

Career Advancement, Organizational Support and Job Satisfaction: A Phenomenological Study of Visually Impaired Employees

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the lived experiences of visually impaired employees in Lahore who work in the public and private sector and how they tackle the challenges they face, the strategies they employ, and the support system they have. Although there is growing awareness and policies encouraging workplace inclusion, people with visual impairments still encounter serious obstacles including inaccessibility and accommodation and poor attitude of the society. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 16 participants selected using purposive and snowball sampling. The results indicate that not only are workplace challenges structural but also strongly social since many of the participants indicated that they have faced experiences of exclusion, undervalued abilities, and limited career advancements. Nevertheless, the study also reveals the strength of these people, who proactively pursue self-advocacy, use assistive technologies, and draw on personal and professional networks of support to overcome the challenges at work. The access to fair praise and conducive organizational behaviours was also identified to contribute greatly to job satisfaction and productivity. The research highlights the importance of organizations to go beyond policy-level inclusion and implement more realistic and people-focused strategies that would provide access and equal opportunities. Since it captures real life experiences, this study offers helpful data to policy makers, employers, and support organizations to develop more inclusive, equitable and supportive workplaces that accommodate the visually impaired.

KEYWORDS: Lived Experiences, Visual Impairment, Employees, Phenomenology, Workplace Challenges, Social Support

Introduction

Visual impairment is a significant global concern that affects millions of individuals and influences many aspects of life, including education, independence, social participation, and employment. According to the World Health Organization (2019), at least 2.2 billion people worldwide have a vision impairment, and at least one billion of these cases could have been prevented or have yet to be addressed. Despite advances in assistive technology and a better understanding of inclusive practices, people with visual impairments continue to face barriers to accessing and maintaining employment.

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At national and international levels, policies and legal frameworks have increasingly emphasized the right of persons with disabilities to participate equally in employment. However, the existence of such policies does not always guarantee inclusive workplace practices. Research indicates that people with disabilities, including those with visual impairments, may experience barriers related to negative attitudes, inadequate services, inaccessible environments, and limited workplace accommodations (Morwane et al., 2021). More specifically, people with visual impairments may encounter employment barriers associated with employer attitudes, concerns about their capabilities, and assumptions regarding their productivity and independence (Castle, 2024).

Apart from environmental and organizational barriers, personal and social factors may also influence how individuals with visual impairments experience employment. Access to appropriate support, workplace accommodations, training, and assistive technology can influence participation and success in the workplace. Recent research has highlighted the importance of assistive technology for employed people who are blind or have low vision, while also demonstrating continuing challenges related to inaccessible software, websites, digital documents, and workplace systems (McDonnall et al., 2024).

In view of these concerns, the present study aims to highlight the experiences of the visually impaired workers in Lahore. It aims to learn about the problems they have, how they deal with work problems, and the supports and accommodations that affect their work experience. The qualitative phenomenological approach will be used to analyze these experiences, hopefully providing a better insight into the experiences of those with a visual impairment, as well as providing a contribution to the understanding of inclusion in the workplace.

Statement of the Problem

Advocacy efforts for the employment rights of persons with disabilities have grown stronger over the years, with laws and policies now in place to provide greater protection of their employment rights; however, individuals with a visual impairment may still face significant employment barriers. These barriers can be physical and digital barriers, lack of workplace accommodations, negative employers' attitudes, lack of support, and restrictive access to employment opportunities (Castle, 2024; Morwane et al., 2021).

These barriers can have a significant impact on employment, career progression, confidence, motivation, and job satisfaction. New studies remain to show that employers, transportation options, training, workplace accommodations, and social support are all problematic for individuals with visual impairment (Crudden et al., 2024). Other challenges to workplace success include unsuitable workplace environments and a lack of reasonable adjustments (Gulyamova et al., 2026).

There has been previous research that has looked at how people with visual impairments are being employed as well as workforce participation, but there is a need to understand the experiences of employed people with visual impairments in their day-to-day work. Of particular interest is the need to better understand the challenges faced by the visually impaired, how they advocate for themselves, how they make use of resources, and how they experience organizational support.

