

DEVELOPING LESSON PLANS FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED STUDENTS OF ENGLISH

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to discuss the importance of lesson planning for visually impaired students of English as a foreign language. Not only will offer basic information related to the history of teaching visually impaired students but it will also provide a set of learning tools, teaching approaches and aids for them. Similarly, it will suggest some procedures and techniques to develop English lesson planning for the visually impaired students. Equally important, the paper will examine the main differences between lesson planning designed for non-handicapped and visually handicapped students. In addition, this paper will conduct semi structured interviews for some visual impaired students in classes to narrate and explain some different stories and challenges that visually impaired students face in their studies and classes. Therefore, this paper includes some solutions and recommendations to teachers and professors to help and educate the visually handicapped students in an effective way.

Keywords: Lesson plan, visually impaired, blind, English language lesson, aids.

INTRODUCTION

The goal of education is to increase and maximize a lifelong success for all people. Visually handicapped people including blindness means an impairment in vision which may affect a students' educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness. The eye is the organ of sight and therefore visual impairment affects the eye to a lesser or greater degree. There are many types of visual impairment; as an example visual impairment in normal vision, glaucoma, macular Degeneration, cataract, diabetic retinopathy, and total blindness. Functionally blind – uses Braille but has vision for environmental tasks. Low vision – can read with magnification or environmental modify. Totally blind- must use tactual and auditory learning; no meaningful input through vision. The term "blind and visually impaired" is mentioned to acknowledge that all individuals who are blind are visually impaired, but that all individuals with visual impairments are not blind.

To develop and maintain a lifelong success and make pertinent decisions about the implementation of programs and services for students with visual impairments depend upon a clear understanding of their particular learning needs and respond to their basic wants to develop successful transition goals for adult independence. Administrators, staff members, and educators must have knowledge about specialized personnel, materials, equipment and educational settings to assure appropriate individual educational program planning for this unique student population. Orientation and Mobility training may be considered special education designed for visually impaired students that enable students to be involved in and make progress.

Teaching English to Visually Impaired Students.

In the past handicapped people used to be integrated in special schools and were not educated in the same school with non handicapped students. Recently, there is a movement of inclusive education which is the right of students with disabilities to fully participate in schools as non handicapped students and that it's the duty of the schools to accept them. As it is important to integrate visually impaired students, it is also important to support teachers with the appropriate techniques and materials to teach these people as equally as their normal peers.

Schools should adapt their curriculum and teaching pedagogy to the needs of the visually impaired students. It is necessary to provide an effective teaching context to all students equally. It is recently that the idea of inclusive education has been created, but it is not applied everywhere. However, all visually impaired students are given the right of education by the law. Besides, everyday more people join the universities to carry on their studies. This new movement comes with a need for new teaching materials, approaches, teaching style and routine in order to adapt the VI students to the classroom. Some of the things that should be considered by the teacher are:

- Explain everything in detail - Lessons, lectures, presentations, visuals on the overhead, diagrams should all be explained in detail for those students who are blind and have no vision.
- Make sure to always give directions orally.
- Help with directional movement and body orientation (move to the left, the board is straight ahead of you, your test is slightly to the left side of your desk, etc.)
- Always offer to read written information aloud.
- Always identify people including yourself by name in case they cannot see well enough to identify them, you or the students in their group.
- Always use a tactile or auditory signal when necessary instead of a visual cue. For example, for clean up or lining up, try hand clapping signals or a song. Instead of showing just pictures, try adding sound effects.
- Always make sure to notify these students ahead of time when there will be changes in the school or classroom schedule, such as special events, guest speakers, etc.
- As mentioned earlier, order all texts, workbooks and tests in large print or Braille if possible.
- Provide tactile learning experiences when possible (i.e. instead of talking about rocks, bring them in to pass around. Same with shells, foods, properties of matter, etc.) It is important to give them hands-on exploration that does not solely rely on their sight.
- Use a tape recorder as much as possible.
- Whenever you leave or enter the classroom, speak to the class notifying those visually impaired students that you are in proximity.
- Have patience with them and repeat any or all information as many times as necessary. (Malburg, 2012)

Types of visual impairments

According to Dr Ananya Mandal, MD (2012) the World Health Organization (WHO) impairment is defined as "any loss or abnormality in an anatomical structure or a physiological or psychological function." Accordingly, a disability is "lack of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being." Visual impairment is defined as the limitation of actions and functions of the visual system. There are many types of visual impairments (Ananya Mandal,2012).

