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A Case Study of a 60-Day English Learning Program for Visually Impaired VS Sighted Students

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Abstract:

This study compares the development of language for two groups of students who participated in an eight-week (60 days) English Language Learning Program. One group consisted of two visually impaired female university students, both at A1 proficiency, while the other consisted of two sighted females at the same proficiency level. Since this is a qualitative comparative study, we used data collection methods such as video recordings of lessons and unstructured interviews. The teaching method for this course included using visual aids to help students understand through listening/auditory means, using vocal explanations rather than written notes, and utilizing computer software called "screen-reader" technology. In comparing the results from the beginning of the course and the end of the course, it was evident that the students who were visually challenged had developed stronger vocabulary inference skills, better pronunciation, and higher scores on their final assessments than did the students without visual challenges. Therefore, based upon these findings, this study concluded that visually impaired students have very good phonological awareness and are able to process auditory information extremely well, which makes them excellent candidates for acquiring second languages.

Keywords: Sighted student, Visually impaired student, Case study, College students, Online lessons.

الملخص:

تقارن هذه الدراسة تطوّر المهارات اللغوية لدى مجموعتين من الطلاب الذين شاركوا في برنامج لتعلّم اللغة الإنجليزية استمر ثمانية أسابيع (60 يومًا). تألفت المجموعة الأولى من طالبتين جامعيتين تعانيان من إعاقة بصرية، وكان مستوى إجادتهما للغة الإنجليزية عند

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المستوىA1 ، في حين تألفت المجموعة الثانية من طالبتين مبصرتين بالمستوى نفسه.

ونظرًا لأن هذه الدراسة دراسة مقارنة نوعية، فقد استُخدمت عدة وسائل لجمع البيانات، مثل تسجيلات الفيديو للدروس والمقابلات غير المهيكلة. واعتمدت طريقة التدريس في هذا البرنامج على استخدام وسائل تعليمية تساعد الطلاب على الفهم من خلال الاستماع، وتقديم الشرح الشفهي بدلًا من الملاحظات المكتوبة، بالإضافة إلى استخدام برامج حاسوبية تعتمد على تقنية (قارئ الشاشة (وعند مقارنة نتائج الطلاب في بداية البرنامج ونهايته، تبيّن أن الطالبتين ذواتي الإعاقة البصرية قد أظهرتا تطورًا أكبر في مهارات استنتاج معاني المفردات، وتحسنًا أفضل في النطق، كما حققتا درجات أعلى في التقييمات النهائية مقارنة بالطالبتين المبصرتين.

وبناءً على هذه النتائج، لخصت الدراسة إلى أن الطلاب ذوي الإعاقة البصرية يمتلكون وعيًا فونولوجيًا (صوتيًا) مرتفعًا وقدرة ممتازة على معالجة المعلومات السمعية، مما يجعلهم مرشحين متميزين لاكتساب اللغات الثانية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: طالب مبصر، طالب كفيف, دراسة الحالة, طلاب جامعة

1. Introduction

Vision is one of the most important senses that humans use to understand and perceive their environment. Students with visual impairments, compared to sighted individuals, experience great difficulty in communication, mobility, and interacting with their surroundings. A lot of research has shown that visual impairment affects many aspects of learning but especially language acquisition. This additional obstacle makes it even more difficult for children with visual impairments to develop their language skills than their peers without visual impairment (American Foundation for the blind; Graham & Bellett, 2015). Language skill development relies on the combination of multiple sensory inputs, so limitations in visual input can also affect the development of all four key skills used for language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Tran & Pho, 2020).

Earlier research has shown that as long as a person's beliefs or perception limit how they see things, then a person's ability to perceive will also be limited. Therefore, many researchers believe that because of these limitations, an individual who is blind at birth will never be able to form certain types of ideas. Several studies from around the world have also been conducted to discuss efficient methods to teach English to students who are visually impaired. Much of this research has dealt with psychological, cultural, and policy-related factors which affect English language learning (Tran & Pho, 2020). Morrow's study (1999), for example, was focused on both the practical and theoretical aspects of foreign language acquisition by students with visual impairment. It pointed out the importance of social interaction between the teacher, classmates, and peers for foreign language acquisition.

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2. Objectives:

The purpose of this study is to look into the effectiveness of a 60-day English learning program in increasing English language abilities among visually impaired students compared to sighted students, as well as to explore learners' experiences, obstacles, and perceptions of the program.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the 60-day English learning program help visually impaired students to enhance their English language abilities (listening, speaking, reading, and vocabulary)?
2. How significantly does the program increase English language skills among sighted students?
3. Are there significant differences in learning outcomes between visually impaired and sighted students at the end of the program?
4. What are the differences in challenges and support needs between visually impaired and sighted students in the program?

