

Maslow's Theory-Based Teaching Strategy Approach in Supporting the Well-Being of Students with Visual Impairments

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Abstract: *This article explores teaching strategies based on Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory in the context of special education for students with visual impairments. The article reviews previous studies examining how Maslow's framework can be applied to address physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization within educational settings. The study emphasizes that teaching strategies aligned with these fundamental needs can enhance the well-being, motivation, and learning potential of students with visual impairments.*

Keywords: Maslow's hierarchy of needs, teaching strategies, special education, students with visual impairments, well-being

1. Introduction

Special education is one of the important aspects of the education system which aims to ensure fair and comprehensive access to learning for all pupils, including students with visual impairments. These groups often face various challenges in reaching their full potential, especially in the classroom and inclusive education programs.

The existence of inclusive education aims to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their physical, sensory, or cognitive abilities. Among students with special educational needs (SEN), those with visual impairments often face unique challenges in accessing learning materials, engaging in classroom activities, and social engagement. These difficulties are not only at the academic level but extend deeply into emotional and psychological well-being, and even result in reduced motivation, isolation and withdrawal from the learning process. Therefore, an effective and comprehensive teaching strategy is needed to ensure that their emotional, social and academic needs are met holistically. One approach that has the potential to support pupils' well-being and motivation is through the application of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory in daily teaching practice.

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a humanistic theory of motivation, offering a valuable framework to help educators understand and address students' needs holistically. Maslow asserted that for an individual to achieve their potential, known as self-actualization, basic needs must first be met, including physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-fulfillment (Maslow, 1943; Maslow, 1970). In the context of special education, particularly for students with visual impairments, Maslow's theory is highly relevant

in guiding the planning and implementation of instructional strategies that not only focus on content delivery, but also support students' emotional, psychological, and social development in the learning process.

Despite increasing efforts towards inclusive practices in education, the application of humanistic theories such as Maslow's in the specific context of visual impairment is still underexplored. There is an urgent need to bridge this gap by reviewing pedagogical approaches that can be aligned with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to ensure that students with visual impairments not only achieve academic success but also develop a strong sense of security, belonging, and personal value.

This article aims to explore how Maslow's theory can inform the development of effective pedagogical strategies to support the well-being of students with visual impairments, while providing educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers with a robust theoretical foundation and practical considerations for fostering inclusive learning environments.

2. Methodology of Literature Review

This study employed a structured narrative review design with systematic search procedures to enhance methodological transparency and academic rigor. Although the article is conceptual in orientation, systematic elements were incorporated to ensure that the selection and synthesis of literature were conducted in a structured and replicable manner. The review process was guided by principles derived from the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework to strengthen credibility and clarity in reporting.

The literature search was conducted exclusively using the Scopus database. Scopus was selected due to its extensive indexing of peer-reviewed journals in education, psychology, inclusive education, and special education research. The search covered publications from 1943 to 2024. The starting year was intentionally set to 1943 to include Maslow's foundational theoretical work, while the upper limit ensured that recent empirical and conceptual developments in inclusive education and visual impairment studies were incorporated.

A combination of keywords was used to refine the search process. The primary search terms included "Maslow's hierarchy of needs," "visual impairment," "visually impaired students," "special education," "inclusive education," "well-being," and "teaching strategies." Boolean operators such as AND and OR were applied to improve the relevance and precision of search results. Search strings were adjusted within the Scopus database to align with indexing terms and subject classifications.

To ensure academic relevance and rigor, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. Studies were included if they were peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in Scopus, written in English, and focused on students with visual impairments or special educational needs within educational contexts. Eligible studies were required to discuss psychosocial well-being, motivational aspects, inclusive pedagogy, instructional strategies, or theoretical applications relevant to Maslow's humanistic framework. Studies were excluded if they focused solely on medical or clinical treatment of visual impairment, were non-peer-reviewed sources, or lacked clear relevance to educational practice.

The screening and selection process followed four structured phases inspired by the PRISMA framework identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. The initial search generated a pool of potentially relevant studies which were subsequently screened based on titles and abstracts. Articles that met the preliminary relevance criteria were subjected to full-text review. Following the eligibility assessment, a total of sixteen 16 articles met all inclusion criteria and were selected for detailed analysis and synthesis. This structured selection process enhanced transparency while maintaining the conceptual focus of the review.

