

English course for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students of the Universidad Juárez del Estado de Durango

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Resumen

En el texto siguiente, el lector podrá conocer un poco más sobre datos importantes a considerar para la aplicación de clases de inglés a personas con discapacidad Auditiva parcial o total. La importancia de la igualdad en la educación para todas las personas con alguna necesidad educativa especial, es tocada en este tema, centrándose en este caso en las personas sordas e hipoacusicas, a las cuales tienen se les brindó la oportunidad de elegir entre ciertas carreras de la Universidad Juárez del Estado de Durango (UJED), para poder continuar con su preparación profesional y personal. Basado en esto, y que las personas sordas puedan tener acceso a los diferentes servicios de la UJED, que incluyen el centro de idiomas, es que se realiza la creación de este curso, el cual busca que la educación que reciben estas personas sea lo más completa posible, permitiendo que el único límite que exista para su educación sea el que ellos mismos deseen establecer.

Terminos como Sordo, Hipoacusico, Lengua de Señas Mexicana (LSM), American Sign Language (ASL) entre otros serán tratados durante la lectura.

Palabras clave/Keywords UJED, Deaf, Hard of Hearing, ASL, LSM, Lexical Approach, English Course, Special Needs

Introduction

During the following pages, the reader will get immerse on the aspects that will conform and contribute with the design of an English course for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students of the Universidad Juárez del Estado de Durango (Juárez University of Durango). Through the next pages, the reader will know more about people with these characteristics, the skills and kind of limitations that they have, perspective of Mexican education and Educational integration, and also about the approach proposed for the correct and successful development of the course.

Background

Article 3rd of Mexican Constitution establishes that every person has a right to quality education. Also on Article 41 of the “Ley General de la Educación” (General Education Law), specifies that people with disabilities have the same right to receive quality education. Based on this, Universidad Juárez del Estado de Durango (Juárez University of Durango - UJED) offered professional development in all fields or areas of study to deaf and hard of hearing problems people at any of the programs offered. They have the possibility to get well prepared in order to get included to social fabric of Durango and to be able and qualified to acquire and maintain a job, and contribute to the development of Mexican country.

Problem

One of the graduation requirements settled by UJED is to attain certain level and use of the English, this, will help students increase the range of job opportunities and widen their knowledge about topics that they may need during their professional life. Students in this institution, accomplish this through the courses given in Escuela de Lenguas (ELE [School of Languages]), these courses are divided between the Language Center (CELE), and the Programa Universitario de Aprendizaje y Acreditación de la Lengua Inglesa (PUAALI [University Learning and Accreditation Program of English Language]). The content of these courses covers the acquisition and use of the target language. UJED has opened these English courses for all students, and marking the learning of English language a requirement established to complete successfully their studies, but, are these courses offered suitable for deaf and Hard of hearing problems students? Analyzing the necessity of our university to offer an English course that covers the characteristics of these students is that the following is proposed as an answer that will adapt to the needs of these students in order to develop the knowledge of the language in them.

Purpose

This course proposal will look forward to adapt to the special learning needs that these students have, the group of participants will be integrated with two kinds of hearing disabilities because some of these students are deaf, others just have some deep hearing problems. This course is planned to be adapted to their characteristics and needs in order to develop a specific way of understanding the language. Learning for them occurs through vision, furthermore their visual intelligence seem to be developed. Taking advantage of this, the course seeks to immerse these students into a real context where they will be able to produce language and to interact in a real way. Leading the participants to express their necessities and to use the language in a written form and also

some of them might be able to produce the language in an oral way, opening their possibilities to a better lifestyle and other job opportunities by course adaptations suitable for their necessities.

