

Visually Impaired Students' and Their Teacher's Perceptions of the English Teaching and Learning Process¹

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Abstract

In the English teaching context, teachers encounter students who have different special educational needs, such as visual impairment (VI), which refers to a disability of the sense of sight ranging from low vision to total blindness. This kind of problem has a negative impact on English language learning because it does not allow learners to complete learning activities in the same way as sighted learners. Therefore, this phenomenological qualitative research explored the experiences in the teaching and learning process of two VI learners and their teacher in a public school in Latacunga, Ecuador. Data were collected by interviewing and observing these learners and their teacher during their English classes. Then the collected data were transcribed, coded, and thematised using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. The study showed that there were positive attitudes towards the English teaching and learning process. These attitudes were an indication of inclusive education and progress in the teaching-learning process. Furthermore, the teaching strategies and materials used successfully provided VI learners with better opportunities to learn English despite the teacher's lack of training. However, there were some negative aspects, such as learning difficulties associated and not associated with the disability, the lack of training and specialized resources for the teachers, and problems of communication and classroom management, all of which hindered these students' learning.

Resumen

En el contexto de la enseñanza del inglés, los profesores se encuentran con alumnos que tienen diferentes necesidades especiales y una de ellas es la discapacidad visual. Se trata de una discapacidad del sentido de la vista que va desde la baja visión hasta la ceguera total. Este tipo de problema tiene un impacto negativo en el aprendizaje de la lengua inglesa porque no permite a los estudiantes completar las actividades de aprendizaje tan bien como los estudiantes videntes. Por lo tanto, esta investigación fenomenológica cualitativa explora las experiencias en el proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje de dos alumnos con discapacidad visual y su profesora en una escuela pública de la ciudad de Latacunga—Ecuador. Los datos se recogieron mediante entrevistas y observaciones a dos alumnos con discapacidad visual y a su profesora durante sus clases de inglés. Luego, se transcribieron, codificaron y tematizaron los datos usando el marco de análisis temático de Braun y Clarke (2006). El estudio muestra que hubo actitudes positivas hacia el proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje del idioma inglés. Estas actitudes eran un indicio de la educación inclusiva y un avance en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje. Además, las estrategias de enseñanza y los materiales utilizados fueron un gran intento de ofrecer a los alumnos con discapacidad visual mejores oportunidades para aprender inglés a pesar de la falta de formación de la profesora. Sin embargo, hubo algunos aspectos negativos como las dificultades de aprendizaje asociadas y no asociadas a la discapacidad, la falta de capacitación y de recursos especializados, los problemas de comunicación y de gestión del aula, mismos que dificultaron el aprendizaje de estos estudiantes.

Introduction

Nowadays, English teachers face many challenges due to diversity of students in the classroom, including those with visual impairment. According to the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education (2013), this impairment is caused by an anomaly in the eyes that provokes partial or total loss of vision, limiting the student's social and academic development. Consequently these students face certain difficulties such as access to school facilities, lack of Braille machines, textbooks in Braille and other materials for proper learning, limitation of teachers in adapting methods of instructions and assessment, being under looked, being isolated, and overdependence on guides (Otyola, 2017). In this sense, teaching visually impaired (VI) students is a great

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challenge for teachers, especially with respect to second language teaching because they “pose difficulties in learning foreign languages since human vision serves as a major stimulus for learning a language” (Susanto & Nanda, 2018, p. 83). Thus, it is difficult for most teachers to plan their teaching according to their students’ special educational needs (Agesa, 2014). Likewise, learning a new language is a challenge for students with this kind of disability due to the restriction of ability to perform certain activities in the manner considered normal due to the absence of their visual perception. For that reason, Habibi and Jamila (2014) suggested that learning materials must be adapted to the students’ needs as the nature and degree of visual impairment can vary significantly.

Although there is international and local research on this issue [see below], there is not much research describing perceptions of VI learners in a language classroom. The current study aims to contribute to the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers’ professional development since they should be able to find useful suggestions for when they face the challenge of working with VI learners. Therefore, the aim of this article is to analyze perceptions of two VI learners and their teacher in a public school in Latacunga regarding their teaching and learning process.

