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A Counseling Student's Experiences with Vision Impairment: A narrative Inquiry

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Keywords

vision impairment, narrative inquiry, counselor education

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Abstract

This article explores a female counseling student's experience with vision impairment in a counselor education program. By using narrative inquiry, three main themes (perceptions, received supports, and challenges for a visually impaired student) and seven subthemes (perceptions of herself, perceptions of others, daily commute, attitudinal barriers, barriers to access, practicum experiences, and disability services) emerged from the analysis. Recommendations for counselor preparation and research are provided.

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According to the World Health Organization (WHO; 2023), there are at least 2.2 billion people who experience near or distance vision impairment (VI). In the United States, VI affects approximately 2.3% of the population, equating to 7.29 million adults (Erickson et al., 2019). This sizable portion of the population with VI often faces educational disparities compared to the general population (Erickson et al., 2019).

Shockingly, only 25 % of individuals with visual disabilities, including VI and blindness, complete high school, and a mere 15% attain a bachelor's degree (Best College, 2020). Given these statistics, it is essential to examine the experiences of individuals with VI within specific educational contexts, such as counseling education programs. This study focuses on exploring the experiences of a female counseling student with VI and sheds light on the unique challenges, received supports, and perceptions encountered by the participant. In addition, understanding the experiences of

counseling students with VI is of paramount importance for counselor educators, as it allows for the development of inclusive practices and support systems within counselor preparation programs.

Disability and Higher Education

Disability is defined as (a) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, (b) a record of such impairment, and (c) being regarded as having such an impairment (Americans with Disabilities Act [ADA], 1990; ADA Amendments Act, 2008; Feather & Carlson, 2019). Within the disability literature, it is reported students face a multitude of challenges (e.g., accessibility, campus inclusiveness) in engaging with the higher education system (Glover-Graf & Janikowski, 2001; Murray et al., 2014; Nott & Zafft, 2006).

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Each year, professional counseling programs (i.e., Clinical Mental Health Counseling, School Counseling, Addiction Counseling, and Rehabilitation Counseling) enroll students with disabilities. Counselor preparation programs emphasize the importance of disability accommodation policy and procedure in the curriculum standards (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2015). However, several scholars have documented that counselor education programs do not offer much training or knowledge related to the specific needs of persons with disabilities (Rivas & Hill, 2018; Stuntzner & Hartley, 2014). The programs often lack sensitivity to the needs of students who have disabilities, particularly those with VI (Glover-Graf & Janikowski, 2001; Olkin & Pledger, 2003).

Furthermore, learning experiences of students with disabilities may be impacted by faculty knowledge of and attitude toward disabilities (Sniatecki et al., 2015). Murray et al (2014) concluded that college and university faculty can affect the postsecondary educational experiences of students with disabilities in at least five important ways: (a) through the design and delivery of instruction in their own courses, (b) through their direct interactions with students with disabilities around issues pertaining to student disclosure and accommodation requests, (c) through their mentoring and relationships with individual students, (d) through their knowledge of campus services and supports available for students with disabilities, and (e) through their influence on the overall climate of the institution.

Disability is considered an important aspect of diversity and multiculturalism in the field of counseling (Peterson & Elliott, 2008; Smith, Foley, & Chaney, 2008; Woo et al., 2016). Professional counseling organizations (e.g., American Counseling Association [ACA]; American Rehabilitation Counseling Association [ARCA]; Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development [AMCD]; CACREP) emphasize training students to be culturally sensitive to disability, and have multicultural attitudes,

knowledge, and competencies to work with clients with disabilities in community and school setting (Castillo, 2016; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992).

