

TEACHING ENGLISH TO A BLIND STUDENT AT A PUBLIC SCHOOL

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**Trabajo de grado presentado como requisito para obtener el título de
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ABSTRACT

This classroom project deals with the implementation of audios and braille as tools to teach English to a blind student in order to explore their effectiveness in a language classroom. Eight sessions were executed, considering the necessities of this student and her right to be included into regular English classes. The participant was a fifth grader from a public school, located in Pereira, Risaralda. She was exposed to listening and speaking activities through the use of Braille system. As a result, the use of braille, audios, and dialogues, as well as the design and accommodation of class materials used in this project facilitated the inclusion of a visually impaired student within a regular English class at a public school.

Key words: Inclusion, braille, visually impaired student, English teaching strategies, accommodated material.

RESUMEN

Este proyecto de grado se basó en la implementación de material de audio y braille como herramientas de enseñanza del inglés con una estudiante invidente. Durante este proceso se llevó a cabo ocho sesiones de clase que consideraron las necesidades de la estudiante y su derecho a ser incluida dentro de un aula de clase regular. La participante fue una niña de grado quinto de una institución educativa pública de la ciudad de Pereira. Ella estuvo expuesta a las habilidades de habla y escucha a través del uso del sistema braille. Como resultado, el uso de braille, audios y diálogos, así como también el diseño y la acomodación de material para las clases, permitieron la inclusión de la estudiante con discapacidad visual dentro del aula regular de clases.

Palabras clave: Inclusión, braille, estudiante con discapacidad visual, estrategias de enseñanza del inglés, acomodación de material.

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INTRODUCTION

Including diverse students in regular classes is a challenge that teachers are going to face at some point in their professional area. Although the Colombian Constitution establishes respectively in the thirteen, forty-seven, and sixty-seven articles that all human beings are born free and equal before the law, plus the education process is a fundamental right everybody has within the nation no matter the disabilities they may have; the government is not providing an accurate preparation for teachers handle a situation of this sort in their classrooms. Facilitators and public schools are in charge of crowded and heterogeneous groups involved in different socioeconomic contexts, particular opinions and a great variety of physical and cognitive possibilities that directly affect their educational process.

Considering this, the need identified by the practitioners to assure inclusive education added to the current importance of the English language nowadays, there were some elemental factors that empower the conception of this project whose main aim was to pursue the line of inclusion taking into account the rawness in the field, but on purpose to follow the government ideals to build an inclusive country -at least in the English classroom- over the implementation of accommodation strategies and use of modeling ideas, such as tools to teach English to a blind student at public school located in Pereira, Risaralda, in sequence to explore which of these strategies could be effective in that specific teaching process.

Here, there were incorporated some definitions such as visual impairment, inclusion, inclusive education, accommodations, and typhology that will support the conceptual framework established for the development of this project. Due to the fact that there are few first-hand papers that promote teaching English as a foreign language to blind students, this

classroom project sets its basis on two studies written by Efstathiou & Polychronopoulou (2015) and Robayo & Cárdenas (2017), that explain how the policies regarding inclusion are established in the Colombian context in contrast to the Greek policies, so as to have a brief idea about how inclusive education is currently handled.

The methodology used in this project includes the PPP sequence, design and accommodations of class materials as strategies that might allow the development of the speaking skill of a blind girl who belonged to fifth grade from a public school. Finally, the results and conclusions obtained after the implementations are presented as a way of reflecting upon the pre-service teachers' professional growth and the outcomes gained by the student.

1. JUSTIFICATION

During the last two decades Colombia has been committed with the improvement of the English level of its citizens; therefore, the Colombian government has stated laws in favor of inclusive education, as well as programs of bilingualism, have been launched in order to foster the use of English. However, the designers of this project have noticed that there is not a real articulation between what the laws say and what the bilingual programs suggest in terms of inclusion. This chapter aims to explore what has been done until now in terms of inclusive education. The purpose of this classroom project will be presented by the end of the chapter.

In 2009, The National Ministry of Education proposed law 366 of February 9th that establishes the requirements to offer education to visual, hearing and speech impaired people. Article seven of law 366 establishes the conditions and requirements about human resources to teach visually impaired people. In this article, the Colombian government requires schools to have specialized teachers as well as a monitor or an interpreter in class to meet the needs of the visually impaired students. Article 16 establishes that local authorities must train teachers and that training should be an ongoing process.

It is known that the training that teachers must receive in order to face students' limitations and special needs in EFL classrooms, and the innovations have come in most of the cases from teachers that are willing to improve their own performance. For instance, González (2012) described herself as "handicapped" when she had to teach French to a blind student. Her efforts to put a blind student to the same level as the sighted classmates led to an investigation in which she implemented three main techniques to overcome the barriers she met with blind students. As it was shown by this study, teachers feel they are not able to manage impaired people in EFL

classrooms. The blind student in González (2012) also expressed that her opportunities of education were reduced compared to the opportunities of sighted people.

In recent years, the English language has become an important matter for people around the world, including 2.624.898 Colombian people with disabilities (DANE, 2005) due to the globalization process. Countries are also interested in improving their education policies regarding bilingual education. For instance, in 2006 the *Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo* was launched in Colombia with a duration of four years. It included the adaption of the Common European Framework and the establishment of the *Guía # 22 Estándares para el desarrollo de competencias en lenguas extranjeras: inglés*. Later, in 2010 the *Programa de Fortalecimiento al Desarrollo de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras (PFDCLE)* was launched in Colombia. One of its focus was the assessment of English teachers and the implementation of the Law of Bilingualism (Law 1651 of 2013). The most recent project was launched in 2014; *the Programa Nacional de Inglés “Colombia Bilingüe”* which aimed to increase the English level throughout the country. One of the objectives of “*Colombia Bilingüe*” was the enhancement of teachers’ performance and it was thought to last until 2025. “*Colombia Bilingüe*” was thought to be developed long-term, and to be integral. However, nothing is mentioned about the inclusion of disabled people of any sort.

