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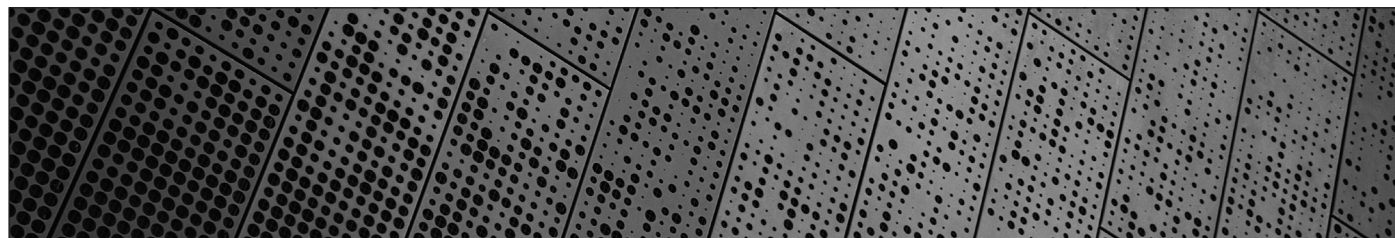
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Learning to “see” again: Overcoming challenges while teaching English to visually-impaired students

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Keywords

blindness; visually-impaired students; pedagogical challenge; emotional challenge; teaching strategies; affective scaffolding; sociocultural theory; critical disability theory

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the pedagogical and emotional challenges and the teaching strategies implemented in face-to-face complementary tutorial sessions requested by visually-impaired students (VIS) learning English as a foreign language in a virtual undergraduate course whose graphic nature diminishes their opportunities. The research methodology selected for this purpose is an evocative autoethnography in which self-observation, self-reflection, and field notes were used for the data collection needed. Transcripts were analysed using qualitative codes for this collection under three main themes: pedagogical and emotional challenges and teaching strategies. The findings revealed how pedagogical challenges derived from emotional challenges, a great sense of affective scaffolding to respond to neglected VIS' needs and concerns attached to materials adaptation, web accessibility issues, and a redefinition of inclusion policies in higher education. A final reflection on the implications of current language teaching that might work for VIS and teacher's training is made in addition to the limitations encountered.

1. Introduction

As an English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher in virtual undergraduate course contexts in Colombia, I implement diverse teaching strategies and materials for different types of students depending on the content, learning styles, and purposes. I faced an unexpected challenge regarding teaching English since I was required to give face-to-face tutorial sessions to 2 visually-impaired students (VIS) who had difficulties with online activities. My main concern was that I had no previous training. Therefore, I was not sure about what to do first.

I then decided to think about some methods and theories that could lead me to meet the blind students’ needs in the face-to-face tutorial sessions and reflect on the accessibility needed for certain digital materials. After covering the review of Sharma (2019) and Brown (2003), I selected the most suitable ones based on the idea that a single method cannot satisfy all the needs of the second language learner of English, and an eclectic approach might work.

I noticed that the Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching emphasize initially spoken language teaching, and materials are taught orally as well before presenting written forms. Students learn through repetition and inductively. They rely on situations and are expected to listen and repeat what the instructor says (Khalilova, 2021). The Audio-Lingual Method asks the learner to repeat patterns until producing them spontaneously. Here, conversations provide learners with materials and context, and through them, they can obtain proper phonetic knowledge (Mei, 2018). Total Physical Response (TPR) begins by placing primary importance on listening comprehension and coordinating speech and physical actions (Intarapanich, 2013). In fact, in Colombia, in the last decade, some researchers have tested the Total Physical Response and Natural approach as language teaching methods to facilitate the language learning process and guarantee the adaptability and motivation of blind students (Torres, 2016). These methods argue that “learning a foreign language mainly relies on the hearing sense” (Jedynak, 2018, p. 201). It is, in fact, the central means that VIS uses to acquire information.

Then, the day of the first meeting with my blind students arrived. I decided that talking and listening to them was a good start. No flashcards, no markers, no papers were going to be the main characters this time. We had a normal conversation. I noticed almost immediately their different skills. One of them was a Braille instructor who disliked technologies such as YouTube, computers, and podcasts. The other

one worked in a restaurant, and he was a technology lover who enjoyed keyboards shortcuts, using screen readers and typing in forums. I knew after this meeting that technology could not be out of our sessions, but I also realized how the lack of accessibility was chasing us.

