"BARRIERS TO ENGLISH WRITING PROFICIENCY: CONTEXTUAL CHALLENGES AND THEIR IMPACT ON SELF-REGULATED LEARNING AMONG VISUALLY IMPAIRED SECONDARY STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN"

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Abstract

This study investigates the contextual barriers that hinder English writing proficiency among visually impaired secondary students in Pakistan's special education institutes, with a particular focus on their impact on self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies. Employing a quantitative research design, data were collected from 110 students in Grades 9 and 10 using the Writing Strategies for Self-Regulated Learning Questionnaire (WSSRLQ), the Contextual Barriers Assessment Tool (CBAT), and a writing proficiency test. The findings reveal significant systemic challenges within the special education system, including limited resource accessibility, inadequate teacher training, and curriculum gaps, which collectively impede writing skill development. Among SRL strategies, Motivational Self-Talk emerged as the most utilized, reflecting students' reliance on internal motivators, while Emotional Control was the least employed, indicating persistent struggles with stress and anxiety. Regression analysis identified resource accessibility and teacher training as key predictors of writing proficiency, explaining 41% of the variance. The findings underscore the need for systemic reforms in special education practices to support visually impaired learners, providing actionable insights for educators and policymakers in addressing barriers and enhancing SRL strategy adoption in resource-constrained contexts.

Keywords: Self-Regulated Learning (SRL), writing proficiency barriers, visually impaired students, special education, Pakistan.

Introduction

In educational systems worldwide, proficiency in English writing is a critical academic skill and a pathway to socio-economic opportunities. For visually impaired students, mastering this skill involves overcoming not only linguistic complexities but also systemic barriers deeply rooted in their special education environments. In Pakistan, these challenges are particularly pronounced due to structural inequities that limit access to essential resources, teacher training, and tailored curricula for students with disabilities (UNESCO, 2017; Rehman & Haider, 2013). The absence of inclusive practices exacerbates these issues, leaving students without adequate support for their unique learning needs.

Although English is a compulsory subject in Pakistan from elementary to higher education, the quality of instruction varies significantly across regions and institutions (Rahman, 2002; Shamim, 2008). Special education institutes catering to visually impaired learners face additional constraints, including limited availability of Braille materials, assistive technologies, and specialized teacher training programs (Ali & Hameed, 2015). These systemic deficiencies widen educational disparities and hinder visually impaired students from developing foundational writing skills, compounding existing inequalities.

Beyond systemic challenges, psychological and social factors also impede writing proficiency. Teachers in special education settings often lack effective pedagogical tools for teaching English writing in EFL contexts (Brodwin, 2016). Simultaneously, visually impaired students frequently experience low self-confidence and feelings of marginalization, further diminishing their motivation and engagement with writing tasks (Khan et al., 2019). Collectively, these barriers

obstruct the development of essential writing components such as grammar, coherence, and editing, limiting students' overall academic potential.

Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) strategies offer a promising framework for addressing these challenges. Grounded in goal-setting, self-monitoring, and reflection, SRL equips learners to independently navigate complex writing tasks, fostering autonomy and resilience (Zimmerman, 2002). However, in Pakistan, the adoption of SRL strategies is hindered by resource constraints and unsupportive educational environments within special education institutes. Investigating the intersection of systemic barriers and SRL strategy adoption is crucial for informing targeted interventions and improving learning outcomes.

Globally, SRL strategies are recognized as critical for fostering writing proficiency and learner independence (Pintrich, 2004; Teng & Zhang, 2018). Yet, in Pakistan's special education system, systemic inequities continue to impede their effective implementation, depriving visually impaired students of essential tools for academic and personal growth. This study examines the contextual barriers affecting English writing proficiency and explores their influence on SRL strategy adoption among visually impaired secondary students in Pakistan. By addressing these gaps, the research aims to provide actionable insights for creating equitable and effective educational practices tailored to the unique needs of visually impaired learners.

Research Question:

1. What contextual barriers hinder English writing proficiency among visually impaired secondary students in Pakistan, and how do these barriers impact their ability to engage in self-regulated learning?