An example is a project *Including students with visual impairment in a Colombian state university: a descriptive case study* of a group of students from *Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira* that were interested in knowing the level of preparation of seven in-service teachers from that university to teach visually impaired people. They found that none of the seven teachers interviewed had a formal instruction to manage students of this sort. The results exposed in both studies show the lack of preparation by teachers and the urgent need to have the training that is

mentioned in law 366. Moreover, the purposes stated in the program “*Colombia Bilingüe*” in terms of bilingualism are difficult to reach if teachers do not have the instruction to do so.

This classroom project is based on what it is established in *Decreto 1421 de 2017* which is the framework of inclusive education that is currently working in Colombia. We took into account some of the responsibilities settled by the Ministry of Education that talks about the development of strategies or techniques that can help students get a better school performance and having as an innovative factor to cover the English language instruction into the classes given to a primary course, although it is not regulated by the law that primary education receives too much instruction related to this subject. Another important aspect that we considered to set up this project was the UDL (Universal Design for Learning), since the academic curriculum must be designed taking in consideration students with special and not special needs in order to promote an universal learning and inclusive education; moreover, students must be exposed to flexible materials to develop their skills, so that students can demonstrate a good performance in the English language and feel included through the use of those strategies and techniques.

The purpose of this classroom project is to explore strategies and techniques that may contribute to the improvement of the performance of teachers to instruct visually impaired people. Thus, its importance lay in the fact that the Colombian government does not offer the training that is required to teach visually impaired people and teachers do not know how or when they are going to have a visually impaired student in the classroom; so perhaps the compilation of experiences stated later in this paper may work for teachers who are interested in teaching people with visual impairments.

The aim of this project is to impact a blind student, who is the focus of the study by providing her at least the basic elements of the English language, due to the fact that knowing a

foreign language is a demand of the 21st century and blind people have the same rights as sighted people. Moreover, it was expected that enough experience could be gathered from this project, so knowledge or at least some insights will be provided on how to face a classroom which includes students with disabilities in the near future.

2. OBJECTIVES

2.1 Learning objectives

2.1.1 General objective

To produce simple sentences in English in both oral and written forms within an A1 level.

2.1.2 Specific objectives

- To identify key vocabulary used in simple sentences.
- To use simple present forms correctly when producing simple sentences.

2.2 Teaching objectives

2.2.1 General objective

To describe the efficacy and appropriateness of different strategies for teaching English to a blind student at a public school.

2.2.2 Specific objectives

- To explore English teaching strategies that fit the needs of a visual impaired student in a regular school classroom.
- To accommodate class materials that meet the needs of a visual impaired student in a regular school classroom.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Literature review

The current literature review aims to explore the findings, methods, and participants of previous researchers regarding English education to visually impaired people. Likewise, results of the analysis concerning the policies in the Colombian context related to inclusion presented in Robayo & Cárdenas (2017), which is one of the weakest points that have been detected and one of the reasons the researchers have taken into account to develop the project. The lack of literature mentioned by Efstathiou & Polychronopoulou (2015) in the field of teaching English to visually impaired people has to lead the implementers to conduct a project that may help to alleviate the struggles that are presented when with visual impairment in the Colombian context.

Inclusive Education and ELT Policies in Colombia: Views from Some PROFILE Journal Authors, Robayo & Cárdenas (2017) is a study, whose aim was to know the current situation of inclusion in the Colombian context. This study was taken into account by means of documentary research method and the critical discourse analysis. The authors explored the policies and their appliances in the EFL classrooms in Colombia. They have found that the national rules tend to discriminate and segregate impaired students. Additionally, they generalize the idea that the foreign teacher is better than the national one, which has led to a lack of prepared teachers to face the teaching to impaired people. The study not only states its findings in regards to Inclusive Education but also concludes that inclusion in ESL should foster the elimination of barriers regardless the social conditions. It also remarks the needs of identifying the students' needs and the adaptation of appropriate material to teach to people with impairments.

In contrast to the previous paper, teaching English as a Foreign Language to Visually Impaired Students: Teaching Materials Used by Teachers of English, Efstathiou & Polichronopoulou (2015) exposes the policies in Greece in regards of inclusion. The collection of data was done by surveys that involve both quantitative and qualitative information. The participants of the study were one hundred two EFL teachers that were teaching to visually impaired people at the moment of the study. The results of the research showed that most of the teachers making part of the project have no formal instruction in the field of teaching to people with impairments. However, in comparison to the study above, the teachers are valued by what they know and not by where they are from. Some of the conclusions of Efstathiou & Polichronopoulou (2015) point out that (1) the materials for visual impaired people are too expensive, (2) there is a huge lack of literature regarding the topic. The author also suggested implementing further investigation in different settings by using the observation as a means of gathering information.

Having into account the main aspects of the studies mentioned before, it was considered important for the current project to take the suggestions given by Efstathiou & Polichronopoulou (2015) about using observation as a means to gather information. Likewise, the lack of information may be narrowed by the implementation of more studies in the field of teaching English as a foreign language to visually impaired people. Moreover, the analyzed aspects by Robayo & Càrdenas (2017) in regard to the policies in the Colombian context provided a strong support to foster the inclusion of visually impaired people to the EFL classroom, as well as the enhancement of preparation of national teachers to meet the students' needs.

3.2 Conceptual framework

This chapter has the purpose to introduce the main concepts that supported the development of this classroom project. Two of the principal elements of education should be inclusion regarding the education of visually impaired people and accommodations to assess the English language from students with special needs. That is why the concept of inclusion was taken as the umbrella term of the current project, so to define it, authors such as Waitoller and Artiles (2013), Acuña and Cárdenas (2017), and Thurlow, M. (2004) were taken into account.

