

## Understanding the Parental Involvement in Promoting an Effective Orientation and Mobility Acquisition among Visually Impaired Children within the Expanded Core Curriculum in Lahore, Pakistan

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### ABSTRACT

This proposed for a research be carried out towards understanding the parental involvement in promoting an effective orientation and mobility (O&M) acquisition among visually impaired children within the expanded core curriculum in Lahore, Pakistan. Orientation and mobility skills are deemed important in preparing visually impaired children towards their independence. Although O&M skills are considered as one of the main components of the expanded core curriculum for visually impaired children, these skills, however, are not explicitly integrated into the expanded core curriculum. As a result, M&O skills are found less acquired by the visually impaired children in Lahore, Pakistan. Moreover, the literature has also shown that Pakistani visually impaired children are experiencing a lack of parental involvement in their O&M skills acquisition, although it is widely recognized that parental involvement is essential for such skills acquisition. Due to the lack of research on parental involvement in the O&M skills acquisition among visually impaired children in Pakistan, a study, is proposed to be conducted to gain understanding on the matter through interviews with the parents of visually impaired children at two secondary level schools in Lahore, Pakistan. A semi-structured interview strategy will be employed to provide more insights into the roles of parents towards the acquisition of O&M skills among their visually impaired children in Lahore, Pakistan. This proposal further discusses the methodology deemed appropriate for this study.

**Keywords:** Parental involvement, orientation and mobility, orientation and mobility practices, expanded core curriculum, visually impaired children.

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### INTRODUCTION

A loss of sight could affect a child's everyday life in all aspects, particularly his O&M skills (Ruzickova, et al, 2009). Hill and Ponder (1976) defined O&M as "the ability to move safely, efficiently, and gracefully through all environmental conditions and situations with as much independence as possible" (p. 3). Visually impaired children are encouraged to use the O&M skills to further develop their life's skills such as confidence, be responsible for their decisions, and be able to travel in all types of environment including schools.

In order for visually impaired children to fully participate in the school's environment and the community, they first need to acquire the O&M skills. According to Jacobson (1993), the ability and usage of O&M skills do affect the access of visually impaired children to their educational opportunities. In order to promote the acquisition of O&M skills among these children, their families should be given the opportunity to take part in the formal training. Most O&M skills are learned and taught within the school boundaries, with an aim to develop the ability to travel independently in any environments.

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Indeed, visual impairment and other disabilities require support by several entities in order for the handicapped to be successfully transitioned from a school life to an adult life. In 1990, US department of education had made some amendments towards the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). One of the amendments was giving the transition service for students with disabilities. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act describe the transition process as an individualized, results-oriented process that includes a set of coordinated activities for children with disabilities. The emphasis of transition services is to improve the functional and academic achievement of visually impaired children by facilitating these children in school-related activities. One key aspect of this process is the provision of related services including the O&M education; to provide independent movement.

Initially, O&M skills were identified in 1872 by Levy as crucial skills to be acquired by a visually impaired individual and the only means of acquiring these skills was through the 'cane techniques'. Further development of the techniques could be seen in 1929 onwards. Profound efforts among professionals were widely observed in the 1940s especially in the area of O&M. The efforts were focusing on helping some of the soldiers who have become blind to go back to their ordinary routine life after the World War II. The Hines Rehabilitation Centre, the predecessor of O&M, specializing in foot travel training (Weiner & Siffermann, 1997) in the Valley Forge Army Hospital has developed a training protocol for vision loss. The training protocol was aimed at helping the visually impaired soldiers to move within their environment using their conceptual memories.

Special educational legislations have always been considered as an important factor in strengthening the parents' role and increasing the opportunity for families to get involved in O&M acquisition of their visually impaired children. In the regard, IDEA (2006) was set to assure the provision of parental involvement in the US. It is unfortunate, however, even with the existence of the IDEA (2006), most families are found not eager enough to get involved in planning such programs for their visually impaired children (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997). The same phenomenon among parents of visually impaired children is also seen in Pakistan.