Review of Literature

Proficiency in English writing is a crucial academic skill, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Developing this skill requires mastery of complex processes such as planning, drafting, revising, and editing, which demand the integration of linguistic, cognitive, and metacognitive abilities (Hayes & Flower, 1980; Graham, 2007). For visually impaired students in special education, these challenges are compounded by systemic barriers, inaccessible educational environments, and the lack of tailored learning strategies. Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) offers a promising framework for addressing these challenges by fostering autonomy and engagement through structured goal-setting, monitoring, and reflection (Zimmerman, 2000).

Rooted in social-cognitive theory, SRL emphasizes the interplay of cognitive, motivational, and contextual factors in learning (Zimmerman, 2000; Pintrich, 2004). Its multidimensional nature positions it as a cornerstone of learner-centered pedagogy, promoting critical thinking, independence, and lifelong learning (Schunk & Greene, 2018). Within the EFL writing domain, SRL strategies such as planning, revising, and self-monitoring are particularly relevant for visually impaired students who face additional obstacles in accessing traditional teaching materials and methodologies (Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997; Teng, 2022).

Despite its well-documented benefits, SRL remains underutilized in Pakistan's special education institutes. The widespread reliance on traditional methods like the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) prioritizes rote memorization over critical engagement, neglecting the cognitive and metacognitive dimensions of learning (Teng & Zhang, 2020). Furthermore, text-based instructional approaches often fail to accommodate the auditory and tactile modalities essential for visually impaired learners (Andrade & Evans, 2013). Adaptive practices such as goal-setting and reflective learning, while beneficial, are largely absent from current teaching methodologies in Pakistan's special education system.

The educational environment for visually impaired students in Pakistan is also characterized by significant systemic barriers. Limited access to resources, including Braille materials, assistive technologies, and audio resources, severely restricts their ability to engage effectively with writing tasks (WHO, 2018; Ali & Hameed, 2015). Compounding this issue is the inadequacy of teacher training in special education, with few opportunities for professional development tailored to inclusive pedagogies. This lack of preparation hampers educators' ability to implement SRL strategies effectively, further disadvantaging visually impaired students (Khan et al., 2015).

Additionally, cultural misconceptions and societal neglect exacerbate the challenges faced by visually impaired learners, reinforcing their marginalization within educational systems (Farooq, 2012; Ajuwon, 2008). While some strategies, such as repetition and motivational self-talk, provide limited support, they are insufficient without a comprehensive framework that integrates SRL principles into special education curricula. For instance, memory-based strategies may aid information retention but fail to foster critical thinking or adaptability in writing tasks.

These systemic barriers underscore the urgent need to integrate SRL strategies into special education practices in Pakistan. Such integration would not only address the challenges posed by limited access to resources and inadequate teacher training but also enable visually impaired students to engage more effectively in writing tasks. By tailoring SRL strategies to their unique needs, the educational environment for these learners can be significantly improved, fostering their academic success and independence.

!Research Gap

While the benefits of SRL strategies in enhancing writing proficiency are well-documented, their application in special education contexts remains underexplored. Most existing research focuses on general EFL learners, with limited attention to the unique challenges faced by visually impaired students in resource-constrained settings such as Pakistan (Ali & Hameed, 2015; Teng, 2022). Furthermore, the literature often addresses inclusive education broadly, overlooking the specific needs of segregated special education institutes, where visually impaired students rely heavily on institutional support. Research on the intersection of systemic barriers and SRL strategy adoption among visually impaired learners is particularly scarce in developing countries.

This study bridges a critical gap in understanding how systemic barriers in segregated special education institutes impact SRL strategy adoption among visually impaired learners. By addressing this gap, the research contributes actionable insights for designing effective interventions and policy reforms that ensure equitable access to education. Through its focus on Pakistan's special education system, the study provides a context-specific analysis, paving the way for targeted strategies to enhance writing proficiency and learner autonomy.