The first set of authors provided a background on the field of inclusion as the access to education to visually impaired people. Acuña and Cárdenas (2017) offered the four elements of inclusive education and its appliance in the Colombian context. Likewise, the UNESCO's (2009) definition regarding inclusive education supported the education as a human basic right. Finally, Thurlow, M. (2004) offered a brief definition of accommodation materials to assess visual impaired students, and also the definition of typhology was included in this paper.

3.2.1 Visual impairment:

Attaching inclusive education with the way to teach English to people with special needs, it is necessary to specify the exact disability that will be faced, to define it, it is extremely mandatory to mention that visual impairment (VI) is a worldwide problem that has been studied for many years, for instance, there are lots of definitions such as the one from IDEA (The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) (1997) which defined VI as “An impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child’s educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness.” Then, it is stated that approximately 90% of individuals with VI have a low vision while 10% are functionally blind (American Federation for

the Blind, 2007). It also mentions that visual impairment may be inherited; it is manifested at birth or in childhood but is more common in elderly people.

The definition of VI is subject to constant changes, so the National Health Service in England (2006) renewed its definition of VI as follows: “There has been a change in the terminology of the registers, blind and partial sight impaired (partially sighted). This change was lobbied by service users/patients as it more accurately describes their situation as people who may be technically blind or partially sighted could have useful residual vision.” Another consideration is the one offered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) which stated that a visually impaired person’s eyesight cannot be corrected to a “normal level.”

To complement this definition, The World Health Organization (WHO) has issued the following classifications of visual impairment:

- Mild Vision Loss or Near-Normal Vision – 20/30 to 20/60
- Moderate Visual Impairment – 20/70 to 20/160
- Severe Visual Impairment – 20/200 to 20/400
- Profound Visual Impairment – 20/500 to 20/1000
- Near-Total Visual Impairment – Less than 20/1000
- Total Visual Impairment – No light perception at all

The previous definitions were the theoretical support that worked for the development of this classroom project. It was essential to have a clear understanding about those definitions, as they helped to comprehend the current need of visually impaired learners to be included in the English learning classroom; so, in that way, the correct materials could be provided, and effective solutions could be taken into consideration the stumbling blocks visually impaired people face when learning a foreign language.

3.2.2 Inclusion:

The term inclusion is the dominant concept under the conceptual framework this project is based on. Waitoller and Artiles (2013), defined inclusion as an educational response for people who are seen as “different” in the society due to their background or physical situation. Additionally, Acuña and Cárdenas, (2017) stated these four elements of inclusion: the ongoing process of inclusion, the recognition of obstacles and their elimination, the improvement of teachers’ performances and finally, the involvement of all the actors around the visually impaired; including the fact that the UNESCO (2009) declared education as a universal right, thus inclusion in education means the elimination of barriers to access in it.

Considering all the aspects that involve inclusion, it is substantial that it is not merely theory and perspectives about what educational field may do in order to involve impaired people, in this case visually impaired into the classroom, but also the commitment of all the actors surrounding the situation and the strong purpose of eliminating the obstacles that may prevent the access to education.

3.2.3 Inclusive education:

The classroom is the environment in which the teacher has the responsibility of breaking down the barriers; here, education is the tool to do it. In previous lines, it was mentioned the UNESCO (2009) position towards education as a basic human right, then education was considered as a tool to include all learners into the classroom. This agency for education established education in 2017 as the basis for peace and for the sustainable development of the world. Additional to that, the UNESCO defined inclusive education as a systematic series of steps that enable teachers to overcome obstacles and become the bridge to reach specific goals. Inclusive education is viewed by Stout, (2001) as the commitment to offer appropriate

instruction to the person with special needs regardless the institution, moreover as the benefits of that instruction rather than the help that may come from a partner. Then, Kilanowski-Press, Foote and Rinaldo, (2010) cited in Teachers' attitudes towards Inclusive Classrooms by Greene, explained inclusive education as the support that impaired people must receive in the classroom that is shared with their nondisabled partners, and at any moment from the specialized services that tend to isolate them from the rest of the group.

3.2.4 Accommodations for English Language Teaching:

When attempting to teach English to visually impaired learners, there is an essential term that should be taken into account, and it is accommodation. Accommodation is known as the act of supplying something for convenience or to satisfy a need when this concept is mentioned, it can be associated with inclusion and visual impairment since it covers most of the aspects that must be included into the inclusive education field. In regard to Thurlow (2014), she supported accommodations as a way to ensure that assessments really avoid measuring construct-irrelevant variance and instead measure what students with disabilities know and are able to do.

So, this concept is a support in order to be informed on how to accommodate class materials for the impaired student that is the main focus on the development of this classroom project. Additionally, this model is applied looking forward to following the parameters and rules that it implies, considering the differences between accommodation and modifications.

3.2.5 Typhology

According to an article taken from "*Periódico El Tiempo*" (2013), typhology is the science that studies blindness and the treatments to dress it. Moreover, it involves the techniques that facilitate blind people's performance through the use of braille, tools management to practice mathematics, and special technology such as orientation and cane's use. In order to give

solutions and alternatives to include them in natural, professional, academic and socio-cultural environments.

This concept is included due to the fact that the project will be developed with a student with a visual impairment. Here, some strategies such as the use of braille and accommodated materials will be included to the activities that will be proposed for the teaching sessions.

4. METHODOLOGY

In this section, information about the context, the setting, the participants, the sample used, and the methods to collect data implemented along the execution of this project will be disclosed in detail.

4.1 Context

This classroom project was carried out with thirty-two students who belonged to fifth grade from a public school in Pereira, Risaralda. This is an inclusive school that has students with different kind of impairments (cognitive, blind, deaf, mute and disabled people), but it also has students without any kind of impairment; additionally, the school works in two schedules, morning and afternoon, having learners from preschool until eleventh grade. On the other hand, the institution is equipped with special materials that are used during the classes in order to merge students with disabilities into the regular classroom so that the classes could be guided in a regular way. It also has a computers lab, an auditorium, and a library that works as an audiovisual room when teachers require it. Moreover, the school has a typhlogist who is in charge of adapting normal texts to braille. Last but not least, students from tenth grade who are paying their social service, work as monitors and they help impaired students who are attending classes.