Data from the selected studies were analyzed using a thematic synthesis approach. The findings were systematically categorized according to Maslow's hierarchical levels of needs, namely physiological and safety needs, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Recurring patterns related to psychosocial well-being, inclusive teaching strategies, and motivational development were identified and mapped onto Maslow's theoretical structure. This analytical mapping enabled the integration of empirical findings with humanistic theory and facilitated the development of a structured pedagogical interpretation tailored to students with visual impairments.

By incorporating systematic search procedures and PRISMA-guided screening phases, this review strengthens methodological clarity while retaining its conceptual orientation. The structured approach enhances the academic credibility of the manuscript and aligns it more closely with publication standards expected in indexed journals.

3. Study Background / Problem Statement

Worldwide, approximately 2.2 billion individuals face some degree of visual impairment, with the vast majority being children who are still in schooling (Tsouktakou et al., 2024). These students often face barriers to education, including limited access to resources, challenges in adapting to traditional teaching methods, and inadequate support to develop independence in education (Pagliara et al., 2024; Alsudairy & Eltantawy, 2024).

Students with visual impairments face a variety of obstacles that hinder their learning process and autonomy. These challenges stem from a lack of accessible resources, limitations in teaching tools, and over-reliance on educators or assistants. One of the most pressing challenges is the lack of user-friendly instructional materials that can be customized specifically for students with visual impairments. Resources such as braille materials are often expensive or unavailable, limiting access to important educational content. For example, according to Tsouktakou et al. (2024), the lack of accessible resources creates significant barriers, especially for students in underfunded or underserved educational settings.

Students with visual impairments face difficulties not only in terms of access to teaching materials, but also in social and emotional aspects. A study by Nazir (2023) found that low-vision pupils showed lower levels of self-esteem than typical pupils, due to a lack of social interaction and a sense of isolation in the school environment. This shows the need for a teaching approach that takes into account the overall well-being of students, not just academic achievements. According to Apio et al. (2023), the experience of students with visual impairments in an inclusive system depends a lot on how well their basic needs are met, including a sense of security, acceptance, and value. However, in current practice, the teaching strategies used still do not emphasize the psychological and emotional dimensions of the students.

Another critical issue is the difficulty of accessing visual information used in the learning process, such as graphics, charts, and visualizations. These elements are important in many educational contexts, however Students with visual impairments is often excluded due to the lack of tactile or audio alternatives. Pagliara et al. (2024) emphasize that this accessibility gap prevents Students with visual impairments from fully engaging with content and achieving the same level of understanding as their peers.

Additionally, Students with visual impairments often rely on their teachers or assistants, which limits their independence. This high level of dependency not only restricts opportunities for self-directed learning but also hinders personal growth and the development of decision-making skills. Alsudairy and Eltantawy (2024) emphasize the importance of fostering independence among these students to ensure their academic and social growth.

Additionally, the relatively limited accessible teaching aids, such as braille graphics and touch materials, pose another significant challenge. These tools are important for interpreting visual information, often expensive and difficult to source. As Mina et al. (2023) noted, the lack of such tools exacerbates educational gaps, as students struggle to engage with content that involves diagrams, charts, or other visual elements.

Such barriers often result in reduced participation, low self-confidence, and emotional disengagement from learning. Although physical facilities such as Braille textbooks and assistive technologies are gradually becoming more available, there remains a significant gap in addressing the emotional and psychological well-being of students with visual impairments within classroom contexts (Zolotareva, 2024). Therefore, the application of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory offers a strong conceptual foundation for developing a more holistic and responsive teaching approach that addresses both academic and well-being dimensions.

Existing studies in special education are mostly focused on academic outcomes, often ignoring the internal experiences of students with disabilities. Emotional security, a sense of belonging, and self-esteem are important components of a student's overall development, yet these aspects are often overlooked in pedagogical planning. When these basic human needs are not met, pupils with special needs with visual disabilities may feel isolated, undervalued and disengaged, which can hinder both their academic achievement and social inclusion.

Maslow's theory highlights the sequential nature of human motivation, emphasizing that high-order cognitive engagement cannot occur without first meeting basic and psychological needs. In the context of students with visual impairments, this suggests that effective teaching strategies must not only deliver academic content but also intentionally foster feelings of safety, acceptance, and personal growth. Unfortunately, some pedagogical models explicitly integrate Maslow's hierarchy into classroom practices tailored for students with visual impairments.

This gap provides an opportunity for theoretical and practical exploration of how Maslow's framework can be adapted to meet the needs of students with visual impairments. By aligning teaching strategies with a hierarchy of needs, educators have the potential to foster a more inclusive and empowering learning environment that supports both academic success and holistic well-being. This article addresses that gap by proposing a pedagogical approach informed by Maslow's humanistic psychology.