- Glaucoma impairment: The impairment is due to the rise of normal fluid pressure inside the eyes. The type of vision is usually like a tunnel. The intact vision remains in the center while progressively the peripheries start decreasing. The center of the tunnel reduces in size progressively till total vision is lost if left uncorrected.
- Macular Degeneration: A central area of woolly or cottony opacity obscures the central part of the

vision. The peripheries may be normally seen. AMD usually blurs the sharp, central vision that is needed for closely viewed activities like reading, sewing, and driving. This is a painless condition.

- Cataract: There is general clouding of the vision. As the whole eye lens is affected the blurring of vision may be diffuse until it is totally lost. There may be other symptoms like photophobia – inability to see the light; diplopia – double vision etc. Cataracts are very common in older people.
- Diabetic Retinopathy: Diabetes leads to damage of the smaller arteries and blood vessels at the back of the eyes over the retina. Diabetic retinopathy is the most common diabetic eye disease and a leading cause of blindness in adults. Usually vision impairment in diabetics begins as black spots or floating shapes that appear in the field of vision. Slowly complete vision may be lost if left unchecked.

Equal education

Students with visual impairments should be assessed and taught appropriately by designing some special applicable programs for them. Technology in the form of computers and low-vision optical and video aids prepare and help many partially sighted, low vision and blind children to participate and be engaged in regular class activities. Students who are visually impaired with all degree of impairment should be expected to participate fully in classroom activities. Although these students might find some difficulties and limitations; however, with proper planning and adaptive equipment their participation can increase and maximize (Kirk & Hellen, 1998).

Morocco is a country where educational institutions exist for inclusive and special needs students. The Moroccan institutions offers a continuum education for both inclusive and special needs students from kindergarten, primary, high school; however, for higher education includes inclusive universities. Inclusive education helps the person not to feel different in the society because of his handicap and he can greatly benefit from time spent with non-handicapped people. However, because inclusive education is a new system which emerged not many years ago, the teaching system and teachers are not fully prepared for it and often do not have enough experience and education for teaching visually impaired students in common classes. Important questions teachers should ask themselves are: why am I teaching? How will I teach? Who I am teaching? How will I know if the student understands? If the teacher is unable to answer these questions, then he/she needs to reconsider and reflect on his/her teaching goals.

Lesson planning

For truly professional teachers, lesson planning is not optional, it is essential preparation for teaching. A lesson plan incorporates five stages warm up or review, introduction, presentation, practice, and evaluation. The teacher should set clear objectives, anticipate problems, follow a good procedure, use effective materials and equipment, and provide appropriate activities and approaches in his/her classroom taking into consideration good effective communicative strategies that he/she may use for visually impaired students. To have blind or low vision child in a regular classroom and not providing the child with support services does not constitute integrated education.

The effective role of the teacher is to provide the needed base services so that the blind child can victoriously be educated in a regular classroom. All the responsibilities of the education teacher in schools or professors in the university are in some way connected with providing support services to the student and his family. According to J. Kirk Horton and Hellen Keller (1998) The teacher in his/her class must.

- a- Adapt materials such as test, worksheets, maps, and charts so they can be understood by the blind or low vision students.
- b- Provide any special equipment and supplies the child needs. This might include a braille writer, braille books, special paper, an abacus, and/or a typewriter for a blind child and large print books, felt tip pens, bold line paper, and magnifiers for low vision.
- c- Assist with providing or locating remedial work or extra help in subject areas that the child may have difficulty following in the regular classroom. This extra assistance is in addition to what the regular classroom teacher is teaching and is needed only when the students have difficulty

understanding certain parts of a lesson.

- d- Act as a link between the child's home and the school. This includes reporting to parents the child's progress and letting them know which skills the child should be practicing at home under their guidance.

