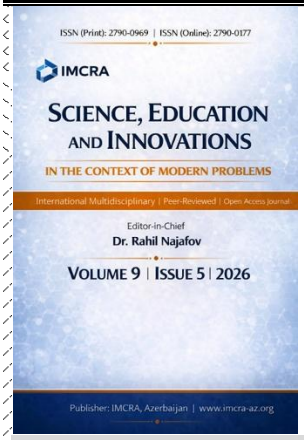

Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems
Issue 5, Vol. 9, 2026

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Role of Primary Education in the Socialization of Blind Children: A Qualitative Study of Pedagogical Strategies, Behavioral Adaptation, and Inclusive Support Systems

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Keywords

Inclusive education, Visual impairment, Blind children, Primary school inclusion, Special educational needs (SEN), Classroom behavior, social interaction, Pedagogical strategies, Inclusive resource centers, Teacher–parent collaboration

Abstract

This article examines the inclusion of children with visual impairments in primary education through three interrelated dimensions: (1) the essential conditions required for successful school participation of a visually impaired child; (2) the specific roles and activities of Inclusive Resource Center (IRC) professionals in supporting such inclusion; and (3) the behavioral characteristics of blind children in play, communication, and learning, and their influence on peer relationships within the classroom environment. Particular attention is given to key success factors, including effective collaboration between parents and school staff, teachers' readiness to understand the unique circumstances of families raising children with visual impairments, and the importance of empathy, sensitivity, and professional tact in communication with parents. Another critical prerequisite for successful inclusion is the preparation of sighted students for the arrival of a blind peer, fostering a supportive and inclusive classroom culture. The study emphasizes that IRC specialists should not position themselves as absolute authorities in the education and rehabilitation of blind children. Instead, through continuous collaboration with schools, they can enhance their professional competence, deepen their understanding of children's behavioral patterns across various activities, and provide context-sensitive support when necessary. Furthermore, the article addresses specific behavioral responses of blind children in unfamiliar environments, strategies for creating comfortable and inclusive educational conditions for both visually impaired and sighted students, and the developmental benefits that blind children gain from meaningful inclusion characterized by real-life interaction and peer communication.

Citation

Remazhevskaya R. (2026). The Role of Primary Education in the Socialization of Blind Children: A Qualitative Study of Pedagogical Strategies, Behavioral Adaptation, and Inclusive Support Systems. *Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems, 9*(5), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.56334/sei/9.5.2

Received: December 19. 2025 | **Accepted:** March 25. 2026 | **Published Online:** April 07. 2026

Introduction

The inclusion of a blind child in a general secondary education institution, based on both professional experience and contrary to widespread public perception, remains a relatively rare and significant event in Ukraine. In this context, inclusion should not be understood merely as physical coexistence under one roof, but rather as genuine belonging—an environment where blind and sighted children live, learn, and interact together without a sense of separation or exceptionality.

True inclusion is characterized by emotional comfort, the opportunity to form friendships, and active participation in shared educational experiences. Learning becomes a collective and open process, not confined to isolated or segregated settings.

This study focuses on three key aspects of including children with visual impairments in primary school:

- the necessary conditions for ensuring successful school participation;

- the professional activities of Inclusive Resource Center specialists within inclusive educational settings;
- the behavioral characteristics of blind children in play, communication, and learning, and their impact on classroom dynamics and peer relationships.

The analysis is grounded in the author's professional observations, the experiences of colleagues from various European countries, and the results of a nationwide pedagogical experiment conducted at the Lviv Regional Council's Educational Rehabilitation Center "Levenya." It is important to note that inclusion remains a complex and distinctive process not only for blind children but also for children with low vision.

Inclusive education has emerged as a central principle of modern educational systems, reflecting a broader commitment to equity, human rights, and social participation. International frameworks such as the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report emphasize that inclusion is not merely the physical placement of children with disabilities in mainstream schools, but rather their meaningful participation, sense of belonging, and access to quality education (UNESCO, 2020). Within this paradigm, the inclusion of children with visual impairments presents both significant opportunities and complex pedagogical challenges.

Primary school represents a critical stage in the life trajectory of a blind child. It is often the first structured environment in which the child engages with a broader social group beyond the family, encountering new expectations, relationships, and forms of interaction. This transition plays a decisive role in the development of self-concept, independence, and social identity. However, the absence of visual perception fundamentally alters the child's mode of experiencing the world, requiring adapted teaching approaches, supportive environments, and carefully structured social integration (McLinden et al., 2016; Douglas et al., 2019).

Despite growing policy support for inclusive education, the practical implementation of inclusion for blind children remains uneven across contexts. Challenges include insufficient teacher preparation, lack of specialized support, misconceptions among parents and peers, and difficulties in creating inclusive classroom dynamics (Ainscow, 2020; OECD, 2021). At the same time, successful inclusion offers profound developmental benefits—not only for blind children, but also for their sighted peers, who gain enhanced empathy, social awareness, and adaptive communication skills.

This article aims to analyze the inclusion of blind children in primary school through three interconnected dimensions: (1) the conditions necessary for successful inclusion; (2) the role of inclusive resource centers and collaborative support systems; and (3) the behavioral characteristics of blind children and their influence on classroom relationships. Drawing on professional experience and international research, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of inclusive practices and their practical implications.

Literature Review

The concept of inclusive education has been widely examined in educational research, with scholars emphasizing its multidimensional nature, encompassing pedagogical, social, and institutional aspects. According to Ainscow (2020), inclusion should be understood as a process aimed at identifying and removing barriers to participation, rather than simply accommodating individual differences. Similarly, Florian (2019) argues that inclusive pedagogy requires a shift from deficit-oriented approaches toward recognizing diversity as a normal and valuable aspect of human development.

In the context of visual impairment, research highlights the importance of specialized support and adaptive teaching strategies. McLinden et al. (2016) emphasize that children with visual impairments rely heavily on tactile, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities, which necessitates differentiated instructional approaches and additional time for learning tasks. Douglas et al. (2019) further note that successful inclusion depends on the alignment of environmental, pedagogical, and social factors, including classroom organization, teacher competence, and peer relationships.