3. Literature Review

The manner in which both visually disabled individuals perceive their surroundings and participate in school-related tasks differs significantly from those without vision loss. As a result, the teaching methodologies for visually disabled students, specifically about learning English, will vary based on methodology. In addition to being unique in terms of methodology, the rationale behind many of these methodologies will also vary due to this fact. In an article by Jørgensen & Helm (2011), they indicate, "there has been considerable advancement in the education of the blind. He proposes practical strategies for teaching students with visual impairments, arguing that neuro-linguistic programming can assist these students in better exploring the intellectual world and the engaging learning environment around them.

Earlier studies suggest that what a person can see and understand is limited to what their perceptions and beliefs allow them to grasp. As a result, some have argued that people who are blind from birth may not be able to develop certain ideas. For example, Vanlierde et al (2005). claim that individuals who become blind early in life do not form a concept of perspective. However, this does not mean that blind and visually impaired people cannot be effective language learners. Language is a flexible system, and children who are born blind can use it properly by adjusting to the language spoken around them.

The issue of verbalism is an example of one of the many problems in using language found in the literature about visually impaired students. Visually impaired students often utilize vocabulary they have never heard of before, because they have never experienced or learned about the concept associated with that particular word.

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There is no correlation between a student's visual acuity and how frequently he/she utilizes verbalism. According to Rosel et al. (2005), both sighted and blind children used language similarly. Therefore, as Atkinson (2004) refers to it as "small culture," the way visually impaired children communicate through words in order to interact with their environment when learning a second language.

Differences between spoken (or written) words and real life exist for every child who learns a new language. A key difference for blind children exists in their use of visual images or the concept of "sight" in many everyday verbalisms. While there may be concerns among certain professionals to avoid such visualizations or references to visual concepts when educating blind children, other professionals see this as an opportunity to aid blind children in connecting their understanding of the world to new vocabulary and concepts that they may find difficult to comprehend.

A lot of research has looked at how many of these "visual" words are used and what they mean in terms of people with vision impairments. The results of studies indicate that a person's level of sight will not significantly impact the frequency of using this type of word. Research has found the language used by visually impaired children to be very similar to the language of sighted children.

Beyond language use, social interaction is another area addressed by previous studies. Research has shown that social behavior in visually impaired children can differ from that of sighted children. Observations indicate that visually impaired children often play differently, spend less time with peers, and spend more time with teachers. They also interact less frequently with others, and inclusion alone does not always guarantee meaningful social interaction.

In foreign language learning contexts, the difficulties faced by blind and visually impaired students have been widely documented, particularly in traditional classrooms that rely heavily on visual materials such as textbooks, images, and written tasks. Numerous studies emphasize the importance of adapting instructional methods and resources to meet the needs of this population.

Morrow(1999) examined the experiences of blind secondary and university students learning foreign languages in non-specialized settings. The findings revealed that blind students frequently struggled with written tasks due to a lack of adaptive technology, whereas greater independence and confidence were observed when using auditory tools, spoken explanations, and memorization strategies. The study stressed the importance of modifying existing teaching practices rather than creating entirely new ones.

4. Methodology:

4.1 Research Design:

A qualitative comparative case study design was used to examine and compare the real learning experience of two students (one visually impaired & one sighted) who participated in the same instructional program. This research focused on identifying similarities and differences in students' participation, learning challenges during sessions, responses during sessions, and overall engagement.

4.2 Participants:

The participants in this study were two females, aged 20, studying in the Arabic Department at the College of Education, Al Zahra University for Women. Before their involvement in the 60-day learning program, both students took the Cambridge English Placement Test, which placed them on the same A1 language level. Since one participant was visually impaired and the other was sighted, these two factors were considered as variables in this study.

4.3 Data Collection:

Data collection occurred through lesson observation and two interviews. The first interview was held after the first week of the study to investigate what students expected to occur in this classroom setting. The second interview was conducted at the conclusion of the 60-day program to obtain students' reflections on their experiences in this classroom setting and the challenges they encountered. The instruction in the study began on January 5th and ended on March 5th. This time frame includes an estimated 32 online lessons using Google Meet. There were four sessions per week, each 45 minutes long. One of these weekly sessions was a grammar lesson, and there were three other weekly sessions focused on listening skills, reading, conversation skills, and/or role-playing skills.

