

*Artículos científicos*

***La integración de estudiantes con discapacidad visual en el aula de L2: una evaluación de las competencias docentes en un programa de Licenciatura en Idiomas***

***The Integration of Visually Impaired Students in L2 Classroom: An Assessment of Teachers Competences in a Languages Degree Program***

***A integração de alunos com deficiência visual na sala de aula L2: uma avaliação de competências docentes em um curso de Bacharelado em Letras***

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## **Resumen**

Este estudio tiene como objetivo analizar la importancia del manejo del aula y el conocimiento pedagógico para enseñar inglés a estudiantes con discapacidad visual. Hoy en día, cada vez más estudiantes parecen tener discapacidades visuales, auditivas, intelectuales u otros tipos de discapacidades que se relacionan con el estudio de lenguas extranjeras y se vuelven más difíciles para la obtención de competencias lingüísticas y comunicativas. Por lo tanto, se determina que los profesores deben tener en consideración organizar o planificar las clases, ya que las personas con discapacidad requieren mejores facilidades para tener las mismas oportunidades que los estudiantes sin discapacidad. Utilizando métodos de investigación cuantitativa, esta investigación profundiza en escenarios de la vida real donde los profesores de idiomas desarrollan diferentes estrategias para enseñar a los estudiantes con discapacidad visual para promover un seguimiento efectivo y evalúa el conocimiento que tienen entorno a las estrategias pedagógicas en de L2. Además, la investigación explora

posibles técnicas para mejorar el desarrollo del aula y las habilidades pedagógicas en la enseñanza del inglés a los estudiantes con discapacidad visual.

**Palabras clave:** Enseñanza de L2, discapacidad visual, conocimientos pedagógicos, manejo del aula.

## **Abstract**

This study aims to analyze the importance of classroom management and pedagogical knowledge in teaching English to students with visual impairments. Nowadays, more students appear to have visual, hearing, intellectual, or other types of disabilities, making it more difficult to achieve language and communicative competencies in foreign language studies. Therefore, this research determines that teachers must be careful when arranging or planning lessons, as disabled students require additional resources to have the same opportunities as non-disabled students. Using a quantitative research method, this investigation delves into real-life scenarios where language teachers develop different strategies to teach visually impaired students, promoting efficient follow-up and evaluating the teachers' knowledge of pedagogical strategies in L2 classrooms. Furthermore, the research explores potential techniques to improve effective classroom management and pedagogical skills in teaching English to students with visual impairments.

**Key words:** L2 teaching, visual disability, pedagogical knowledge, classroom management.

## **Resumo**

Este estudo tem como objetivo analisar a importância da gestão de sala de aula e do conhecimento pedagógico no ensino de inglês para alunos com deficiência visual. Hoje em dia, cada vez mais alunos parecem ter deficiências visuais, auditivas, intelectuais ou outros tipos de deficiências relacionadas com o estudo de línguas estrangeiras e tornam mais difícil a obtenção de competências linguísticas e comunicativas. Portanto, determina-se que os professores devem levar em consideração a organização ou o planejamento das aulas, uma vez que as pessoas com deficiência necessitam de melhores instalações para terem as mesmas oportunidades que os alunos sem deficiência. Utilizando métodos de pesquisa quantitativos, esta pesquisa investiga cenários da vida real onde professores de línguas desenvolvem diferentes estratégias para ensinar alunos com deficiência visual para promover um monitoramento eficaz e avaliar seu conhecimento de estratégias pedagógicas de L2. Além

disso, a pesquisa explora possíveis técnicas para melhorar o desenvolvimento em sala de aula e as habilidades pedagógicas no ensino de inglês para alunos com deficiência visual.