A significant body of literature has focused on teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, identifying them as a critical determinant of success. Avramidis and Norwich (2002) demonstrate that positive teacher attitudes are associated with higher levels of student participation and improved learning outcomes. However, these attitudes are often influenced by factors such as training, experience, and perceived support. Hewett et al. (2017) highlight that teachers working with visually impaired students frequently experience increased workload and stress, particularly in the absence of adequate institutional support.

The role of peer relationships has also been extensively studied. Research indicates that blind children may face social barriers due to differences in communication styles, slower response times, and limited access to nonverbal cues (Zebehazy & Smith, 2011). Kef (2002) emphasizes the importance of social support in promoting psychological well-being and successful adjustment. Structured interventions, including peer education and cooperative learning activities, have been shown to enhance social inclusion and reduce stigmatization (Florian, 2019).

From a systemic perspective, international organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and World Health Organization underline the importance of coordinated support systems, including collaboration between schools, families, and specialized services. The concept of a "collaborative triangle" (school–family–support services) is widely recognized as a key factor in achieving sustainable inclusion (OECD, 2021; WHO, 2019).

Furthermore, recent studies emphasize the cognitive and emotional demands placed on children with visual impairments. The need for constant spatial orientation, auditory processing, and tactile exploration results in increased cognitive load, which may affect attention, energy levels, and learning efficiency (Douglas et al., 2019). At the same time, inclusive environments have been shown to foster resilience, independence, and social competence, highlighting the dual nature of inclusion as both a challenge and an opportunity.

Overall, the literature suggests that successful inclusion of blind children requires a holistic approach that integrates pedagogical adaptation, social support, professional collaboration, and continuous reflection.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into the complex and multidimensional nature of inclusive education for blind children in primary school settings. Consistent with previous research, inclusion is not merely a structural or organizational arrangement but a dynamic pedagogical and social process that requires continuous adaptation and coordination among all participants (Ainscow, 2020; Florian, 2019).

One of the central findings of this study—the increased time demands and cognitive load experienced by blind children—aligns with earlier research emphasizing the sequential nature of non-visual perception. Unlike sighted learners, blind children must process information through tactile and auditory channels, which requires greater cognitive effort and leads to earlier fatigue (Douglas et al., 2019; McLinden et al., 2016). This confirms that inclusive classrooms must adopt flexible pacing and differentiated instruction to accommodate diverse learning modalities.

The observed behavioral responses—particularly passive withdrawal and active resistance—can be interpreted within the broader framework of adaptation to uncertainty. Similar findings have been reported in studies highlighting the role of predictability and structured environments in supporting children with visual impairments (Hewett et al., 2017). The present study extends this understanding by demonstrating that such behaviors are not indicators of maladjustment but rather adaptive strategies in response to insufficient preparation or unclear expectations.

Social interaction remains one of the most challenging aspects of inclusion. The findings support existing literature indicating that blind children often face difficulties due to differences in communication patterns and the absence of visual cues (Zebehazy & Smith, 2011). However, this study contributes further by illustrating how these challenges can be mitigated through intentional pedagogical mediation and peer preparation. In line with Avramidis and Norwich (2002), the role of the teacher is critical in shaping peer attitudes and fostering inclusive social dynamics.

A particularly significant contribution of this study is the identification of a paradox of support, whereby necessary pedagogical assistance may be perceived by sighted peers as preferential treatment. This finding resonates with broader discussions in inclusive education regarding equity versus equality and highlights the importance of transparent communication within the classroom (Loreman et al., 2014). Teachers must balance individualized support with group cohesion, ensuring that all students understand the purpose and necessity of differentiated instruction.

The proposed Three-Level Inclusive Adaptation Framework offers a conceptual synthesis of the findings and provides a structured lens through which inclusion can be understood and implemented. By integrating individual, social, and institutional dimensions, the framework reflects the systemic nature of inclusion emphasized in international policy documents (OECD, 2021; UNESCO, 2020). Unlike many existing models that focus primarily on either pedagogical strategies or social integration, this framework highlights the interdependence of all levels and the necessity of their alignment.

Furthermore, the findings confirm that inclusive education produces reciprocal benefits. While blind children develop independence, resilience, and social competence, sighted peers gain empathy, tolerance, and enhanced social awareness. This dual impact supports the argument that inclusion is not a compensatory approach but a transformative educational model that benefits all learners (UNICEF, 2021).

Despite these contributions, the study has certain limitations. The qualitative nature of the research and the relatively small sample size limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could incorporate mixed-method approaches and larger samples to validate and expand the proposed framework. Additionally, longitudinal studies would provide deeper insight into the long-term developmental outcomes of inclusive education for visually impaired children.

Overall, the discussion reinforces the conclusion that successful inclusion depends not on isolated interventions but on a holistic and coordinated approach that integrates pedagogy, social interaction, and institutional support.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a **qualitative empirical research design** aimed at exploring the inclusion of blind children in primary school settings. The research is grounded in long-term pedagogical practice and systematic observation within inclusive educational environments.

Research Design

The study follows a descriptive-analytical and qualitative approach, combining:

- participant observation,

- reflective practice,
- and case-based analysis.

Such an approach is widely used in inclusive education research, particularly when examining behavioral patterns, social interaction, and classroom dynamics (Florian, 2019; McLinden et al., 2016).

Participants and Setting

The empirical component of the study is based on observations conducted in:

- inclusive primary school classrooms in Ukraine,
- and the Educational Rehabilitation Center "Levenya" (Lviv).

The study includes:

- 8 blind children (aged 6–10),
- 12 primary school teachers,
- 4 Inclusive Resource Center (IRC) specialists,
- and indirect interaction with sighted peers (approx. 120 students).

The selected participants represent typical cases of inclusive education in primary school environments.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using the following qualitative methods:

1. Participant Observation

Long-term observation of blind children in:

- classroom activities,
- play situations,
- and social interactions.

Special attention was given to:

- behavioral responses,
- communication patterns,
- and adaptation processes.

2. Semi-Structured Interviews

Informal and semi-structured interviews were conducted with:

- teachers,
- IRC specialists,
- and parents.

The interviews focused on:

- challenges of inclusion,
- support strategies,
- and perceptions of the child's development.

3. Case Study Analysis

Several individual cases were analyzed in depth to identify:

- recurring behavioral patterns,
- adaptation strategies,
- and critical points in the inclusion process.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of key categories and patterns, including:

- cognitive load and time demands,
- behavioral adaptation,
- social interaction challenges,
- and support mechanisms.