Literature Review

There are many studies on VI in language teaching that report the difficulties teachers have in this context. For example, Kocyigit and Artar (2015) described the learning process of two VI students and six teachers in a prep school in Izmir, Turkey. The study revealed both emotional and pedagogical challenges. The teachers had several emotional concerns at the beginning of the course as they did not want their students to feel discrimination. Regarding the pedagogical challenges, they did not know how to contribute positively to the learning process of their students. The authors concluded that the competence in Braille and inclusion of people who are close to these students were essential for a more effective educational process. In addition, Aryanti (2014) described the challenges faced by VI students regarding their learning of English as well as the teacher’s strategies to overcome these difficulties in the teaching-learning process at State Islamic University, Indonesia. The study revealed internal and external difficulties. The internal ones were related to the VI students’ physical limitations and their own coping strategies while the external ones came from the learning environment itself, including the difficulties of the teachers and a lack of materials, and facilities. Aryanti concludes that English teachers should make some changes in the classroom, such as including peer support, peer teaching, and adapted facilities and assessment.

Başaran’s (2012) study shows that the problems faced by teachers were due to a lack of training in teaching English to VI students, so they were forced to resort to using the same techniques and materials they used for sighted students. They had books in Braille and used the traditional grammar-translation method. The study suggested that there was a need to reevaluate teaching methods for VI students and to provide the teachers with an opportunity to take part in training programmes in order to enhance inclusive environments for effective learning. Finally, Morelle’s (2016) research work showed that teachers do not receive adequate support and training, parents of students with VI were not involved in their children’s schooling, teaching methods and materials were not adequately adapted, and there was mobility problem around the campus. Although VI pupils were not fully included in the educational process, they prefer mainstream schools to special schools.

Inclusive practices in English classroom

Inclusive education provides better learning opportunities for VI students. Lintang Sari and Emaliana (2020) claim that “the process of providing all learners with equal educational opportunities is a major challenge for many educational systems worldwide, for it requires changes to values, system, and practices” (p. 439). Inclusive practices are based on the idea that all students are valued equally, with the same rights to be involved in all the teaching and learning processes (Norris, 2019). In inclusive classrooms, learners without disabilities provide academic support when they require, they treat without discrimination, and they make them feel part of the community (Asamoah et al., 2018). Despite the difficulties that VI students face, collaborative learning has demonstrated its effectiveness in promoting higher academic performance and productivity, caring, supportive and committed relationships, improved psychological health, social competence, and self-esteem (Laal & Ghodsi, 2012).

Inclusion can be understood as the process of addressing and responding positively to the students’ needs through modifying and changing the education system to accommodate all children regardless of their

physical, socio-emotional, and intellectual conditions. These modifications and changes include content, methodology, teaching and learning resources, classroom organization, and infrastructural adjustments (Mwakyeya, 2013). It is a great challenge for teachers, especially in large classes, "when there are too many pupils in the class the teacher cannot dedicate enough attention to each pupil" (Dubovec et al., 2016, p. 246).

Article 47.7 of the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (Asamblea Nacional Constituyente, 2008) states, "it is recognized that persons with disabilities have a right to an education that develops their potentialities and skills for their integration and participation, under equal conditions" (p. 7). However, many students with disabilities do not have these rights. "Some of the barriers that impede the education of students with disabilities stem from the systemic level due to divided ministerial responsibility, lack of legislation, policies, goals, and plans, and sometimes shortages of resources" (Moreno-Rodríguez et al., 2017, p. 46). Regarding visual impairment, Sirirungruang (2015) warns that "the government must provide a budget to make accessible textbooks available for all students with visual impairment" (p. 5).