Therefore, the present study aims to fill this gap by examining the lived experiences of the visually impaired employees in Lahore. They may offer useful feedback on issues of workplace inclusion, organizational support, reasonable accommodation, and career progression.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore challenges and barriers faced by individuals with visual impairments in maintaining and advancing in employment.
2. To examine the role of organizational support systems and accommodations in facilitating job satisfaction and career development among individuals with visual impairments.
3. To explore how employers and colleagues perceive and support employees with visual impairments in the workplace.

Research Questions

1. What challenges do visually impaired employees encounter, and what strategies do they use to cope with these challenges?
2. What support systems and accommodations contribute to their job satisfaction and career advancement?
3. How do employers and colleagues perceive and support employees with visual impairments?

Rationale and Significance

The main rationale for this study is to develop a deeper understanding of the real-life experiences of individuals with visual impairments who are currently employed. There has been a growing focus on the issue of disability inclusion and equitable employment, but it is still essential to consider the reality of inclusion from the disabled person's point of view in the real world of work.

There are several potential barriers that individuals with visual impairment might face in the workplace, such as workplace accessibility, negative attitudes, assumptions about their abilities, and the lack of accommodations (Castle, 2024; Gulyamova et al., 2026). These challenges are not necessarily captured in organizational policies or statistical reports. Hence, a consideration of the lived experiences of visually impaired workers can provide a more detailed understanding of how workplace barriers are lived and experienced in practice.

The study also acknowledges the active development of strategies to manage workplace challenges that people with low vision experience. They can involve things such as self-advocacy, assistive technology, developing skills, and personal and professional support networks. Evidence has shown the value of workplace technology and accessibility to individuals with a visual impairment, including those who are blind or low vision, and that inaccessible digital systems can persist and continue to present barriers even in the presence of assistive technology (McDonnall et al., 2024).

The significance of this study is that it might have a positive impact on several stakeholders. This information can be used by employers and policymakers to increase understanding of the real-life experiences and needs of the visually impaired workforce. An understanding of this can help to create more accessible workplaces, better accommodation practices, and more equal opportunities for career development.

The results could also be valuable to the field of rehabilitation and disability support organizations, as they will gain insights into the problems encountered by visually impaired workers. This information can help inform training, career advice, and support services to better meet the needs of people who are visually impaired.

Overall, this research can be seen as a step towards the overall objective of fostering workplace inclusion and equity. The study is not focused on employment-related data alone, however, and aims to offer information that could contribute to organizational efforts to shift beyond a policy-level commitment to creating a more accessible and supportive working environment.

Literature Review

Employment is central to aspects of independence, financial security, social participation, and personal fulfilment. However, access to and employment of an individual who is visually impaired may be more complex than just possessing the skills or qualifications needed. Barriers can include difficult work environments, negative attitudes, lack of access to technology, lack of accommodations, and lack of social and/or organizational support. While country policies and legislation for disability rights and inclusive employment have increased, the reality of working in the workplace for individuals with visual impairment may still be difficult.

As per WHO (2019), it is estimated that there are at least 2.2 billion people in the world with vision impairment. Visual impairment can have impacts on health and functional abilities but can also have impacts on educational opportunities, independence, mobility, and employment.

The study of employment and visual impairment has focused more and more on the fact that problems with employment are not solely due to vision loss. Rather, employment experiences are determined by the relation between the person and the person's life and work context. Ogedengbe et al. (2024) conducted a scoping review of employment integration of people with vision impairment, which identified several key issues impacting employment, such as social support, disability rights and service systems, career development, employment environments, adaptive potential, and employment sustainability. They also noted a greater focus on participation in the workplace and the availability of workplaces for people with vision impairments.

Similarly, Morwane et al. (2021) showed that personal and environmental factors affect employment barriers of PWDs in LMICs. They concluded that negative attitudes, poor services, poor education, and environmental barriers have a negative impact on employment participation. This is especially important in the context of this study as Pakistan, like many other low- and middle-income countries, has issues around the implementation of disability inclusion and equal employment opportunities in practice.

Employment and Workplace Barriers for People with Visual Impairments

People with visual impairments may encounter difficulties at different stages of their employment journey. Individuals who are blind or have low vision can experience a wide range of problems throughout their career. These challenges can emerge in learning and skills development, through the job-seeking process, and persist once someone has a job. Hence, employment is not just about finding work; it is also about allowing the person to do his/her job effectively, to participate in the job equally, and to advance in the profession.