Materials for instruction came from A1-level English language learning resources (i.e., online websites; podcasts; educational YouTube content). Instructors adjusted instruction based on the individualized needs of each student. The instructor who worked with the visually impaired student verbally communicated instruction to her in detail, repeatedly explained concepts she may have missed, and walked her through every step during lessons. Additionally, instructors used screen-sharing to provide visual support for the sighted student. Also, in addition to the instructional strategies listed above, instructors provided additional practice opportunities for reading to help address difficulties the sighted student had experienced in this area. To introduce vocabulary to both students, teachers used translations, examples, definitions, and synonyms. After each session, a non-participating observer reviewed the recordings made by the teacher and then completed structured observation notes to

assess whether or not students were engaged in instruction, their behavior in class, and whether students exhibited any learning challenges.

4.4 Data Analysis

The data collected from lesson observations and interviews were analyzed using inductive coding and thematic analysis. The researchers first reviewed the data several times to gain familiarity with the content. Codes were then generated directly from the participants' responses and observed behaviors without using predefined categories. Similar codes were grouped into broader categories, which were analyzed to identify key patterns and differences between the two participants. This process resulted in the development of the main themes representing their learning experiences and challenges.

5. Results:

This section presents the findings based on the lesson observations during the program. The data were analyzed using coding and thematic analysis, which led to several main themes. These themes show the differences in learning, performance, and participation between the visually impaired student and the sighted student during the lessons.

Theme 1: Differences in Vocabulary Comprehension and Conceptual Understanding

During the lessons, when new vocabulary was introduced, the instructor did not provide direct meanings. Instead, the words were explained through usage or placed within sentences to help the students guess their meanings. In most cases, the visually impaired student was more successful in inferring the correct meanings of the words compared to the sighted student. For example,

Teacher: What does the word "excited" mean?
S1: I'm not sure.
S2: I think it means (متحمس).
Teacher: Good. What about the word "proud"?
S2: It means (فخور)
Teacher: A dishwasher is used to wash the dishes
S1: Does it mean (غسالة ملابس)?
S2: No, I think it means (غسالة صحون)
Teacher: A wheelchair is used for old people or a person who can't walk
S2: Oh so it means (كرسي متحرك).
Teacher: Did you hear about the word "sports"?
S1: I know it, but I can't remember.
S2: yes it means (رياضة)
S2: What is the difference between "home" and "house"?
Teacher: They both mean "بيت", but "house" is used for the physical building, while "home" is used in an emotional sense. It can also mean "الوطن".
S2: Does not "called" mean (بارد)?
Teacher: "Called" and "cold" sound similar, but they have different meanings and spellings; called means (يدعى) and Cold means (بارد).

Theme 2: Pronunciation Accuracy and

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Phonological Awareness

Classroom observations revealed differences in pronunciation skills between the participants. The visually impaired student generally pronounced words accurately from the first attempt and demonstrated strong phonological awareness. In contrast, the sighted student experienced difficulties with certain sounds and words; she mispronounced “some” as “somi” and “the” as “they.” In addition, she showed difficulty with specific sounds such as /p/, /ch/, and the vowel sounds. It often required repeated practice before achieving correct pronunciation. These findings suggest that the visually impaired student possessed stronger auditory processing and pronunciation skills.

Theme 3: Learning Strategies and Cognitive Processing

Participants utilized a variety of learning strategies in their classes. A large portion of the visually impaired participant's reliance was placed upon auditory learning through listening and memory; as such, he demonstrated an excellent ability for both comprehension and recall. On the other hand, much of the sighted student’s reliance was based upon writing, taking notes, and utilizing screen sharing technology to help him understand what he heard during class. Although the visual aids allowed the students to better organize the information presented in class, it didn't necessarily aid them immediately with regards to developing an overall understanding. Overall, the visually impaired participant tended to utilize more auditory-based learning strategies than the sighted participant, who relied heavily on visual reinforcements.

Theme 4: Participation, Engagement, and Peer Support

Classroom observations showed that the visually impaired student was more active and engaged during the lessons. She responded quickly, participated in discussions, and frequently used context to infer the meanings of new words. In contrast, the sighted student was less confident and often hesitated before answering. At times, the visually impaired student provided correct explanations that helped her peer understand lesson content, demonstrating both confidence and peer support.

For example,

Teacher: S1, which article should you put before the “ Hour”?

S1:” a “?

Teacher: What about you, S2, what do you think?

S2: We use “an” before “hour” because the “h” is silent

Theme 5: Learning Through Practice and Error Correction

The sighted student's learning process was characterized by trial and error, particularly in pronunciation and vocabulary, requiring repeated correction and practice. In contrast, the visually impaired student generally provided accurate responses with fewer corrections and showed more consistent progress throughout the program.