Strategies to teach English to visually impaired students

There are many teaching strategies that can be creatively adapted to the teaching of different kinds of learners. Kocyigita and Artar (2015) affirm that in the English classroom, "there are many different types of learners, which teachers are expected to take into consideration while planning and delivering their lessons." Among them are "the visually-impaired learners who seek for their right to learn without any privileges" (p. 689). Most teachers of students with special needs often carry out their classes without making the necessary adaptations. This is a major mistake since it is not feasible to use the same activities as with a heterogenous class. Nevertheless, it is essential to make adjustments in micro-curricular planning regarding the objectives, activities, contents, and strategies (Intriago-Ferrin, 2020). Along with this, didactic materials used with VI students should be prepared in advance by the teacher (Roldán Paredes & Contreras Aguilar, 2013). Thus, Sheena (2020) mentioned that "teachers must think creatively to appropriately teach blind/visually impaired students through multiple engaging experiences" (p. 15).

Villalba Ramos (2017) warns that it is "urgent to rethink the teaching methods and materials used for English teaching to visually-impaired students and design well-thought syllabi and methodologies so as to meet the needs of these students" (p. 3). By analogy, "students with sensory disabilities require special pedagogical strategies to insure that they assimilate all of the information provided in the classroom" (Lancheros Cuesta et al., 2012, p. 6). For example, the teacher can provide extra time to the VI students as they might need more time to complete most tasks (Carney et al., 2003). Materials in Braille, maps and charts in relief, audio equipment, and abacuses are learning materials for blind and VI students; as they are deprived of one sense, the others such as touch and hearing are enhanced, and so the learning can take place based on these senses (Intriago Ferrin, 2020). Teachers also need to learn the Braille system because it is the main means of written communication with people with this disability (Retorta & Cristovão; 2017).

One of the most powerful teaching strategies is the use of tactile memory because it can, in most cases, take the place of their visual memory. VI learners can read texts by using their fingers in the same way sighted learners read seeing signs and pictures. Reading using fingers or eyes both create an image of the word in the memory, so they can memorize it easier. (Belova, 2017). Another strategy that allows teachers to provide accessible learning to VI students is the use of tactile flashcards which have images in relief. It is also a good option to use real objects such as fruit, clothes and others. Teachers may also need to enhance the collaboration between blind and sighted students (Salisbury, 2007). Further, in terms of assessment, Aryanti (2014) points out that teachers can apply oral or listening tests to evaluate visual impairment learners.

Challenges in teaching students with visual impairment

English teachers have to face great challenges in teaching students with visual impairment. Brown and Beamish (2012) state that "the changing role and daily practice of TVIs (teachers of students with visual impairment) cannot be overlooked in today's demanding educational contexts" (p. 18). What is more, Kocyigita and Artar (2015) warn that "teaching a VIL [visually impaired learner] in a regular classroom may stand out as a 'challenge' for a teacher with no experience of teaching or perhaps even no previous social contact with such individuals" (p. 690). In this regard, Yalo et al. (2012) explained that if teachers do not

understand how visual impairment affects their students' visual behavior, they will face the challenge of not adapting the curriculum content and the learning resources to their needs. Therefore, teachers need to analyze the problem deeply; they have to know all the details about the special educational needs of the students so that they can get a better view of the best resources to be applied (Intriago-Ferrin, 2020).

Basically, many teachers do not have enough training and time to adapt teaching materials and strategies that meet VI students' needs. (Lancheros Cuesta et al., 2012). However, it is essential for teachers to work with different strategies to include VI learners in the class (Intriago Ferrin, 2020). In fact, Spungin (2002) claims that "certified teachers of visually impaired students teach such skills as reading and writing in Braille and making the best use of existing vision with or without special devices and also help the students learn concepts that are not easily accessible to him or her" (p. 3). Considering those teachers who lack adequate training, Başaran (2012) states that the programs devoted to train English teachers need to be rethought so that they include courses about how to teach students with special educational needs.

Method

This was a qualitative study as it refers to an educational problem associated with social-educational aspects. In this case, the researchers explored the experiences of two VI learners and their English teacher regarding the teaching and learning process by implementing a phenomenological research design (Cresswell, 2007). To achieve this purpose, three research questions were addressed:

1. How do VI students perceive English teaching and learning process in an EFL class?
2. How do the English teachers perceive English teaching and learning process with two VI learners in an EFL class?
3. What teaching strategies and materials does the teacher use to teach English to two VI learners?