Earlier research by O'Day (1999) identified three impediments to employment for adults who are legally blind: personal, societal, and programmatic. This resource has been written for people who are not currently in work, but the results of this study are applicable as they show how barriers to employment can be interlinked. Social attitudes, individual factors and institutional arrangements can make employment more challenging for individuals with visual impairment.

More recent research continues to show that these barriers have not completely disappeared. Crudden et al. (2024) explored the experiences of individuals with vision impairments outside the workforce. These findings revealed employer attitudes, transportation costs and problems, health issues, training needs, economic factors, and lack of support as key factors to getting to work. The study participants were not currently working, but the results are relevant to workers because some of these barriers are likely to persist and affect people after they enter the workforce. Studies in Pakistani settings also indicate that visually challenged people face various problems in job search and employment.

Workplace Accessibility and Reasonable Accommodation

Accessibility is one of the most critical factors that affect employment-related outcomes for people with visual impairments. While a workplace may be inclusive in policy, it may not be inclusive in practice due to physical environments, documents, computer systems, software, and communication channels.

Many of these barriers can be mitigated with reasonable accommodation. Accommodations can include making electronic documents accessible, providing screen-reading software, magnifying the computer screen, providing alternative formats, modifying work procedures, or anything else that will enable an employee to do their job.

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2023) emphasizes that people with a visual disability may need reasonable accommodations to have equal access to employment opportunities and equal opportunity to participate in employment. It sets out guidance on accessible technology, working practices, and discrimination and harassment.

An accommodation does not automatically mean it will be easily accessible at the appropriate time. The explanation of need may have to be repeated, the requests for accommodations may be required, or organizational decisions may have to be waited for. This can be a burden on the employee and can be a demeaning or intrusive experience, which might reduce the employee's sense of independence and belonging in the workplace.

Recent research on the employment integration of people with vision impairments also suggests that workplace accessibility should not be treated solely as an individual problem. Ogedengbe et al. (2024) argue that the employment environment itself should be accorded more attention. In other words, organizations should not just assume that people with visual impairment will adapt to workplaces, but ask if the workplace is ready to adapt to the needs of those with visual impairment.

Assistive Technology and Workplace Participation

With the advent of modern workplaces, assistive technology is playing a more significant role in the lives of individuals with visual impairments. Employees may use technologies like screen readers, screen magnification software, braille displays, speech recognition software, and easy-to-access digital platforms to accomplish tasks independently and engage more fully in workplace activities.

McDonnall et al. (2024) explored the use of assistive technology for employed individuals with low vision and/or blindness. Their research shows that assistive technology has an important place in workplace participation. Meanwhile, participants had ongoing problems with software, websites, digital documents, presentations, spreadsheets, and other workplace systems.

This implies that the use of only assistive technology might not suffice. For instance, an employee might be able to access a screen reader, but if an organization's website or software is poorly designed or inaccessible, then it will not be effective. Thus, both the right assistive technology and the organization's commitment to accessible systems are necessary for accessibility.

Accessibility to the right technology can also factor into confidence and independence for the visually impaired employee. If workers can find information and perform normal tasks without relying on others for support, they might not need to seek assistance from peers for everyday tasks. However, if a system cannot be accessed, it will generate frustration and might result in employees having to ask for help with tasks that they are able to do on their own.

Stigma, Discrimination, and Employer Attitudes

Negative attitudes about disability continue to be a big hurdle in the work lives of those with visual impairments. Assumptions about the abilities of the person who is visually impaired may be conscious or unconscious, made by employers, colleagues, and others. These assumptions might influence recruitment, assignment, working relationships, and promotion.

Castle (2024) conducted a scoping review that explored employer attitudes towards individuals with a visual impairment. The review identified a generally negative or neutral attitude towards employees with visual impairments by their employers and some concerns about their productivity, performance and capabilities. The results also indicated that there is potential for improved attitudes of employers through knowledge and understanding of visual impairment.

These attitudes can influence employees even when they have already obtained employment. A visually impaired employee may find themselves having to prove their competency over and over again, or prove they can do things on their own. They may also be denied some tasks due to others believing that their visual impairment is going to prevent them from being able to perform it.