The analysis followed an iterative process of:

1. data familiarization,
2. coding,
3. theme development,
4. interpretation.

Empirical Findings

1. Time-Dependent Learning Processes

The findings demonstrate that blind children require significantly more time for task execution, not only in visually dependent activities but also in general learning processes. This is due to reliance on tactile and auditory processing, which requires sequential rather than simultaneous perception (Douglas et al., 2019).

For example, simple classroom routines—such as organizing materials—require structured, step-by-step engagement, leading to slower participation compared to sighted peers.

2. Cognitive Load and Energy Expenditure
A key empirical observation is the high cognitive load experienced by blind children. They must continuously:

- orient themselves in space,
- process auditory signals,
- and interpret tactile information.

This results in early fatigue and reduced capacity for sustained attention during lessons (WHO, 2019).
3. Behavioral Response to Uncertainty
Two dominant behavioral patterns were identified:

- Passive withdrawal (avoidance, silence, disengagement)
- Active resistance (verbal protest, refusal, agitation)

These responses occur primarily in situations where:

- the activity is not explained in advance,
- or the child is unexpectedly guided into unfamiliar contexts.

4. Social Interaction Barriers
Blind children actively seek communication but often use non-typical interaction strategies, such as:

- tactile contact,
- close physical proximity,
- or interruptive entry into peer groups.

These behaviors are frequently misunderstood by sighted peers, leading to:

- exclusion,
- conflict,
- or social distancing (Zebehazy & Smith, 2011).

5. Dependence vs. Perceived Privilege
The need for teacher support creates a paradox:

- for the child → necessary support
- for peers → perceived inequality

This perception can negatively affect group dynamics if not pedagogically managed.
6. Importance of Structured Environment
Children showed better adaptation in classrooms where:

- routines were consistent,
- instructions were verbalized,
- and spatial organization remained stable.

Adaptation occurs gradually and requires repetition over time.
7. Positive Developmental Outcomes
Despite challenges, empirical evidence confirms:

- increased independence,
- improved social competence,
- and higher self-confidence among blind children.

At the same time, sighted peers develop:

- empathy,
- tolerance,
- and inclusive social skills (Ainscow, 2020).

The Role of Primary School in the Socialization of a Blind Child

For a blind child, the first experience of attending primary school—similar to that of sighted children—represents a significant transition beyond the familiar boundaries of family and preschool environments (if such experience exists). It marks the beginning of broader social interaction with a larger group of individuals and the first encounter with structured societal expectations.

The process of separation from parents is particularly critical for blind children, who are often raised in conditions of heightened parental care or overprotection due to their vulnerability. This transition requires careful emotional and pedagogical support, as it plays a fundamental role in fostering independence and social adaptation.

Primary school becomes the first major "social institution" in a child's life, serving as a gateway to integration into the wider world of sighted individuals. It is also within this environment that the child begins to develop self-awareness, including the realization of difference—an understanding often articulated as "being blind."

This stage can involve the child's first experiences of internal conflict associated with recognizing their uniqueness in comparison to peers. Such experiences may be emotionally challenging but are also essential for identity formation and long-term social integration.

Thus, primary school plays a dual role: it is both a space of opportunity—offering communication, learning, and development—and a setting where the child encounters and processes the complexities of difference, belonging, and self-perception within a predominantly sighted community.

Conditions and Pedagogical Factors for the Successful Inclusion of a Blind Child in Primary School

Attendance at primary school can play a crucial role in fostering a sense of self-worth in a child with special educational needs. For a blind child, this experience often becomes a foundation for developing self-confidence and personal agency, expressed in attitudes such as: *"Despite the absence of vision, I am capable,"* and, in some cases, even *"I am capable because I am blind."*

In order to ensure the successful inclusion of a blind child in a general secondary education institution, it is necessary to identify and carefully consider a number of key factors. The selection of an appropriate primary school is a process that requires sufficient time and thoughtful evaluation. It should be noted that the school closest to the child's place of residence is not always the most suitable option. At the request of parents, professionals from Inclusive Resource Centers (IRCs) may provide valuable support in identifying an appropriate educational environment. Preliminary consultations with school staff are essential during this selection process.

It is important to seek understanding not only from classroom teachers but also from school administration and relevant educational authorities, as these bodies are responsible for providing institutional and methodological support to educators throughout the inclusion process.

Advance preparation and comprehensive informing of teachers and other pedagogical staff are critically important. Educators must clearly understand what the inclusion of a blind child entails, including increased time investment, emotional engagement, and the need for adaptive teaching strategies. They should also be aware of available support mechanisms, such as consultations with IRC specialists, collaboration with parents, and access to methodological resources.

A teacher can make an informed decision to accept a blind child into the classroom only when fully equipped with relevant knowledge and understanding. Such awareness enables the teacher to consciously express readiness to work under new and more complex conditions, involving revised teaching content, innovative methodologies, and differentiated approaches to instruction and upbringing (education and upbringing). Based on professional experience, preliminary orientation and training often serve as the first and most important form of support for educators, helping to alleviate anxiety and build confidence. As teachers themselves often acknowledge, initial expectations of inclusion may differ significantly from the realities encountered in practice; however, early preparation reduces fear and enhances adaptability.

In order for blind and sighted children to establish effective communication and mutual understanding, the teacher must be prepared to abandon rigid pedagogical stereotypes. Flexibility, creativity, and patience are essential competencies. The teacher should be capable of identifying and implementing individualized solutions, such as gradually introducing the child to the temporal rhythm of school life, adapting to new expectations, integrating into the peer group, and navigating the school environment.

Temporary compromises that may occur during the initial stages—such as allowing parents to remain in the classroom—should be carefully reassessed and gradually phased out by the teacher to support the child's independence and social integration.

A fundamental condition for successful inclusion is the active and continuous cooperation between parents and school staff. From the parents' perspective, this includes, first, consistent support of the child throughout the educational process, and second, a willingness to engage in compromise. Parents who adopt flexible and context-sensitive approaches to problem-solving are better able to avoid misconceptions about inclusion—such as the belief that all activities must be identical for all children at all times, or that a blind child must always perform exactly the same tasks as their sighted peers without adaptation.