Limitations

The possibility of oral production in most of the participants is null, only two of the participants had hearing residues enough to acquire some oral production, so with the rest of the participants the production of English language will be through signs, and the sign language that will be used on this course will be the *American Sign Language*. Is highly important to consider that deaf and most of people with deep hearing problems' mother tongue (L1) is sign language, settled this into the context they know about Mexican Sign Language, or LSM by its Spanish acronym (Lengua de Señas Mexicana), and that Spanish is their second language (L2), due to this, some of the participants may have some limitations to understand Spanish in the way that we, as normal hearing people, use it. Due to the changes of grammar structure (syntax, and exceptions on Parts of speech) and obvious language production.

Summary

Learning English for these participants will lead them to encourage other people of their community, also, it will open paths for them in their respective fields of study and simply will open a chance for them to interact with their family that lives out of the country (most of them in USA) or people from other English speaking countries, in order to obtain better job opportunities.

For this project terms like "deaf" and "hard of hearing" need to be studied, these are the terms of how people with hearing problems are called, the reader might also know about the American Sign Language, because it will be used during the course, this will be

equivalent for the participants to the oral production and listening. Lexical approach will be applied with students in order to facilitate language learning.

CONTENTS DEVELOPMENT.

2.1 Introduction.

In order to explain about how this course has been applied, first of all, it is important for the reader to know about definition and characteristics of “deaf” and “hard of hearing” people, the Mexican Sign Language and other important aspects like learning abilities and limitations, continuing with American Sign Language and also will abroad some aspects about the Mexican education systems.

Information about teaching common subjects (like math, science, etc) for people with these characteristics is found on books for Special Education, or on books dedicated to people in charge of human communication therapies, but for language teaching, information is only on some articles and other websites, but there is no concrete information about proper ways to teach language for people of these characteristics.

Based on the previously mentioned, this project looks forward not only to develop an English course for deaf and hard of hearing people in the Universidad Juárez del Estado de Durango, besides, it looks after integration of people with these kind of specific needs to the academic environments that they have a right to. Inclusion of people with different learning needs is a labor that teachers must look for.

Lengua Mexicana de Señas (Mexican Sign Language – LSM)

Starting with the information of what is the *Lengua Mexicana de Señas* (Mexican Sign Language – LSM) is important to know that this has been transmitted generation to generation in silent communities, and this has been, and will be the first language acquired by deaf people considered as “pre-linguistic”, in other words deaf people that

did not acquire language through listening, this by reason of the lack of acquisition of Spanish as in every other normal hearing person.

Mexican Sign Language, is the language used by Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities here in Mexico, this one, has not specific signs for some words all over the country, many may vary according to the place of living of the people. It is important to mention that LSM has not the same grammatical structure that Spanish has, even when the LSM is Spanish too. At this moment, the grammatical structure has not been precisely specified due to the fact of the diversity in interactions between parts of speech used in Spanish, the most common is

“ *Time – Subject – Object – Verb – Compliment* ”

Also, some other parts of the speech are not used when signing; most of prepositions, most pronouns, some linking words, and the specification of time in verbs are not applied. Important to consider that this structure is not always followed by signing people, due to the fact that is not well known the way of interaction between subjects and verbs and that this is mostly adapted according to the context where the situation is settled. (Dirección General de Educación Especial, 1983)

2.3 American Sign Language – ASL

American Sign Language also known as ASL, is the sign language used in United States, this sign language as in the LSM skips some parts of the speech and also has a different structure from English.

“ *Time – Topic – Comment (Vicars. n/d.)* ”

This way we can identify the fact that structures are not related to the common structures that we have in written English. The expression of these ideas is at the same way that the

used in Spanish. For instance, according to Bill Vicars on his site “ASL University (2012)”, if a person wants to express where is he/she from, signing will be

“ I FROM U-T-A-H I. / I FROM U-T-A-H. / FROM U-T-A-H I. ”

As we can appreciate, verb “to be” is not included when signing these sentences; also, there are different ways to express the same idea, what relatively will avoid the structure that it is supposed to be settled in order to facilitate the expression of ideas. As mentioned before in LSM, ASL will only looks forward to communicate concrete thoughts or ideas. But which one of the above is the most correct way if signing? In this case, the one elected will be the third option, due to the fact that some ASL teachers, tend to become fanatical about encouraging their students to get as far away from English word order as possible, and focus on the version “FROM U-T-A-H I”

Why is this one elected? Even when on William Vicars experience, the answer “I FROM U-T-A-H” is easier to understand, the one elected will be “FROM U-T-A-H I”, on easy words it is just because it “looks” less like English and if the signing person is taking proficiency test about ASL knowledge, evaluators will consider this as an important point to evaluate also with the proper facial expression.