Research from Lahore also supports the importance of workplace attitudes. Aftab et al. (2024) examined the career and job adjustment issues for visually challenged people and emphasized the role of discrimination, negative attitudes of the public, and inadequate social support on employment and job adjustment. It suggested that organizations need to promote healthier workplaces and eliminate the negative attitudes of employers towards employees with visual impairments.

These findings have special implications for the current study because attitudes in the workplace do not necessarily get reflected in formal organizational policies. Positive intent and support for inclusion may exist at an organizational level, but negative assumptions about disability may exist at the level of individual employees and supervisors. Knowing the lived experiences of visually impaired employees can help to inform our understanding of how inclusion is experienced on a day-to-day basis.

Social Inclusion and Support Networks

Being employed is not just about working on tasks assigned. Staff also require opportunities to build relationships and interact informally with others and to feel part of the team. Social inclusion can then be a key factor of job satisfaction and employment.

Naraine and Lindsay (2011) examined the social inclusion of individuals with low vision or blindness in the workplace. In their qualitative study, their study participants did not always experience complete integration in their workplaces, and the absence of social support may lead to social exclusion. The study highlighted the importance of recognising social barriers as workplace barriers, as they can impact an employee's experience even if physical barriers are available.

Support can come from different sources, including supervisors, colleagues, family members, rehabilitation professionals, and disability-support organizations. Crudden et al. (2024) also identified that lack of support influenced the participation of people with vision impairments in employment. The results of their research indicate that the interaction of practical and emotional support can affect an individual's capacity to find, acquire, and maintain work.

A supportive supervisor can assist an employee to get the accommodations he or she needs to be able to do a good job. Likewise, co-workers who grasp accessibility requirements can help create an inclusive workplace. But support does not imply that a visually impaired employee is reliant upon others to carry out tasks that may be made accessible. Rather, support should focus on promoting independence, equal participation, and a sense of belonging.

The literature therefore suggests that formal and informal support needs to be considered in order to reach a workplace inclusion goal. Policies can be a good starting point for inclusion, but the everyday experience of employees, supervisors, and peers can make the difference in whether a person feels included or not within an organization.

Coping Strategies and Self-Advocacy

Individuals who are visually impaired are not isolated recipients of job accommodations. People are actively working on solutions to barriers and making adaptations to varying situations. They might involve building professional skills, learning to use assistive technology, expressing their needs, requesting help, and requesting accommodations.

The concept of adaptive potential and personal strategies has been gaining increasing recognition in the research on visual impairment and employment. Among the themes that emerged in the literature on the employment integration of persons with vision impairment identified by Ogedengbe et al. (2024) is adaptive potential. Their review indicates that people might employ a variety of approaches to securing a job and dealing with the demands of the job over their careers.

Self-advocacy may be crucial in situations where employees are working in an environment where others are not familiar with visual impairment. Staff may need to share information about the accommodations they need, how AT works, and how workplace information can be made accessible. Self-advocacy may help become more independent and more confident, but it can also be exhausting if employees are consistently asked to explain what they require.

Strategies to differentiate coping from the environment may thus be influenced by a combination of personal abilities and environmental support. Staff can learn to be resilient and to problem solve; however, it's also an organization's responsibility to minimise any unnecessary barriers. Asking people to take it upon themselves to address all the barriers is not real inclusion in the workplace.

Career Development and Advancement

Obtaining employment does not necessarily mean that equal opportunities for career development are available. Professional training, leadership opportunities, performance assessment, and promotion can still be a challenge for a person who is visually impaired.

Employer perceptions of the abilities and work productivity of individuals with visual impairments can affect their work experience (Castle, 2024). When employers do not value their employees, they might not give them enough challenging tasks or offer to develop the employee.

The literature reviewed by Ogedengbe et al. (2024) also identified career and employment sustainability as important themes in the employment experiences of people with vision impairments. This indicates the need to not only recruit but also include people in the workforce. They should also be aware of equal opportunities to develop new skills, advance in their careers, and continue to work in the future within their organisation.

In the Pakistani context, Aftab et al. (2024) highlighted career and job adjustment issues among the visually impaired. They found that creating supportive organizational environments and decreasing negative attitudes play an important part in the employment experience.