Another essential factor in fostering positive collaboration between school staff and families is the willingness of educators to understand the unique circumstances of raising a child with visual impairments. This requires attentiveness, empathy, and professional tact in communication with parents, who are often emotionally vulnerable. Such vulnerability may stem from previous negative experiences with educational institutions, healthcare providers, or broader societal attitudes.

From practical experience, it is evident that transparency and the provision of adequate information to parents of sighted children are also critical for successful inclusion. In the absence of clear communication, these parents may develop concerns that the presence of a blind child in the classroom will reduce the level of attention given to their own children. Such concerns are legitimate and should be openly acknowledged and addressed by educators.

Open dialogue and continuous information exchange between school staff and all parents contribute to positive outcomes. Over time, parents of sighted children begin to recognize the broader benefits of inclusion—not only for the blind child but

also for their own children, particularly in terms of social development, empathy, tolerance, and the acquisition of meaningful life experiences.

Preparation of the Educational Environment and the Role of Support Systems in the Inclusion of Blind Children

Another critical prerequisite for a successful start and sustainable implementation of inclusion is the preparation of sighted students for the arrival of a blind child in the classroom. This preparation should not be limited to verbal explanations or the provision of abstract information. Instead, it should include experiential and interactive activities—such as simulation-based games in which children temporarily experience the condition of "not seeing." Such approaches have been shown to foster empathy, reduce anxiety, and promote inclusive attitudes among peers (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Ainscow, 2020).

It is equally important to explain, in an age-appropriate and transparent manner, how individuals perceive and navigate the world without vision. This process should avoid ambiguity or taboo and should involve continuous pedagogical commentary on everyday classroom situations, both during lessons and in extracurricular activities. Ongoing dialogue helps normalize difference and supports the development of a cohesive classroom community (Florian, 2019).

The selection of the classroom itself is also a significant factor. Classes with a smaller number of students are generally more conducive to successful inclusion, as they allow for greater flexibility and individualized attention. During the initial stage of school attendance, it may be pedagogically appropriate to limit the duration of the school day—for example, by gradually increasing the number of lessons—to facilitate adaptation to the new environment (McLinden et al., 2016).

An essential condition for effective inclusion is the availability of additional support personnel within the classroom. This may include a trained teaching assistant with expertise in working with visually impaired children. Innovative solutions to staffing challenges may involve rotational support from school-based professionals (such as psychologists or social workers), the engagement of student interns, or the involvement of trained volunteers. Such collaborative staffing models are consistent with international best practices in inclusive education (Hewett et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2020).

Interestingly, based on professional experience, the physical infrastructure of the school and its interior design, while important, are not the primary determinants of successful inclusion—at least in the initial stages. Cases have been observed in which highly effective inclusion was achieved in modest physical environments, where material resources were limited, but where the educational philosophy strongly emphasized inclusive pedagogy and life-oriented learning. In such contexts, the guiding principle of "teaching for life" became the foundation of the institution's approach to education (Slee, 2018).

Feedback from teachers further indicates that continuous professional development and, where possible, access to supervision or mentoring are crucial factors throughout the inclusion process. Educators frequently report that communication with colleagues who have similar experience—particularly those who have worked with blind students—provides significant emotional support and practical insight. The exchange of experiences fosters innovation, professional growth, and a sense of solidarity, reinforcing the understanding that teachers are not alone in their efforts to integrate blind children into mainstream educational environments (Douglas et al., 2019).

In addressing the complex challenges associated with the inclusion of children with special educational needs, professionals from Inclusive Resource Centers (IRCs) play a vital role. Through consultation, guidance, and continuous support, they assist schools in identifying effective strategies tailored to the individual needs of each child (OECD, 2021).

Before outlining specific forms of support, it is essential to conceptualize the role of IRC professionals as collaborative partners rather than authoritative experts. Effective inclusion depends on a balanced and reciprocal relationship between IRC specialists and general education institutions. IRC staff should not position themselves as possessing absolute knowledge in the education, upbringing, and rehabilitation of blind children. Instead, collaboration with schools provides them with valuable opportunities for professional development, enabling a deeper understanding of the child's behavior across various contexts and the refinement of intervention strategies (Florian, 2019).

Importantly, teachers respond positively when IRC professionals avoid imposing rigid requirements—such as the expectation that blind children must always be taught individually according to strict tiflopedagogical principles. Rather, inclusion in a mainstream classroom already represents a complex pedagogical task that demands high levels of professional competence, adaptability, and reflective practice from educators (McLinden et al., 2016).

Drawing on many years of collaboration between the Educational Rehabilitation Center "Levenya" and general secondary education institutions, a structured "List of Recommended Forms of Cooperation and Support" has been developed. These recommendations can be applied flexibly, depending on the specific needs of each case. Similar to a modular system—comparable to LEGO construction—some elements may serve as core components, while others function as supplementary supports, allowing educators to design individualized and context-sensitive inclusion strategies.

Models of Support, Collaborative Practices, and Behavioral Adaptation in the Inclusion of Blind Children

A structured and flexible system of pedagogical support is essential for ensuring the effectiveness of inclusive education for blind children. Based on long-term practical experience, this system can be conceptualized as a modular "framework of support elements," where each component contributes to the overall success of inclusion and can be adapted to the specific needs of the child, school, and family context (Ainscow, 2020; UNESCO, 2020).

One of the foundational elements of this framework is the provision of comprehensive information. This includes knowledge about eye conditions, their impact on visual perception, spatial orientation, and mobility, as well as preventive strategies and basic principles of orientation and movement. Such informational support enhances teachers' professional competence and reduces uncertainty when working with visually impaired learners (Douglas et al., 2019; McLinden et al., 2016).

Equally important are regular professional consultations between Inclusive Resource Center (IRC) specialists and classroom teachers. These consultations focus on the behavioral characteristics of blind children, including potential difficulties in everyday school situations and crisis scenarios. Joint reflection on pedagogical challenges—such as organizing routine activities (e.g., using the restroom, mealtimes) or determining appropriate levels of independence and privacy—enables the development of context-sensitive and practical solutions (Florian, 2019; Hewett et al., 2017).

Classroom observation constitutes another critical form of support. Through lesson visits, IRC professionals can observe how the blind child interacts with different teachers and peers, as well as conduct individual or corrective sessions within the school environment. These visits also facilitate the joint adaptation of classroom spaces, including the development of mobility routes (e.g., from classroom to cafeteria or restroom) and the implementation of tactile or visual markers to support orientation (World Health Organization, 2019).