**Palavras-chave:** Ensino de L2, deficiência visual, conhecimento pedagógico, gestão de sala de aula.

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## Introduction

Learning a foreign language is a complex and nuanced task that involves multiple personal and environmental experiences and influences converging to acquire, enrich, or modify knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, behaviors, and worldviews to actively participate in a knowledge-based society. During the learning of English as a foreign language, students often encounter obstacles in their development of abilities to understand and interpret messages in real contexts. Moreover, there are other barriers such as motivation, language exposure, L1 background, and psychopedagogical problems that may influence the language learning stages. At the same time, there are students with specific counseling needs as they have disabilities such as visual, hearing, mental, or other types of incapacities that make this process hard to develop.

When it comes to instructing blind students in a foreign language, additional challenges arise that require careful consideration and innovative solutions to facilitate their language learning process. Blind students face unique obstacles in language learning, as traditional teaching methods often rely heavily on visual aids. From this point of view, L2 teachers commonly deal with challenges in adjusting educational planning, classroom management, and the methodologies they apply in English assignments to integrate equitable education for blind students. This requires a thoughtful and inclusive approach that considers the unique needs and challenges of visually impaired individuals.

Mushome and Monobe (2013) indicate that instructors find teaching visually impaired students (VIS) rather challenging because they were never trained to teach visually impaired students and that the institution should employ a permanent specialist in teaching students and creating a resource center for them. Similarly, Elshemy and Alzahrani (2013) found that the lack of appropriate teaching methods for learners with visual impairment could be another issue for VIS. This implies that students experience different challenges when their teachers use a question-and-answer method, expository method, group discussion, demonstration, and inquiry methods.

On the other hand, Morúa (2019) consider that blind students have more facilities for second languages than sighted students, due to their enhanced sensitivity and memory training. Nevertheless, blind people consider all imagery information useless and forget it quickly if it is not connected with their practical experience. The majority of information exists in the form of signs or words. That is why it is important to explain from word to possible image, not the other way round” (Belova, 2017, p. 595). As a result, students with visual impairments often have problems completing tasks because adapting the visual content of the material to the needs of blind people is difficult and laborious for teachers.

Moreover, it should be noted that education is a fundamental right that should be accessible to all, irrespective of physical abilities. In the learning and teaching process, these problems should not affect students at specific centers, since “neither teachers nor students can be biased or hold negative feelings towards a certain type of student. Without exception, all students must be engaged in the lesson and be given equal opportunities to participate” (Morúa, 2019, p. 67). Adapting to changes also means adjusting to new educational models, learning experiences, and evaluation systems in line with the competency-based model of foreign languages.

Students with visual impairments (VI) have specific pedagogical necessities that, unless they are flexibly satisfied, can generate obstacles in learning a foreign language. Inclusion or inclusive education stands for a fairer strategy to fulfill the demands of all students. This means that higher education institutions cannot have any barriers to participation in education. Students with VI also need education that favors independence. Vision is vital for people to learn, and that is probably why most traditional education is based on it. However, if students who are visually impaired are provided with appropriate and personalized instruction, they can succeed in the educational process as well. Therefore, universities should be institutions where diversity prevails. There is no place for discrimination, and it is the educators’ duty to recognize and respect the differences that form each person so that they can meet their requirements as students with disabilities.

While discussing inclusive pedagogical strategies for students with VI, “some educators choose to replace illustrations with three-dimensional objects, although this involves a constant search effort and often retards the pace of the class” (Edubirdie, 2022). On the other hand, others prefer to organize teamwork where sighted children decipher the visual clues for their blind classmates. In this type of activity, “collaborative tasks should be promoted because, in that way, students can conceive more creative solutions to problems and enhance their learning. Awareness should be raised among all students in order to avoid

exclusion.” (Morúa, 2019, p. 67). In addition, educators complain that this solution could interfere with the independence process of the blind child. The learner’s capacity to obtain skills and concepts is affected by the age and level of development of the student before the onset of the visual impairment. “Students with congenital blindness may have difficulty acquiring concepts, while students with adventitious blindness may retain sufficient visual memory to benefit from visual descriptions” (Morúa, 2019, p. 12). This is why the visual impairment diagnosis of the student determines how instructional practices and materials should be adapted to achieve effective learning.