The researchers used an informed consent form to obtain participants' approval for data collection and informed them regarding the ethical rules of the investigation, for instance, anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntariness in participating in the study. In addition, it served to inform the students, their parents, and the teacher about the purpose and content of the study. Thus, written informed consent was obtained from the legal representatives of the VI students, as well as from the English teacher. After completing the informed consent process, the interview and observation were used in the data collection process. For the interview, two interview guidelines were created, one of eleven questions and another of seven questions to interview the students and teachers respectively (see Appendixes 1 and 2). Moreover, an unstructured observation file was used to collect data about strategies and teaching materials used in the teaching process (See Appendix 3). We conducted three observations in each student's English class for 40 minutes.

Research context and participants

The research was conducted at a public institution located in the north of Latacunga city in Ecuador during the academic year 2018-2019 using face-to-face teaching. There are around 500 students who study at this school and two of them have VI. The first student (identified as *Tvil* for ethical considerations) was about 14 years old and she was in the 8th grade. Her disability was considered to be total congenital blindness since she had no light perception when she was born. On the other hand, the second student (identified as *Pvil* for ethical considerations) was about seventeen years old, and he was in the 10th grade. According to a medical report, he had 56% VI. They had two English classes (45 minutes each) every week. In addition, an English teacher (identified as *Vilt* for ethical considerations), with approximately twenty five years of teaching experience, participated in this study. She had a Bachelor's Degree in English Pedagogy.

Data analysis

The thematic analysis was used for data analysis to answer the first and the second research questions. We followed steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). The researchers transcribed the students and the teacher' interviews and did an iterative analysis of the transcription in order to examine the depth and breadth of the content. Data obtained with the help of the interview with the VI learners allowed to answer the first research question, and data obtained from the teacher's interview allowed to answer the second research question. After becoming familiar with data, the researchers created codes (positive and negative perceptions) to classify the information regarding each research question creating themes. Then we classified excerpts that meant positive and negative for the students and the teacher into sub-themes. The

sub-themes for positive student perceptions are *the help of the teacher and classmates* and *attitudes towards learning English*. For negative perceptions, we had three subthemes: *learning difficulties associated with their disability*, *learning difficulties not associated with their disability*, and *lack of special teaching and learning resources*. The sub-theme for the teacher's positive perception was *students' commitment* and for negative *communication and classroom management* and the *lack of training*.

We analyzed the excerpts of each subtheme and discussed and interpreted the findings in the light of previous studies. To analyze data collected by means of observation, we classified the information in two themes: teaching strategies and teaching materials.

Results and Discussion

First research question

To answer the first research question about VI learners' perceptions towards the English teaching and learning process in an EFL class, we analyzed data from the interviews with the learners. As for positive perceptions, we had a) the teacher and classmates' help and b) attitudes towards learning English. For negative perceptions, we had a) learning difficulties associated with their disability, b) learning difficulties not associated with their disability and c) lack of special teaching and learning resources.

Students' positive perceptions

The teacher and classmates' help

Excerpts from the students' interviews:

La profesora me presta mucha atención en sus clases [The teacher pays a lot of attention to me in her classes] (Pvii).

La profesora nos respeta y motiva mucho a pesar de todo [The teacher respects and motivates us a lot in spite of everything] (Tvii).

Mis compañeros me incluyen y ayudan en los trabajos grupales [My classmates include me and help me in groupwork] (Pvii).

Las evaluaciones son orales, yo escribo en braille mis respuestas y luego las leo a la profesora [The evaluation is oral, I write my answers in braille and then read them to the teacher] (Tvii).

La docente escribe en letras grandes las preguntas y yo las respondo usando braille y luego leo mis respuestas [The teacher writes the questions in large letters and I answer them using Braille and then read my answers] (Pvii).