Workplace inclusion is thus intimately linked to career progression. Even if an employee has the necessary skills and knowledge to be successful, unequal access to opportunities, discrimination, and assumptions that may hinder job performance can limit career advancement.

Organizational Responsibility and Inclusive Workplace Culture

The literature has grown to be more and more clear that it is not enough for individual employees to 'do the right thing'; a committed organizational response is needed for successful inclusion. Accessible technology, reasonable accommodation, disability awareness, supportive management, and equitable career opportunities are all important components of an inclusive workplace.

Morwane et al. (2021) determined that environmental issues significantly help or hinder employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, especially in low- and middle-income countries. Some negative attitudes and poor services were found to be significant environmental obstacles.

Likewise, recent studies on employment integration of individuals with vision impairment have urged that there is a need to focus more attention on workplace and employment readiness. Ogedengbe et al. (2024) suggest that most of the previous studies have been focused on the preparation of individuals with vision impairments, and few have considered whether the workplace is set up for diverse employees.

A welcoming culture should transcend the level of formality or policy, therefore. This must be evident in normal routines such as communication, recruitment, setting up and access to appropriate accommodation, supportive relationships, and equal opportunities for professional development.

Research Gap

There is much evidence in the existing literature on the employment barriers experienced by people with a visual impairment. Employer attitudes, assistive technology, social inclusion, accessibility, employment participation, and career development have been explored in previous research. There are, however, a few areas that still need to be addressed.

There is, first, a lot of research that deals with unemployment, employment opportunities, or the overall employment situation. There has been less emphasis on the day-to-day lives of persons who are already working and must interact in the workplace on a daily basis.

Second, although workplace accessibility and the attitudes of employers have been found to be important, there is still a need to gain an understanding of how these issues are experienced by employees and how they will respond to them. Information about lived experiences of employees can also be gathered that may not be reflected in surveys or employment statistics.

Third, continued study gaps were identified in the literature reviewed by Ogedengbe et al. (2024), which included areas of participation in the workplace, colleagues' perceptions, work environment, and employment sustainability. These areas are of direct relevance to the understanding of inclusion for visually impaired employees upon entering the workplace.

Finally, there is a lack of research that concentrates specifically on the experiences of the working body with visual impairment in Pakistan. Previous local studies have found barriers such as negative attitudes, transportation, skill development, access to assistive technology, and career adjustment. However, qualitative research is still needed that

puts the voices of the visually impaired employees as its focus and investigates the lived experiences and challenges for them in the workplace.

Therefore, the present phenomenological study aims to fill this gap with regard to the lived experiences of visually impaired employees in Lahore. It emphasizes issues that may arise in the workplace, coping strategies, support systems and accommodations, and job satisfaction and career progression factors. The study will focus on the voices of the employees themselves to offer a more nuanced understanding of what it means to be included in the workplace.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of individuals with visual impairments who were currently employed. A phenomenological approach was considered appropriate because it focuses on how individuals understand and describe their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were employed as the primary source of information collection to acquire rich and insightful data. This enabled the participants to express their experiences freely, and it was possible to probe deeper into their workplace struggles, coping mechanisms, and the general experiences of the participants.

The target population to be used in this research is people with visual impairments who are already working. The target population of this study comprised individuals with visual impairments who were currently employed. This included individuals who were blind or had low vision and were working in different occupations and sectors. Purposive and snowball sampling were combined to get a range of views. The selection of the participants was done selectively, considering the following factors: age, gender, nature of visual impairment, occupation, and work experience. Participants were recruited through organizations serving persons with visual impairments, rehabilitation centers, professional networks, online forums, and participant referrals. A total of 16 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached, meaning that no substantially new themes or meaningful insights were emerging from subsequent interviews (Guest et al., 2020). This study employed a non-probability sampling approach, combining purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who met the inclusion criteria, including being employed and having a visual impairment. Snowball sampling was then used to identify additional eligible participants through referrals from existing participants. This approach helped the researcher access individuals with relevant workplace experiences and obtain rich and detailed insights into the phenomenon under study. This study utilized semi-structured interviews to gather data that was guided by an interview protocol that was designed following the available literature. The interview questions were open-ended, which allowed the participants to freely give their experiences. The interviews centered on experiences and challenges faced in the workplace, coping strategies, types of support and accommodations provided by the organization and peers, career advancement opportunities, and barriers.