It has been emphasized that one of the most important challenges in current education is to integrate all the resources and tools that can help develop skills-based learning in an inclusive context. Globalization and the information age are paramount paradigms that have created new demands for many professions and education. It is compulsory that disabled professionals be incorporated into the working world under these models to be successful. Therefore, higher education professors must be trained to provide effective language scenarios to attend to students with diverse necessities.

Furthermore, many definitions exist for the term classroom management; Sieberer (2016) claim that classroom management is the ability of a teacher to organize, nurture, and manage the learning environment so that the talents of its students become better, focused, and organized, allowing time to be used efficiently. But when it comes to classroom management for students with disabilities such as VI, teachers should follow procedures that are correctly executed in the classroom, allowing for good integration of the students during the class, as well as effective teacher-student communication leading to a good teaching-learning environment. This, of course, means that the objectives of the class have been achieved in most cases.

Jedynak (2018) explains that a foreign language teacher who works with a visually impaired or blind student should possess not only substantive knowledge of a foreign language but also knowledge related to first language and second language acquisition by visually impaired people. This means that their “disciplinary, didactic, and pedagogical knowledge” is not enough; it is also necessary to incorporate in their training the technological knowledge and management of typhlo-technical tools.

On the other hand, Miyauchi (2021) affirms that teachers are not aware of the specific needs of the students and the general implications of their visual impairments, as they are not aware of how to behave towards the students. However, if institutions offer training courses for teachers to adjust their lessons in the case of having students with visual impairments

(VI) or any other type of disability, they will increase their classroom management competencies to provide inclusive education in foreign languages. Through thoughtful consideration and ongoing collaboration, educators can break down barriers and ensure that blind students have equal opportunities to explore the richness of foreign languages.

Because of this, institutions and language programs must remain open to student requests for reasonable accommodations or adjustments, while understanding that changes in educational programs are important to integrate an inclusive language education. They must be open to innovating creative solutions developed with student input and asking colleagues what solutions they have used, as language is the door to many aspects of life and the key is to make sure the door stays open for any person in society.

Teaching English to blind students is not merely an act of accommodation; it is a commitment to inclusivity, empowerment, and breaking down barriers. English proficiency is a gateway to knowledge, communication, and independence, and blind students deserve equal access to this vital skill. By adopting inclusive teaching methods, providing accessible resources, and fostering a supportive learning environment, foreign language educators can contribute to the holistic development of blind students, ensuring they are well-prepared to navigate the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in an English-dominated world.

## **Methodology**

This study adopted a quantitative approach which helps to understand research questions and gain a better understanding of a complex phenomenon (Dörnyei, 2007; Ray, 2007). The purpose of the study was to assess teachers' pedagogical competences in the BA in Languages Program at Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco to determine the classroom management and pedagogical knowledge teachers have while teaching English as L2 and integrating students with visual impairment in classroom performance.

### ***Study instrument***

Given the primary aim of this study, the data collection instrument was determined to be a survey. This is discussed next.

### ***Teacher's survey: Pedagogical Knowledge Base in ELT for VIS***

The main aim of conducting this quantitative survey was to focus on the pedagogical knowledge that language teachers have when teaching English as a foreign language to students with visual impairments (VIS) in the classroom. A general invitation was sent out to all the language professors in the BA in Languages program at División Académica de Educación y Artes at Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco to participate in the survey. A total of 13 professors showed interest in taking part in the survey, with six being male and seven female. Among them, four had experience working with blind students, while nine did not. Participants were informed that the study was voluntary and that they would not be rewarded for their involvement. The survey consisted of 15 items corresponding to ten different dimensions described in the operationalization of the categories (see table 1), corresponding to the formation of pedagogical knowledge and background in English Language Teaching (ELT) for visually impaired students.