However, Degeneffe et al (2023) concluded after an analysis of articles in the *Journal of Counseling and Development*, there was a lack of focus on disability in this flagship publication of the counseling profession. Likewise, Feather and Carlson (2019) investigated how 141 counselor educators included disability content in their curriculum and concluded counselor education programs were ineffective in addressing the general needs of adults with disabilities. CACREP standards (2016) could be a barrier to address disability in counselor education curricula in that disability is not mentioned in the curricular standards on social and cultural diversity (Feather & Carlson, 2019). This is a cause for concern given the belief in counselor education that knowledge, skills, and sensitivity to disability should be addressed by professional organizations and standards (Feather & Carlson, 2019). Part of the problem is that disability-related issues traditionally belonged to a domain of rehabilitation counseling (Foley-Nicpon & Lee, 2012). As such, the concerns for disability research and practice call for not only increased counseling research and improved counselor education curricula, but for counselors to critically examine their views about clients and counseling students with disabilities from an inclusive perspective.

Vision Impairment

Vision impairment (VI) is typically assessed by measuring the best-corrected visual acuity (BCVA) of the better-seeing eye, although it lacks a universal definition (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2021). In this article, the terms "*visual impairment*," "*visually impaired*," and "*low vision*" are used interchangeably. In the United States, VI is defined according to BCVA, with a threshold of 20/40 or lower in the better-seeing eye,

ranging from mild (20/40 – 20/63) to severe ($\leq 20/200$; Varma et al., 2016). A person with 20/40 vision sees things at 20 feet that individuals without vision correction can see at 40 feet. Extensive research has demonstrated that visually impaired adults experience increased levels of depression, anxiety (Brody et al., 2001), mental fatigue (Van Der Aa et al., 2016), reduced social contact, and feelings of loneliness (Kempen et al., 2012) when compared to those without visual impairment. In a systematic review of 27 papers published between 1981 and 2015, Van Der Aa et al. (2016) identified a scarcity of effective counseling interventions addressing the mental health of individuals with VI.

The higher education environment adds another layer of challenge for individuals with VI. Existing research highlights these difficulties, including the need for additional time to complete coursework (Opie & Southcott, 2016), feelings of isolation from classmates (Opie & Southcott, 2015), and struggles to integrate into the classroom setting (Worth, 2013). Additionally, studies suggest a lack of self-advocacy skills upon entering higher education can further hinder their success (Kartovicky, 2020). Beyond these general challenges, students with VI in higher education encounter specific barriers related to limited academic support, lack of accessible materials, and inadequate library resources (Akbayrak, 2024). Difficulties obtaining lecture notes and navigating academic resources further exacerbate these issues (Firat, 2021). The complexity of these experiences, including both social-emotional factors and practical barriers, underscores the importance of gaining insight into the direct lived experiences of students with VI. While research on social-relational variables like sociality, family support, and self-determination has primarily focused on K-12 settings (Cavendish, 2017; Worth, 2013), these factors likely still influence success in higher education. Understanding the lived experiences of students with VI within this context can inform strategies to support their success in the higher education environment.

Theoretical Framework

Our study is grounded in Dewey's (1938) notion of experience as a dynamic interplay between personal, social, and environmental contexts. This concept aligns with a dynamic view of disability, shaped by time, context, and individual stories (Thacker et al., 2021). Constructivist epistemology, emphasizing the co-constructed nature of knowledge (Denzin, 2017), further supports this perspective.

To explore these ideas, we adopted Clandinin & Connelly's (2000) narrative inquiry framework. This framework provides a three-dimensional lens for analyzing lived experiences: interaction (personal & social), continuity (past, present, and future), and situation (place). In our study, the chosen institution represents the situational dimension. The timeframe from 2017 to 2020 captures the continuity dimension. Finally, the interactions among the student participant, her classmates, site supervisor, and other community members represent the interaction dimension.

Purpose of this Study

This study aimed to explore the experiences of a visually impaired school counseling student, Carrie (pseudonym), within a counselor education program. Existing research highlights the challenges faced by visually impaired students in K-12 settings, including emotional and physical difficulties that can lead to feelings of isolation (Cavendish, 2017; Worth, 2013). However, research on the experiences of visually impaired graduate students in higher education, particularly regarding their interactions with classmates, faculty, and supervisors, is limited.