From this experience, I started wondering what roles I would be performing here: facilitator, translator, reader, among others. Were they strategies or roles? I asked myself. I needed to know more. I did not want to give them a low-quality class. Then, I explored the university’s options for students with special needs, and I realized that policies were unclear. I felt that the university was ignoring them, and they were forced to use the virtual course exclusively designed for sighted people.

As we know, technology has brought empowerment and entitlement to many communities worldwide, but it has also left behind those who suffer from a lack of accessibility (Ullah, 2020). A clear example of that is what happens to VIS in academic contexts. Accessibility and effective teaching strategies for different groups of students with diverse forms of disabilities in the EFL context represent a significant concern since regulations, and authoritarian policies can be somewhat limiting and dangerous than empowering and enabling students to participate actively in virtual environments. Creating and adapting materials became an arduous task since the course, books, and resources available are primarily visual. Additionally, the complex relations between educational experiences in Colombia affected by centralism, different forms of violence, and discrimination influence the access and equity to educate blind and visually-impaired students.

This study is autoethnography, which corresponds to the practice of critical analysis perspective on self “as an object of inquiry and the sense in which selfhood is a social construction” (Denzin, 20014, p.28). Through this, I attempt to vividly illustrate what challenges I have faced as a visually-impaired students’ teacher and what strategies I have developed to address these challenges. It started as a frustrating, demanding process, and self-reflection of what I do to teach them constantly emerged while searching for a way to become a better English teacher who was swimming in the field of special education and is trying to raise the voices of the marginalized students.

2. Literature Review

Different challenges identified in special education for the VIS and the initial strategies applied in the past will be

described to illustrate what research has defined and the evolution it has had to contextualize the problem stated.

Historically, protecting the rights of people with disabilities has been a slow process. The more significant judicial consideration must defeat stigma and perceptions (Waterstone, 2014). As education is a fundamental right for all granted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the laws must help deal with the dominant problem in the disability field I am addressing, the lack of access to language learning that blind people suffer? First, I will expose the early schools, methods, and strategies used to teach VIS. Secondly, I will get closer to the first attempts to teach languages to blind people, and finally, I will explore how technology is responding to the current needs of VIS. I found this historical review relevant to understand where we are in terms of special needs pedagogies and avoid omitting previous research works that might construct my selfhood.

2.1 Exploring initial efforts to teach blind people

Among the first efforts to offer primary education to sensory disabled people, I encountered oralism and sign language as ways to teach them (Rotatori, Bakken & Obiakor, 2011). In 1784, the Institute for Blind Youth in Paris was the first school created explicitly for blind people. By 1829, three critical events co-occurred, and the New England Asylum was built for the Blind in The US (Rotatori, Bakken & Obiakor, 2011), Louis Braille created his reading-writing method with dots. The Coventry University in the UK became a pioneer in special education by providing tutors with a Disability Office and the Royal National College for the Blind (RNC) (Orsini-Jones, M., 2009). Consequently, some skills in terms of language teaching started to be considered, such as the reading skills issues which were solved by using Braille; writing tasks receive time adjustment, and speaking and listening were re-thought when they were focused on visual aids.

At this point, I explored what Cox & Dykes (2001) argued that the limited nature of visual associations for students with visual impairments has academic and classroom implications. Subsequently, they indicate that the physical orientation of students is a good start, as well as appropriate activities to recognize objects, locations, and partners. My main concern was that language teaching has been primarily visual. I realized that a general tutor who has visually-impaired students in the classroom must collaborate with vision specialists to determine the best strategies. One of these could be the support of sound and voice recording.

In the last half of the twentieth century, significant progress for visually-impaired people was the invention of sound reproduction (Stuckey, 1993). The telephone became more accessible for ordinary people, and other methods (records, cassette recordings, and radio) expanded the access to information in the classroom. In this way, oralism, Braille, physical orientation, and audio have evolved to start systematizing education for blind people and have a considerable influence in the EFL field eventually.

2.2 Teaching English to blind students

In the case of foreign language teaching, helping visually-impaired students to learn them has been addressed in different studies abroad. In England, for instance, “most lecturers agreed that the discipline required for the advanced preparation of the teaching materials for students with special educational needs also benefited other students” (Orsini-Jones, M., 2009, p.3). However, I reflected that the challenge was behind adapting specific resources, a subject that demands time and requires orientation from specialized instructors and centers.