#### *Problem Statement*

An effective use of O&M skills enables visually impaired children to perform better and accomplish their daily routines as independent individuals (Rosen & Joffe, 1999). These skills are needed by visually impaired children in moving towards the targeted goals safely, efficiently and independently (Hill & Ponder, 1976; Tuncer & Altunay, 1999). Therefore, in the area of O&M, research on parental involvement is crucial to be carried out. Since parental involvement is considered as one of the main factors in promoting learning among visually impaired children, numerous studies had highlighted the engagement of parents in school related activities and concluded that children's academic results were better as compared to those who were not engaged actively (Barnard, 2004; Fan & Chen, 2001; Fehrmann, Keith, & Reimers, 1987; Ho & Willms, 1996; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Michael, 1999). According to Aziz (2007) there is a lack of research conducted on parental involvement in O&M for this visually impaired population in Pakistan. Therefore, this calls for more research to be conducted in this area so that the problems could be overcome.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to identify the phenomenon of parental involvement in promoting an effective O&M skills acquisition among visually impaired children within the expanded core curriculum in Lahore, Pakistan. More specifically, the research objectives are, to describe the extent of parental involvement in O&M education, and to discuss how parents could be involved in promoting an effective orientation and mobility skills acquisition among their visually impaired children.

#### *Significance of Study*

This proposed study hopes to provide useful information on parental involvement in promoting an effective O&M skills acquisition among visually impaired children within the expanded core curriculum in Lahore, Pakistan. This study will focus on two important points. Firstly, parental involvement as a crucial aspect in the study of the visually impaired children and it is pertinent to the education of visually impaired children for their better independence. Secondly, policymakers in the field of special education need to combine parental involvement and O&M to ensure a better independence for the visually impaired children.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *Parental Involvement*

Parental involvement is defined as an active participation and combination of commitment on the part of the parents (Gonzalez-Mena, 2011). Anyikwa and Obidike (2012) stressed that parental involvement is the parents' participation and support at home and school, which impacts on the educational performance of their children. In this way, parent participation is important not only in school-related activities but also in domestic-related activities. Parental involvement is also described as an active participation of parents in their children's development and making sure that parents know about their children's progress at school (Williams & Ullman, 2002). Moreover, Chan (1995) defined parental involvement as, "not something that is 'done' to parents" (p. 19).

Several studies have shown evidence of parental interests and involvement relating to their child's achievement and learning (Ali, 2012; Curriculum for Excellence 2010; Reynolds, 2007; Sylva, Scott, Totsika, Ereky-Stevens & Crook, 2008). Morrison (2007) stressed that at school, children's performance is indeed affected by parental involvement. Similarly, Kindiki (2009) explained that academic achievement and increased motivation can be observed when there is sufficient parental involvement in a child's education. The findings from Anyikwa and Obidike (2012) study also identified that parental involvement is required to maximize the potential of visually impaired children at school.

Parental involvement was also found to contribute to the academic success of the visually impaired children (Anderson & Minke, 2007). Several studies have shown positive connections between parental involvement in educational programs with student academic achievement, cognitive growth, and emotional well-being (Epstein, 2010). Insufficient parental involvement may result in less sensitive towards the needs of visually impaired children among parents.

#### *Parental Involvement in Orientation and Mobility*

Several barriers that hinder parents to be involved in their children's O&M education have been identified (Constantino, 2003; Jesse, 1986; National Parent Teacher, 2000; Patrikakou, et al, 2003); teacher's insufficient knowledge about culture, time, lack of information about the system of education, and transportation difficulties. Some studies identified culture as a much more important barrier in lessening parental involvement in school activities (Kottler & Kottler, 2002; Noguera, 2003; Singleton & Linton, 2006).

In addition, Constantino (2003) and Kottler & Kottler (2002) discussed that there are a limited number of parents, who do not understand the school requirements and also unaware of the grading system in schools. This situation in return makes them feel uneasy during a conversation with teachers of their children. Moreover, the situation also hinders parents to involve in O&M education and creates a feeling in them that the school personnel have no efforts in understanding their culture. Parents, who cannot speak English, feel frightened by the school boundaries and are unable to get proper information from the schools (Kottler & Kottler, 2002; Muldrow, Cano, Kimmel, 1999; Noguera, 2003). Therefore, there is a need to understand parents' problems in order to make sure the success of parental involvement in the O&M education of the visually impaired children. One way in doing so is to involve parents in school-related activities.