Our study contributes to this gap in understanding by examining Carrie's narrative. Her story offers counselor educators valuable insights

into the needs of this underrepresented population. Narrative inquiry, as suggested by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), is well-suited for examining experiences where individual and social factors intertwine to shape meaning. This approach allows us to delve into Carrie's experiences as a visually impaired student and gain a deeper understanding of their significance for her. We employed the following research questions to guide our exploration:

- What are the experiences of a visually impaired female school counseling student like Carrie?
- What meaning does Carrie make of her experiences within the counselor education program?
- What barriers does Carrie experience as a visually impaired student in this program?

Method

Design

To the best of our knowledge, both visually impaired students and their experiences in the counselor education program have barely been considered in the current literature. Fitting within this research line and following a narrative inquiry approach, we conducted a single case study to investigate lived experiences of a visually impaired student. Given that the scope of work was bound within a specific experience, this research design was considered suitable for this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Sheperis et al., 2017). This case provided authors a unique opportunity to embed themselves within details and context of this participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The participant (Carrie) was purposefully selected as she had been particularly affected by vision impairment and had expressed an interest in sharing her story. This approach allowed Carrie to tell her stories in her words, to choose what to tell and the sequence of events narrated, and to construct her story of being a graduate student from her own perspective with minimal intervention from the researchers. By

inquiring about Carrie's experiences in pursuing a school counseling degree (*Note.* Carrie changed her major from School Counseling to Higher Education Counseling after we completed the interview), we explored in detail Carrie's thoughts, feelings, and actions about the challenges she had encountered during her study. In addition, the narrative inquiry helped us to have a particular view on counselor advocacy from both the vantage point of counselor educators and a perspective of a visually impaired student.

Participant

To protect participant identification, we report only a summary of participant demographics. The participant was in her 30s during the study, identified as female, and self-reported as White/Caucasian. She was a graduate student pursuing a school counseling degree at a large Midwestern research university. Her vision impairment resulted from an eye disease that began in seventh grade. While voluntarily participating in this study, the participant has completed 32 credit hours in the counselor education program and encountered difficulties in completing a required school counseling internship course due to her VI (*Note.* the program Carrie has enrolled in was aligned with CACREP standards and in the process of seeking CACREP accreditation when this study was conducted). The participant was recruited through research team member's referral and met the criteria of being (a) 18 years of age or older; (b) diagnosed with VI (which was also verified by Office of Disability in the target university); and (c) currently a graduate student in the counselor education program.

Sampling Criteria

The determination of sample size in qualitative research is contingent upon the nature of the answers being sought, the data collection procedure, and the theoretical framework (Kim, 2016; Patton, 2015; Sheperis et al., 2017). For the current study, a single participant was deemed sufficient due to several factors: (a) We adhered to Kvale's (1996)

recommendation of conducting a minimum of three rounds of open and in-depth life story interviews. (b) The participant, owing to her excellent communication skills, was able to provide ample information for this study (Kim, 2016; Morse, 2000). This significantly contributed to the depth and richness of the data collected. (c) We achieved data saturation, a point at which additional interviews do not yield any new insights or knowledge, thereby ensuring the comprehensiveness and reliability of our findings (Charmaz, 2006; Kvale, 1996). These factors collectively justify the adequacy of the sample size for this study.

Research Team

Our research team was composed of four faculty members from the university. To ensure the trustworthiness of our results (Patton, 2015), all members of the research team share a common identity as counselor educators and licensed professional counselors. Additionally, all members have experience working with school counseling students in both school and university settings. During the time of the inquiry, the first and second authors, one male and one female associate professor respectively, were involved in the development of interview questions and protocols, as well as data collection and analysis. The third researcher, a female full professor, served as an auditor for this study and brought her expertise in disability studies to the table. The fourth author, a male assistant professor, contributed to the manuscript editing process as a reviewer. As researchers, we engaged in discussions about our own experiences and perspectives related to the research topic at the outset of this study. This included acknowledging and addressing potential biases to ensure the integrity of our research (Patton, 2015).