4. Literature Review

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory has long been used in various educational contexts to understand students' motivation and well-being. Maslow (1943) stated that humans are driven by multi-layered needs, ranging from basic physiological needs to the achievement of self-actualization.

In the context of special education, this approach provides a holistic framework for understanding the learning needs of students with special needs, particularly those with visual impairments. Caron et al. (2023) through their systematic review assert that carefully planned social interventions can help build the interpersonal skills of low-vision pupils, which in turn meets the needs of affection and belonging.

Meanwhile, Olukotun et al. (2023) found that social support from peers, family, and teachers is closely related to the self-esteem level of students with special needs. Erten and Savage (2023) emphasize the relationship between social-emotional competence and the effectiveness of inclusive education, which parallels emotional needs and self-esteem in Maslow's hierarchy.

Furthermore, O'Connor et al. (2024) show that the active involvement of Students with visual impairments in the learning process is directly influenced by the school's ability to provide a safe, welcoming, and supportive environment. These findings reinforce the justification for the use of Maslow's theory in formulating teaching strategies that are inclusive, comprehensive and emphasize the psychosocial aspects of students, in line with the goal of education for all.

5. Critical Evaluation of Maslow's Theory in the Context of Special Education for Students with Visual Impairments.

While Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs provides a valuable humanistic framework for understanding student motivation and well-being, its application in the context of special education particularly for students with visual impairments, requires critical consideration.

One of the primary critiques of Maslow's theory concerns its hierarchical and linear structure. Maslow (1943; 1970) proposed that lower-level needs must be fulfilled before higher-order needs such as self-actualization can be achieved. However, contemporary educational research suggests that human motivation does not always follow a strictly sequential pattern. For students with visual impairments, emotional belonging and social acceptance may become immediate priorities even when certain physiological or environmental needs remain partially unmet. This indicates that needs may operate in a more dynamic and overlapping manner rather than in rigid stages.

Furthermore, Maslow's theory has been criticized for its Western-centric orientation. Developed within an individualistic cultural framework, the theory emphasizes personal growth and self-actualization as ultimate goals. In collectivist societies, including many Asian contexts well-being may be more closely tied to relational harmony, community inclusion, and interdependence. Therefore, applying Maslow's framework within the Malaysian special education context requires cultural sensitivity and contextual adaptation to ensure that social belonging and collective identity are appropriately emphasized.

Another limitation relates to the theory’s limited consideration of disability-specific factors. Maslow’s original framework does not explicitly address structural barriers, accessibility constraints, or systemic inequalities that students with visual impairments often face. For example, environmental accessibility, assistive technologies, and inclusive school policies are critical determinants of well-being but are not directly articulated within Maslow’s original hierarchy. Consequently, educators must reinterpret physiological and safety needs to include accessible classroom design, adaptive materials, and supportive institutional practices.

Despite these limitations, Maslow’s theory remains conceptually powerful when applied flexibly. Rather than viewing the hierarchy as rigid, it may be more productive to interpret it as an interconnected motivational framework. When adapted to inclusive education settings, Maslow’s model can serve as a guiding structure for designing pedagogical strategies that simultaneously address emotional security, social belonging, self-esteem, and opportunities for personal growth.

In the context of students with visual impairments, this adaptive interpretation enables educators to move beyond purely academic concerns and intentionally cultivate environments that promote psychological safety, dignity, and empowerment. Therefore, while Maslow’s hierarchy should not be applied mechanically, its humanistic principles provide a valuable foundation for developing holistic teaching strategies in special education.

6. Discussion

This section discusses how the principles of Maslow's Theory can be applied strategically in the teaching of pupils with special visual needs. By integrating physiological needs through to self-actualization into classroom practice, teachers can build a learning environment that supports students’ overall well-being. This alignment reflects humanistic and differentiated instructional approaches that emphasize responding to learners’ diverse needs and readiness levels (Tomlinson, 2014). The following table illustrates the alignment between Maslow’s levels of need and specific teaching strategies for pupils with visual impairments.

Table 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Application of Teaching Strategies for Students with Visual Impairments

<i>Maslow's Levels of Need</i>	<i>Teaching Strategies for Students with visual impairments.</i>
Physiology and Safety	The classroom layout is mobile-friendly and the sufficiency of materials such as braille machines and audio materials.
Affection and Belonging	Group activities and peer mentoring.
Appreciation	Positive feedback and encourage self-learning.
Self-actualization	Interest-based projects and goal setting.