Overall, parental involvement includes psychological resources and beliefs that parents are indeed a part of the educational success of their visually impaired children (Patrikakou et al. 2003). An issue pertaining to parent participation in O&M education is the lack of their confidence could influence the education of their children. To some extent, the parents create barriers of their own through inadequate feelings, low self-esteem, anger at school, their failure in school and also having a lack of parental skills (Hale 2001, Measuring Up, 1999). All of these barriers are considered the biggest hindrance towards the success of their visually impaired children's education.

#### *The Expanded Core Curriculum*

"Disability-specific curriculum" is commonly known as the expanded core curriculum. The expanded core curriculum was written in response to a report issued by the U.S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (Department of Education, 2007). It has been acknowledged that the needs of visually impaired children were not being met by the standard curriculum (McDonough et al., 2006). The National Agenda argued that the expanded core curriculum reflects the best skills that are necessary so that children with visual impairments may directly access the core curriculum. Thus, the expanded core curriculum is viewed as an indirect service that allows children with visual impairments the opportunity to receive an appropriate education (Hatlen, 1996; Huebner, Garber, & Wormsley, n.d). Furthermore, visually impairedness need modifications in the existing curriculum and also requires special services along with the adopted resources and existing facilities (Ali & Hameed, 2015).

The expanded core curriculum reflects a “body of knowledge and skills that are needed by children with visual impairment due to their unique disability-specific needs” (American Foundation for the Blind, n.d, p. 100). It contains nine critical components: compensatory or functional academic skills, including communication modes, orientation and mobility, social interaction skills, independent living skills, recreation and leisure skills, career education, use of assistive technology, and sensory efficiency skills (Levin, 2011). Yet, little empirical evidence is available to document the effectiveness of the expanded core curriculum and its roles in the transition to adulthood, particularly the major component of O&M. The following table includes a brief summary of factors related to the nine areas of the expanded core curriculum.

**A Summary of the Components of the Expanded Core Curriculum (Figure.2.0)**

<b>Compensatory Skills</b>	These skills are needed by visually impaired children to access the general education printed material.
<b>Orientation and Mobility</b>	The ability to move in one's environment is key to independence. Orientation and Mobility include instructions moving, at home, schools, and communities as well as instruction in the use of a cane.
<b>Social Skills</b>	Visually impaired children need to interact and form work and personal relationships. Social Skills that must be taught to those who are visually impaired include: looking towards a person talking, how close to stand to people, and how and when to shake hands, hold doors and other skills that sighted individuals learn through observation.
<b>Independent Living Skills</b>	These skills are needed in order to participate in everyday living. Activities such as grocery shopping, food preparation, laundry and personal hygiene all need to be taught systematically.
<b>Recreation and Leisure Skills</b>	Independent living skills involved in recreational and leisure activities that require a systematic approach for acquisition.
<b>Career Education</b>	In order to make a good career decision, a visually impaired child needs to have first-hand experience of job opportunities, as there is no opportunity for observation and incidental learning that is available for sighted peers.
<b>Assistive Technology</b>	Assistive technology consists of the tools that visually impaired use to access and share information. Tools for children, both low vision and blind can be simple, low-tech devices, such as slant boards, and handheld magnifiers. High-tech devices include voice output for computers or text to speech devices such as Braille Notes.
<b>Visual Efficiency Skills</b>	These Skills are taught to low vision students. Visual efficiency is the ability to use effectively the vision that is available to the individuals.
<b>Self-determination Skills</b>	Not unlike their sighted peers, students who are blind and visually impaired need to learn what choices are available for them, how to advocate for themselves and how to make informed decisions.

Source: [Adopted from Sapp & Hatlen, (2010)].

*Orientation and Mobility*

Orientation and mobility is a set of skills that are needed during travels in a familiar and unfamiliar environment in order to guarantee the safety and efficient movement of the visually impaired children (Hill & Ponder, 1976). Hill & Ponder (1976) explained that orientation is “the process of using one’s senses to establish one’s position

and relationship to all other significant objects in one’s environment” (p. 3). Orientation “includes using language, understanding cause and effect, and learning about concepts that are related to objects and things” (Hill & Ponder, 1976). Orientation also involves in increasing the awareness of one’s body, developing sensory skills, and using landmarks as assistance during travels. Mobility is the second element of O&M. Mobility refers to the physical part of travel, which includes confident, safe, and efficient movement from one place to another (Pavey, 2003).