4.2 Setting

The classroom in which the execution of this project took place was big, it had enough space to move around in case of monitoring activities or in case of evacuation, it had chairs and desks for each one of the thirty-two students who belong to the course and a teacher's' desk. Furthermore, the room had a big board on which teachers regularly guide classes.

4.3 Participants

4.3.1 Students

The learners involved in this classroom project were thirty-two students from a public school in Pereira, but it is important to highlight that the focus was just on a ten-year-old blind girl. The socioeconomic status varies among the students since they all had different social backgrounds; most of them belonged to middle socioeconomic stratum. Their ages ranged from nine to eleven years old and their English level was A1. As it was mentioned before, the instruction they have received until the implementation sessions started was related to basic vocabulary such as the name of some colors, the numbers from 1 to 10, and greetings and farewell expressions.

4.3.2 Specifications about the student who was the main focus of this project

According to The World Health Organization, this student presented total visual impairment from birth which means that she has no light perception at all, and for that reason, she has received training on how to read and write in Braille and so she does it extremely well.

4.3.3 Practitioners

Three pre-service teachers from ninth semester of the *Licenciatura en Bilingüismo con Énfasis en Inglés* from *Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira* were in charge of the project. The practitioners had different tasks during the development of the project. For instance, the roles were divided into lesson plan and material designer, implementer, and observer. The roles rotated among all the sessions, so each of the participants took any of the roles at any given moment. Therefore, it can be said that the current classroom project was developed in a non-real environment as in the Colombian context there is only one teacher in charge of a whole group, no matter the special needs that can be found on it.

4.4 Sample

As the main focus of this classroom project was on a blind student that belonged to the course, it can be said that judgmental sampling was used to collect the relevant information required to accomplish the project objectives that were laid out at the moment to plan the classes, so, essential aspects such as the abilities, behavior, strengths, and weaknesses from that blind student were taken into consideration. Besides, the general and specific standards from the “*guía 22*” were used during the planning and execution of this project with the purpose to guide the classes in an objective and pertinent way and be in line with the grade and level of the students.

The work done with the visually impaired student could be carried out through the adoption of teaching strategies that require visual aids as little as possible. On the contrary, the pre-service teachers incorporated an alternative form of interaction with the braille system which was designed using cardboard and foamy dots and whose role was to promote the student’s spelling as well as her understanding on how different it is to write a word from the pronunciation of itself in English.

4.5 Reflection Instruments

All the work done during this classroom project would be worthless if it is not judiciously reflected upon the development and results are not done. That is why the linguistic outcomes, the student’s responses, and the practitioners’ professional development were registered and reflected on them. In order to do such reflection, the implementers of this classroom project bore in mind the words of Dörnyei (2016); this author explored several qualitative ways to gather information when doing research and the way information should be put in written form. Among the way he explored, there are journals, observations, and student’s artifacts. For this project,

those were the resources of information used that allowed the pre-service teachers to collect suitable information to come up with the results.

Consequently, the student performances during the classes were recorded in order to collect information about her linguistic production and attitudes towards the class (student responses). Observation reports were used to register whether the class and project objectives were accomplished or not. Finally, teacher journals and lesson plans were used to reflect upon pre-service teachers' performance and how the development of the sessions were going as they served to evaluate what went well, what did not go well and what needed to be improved in the classes.

4.5.1 Journals

They were used by the implementers to reflect on the different good or not so good situations that arose within each implemented session as well as to write about the personal strengths and weaknesses that were identified in both process, planning and implementing.

4.5.2 Observations

In each session, one of the implementers took the role of an observer, so that she could had a deeper perspective of the events that occurred in the classroom. Besides, the observations were used for analyzing the good and not so good things that needed to be changed for the next implementation attempting to find a solution to the problems faced.

4.5.3 Students' artifacts: This instrument was used by the pre-service teachers with the purpose to have evidence of the work done by the learner in each implementation, so the different classroom activities were recorded and saved because they allowed post reflection upon the results gathered.

4.6 Instructional design

Aiming to assure the English learning for a blind student, two class observations and an initial survey with the head teacher and the blind student's mother were applied before the implementation could take place. First, after analyzing the field notes taken during the observations and the conclusions drawn from the surveys, the way forward was established. Therefore, nine EFL lessons were planned and the selected topics were aligned with the PPP sequence as stated by Brown (2004) and some specific teaching strategies such as using braille, audios, and dialogues, as well as the design and accommodation of class materials were used having as the main objective to determine whether the use of that sequence and those strategies could be useful to ensure the learning of a foreign language for a blind student.

In addition, after having selected the topics to work on during the implementations, the lesson plans were designed every week by the three practitioners. As it has been stated here before, the participants were beginners' users of the target language, this is why one topic could be implemented in more than just one session. Eventually, the materials used were accommodated and some others were designed following the ongoing needs of the blind student.

5. RESULTS

This section aims to present the results obtained in relation to the teaching strategies that were used in a set of English classes with a blind student, as well as the strengths and challenges that were identified during the implementation of the project. These strengths and challenges are related to the accommodation of materials and linguistic outcomes. These results will be presented in the following order: First, professional growth, in relation to the strengths and challenges in the exploration of teaching strategies and accommodation of class materials. Secondly, linguistic outcomes, and finally, student responses in terms of autonomy and motivation.

5.1 Strengths in the exploration of teaching strategies

The strengths that were identified during the exploration of teaching strategies will be reported in this section. The strategies used were braille, audio materials, and dialogues. They were applied throughout eight class sessions with the aim of suiting the needs of a visual impaired student in a regular school classroom. Each one of the strategies proved to contribute to the inclusion of the blind student in the English classes she attended.