Then, I explored the first official English courses for blind people. I discovered that one of the first programs for teaching English was developed by the Catholic Guild for the blind in New York City in 1968. The focus was on the principles of modern linguistic science and included aural-oral method or training through the ear, adaptation of materials, and later introduction of graphic symbols (Snyder & Kesselman, 1972). In the late '80s, Nikolic (1987) suggests that visually-impaired learners can speak another language if their strengths are capitalized. Here I noticed that the author underlines the pedagogical challenges related to selecting activities that foster their memory and good hearing.

Later, I found how Aikin (2003) developed didactic materials for visually-impaired students in Spain, based on her consideration that these students will learn different languages if they have access to activities in which communicative functions are more important than the linguistic code. That was a reason that led her to work with tactile materials visually attractive to sighted students and helpful for the ones that are not. In this way, I started to understand that students who have access to flexible materials that include sighted and visually-impaired students in the same classroom can also promote school integration.

Other authors, such as Hanzálková (2006) and Coşkun (2013), have focused on materials, equipment, and procedures available for teaching English to blind students. Coşkun introduces his research on the use of T3 or talking

tactile, a specially made Braille-free tactile diagram that is placed on a pressure-sensitive surface. It uses a combination of touch, sound, and learning systems called audio-haptic pedagogy by creating tactile diagrams carrying layers of information that can be vocal, musical, or other audio sounds (Coşkun, 2013).

2.3 New technologies, new challenges

In terms of accessibility, I can recognize that smart-phone-based assistive technologies are an emerging trend for blind people. The accessibility services such as “talking back, haptic feedback, screen magnifier, large text, color contrast, shortcuts, among others, are facilitating blind and visually-impaired people in performing several operations” (Khan, Khusro & Alam, 2018, p.2775). These services allow users to have an assistant while taking notes or finding locations, increasing the size of text or graphs when there is a low vision condition, avoiding colour confusion for colour blindness, and having easy access to icons.

Today, experts even talk about the Universal learner who has emerged then as an online integrated learning module that incorporates accessible technology and universal design for learning to improve online education for VIS (Sapp, 2009). Most applications of universal design in such materials have focused on providing access through design features that work with adaptive software, such as screen readers, or additional options, such as captioning (Rose & Meyer, 2002).

While implementing all these new materials and adjustments, overcoming several issues emerge in online, blended, and traditional scenarios. In Asia, for example, some works have been done to reveal the instructions modifications and the unique ways that blind students might learn English (Melie et al., 2020; Olivares, 2020; Setyawati et al., 2018). One of these projects developed by Susanto & Nanda (2018) specifies the needs of the students and the general implications of their visual impairments, such as difficulties with Non-Visual Desktop Access and reading Braille materials.

Other challenges both blind students and teachers faced were discussed by Kocyigit & Artar (2015). These authors could group under two main headings these challenges: emotional and pedagogical. The emotional part was related to the number of negative feelings they might encounter, and the pedagogical challenges were connected to the barriers and problems while teaching. For Lund & Chemi (2015), emotions can influence the ways students interact with the world, and they can model the way teachers reflect and develop their pedagogical strategies. In this part, my research work matches the same concerns toward these

types of challenges, especially the emotional part behind every pedagogical action performed in class in which I am attempting to teach English to blind individuals either while using online materials or adapted ones.

2.4 Gaps in the literature

These previous studies have shown the evolution of the materials and strategies implemented by teachers. This literature review also illustrates that several pedagogical and emotional challenges remain the same as the population’s needs evolve. They are simply translated to other scenarios such as virtual environments.

This autoethnography attempts to address the gap between what is known about language teaching strategies and the emotional and pedagogical challenges implied in teaching EFL to VIS. The idea is to itemize aspects to guide teachers when the integration of special education and language learning meets and offer opportunities to become more visible in this field.

3. Theoretical Framework

After reviewing different challenges while teaching blind students and the efforts made toward them through history, it is essential to support how theories have responded to sketch special education before interwoven it with foreign language learning.

