

Title: The Use of Audio-recordings to facilitate English Language Learning: Case of Blind Students at Tlemcen University

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Abstract :

Teaching is with no doubt a fascinating and challenging profession. Teachers sometimes face some unusual situations. One of these might be teaching visually impaired students. This category of students is not able to read from a book or even from the board, take notes, or answer the exam questions. This research, then, addresses this topic through a case study journey. The researcher opted for a questionnaire to be used as a research instrument with 10 teachers at the department of English at Tlemcen University and the use of an interview with the English blind students. The results obtained showed that teachers encountered various challenges to teach blind students including both teaching and evaluation processes. Nevertheless, they ignore using audio-recordings to teach this category of students, for it is not always easy to have the necessary equipments and because they are more familiar with the traditional ways of teaching.

Keywords: Audio Recordings, Blind students, Learning

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1. The Introduction

Teaching is an integral part of the educational process. It is a system of actions intended to include learning. It can be considered as the art of assisting another to learn by providing the information and appropriate situations, conditions or activities. While teaching English, teachers may face some students who are visually impaired. Those students require various adjustments throughout the learning process and environment because they inevitably encounter obstacles which prevent or impair their full and efficient inclusion and participation in the learning process.

Visual impairment as a generic term is a wide range of visual problems. It is a concept that includes categories such as total blindness as well as mild and serves cases. Students who have a visual impairment are as different as any other group of students. Also, their needs differ from those of students with other impairments. Thus, by meeting the individual and unique needs of blind or visually impaired students, and through the collaboration and cooperation of the team members responsible for those students and their teaching program, there can be successful results.

It is true that teachers of English are aware of the importance of considering all categories of students to ensure a better harmony in the classroom. However, both teachers and administrations seem to sometimes ignore incorporating techniques and solutions, such as the use of audio recordings, in the teaching practices to improve English language learning and assure high-quality teaching for visually impaired students.

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Taking into consideration the different needs and difficulties of the learning process of this category of students, the current study is made for the purpose of: Unveiling the reasons behind ignoring the use of audio-recordings to teach visually impaired students. Besides, introducing the use of audio-recordings as a solution for persistent English learning problems of visually impaired students.

Actually, the scope of this research is covered by the three following research questions:

1. What are the main difficulties teachers face while teaching a class that include blind students?
2. Do English teachers use audio-recordings in their classes?
3. What are the main reasons that prevent teachers from using audio-recordings as a teaching tool in their classes?

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Taking into account the previous questions, the following hypotheses can be put forward:

1. Teachers face different difficulties with blind students. Among them: Difficulties in making them understanding the lectures, difficulties during and after exams; when blind students answer their exams as well as when teachers correct the students' papers.
2. English teachers do not use audio-recordings in their classes.
3. The main reasons that prevent teachers from using audio-recordings as a teaching tool in their classes are mainly: The lack of the necessary equipments in classes and amphitheatres, and teachers prefer using traditional methods and techniques of teaching.

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2. Students with Special Needs

While there is consensus that teaching students with special needs require certain skills in their teachers and related service providers, there appear to be no detailed studies of the number of trained teachers of the students with special needs qualified to provide such services.

Adequate personnel preparation programs must be in effect to train staff and to provide specialized services that address the academic and non-academic curriculum. Additionally, research supports the essential elements that teachers of students with visual impairments should possess including effective communication skills, ability to correctly place students in appropriate settings, and knowledge of the educational implications of eye conditions.

These competencies aligned with the development of personnel preparation programs have provided a foundational structure of future teachers. Experts contend that students with visual impairments need instruction by a teacher with expertise in the areas of visual disorders, and sufficient training in effective use of strategies. Students with visual impairments are not only required to master the same educational curriculum as their peers, but also the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) if they are to be successful (Hatlen, 2000).

3. Visually Impaired Students

A visual impairment is any visual condition that impacts an individual's ability to successfully complete the activities of everyday life. Students with visual impairments are infants, toddlers, children and

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youths who experience impairments of the visual system that impact their ability to learn. The nature and degree of visual impairment may vary significantly, so each student may require individual adaptations to instructional practices and materials in order to learn effectively. Students with visual impairments sometimes have fewer natural learning experiences because they are not able to observe objects and interactions. Visual impairments are further classified as congenital or adventitious.

➤ **Congenital** refers to loss of vision present at birth. Some of the more common causes of congenital visual impairment are:

- Prematurity
- Genetic diseases
- Prenatal and perinatal infections
- Maternal substance abuse.



Adventitious refers to loss of vision acquired after birth as a result of illness or accident.

3.1 Visual Impairments Defined by the Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act (IDEA)

IDEA defines visual impairment for the purpose of evaluation and receiving educational and related services. In order for a student to be identified as having a visual impairment, he or she must be identified in one of the four categories: partially sighted, low vision, legally blind, or totally blind. Partially sighted is characterized as a visual impairment that adversely affects a student's educational performance even when corrected to the extent possible. Low vision is characterized as having

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vision between 20/70-20/160, and cannot be corrected. Legally blind is a severe vision loss that is from 20/200-20/400 and can also be a profound loss from 20/400- 20/1000. Totally blind is characterized as the lack of light perception or total blindness (Gabbert, 2012).