The questions in this instrument were closed-ended, with participants required to choose one of the options that best represented their agreement or disagreement, using the Likert scale. The Likert scale is a psychometric instrument where respondents indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with a statement, item, or reagent, through an ordered and unidimensional scale (Croasmun and Ostrom, 2011).

This survey was designed for professors who have experience in teaching students with visual impairments. It contained 15 questions and was directed to teachers who have worked with visually impaired students in the BA in Languages program at UJAT. The instrument included both closed-ended and open questions. The questions were designed based on the dimensions of the survey, with the objective of determining if the experience of teaching English to blind students could make a difference for those who have not had such experience. The survey followed the five dimensions described in the table below:

**Table 1.** Operationalization of the categories: Pedagogical Knowledge Base for VIS and Classroom Management and Pedagogical Knowledge for Teaching Blind Students.

Variable	Dimensions	Indicators	Items
<i>Pedagogical Knowledge Base in ELT for VIS</i>	Knowledge of subject matter	L2 pedagogical Knowledge	1,2,3,4,5
	Knowledge of culture and cultural differences	Inclusion of VIS, VIS L2 teaching	1,2,3,4,5
	Knowledge of students	Classroom management	3,4,5,9,10
	Knowledge of (second language) learning	L2 pedagogical Knowledge	5,6,7,8,9
	Knowledge of (second language) teaching	L2 pedagogical Knowledge	8,9,10,11,12
	Knowledge of assessment/testing	VIS L2 teaching, VIS evaluation instruments	9,10,11,12,13
	Knowledge of classroom management	Classroom management, Materials to work with	4,5,12,13,14
	Knowledge of educational context	Inclusion of VIS	7,8,10,11,12
	Knowledge of democracy, equity, and diversity	Inclusion of VIS	10,11,12
	Knowledge of (professional) self	VIS L2 teaching, Training	13,14,15
<i>Classroom Management and Pedagogical Techniques to</i>	Teaching English to visual impaired students	Work with VIS, Experience, Blindness	12,13,14,15
	Teaching-learning English VIS	Teach English to VIS, Blindness	4,5,6,7,8
	Inclusive education	Inclusion of VIS	9,10,11,