3.1 Sociocultural theory

From the interpretive perspective, it was essential to understand the social substance and dynamic of the organic impairment to find the most effective psychological compensation (Vygotsky, 1983). Then, the social/cultural implication of disability and Vygotsky’s paradigm for special education was suitable in this qualitative study.

Special education was the primary domain used by Vygotsky to obtain data to support his general theoretical conceptions (Gindis, 1990). These studies helped modify the purpose of special education from giving supervisory care to educating students. These ground-breaking and even revolutionary educational studies also established the benefits of early intervention and helped create the commitment to the development of the field of special education.

I selected Vygotsky because he asserts that impairment leads to a restructuring of social relationships and a displacement of all behavior systems. The primary problem of

disability is not the impairment itself but its social implications (Gindis, 1990). He promoted an exceptional education model called inclusion based on positive differentiation in which education starts from the individual's strengths instead of the weaknesses.

According to a social constructivist perspective, the "disabled identity results from social, cultural, environmental and/or political factors such as social discrimination and power relationships" (Abeelee, de Cock, & Roe, 2012, p. 130). Other authors consider that the group of practices and actions that affect people's lives is what makes them disabled (Moser, 2006).

Based on the definitions above, my blind students may experience problems with access to certain activities and gaining reception within the community. Therefore, two essential aspects emerged to solve this: "understanding the opportunities and challenges of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for people with disability, give us a broader understanding of the possible impact virtual worlds may have on people with disability" (Stendal, 2012, p.2) and scaffolding defined as "providing contextual supports for meaning by using simplified language, teacher modeling, cooperative learning and hands-on learning" (Ovando, Collier, & Combs, 2003, p. 345).

What I can reflect from this is that the ICT might work as an efficient mediation for the challenges if it is adapted and the human support recognized as scaffolding could turn to me into an effective one since I was trying to overcome possible emotional challenges because of the vulnerable nature of disability in Colombia and the evident lack of web accessibility in my virtual English course.

Authors such as Porayska-Pomsta & Pain recognize that providing students with cognitive and affective support is equally vital to their fruitful learning (2004). This concept was underlined in this autoethnographic project since the analysis of sets of human-human tutorial and classroom dialogues was being made. There are tremendous amounts of linguistic politeness to be central to successful communication due to the particular circumstances surrounding a tutorial session with two blind students looking for comprehensive support after being segregated from their virtual environments.

3.2 Critical disability theory and accessibility

As I could understand from sociocultural theory, the challenge behind disability is the marginalization of the

individuals in terms of power and domination and the failure of society to accommodate such

Differences. This is how the critical social theory emerges as an emancipatory dialogue thinking from the diversity in which gender and disability are ways of signifying relationships of power (Garland-Thomson, 1996).

A tentacle from this critical social theory is called the critical disability theory, "a diverse set of approaches that essentially seek to theorize disability as a cultural, political, and social phenomenon, rather than an individualized, medical matter attached to the body" (Hall, 2019). Consequently, I selected this critical disability theory as a manner to find a solution that could respond to the inclusion of blind students in the EFL classroom and as a way to get attached to a deeper philosophical view of it through Habermas's approach looking toward the universality as the real power of the web (Adam & Kreps, 2006).

In this concept of universality, I found the feeling of inclusion in the air. However, the graphical nature of the standard interface is still the main concern I have in terms of accessibility. People with low vision or visual acuity loss (Leat, Legge & Bullimore, 1999) can play with specialized monitors or size adjustments, others with colour blindness usually deal with high contrasts and images, but those considered legally blind and completely sightless represent a considerable challenge since they face images, tables, frames, and charts without description (Paciello, 2000).

In this way, accessibility should be considered a combination of web accessibility guidelines, standards, and coding to deal with disabilities and extend the opportunity to navigate, identify and interact with them (Rutter et al., 2007). Since this is a demanding process, I started to understand that there is no single formula for accessibility, and it entails more than one solution and sometimes complex alternatives.

Most approaches are aimed at facilitating the access of blind users to computers through alternative sensory channels such as the auditory channel and tactile devices (Harper & Yesilada, 2008). Universal design features are intended to increase access to educational materials presented only visually by making the learning goals achievable by individuals with vast differences in their abilities (Saap, 2009). These last concepts gave me some ideas about dealing with the materials. The last missing aspect was regarding the teaching strategies that I could implement in EFL teaching while taking care of my student's unique needs.