2.4. Equity in Mexico’s Education and Educational Integration.

Equity in education has been a topic which has been deeply abroad, those with special educational needs are not considered as a separate group from the social context; therefore, they should not be separated from the education system.

Equity in education has been considered internationally on commitments like “Education for All” organized by the United Nations (UN) in 1990, where Mexico was a participant. Also, in the “Ley General de la Educación (General Education Law)”, where in chapter

fourth discusses this issue, specifically in Article 41, that talks about people who require special education.

Constitutional references in Article 3 of Mexican Constitution which states that basic education (that covers: Pre-school, Elementary and Junior high education) is mandatory and also a right of Mexican people. This article establishes the four fundamental principles of education in Mexico, which are democratic, considering it not only as a governmental structure, but also as a political regime; National, because it must respond to problems of national worry, also economic and political independence assurance, and continuity and growth of Mexican culture; Free, access to basic education, as mentioned earlier, is a right; and will contribute to better human relationships, also should reinforce in students appreciation for dignity and integrity of the family, brotherhood and equal rights of all men avoiding privileges (SEP, 2002. P. 41).

Educational integration of students with disabilities emerged in several countries during the 1960's by a social movement that fights for human rights. There was a main argument: "All students have the right to be educated in an environment that ensures their future integration and participation in society" (SEP, 2002. P. 33).

Integration is the right for people with disabilities to participate in all areas of society receiving the support needed in the framework of common structures of education, health, employment, leisure and culture, and social services. Educational integration is a dynamic and changing process that takes different modalities based on characteristics of each individual. Must be a strategy that targets a quality education for all and this way assure that each and every one of the integrated students receive a broad and balanced education (SEP, 2002).

For participants of this course, their educational process has been a laborious route, where they had to deal with the changes and new ways of interaction applied in order to facilitate learning processes on schools, looking to make a suitable curriculum according to their necessities, also the different law changes applied, and even to deal with teachers with lack of experience treating people with their characteristics. Once they conclude their

high school education, the integration to university was reached with help of the *Parents of Hearing Impaired People Association (Asociación de Padres de Personas con Discapacidad Auditiva -APADAC)* when getting the opportunity to immerse 8 Deaf and Hard of Hearing students to different schools of the *Universidad Juárez del Estado de Durango* during the first period of agreement (Cardoza, 2012).

Looking forward to assure the stay of the students with special learning needs, a support course was established to reinforce special areas where Deaf and Hard of Hearing people had problems with. Topics like mathematics, reading comprehension, Spanish grammar, critical thinking development, and Fitzgerald key, the latter will help as a communication resource to manifest needs, ideas or else (LecturayCiencia.org, n/d).

The topics about Spanish grammar, and reading comprehension are really useful, this will result as an improvement of the areas that have more difficulties with hearing impaired people.

2.5 Deaf, Hardly impaired, and Spanish speakers English learners problems

According to Michael Swan on his book *Learner English: A Teacher's Guide to Interference and Other Problems*(2001), mentions that English learners from Spanish languages have problems on contractions, due to reasons that those are not applied on Spanish language, and on *Lengua de Señas Mexicana (LSM)* they are not applied either.

When getting on Grammar situations, Spanish speaking English learners often have problems due to the changes on the adjective position. Also, auxiliaries like “Do/Does/Did” or in continuous tenses, the addition of the verb “To be” causes some errors. For deaf participants on the course, the construction of sentences was a major difficulty, because the grammar structure (even when does not follow a concrete structure) is different from the one used in Spanish, and obviously it is different from the one used in English.