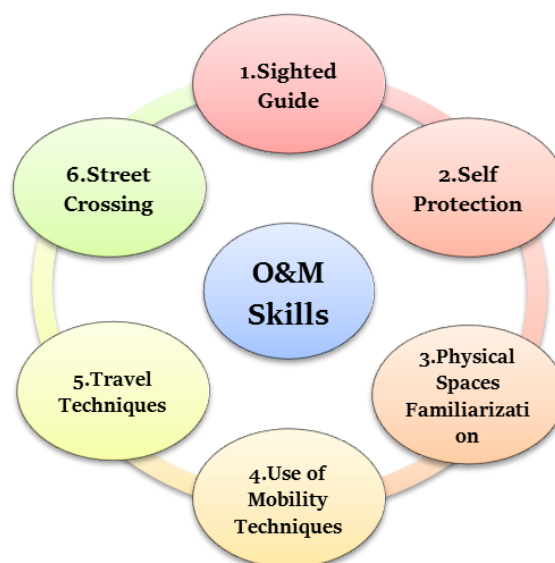
According to Hill and Ponder (1976), O&M comprise of two distinctive, but equally dependent essential components: (a) orientation and (b) mobility; both are essential for the purposeful movement of the visually impaired children. Several studies have revealed the importance of O&M in the area of visual impairment as an essential component that needs to be gained by the visually impaired children (Hatlen, 1996; Hazekamp & Huebner, 1989; Huebner, Merk-Adam, Stryker, & Wolffe, 2004; Lowenfeld, 1964). As a consequent, O&M has emerged in the National Agenda as one of the crucial components in the expanded core curriculum for visually impaired learners (Huebner et al, 2004).

For the attainment of educational benefits among visually impaired learners, O&M skills were developed (Lowenfeld, 1964) in order to integrate them into the community, gaining employment and social networking opportunities (DeMario, 1990). Mobility involves processes to move through space to reach a destination. The term, “orientation and mobility” was originally referred to as “foot travel” (Bledsoe, 1980). Individuals with visual impairments learn independent travel skills through O&M education. Specifically, Jacobson (1993) defined that “orientation and mobility are the teachings of individuals with visual impairments the concepts, skills, and techniques necessary for safe, efficient, and graceful travel under all environmental conditions” (p. 3).

Orientation and mobility skills are defined in the IDEA as “services provided to blind or visually impaired children by qualified personnel to enable those students to attain systematic orientation to safe movement within their environments in school, home, and community” (p. 140). More specifically, IDEA mandates an instruction in the following areas: (a) environmental and spatial concepts; (b) usage of senses to receive information for a purposeful travel; (c) usage of the long cane; (d) usage of low vision aids and remaining vision; and (e) other techniques, concepts, and tools. Orientation and mobility instruction in community settings is fundamental for individuals with visual impairments to learn skills that are necessary for their independence. Optimal instruction may be hindered by several factors, including time constraints (Lohmeier, Blankenship, & Hatlen, 2009) and liability concerns (Marsh, Hartmeister, & Griffin-Shirley, 2000).

#### *Effective Orientation and Mobility Skills*

Visually impaired children need to develop their O&M skills in order to participate in the community and school more actively. More importantly, these skills will affect the attainment of educational opportunities and the abilities to improve their quality of life. In schools, O&M skills are taught by a teacher or an expert in O&M education. Sensory perceptions are also needed in orientation skills to reach the desired goal and to determine one’s position to get to a destination (Hill & Ponder, 1976).



*Figure.1: Orientation and Mobility Skills*

### *Sighted Guide Skills*

Sighted guide skills are basically a system of mobility which is developed for visually impaired children for their active participation in different environments, including travelling with the guidance of a sighted person (Hill & Ponder, 1976). These important skills are learned by the visually impaired children with the help of a sighted guide, and both will demonstrate a team for efficient movement. There is a need for physical contact and training, which are considered essential parts of the guide and the visually impaired.