Despite the level of vision loss, infection and trauma. These are just a handful of dozens of conditions impacting sight, and each condition has its own unique characteristics and clinical features.

In addition to low visual acuity and visual field, a number of other vision issues may also affect the visual performance of a student with visual impairment. There may be problems with sensitivity to light, glare, blind spots in their visual fields, or problems with contrast or certain colors. Factors such as lighting, environment, fatigue, and emotional state can also affect the visual performance of many of these students throughout the day. Students with the same visual state can use their eyesight completely differently.

Rahi and Cable (2003) report the characteristics of the population individuals with visual impairments are changing due to an increased ability to prevent and treat disorders that have historically led to visual impairments or blindness. Visual impairment is described as the consequence of a functional loss of vision, rather than the eye disorder itself. In the other hand, Douglas and McLinden (2005) described visual impairment as a term that outlines the wide spectrum of the loss of visual function. However, the degree of impairment, age of onset, particular eye condition, and aspect of the visual system affected, can determine how much correction is possible through glasses, contacts, medicine, or surgery.

3.2 Understanding how Students with Visual Impairments Learn

It is important to highlight the notion that educational goals for individuals with visual impairments should be essentially the same as for all students. Students with visual impairments require specific interventions and modification of their educational programming. Students with visual impairments require different ways to interact with information, relying on touch, taste, and hearing to gather information, (NICHCY, 2012). As cited in Johnson-Jones, 2017, p. 28, Douglas and McLinden (2005) reviewed pedagogy and visual impairment education and argued that the research of the past has emphasized the concept of gaining access. The rationale for this appears to be a view that the impending barrier that individuals with visual impairments are faced with is the lack of access to visual information (Cavanaugh, 2002). students must be properly identified in order to receive appropriate services (Kerri,2017).

3.3. Categories of Visually Impaired Students

Visual impairment as a generic term is a wide range of visual problems. It is a concept that includes categories such as total blindness as well as mild and serves cases. Educational definition of visual impairment emphasizes the functional visual efficiency because visual efficiency is unique to each learner.

To summarise, an educational description of visual impairment may include the following:



Totally blind: means that the individual receives no useful information through the sense of vision and must use tactile and auditory senses for learning (severe impairment).

Functionally blind: means that learners learn mostly through other senses but may be able to use vision to supplement

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information receive from the other senses. They would need to use Braille to learn to read. Functional vision cannot be measured using visual field and visual activity tests.

- **Low vision learners:** primarily use vision as a means of learning. They may learn to use print (Mild to moderate impairment).
- **Visual efficiency:** refers to how well a person uses whatever vision present. This includes the ability to control eye movements to discriminate objects from their background, and to pay attention to impairment details (Beatrice and Janet 2003, Yao and Prosper 2011).

4. Characteristics of Visual Impairments and Blindness

Visual impairment is essentially an umbrella term used to describe the loss of sight that can be a consequence of a number of different medical conditions. So, not all visual impairments are the same. There are different common causes of visual impairment including glaucoma, retinopathy of prematurity, cataracts, retinal detachment, macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, cortical visual impairment,

The need to access print materials using alternative methods affects blind students' participation in classes. Braille readers tend to read more slowly than print readers. The educational environment itself can also create a barrier for students with visual impairments since the general education classrooms are designed with sighted students in mind. The formats of the educational materials are presented in a variety of visual formats: posters, charts, diagrams, videos, models, demonstrations, and print materials. The students with visual impairments often have difficulty benefiting from these materials (Cavanaugh, 2002).

5. Teaching Students with Visual Impairments

One characteristic that is shared by all students with visual impairment is that these students have a limited ability to learn incidentally from their environment. The key element for decision making/ teaching adaptation is on the selection of medium of instruction and teaching strategy which enables the learners with visual impairment to be most proficient in learning and in life achievement.

UNESCO (2001), Leonard Cheshire Disability (2011), state some of the strategies for dealing with learners with visual impairment in the classroom. The strategies include:

- Read loudly what is written on the board.

- Prepare educational aids that learners can read more easily like large print materials. Other class learners can help prepare them or can be produced by enlarging font sizes on computer prints. This can also help learners with reading difficulties.

- Learners may have difficulties seeing the lines on writing papers. They can be given papers with thicker lines drawn on it.

- Some learners will benefit from using the different types of magnifying aids. The ones that enlarge the whole page or line magnifiers

- Encourage the learners to use a pointer or their finger when reading. Cover the rest of the page with paper except for the paragraph they are reading.

Use a bookstand to avoid reflection.

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Students with poor vision need to learn through touch as well as through hearing. They should be given a chance to handle objects.

➤ Pair the blind student with his classmate who do not have a visual problem and who can assist him/her to organise their work. The classmate can also help find the correct page. Repeat your instructions and so on.

➤ Use the name of the students during class discussions so that the individual knows who is talking.

➤ Computers offer particular support to learners with visual impairment. They can print out a large print copy, read text on the screen using the text on a voice synthesizer or convert it in to Braille.