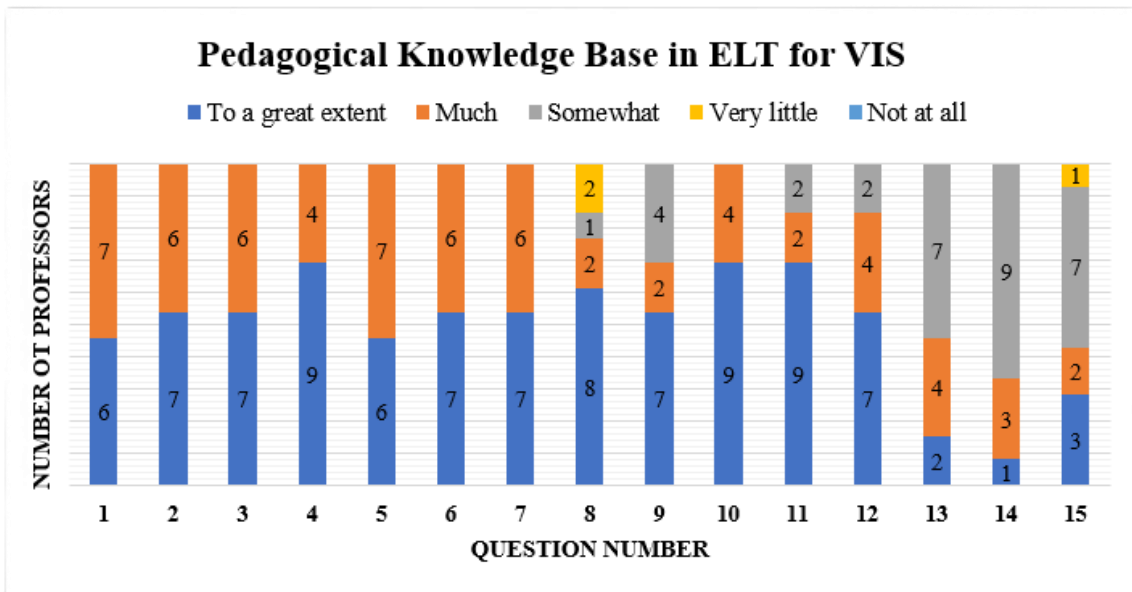


<i>Teach Blind Students</i>	Problems that English teachers face when teaching English to VIS	Problems in teaching English to VIS, Problems in teaching and learning English	12,13
	Classroom management	Materials to work with, Classroom management and pedagogical knowledge, Training, Methods	14,15,

## Results

After analyzing the obtained results from the survey to measure teachers' competences in classroom management and pedagogical knowledge in teaching English while integrating Blind Students in L2 Classroom, it is possible to determine that teachers must be aware of VIS pedagogical strategies to apply correct inclusive techniques in the teaching and learning process of foreign languages. Moreover, due to the lack of awareness they have of language instructions while teaching students with visual disabilities, they must adapt materials to pursue strategies to expose students with diverse disabilities to the correct learning of foreign languages. Collecting the most important information during the development of the instruments, it was self-evident that teachers are aware of the necessity of developing competences to assist students with disabilities. However, in L2 classroom management, there is clear evidence of training necessities for them. The following figure indicates the general results from the survey in charge of measuring Teachers' Pedagogical Knowledge Base in ELT for VIS. The group of teachers was composed of 13 members enrolled in the BA in Languages program teaching body at UJAT.

**Figure 1.** General results of Teachers' Pedagogical Knowledge Base in ELT for VIS.



According to the results from figure 1, it is possible to infer that from the total of 13 ELT interviewed professors half of them have previous knowledge of subject matter, culture and cultural differences for VIS related to indicators 1, 2, 3 and 5. Moreover, a major part of them has previous knowledge of L2 learning, teaching, and assessing as indicators 6, 7, 9 and 10 mention. Similarly, indicators 13, 14 and 15 show that teachers have lack of knowledge related to classroom management while teaching English to visual impaired students.

## Discussion

One of the most outstanding findings in the present research is the positive perception of foreign language teachers. It is stated that knowledge of pedagogical competences in educational inclusion, especially in teaching visually impaired pupils, can contribute to the development of optimal language scenarios to integrate the diversity of students with various types of disabilities. However, the lack of constant training in educational institutions towards these necessities causes a lag in the ELT teaching process, since not all teachers are prepared to modify their teaching strategies in these situations. This study shows that the teachers at a higher-level university have faced students with visual disabilities and have developed soft skills for monitoring and accompanying them in the learning of foreign languages. The relationship between pedagogical skills in the teaching of foreign languages and students with visual disabilities is intrinsically related, since teaching and learning processes must be optimized to provide strengths in the continuous improvement of these types of programs.

On the other hand, “the principles of inclusion and equity are, then, not only about ensuring access to education, but also about having quality learning spaces and pedagogies that enable students to thrive, to understand their realities, and to work for a more just society” (Unesco, 2017, p. 18). In terms of higher education, very few schools are equipped to accommodate students with disabilities. Likewise, the professors commonly working in HEIs do not have the necessary experience to accompany students with VIS, since many of them do not know how to keep all their students at the same level of learning, as students with disabilities depend more on themselves. Although the learning of a foreign language is attached to pedagogical knowledge, it is also important to manage ELT competences for teaching students with disabilities. Despite teacher knowledge being certainly a component of teaching professionalism, professional competence involves more than knowledge. “The time required by VIS to acquire the English knowledge incorporates new challenges for teachers who are forced to perform improvised activities when a VIS is presented in their classroom environment” (Cárdenas & Inga, 2019, p. 29).