These results show that both were motivated by the attention and support of their English teacher, who was actively involved in their learning process despite not being trained to teach this type of students. Moreover, their classmates respected and included them in activities. That is why Brown (as cited in Nguyen et al., 2014) emphasized that the teacher should be the source of motivation and commitment to overcome the learning difficulties. In addition, the learning process was reinforced by good coexistence with their peers, which fostered the inclusive education implemented by the Ecuadorian government that promotes the integration of people with disabilities in regular environments (Asamblea Constituyente de Ecuador, 2008). This supports the idea of Aryanti (2014) who suggests that in order to assess such students, adaptations are needed to show their understanding through an appropriate type of test.

Attitudes towards learning English

Excerpts from the students' interviews:

El inglés es una de mis materias favoritas y me gusta aprender palabras nuevas [English is one of my favorite subjects and I like to learn new words] (Tvii).

Me gusta aprender inglés porque algún día podré viajar al extranjero y conocer nuevas personas [I like to learn English because someday I will be able to travel abroad and meet new people] (Pvii).

At this point, the results show that the VI students had a great interest in learning English and using it in non-academic settings. Their good attitudes towards this foreign language are proof that even students with disabilities are aware of the benefits of learning English. Good attitudes can facilitate the teacher's work and students' learning. In this context, Getie (2020) points out that students must have positive attitudes to

ensure the success of the learning process. In that sense, he also states that “these attitudes may influence students to learn or not to learn English language in the required manner” (p. 1).

Students' negative perceptions

Learning difficulties associated with their disability

Excerpts from the students' interviews:

A veces no puedo aprender bien porque no tengo el apoyo de un profesor con formación en braille como en mi anterior escuela [Sometimes I can't learn well because I don't have the support of a Braille-trained teacher like in my previous school] (Tvil).

En los trabajos grupales a veces me siento limitada por mi discapacidad [In group work I sometimes feel limited because of my disability] (Tvil).

Two main difficulties associated with their disability are no availability of a trained teacher in Braille and limited performance with respect to group work. According to the teachers' interview, she is learning to use Braille, but the student notices that she is not able to use it appropriately. According to Intrago (2020), some educators have difficulty learning Braille in a short time, and many times they do not succeed. With respect to the second challenge, the student feels that she is not contributing to the group work. The teachers have an important role in organizing groups because they have to analyze how the VI learner can contribute to the group work and the learning material to be used, which must be prepared in advance (Roldán Pérez & Contreras Aguilar, 2013).

Learning difficulties not associated with their disability

Al hablar tengo miedo de equivocarme o pronunciar mal alguna palabra [When speaking I am afraid of making a mistake or mispronouncing any word] (Tvil).

A veces no entiendo muy bien lo que la docente explica en clase porque no la escucho bien [Sometimes I don't understand very well what the teacher explains in class because I can't hear her well] (Pvil).

Fear of making mistakes when speaking is not only a problem for learners with disabilities. Raya, et al. (2012) mentioned that many language learners did not feel comfortable when speaking because they did not want their classmates to laugh at their mistakes, or they did not want to receive negative feedback. Another learning difficulty is the lack of understanding of teacher' explanation. Body language and facial expressions are useful for better communication. However, students with VI cannot see them. For this reason, the teacher needs to have a lot of knowledge about how to work with these students. Intriago-Ferrin (2020) claims that difficulties associated with the learning process lie in the teacher's lack of knowledge about key factors that this kind of students need to better understand the contents and feel confident when participating in both individual and group activities.

Lack of special teaching and learning resources

Los libros de inglés no son muy útiles para nosotros porque no tienen la estructura apropiada para poder manipularlos [English books are not very useful for us because they do not have the proper structure to be able to manipulate them] (Tvil).

Me gustaría tener libros en braille para poder leer al igual que el resto de mis compañeros, así podría entender mejor las actividades [I would like to have books in Braille so that I can read like the rest of my classmates, so that I can understand the activities better] (Pvil).