Data Collection

Data was collected from October to November 2019 after obtaining institutional review board approval. Initially, the potential participant was approached

by one of the research team members. Following indication of her interest to participate, two of the research team members then met with the participant and explained the research study and participant's role. The participant provided both verbal and written informed consent indicating that she (a) was willing to take part in the study, (b) was free to withdraw at any time, and (c) was willing to have the interviews audio recorded.

Following Kvale's (1996) interview recommendations, research team members conducted three rounds of interviews to gather a sufficient depth of information from the participant's life story in a conference room of the target institution. Each interview was completed by using a two-sentence format technique (Morrissey, 1987). The two-sentence format consists of a statement and a question, which works to explain the question before researchers ask it. The semi-structured interview was the main tool of our current study. Open-ended questions were used to help researchers to have a deeper and clearer understanding of the participant's story. A sample of interview questions is as follows:

1. How would you describe your experiences in the counselor education program? Start where you like and take as much time as you need.
2. What does vision impairment mean to you?
3. You have talked about many challenges you face due to your vision. How have these challenges influenced your life? (Two-sentence format)

Our interview process was guided by the basic phases of the narrative interview as outlined by Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000), which include preparation, initiation, main narration, questioning phase, and concluding talk. Each phase started with an initiation, where the participant was invited to share her story in response to the interview questions. Throughout the interview, the participant maintained full control over the content and direction of her story, without any interruptions.

When the participant was engaged in the process, we paid special attention to potential emotional stress by employing nondirective counseling techniques (e.g., attending skills). As the narration came to an end, we initiated the questioning phases to elicit new and additional information beyond the participant's story. Lastly, the interview concluded with a relaxed discussion, utilizing why-questions to gain a deeper understanding of the participant's

Data Analysis

The data analysis used the conventional content analysis of narrative as proposed by Connelly and Clandinin (1990). Data collected in the interviews were analyzed by using three analytical tools: broadening (look for a broader context of the story), burrowing (focus on specific details of data), and storying and restoring (capture the significance of the lived experiences of the participant; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This allowed the stories to remain intact and present the real voice of the participant as a research phenomenon (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). For the data analysis process, two of the research team members read transcripts individually to identify preliminary themes using general content analysis coding. The researchers then met and discussed their lists of themes and came to consensus about analytical findings through open and critical discussion (Creswell & Poth, 2018). When disagreements came up, the researchers went back to the raw data until consensus was reached. An auditor reviewed all identified themes and provided detailed feedback for the research team members. Finally, the research team met to discuss any emergent themes until analyses were mutually agreeable. Our data was managed and coded using NVivo data analysis software (v.12).

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of our narrative inquiry and the rigor of our analysis, we employed several strategies (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Sheperis et al., 2017). First, we utilized a peer validation process with experienced counselor educators to assess the quality and coherence of our findings through collaborative content analysis. Second, an

external auditor provided feedback on the coding and data analysis, prompting revisions and discussions within the research team to reach consensus. Third, we openly discussed our own expectations and potential biases as researchers to minimize their influence on the interpretation (Sheperis et al., 2017).

Furthermore, we employed member checking to enhance both verisimilitude and instrumental utility of our findings (Loh, 2013). This involved inviting the participant, Carrie, to review and comment on our interpretations of her narrative. We acknowledge the unique dynamic introduced by our role as Carrie's professor. To mitigate potential bias and promote objectivity in data collection and analysis, we practiced ongoing reflexivity (Miller et al., 2012). This involved critically examining our own positionalities, assumptions, and expectations throughout the research process, particularly after the interviews.

Results

Based on Chandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional framework, we explored the experiences of a female student with vision impairment experienced within the counselor education program. Our study led to the emergence of three main themes: (a) perceptions, (b) received supports, and (c) challenges faced by a visually impaired student. Detailed information about these themes is presented in Table 1. Each theme provides a unique perspective on student's experiences, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of her journey in the counselor education program.

Perceptions

The first theme pertains to Carrie's self-perceptions as a visually impaired student in the counselor education program, as well as her perceptions of others who influenced her decision to pursue a career as a professional counselor. These perceptions can provide valuable insights for counselor education communities in formulating intervention strategies tailored for students with disabilities. Upon analyzing this theme, two subthemes surfaced: (a) self-perception and (b) perception of others. Each of these subthemes offers a nuanced understanding of Carrie's experiences and perspectives.