4. Research design

4.1 Autoethnography

Autoethnography encompasses an array of different ethnographic techniques that in some way embrace the “self” or “I” of research (Ellis, 2004 ;) and “lets you use yourself to get to the culture” (Pelias, 2003, p. 372). Therefore, it is an excellent way to get closer to what personal experience can explore in a particular case, such as teaching visually-impaired students in EFL. While autoethnography is an emergent form of research, some studies have been conducted on ESL students and EFL teachers in which topics such as identity, EFL textbooks, immigration, and ESL writing have been discussed (Lapidus et al., 2013; Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton, 2000, 2001).

Regarding the type of autoethnography, as Norman Denzin (1997, 228) claims: evocative auto ethnographers “bypass the representational problem by invoking an epistemology of emotion, moving the reader to feel the feelings of the other.” Using the examples of real-life experiences while teaching visually-impaired people is poorly developed and researched, and it is interesting to discover the emotions behind it. In fact, through evocative autoethnography, substantive contribution to social understanding is underlined, and space for reflexivity, emotional impact (Lake, 2015), and the description of reality by the researcher involved is a valuable feature to the way pedagogy emerges in special needs context. Since the main focus of this work was to describe the emotional and pedagogical challenges faced as an English teacher who is struggling with VIS for the very first time, an autoethnography was selected due to its methodological principle of focusing on one specific aspect of being and how it was internalized by interacting with others and exploring one’s “learning experience, struggles, solutions, failures and successes” (Kaveh, 2012, p.7). Autoethnography can also “provide a medium for an evocative story, compel emotional responses and activate a critical analysis of her own lived experiences” (Hagan, 2005, p. 401).

For this research, the common purpose of selecting autoethnography also has to do with the disregarded voices of tutors and instructors who day after day try to work in favor of inclusion even if the institution or government is not guiding the process. It also favors the individuals to become part of the transformation of education and become visible among the others.

4.2 Research questions

- RQ1. What challenges have I faced as a visually-impaired students’ teacher?
- RQ2. What strategies have I developed to address these challenges?

To answer the questions, I collected data from my field notes, self-observation, and self-reflection made for one month and memories I had from previous semesters before the pandemic. I could have in situ sessions, make questions in real-time, and observe their behavior, gestures, and even their tone. Since auto ethnographies allow me to write about remembered moments selectively perceived to have a significant influence (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011), I collected eleven self-observation pages analysed by coding what events were pedagogical challenges and which were emotional. I maintained a sequential order of my self-reflection in the tutorial sessions with the blind students by adding a reflection paragraph for each self-observation page. I categorized the pedagogical challenges every time I encountered a difficulty connected to the university, lesson planning, material accessibility, and lack of training. I decided to focus on the feelings I had every time I faced a pedagogical challenge for the emotional ones. For instance, self-questioning my decisions as a teacher, controlling the frustration, dealing with fears, or simply looking for support.

I relied upon the self-observation and a few field notes taken simultaneously while having the face-to-face sessions because I wanted to evoke in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike. Collecting the information directly from the participants, who became a valuable source of continuous evaluation and self-analysis, was also a way to show coherence to make my VIS more visible.

For each session, I included a classification of the teaching strategies I applied to name my actions and describe how this implementation helped me overcome the challenges. Finally, field notes were shorter since only four sessions included them, but they were helpful to focus on the materials used and describe how VIS manipulated them.

4.3 Ethics and quality

To assure the quality or trustworthiness of this study, actual blind students are part of the interaction with me, transcripts of the recorded classes are available to check the reliability of the data collected and the software at last. It is helping me organize the information so I can have a clear picture of the challenges mentioned and the recurrent teaching strategies. People involved in the field notes and

my story also provided consent to allow me to use their opinions and perceptions of the class and their personal experiences as learners. This process was developed as part of understanding the ethical issues that come with autoethnography. I find my monologic voice and dialogic and multiplicity of other voices reported through my internal speech (Roth, 2009).

5. Results

This autoethnography exposes a closer view of the challenges I have faced as an EFL teacher for blind students and the teaching strategies implemented to overcome them initially.