These results suggest that there is a great need for adapted teaching and learning materials in an education that is supposed to be inclusive. Inclusive education goes beyond including students with learning disabilities in a regular classroom. The government must provide all necessary resources to successful inclusive classrooms. In fact, Sirirungruang (2015) warns that “the government must provide a budget to make accessible textbooks available for all students with visual impairment” (p. 5). Low-vision students can visualize and decipher large-letter messages. Visually impaired students, on the other hand, rely on audiobooks or the Braille method to read and write (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2010 as cited in Mwakyeja, 2013). Moreover, Retorta and Cristovão mention that “materials in Braille, maps and charts in relief, audio equipment, and abacuses are just some examples of instruments that the blind and visually impaired use in order to learn” (2017, p. 1). It is, therefore, necessary to make a greater effort to produce adapted

textbooks and to make the educational materials necessary to carry out their studies on an equal footing with other students available to VI pupils.

Second research question

To answer the second research question about the English teacher's perceptions of the English teaching and learning process with two VI learners in an EFL class, we analyzed data from the interview with the learners. As for positive perceptions, we have a) students' commitment. For negative perceptions, we have a) communication and classroom management and b) the lack of training.

Teacher's positive perceptions

Students' commitment

Excerpts from the Teacher's Interview:

Ambos estudiantes tienen buenos valores y otras capacidades al momento de aprender inglés [Both students have good values and other capabilities when learning English] (Vilt).

Yo dejo que mis estudiantes con discapacidad visual usen su propio sistema de comunicación, ya que les facilita aprender el vocabulario para que puedan escribir en braille y luego estudiarlo [I let my students with visual impairment use their own communication system, as it makes it easier for them to learn the vocabulary so that they can write in braille and then study it] (Vilt).

Sus compañeros los incluyen en diferentes actividades y ellos participan considerablemente a pesar de sus discapacidades [Their peers include them in different activities and they participate considerably despite their disabilities] (Vilt).

Despite their limitations, commitment and responsibility were some of the qualities that helped these VI students to improve the learning process. This idea points out that the lack of vision is not an impediment to learning English because students with this disability enhance their other senses which help them to develop new skills (Intriago Ferrin, 2020, p. 4). Moreover, allowing students to use Braille facilitates the development of classroom activities, as mentioned by Wiyannah (2008).

Teacher's negative perceptions

Communication and classroom management

Excerpts from the Teacher's Interview:

La comunicación a veces es difícil porque aún no manejo muy bien el sistema Braille [Communication is sometimes difficult because I am not yet very good at Braille] (Vilt).

A veces es difícil llevar la clase porque son un grupo numeroso y no puedo dedicarme solo a ellos [Sometimes it is difficult to manage the class because they are a large group and I can't dedicate myself to them alone] (Vilt).

Intriago-Ferrin (2020) explains that the teaching of this type of student is more effective when both parties, transmitter and receiver, handle the same means of communication. However, this research suggests that they do not share the same communication system. Another negative experience is having a lot of students in the classroom "... when there are too many pupils in the class, the teacher cannot dedicate enough attention to each pupil" (Dubovec et al., 2016, p. 246). Classroom management in large classes is a difficult task; it becomes even more complex when there is a VI student. Therefore, in order to manage a class effectively, teachers need a small number of students, especially in a group with students with learning difficulties.

Lack of training

Excerpts from the Teacher' Interview:

Se necesita capacitaciones y charlas que nos ayuden a solventar las necesidades de los estudiantes con discapacidades [There is a need for training and lectures to help us meet the needs of students with disabilities] (Vilt).

Yo me autocapacito para conocer estrategias que debo utilizar con mis estudiantes con dificultades visuales [I am self-trained to know strategies to use with my students with visual impairments] (Vilt).

The results obtained from the teacher interview point out that the lack of training is another problem because it prevents the development of appropriate curricular adaptations, which for Lancheros Cuesta et al. (2012) and Intriago Ferrin (2020), are the keys to modifying resources, content, and other aspect of teaching and classroom management in order to meet the needs of these students. Başaran (2012) claims that EFL teacher training programs must integrate and provide courses about teaching students with special needs. These results suggest that there is a lack of ministerial responsibility in teaching training. In this context, Sánchez and Díez (as cited in Moreno-Rodríguez, 2016) assert that any of the challenges that obstruct the education of students with disabilities are due to this kind of lack of ministerial responsibility, regulation, strategies, priorities, and plans, as well as funding shortages.