Perception of Self

Through our interview with Carrie, it became evident that she views herself as a self-motivated individual, balancing her roles as both a mother and a graduate student with dedication. The fragments of Carrie's narrative reveal a self-perception that is both consistent and authentic. This perception significantly influences her understanding of her experiences and her journey toward earning a degree in counseling.

I feel like I was always kind of a born helper anyways I've always looked out for people I always wanted people to be happy to feel good and so for me when I decided to come to school to be a counselor is related to refine and gain the skills needed to help someone through situations crisis without harming them.

Perception of others

Before enrolling in the counseling program, Carrie spent five years working as a parole officer. This was just one of the examples that Carrie described in the interview in which she found herself facing barriers that others may not have to face. When Carrie described feeling connected and supported by others, she seemed to discuss these connections

as meaningful and influential in her journey. However, when she spoke about those with whom she did not feel strongly connected to, she seemed to feel as if she was being judged. Carrie describes feeling vulnerable, as if people are taking a chance on her. The associated strain and perception that others are constantly evaluating her has caused her to consider withdrawal from her educational program. This perception has influenced her ability to socialize and connect with others.

I can never just be me. I have to constantly sell myself; I have to make sure that you know I sell myself well enough that people are willing to take a chance on me. and I think a lot of people just don't think about barriers that visually impaired people have until you try to put yourself in that position.

Received Supports

Good supportive environments from school and family lead to increased feelings of competence and self-determination for students with disabilities (Cavendish, 2017; Deci & Ryan, 2008). In Carrie's story, the major support she received was from her school counselor, family, friends, and faculty members. These experiences varied but served as potential means to build up Carrie's determination to become a counselor.

I thought about [School Counselor] who was my high school counselor and how intrinsically he was in terms of getting me through high school because of my disability and encouragement he gave me, and I thought that if I could use my story of overcoming obstacles to help someone else... [Husband] has been a wonderful help to in terms of really supporting me and encouraging me... [Friend] told me to stop feeling bad and that was a really profound moment that I still struggle with. I seek the support like [Professor].

Challenges for a Visually Impaired Student

The third theme that emerged in this study pertains to the challenges faced by a visually impaired student. This theme encompasses four subthemes, each representing a unique challenging situation: (a) the daily commute between campus and home, (b) attitudinal barriers, which encompass faculty attitudes toward students with disabilities, (c) barriers to access, and (d) experiences during practicum. Each of these subthemes provides a nuanced understanding of the difficulties encountered by this visually impaired student in her academic journey.

Daily Commute

Most students who are visual impaired will not have enough vision to be a driver and need to access transportation. During the time our study was conducted, Carrie had been able to drive with vision requirements under a daylight-only condition since she had a mild VI. In her story she reflected how her commute was affected by daylight saving or bad weather (i.e., raining):

I think a lot of people just don't think about barriers that visually impaired people have until you try to put yourself in that position. You know imagine if you had to be home every night by 5 PM because it was dark, or you couldn't drive because it was raining.

In addition, most required courses in the targeted program were offered in a traditional face to face format in the evening. As a result, Carrie had to seek out and arrange for her transportation needs while coping with the reality of not being able to be a driver. Carrie's story exemplified the life story of visually impaired students who need transportation in the evening:

Because the public transportation that is available for someone like me doesn't run after certain hours. and so, you know to get to a 7:30 class and you know the public transportation only goes until six. So just trying to be as positive as I can be.

Attitudinal Barriers

Attitudinal barriers refer to attitudes toward persons with disabilities (Chubon, 1992). Faculty attitudes toward students with disabilities in higher education institutions are one of the important contributors to the success of students (Rao, 2004). In her story, Carrie reported a mixed feelings of faculty attitudes toward her disability:

[Positive attitude]: [Professor A] has made me feel like people cared and wanted to know more I've never had professors really take the time to get to know me or to understand me....