Besides the interviews, a brief demographic survey was employed to collect some general data like the age, gender, occupation, and the nature of visual impairment of the participants.

Participants were provided with clear information about the purpose of the study before taking part. Written informed consent was obtained prior to the interviews. Interviews were conducted either in person or through audio-based online platforms, such as Zoom and WhatsApp, depending on participants' convenience and accessibility needs. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent.

Analysis and Findings

Data analysis was conducted under a six-phase thematic analysis method suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process began with familiarization, where all interviews were transcribed word-for-word and read several times to

gain a clear understanding of the content. Subsequently, preliminary codes were obtained based on the creation of valuable and significant parts of the data.

In the second stage, similar codes were clustered to form larger themes. These themes were then scrutinized and revised to get the themes that best captured the data and were uniform across all the interviews. After being completed, every theme was well defined and named. The last phase was interpreting the findings and relating them to the objectives of the research.

In the process, the transcripts were read and re-read until patterns and underlying meanings were found. The identification of relationships in the data was also supported using the semantic relationship framework by Spradley's (1979). The data were coded, organized, and analyzed in a systematic way to gain a deeper insight into the experiences of the participants.

The discussions led to the development of six key themes through the interviews of employed persons with visual impairments. Pseudonyms were employed in order to keep confidentiality. Data saturation was achieved, with the same patterns and ideas being shared in various interviews.

Theme 1: Workplace Challenges and Structural Barriers

Participants reported that they constantly encounter different obstacles at their workplace, primarily because of inaccessible environments. The lack of assistive resources, the unavailability of documents and software, and coworkers' insufficient understanding of the needs of visually impaired persons were frequent concerns. Most respondents articulated how even out-of-the-ordinary, basic tasks are hard when they are not configured to systems and materials.

One study participant said:

"Most office work is designed for sighted people. I have to ask others to read documents, which makes me feel dependent." (Participant 3)

These experiences usually led to frustrations and low productivity in the workplace. Another reason cited by the participants was feeling excluded, particularly in facilities that did not make much effort to make the environment disability-friendly or to offer the support needed.

Theme 2: Accessibility and Reasonable Accommodations

The participants emphasized that the availability of the right technology and work arrangements is critical in their performance at their workplaces. Those participants who were also supported by being provided with assistive technologies (screen readers, magnification software) or a flexible work schedule reported feeling more self-reliant and satisfied with their employment. These assistive tools helped them to conduct their work efficiently and confidently.

As one member of the group said:

"Once my organization provided screen-reading software, my productivity improved immediately." (Participant 7)

Participants who experienced negative experiences, on the other hand, reported a lack of access to timely and adequate accommodations. When they were not given the required support in a timely manner or at all that was required, this tended to have an impact on their performance and morale. This indicates that commitment to inclusion in an organization is not a constant in all workplaces.

Theme 3: Stigma, Discrimination, and Attitudinal Barriers

This problem of negative attitudes and stigma was reported by many participants as a significant barrier to their professional lives. They usually believed that their talents were not taken seriously merely due to their visual impairment. Others stated that they were not included in leadership positions or assigned fewer duties, irrespective of their qualifications and competence.

One of the participants said:

“My skills are often ignored because people assume I can’t handle responsibility.” (Participant 11)

These not only limited their career-development opportunities, but also impacted their confidence. This, over time, lengthened the feeling that they were not getting equal opportunities to grow in their careers.

Theme 4: Coping Strategies and Self-Advocacy

The participants were very resilient, as they had other coping mechanisms. One important strategy that arose was self-advocacy. Many respondents emphasized the need to fight for their needs, insist on the conditions and accommodations they require, and overcome misunderstandings at work.

As one participant shared:

“I had to learn to speak up for myself. If I don’t, no one understands my needs.” (Participant 5)

In addition to self-advocacy, the participants used other methods like developing their abilities, effective utilization of assistive technology, and a positive and determined attitude. These strategies helped them to deal with their challenges at work successfully and continue to progress in their careers.

Theme 5: Role of Support Networks

Social support was found to be one of the factors that assisted the participants' success in the workplace. The majority of the participants stated that their supervisor, co-worker, family, and disability organizations were important sources of support and recognition in their work. Those who felt in a positive environment were more likely to report feeling motivated, confident, and emotionally stable.

