

Strategies for Teaching English to Visually Impaired Learners

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ABSTRACT

The target of the paper is to inform about significant and practical tips for foreign language teaching with special emphasis on children who have disabilities with their visuality. The article presents how to overcome barriers associated with visual disability and achieve success in foreign language acquisition. The paper can support teachers and provide them the skills and qualities required every instructor. Also, it points out advanced learning technologies for inclusive teaching of a foreign language to blind students.

Keywords: Adapting methods, teachers' responsibility, audio-visual, kinaesthetic, technologies.

Introduction

In this global world, our century requires us to learn languages and speak fluently at least two or three languages. That is why everyone is at the process of learning foreign languages. But what do you think has everyone chances and facilities as you?! There are also people who have disabilities with their ears, eyes, tongue and others. How to teach visually impaired students is not complicated as we thought. In following article, we can find out new ways for each instructor who have problems in how to educate and make interesting classes.

"No-one should be absent, let alone excluded, from wisdom and education and training of the mind. Unless someone plans to do wrong to the individual in particular and to the whole essence of humanity in general. The question is whether the blind, the deaf and the retarded (who for their handicap are unable to learn like the healthy) should receive education. My answer is: All humans should be educated, with the exception of non-humans. The more so as they need help for the nature cannot help them for the handicap they have to bear". J. A. Komenský (Hluší, 2002, p.1)

"The word 'blind' refers to a child with minimal or no vision, and 'partially sighted' to a child with useful residual vision." (Harrison & Crow, 1993, p. 4). On the authority of Westwood (2009) vision impairment, also known as visual impairment, is the term used to refer to all sight disabilities that go from a small loss of vision through to total blindness. It does not include conditions that can ameliorate with the use of glasses. About 10% of children with vision impairment (VI) are completely blind. For people with blindness learning acquisition can be the path out of isolation. Because it serves as the vehicle that will enable them to take part in various formal and informal learning activities or international meetings. There are two general approaches when teaching a foreign language to a blind student in an inclusive environment. Depending on the learning objective of each lesson a teacher can follow one of these approaches or a combination of the two. This means that using one approach does not exclude the use of the other:

1. Adapting the methods already used by the teacher to meet the needs of the student who is

blind in the classroom.

2. Implementing an entirely new teaching approach (also in the classroom).

Adaptation of existing methods

The following techniques can easily be implemented in the methodology already applied:

- a. Use of the blackboard:

- The teacher reads out aloud what he/she writes on the blackboard, by spelling out difficult or new words so the student who is blind can write them down.

- b. Use of pictures, posters etc.:

- Give a general description and then move on to give more details, using the clock method or terms such as “on the top left”, “on the top write corner” (this requires picture description skills).

- Description by a classmate or some other sighted person.

- Written description in an accessible format.

- c. Knowing how to behave around a blind student:

- The teacher should not avoid using everyday vocabulary, e.g. phrases like: “do you see what I mean” or any other words related to vision such as: watch, look, see.

- The teacher should announce his/her presence in the classroom (entering and/or leaving).

- The teacher should make clear to the blind student when it is his/her turn to speak by addressing them by their name.

- The teacher should use precise language when addressing the class. For example, instead of using the phrase: “this group should go there”, he/she should say: “students sitting in the first row should move to the back of the class by the window”.

- d. Classroom environment:

- He student should be allowed to choose where to sit in the classroom. But sometimes sitting closer to the teacher might be better since it will allow him/her to be the first one to get a new object in his/her hands and also ensure that he/she will be able to listen better to the teacher.

- The classroom environment should be adopted to be accessible to the blind student (e.g. obstacles between the entrance door of the classroom and the student’s place should be avoided, classmates should be careful where they leave their bags or other material).

- When changes are made to the classroom the student who is blind should be notified and be given the time needed to explore the changes and be accustomed to the new situation.

- e. Adapting material:

When material is going to be adapted in any accessible format (Braille, Digital, Audio) the teacher should follow these simple rules when preparing such material:

- Digital material should accessible formats such as the following formats: Microsoft word (*.doc) or *(.docx), Rich Text Format (*.rtf), Plain Text (*.txt), Portable Document

Format-only text based (*.pdf).

- In case a text includes questions, they should be clearly numbered.
 - Lists should be clearly organized using a dash at the beginning of each item.
 - Text irrelevant to the content (like headers, footers, or references) should be either excluded or included in a different way e.g. footnotes and references at the end of the text, footnote and endnote symbols replaced with a number or letter following the word in a parenthesis or after a dash.
 - Extra spaces and blank lines should be avoided.
 - Matching exercises should be completely adopted and written in two lists, numbered with letters and numbers in order to be distinguished. The same should be done for exercises that require filling blank spaces (these should also be numbered).
 - Tables should be written in a linear manner: e.g. the first column should be written as a horizontal line with the header of the column followed by a colon mark.
 - Pictures, drawings and diagrams, all should be deleted from the document. Those necessary to the comprehension of the text should be either described (e.g. pictures) or adopted (tactile graphics or diagrams).
- f. If any audio-visual material is going to be used, the teacher should ensure that:
- The sound is of good quality.
 - Visual content that is important to the lesson should either be verbally described (by the teacher during the viewing) or given in a written form to the blind student beforehand.
 - Any text included in presentations (like Power Point), should also be given in a written form to the blind student beforehand and images should be described (as mentioned above in “e. Adapting material)
- g. Kinaesthetic approach-replacing pictures with movements and gestures:
- The teacher can encourage the use of all the students’ bodies, their hands and even different gestures, when introducing new vocabulary in order to enhance or assist learning. E.g. students may stand up and jump when introducing the new word “Jump”, instead of showing a picture of someone jumping.

Conclusion

It has been proved that language learning process does not need to be visual. Most language course work contain visual materials. But by using the best practices, everyone even disabled bodies will enable to reach for the stars. I mean that they can learn English as a second language. My advice to teachers is just to modify approach to such people. We should confess that they are not able to see, but their other senses are intact.

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