From the list in Figure 1, the significant pedagogical challenges were about the following three aspects: First, lack of institutional support (when I searched for the institutional guidelines, I found unclear inclusion policies). Secondly, lack of training in this field and a lack of knowledge regarding Braille and inclusive lesson planning. The first two challenges made me feel that things were beyond my control because there were no institutional documents to read and people in charge. Working alone did not offer solid support, and hence I decided to focus on the third most significant challenge that seemed more manageable to me. Braille gave the impression to be the first resource my blind student's trust; I felt frustrated for not having the ability to communicate by using this code or incorporating it into our sessions. My initial attempts to learn it was also useless since I felt I had no talent, and my learning process was too slow.

Right after this initial experience, three essential incidents emerged:

1. There were Braille printers that I could use without learning Braille previously.
2. The Braille code in English was different from Spanish, and it was not a universal code.
3. I explored two web pages that were the pioneers of visually-impaired learning and instruction: The Perkins School for the blind and the Hadley School for the blind in The United States.

These two sites offered general guidelines, valuable courses and, materials. At that moment, I felt that I was not the only teacher under the same circumstances, and I felt encouraged to conduct more research.

The fourth and the fifth most common challenges were adapting materials for VIS and redesigning lesson

plans. In writing, I observed that the blind students needed to participate in a collaborative asynchronous forum that was open for almost a month. In the registered virtual course, they have a different tutor assigned. I felt that the university's dynamic was to encourage blind students to work in Moodle by receiving my assistance (which is unfair for them). I decided then to inform the virtual tutor about the students' situation, and he allowed them to prepare an oral presentation using the same topic from the writing section.

Nonetheless, I was concerned about it because it is frustrating not developing the activity as their partners do. Additionally, they were interested in learning about the way English is written, so I brought the alphabet made of foamy to maintain the interest they had in a friendly manner and explain spelling easily. Figure 1 indicates what pedagogical challenges were more common and least evident in the self-observation description and field notes.

6. Findings

Through this autoethnography, a closer view of the challenges I have faced as an EFL teacher for blind students and the teaching strategies implemented to initially overcome them are exposed.

6.1 Pedagogical challenges

From the list in Figure 1, the major pedagogical challenges were about the following three aspects: First, lack of institutional support (when I searched for the institutional guidelines, I found unclear inclusion policies). Secondly, lack of training in this field and lack of knowledge regarding Braille and inclusive lesson planning. The first two challenges made me feel that things were beyond my control because there were no institutional documents to read and people in charge. Working alone did not offer actual support and hence I decided to focus on the third biggest challenge that seemed more manageable to me. Braille gave the impression to be the first resource my blind students trust, I felt frustrated for not having the ability to communicate by using this code or incorporating it into our sessions. My initial attempts to learn it were also useless since I felt I had no talent for it and my learning process was too slow.

Right after this initial experience, three important incidents emerged. First, there were Braille printers that I could use without learning Braille previously. Second, Braille code in English was different from Spanish, it was not a universal code. Thirdly, I explored two web pages that were the

pioneers of visually-impaired learning and instruction: The Perkins School for the blind and the Hadley school for the blind in The United States. These two sites offered general guidelines, useful courses and, materials. In that moment, I felt that I was not the only teacher under the same circumstances, and I felt encouraged to conduct more research.

The fourth and the fifth most common challenges were adapting materials for VIS and redesigning lesson plans. I could observe that in writing, it was mandatory for the blind students to participate in a collaborative asynchronous forum that is opened for almost a month. In the registered virtual course, they have a different tutor assigned and I felt that the dynamic of the university was to encourage the blind student to work in Moodle by receiving my assistance (which is unfair for them) I decided then to inform the virtual tutor about the students’ situation and he allowed them to prepare an oral presentation using the same topic from the writing section. Nonetheless, I was concerned about it because it is frustrating the fact of not developing the activity as their partners do. Additionally, they had interest in learning about the way English is written, so I brought the alphabet made of foamy to maintain the interest they had in a friendly manner and explain spelling easily. Figure 1 indicates what pedagogical challenges were more common and least evident in the self-observation description and field notes.

6.2 Emotional challenges

While the pedagogical challenges were related to the interaction with the English course, the emotional challenges

were a response to these pedagogical problems that made me initially feel helpless. Then, a big question I asked myself when I started this process, Am I currently prepared to teach blind people?