Nevertheless, it is important to mention the research of Brixius *et al.* (2022) that determines that the adaptation of pedagogical ELT strategies for approaches to teach blind students will enhance didactic materials that may be valuable to research and implement in their education. For instance, “texts in Braille, recorded audios and debates and description of images and graphs may also be helpful and stimulating activities when teaching foreign languages to blind students” (Brixius *et al.*, 2022, p. 21).

Finally, based on the analysis carried out, it appears that integrating blind students into the L2 classroom requires specific teaching skills that go beyond conventional methods. Training in accessible technologies, curriculum adaptation, effective communication, and awareness promotion are key elements. By addressing these challenges with empathy and dedication, teachers contribute not only to equal opportunities but also to the creation of an enriching and truly inclusive educational environment. Inclusive education becomes a beacon that lights the way to a more just and equitable society.

## Conclusions

Inclusive education is a fundamental pillar in building equitable and just societies. In this context, the integration of blind students into the L2 classroom presents specific challenges that require specialized teaching skills. In conclusion, this study highlights some of the key findings regarding the challenges and opportunities that arise with the integration of students with visual impairments (VIS) into the language classroom, the evaluation of

teachers' pedagogical knowledge in response to these students, and its impact on higher education.

It may be noted, as a first point, that the importance of integrating pedagogical resources and knowledge for the care of students with VIS lies not only in ensuring equal opportunities in foreign language learning but also in enriching the educational experience of the entire community with this type of disability. Ignoring pedagogical aspects for the proper integration of students with VIS into the teaching and learning process of L2 has a significant impact on academic participation and educational quality.

It is also important to note that accessibility is a fundamental principle in the effective integration of blind students into the classroom. Teachers should be familiar with technologies and tools designed to facilitate the active participation of these students, such as screen readers, voice software, and adapted touch devices. It is also imperative that educational materials be presented in accessible formats, such as Braille or modifiable text files, to ensure that every student has equitable access to information.

On the other hand, curricular adaptation becomes a second crucial pillar. Foreign language teachers must have the ability to adjust content and methodologies to meet the individual needs of blind students. This involves not only providing the same content but also designing activities that encourage participation and the development of language skills in an inclusive environment. The planning of lessons should be flexible, allowing modifications according to the specific needs of each student and adapting the didactic plans when in charge of students with VIS.

In addition, effective communication stands as an essential skill for teachers looking to successfully integrate blind students into the L2 classroom. Visually describing key elements, using clear and precise language, and fostering an open communication environment are crucial practices. Collaboration with support professionals, such as special education specialists or teaching assistants, becomes imperative to provide the necessary support to blind students. Constant training in the care of students with VIS and other disabilities is therefore a key element in the continuous improvement of educational programs in language teaching.

Overall, awareness and empathy are fundamental attitudes that must be cultivated in the educational environment. Teachers should be aware of the barriers that blind students face and foster mutual understanding among all students. Activities that promote awareness and respect for diversity can contribute to the construction of an inclusive and supportive educational environment.

## Recommendations

Considering the findings and observations presented in the study on the integration of Blind Students in L2 Classroom: An Assessment of Teachers' Competences in a Languages Degree Program, several areas for further research are identified. These areas include: The necessity to explore relevant and specific teaching resources that are accessible to visually impaired students to facilitate the process of learning foreign languages. This could include tracking students along their academic trajectory to assess the continued impact of implementing these resources in the classroom. Furthermore, it is important to research and develop assessment methods that are inclusive and accessible to visually impaired students. This could include a detailed analysis of the disparities between the assessment of students with specific needs and students in general, especially in vulnerable groups, and how these disparities affect foreign language learning.

At the same time, it is necessary to explore effective strategies for the training and adaptation of teachers in the use of technological tools for the teaching of foreign languages to students with visual disabilities. This could include identifying the specific training needs and specific needs of students with a general disability for early intervention. These research areas offer opportunities to broaden understanding of the effects of appropriate use of pedagogical strategies and knowledge for teaching foreign languages to visually impaired students.

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