain tasks. These experiences contributed to a sense of isolation and reminded them of persistent misconceptions about visual impairment. *As recounted by the participants:*

“I feel bad sometimes during activities when I feel excluded because the teachers do not give us tasks. It feels like I am separated from the group since the teachers simply exempt me from activities they think I cannot do. The prejudice that I “cannot do” certain tasks hurts me, especially when I know that I can do them—just in another way.” (Participant 1, personal communication, November 17, 2025)

“One of the challenges is that our professors sometimes treat us differently. There were times when I wanted to participate, but they excused me because of my condition. They see me as blind, forgetting that I still have hands and feet. Even if they don’t mean harm, the feeling of exclusion is damaging... Our teachers sometimes feel clueless on what to do or how to accommodate us.” (Participant 2, personal communication, November 17, 2025)

“I had experiences where the teachers gave very difficult activities, and when I asked my classmates to help me read, write, or draw, the teachers did not allow it.” (Participant 3, personal communication, November 21, 2025)

### **Coping Strategies.**

The participants responded to their challenges with a variety of coping strategies that speak to their creativity, adaptability, and emotional strength. These strategies allowed them to navigate academic demands while maintaining personal well-being.

*Use of Assistive Technology.* Technology and assistive tools such as screen readers, Braille materials, and text-to-speech software became essential companions in their learning journey. These technologies helped bridge accessibility gaps and allowed them to process academic content more efficiently. As shared by the participants:

“I help myself by converting PowerPoint files to PDF so that my phone’s text-to-speech software can read them.” (Participant 1, personal communication, November 17, 2025)

“Sometimes I audio record the classroom lectures so that I can review them... I also use the text-to-speech to read the notes for me.” (Participant 2, personal communication, November 17, 2025)

“I use Braille to study, and other times I use text-to-speech technology.” (Participant 3, personal communication, November 21, 2025)

*Personal Stress-Relief Activities.* Participants also relied on hobbies and routines that brought them comfort. Listening to music, singing, praying, or engaging in quiet personal activities helped them unwind after overwhelming days. As told by the participants:

“When I am stressed, I sing and play the guitar. I also pray when I am feeling down. Prayer gives me strength, and I ask God for guidance so that I can endure everything.” (Participant 1, personal communication, November 17, 2025)

“When I feel stressed, I go on food trips, sing, or listen to music... I handle stress by laughing, going with the flow, and focusing on solutions instead of the problem... If you are exhausted and overthinking, it becomes harder to find solutions. They come easier when you relax and get fresh air.” (Participant 2, personal communication, November 17, 2025)

“When I struggle, I feel anxious, so I just pray... Music is my source of happiness. I am a K-pop fan and I also play the flute, so music helps me cope during difficult times.” (Participant 3, personal communication, November 21, 2025)

*Support from Friends and Family.* Participants often turned to their support systems during stressful periods. Friends provided assistance with mobility, studying, and maintaining emotional balance, while families supplied encouragement and guidance. As expressed by the participants:

“I rely on my trusted friends who support and encourage me when I feel down... My family also reminds me that I am capable.” (Participant 1, personal communication, November 17, 2025)

“My friends who are also visually impaired are my shock absorbers and my sponge. Without them, I don’t know how to move forward. Our bond is strong and we consider each other family.” (Participant 2, personal communication, November 17, 2025)

“At some point, studying in college with blindness is very difficult, but I can manage because I have people who support me. My family also helps me overcome my difficulties and provides moral support.” (Participant 3, personal communication, November 21, 2025)

## Resilience

Across all narratives, resilience emerged as a powerful theme. Participants consistently demonstrated strength, determination, and the ability to adapt to challenging circumstances.

*Perseverance Through Difficulties.* The participants’ stories are filled with examples of pushing forward even when circumstances seemed overwhelming. They described moments of doubt, fatigue, and frustration, yet they continued because of their determination to achieve their goals. As highlighted in their accounts:

“There are times when I doubt myself and wonder if I can really do it. I tend to overthink and worry that I might fail. But I keep going and trust that I can handle it.” (Participant 1, personal communication, November 17, 2025)

“Even if it’s just me and my visually impaired friends on this ship, we will keep it afloat. We help each other, and no one will be left behind. We continue to hold on to the promise that we will survive all educational challenges.” (Participant 2, personal communication, November 17, 2025)