5.1.1 Use of braille system

Braille permitted the student's association between the written language codes and their pronunciation in the sense that she wrote new vocabulary and sentences after each word was spelled by one of the project implementers. This was possible because she had developed the ability to use this system since she started her academic process. This can be illustrated in the audio script #4, in which the student was reading aloud the words that she wrote down on her notebook while the teacher was providing feedback to her pronunciation.

Audio script #4, 09/05/18

Student 1: She is Claudia

Student 1: She is my mother

Student 1: She is medium

Student 1: She is chubby

Student 1: She has...

Teacher: She has sh...

Student 1: She has short hair

Student 1: and she has brown eyes

Teacher: Good job!

In the script 4, the learner is reading aloud a short physical description that she wrote about her mother. There, it can be seen that she was using the vocabulary learned during the class and the teacher was guiding her process by helping her with the correct pronunciation. Moreover, it is inferred that the use of braille as a strategy in the English learning process of the learner helped her to make associations between written letters and their sounds not only as particular units but also as the combination of those sounds to produce full and well-pronounced words.

This result is aligned with Morrow (1999) in that the use of braille allowed the student to feel included within the classroom since she could write and read in a similar way their visual capable classmates do. Similarly, oral production combined with the ability to write in braille permitted the student to have access to the content of the English syllabus, including grammar and pronunciation. Based on the aforementioned, it can be said that using braille as a strategy to facilitate the access to the foreign language signified a positive impact on the student's learning process.

5.1.2 Use of audio material

The audio material permitted that the student learned new vocabulary and improve her pronunciation and fluency. An example of this occurred when the teacher played an audio so that the blind learner raised the correct flashcard when a characteristic was mentioned. This can be exposed in Journal #7, in which the blind student made connections between what she heard and the flashcards she had in her hands.

Journal #7, 02/05/18 *“... in the listening activity, the teacher gave to each student a flashcard with some physical characteristics of a person, so learners had to raise the flashcard when the characteristic was mentioned in the audio. It was evident that the blind student was very auditory because she always raised the flashcard without making mistakes and she repeated the word.”*

In the data, it is interpreted that during listening activities the blind student was attentive and trying to guess and understand what was said in order to make relations between the accommodated flashcards and the words mentioned. It is important to emphasize that the students were exposed to the pronunciation of the new vocabulary before working on the listening activity. Furthermore, thanks to one of the tutors' guidance regarding listening and the verbalization used in L1 to facilitate the comprehension of the flashcard's meaning, the blind student could internalize the correct pronunciation of those words and match them with the one that represented each of them during the pre and while listening activity.

This result is aligned with Morrow (1999) since the population of her study drew attention to the fact that having this sort of disability allowed them to amplify their auditory skills when learning a foreign language. The use of audio material worked by means of providing the student with authentic input that could help her produce the expected output for the classes and the student's familiarization with how different the pronunciation of the target language is.

Therefore, it can be said that using audio materials proved to be an effective strategy in terms of student's production and her adaptation to the classroom environment.

5.1.3 Use of dialogues

Dialogues permitted the creation of a comfortable environment in the sense that students were provided with opportunities to communicate and talk about themselves using the language taught beforehand. This was conducted with the intention that the student could gain some confidence when speaking. This was achieved by providing an example of the speaking activity, giving the instructions to all pairs at the same time, monitoring and helping them to solve any doubt they could have during the preparation time, and, finally, focusing on accuracy to provide immediate feedback on the students' performance. This can be evidenced in the following artifact, audio script #3, in which the target student (student 1) performed a dialogue with a pair guided by the pre-service teacher.

Audio script #3, 18/04/18

Student 1: And you?

Student 2: What is your name?

Student 1: My name is Laura

Student 2: How old are you?

Teacher: I am

Student 1: I am ten years old

Student 2: What do you want to be when you grow up?

Student 1: Teacher

Teacher: Repeat after me, I want

Student 1: I want

Teacher: To be

Student 1: To be

Teacher: Aquí mencionan la profesión que quieren tener cuando sean grandes. For example, a teacher

Student 1: A teacher

Teacher: Say bye, girls

Student 2: Bye

Student 3: Bye

Teacher: Great! You can go back to your seats.

It can be seen that in the first part of the dialogue, both students were able to ask each other by their names and ages and answer in an accurate way to those questions in the foreign language. However, when the student 2 asked the student 1 what she wanted to be when she grew up, it seemed that this question was complex for her. That is why the teacher decided to directly tell the students involved how to answer that question.

This result is aligned with Brown (2001) in that dialogues are activities that help the students, especially beginners, to use and improve their English speaking skill since they can count with teachers help before start moving forward by their own. Moreover, when students perform this type of activities, an appropriate learning atmosphere is created as dialogues allow pair-group work that makes the experience meaningful since students can express themselves in a free way and gain some confidence.

It can be said that the strategies of braille, audio material and dialogues helped with the inclusion of a blind student in a regular English class. This set of strategies were used to facilitate her access to the demands of the class, allowing her to feel affirmed within the classroom and motivated to learn and start speaking in the foreign language. This achievement was possible because of the encouraging process that made her take advantage of the remaining senses she

had and her special abilities. One of the student's motivation was her willingness to show everyone that, no matter her impairment, she could learn in the same way as the sighted classmates do. On the other hand, we, as teachers in development, learned that to deal with a situation like this, it is required to use certain strategies based on the student's own disability. In addition, knowing the student's abilities bring advantages for selecting teaching strategies; for example, the fact that she knew how to read and write in braille system, made it one of the chosen strategies for this project. Likewise, identifying that the student had a well-developed sense of hearing, led us to choose using audio material from all the other possible strategies. Lastly, aiming at integrating this student into the classroom environment, so that she could interact, share with their classmates, and be able to work in team, the strategy of using dialogues permitted her to work on equal basis with other students.