RESEARCH METHOD

In the research, the main objective was to compare the English lesson planning for VI students of English as a foreign language and English lesson planning for non-handicapped students of English as a foreign language. In order to find out which lesson planning is more demanding for the teacher in means of time, re-usability, creativity and material availability. The current study opted to carry out a qualitative research, because the number of respondents was going to be small. The reason is that there are not many students of VI students, because VI students are a minority. Although, a qualitative research would be too time-demanding and would require a longer time span.

Hypothesis

Based on the goals mentioned above, the pronounced hypotheses are as the following:

H1: Lesson planning for visually impaired students of English as a foreign language is more demanding in terms of time and material than lesson planning for non-handicapped students of English as a foreign language.

H2: There are fewer suitable teaching materials available for the visually impaired than for the non-handicapped.

Data Collection

Interviews analysis

Cohen and Manion (1985) stated that interviews are one of the most frequently used methods of eliciting information in social and educational research. Thus, information which was difficult to secure by questionnaires and direct observation of the subjects in the study was obtained through the interview instrument. The interviews were primarily designed to allow opportunities to explore matters further whenever possible. Hence, a list of specific questions covering the main points under consideration was recorded. The interview was aimed at 10 visually impaired students of English as a foreign language at the university of Moulay Ismail in Meknes, Morocco. The interviews, which lasted on average 15 minutes to 1hour, were mostly administered informally.

In interviews, informants are asked to describe verbally learning experiences that have occurred sometime before (Cohen 1984). The aim of the interview is usually to allow the subjects to tell their own stories and to give their personal views in their own words so that the researcher can gain more insights and a clear understanding. The disadvantage of interviews is that students may not report their learning issues and method accurately or may forget to mention some techniques or teaching difficulties. Interviews have also been criticized (Oxford & Burry-Stock 1995) as being time-consuming in respect of both data collection and analysis because they need to be transcribed, coded and possibly translated as was the case in the present study.

The interview guide incorporated nine main questions, each being supplemented by possible follow-up questions. The purpose of the probing was to give cues to the interviewee about the level of response that was desired, to deepen the responses to a question, and to increase the richness of the data being obtained. The aims of the questions prepared for the interview were as follows:

Q1. To elicit the number of years they have been learning English as a foreign language.

Q2. To elicit the techniques, they are using to learn English as a foreign language.

Q3. To elicit sources that are available (materials, aids, out of class activities) and if they are sufficient to satisfy their needs.

Q4. To elicit aspects of language they think they have more difficulties with

Q5. To elicit language skills that they find difficult to improve.

Q6. To elicit any additional comments

It should be noted that the actual questions put to the interviewee did not always follow exactly the order of the questions as shown above. The questions only served as a guide for the discussions, and the order of questioning depended on the situation and how the discussion progressed during each interview. Furthermore, each participant's responses might lead to other questions being asked for elaboration or clarification. However, all the questions were put to all the participants in the same manner. In addition, through the interviews, it was important to clarify and extend the meanings of the interviewees' statement in order to avoid misinterpretations on their part. Kvale (1996) suggests that researchers should use such procedures to allow the interviewees to confirm or disconfirm what has been interpreted by the researcher.

ANALYSIS

The study procedure described above were completed over a month, resulting in a set of audio-recorded interviews with 10 visually impaired students. Results about the number of years the respondents have been learning English as a foreign language, show that all of the participants are third year students from the English department at Moulay Ismail university of Morocco. Based on the interviews, most of the respondents agree that they all depend on the listening skills because it is the most major source of information. As for the questions related to learning difficulties faced by visually impaired students of English as a foreign language, through research and analysis, difficulties faced are related to reading, and writing skills.

The reading materials according to the students with visual impairments prints tend to be smaller and needs to be modified into larger clear prints. Thus, teachers should make sure to the use the appropriate material in the classroom. Besides, students with particular visual impairments may have difficulties with skimming and scanning techniques. Their reading might be slower and they may feel exhausted easily. Therefore, it is often useful to allow students take materials home to read before they are used in lessons so that they can participate in activities instead of spending their time trying to read the material.