“Studying in college with blindness is very difficult at times, but I remind myself that I can overcome challenges step by step.” (Participant 3, personal communication, November 21, 2025)

*Pride and Achievement.* Accomplishments, whether academic, artistic, or personal, provided participants with a sense of pride and strengthened their belief in their abilities. These successes, big or small, served as tangible evidence that their resilience was paying off. As described in their experiences:

“I feel proud of myself for getting high scores in tests and exams despite all my hardships.” (Participant 1, personal communication, November 17, 2025)

“I was chosen as the group leader for a performance task, and we earned a grade of 98. That was uplifting and boosted my self-esteem. It showed others that I am

not just here to sit and listen—I am capable. I have also received awards in music and have been recognized nationally and internationally. In academics, I also excel, which makes me proud.” (Participant 2, personal communication, November 17, 2025)

“I am an athlete, and my achievements in sports made me proud. I also really want to be a dancer, and when I am able to perform, it gives me a sense of achievement knowing I can still do it despite my visual impairment.” (Participant 3, personal communication, November 21, 2025)

*Learning from Life Experiences.* The participants expressed that their life experiences had taught them resilience. Every challenge they had faced had shaped their ability to adapt and persevere. As recounted by the participants:

“My educational experiences molded me into the person I am today and taught me how to handle challenges on my own.” (Participant 1, personal communication, November 17, 2025)

“My experiences and scars made me into a person I am today. I always remind myself that I have overcome challenges before, and I can do it again.” (Participant 2, personal communication, November 17, 2025)

“Studying in college with blindness is not easy, but every obstacle has taught me to be more patient, resourceful, and determined. My experiences have made me stronger and helped me realize that struggles are part of life, and we must learn from them to move forward.” (Participant 3, personal communication, November 21, 2025)

The study highlighted four key themes: motivations, challenges, coping strategies, and resilience. Some of the participants’ experiences confirmed what previous research has found, while others revealed fresh perspectives that could spark further exploration.

## Discussion

### Motivations

A striking aspect of the participants’ lived experiences is that their motivation is deeply rooted in relationships. In line with Sagna and Vaccaro (2022) and Salazar (2021), family members played a crucial role in sustaining learners’ desire to continue studying. Participants described motivation as nurtured by others, supporting Bureau et al. (2021) that external relational support shapes students’ drive. This pattern reflects collectivist cultural values, as noted by Jabar (2020) and Garcia and De Guzman (2020), where education is a shared family endeavor rather than an individual pursuit. Consistent with Bueno et al. (2022), participants highlighted how emotional encouragement, daily check-ins, and tangible support from family reinforced personal

ambition while fostering connectedness and belonging. These findings affirm existing literature and provide lived examples of how familial relationships actively shape the daily motivation of students with blindness.

Friends also emerged as important sources of motivation, serving not only as emotional supporters but as living examples that succeeding in college is possible despite blindness. Participants' statements, such as "if they can do it, then I can too," reflect Bandura's social learning theory (1977), showing how witnessing peers with similar conditions can reshape beliefs about what is possible. This aligns with Woreta et al. (2025), who found that peer interaction and positive academic norms enhance self-efficacy, academic self-concept, and performance. Beyond serving as role models, friends offered guidance, practical help, and emotional support, acting as a social mirror that affirmed participants' goals. This dynamic reflects Miklos et al. (2021) and Shanti et al. (2021), who emphasize that group interactions and peer support foster engagement, belonging, motivation, emotional adjustment, and academic outcomes.

Alongside external motivation, participants were driven by internal aspirations, such as passing the board exam, teaching, and supporting others with disabilities. Their goals reflect purpose and personal meaning rather than mere career advancement, echoing Zhang (2022), who found that educators are often guided by a strong sense of calling. This meaningful "why" reinforces motivation, aligning with Ratner et al. (2023) that purpose and goal pursuit create a self-sustaining cycle that helps individuals persevere despite challenges.

In essence, their motivation stems from a dynamic interplay of internal desires and social support, each reinforcing the other. This aligns with Schunk and DiBenedetto (2019), who view motivation as developing through reciprocal interactions among personal, behavioral, and environmental influences.