6.1 Physiological and Safety Requirements

Students with visual impairments need access to appropriate teaching aids such as large print, Braille, or audio resources. The physical environment also needs to be arranged in a mobility-friendly manner. According to Nyame (2023), constraints such as unfriendly classroom layouts and lack of accessible learning materials are major obstacles to effective learning. Therefore, teachers need to provide a well-planned and safe classroom, as well as use appropriate visual aids to support learning.

6.2 The Need for Love and Belonging

Feelings of acceptance and love among peers and teachers are very important for Students with visual impairments. Parker (2023) emphasizes that feelings of isolation are often experienced by Students with visual impairments, which can affect motivation and enthusiasm for learning. Social support from teachers and peers plays an important role in forming healthy relationships and building self-confidence (Olukotun et al., 2023). Collaborative activities and engagement in small, inclusively structured groups can meet these needs of love and belonging.

6.3 Requirements for Appreciation

Valued student feels more confident to participate in the learning process. A study by Nazir (2023) found that Students with visual impairments had lower levels of self-esteem, which impacted their academic achievement. Teachers need to practice positive reinforcement and recognition of non-academic achievements such as vocal, musical or communication skills. Providing space for students to master an assignment independently also has a big impact on the development of self-esteem.

6.4 Self-actualization

The highest rank in Maslow's hierarchy is the achievement of self-potential. In the context of Students with visual impairments, this can be achieved through engagement in interest-based learning, personal learning goal setting, and self-reflection. According to O'Connor et al. (2024), pupils are more likely to engage in learning when they are given the opportunity to voice their views and actively participate in the classroom. Education that empowers students to pursue their aspirations without physical limitations is key to achieving self-actualization.

7. Conceptual Framework Integrating Maslow's Hierarchy and Special Education Pedagogy.

To address the structural breadth of this article and to clarify the interrelationship between theoretical foundations and practical implementation, a conceptual framework is proposed to integrate Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs with special education pedagogy for students with visual impairments.

The framework conceptualizes Maslow's hierarchical needs as the foundational motivational structure guiding pedagogical planning. At the first level, physiological and safety needs are interpreted in educational terms as accessible classroom design, mobility-friendly environments, and the provision of adaptive learning materials such as Braille and assistive technologies.

At the second level, love and belonging are operationalized through inclusive peer interaction, collaborative learning structures, and emotionally supportive teacher-student relationships. The third level, esteem, is reflected in pedagogical strategies that foster autonomy, positive reinforcement, and recognition of both academic and non-academic strengths.

Finally, self-actualization is facilitated through interest-based projects, goal-setting practices, and opportunities for meaningful participation in learning processes. Beyond classroom implementation, the framework expands across three interconnected layers: teacher-level practice, school-level leadership, and policy-level support. Teachers translate motivational needs into daily instructional strategies. School administrators ensure institutional structures

and resources support inclusive practice. Policymakers provide systemic reinforcement through well-being-oriented educational policies and accessibility standards.

This integrative model demonstrates how Maslow’s humanistic principles can be operationalized within a multi-level educational ecosystem. By visually and conceptually linking theory, pedagogy, institutional support, and policy alignment, the framework strengthens the coherence and focus of the article while clarifying its practical and systemic implications.

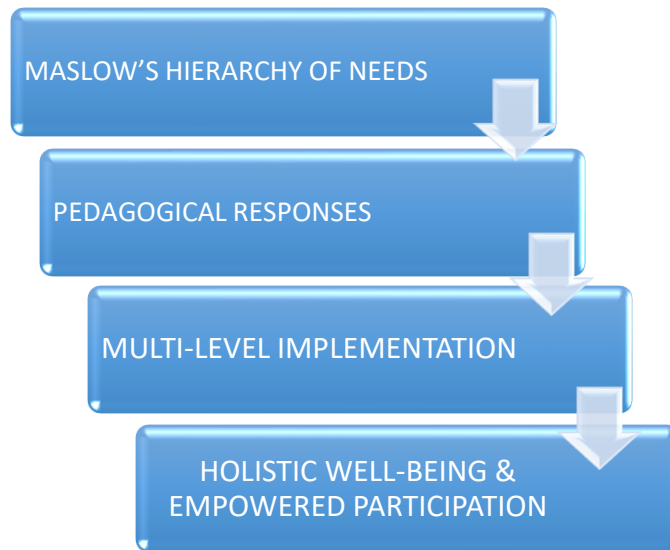


Figure 1: illustrates the conceptual integration between Maslow’s hierarchical needs, pedagogical responses, and multi-level educational implementation leading to holistic well-being outcomes.