Research Design and Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research design to examine the contextual barriers affecting English writing proficiency and their impact on self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies among visually impaired secondary students in Pakistan. Grounded in Pintrich's (2004) SRL framework, the research investigates the interplay between systemic challenges, SRL strategy adoption, and writing proficiency through meticulously designed instruments and structured data collection procedures.

A total of 110 visually impaired secondary students from Grades 9 and 10 participated in the study. Using a purposive sampling technique, participants were selected to represent active EFL learners from diverse special education institutes across Pakistan. This approach ensured that the sample

captured diverse perspectives within the targeted demographic while focusing on the unique needs of visually impaired learners.

Three instruments were utilized for data collection. The **Writing Strategies for Self-Regulated Learning Questionnaire (WSSRLQ)**, adapted from Teng (2022), assessed SRL strategies across six dimensions: text processing, goal-oriented monitoring, feedback handling, memory strategies, emotional regulation, and motivational self-talk. To ensure accessibility, the questionnaire was modified into Braille and audio formats. The **Contextual Barriers Assessment Tool (CBAT)**, developed specifically for this study, evaluated systemic barriers such as resource accessibility, teacher training, curriculum inclusivity, and societal attitudes, using a 5-point Likert scale. Writing proficiency was assessed through a **200-word argumentative essay task** on topics like "The Role of Education in Personal and Social Development." Essays were evaluated using an analytical rubric adapted from Jacobs et al. (1981), focusing on content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics.

The data collection process was conducted in three phases:

1. **Preparation Phase**: Permissions were obtained from institutional authorities and guardians, and research assistants were trained to administer the instruments while accommodating the specific needs of visually impaired participants. Materials were prepared in Braille and audio formats to ensure accessibility.
2. **Administration Phase**: Participants completed the WSSRLQ and CBAT in distraction-free environments, with guidance provided by research assistants as needed. The writing task was conducted under standardized conditions, with transcription support offered to participants requiring assistance.
3. **Quality Control Phase**: Responses were reviewed for completeness, anonymized to maintain confidentiality, and securely stored to ensure data integrity.

This methodological framework ensures reliability and inclusivity in data collection while adhering to ethical standards and accessibility principles. The use of quantitative analysis provides a robust foundation for identifying measurable relationships between systemic barriers, SRL strategies, and writing proficiency. By addressing the unique needs of visually impaired learners in special education institutes, this study offers actionable insights into the interplay of systemic challenges and SRL strategy adoption.

Here's the **refined Data Analysis section** with the minor adjustments for clarity and flow, integrating the modifications seamlessly:

Data Analysis

This section examines the contextual barriers affecting English writing proficiency and their impact on self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies among visually impaired secondary students in Pakistan. The analysis is based on data collected through the Writing Strategies for Self-Regulated Learning Questionnaire (WSSRLQ), the Contextual Barriers Assessment Tool (CBAT), and a writing proficiency test. Both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were employed to explore SRL strategy adoption and the influence of systemic barriers on writing outcomes.

Participant Demographics and Writing Proficiency Levels

Descriptive statistics summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants and their performance in English writing proficiency and SRL strategy adoption. The sample comprised 110

visually impaired secondary students from Grades 9 and 10 across special education institutions. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants' demographics and proficiency levels.

Table 1: Participant Demographics and Writing Proficiency Levels

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gender of Students	110	1 (Male)	2 (Female)	1.34	0.47
Academic Level (Grade)	110	9	10	1.96	0.19
English Writing Proficiency	110	1 (Low)	3 (High)	1.89	0.82
SRL Strategies Score	110	135	224	167.08	15.58

The mean writing proficiency score (M = 1.89, SD = 0.82) reflects low to moderate competency levels, highlighting the challenges in developing foundational writing skills. Similarly, the variability in SRL strategy adoption (M = 167.08, SD = 15.58) indicates differences in students' approaches to self-regulated learning.