[Negative attitude]: You know like again I missed an assignment... I fear that [Professor B] doesn't believe me over email and with that person not knowing me.

Barriers to Access

Students with visual impairments often need to advocate for themselves and actively seek out the accommodations they require. They must be adept problem solvers, ready to overcome the barriers they encounter daily. At the time of the interview, Carrie had been enrolled in the program for two years. She was familiar with the accessibility and accommodation services provided by the Disability Services Office. However, she still faced barriers when trying to access certain information, such as the Student Perception of Teaching Effectiveness (SPTE) instrument, campus wall signs, and classroom accessibility. This highlights the ongoing challenges faced by visually impaired students, even when support services are in place.

Because some of the efforts they've made in terms of making this campus accessible for visually impaired people was obviously not done with the advice or feedback from a visually impaired person; and the one thing I always come to is the little signs on the wall those little pieces of paper that I still have no idea what they say in terms of whether it's about making campus accessible because I can't read that.

Practicum Experience

School counseling practicums offer students valuable real-world experience, increasing their chances of landing good jobs after graduation (Blau et al., 2015). Positive interactions and communication between faculty and supervisors at practicum sites can create a well-rounded and supportive experience for students with disabilities (Nott & Zafft, 2006). However, Carrie's story highlighted that despite this potential, she did not receive the necessary support from her supervisor. This lack of support negatively impacted her experience in the practicum.

[site supervisor told me that I would be unable to do the job and that I should probably consider something else. When [site supervisor] said that to me, I was blindsided. I didn't expect her or anybody at that point to tell me... I think you should do something else, because I couldn't keep up with the other practicum students in their meeting with students, and doing schedule, and getting them. it was definitely probably a very dark time for me... it was a really bad time... I realized that I had to fight harder to prove myself because of my disability.

Discussion

This study explored the experiences of Carrie, a female counseling student with visual impairment (VI) using Chandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative structure approach. This approach allowed us to gain insights into her life story and the meaning she attributed to her experiences. The themes that emerged from her narrative provide a valuable case example that can inform counselor educators about the potential strengths and challenges faced by students with VI. It is important to note that this is a single case study, and the findings may not be generalizable to all students with VI.

Perceptions

One key theme centered on Carrie's perceptions of her disability and how they shaped her interactions with others. Her story echoed findings by Southall and Wittich (2012) in highlighting a lack of understanding and support from some individuals. However, Carrie's experience also showcased remarkable resilience and self-discovery. She actively redefined her identity, viewing her VI not as a limitation, but as a source of personal strength. This finding contrasts with studies suggesting low self-motivation in individuals with disabilities (Cavendish, 2017; Chubon, 1992; Deci & Ryan, 2008). This case demonstrates the potential for students with VI to develop strong determination and motivation in overcoming challenges.

Received Supports

This thematic section explores the experience of Carrie who highlighted the importance of support from various sources, including her school counselor, family, friends, and professors. Her narratives suggest that effective communication, positive attitudes, and access to relevant information were key components of this support. These, in turn, helped her navigate the challenges of stigma and frustration encountered when interacting with a specific societal segment. Carrie described receiving encouragement and acceptance, unwavering support, helpful suggestions, and empathetic listening. These experiences illustrate how she actively sought and utilized support systems, which empowered her to confront challenges related to her disability. This case aligns with existing research emphasizing the importance of support for individuals with disabilities (Olkin & Taliaferro, 2006; Sniatecki et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2017).

Challenges for a Visually Impaired Student

This theme explores the challenges faced by Carrie, beyond logistical difficulties like daily commutes.

Her experiences suggest that attitudinal barriers and accessibility issues can affect academic performance and limit access to rights. These findings align with prior research on students with disabilities (Foley-Nicpon & Lee, 2012; Lock & Layton, 2001; Olkin & Pledger, 2003). Carrie described feelings of inadequacy and frustration that hindered her ability to advocate for her needs. This limited self-advocacy, she acknowledged, could negatively impact her educational experience and ability to secure accommodations. These experiences highlight the importance of counselor training in disability issues, as documented in previous studies (Foley-Nicpon & Lee, 2012; Lock & Layton, 2001; Rivas, 2020; Olkin & Pledger, 2003). Consistent with existing research (Rivas, 2020; Rivas & Hill, 2018), the findings suggest a need for counselor education programs to integrate disability issues more fully into their curricula. Equipping students with disabilities with self-advocacy skills, both before and during their studies, could significantly improve their academic and career outcomes.