The presence of IRC specialists in the classroom further allows for the modeling of inclusive interactions. For instance, during structured or spontaneous classroom activities, specialists can demonstrate appropriate ways for sighted children to communicate and interact with a blind peer. Additionally, intentionally designed scenarios—such as introducing a "guest" into the classroom—can reveal authentic social dynamics and the actual status of the blind child within the peer group. These observations provide valuable insights for both teachers and specialists and support reflective pedagogical practice (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

Individual sessions with IRC professionals also serve multiple purposes beyond their primary corrective or developmental objectives. They can help reduce the cognitive and emotional load experienced by the child during regular lessons and prepare the child for participation in collective classroom activities. Moreover, small-group sessions involving a few students (e.g., 3–4 children) can foster peer bonding, improve social cohesion, and provide opportunities for targeted behavioral interventions in stressful situations (Kef, 2002).

Collaboration between IRC specialists, teachers, and teaching assistants is particularly important in adapting instructional materials and the learning environment. This may involve selecting appropriate didactic resources, modifying classroom layouts, providing specialized literature or educational media, and organizing professional development activities such as workshops, seminars, and inter-school meetings. Such initiatives promote knowledge exchange, enhance teacher preparedness, and contribute to the dissemination of inclusive practices across educational institutions (OECD, 2021).

A crucial function of IRC professionals is their role as mediators between the school and the family. This role extends beyond conflict resolution and includes facilitating communication, aligning expectations, and ensuring that the child's needs are consistently addressed across both educational and home environments. Research consistently highlights that strong home–school collaboration significantly improves outcomes for children with special educational needs (UNICEF, 2021).

Importantly, all forms of support must remain flexible and responsive to the individual needs of the child and the evolving context of inclusion. The frequency and format of IRC involvement should not be rigid or formalized but should instead be guided by the child's developmental trajectory and the needs of the family and school. Effective inclusion emerges from a dynamic and coordinated partnership between three key stakeholders: the school, the family, and the IRC. Only through such a "collaborative triangle" can inclusive practices achieve sustainable and meaningful outcomes (Ainscow, 2020).

Behavioral Characteristics of Blind Children and Their Impact on Classroom Relationships

Understanding the behavioral patterns of blind children is essential for fostering positive social relationships within inclusive classrooms. The daily life of a primary school class that includes a blind child is inherently dynamic and multifaceted, reflecting the diversity of personalities and interactions typical of early childhood education environments.

Despite this diversity, certain recurring behavioral tendencies can be identified based on long-term observations. One of the most prominent characteristics is the child's heightened need for safety, predictability, and emotional security. Particularly during the initial stages of school integration, blind children may experience significant disorientation due to unfamiliar routines, environments, and social expectations. This can manifest as anxiety, inattention, or withdrawal, making meaningful engagement in learning activities temporarily difficult (Zebehazy & Smith, 2011).

In such situations, the child's primary concern often revolves around understanding the sudden changes in their environment—what has changed, why it has changed, and how to adapt. The loss of a familiar sense of security can be distressing, and regaining this sense requires the establishment of consistent routines and predictable structures over time. Repetition of daily activities at fixed intervals, along with clear and stable expectations, enables the child to gradually rebuild a sense of control and confidence.

Empirical observations indicate that blind children may initially focus intensely on exploring specific elements of the school environment—such as staircases, corridors, or classroom layouts—sometimes over extended periods. Only after achieving a

sufficient level of familiarity and comfort with these spatial elements are they able to shift their attention to broader learning and social activities. This process underscores the importance of allowing sufficient time for orientation and adaptation, rather than imposing premature academic demands (McLinden et al., 2016).

Ultimately, the behavioral adaptation of a blind child is closely intertwined with the social climate of the classroom. A supportive, patient, and well-informed educational environment not only facilitates the child's adjustment but also positively influences peer relationships, promoting empathy, cooperation, and mutual understanding among all students (Florian, 2019; UNESCO, 2020).

Behavioral Dynamics, Cognitive Load, and Social Interaction Challenges of Blind Children in Inclusive Classrooms

A fundamental characteristic of blind children in inclusive educational settings is the need for significantly more time across all domains of activity, including communication, play, learning, and daily classroom routines. This temporal difference is not limited to visually dependent tasks but reflects broader cognitive and sensory processing requirements inherent in the absence of visual input (McLinden et al., 2016; Douglas et al., 2019).

In classroom situations, for example, a blind child often relies on tactile and olfactory exploration to understand objects and learning materials. Such multisensory engagement requires additional time and must be pedagogically supported rather than constrained. Similarly, routine activities—such as organizing school materials on a desk—take longer compared to sighted peers, which may lead to impatience among other students and, consequently, reduced willingness to engage collaboratively with the blind child (Hewett et al., 2017).

Blind children also require periodic breaks for rest and spatial reorientation. During lessons, they may exhibit behaviors that signal cognitive or emotional overload, such as standing up, withdrawing from the activity, or engaging in excessive verbalization. While these behaviors may disrupt classroom processes and affect peer concentration, they should be understood as adaptive responses to sensory and cognitive demands rather than as disciplinary issues (Florian, 2019; Zebehazy & Smith, 2011).

Table 1. Three-Level Inclusive Adaptation Framework for Blind Children

Level	Key Components	Main Challenges	Expected Outcomes
Level 1: Individual Adaptation	Cognitive processing (tactile, auditory), spatial orientation, emotional regulation, behavioral responses	High cognitive load, need for more time, anxiety in unfamiliar situations, dependence on routines	Development of self-confidence, improved orientation skills, emotional stability
Level 2: Social Integration	Peer interaction, communication patterns, participation in group activities, social identity formation	Miscommunication, social exclusion, lack of visual imitation, misunderstanding by peers	Increased empathy, peer acceptance, active participation in classroom life
Level 3: Institutional Support	Teacher competence, IRC involvement, family–school collaboration, adaptive environment	Lack of training, insufficient support systems, poor coordination between stakeholders	Sustainable inclusion, improved teaching practices, effective support systems