### **Challenges**

Despite strong motivation, participants faced challenges that affected their academic performance and learning experience. Consistent with Negash and Gasa (2022), academic barriers, particularly inaccessible learning materials, were a recurring struggle. As Peng et al. (2021) note, difficulties often stemmed from material formats, such as PowerPoint slides without alternative text, unreadable handouts, and videos lacking audio descriptions, rather than from content itself. This aligns with Palmieri et al. (2025) and Beltran et al. (2025), who report that inadequately adapted resources and challenges in providing accessible learning are persistent hurdles globally and locally. These findings illustrate an "accessibility gap," where inclusive

education policies exist but practical accommodations are inconsistent (Obah, 2024; Waisath et al., 2022). Repeatedly adapting materials and developing personal coping strategies adds significant cognitive and emotional load, making routine learning tasks far more labor-intensive, affirming the findings of Binlang and Donguiz (2024).

Social barriers often proved more emotionally taxing than academic ones. Participants described teachers excusing them from tasks, reflecting subtle forms of exclusion highlighted by Armstrong (2021) and reinforced by stereotypes and low expectations noted by Landim et al. (2024). These experiences align with Vogel-Campbell (2025), who emphasizes that inclusion requires full recognition and engagement, not just attendance. Even minor exclusions, such as being left out of group work or denied certain roles, can significantly impact motivation, self-esteem, and belonging, as also observed by Zinovieva et al. (2024).

### **Coping Strategies**

To navigate these challenges, participants relied on practical strategies and emotional support. Their use of assistive technologies, text-to-speech, and lecture recordings demonstrates resourcefulness and adaptability, consistent with Rani and Khan (2022). They adjusted strategies as needed, reflecting the concept of "digital resilience" described by Sun et al. (2022). These approaches not only bridged gaps from inaccessible materials but also fostered independence, problem-solving skills, and confidence, aligning with Hacatrjana (2021), who found that students with stronger problem-solving skills experience less stress in challenging situations.

Personal stress-relief activities were also essential. Consistent with Sun et al. (2022), Cleary et al. (2025), and Pandya (2022), music, hobbies, and prayer helped participants regulate emotions and maintain balance amid academic and personal challenges. This supports Huang and Kou (2025), who note that resilience involves nurturing mental and emotional well-being alongside academic adaptation. Engaging in enjoyable activities allowed participants to reset, gain perspective, and approach challenges with renewed focus, aligning with Click et al. (2025) and Müller et al. (2021), who highlight the restorative effects of mindfulness on mood, attention, and executive functioning.

Friends and family served as everyday companions, making the academic journey more manageable for students with disabilities, consistent with Moríña and Biagiotti's (2021) review. Participants described friends as "shock absorbers" and "sponges," reflecting the depth of support identified by Bromley et al. (2020). These relationships offered practical help and emotional reassurance, underscoring the critical



role of social connections in fostering persistence and resilience (Frisby et al., 2020; Lane et al., 2022). Through collaboration, problem-solving, and emotional support, friends and family transformed an isolating experience into a network of care and encouragement.

### Resilience

The results of this study align with Ong and Cammarata (2020), who view resilience not as a fixed trait but as a capacity developed through repeated effort and adaptation. Participants' narratives revealed that resilience involves vulnerability, uncertainty, and ongoing determination, echoing Zhao (2023c), who found that repeated challenges and continuous adaptation strengthen agency and self-efficacy. Consistent with OECD (2021), the study also shows that resilient learners reframe challenges as opportunities for growth when supported by empowering learning environments, adaptive pedagogies, and sustained resources.

Participants' pride in their academic and personal achievements provided affirmation of their capabilities, reflecting similar findings by Cross et al. (2023), who noted that accomplishments serve as powerful motivators that sustain engagement even during periods of doubt or fatigue. This aligns with Liebenberg (2020), who emphasized meaning-making as a core process of resilience, and with Liu and To (2020), whose work highlights how hardships can be transformative, shaping values, personal growth, and resilience over time. Further support comes from Falon et al. (2021), Russell (2022), and Guthrie et al. (2021), all of whom stress that resilience develops not simply through enduring adversity, but through reflective learning and purposeful interpretation of experiences. Together, these studies and the present findings show that each challenge becomes an opportunity for insight, learning, and purpose, illustrating that resilience is actively constructed through reflection and personal interpretation rather than through survival alone.