8. Contribution of the Study

This article makes several important contributions to the field of special education, particularly in the context of students with visual impairments.

First, from a theoretical perspective, the study extends Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs beyond its traditional psychological interpretation by contextualizing it within inclusive and special education settings. While Maslow’s framework has been widely discussed in general educational psychology, its structured integration into pedagogical strategies for students with visual impairments remains limited. This article bridges that gap by systematically mapping hierarchical needs onto classroom-based instructional responses.

Second, from a practical standpoint, the article provides educators with a structured humanistic framework to guide inclusive teaching practices. By aligning physiological, emotional, social, and self-actualization needs with specific pedagogical strategies, the study offers a conceptual model that teachers can operationalize in classroom contexts. This contributes to the development of well-being-centered instructional design in special education.

Third, in the Malaysian context, this article contributes to ongoing discussions on inclusive education reform and holistic learning approaches. It highlights the importance of integrating psychological well-being into pedagogical planning, particularly for students with visual impairments who often face systemic and environmental barriers. The study therefore supports

policy-level considerations that emphasize emotional security, accessibility, and empowerment as core components of inclusive education practice.

Overall, this article contributes conceptually, pedagogically, and contextually to the advancement of humanistic and well-being-oriented approaches in special education.

9. Implications of Maslow's Theory

This section elaborates in more depth on the implications of Maslow's theory on special education practices, emphasizing how all teachers, administrators and policymakers need to contribute to shaping a comprehensive and responsive educational ecosystem to the needs of Students with visual impairments.

9.1 Implications for Teachers

Teachers not only convey the content, but also act as emotional guides and motivators. By understanding Maslow's theory, teachers can organize lessons that start from the basic needs of the students, until they reach the level of development of their own potential. Teachers are the main agents in ensuring that the needs of students are met holistically. By understanding Maslow's hierarchy of needs, teachers can devise teaching strategies that not only emphasize the cognitive aspects but also touch on the emotional and social dimensions of students. For example, the use of teaching aids such as embossed diagrams or Braille prints not only meets physiological needs, but also empowers students' self-esteem (Erten & Savage, 2023). Teachers are also encouraged to encourage pupils to set personal goals, participate in self-assessments, and give genuine praise for their efforts (Nazir, 2023).

9.2 Implications for School Administrators

Administrators need to ensure that schools are provided with appropriate resources, create an organizational culture that understands special needs as well as support teachers in delivering holistic teaching strategies. The use of Maslow's approach as a foundation in an inclusive school development plan can bring about systemic change. School administrators need to play an important role in building a school climate that supports the well-being of students with special needs. This includes providing safe physical facilities, vision assist technology, as well as professional training to teachers on humanistic pedagogical approaches. According to Apio et al. (2023), teacher training that focuses on emotions and empathy increases the effectiveness of teaching to students with special needs. Administrators can also support the involvement of parents and the community in forming a comprehensive support network for students.

9.3 Implications for Policymakers

Policymakers need to ensure that support for educational approaches based on psychological theories such as Maslow is integrated into teacher training policies, school monitoring, and assessment systems. Policymakers play a major role in ensuring that national education policies support well-being-based learning. Progressive policies need to emphasize the integration of humanistic approaches in teacher training, special education modules, and curriculum assessments. A study by O'Connor et al. (2024) shows that meaningful participation of pupils in the learning process can only be achieved if the school environment is supported by inclusive and comprehensive policies. The provision of special budgets for vision-friendly teaching materials as well as collaborative policies between the education, health and social sectors will strengthen the effectiveness of this teaching strategy. Finally, an approach based on Maslow's theory should not be seen as an alternative option, but a basic requirement to ensure that

education is truly comprehensive, fair and touching to the hearts of every students with visual impairments.

10. Conclusion

The use of Maslow's Theory as the basis of teaching strategies for students with special visual needs can strengthen the psychological, emotional and social aspects of students. Meeting basic needs such as safety and self-esteem not only stimulates inner motivation, but also provides a foundation for the achievement of students' self-potential. Previous studies have shown that an emotionally, physically and socially friendly environment allows pupils to be actively involved in learning and build a healthy identity. The implications for teachers, administrators, and policymakers show that this approach requires integrated collaboration and consistent implementation. Therefore, it is important to continue to study and improve teaching strategies based on holistic and student-centred psychological theories, in order to ensure a more inclusive and balanced future of education.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study.

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