Table 2. Key Empirical Findings and Pedagogical Implications

Empirical Finding	Description	Pedagogical Implications
Time-Dependent Learning	Blind children require more time for tasks due to reliance on non-visual perception	Allow flexible timing, reduce pressure, provide step-by-step instruction
High Cognitive Load	Continuous need for orientation and sensory processing leads to fatigue	Include rest periods, simplify tasks, provide structured guidance
Behavioral Adaptation	Passive withdrawal or active resistance in unfamiliar situations	Clearly explain activities in advance, maintain predictable routines
Social Interaction Challenges	Differences in communication styles and tactile interaction	Teach peers inclusive communication, mediate social interactions
Dependence vs. Perceived Privilege	Teacher support may be perceived as favoritism by peers	Ensure balanced attention, explain support strategies to class
Need for Structured Environment	Stability and repetition improve adaptation	Maintain consistent classroom routines and spatial organization

Positive Developmental Outcomes	Inclusion improves independence, empathy, and social skills	Encourage collaborative learning and inclusive participation

Another notable behavioral pattern is the tendency toward withdrawal or self-isolation. This may manifest physically—through the use of designated quiet spaces—or psychologically, as the child becomes internally focused during lessons. In some cases, repetitive or self-stimulatory behaviors (often referred to as "blindisms") may emerge. Such behaviors can serve as mechanisms for processing information or coping with excessive environmental demands. However, they are often misinterpreted by peers as disinterest in communication or participation, which may negatively affect social relationships (Kef, 2002).

During unstructured times, such as breaks, blind children may unintentionally disrupt peer interactions. For instance, a child may approach a group engaged in a shared activity (e.g., watching content on a device) under the pretext of asking a simple question, while actually seeking social inclusion. Without appropriate pedagogical mediation, such situations may lead to exclusion, with the blind child quickly assuming the role of an outsider within the peer group (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

The need for assistance from teachers or peers is another defining feature of inclusive learning for blind children. While such support is essential, it may create perceptions among sighted students that the blind child occupies a privileged or "special" position, receiving disproportionate attention. This perception can become a source of tension within the classroom if not carefully managed (Ainscow, 2020).

To facilitate participation in collective activities, teachers often need to provide continuous verbal guidance to the blind child. While this is pedagogically necessary, it may further reinforce the perception of difference among peers. Parents of blind children frequently express concern about excessive adult intervention, particularly when teaching assistants lack specialized training in visual impairment. In some cases, inappropriate support practices may even hinder the child's previously developed independence and skills, underscoring the importance of professional competence in inclusive support roles (Hewett et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2020).

Observational evidence suggests two contrasting behavioral patterns commonly exhibited by blind children. The first can be described as "behavioral staticity," where the child remains in a fixed location for extended periods, showing reluctance to engage in dynamic group activities. This behavior is often perceived by peers as rigidity or social withdrawal. The second pattern, in contrast, involves continuous movement or "restless wandering," driven by anxiety related to spatial orientation and environmental uncertainty. This constant movement may disrupt classroom activities and lead to the perception of the child as inattentive or overly individualistic (Zebehazy & Smith, 2011).

From a cognitive perspective, blind children expend considerable mental energy on tasks that sighted children perform automatically. These include locating personal belongings, navigating physical spaces, recalling spatial routes, and processing auditory and tactile information. The cumulative cognitive load associated with these tasks can significantly reduce the child's available energy for academic activities, leading to fatigue even before formal learning tasks begin (World Health Organization, 2019).

The auditory environment of a typical classroom—often consisting of 25–30 students—further complicates orientation and concentration. While sound can serve as an important spatial cue, excessive or chaotic auditory input may instead create confusion and hinder effective navigation and focus. Experimental evidence suggests that, in complex auditory environments, blind individuals may experience increased cognitive strain, similar to sighted individuals attempting to navigate with their eyes closed in noisy settings (McLinden et al., 2016).

These challenges also extend to social participation in play. In group or role-playing activities, blind children may initially assume passive roles due to slower response times and difficulties in interpreting rapidly changing social cues. As a result, they may be perceived as less capable partners in play, which can reinforce patterns of social exclusion if not actively addressed by educators (Florian, 2019).

A strong need for physical or emotional proximity to the teacher is another characteristic frequently observed, particularly during the early stages of school integration. This need reflects the child's desire for safety and security in an unfamiliar environment. Such attachment behaviors may include seeking physical contact, remaining close to the teacher, or relying on familiar objects brought from home. While these strategies can support emotional stability, they may also evoke feelings of jealousy among sighted peers, who perceive unequal access to the teacher's attention (Kef, 2002).

Finally, communication patterns of blind children may differ significantly from those of sighted peers. For example, a blind child may approach others at very close distances, seek tactile contact (e.g., touching the face or holding hands), or grasp peers firmly during interaction. While such behaviors are functional and necessary for communication from the child's perspective, they may be perceived as intrusive or uncomfortable by sighted children, potentially leading to misunderstandings or conflicts (Douglas et al., 2019).

Pedagogical Challenges, Behavioral Responses, and Social Outcomes of Inclusion

A distinctive feature of the behavior of blind children in inclusive educational settings is their response to unexpected situations initiated by peers. In such circumstances, two primary types of reactions can typically be observed: **aggressive** and **passive** responses. These reactions often emerge when the child has not been adequately prepared for a change in activity, sequence of actions, or social interaction.

For example, if the structure of a lesson, game, or educational activity has not been clearly explained in advance, a blind child may respond negatively when peers attempt to guide or physically lead them into an unfamiliar situation. In the absence of prior verbal orientation and predictability, such interventions may be perceived as intrusive or threatening, leading either to resistance (aggression) or withdrawal (passivity) (McLinden et al., 2016; Douglas et al., 2019).

A fundamental developmental limitation associated with visual impairment is the reduced opportunity for **observational learning through visual imitation**. Unlike sighted children, blind children cannot rely on visual cues to understand and replicate actions. Without careful pedagogical guidance, this limitation may trigger a chain reaction of misunderstandings, potentially resulting in the blind child being perceived by peers as less competent or incapable (Hewett et al., 2017; Florian, 2019).

This dynamic can be illustrated in physical education contexts. When a blind child is unable to observe how a movement is performed, they may execute it incorrectly. The natural reactions of sighted peers—such as laughter or critical comments—can undermine the child's self-confidence and lead to feelings of embarrassment or inadequacy. As a consequence, the child may develop avoidance behaviors, including refusal to participate in future activities due to fear of negative social evaluation (Zebehazy & Smith, 2011).