Utilization of SRL Strategies

The analysis of SRL strategies revealed notable variations in their adoption. Participants frequently utilized Motivational Self-Talk (M = 37.2, SD = 6.7) to sustain engagement with writing tasks, while Emotional Control (M = 12.3, SD = 3.7) was the least employed strategy. Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics for SRL strategy usage.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of SRL Strategies

Strategy	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Text Processing	110	10	32	23.74	4.79
Course Memory	110	4	20	12.40	3.53
Idea Planning	110	4	19	11.59	3.18
Goal-Oriented Monitoring	110	15	35	24.26	4.53
Peer Learning	110	4	56	12.71	5.51
Feedback Handling	110	6	49	16.67	5.45
Interest Enhancement	110	7	29	16.24	4.01
Motivational Self-Talk	110	19	55	37.20	6.70
Emotional Control	110	3	21	12.27	3.74

The prominence of Motivational Self-Talk highlights students' reliance on internal motivators to navigate challenges. Conversely, the low adoption of Emotional Control strategies indicates persistent struggles with managing stress and anxiety during writing tasks, underscoring the need for targeted interventions.

Gender-Based Comparisons

Gender-based comparisons revealed slight variations in SRL strategy usage. Male students exhibited higher scores in Motivational Self-Talk (M = 37.4) and Feedback Handling (M = 16.9), whereas Emotional Control was marginally lower among female students (M = 11.8). These findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Gender Differences in SRL Strategies

Gender	Motivational Self-Talk (M)	Feedback Handling (M)	Emotional Control (M)
Male	37.4	16.9	12.5
Female	36.8	16.2	11.8

These results suggest gendered nuances in SRL strategy adoption, highlighting potential differences in coping mechanisms that merit further exploration.

Impact of Contextual Barriers on Writing Proficiency

Resource Accessibility emerged as the most significant determinant of SRL strategy adoption and writing proficiency. Students with access to Braille materials and assistive technologies scored higher in Text Processing (M = 26.1) and Motivational Self-Talk (M = 38.7). Table 4 summarizes the correlation between contextual barriers and writing proficiency.

Table 4: Correlation Between Contextual Barriers and Writing Proficiency

Variable	Correlation (r)	p-value
Resource Accessibility	0.72	< 0.01
Teacher Training	0.68	< 0.01
Curriculum Inclusivity	0.63	0.02
Societal Support	0.54	0.03

These findings emphasize the critical role of resources and teacher training in shaping students' writing proficiency.

Regression Analysis

Regression analysis confirmed that contextual barriers accounted for 41% of the variance in writing proficiency, with Resource Accessibility and Teacher Training emerging as the most significant predictors. Table 5 provides the regression model summary.

Table 5: Regression Model Summary for Writing Proficiency

Model	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error
Predictors: Barriers	0.48	0.41	0.71

The adjusted R^2 value of 0.41 underscores the influence of systemic challenges, highlighting Resource Accessibility (r = 0.72, p < 0.01) and Teacher Training (r = 0.68, p < 0.01) as critical determinants of proficiency.

Findings and Discussion

The findings reveal that systemic barriers, particularly limited resource accessibility and inadequate teacher training, significantly impact SRL strategy adoption and writing proficiency. Resource accessibility emerged as the most critical determinant, showing a strong positive correlation with writing proficiency (r = 0.72, p < 0.01). Students with access to Braille materials and assistive technologies demonstrated higher proficiency levels compared to their peers in resource-limited settings. Similarly, teacher training exhibited a significant correlation with proficiency (r = 0.68, p < 0.01), emphasizing the importance of adequately trained educators in achieving effective learning outcomes. While curriculum inclusivity and societal support were also statistically significant, their relatively lower correlations suggest that structural inequities in curriculum design and societal attitudes hinder the adoption of inclusive pedagogies in special education institutes. These findings align with Brodwin's (2016) assertion regarding the essential role of tailored resources and professional development in supporting visually impaired learners. The results also highlight diverse patterns in SRL strategy adoption. Motivational Self-Talk emerged as the most frequently employed strategy (M = 37.2, SD = 6.7), reflecting students' reliance on internal motivators to overcome challenges in writing tasks. This finding aligns with Boscolo and Hidi's (2007) view that motivational regulation fosters persistence and engagement

in academic activities. Conversely, Emotional Control was the least utilized strategy (M = 12.3, SD = 3.7), revealing persistent struggles with stress and anxiety. These challenges echo Khan et al.'s (2019) findings, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to enhance students' emotional resilience.