### *Self-protection Skills*

The usage of hands and arms is required as bumpers in self-protection techniques to avoid physical hazards. Any injury to the face and body can be reduced in this way. Jacobsen (1993) defined the skills of the forearm and upper and lower hand skills are useful in the protection of body parts.

### *Familiarization of Physical Spaces Skills*

Physical spaces familiarization helps the visually impaired in seeking the information related to an area. The technique of self-familiarization is used for self-exploration, which is used in buildings, classrooms, larger areas, and hallways, (Jacobsen, 1993).

### *Usage of Mobility Skills*

Mobility techniques are mostly used for directions. There is a need for professional guidance to use the tools and methods to acquire mobility. On the traveller's cognitive and physical ability, the instructions are modified to use a particular environment and several hazards that are encountered. Human/sighted guide, instructions include: mobility techniques through pre-canes, canes, alternative or adapted mobility devices, electronic travel aids (ETAs), and dog guide.

### *Travel Skills*

Transportation/travel with O&M skills is necessary for visually impaired children, for example, railways, buses, cars, aeroplanes, and taxis (Jacobsen, 1993). In addition to this, the application of O&M skills is also a part of the training in environments with different features.

### *Street Crossing Skills*

For visually impaired children to cross the streets, it requires a sighted person to travel with them in the neighboring area. These visually impaired children need to master particular O&M skills that are needed to cross a street safely. Instructions in crossing the streets always need the coordination of other skills including orientation, conceptual skills application, techniques of physical familiarization, and also the cane techniques (Bischof, 2008).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study will employ qualitative research design in order to get an in-depth understanding of the involvement of parents in promoting an effective O&M skills acquisition among their visually impaired children. According to Cresswell (2005), a qualitative research could be conducted for many reasons, such as understanding a phenomenon and interactions. More specifically, a case study approach will be used in this study. Yin (2008) describes "a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18). Case study design is commonly used to gain accuracy of information and trustworthiness on the findings of a study (Merriam, 2009). This study will be carried out at two government secondary level visually impaired institutes in Lahore, Pakistan. A purposive sampling will be carried out in order to choose the respondents. The respondents will be selected with the help of school administration. According to Patton (2002), the logic and power to purposeful sampling lie in the selection of information-rich cases.

In this study, the interview protocol will be focusing on the parental involvement in O&M acquisition among their visually impaired children. Since the nature of this research is qualitative, semi-structured interviews will be carried out during the data collection. The content of the interview protocol will be validated by two experts in qualitative research with a minimum of two years teaching experience. Results from the cross-case examination of the cases will help to distinguish the lack of parental involvement and a success of parental involvement towards promoting the O&M skills among their visually impaired children.