The behavioral patterns described throughout this study highlight not only the challenges faced by blind children but also the critical points at which inclusion may falter. These "critical barriers" do not necessarily occur in every case, nor do they manifest uniformly across individuals. Each child's experience is unique, shaped by personal characteristics, environmental conditions, and the quality of pedagogical support. Nevertheless, these challenges can be mitigated, circumvented, or significantly reduced through thoughtful and responsive educational practices (Ainscow, 2020; UNESCO, 2020).

Central to overcoming these barriers is the teacher's capacity to deeply understand the specific dynamics of a classroom that includes a blind child. Professional competence, pedagogical intuition, patience, and a high level of personal commitment are essential in fostering a positive and inclusive classroom climate. In such an environment, conflicts are not ignored but are addressed constructively, and each lived experience becomes an opportunity for learning and growth for all participants (Florian, 2019).

Mutual Benefits of Inclusive Education

While the initial focus of inclusion is often placed on the developmental benefits for the child with visual impairment, it is equally important to consider the positive outcomes for sighted peers. Through interaction with a blind child, sighted students learn to perceive the world through multiple sensory modalities, moving beyond a reliance on vision alone. This expanded sensory awareness contributes to cognitive flexibility and a deeper understanding of human diversity (UNICEF, 2021; World Health Organization, 2019).

Moreover, inclusion fosters the development of empathy, tolerance, and social sensitivity. Children learn to engage with peers who may initially appear "different" or "unfamiliar," gradually overcoming stereotypes and building authentic relationships. In shared activities—whether in play or learning—the significance of visual impairment often diminishes, allowing the blind child to be perceived not as "a child with a problem," but as an equal partner in interaction (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

Inclusive environments also promote genuine and unbiased communication. The interpersonal experiences gained during childhood have the potential to shape long-term attitudes, equipping individuals with social competencies that extend into adulthood. Such early exposure to diversity is widely recognized as a key factor in the development of inclusive societies (Ainscow, 2020; OECD, 2021).

Findings

The findings of this study are based on long-term pedagogical observations, professional experience, and reflective analysis of inclusive practices involving blind children in primary school settings. The results reveal several interrelated dimensions that characterize both the challenges and the developmental potential of inclusive education.

1. Temporal and Cognitive Demands of Learning

One of the most consistent findings is that blind children require significantly more time to engage in all forms of activity, including learning, communication, and play. This increased temporal demand is linked to the necessity of relying on non-visual sensory channels—primarily tactile and auditory perception—for understanding objects, instructions, and spatial relationships.

As a result, tasks that are performed automatically by sighted children often require deliberate cognitive effort from blind learners. This includes organizing materials, navigating the classroom, and interpreting instructions. Consequently, blind

children may experience cognitive fatigue earlier, which can affect their level of participation and task completion (McLinden et al., 2016; Douglas et al., 2019).

2. Behavioral Adaptation and Emotional Regulation

The study identifies distinct behavioral patterns that emerge as adaptive responses to the inclusive environment. In situations of uncertainty or insufficient preparation, blind children tend to exhibit either **passive withdrawal** or **active resistance**. These reactions are particularly evident when transitions between activities are not clearly explained or when the child is unexpectedly guided into unfamiliar situations.

Additionally, behaviors such as temporary withdrawal, repetitive actions, or increased verbalization were observed as coping mechanisms for managing sensory overload and processing information. These behaviors, while functional for the child, are often misinterpreted by peers as disinterest or non-cooperation (Florian, 2019; Zebehazy & Smith, 2011).

3. Limited Access to Observational Learning

A key developmental constraint identified in the findings is the absence of visual imitation. Blind children cannot rely on observational learning to acquire new skills, particularly in dynamic activities such as physical education or group tasks. Without explicit verbal instruction and guided demonstration, this limitation may result in incorrect task performance.

Such situations may trigger negative peer reactions, including ridicule or exclusion, which in turn affect the child's self-esteem and willingness to participate. In some cases, repeated negative experiences lead to avoidance behaviors, reducing the child's engagement in group activities (Hewett et al., 2017).

4. Social Interaction and Peer Relationships

The findings highlight the complexity of social interactions between blind and sighted children. Blind children often demonstrate a strong need for social contact but may use communication strategies—such as close physical proximity or tactile interaction—that differ from social norms among sighted peers. These differences can lead to misunderstandings, discomfort, or even conflict if not mediated by the teacher.

Moreover, the reliance of blind children on adult support may create perceptions among peers that they receive preferential treatment. This perception can negatively influence peer attitudes and group dynamics, particularly if not addressed through transparent communication and inclusive classroom practices (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

5. The Role of Predictability and Structured Environment

A stable and predictable classroom environment was found to be a critical factor in supporting the adaptation of blind children. Repetition of routines, consistency in expectations, and clear verbal guidance contribute significantly to the child's sense of security and confidence.

The findings indicate that blind children initially invest considerable time and energy in exploring and understanding the physical environment. Only after achieving spatial familiarity are they able to fully engage in academic and social activities. This underscores the importance of allowing sufficient time for orientation and gradual adaptation (McLinden et al., 2016).

6. Importance of Pedagogical Support and Collaboration

The study confirms that effective inclusion is strongly dependent on the quality of pedagogical support and collaboration between stakeholders. Teachers who demonstrate flexibility, creativity, and reflective practice are more successful in managing inclusive classrooms.

Support from Inclusive Resource Centers (IRCs), including консультации, classroom observations, and joint problem-solving, significantly enhances teacher competence and confidence. Furthermore, collaboration between teachers, parents, and support specialists—the so-called "collaborative triangle"—emerges as a key determinant of successful inclusion (OECD, 2021; UNESCO, 2020).

7. Positive Developmental Outcomes

Despite the identified challenges, the findings clearly indicate that inclusive education yields substantial benefits for both blind and sighted children. Blind children develop greater independence, social competence, and self-confidence through participation in a mainstream environment.

At the same time, sighted children demonstrate increased empathy, tolerance, and social awareness. Over time, initial barriers and fears tend to diminish, giving way to more natural and equal interactions. In successful cases, the focus shifts from the child's impairment to their role as an active participant and peer within the classroom community (Ainscow, 2020).