As for the writing skills, students find handwriting a frustrating task. Their writing might also be slow, that is why it is usually useful to teach student typing skills and then they can supply work by email rather than wasting their time trying to write. Spelling is another obstacle faced by the visually impaired students because they have had less exposure to written words. For that reason, teachers may better avoid any spelling tasks or they might need to adapt the task for the visually impaired students advantage.

Lesson planning

Lesson planning is an essential step for teaching. A successful teacher has to set some objectives to achieve in most effective possible way, which he needs to plan beforehand. During the lesson planning the teacher should list his expectations at the end of the lesson as things students will be able to do during the lesson, and the condition under which the students' performance will be accomplish. Next, he should prepare stages of the lesson about the teaching and learning process. In general, a language lesson plan incorporate five stages warm up or review, introduction, presentation, practice, and evaluation. A lesson plan can also serve the teacher as a reference, because it records all steps and activities that have been done with the students.

The Components of a Lesson Plan

Objectives

A lesson plan should clearly state the teacher's objectives and expectations. As what results, language, skills, and kind of performance the students would be able to attain at the end of the lesson. To Gower, Phillips and Walters a lesson plan usually incorporate more than one objective but it should be clear to both the teacher and the students.

While teaching visually impaired students, the aims are also important. Yet, the teacher should make sure that the students understand clearly the objectives. The blind students pay more attention to verbal communication and every single detail that might look futile can be meaningful to them. In addition, it is advisable for teachers to double check they have understood the objectives.

Procedure

The teacher organizes the steps taking into consideration the objectives that should be attained. There should be a plan for each step along with a justification. The teacher has also to consider the materials, the approach, and the activities that he is determined to be used during the lesson. He should take into consideration the timing too.

However, for teaching visually impaired students, the teachers have always to bear in mind that they are slower than non-handicapped students. The learning progress can be affected by many reasons as the type of impairment, age, the amount of content, and motivation. The teaching materials might create an issue to teachers, because that depends on the kind of handicap. But most of the time, they need a Braille print or the electronic version.

Teaching Approaches

The teacher should vary the activities and the skills that have to be chosen according to students' interest, level, age, and the course objectives. It is also necessary to decide on the best way to check students understanding either during the lesson or at the end of the lesson.

While teaching visually impaired students, the teacher should be more creative because the choice of activities is very limited. There are materials like pictures and videos, as well as some activities like describing something, find a difference based on visual sense, retelling a story based on a picture, and drawing are all beyond the bounds of possibility. All activities based on vision must be replaced or modified to visually impaired students advantage. For example, it is possible to use a video but base the activity mainly on the sound, and the pictures can be described in writing and used more as a reading activity.

Teaching Materials

The lesson plan should incorporate the materials and equipments needed during the lesson. Davies (2008) mentioned that materials should be suitable to both the objectives of the lesson and the particular group of students. The number of students, their age and interest are also important and should be taken into account while preparing a lesson plan. Among the teaching materials used in class are CD player, pictures, flashcards, overhead projector, board, cassettes, internet, TV, worksheets, laptop, authentic objects, and puzzles.

It is essential to find the appropriate materials to be applied in a class of visually impaired students. Furthermore, there are various materials can be employed to help visually handicapped students to acquire knowledge. Nevertheless, the materials are based on the kind of impairment whether they are partially sighted students, low vision students, legally blind students, or totally blind students. Among the teaching materials used in class are enlarged text, pens and markers with thick marks, non-illuminated or illuminated pocket magnifying glass, digital magnifiers, PC and specialized software, the Braille line, and Picht typewriter.

Braille

Braille is a universally accepted system of reading and writing through raised dots for blind people. It was first created by a blind Frenchman Louis Braille in 1820s. It is read by dots which enable visually impaired people to read as anyone else. Thus, Braille can help handicapped students to learn to read foreign languages. Moreover, it is consisted of a code of 63 characters; everyone is composed of one to six raised dots arranged in a six position cell. These characters are imprinted in lines on paper and read by passing the fingers gently on the manuscript. The manuscript can be typed on Braille writer and can be printed on a special printer, and it also can be connected to a computer. But not every student owns a Braille line because it costs a lot (Encyclopedia Britannica).