The experiences of the three participants reveal a complex but inspiring picture of what it means to study in higher education while navigating blindness. Their stories illustrate that the journey is neither linear nor simple; instead, it is shaped by a shifting interplay of motivation, obstacles, coping mechanisms, and personal resilience. As noted by previous scholars, this reality aligns with earlier findings that learners with impairments often encounter uneven inclusive practices within Philippine higher education (Tagyamon et al., 2025; Tenerife et al., 2022). Consistent with these observations, their narratives show that inclusion is not merely a concept written in policy but something that must be lived, felt, and supported daily, as emphasized by Haegele and Maher (2023). When these

supports are present, students thrive; when they are not, students must compensate through extraordinary effort, echoing Ogundokun and Hamel's (2023) assertion that learners with impairments frequently rely on creative solutions, determination, and persistence to keep pace with their peers. As affirmed by Croft (2021), these experiences highlight the need to consider both the systemic structures and the individual strategies that visually impaired learners employ to navigate higher education successfully.

In essence, the lived experiences of visually impaired College of Education students in regular school settings extend far beyond academic participation. Their educational journeys reflect a profound exploration of self, identity, and capability amid ongoing challenges and systemic barriers.

### Conclusion

This transcendental phenomenological study of College of Education students with blindness in regular school settings reveals a multifaceted journey shaped by motivation, challenges, coping strategies, and resilience. Their experiences go beyond academic participation, reflecting personal growth, self-understanding, and active engagement with inclusive learning environments. The students' narratives highlight how they navigate systemic and social barriers while striving to achieve both educational and personal goals.

Motivation is a central theme in shaping their educational experiences. Family support instills confidence and determination, while friendships provide emotional encouragement and a sense of belonging that strengthens commitment to learning. Personal goals and aspirations further drive perseverance, reflecting a strong dedication to academic success and professional growth. The combination of external support and intrinsic motivation highlights its pivotal role in sustaining engagement and achievement.

These students face significant and multifaceted challenges. Academically, they navigate learning environments that are not always fully accessible, requiring extra effort, strategic planning, and adaptive approaches. Socially, they encounter exclusion or unintended leniency from teachers and peers, which can limit meaningful participation. Despite these obstacles, they demonstrate remarkable adaptability, viewing challenges as opportunities to develop resilience, problem-solving skills, and self-advocacy.

Coping strategies are essential for managing these challenges. Assistive technologies support independent learning, while personal stress-relief activities help maintain emotional balance and focus. Family and friends provide crucial encouragement, guidance, and reassurance. Together, these strategies reflect the students' proactive,



resourceful, and adaptable approaches to overcoming academic and social obstacles.

Resilience is central to their experiences, evident in perseverance, pride in achievements, and the ability to learn from setbacks. Participants consistently adapt and thrive despite adversity, transforming challenges into opportunities for growth. Their resilience, closely tied to motivation and coping strategies, forms an interconnected framework that supports sustained engagement and meaningful participation in education.

Finally, the experiences of College of Education students with blindness in mainstream schools go beyond academic participation, reflecting determination, adaptability, and self-realization. Their journeys highlight how motivation, coping strategies, and resilience shape educational experiences and demonstrate the transformative potential of inclusive environments. By overcoming systemic and social challenges, these students advance their own growth while contributing to a broader understanding of inclusion, capability, and human potential in higher education.

## Limitations and Directions for Future Studies

This study has several limitations. The small number of participants, all drawn from a single school, may limit the generalizability of the findings to students with blindness in other schools or contexts. The reliance on self-reported experiences may also be influenced by participants' perceptions or willingness to share certain information. Additionally, focusing exclusively on regular school settings means the findings may not reflect the experiences of students in specialized institutions or other educational environments.

Future studies could investigate the experiences of students with blindness across different regions, schools, and educational contexts to provide a broader understanding. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches may enhance the generalizability of findings. Research could explore strategies to strengthen motivation, coping mechanisms, and resilience, as well as the effectiveness of assistive technologies and inclusive teaching practices.

Other potential areas include developing tailored curricula and learning materials aligned with students' goals, examining the role of family support in engagement, and exploring classmates' perspectives on fostering inclusive social interactions. Studies could also investigate ways to reduce social and academic barriers, conduct cross-institutional comparisons, track long-term academic and personal outcomes, and examine teacher and parent perspectives on supporting inclusion and accessibility. Insights from such research can guide

educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers in creating inclusive, empowering, and responsive learning environments for students with blindness.

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