This experience was described by one of the participants as follows:

“My supervisor treats me like any other employee and supports me when needed.” (Participant 9)

Aside from the workplace support, external organizations also played a crucial role by offering training, counselling, and employment advice. These support systems proved to be more beneficial to participants as they were able to overcome the difficulties more easily and feel less alone.

Theme 6: Career Advancement Opportunities and Barriers

Most said they wanted to move up in their careers, but a significant portion felt they didn't have much opportunity to advance. They reported a lack of training opportunities as the most common reason for not being able to access them, a lack of equal opportunities, and discrimination in their assessment.

According to one of the participants:

“Promotions are rare for people like us, even when we meet all requirements.” (Participant 14)

Other respondents, though, were able to grow and even lead within an organization that had the policy of equity and inclusion. This suggests inclusive practices would have a huge effect on career development.

Discussion

The present study aimed at investigating the lived experience of the visually impaired employees working in public and private sector organizations in Lahore. The results indicate that they are not only affected by visual impairment itself, but also by the accessibility of the workplace, the attitude of the employer and fellow staff, the accessibility of the workplace, and the availability of products and services to support the employees with visual impairment and their opportunities for professional development. The participants faced various challenges, but they also showed signs of resilience and applied various strategies to address workplace challenges.

Structural and accessibility-related barriers were one of the significant results. The problems participants experienced with the use of documents, software, and other workplace resources were primarily due to these being developed primarily for sighted employees. These are sometimes exacerbated by the problems they encounter, which made them more reliant on colleagues and impacted their capacity to undertake routine tasks independently. This finding supports Ogedengbe et al. (2024), who noted that the work environment is crucial to the successful integration of the visually challenged. Similarly, Morwane et al. (2021) have recognized environmental barriers as key factors that impact the employment of persons with disabilities. The results of this study accordingly indicate that inclusion should not be limited to the provision of employment but also needs to include access to workplace systems and resources.

Participants' workplace experiences also seemed to be significantly affected by the availability of reasonable accommodation and assistive technology. I was more independent and confident when I had the appropriate technology and work arrangements that allowed me to participate. Others, however, were hindered in their productivity and morale due to the lack or delay of accommodations. This finding is consistent with McDonnall et al. (2024), who concluded that AT is a significant contributor to the employment of individuals with low vision or blindness. But if digital documents, software, and organizational systems are not available, then it won't be enough. Accessibility, however, needs to be accompanied by the right type of technology and an organisation's commitment to inclusive workplace practices.

Another significant finding was the effects of stigma and negative attitudes. Some participants expressed a belief that their capabilities were not obvious due to their visual impairment and that they were not afforded the same responsibilities or opportunities. This finding is consistent with Castle (2024), who noted that employer attitudes play a role in employment experiences for people with visual impairments. Similarly, Aftab et al. (2024) also found negative attitudes and discrimination among visually impaired people to be significant issues in career and job adjustment in Pakistan. The results indicated that formal inclusion policies could not be expected to work if there is a negative attitude towards disability among colleagues and employers. Awareness and sensitivity training can thus contribute to creating a more supportive and respectful workplace environment.

Despite these challenges, participants in the present study demonstrated different coping strategies. Self-advocacy was one of the key means by which participants shared their needs, requested accommodations, and dealt with misunderstandings. The participants also made use of their work skills, assistive technology, and determination to deal with challenges in the workplace. This supports the findings of Ogedengbe et al. (2024), who found adaptive potential to be one of the areas that affect the employment integration of persons with vision impairment. The results also indicate, however, that workers should not be forced to endure constant demands for basic accessibility. Although there is a need for individual resilience, there is also a need for organisations to find ways of minimising unnecessary barriers and offering support when it is needed.

The other major part of participants' experiences involved support networks. Participants reported they were motivated, confident and better able to face challenges as a result of their supervisors, colleagues, family and disability-related groups. This finding is consistent with Naraine and Lindsay (2011), who highlighted the importance of social inclusion for blind and low vision employees. The results show that beyond the actual job-related duties, employment involves being treated with respect, inclusion and value in the workplace. Positive relationships can help boost staff confidence and satisfaction levels, but should not result in over-dependence.