The analysis further revealed differences in SRL strategy usage across academic levels. Tenth-grade students demonstrated greater engagement in Goal-Oriented Monitoring (M = 24.4, SD = 4.5) and Text Processing (M = 23.8, SD = 4.8) compared to Grade 9 students, likely due to their increased exposure to structured feedback and more complex writing tasks. This finding supports Teng's (2022) assertion that advanced learners develop a broader repertoire of SRL strategies. However, consistently low Emotional Control scores across both grades suggest that systemic challenges in managing stress transcend academic progression. Incorporating emotional regulation training into special education curricula could provide learners with much-needed support at all levels.

The correlation analysis revealed nuanced relationships between specific SRL strategies and writing proficiency. Course Memory demonstrated a positive correlation (r = 0.205, p < 0.05), suggesting that repetition and mnemonic aids effectively enhance task performance. However, Goal-Oriented Monitoring exhibited a negative correlation (r = -0.201, p < 0.05), indicating that rigid goal structures may limit adaptability in writing tasks. These findings highlight the dual role of SRL strategies. While some strategies, such as memory-based techniques, foster proficiency by leveraging the strengths of visually impaired learners, others, when applied rigidly, restrict creativity and flexibility. Balancing these strategies with adaptive approaches can prevent over-reliance on fixed techniques and foster more holistic learning outcomes.

The findings align with Zimmerman's (2002) SRL framework, which emphasizes the interplay of cognitive, motivational, and emotional dimensions in learning. While students displayed significant reliance on motivational and memory-based strategies, the limited use of emotional regulation underscores systemic gaps in the support provided by special education institutes. Addressing these gaps requires a multifaceted approach: introducing emotional regulation training to help students manage stress and anxiety, enhancing access to assistive technologies and other essential resources, and providing specialized teacher training to equip educators with the skills needed to support visually impaired learners effectively. By addressing these areas, educators and policymakers can create equitable and inclusive learning environments that empower visually impaired students to succeed in writing and other academic tasks.

Conclusion

This study investigates the contextual barriers impeding English writing proficiency among visually impaired secondary students in Pakistan, with a particular focus on their impact on self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies. The findings highlight systemic challenges, including limited resource accessibility, inadequate teacher training, and insufficient curriculum inclusivity, which collectively hinder the development of foundational writing skills. These challenges are further exacerbated by societal misconceptions and a lack of institutional support, restricting opportunities for students to achieve their full academic potential.

Despite these barriers, students demonstrated resilience by frequently employing Motivational Self-Talk as an SRL strategy, reflecting their reliance on internal motivators to navigate complex writing tasks. However, the underutilization of Emotional Control strategies underscores persistent struggles with managing stress and anxiety, pointing to the need for targeted interventions that enhance emotional resilience. The study also revealed variations in SRL strategy adoption across

academic levels, emphasizing the importance of scaffolding interventions to align with students' developmental stages. Systemic factors, particularly resource accessibility and teacher training, emerged as key determinants, collectively accounting for 41% of the variance in writing proficiency and highlighting areas requiring immediate attention.

This research underscores the critical role of systemic reforms in shaping equitable and effective educational practices for visually impaired learners. By integrating SRL frameworks into special education curricula, prioritizing teacher training, and enhancing resource accessibility, stakeholders can empower students to achieve academic success and greater autonomy. Reforms should also address emotional resilience by incorporating stress management support into special education practices.

Future studies should build on these findings by investigating the longitudinal effects of targeted interventions and conducting cross-cultural analyses to enhance the generalizability of these insights. A deeper understanding of the interplay between systemic barriers and SRL strategies will provide evidence-based guidance for advancing the educational outcomes of visually impaired students globally.

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