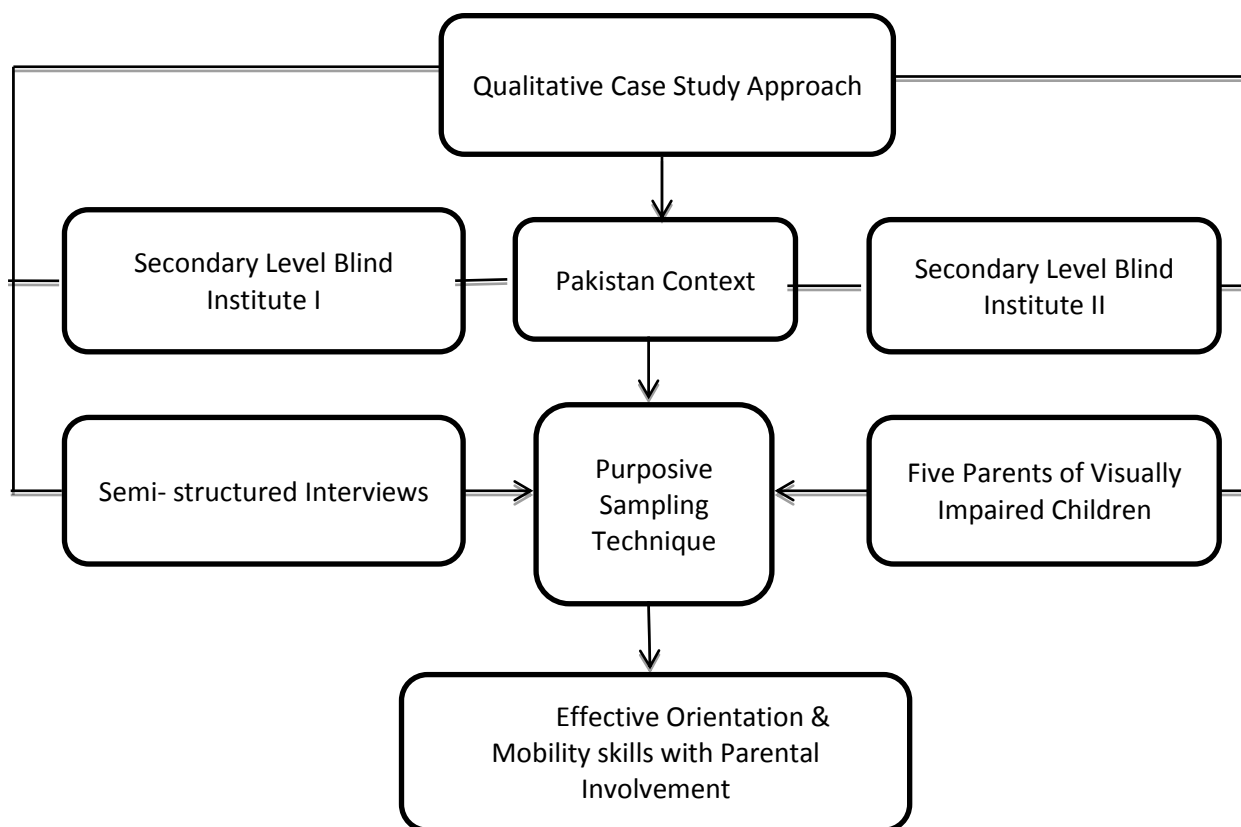


Figure 3.0: Method of the Study

#### Collection and Analysis of Data

The process of data collection begins with gaining entry to the selected schools from the appropriate authorities and consent forms from the parents. Permission letters will be delivered to the heads of institutes with an intention to carry out research in their premises. The consent forms will be given to parents with visually impaired children, requesting for permission to carry out interviews, along with detailed guidelines for the research. All data will be kept confidential and only intended for the purpose of this research. In the first phase, interviews will be conducted with each respondent. An interview will take about 25-30 minutes. Each of the interviews will be conducted separately.

Subsequently, after the data collection, the data analysis will be carried out—a process of making sense of the data (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Interviews will be verbatim-transcribed. A systematic approach will be employed in order to gain better findings. According to Cresswell (2005), a systematic approach can be done through “coding the data, reducing them into meaningful segments, and combining the codes into broader themes”. During the data analysis, it involves the process of sorting out what the researcher has seen, read and heard. By doing so, it enables the researcher to extract meaningful findings from the study. Merriam (1998) defines data analysis as the process of establishing a logical thinking or sense out of the collected data—a process of establishing the meaning of what the parents have said and what the researcher has read or seen.

#### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Orientation and mobility are integral components of the Expanded Core Curriculum (Hatlen, 1996). Children with visual impairments require O&M education from the experts in O&M (Lohmeier, Blankenship, & Hatlen, 2009). Parents of visually impaired children need to get involved in the O&M skills acquisition by getting the proper guidelines and instructions from their children’s teachers (Kirk, 2011). Although M&O is considered as one of the major components of the expanded core curriculum, there has been a limited research carried out in exploring the parental involvement in M&O skills acquisition among the visually impaired children in Pakistan (Aziz, 2007). Therefore, this research will serve as an add-on to the existing limited literature, especially in providing the O&M specialists and special education educators with several ways in planning the appropriate implementation of parent-teacher meetings, particularly in making sure the success of parents’ involvement in the O&M skills acquisition among their visually impaired children. It is hoped that findings from this proposed

study will help the administration in the special education department to plan new programs, of which empower parents of visually impaired children to be actively involved in the O&M skills acquisition among their children.

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