Finally, the study pointed out issues of career development and advancement. While many of the respondents were interested in making a career, some were convinced that there was a lack of training, promotion, and leadership opportunities. These findings support the work of Ogedengbe et al. (2024), which placed emphasis on the need for career development and sustainability of employment for persons with visual impairment. The role of assumptions around the potential of visually impaired workers could also affect their work prospects, as noted by Castle (2024). This means that the findings indicate that workplace inclusion should not stop with recruitment. Visually impaired employees should also receive fair chances for professional development, evaluation, promotion, and leadership opportunities.

In general, the results showed that the experiences of the visually impaired employees are influenced by a mixture of their own characteristics and conditions at work. While participants displayed resilience, determination, and adaptability, they also found the level of access and inclusiveness of their organisation to be a key factor in their capacity to work independently and to advance their professional growth. The study thus emphasizes the importance of going beyond a policy commitment and implementing practical strategies in the workplace to increase accessibility, foster positive attitudes, provide appropriate accommodations, create supportive relationships, and ensure equal opportunity for career advancement. This study concentrates on the experiences of visually impaired employees in Lahore to deepen the understanding of what workplace inclusion would look like in practice and to serve as an indicator for which areas need to be looked at more closely by employers and policymakers.

Ethical Considerations

This study was carried out respecting the principles of ethics to provide all respondents with safety, dignity, and rights. All participants were provided with clear information regarding the purpose of the study and what they could get involved in before their participation in the study. Informed consent was provided in writing, and all participation was voluntary. Participants were also told that they could pull out of the study at any time without having any negative repercussions.

During the research process, confidentiality was accorded great emphasis. The personal information of participants was not disclosed, and pseudonyms were employed instead of real names to ensure the identity of the participants was not exposed. There was no physical or emotional risk in the study, and care was taken to make sure that the study participants were comfortable and respected throughout the study.

The interviews were carried out in secure and confidential places to ensure the privacy of the participants. All research data were safely stored on password-secured systems, and only the research team could access the data. Moreover, cultural sensitivity was observed, keeping in mind individual differences and backgrounds, and it was observed that the research process was inclusive, fair, and respectful to all the involved parties.

Limitations

While the findings from this research are valuable in their contribution to the lived experiences of employed persons with visual impairments, the following limitations should be recognised in interpreting the findings. First, the study

was conducted with 16 people, which might restrict the generalizability of the results. But qualitative research is to give in-depth information about the experience of the participants, not to give statistical generalization.

One drawback is that the results reflect the participants' self-reports. Their answers could have been biased by either social desirability bias or by recalling, describing, and interpreting their experiences of the workplace in different ways. As a result, the information presented may have been presented at different depths and levels of detail for different participants. In addition, purposive and snowball sampling techniques could have caused selection bias. The participants were identified using organisations, professional networks and referrals, and the results might not reflect the experiences of all visually impaired employees in different regions, different roles and at different socioeconomic levels.

Finally, although semi-structured interviews provided flexibility and allowed participants to share their experiences in depth, differences in the way interview questions were asked, or responses were interpreted, may have influenced the findings. To reduce this possibility, a consistent interview protocol was followed, and the researcher prepared carefully before conducting the interviews.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study define the boundaries within which the research was conducted. The study focused on employed individuals with visual impairments living and working in Lahore. Only participants aged between 25 and 65 years were included, as individuals outside this age range may have different experiences related to career development and employment. The study included individuals working in formal organizations on a full-time or part-time basis and excluded volunteers, self-employed individuals, and those engaged in informal or non-traditional forms of employment. Participants with low vision and blindness were included; however, individuals with additional disabilities were excluded to maintain a specific focus on experiences related to visual impairment.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed for organizations and government authorities:

- ▶ Improve workplace accessibility through assistive technologies and accessible systems.
- ▶ Conduct disability awareness and sensitivity training for employers and colleagues.
- ▶ Ensure the proper implementation of reasonable accommodation policies.
- ▶ Promote inclusive workplace cultures and equal opportunities for career advancement.
- ▶ Strengthen collaboration between employers, rehabilitation centers, and support organizations.
- ▶ Encourage future research with larger and more diverse samples from different regions.

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