The exploration of teaching strategies taught us the importance of identifying what a student with any kind of disability can perform beforehand. In this way, we can make decisions about which strategies to use and promote those that allow teamwork, seeking to decrease all forms of discrimination and stigma against students with disabilities in regular classrooms. We also learned how important it is to teach following the UDL (Universal Design for Learning) (2008) bases to work with students with special needs, as it states that it is essential to offer different learning methods to motivate students to learn. Moreover, the UDL must be applied according to the student's life, age and disabilities so as to give them the opportunity to explore, participate and experiment during the development of activities; requesting them personal answers, assessing them and asking for self-reflection about what they are doing and how they are feeling are necessary aspects to consider in order for changes to be made. In the same manner, the UDL provides some examples to apply such as adapt different models to emulate; in

this way, teachers can find the same results, but use other strategies, approaches and skills as required by every particular teaching context. Finally, it recommends to provide a flexible feedback with information that can be accommodated or personalized to each student and their different needs, and that is what was done to contribute to the student's learning process.

5.2 Strengths in the accommodation and design of materials

The strengths identified at the moment to accommodate and design class materials will be stated in this section. In fact, the accommodation of flashcards and the design of an alternative form of interaction with the braille system, enriched our experience as material designers to teach English to a blind student since everything we did was according not only to the class learning objectives but also to the student needs. These aids intended to support the inclusion of a visually impaired learner within the English classroom.

5.2.1 Accommodation of flashcards

The accommodation of flashcards for the subsequent design of embossed pictures to teach the topic of physical descriptions contributed to the English learning process of the blind student. This, in the sense that she could relate what she was touching with what she heard, so she could grasp the meaning of people's physical characteristics such as long hair, wavy hair, tall, short, and so on. This was possible since the student could use her sense of touch to call back the mental image she had about the characteristics presented beforehand. This can be confirmed in Observation #7 when it was mentioned that:

Observation #7, 02/05/18 *“The blind student was so interested in knowing the vocabulary related to physical descriptions and did not wonder that we had accommodated the flashcards to explain that type of vocabulary following some recommendations that were given by one of her teachers. When I gave her the cardboards that represented the height, she was amazed and enthusiastic to*

continue touching the materials brought. She understood the concepts in Spanish and then they were translated into the foreign language.”

In the extract above, it is evident that the blind student was able to understand the meaning of the words presented through the use of embossed pictures due to the fact that those flashcards were designed aiming to get benefit from her developed sense of touch and the use of verbalization as a sub strategy in this process. This result is aligned with Scanlon and Baker (2012) when he states that in order to make accommodations work, a three-phase process of preparation, provision and evaluation, must be followed; this was done by following real student’s needs and usage appropriateness for effective classroom teaching. That is to say that the use of flashcards and embossed pictures was beneficial for the blind student vocabulary learning and use.

5.2.2 Design of an alternative form of interaction with the braille system

Since none of the pre-service teachers knew how to write or read braille nor did they have the slate and stylus to produce texts on it, they designed an alternative form to interact with it by using cardboard, glue, and foamy dots. The dots were glued onto the cardboard in the sense that the uncontracted braille could be read by the student. This was possible because the student knew braille since she started her learning process at school and a short explanation was provided to her before handling the material, so she could read letter by letter and then she was able to pronounce the whole word, which can be evidenced in journal #4.

Journal #4, 16/04/18“... *When I handed the cardboard to the student and explained what it was she seemed to be very interested in discovering it by her own. The student started reading each letter in Spanish but it was not a problem at all since she learned the English pronunciation of those letters through repetition guided by the pre-service teacher. At the time the student finished pronouncing all the letters of a word in English, the pre-service teacher practice the*

pronunciation of the whole word along with the blind girl, and listening to her while she was repeating the words correctly made us feel that all the work done was worth it.”

In this excerpt, it can be interpreted that the material accommodated and designed to fulfill the visually impaired student’ specific necessities was well received by her since it aroused her interest in learning new vocabulary. In addition, the materials used to carry out the presentation stage of the English class facilitated the relationship between English and Spanish of certain vocabulary inasmuch as those materials provide the blind student with autonomy, and that made her feel embraced by the group in charge of the project and their commitment to contribute to her inclusion within the English classroom.

This result is aligned with Arenas (2012), in that the use of braille, in this case an alternative form of interaction with braille, worked as an assertive strategy to use with this blind student as she felt included within the process while learning the pronunciation of isolated words that contributed to the construction of her own vocabulary. Subsequently, this may result on the student producing complete and well-structured sentences as well as in her motivation to continue learning English as a foreign language.

It can be said that the accommodation of flashcards and the design of an alternative form of interaction with the braille system helped the inclusion of a blind student in a regular English class and contributed with the professional development of the implementers involved. Considering that, it was observed that the selection and design of material should be done carefully as lessons progress; besides, it should be appropriate to meet the student’ needs. This particular case demanded a great amount of time in view of the fact that the pre-service teachers did not use braille, so they had to search about it before accommodating the material to make it relevant for the student.

5.3 Challenges in the accommodation and design of materials

The challenges faced in these two areas were the accommodation and design of materials for the time it takes in its construction. This challenge was evidenced immediately after the beginning of the implementation process of this classroom project on account of the tutors' lack of experience in this field. This assertion can be corroborated in the journal #9, in which one of the facilitators reflects upon how difficult it was to think about the type of materials an implementation required and how to accommodate them.

Journal #9, 23/05/18 *"...When we decided to work on this classroom project, the fact that concerned us most was regarding class materials since we had to find the way to make them accessible for a blind girl. The selection of topics and lesson planning were activities we were able to develop without any problems at all, but the designing of class materials took a considerable amount of time since we did not have experience working with a student with disabilities. So we had to, first, look for experts' support in order to be oriented with the theory and then, start the process of design and accommodation of the required materials in order to achieve the project' goals. However, after each implemented session more experience was gained inasmuch as we started to be aware of the significance that using this strategy will bring to the student's learning process, and thus, we thought of the accommodations much more quickly".*

In this data sample, one of the facilitators revealed that designing and accommodating class materials, taking into account the visually impaired student's needs, became a demanding task for the group in charge of the project. However, as time passed, this task became easier to accomplish thanks to the experience acquired during the planning and execution of the project.