Limitations and Further Research

This study has several limitations. First, the narrative interview approach captured the experience of only one white female student, excluding perspectives of individuals with different backgrounds and disabilities. To gain a more comprehensive understanding, future research should involve participants from diverse programs (e.g., doctoral programs, various counseling specializations) and ethnic/cultural backgrounds. Exploring these dimensions would enrich our understanding of the experiences of counseling students with visual impairments (VI) within counselor education programs and their unique concerns. Second, the single participant limits the generalizability of the findings. Repeating this study with a larger and more diverse group of participants would provide a broader understanding of the experiences of VI students in counselor education programs. Lastly, Given the researchers' familiarity with the participant as faculty members, the possibility of social desirability bias (Grimm, 2010)

exists. The participant might have felt pressure to provide responses perceived as favorable towards the program or faculty. To mitigate this potential bias, the study (a) focused on the participant's perceptions and experiences within the program, rather than seeking evaluations of specific faculty or the program itself, and (b) employed member checking for verification. Future research could benefit from interviewers with no prior relationship to participants. This can further minimize potential power imbalances and encourage participants to provide more critical perspectives on their experiences.

Conclusions and Implications for Counselor Educators

This study highlights the need for comprehensive support for students with visual impairments (VI) within counselor education programs. While university disability services offer general assistance, counselor educators have a unique role in creating an inclusive learning environment. Here are specific strategies for supporting visually impaired students in counselor education programs:

1. Increasing faculty awareness and preparation
 - a. Regular faculty meetings: Include discussion on common access needs of students with VI, such as accessible course materials in audio formats, and/or enlarged print.
 - b. Professional development: Encourage faculty to attend workshops or trainings on supporting students with VI in the classroom. This can equip them with strategies for adapting teaching methods and utilizing assistive technologies effectively.
2. Building a support network
 - a. Faculty advisors with disability expertise: Assign VI students advisors with knowledge of accessible resources and experience working with students with disabilities. This advisor can provide

- tailored guidance and support throughout the program.
- b. Collaborative advocacy: Foster communication among faculty, disability services, academic departments, and practicum/internship sites. This collaborative network can identify and remove barriers to success for VI students. Share success stories and ongoing challenges to promote awareness and advocate for necessary accommodations.
3. Fieldwork considerations:
 - a. Proactive planning for accommodations: Counselor educators should work closely with VI students and practicum/internship sites well in advance to ensure necessary accommodations are in place. This could involve accessible technology in the field setting, training supervisors on working with VI students, and exploring the use of screen readers or assistive listening devices in client sessions.
 - b. Self-Advocacy skills development: While the participant's experience highlights the importance of self-motivation and self-advocacy, counselor educators can further empower VI students. Offer dedicated workshops or integrate self-advocacy training into the curriculum. This can equip students with the skills to confidently communicate their needs and navigate challenges within the program and future professional settings.
 4. Additional considerations
 - a. Include the participant's experience with self-advocacy as a case study within the program to illustrate the importance of these skills for VI students.
 - b. Explore the potential benefits of peer mentoring programs where experienced VI students can support incoming students.

By implementing these strategies and fostering a culture of inclusion, counselor education programs can better equip VI students with the skills and resources they need to succeed.

This research contributes to the growing body of evidence emphasizing the crucial role of cultural sensitivity in counselor education, particularly for including students with VI. Faculty, as educators, should proactively identify and address potential and existing barriers that students with VI may encounter, rather than adopting a reactive approach. Counselor educators should exhibit flexibility and sensitivity toward the logistical challenges that VI students may face, ensuring their needs are effectively met.

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