The final six lessons served as assessment

sessions, with one point awarded for each correct answer. The results revealed a clear difference in performance: the visually impaired student scored 91.5, while the sighted student scored 73.5. These findings suggest stronger overall language development in the visually impaired student, especially in listening comprehension and response accuracy.

The following section presents the findings from the pre- and post-program interviews. The interview data were analyzed thematically, leading to the identification of several key themes.

4.2 Findings of the First Semi-Structured Interview

1. Students' English Language Skills Improved Significantly

The results of the interviews reflect substantial growth in the students' ability to read, write, listen, and speak in the English language within a very short period of learning. The interviews showed that both students believed they had improved their knowledge of vocabulary as well as grammar through this course.

S1 said, "I think I have made an improvement."

S2 said, "I started using more vocabulary; I have learned new vocabulary and also reviewed my previous vocabulary."

2. Effectiveness of the Teaching Method

Both students expressed satisfaction with how effectively the teachers used their instructional techniques in providing helpful resources that could assist each student's learning processes by supporting the individual students' ability to learn on their own (self-learn), while still encouraging and assisting them during their independent learning process. S1 stated, "I like the way you explain a lesson but don't answer every question so it encourages me to be independent in my learning and have confidence in my own thoughts and ideas." S2 stated, "This is an effective teaching technique and does not need to be changed."

3-Importance of Error Correction in Learning

Correcting mistakes is a very important part of learning. It helps to reduce or eliminate fear of making errors and provide students with a feeling of accomplishment as they learn. Both s1 and s2 stated that they were afraid to make mistakes but now understand that errors are essential for learning. S2 also agreed with this statement and added that "the error correction techniques we use are extremely effective... They enable me to gain deeper insights into what i am learning"."

4-Organization and Clarity of Instruction

The way the lesson material was organized and the fact it was clear for both the students. Both students thought their lessons were easy to follow because they were well laid out and easily understood. Both S1 & S2 said some very positive things about the way their lessons were organized.

S1 said: "I have liked all the classes I have attended as they are well-organized and nice."

S2 stated: "All the classes I have attended are very well organized and build upon one

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another."
She also commented positively on her teachers' ability to be heard."

4.3 Findings of the second semi-structured interview :

1- Improvement in Language Skills and Learning Progress

The interview results show significant improvements in students' use of the English language throughout the course. This is evident in the vocabulary and grammar, based on comments from S1, "It has slowly been improving very well," and S2, "I was able to learn some new vocabulary and basic grammar, so I had just enough to be able to understand short sentences."

2- Developed Self-Assurance in Speaking English

The study shows that this class gave the students the support they required to build confidence (self-assuredness) in particular areas of English-speaking; as well as decrease their fear of using English. S1 said, "Yes, I feel a lot more confident when using English."
S2 replied, "This course has broken down barriers for me ...and has increased my verbal communication self-confidence when interacting with other people."

3. Effectiveness of Teaching Methods and Learning Strategies

The results of the interviews suggest the approach used by the instructor when teaching English was effective in developing students' abilities to understand and learn material covered in class. S1 said he liked the questions asked after every lesson.
S2 also made a similar statement; "Your explanations were very clear & detailed ….. Also, they related well to the audio."

4. Use of Audio Materials and Continued Practice Improve Understanding Of English Language Skills

Audio, in addition to continued exposure to the same audio, was the best two influences for students' English Language Development (ELD) and Comprehension. Student S1 said, "The fact that I could continue to listen without the assistance of a translator has greatly improved my understanding."
Student S2 also stated, "Listening to audio clips helps us have a better understanding of vocabulary, and they assist us in using correct pronunciation when speaking.

Conclusions:

The main goal of this investigation is to explore the developmental differences in linguistics between visually impaired as well as sighted students during a 60-day English learning program. The data collected indicate that being visually impaired will not impede the ability to acquire new languages; rather, being visually impaired will encourage greater use of auditory memory, as well as increased usage of cognition. The results indicated that there were statistically significant performance differences ($p < .001$) among both participants' scores. While the sighted learner had access to all forms of visual aids and the option of using written aids, the

visually impaired learner scored significantly higher on the pronunciation aspect of speaking than the sighted learner. Additionally, the visually impaired learner also inferred significantly more about the meanings of new vocabulary from context than the sighted learner. Overall, this research has provided evidence to indicate that through structured online lessons, clear verbal instructions, and accessible technologies such as screen reading software, visually impaired individuals are capable of achieving high levels of

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