According to Ramos & Aguirre (2014), during the process of material development it is normal to find shortcomings but those challenges are the ones that help us to grow professionally since developing our own materials bring benefits for both, students and teachers. Nevertheless,

the role of teachers as material developers involve to identify the needs to cope with, the creation or accommodation of the material, the piloting and evaluation before it is presented to the student. This demonstrates that it is a process that takes a lot of time and dedication from the teacher for both, the needs analysis and the creation of material, which require intensive reading and creativity in order to ensure its meaningfulness. Developing materials is an essential characteristic every teacher should have, but the most important is to design those materials bearing in mind to address the various needs of the students and work towards the creation of an inclusive environment.

5.4 Strengths in terms of linguistic outcomes

The implementation of the current project supported the production of sentences using the simple present tense and key vocabulary about topics such as introducing yourself, professions and workplaces, family members, and physical descriptions. The student who was the sample of this project was exposed to the foreign language content not only through listening activities, but also through speaking ones. At the end of the class-implementations, the student was able to produce grammatically correct simple sentences, in which she included the vocabulary taught in class. Additionally, she showed improvements considering her listening comprehension. The development of these strengths can be seen in journal#9 and audio script #4, in which the group conducting the project realized on the improvements made by the student.

Journal #9, 09/05/18 *“During the implementations carried out, we could notice that the blind student was very auditory, and she tried to pay attention to every explanation or instruction given as a way to grasp the vocabulary presented and its pronunciation. Likewise, she got input from the audios played in class which enabled her to produce sentences using present simple and the vocabulary taught at the end of the sessions”*

From the previous data, it can be determined that the work done with the student, lead to a successful outcome inasmuch as she started producing grammatically correct sentences with an accurate pronunciation. This was due to the learning process she was involved in, mostly based on oral transmission of knowledge.

To complete the above assertion, more evidence of the enhancements shown by the student are exposed in audio script #4:

Audio script #4, 09/05/18

Student 1: She is Claudia

Student 1: She is my mother

Student 1: She is medium

Student 1: She is chubby

Student 1: She has...

Teacher: She has sh...

Student 1: She has short hair

Student 1: and she has brown eyes

Teacher: Good job!

As it can be seen in the above sample, the student was reading aloud a physical description that she wrote in class about her mother, which is evidence in one of the linguistic outcomes she achieved, considering that she used the vocabulary learned and bore in mind the patterns of pronunciation suggested by the pre-service teacher.

In the previous data, the progress made by the student throughout the English lessons was evidenced by considering that in several opportunities, the classroom project team recorded the advances that the student presented in the speaking skill. In fact, the student's oral production was improved by acknowledging her interest in learning the foreign language, her well-

developed listening comprehension, as well as the positive impact the teaching strategies and materials used had towards student's autonomy to communicate in the English language.

Consequently, the idea of employing communication activities, in this case, the use of dialogues supported by Rukminingsih (2016), was used to develop the student's ability to use the target language, and assess grammar simultaneously. Afterwards, teaching grammar "enables students to use grammar structures correctly in writing and speaking", for this reason it could be assessed through speaking skill in an effort to check that the student already learned the vocabulary, the grammar rules taught and be able to apply them correctly along with her speech and writing. This has led us to obtain conclusions similar to Rukminingsih's, in that "teaching grammar in communicative activities is one of the techniques which is much more effective than teaching grammar as a separate subject or as in conventional one". This type of activities helped the learner to comprehend how the foreign language works, how to use it and it also created a relaxed environment, facilitating that the blind girl assimilated the structure of the simple present tense, without losing her natural curiosity in learning English.

5.5 Student's responses

This category presents some reactions and attitudes that were recorded about the visually impaired student during the implementation of this classroom project. The most remarkable factors that influenced the performance of the student were regarding autonomy and motivation, which proved to have a positive impact in the student's English learning process.

5.5.1 Autonomy

Despite the fact that this project focused on exploring accommodations, and teaching strategies that might contribute to English learning for a visually impaired student, it was also found that there was an increase in the student's autonomy. This was observed in that she started

to do things by her own and rely less on teachers' guidance. Such assertion can be identified in journal #9, in which the pre-service teachers reported changes in the student's behavior that lead to suppose that the accommodation of class materials was associated with her empowerment in class.

Journal #9, 09/05/18, *“At the beginning of the English classes there was an student from eleventh grade that help the blind student writing the content of all the subjects in her notebook, so it means that the student job was limited to be seated in her chair just listening to the teachers' explanations, this happened during the school day, every day. Whenever the student came home from school, her mother help her to review everything she was taught. This soon changed when we take the accommodated material to class, from then on, the student felt encouraged to write in her notebook using her slate and stylus as she knew that she could do it and one of the pre-service teachers could understand what she had written, although it could not be done so quickly forasmuch as the pre-service teacher was just starting to learn the braille system. In addition, she contacted us through WhatsApp and she asked for the pronunciation of some words or explanations that allow her to make reviews of the English classes at home”.*

In regards to the previous journal, it can be confirmed that the design and accommodation of class materials benefited the student in many ways since they helped her prompt her learning of the foreign language along with the development of her intrapersonal skills such as autonomy and motivation.

According to Barrantes and Olivares (2013), “learner autonomy in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom involves conscious, reflective decisions and explicit procedures from students”. On those grounds, we assumed that the visually impaired student felt motivated during the English class; she decided by herself to start writing in her slate the activities that were proposed in-class time and to accept teachers help just when she had doubts

or wanted to clarify the pronunciation of the vocabulary presented. Moreover, she participated actively and was responsible for her own learning, which granted the straightforward internalization of the foreign language, succeeding to accomplish the learning objectives that were set for the development of this classroom project.