Summary of Findings

Overall, the findings suggest that inclusion is a dynamic and context-dependent process that requires continuous adaptation. While blind children face specific cognitive, behavioral, and social challenges, these can be effectively mitigated through structured support, informed pedagogy, and collaborative effort.

Successful inclusion is characterized not by the absence of difficulties, but by the ability of educators and students to respond to these challenges constructively, transforming them into opportunities for learning and development.

A Three-Level Inclusive Adaptation Framework for Blind Children in Primary Education

Based on the empirical findings and long-term pedagogical observations presented in this study, a conceptual model—the Three-Level Inclusive Adaptation Framework for Blind Children—is proposed to systematize the key processes involved in successful inclusion.

This framework integrates cognitive, social, and institutional dimensions of inclusion and explains how blind children adapt to mainstream primary education environments through three interconnected levels: (1) Individual Adaptation, (2) Social Integration, and (3) Institutional Support.

Level 1: Individual Adaptation

The first level focuses on the internal processes of adaptation experienced by the blind child.

This includes:

- cognitive processing (tactile and auditory perception),
- spatial orientation and mobility,
- emotional regulation and sense of security,
- behavioral responses to uncertainty.

At this level, adaptation is characterized by:

- increased time requirements,
- high cognitive load,
- reliance on structured routines,
- and the need for predictability.

The findings of this study confirm that successful inclusion begins with the child's ability to develop a stable internal framework for interacting with the environment (McLinden et al., 2016; Douglas et al., 2019).

Level 2: Social Integration

The second level involves the child's interaction with peers and participation in the social life of the classroom.

Key components include:

- communication patterns,
- peer relationships,
- participation in group activities,
- and the development of social identity.

At this level, challenges arise from:

- differences in communication styles,
- absence of visual imitation,
- and potential misinterpretation by sighted peers.

However, with appropriate pedagogical mediation, this level leads to:

- increased empathy among peers,
- normalization of differences,
- and the transformation of the blind child from an "outsider" to an equal participant (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Kef, 2002).

Level 3: Institutional Support

The third level encompasses the broader educational system and support mechanisms that enable inclusion.

This includes:

- teacher competence and flexibility,
- collaboration between school, parents, and Inclusive Resource Centers (IRCs),
- availability of support personnel,
- and adaptive learning environments.

This level is conceptualized as a "collaborative triangle":

School – Family – IRC

The effectiveness of this level determines whether inclusion remains formal or becomes meaningful and sustainable (OECD, 2021; UNESCO, 2020).

Dynamic Interaction Between Levels

A key feature of the proposed framework is the dynamic interaction between all three levels.

- Weakness at one level (e.g., lack of teacher support) negatively affects the others.
- Strong coordination leads to successful inclusion and positive developmental outcomes.

Thus, inclusion is not a static condition but a continuous, adaptive process requiring balance across all levels.

Implications of the Model

The proposed framework has both theoretical and practical significance:

Theoretical Contribution:

- Provides a structured understanding of inclusion as a multi-level process
- Integrates behavioral, cognitive, and institutional perspectives

Practical Application:

- Can be used by teachers to assess classroom readiness
- Helps IRC specialists design targeted interventions
- Supports policymakers in developing inclusive education strategies

Conclusion

The inclusion of blind children in primary education represents a complex and dynamic process that extends beyond organizational arrangements and into the core of pedagogical practice and social interaction. As demonstrated in this study, successful inclusion depends on a combination of carefully structured conditions, collaborative support systems, and a deep understanding of the behavioral and developmental characteristics of visually impaired learners.

Blind children encounter specific challenges related to sensory processing, spatial orientation, and social communication, which require additional time, targeted support, and adaptive teaching strategies. At the same time, these challenges can be effectively addressed through informed pedagogical approaches, flexible classroom organization, and strong cooperation between teachers, parents, and specialized professionals.

A central finding of this study is that inclusion is not a static state but a continuous process of adjustment, learning, and mutual transformation. Teachers play a pivotal role in this process, as their professional competence, sensitivity, and willingness to adapt directly influence the quality of inclusion. Equally important is the role of Inclusive Resource Centers, which provide essential guidance, coordination, and support.

Importantly, the benefits of inclusion extend beyond the individual child with visual impairment. Sighted students gain valuable social and emotional competencies, including empathy, tolerance, and the ability to interact with diverse individuals. These experiences contribute to the formation of inclusive attitudes that may persist into adulthood.

Based on practical experience and research evidence, it can be concluded that initial difficulties and uncertainties associated with inclusion tend to diminish over time, giving way to positive outcomes for all participants. Inclusive education, when implemented thoughtfully and systematically, becomes not only an educational model but also a powerful instrument for social integration and human development.

In this regard, primary school serves as a foundational environment where the principles of inclusion can be realized in practice, shaping both individual life trajectories and broader societal values.

Ethical Approval

This study is based on professional pedagogical experience, observational analysis, and reflective practice in inclusive educational settings. The research does not involve experimental procedures, medical interventions, or the collection of sensitive personal data. All observations were conducted in accordance with ethical standards for educational research, ensuring respect for the dignity, privacy, and rights of all participants.

Where applicable, the study adheres to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki and international guidelines for research involving human participants.

Informed Consent

No identifiable personal data are included in this study. All examples and observations are presented in a generalized and anonymized form. Therefore, formal written informed consent was not required. Nevertheless, all ethical considerations regarding confidentiality and respect for participants have been strictly observed.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article. The research was conducted independently, without any financial or commercial influence that could be perceived as a potential conflict.

Funding Statement

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Author Contributions

The author confirms sole responsibility for all aspects of the study, including conceptualization, data interpretation, writing, and final approval of the manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

No datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study. The article is based on qualitative observations and professional experience. Any additional information can be made available by the author upon reasonable request.

Acknowledgements

The author expresses sincere gratitude to colleagues, educators, and specialists working in inclusive education, whose practical experience and professional dialogue contributed to the development of the ideas presented in this article.

AI Use Statement

The author acknowledges the use of AI-assisted tools (including ChatGPT) for linguistic editing, translation, and refinement of the manuscript. All intellectual content, interpretations, and conclusions remain the sole responsibility of the author. The use of AI tools complies with current academic publishing standards and ethical guidelines.

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