➤ Lessons can be taped using a cassette recorder for later playback at home or as revision. Learners who experience difficulties in writing can also provide information on audiotape. Taped versions of books are sometimes available in libraries and resource rooms.

5.1 Problems of Teaching Students with Visual Impairments

It is through sight that much of what the students learn is received and processed. It is believed that up to 80% of what learners without visual impairments learn is through visual cues. The other senses do not fully compensate for the loss of sight.

There are several and unique problems of teaching students with visual impairments. These students frequently receive instruction from

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personnel who are not qualified to teach critical skills such as Braille, cane and other travel skills, and effective use of available vision. As cited in Nsagha, 2018, p.116, Braille reading and writing as beneficial as it is to the visual impaired has some problems or difficulties in learning it. These problems vary with individuals that is, the onset of the visual problem and age of the individual. For instance, when one is visually impaired from childhood, the problem is reduced as the sense of touch on the finger tips are easily developed unlike adult age and not to talk of teacher who need to know Braille in order to teach better (Nsagha, 2012).

6. The Research Instruments

Among the numerous available research tools, the researcher opted for the use of only a limited number of them. This is, in actual fact, determined by the nature of the research topic, the research approach, the method selected and the time limitations. The present work was conducted through the use of a questionnaire and an interview. The questionnaire is addressed to EFL teachers of the department of English at Tlemcen University. On the other hand, the interview is addressed for the blind students in the English department. These research instruments are used to collect data for a deep investigation and from a great source of insight.

6.1 The Mixed Methods Research

The third approach in research methodology is known as the 'mixed methods research' Mixed methods research was defined by Dornyei (2007: 45) as:

“...some sort of a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods within a single research project...Furthermore, qualitative

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**and quantitative principles can also be
combined at the data analysis stage by
'quantifying' or 'qualitizing' the data"**

In fact, the mixed methods approach is favored among researchers because it allows the strengths of one approach to cover the weaknesses of the other. Thus, this research is based on a mixed methods research to ensure the validity of the results.

7. Research Participants

As cited in Kebiri, 2013, p.42, in any research, not only the methodology and the instrumentation determine its quality; but rather, the sample population selected as well. Accordingly, Cohen et al pointed that researchers **"...often need to be able to obtain data from a smaller group or subset of the total population in such a way that the knowledge gained is representative of the total population under study"** (2000: 92). Additionally, researchers have focused a lot on how the investigator selects the sample. In fact, he/she must follow a top-down process in which the total population is first identified, and then the sample is selected to better ensure its representativeness and therefore its validity (Cohen, 2000).

7.1 Teachers' Profile:

Participants in this study were the English teachers in the department of English at Tlemcen University. Teachers were given a great deal of attention in this research; in order to check how they use audio-recordings as a tool to facilitate English language learning to visually impaired students as well as to unveil the reasons behind not using this technique.

7.2 Students' Profile:

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In addition to the English teachers in the department of English at Tlemcen University, this study involves English blind students. They have been chosen at random to make an interview with them about their opinion and attitudes about the use of audio-recordings as a teaching tool to facilitate English language learning for them. The reason behind choosing this category of students is to give more importance to their learning process and to find solutions to the difficulties they face while learning.

8. The Research Instruments

Among the numerous available research tools, the researcher opted for the use of only a limited number of them. This is, in actual fact, determined by the nature of the research topic, the research approach, the method selected and the time limitations. The present work was conducted through the use of a questionnaire and an interview. The questionnaire is addressed to EFL teachers of the department of English at Tlemcen University. On the other hand, the interview is addressed for the blind students in the English department. These research instruments are used to collect data for a deep investigation and from a great source of insight.

9. Data Interpretation and Discussion of the Main Results

The results obtained from the teachers' questionnaire confirm that teachers face different difficulties while teaching a class that includes blind students. These difficulties include on the one hand difficulties in making blind students understand the lectures. On the other hand, exams' difficulties in both answering and correcting papers. Additionally, the results demonstrate that teachers have shown their agreement that they do not use audio-recordings as a teaching tool in their classes. Finally, teachers' answers confirm that the reasons behind not using the audio-recordings in classes are the lack of the necessary equipments and the use of traditional and classical methods and techniques of teaching.

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On the other hand, the results obtained from the students' interview also help in confirming the hypotheses. The results showed that teachers use traditional methods in their teaching and ignore the use of audio-recordings which may be considered as an important tool to facilitate English language learning for visually impaired students.

To sum up, in the light of what has been said, the above findings reinforced the most basic ideas of this research work. Moreover, the three hypotheses put forward are approved and confirmed.

10. Conclusion

Life without sight is definitely challenging for people of all ages. Specifically, University students suffer a lot to join the normal learning process as their other classmates. Teachers, on the other hand, find it confusing to deal appropriately with this category of students. Thus, the primary purpose of this study was to unveil the reasons behind not using audio-recordings to teach visually impaired students at the department of English at Tlemcen University; in addition to introducing the use of audio-recordings as a solution for the different learning problems of visually impaired students.

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