Furthermore, it also can be said that the student's autonomy was implicitly developed through the design and accommodation of class materials, a process that was done taking into consideration the individual needs of the blind girl to learn English as a foreign language. The fact that she felt included into the classroom by the pre-service teachers increased her willingness to stop depending on others help. She started doing things by her own, which contributed to her personal and academic development.

5.5.2 Motivation

Based on the data gathered by the implementers of this classroom project, it was found that the goals achieved during English class sessions were due to pre-service teachers' commitment with their teaching role added to the student natural desire to learn from them. This issue associated to student's motivation was repeatedly registered in the class observations conducted by the group in charge of the project. An example of this is presented in observation #6, in which one of the pre-service teachers detected some positive reactions and attitudes from the student.

Observation #6, 25/04/18 *“The topic about family members increased the student's interest in continuing learning English in view of the fact that the student was constantly asking the pre-service teacher for new words, she did it in this way: “Si mamá se dice mother, ¿entonces cómo se dice papá?”. Also, she showed enthusiasm for the activities executed by the pre-service teachers by having an active participation role within them”.*

From this observation, it can be evidenced that the student was motivated to learn English as a result of the fact that she had shown her interest in the activities and strategies proposed by the pre-service teachers to teach the language. The positive attitudes she had towards the three pre-service teachers and their corresponding ways to teach can be interpreted as a factor that enhanced her intrinsic motivation to learn.

This is aligned with Harmer (2015), when he said that the students' natural curiosity has a positive effect upon their own desire to learn, but this can change soon if there is no rapport between them and the teacher. Therefore, teachers' work is to have students interested along the classes as well as to care for the students, foster their self-esteem, bring engaging activities and materials that make the student have positive emotions during class time, so they will remain encouraged to learn. Consequently, the fact that the implementers showed care about meeting the needs and achievements of the blind student within the English classroom, affected positively her behavior and proved to motivate her learning process.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This classroom project aimed at exploring the teaching strategies and accommodation of class materials that could be suitable to teach English to a blind student at a public school located in Pereira, Risaralda. During the implementation of this project, the pre-service teachers used strategies such as braille, audio materials, and dialogues; besides, accommodated and designed materials also took part within this teaching process, so as to determine whether they could work towards the inclusion of a visually impaired student in a regular classroom or not. We concluded that those alternatives supported the English learning process of a blind girl in a regular school classroom. In fact, we perceived that this student tended to participate more actively during the class activities, her speaking ability was improved, and she felt included over the course of the implementations.

The learning objective “*to identify key vocabulary used in simple sentences*” was achieved successfully through the use of braille as it helped to identify key vocabulary learned during the classes implemented. Additionally, it facilitated the student's learning process because she knew how to use the braille system, so it allowed her to have a brief idea of English grammar. In terms of accommodations, they were an efficient strategy since, based on the theory and examples explored, the material helped the student have access to the same activities that were implemented inside the classroom. Due to this, it not only gave the advantage to include the blind student into the regular class, but also facilitated our work at the moment of design the activities that were going to be applied during the sessions.

On the other hand, the learning aim “*to use simple present forms correctly when producing simple sentences*” was also achieved considering the assessment of grammar through

the oral skill. This was possible due to the fact that, based on the rules we presented at her regarding grammar and the dialogues that learners performed, the student produced orally the sentences required following the structure that had been explained. In that way, it could be achievable for us to make sure that she was understanding and she was learning the language we were introducing to her. Similarly, it provided enough input to the student's learning of new vocabulary; plus, her accurate pronunciation allowed her to create a comfortable environment in order to participate in the sessions.

Secondly, the design of an alternative form of interaction with the braille (cardboard and foamy dots) and embossed flashcards, played an important role regarding the purposes of the project. In this part, the cardboard and the foamy were useful at the moment of presenting to the student specific words related to the new vocabulary that teachers took to class every week. Thus, the blind girl could read and memorize the words touching the foamy dots and connecting the content with her knowledge in braille. Additionally, using embossed flashcards helped us to explain to her some physical characteristics and descriptions, since the student could interpret or infer what was drawn in the picture, considering the textures that she had had contact with.

Thirdly, the strategies implemented to achieve the specific teaching objectives helped us to be aware about the importance of being prepared to confront special cases in real life. The classes were planned taking into consideration the student's needs with the aim to benefit the learning process, not only of the students but also our learning process as teachers to be by gathering some experience in the field of teaching English to the blind population. Moreover, when discussing the strengths identified in the exploration of the strategies used in this project, it was noticed that they work towards the development of the speaking skill, which was one of the

aims proposed. Indeed, they have proved to help the student to get the input and confidence needed to speak in the foreign language.

In terms of accommodations, it must be highlighted that they were efficient, favoring the inclusion of the visually impaired student into the English classroom. The class materials were designed and accommodated taking into consideration the real needs of the student, and she could participate in the activities proposed for each session in an equitable way as her sighted classmates did. Therefore, create those accommodations implied some choices that the pre-service teachers had to make regarding the blind student's background using this kind of material, considering what they had noticed during the class observations made before starting with the project implementations. Additionally, teachers had to consider the time that they should invest designing the material, get the materials needed to design those accommodations and pilot them once they were finished with the purpose of being sure that they met the student's necessities and promoted her interest in learning the foreign language in an environment free from discrimination.

Concerning the aforementioned, it can be said that this classroom project reached its main objective, which was to explore a set of strategies to teach English to a blind student while fostering her speaking skill. Nevertheless, we as English teachers in development also learned that inclusion is not merely admitting to school a child with disabilities, but taking into consideration the student's special needs in order to guarantee her access to education on an equal basis with other peers. On the other side, we realized that teachers are not prepared to deal with those cases due to the lack of training they have in the field. In addition, the work that the government is trying to do by making laws in favor of providing inclusive education to all

human beings with different types of disabilities would not be enough until real concerns about improving the life quality of people in academic areas are considered.

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