Speech Synthesizer

Speech synthesizer is a screen reader software simulation of human speech. It is employed to translate written information into aural information. It is also used to help the vision impaired so that a content of a screen can be automatically read aloud either through letter by letter, word by word, or line by line for the blind to hear and understand. The speed of speech can be adapted to the user's needs. The users might also choose a male or a female voice (Margaret, 2005).

Expected issues

One of the main stages of a lesson plan is stating the expected issues and finding the best strategies to overcome them beforehand. There are many things which might hinder the flow of the course. These issues can be related either to language or classroom management, for example, activities take longer or shorter than what the teacher planned for; a lesson can be very difficult or less difficult than the teacher expected. This stage enables the teacher to achieve his or her objectives the best way possible.

To teach visually impaired students. There are various issues that the teacher should consider while planning the lesson, and while teaching it too. The teacher first should know the type of complexity that the handicapped student faces and his or her way to overcome it. Besides, it is important to recognize the kind of materials the student employs, so that the teacher can take them into consideration while preparing the lesson plan.

It is very hard to use the same activities and teaching approaches that the English teacher uses with non handicapped students such as pictures, colors, describe the, graphs and shapes, Total Physical Response, videos, and testing. Some of the solutions have been suggested by Ivana (2012), first pictures are most of the time used in complementary activities. To visually impaired students, pictures can be described orally or in writing. The teacher can choose to use either the mother tongue or English language; it depends on the level and the objectives of the lesson. Sometimes, it is better to use the mother tongue because the use of English could tell students the answer. But if the pictures describe real objects, it is preferable to get real things to work with.

Secondly, colors might create an obstacle to the teacher but visually impaired have these words in their mother tongue repertoire. Furthermore, they know that blood is red, the sky is blue and the tree in green. Then, the famous activity of "describe the" is one of the activities that encourages students productive skills. This kind of activity cannot be appropriate for the visually impaired students. However, they can be modified; the visually impaired are always interested to know anything about their surroundings. Accordingly, they can listen to the description in their mother tongue and ask them to translate or produce their own version in English. Otherwise, they can touch things if it is possible and try to describe them.

As far as graphs and shapes are concerned, the teacher can cut shapes out of the card board and use them with a description in the back in Braille or glue them on a piece of paper. On the other hand, the Total physical response is an effective method to use not only with non handicapped students but also with visually impaired students, because it helps them to act, remember and learn. The challenge is that visually impaired students cannot see the action so as to perform it. In this case, the teacher can ask the students permission to instruct him by touching, moving or pushing parts of his body. Listening to videos can be challenging to VI students because they cannot maintain the same pace as their classmates. Therefore, the teacher has to recall that he has to describe the general scene to the student, but it is important to assess which information to be omitted and which one has to be included in the description.

Finally, testing VI students is the same as non handicapped students. Yet, VI students need more time to complete the test than others because they spend more time to understand the test and to answer its questions. It is also important to discuss with the student what arrangements should be

made so as to finish their tests effectively and some of the things that are suggested for test adjustment are:

1. Make sure the test format suits their visual ability (Braille if needed, large print, recorded, etc.) Reading the test aloud may also be the best method for test implementation.
2. Allow for more time and repeat questions if necessary.
3. Try adding visuals with bold or distinct contrasting colors that will help them to identify certain objects in a diagram, graph, etc. Also, using tactile learning through 3D objects can help in a lab or science setting.
4. Allow the use of large-buttoned or talking calculators, provided they do not distract other students.
5. Allow after school time to review or repeat any questions missed during class (only if they have concentration or focus problems). (Malburg, 2012)

CONCLUSION

A teacher of visually impaired students has to be innovative, patient and professional. Teaching visually impaired students is a real challenge to any teacher of English as a foreign language. Therefore, this paper has attempted to introduce some practical and helpful background knowledge about the teaching of VI students, because this kind of students need specialized lesson plan with some different activities and instructions than the one used with non-handicapped ones. VI students have to be integrated and supported in meaningful context with real and authentic objects that they are able to touch, see, smell and taste. They also need clear and guided instructions and explanations, to help students relate what they are feeling to their learning experience.

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