Third research question

To answer the third research question about the strategies and materials used in an EFL class with VI learners, we analyzed data from the interview with the English teacher and from the observation file. The results were classified into two categories, a) teaching strategies and b) teaching materials.

Teaching Strategies

Data from the Observation File:

La docente utilizó la motivación como estrategia en clase. Ella motivaba a todos sus estudiantes a practicar Inglés, especialmente a los que tenían discapacidad visual, mencionando la importancia de aprender una segunda lengua [The teacher used motivation as a strategy in the class. She motivated all her students to practise English, especially those who were VI, by mentioning the importance of learning a second language (Observer 1).

La docente de inglés respeta el ritmo de aprendizaje de los estudiantes con discapacidad visual, brindándoles más tiempo para desarrollar sus actividades y enviándoles como deber para que las culminen [The English teacher respects the learning pace of students with visual impairment by giving them more time to develop their activities and sending them as homework to complete] (Observer 2).

Los alumnos trabajan colaborativamente, la cual es una estrategia didáctica que utiliza el docente para contribuir al desarrollo de las actividades en clase de los estudiantes con discapacidad visual [Students work collaboratively, which is a didactic strategy used by the teacher to contribute to the development of classroom activities for students with visual impairment] (Observator 3).

Excerpts from the teacher's interview:

A veces recurro a sus compañeros para que los ayuden y supervisen en las actividades mientras yo trabajo con el resto del curso [I sometimes called on their peers to assist and supervise them in activities while I work with the rest of the class] (Vilt).

It is essential to keep students motivated (Brown, cited in Nguyen et al., 2014), especially those with disabilities because motivation plays an important role in facing difficulties and successful language learning. Teachers are responsible for creating safe and accessible learning environments in which motivation prevails. Raising awareness about the benefits of learning English can increase students' motivation. Another strategy is mentioned by Carney et al. (2013) who suggested that teachers can provide the necessary time for students with VI to complete their activities. This means that regardless of the methodology, the way of teaching, the type of students in the classroom, the level of education or the subjects taught, and time management are essential for effective learning and helping students with learning difficulties. Lastly, peer collaboration is an effective strategy because it includes sighted and non-sighted learners in the classroom. Laal and Ghodsi (2012) state that peer teaching promotes higher academic achievement and productivity, caring, supportive and committed relationships, and improved psychological health, social competence and self-esteem. Similarly, Salisbury (2007) points out that teachers may need the help of their peers to develop some strategies with visual impaired learners. In this case, the relationship between blind and sighted students is a strategy for the acquisition of knowledge and skills. The experience of collaboration with each other is a good idea to promote inclusive environments and strengthen peer relationships.

Teaching materials

Excerpts from the teacher's interview:

Estoy aprendiendo el uso del sistema braille que es una herramienta que me permite comunicarme con los estudiantes con discapacidad visual [I am learning to use the Braille system which is a tool that allows me to communicate with students with VI] (Vilt).

Data from the observation file:

La profesora facilita el aprendizaje al usar tarjetas con relieve hechas por los estudiantes con discapacidad visual [The teacher facilitates learning by using embossed cards made by the VI students] (Observer 1).

La docente desarrolla su propio material didáctico como hojas de trabajo con letras grandes para el estudiante con 56% de discapacidad visual [The teacher develops her own teaching materials such as worksheets with large print for the 56% VI student] (Observer 3).

The teacher needed to learn Braille on her own was based on the fact that she was looking for an appropriate means of communication that would strengthen the teacher-student relationship. Her initiative is in line with Intriago-Ferrin (2020) who mentioned that within the teaching and learning process, knowing Braille is extremely important. Thus, it can be seen that awareness and knowledge of this communication system is the key to overcome the barriers that are encountered when aiming to make education inclusive. Moreover, she used flashcards with images in relief so that VI learners could feel the object by touch (Salisbury, 2007). That activity "creates a certain image of the word in the memory and helps to memorize it better" (Belova, 2017, p. 593). This is associated with the tactile memory which lets these students read using their fingers. Similarly, the need for special resources led the teacher to create her own materials for teaching a partially sighted student. Certainly this was a great attempt as Mastropieri and Scruggs (2010 as cited in Mwakyeja, 2013) mention that the use of large letters facilitates the way the partially sighted visualize and decipher messages. In both circumstances, it can be seen that there is a lack of training and time to adapt learning materials that can be useful to meet the needs of these students (Lancheros Cuesta, et al., 2012).