Also time tenses are one of the problems that are presented on, because for Spanish speaking learners some tenses are simpler, and on English, auxiliaries and verbs have a specific order and way of writing according to the ones used. For deaf students that haven't developed strong Spanish language abilities, this was one of the most significant difficulties because as previously mentioned, LSM omits parts of the Spanish grammar and tenses on verbs, mainly focusing on the communication of the idea (what can be compared to what we know as "chunks") and not even following a certain structure of the words.

For Spanish speaking English learners, all nouns, as well as related articles and adjectives, are masculine and feminine. Reference is made with the corresponding pronoun. It is important to specify that even when the mistakes made by Deaf participants of this course are kind of related, they are because of the differences with Mexican Sign Language that, as mentioned before, skips parts of the grammar and verb tenses and only focuses on the communication of the idea.

2.6 General information of the course.

Comments of the participants remark that they feel very excited about learning English and American Sign Language (ASL), even when they know that their difficulties are on grammar, they are starting to express certain ideas and needs when required. Also is important to mention that grammar structures are coded on Broca's area of the brain (Society, 2013), and deaf people use more Angular Gyrus area of the brain. The Broca's area is stimulated through listening, but for obvious reasons on Deaf and Hard of Hearing people this cannot be accomplished, and that is why they store language on the Angular Gyrus area.

The exam that they answered is the same exam that is applied to all the students of the PUAALI program, and the evaluation was based on the same rubrics and parameters established for this coordination. There is no sample of the exam on the appendixes due to privacy policies of the program, but a chart with the results can be seen on Appendix 1.

Through the exam, some of them have problems with the instructions because of the grammar structures, that as previously mentioned, is a different structure that the one that they use on Sign Language. Not all deaf participants are unfamiliar with the grammar structures of the language at the way that we know it; they can avoid many of the troubles presented when having a Logogenia background. Logogenia is a system that helps deaf people to have a closer understanding of how grammar structures work and having as main goal to develop on participants of this kind of method an accurate communication system (Velazco, 2012). This can be an important influence on deaf people learning, because on the results gathered, the student with the highest score had a 3 years background with this method.

Conclusions

Participants of this course, with Deaf and Hard of Hearing problems have been learning language through their entire life just as any other person, this has been by learning new vocabulary on Spanish, or specific terms of their respective career but their linguistic abilities are always working and in constant development.

This is an important skill that help them to acquire language easier, the trouble comes when they are required to interact in a written form that they are not so involved not even on what should be their first language (Spanish in this case but as mentioned before is Sign Language the first language that they acquire).

Some have considered that learning abilities on deaf and hard of hearing people are limited. The truth is that society and people that have not enough information about the abilities of these people are the ones that establish the limit to them. During their secondary school they were suspended from the English class, and a university teacher considered that will be impossible for them to learn English language.

At this point it is not possible to conclude that they already acquire this language, but now they are on the process. The experiences that they are having during the course that is currently been applied to them, are something totally new in all senses. The change for

them of having an interpreter on their common classes to be in direct contact with this foreign language, and expressing their needs, their questions, feelings, likes or dislikes through their own ways is something totally new.

It is important to emphasize that Logogenia seems to be an important tool that will help to deaf and hard of hearing people to develop a better way of the communication. This with a compliment of tools suitable for them will facilitate and help participants to acquire the language in an easier way due to the fact that they would have a wider knowledge of a language that can be use in order to scaffold new learning.

Educational integration is a reality that as teachers we need to apply to all students, without matters of academic subjects. Nowadays it is starting to be a reality on Primary schools, but it is important to apply this on every school level. If people with different abilities do not establish a limit to their learning... Why should we mark a limit for them? Facilitate and adequate learning for ALL of our students must be our main task.

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