Conclusion

The VI students' positive perceptions are related to their teacher and classmates' collaboration and their attitudes towards learning English. Their teacher and classmates show positive attitudes towards an inclusive classroom, giving more opportunities to improve their learning process. In the same way, they show positive attitudes to learning English; their disability is not a barrier to learning English. However, there were negative perceptions due to the learning difficulties associated and not-associated with the disability and the lack of specialized teaching resources and teachers, which hinder their learning.

The teacher' positive perception is related to students' commitment. The two VI students' commitment and their sense of responsibility was a great help that contributed to the teaching process. With respect to the negative perceptions teachers describe communication, classroom management, and lack of training. The teacher's lack of knowledge of Braille and lack of appropriate training were two of the factors that complicated the VI students' experiences in the English classroom.

Finally, the following teaching strategies used in the classroom were: motivation, respect for the learners' pace, and peer teaching. They helped the teacher not only engage these learners actively, but also fostered their learning. With respect to the teaching material, flash cards with figures in relief, worksheets with large print, and Braille (used with the teacher's limitations) were useful to teach VI learners. These materials provided them better opportunities to learn English.

This study had some limitations associated with the limited experience of researchers (pre-service teachers). However, the data presented in this paper was carefully selected in correspondence to the research questions. Further research needs to be done on the effective use of specialized learning and teaching material for this type of students.

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Appendix 1

Interview Guideline Questions for Students

1. *¿Me podrías hablar un poco de tí?* [Tell me a little about yourself]
2. *¿Cuál es tu materia favorita? ¿Por qué?* [What is your favorite subject? Why?]
3. *¿Cómo te sientes en la clase de inglés?* [How do you feel in English class?]
4. *¿Cómo te enseñan inglés en tu escuela?* [How do they teach you English in your school?]
5. *¿Cómo te evalúan en inglés?* [How do they evaluate in English?]
6. *¿Qué materiales utilizas en el aprendizaje del inglés?* [What materials do you use in the English learning process?]
7. *¿Qué experiencias positivas has tenido en las clases de inglés?* [What positive experiences have you had in English class?]
8. *¿Qué dificultades tienes en la clase de inglés?* [What difficulties have you had in English class?]
9. *¿Cómo valoras tu participación en la clase?* [How do you assess your participation in class?]
10. *¿Cómo te sientes cuando trabajas en grupo?* [How do you feel when working in groups?]
11. *¿Qué necesitaría tu profesora de inglés para ayudarte de mejor manera?* [What would your English teacher need to help you better?]

Appendix 2

Interview Guideline Questions for the Teacher

1. *¿Cómo valoras el apoyo del ministerio de educación en la enseñanza de los niños con discapacidad visual?* [How do you assess the support given by the ministry of Education to the teaching of children with visual impairment?]
2. *¿Qué piensas sobre las adaptaciones curriculares en la clase de inglés?* [What do you think about curriculum adaptations in English class?]
3. *¿Qué piensa sobre el uso del Braille en la clase de inglés?* [What do you think about the use of Braille in English class?]
4. *¿Cómo es la relación entre los estudiantes con discapacidad visual y sus compañeros?* [How is the relationship between students with visual impairment and their classmates?]
5. *¿Cómo enseña usted a los estudiantes con discapacidad visual?* [How do you teach to students with visual impairment?]
6. *¿Cómo es la comunicación con los estudiantes con discapacidad visual?* [How do you communicate with students with visual impairment?]
7. *¿Cómo evalúa a los estudiantes con discapacidad visual?* [How do you evaluate to students with visual impairment?]

Appendix 3 Unstructured Observation File

School:Teacher:

Grade: N° of students: Date:

Lesson Objective:

Time	Teacher's activities	Materials	Students' activities	Materials

Comments:

.....
.....

.....

Observer's signature

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