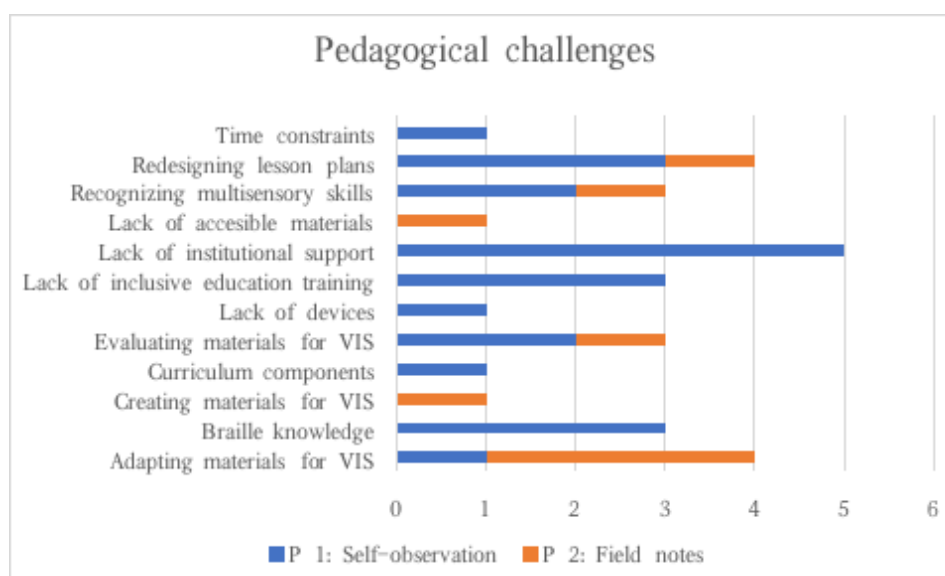
A massive wave of negative thoughts covered my head nonstop. Reflecting on every decision made and every action taken during my sessions with the blind students became my daily routine. It was like a metacognitive strategy that I was using to monitor what I was doing wrong or not. I categorized it then as impotence and was the most common emotional challenge since, through it, I realized I could not solve all the pedagogical challenges immediately. I constantly wrote impressions and thoughts, and my inner voice was active daily, looking for my constant improvement but affected by a feeling of powerlessness. This led me to the second most relevant emotional challenge that reduced my levels of anguish due to the crisis I had at the beginning.

One of the most vivid examples of this was when I went to the ICT leader office to request some assistance in terms of accessibility, and he replied:

You must be very careful with these blind people because of their condition. They become manipulators. A braille printer needs an expert, and we do not have any.

I was in shock. The level of prejudices was high, and he simply did not care. I felt he despised my students, but his attitude encouraged me to continue looking for options to start reducing my distressful feelings. I did not want to be

Figure 1. Pedagogical challenges recurrence in tutorial sessions with visually impaired students



like him, which convinced me to become part of the solution. Consequently, I decided to request the braille printer from my boss. Still, she said that I had to wait for permission from the central office (Colombia is a centralist country and depends on the decisions made in the capital city). I formally understood that I needed to create my materials and lessons to continue supporting them without any institutional help.

The last two challenges encountered were related to my fear of failing since I wanted to give hope to these students while learning English. Simultaneously, I did not want to discriminate them unconsciously with language, behavior, or suppositions that could increase their frustration toward the course.

As it is seen in Figure 2, 5 main emotional challenges recurrence can be analysed. In Table 1, each emotional challenge contains a type of pedagogical challenge that is connected to its origin.

6.3 Scaffolding and teaching strategies

The emotional process behind the pedagogical challenges encountered in the tutorial sessions revealed several feelings that led to my selection of strategies. I felt the necessity to implement techniques from the literature review, such as the principles behind the oral and audio-lingual methods and the practical scaffolding suggestions. At this level, I felt that my level of empathy was directly affecting my performance as an English teacher. Grading became less critical, a desire to create materials emerged and feelings of anger toward the government obliged me to assume this challenge to protest.

I think this is the reason why effective scaffolding was the main character. I opted to use strategies that could guarantee the motivation and support that were missing from the institutions in charge and the willingness to communicate. Since they could not see what was presented on the screen, I incorporated specific affective scaffolding here to guarantee the acceptance of the materials adopted and avoid blocking and lack of confidence. Therefore, in these sessions, I did not use expressions such as Do not say it, you are entirely wrong, I cannot understand you.

In contrast, I included expressions related to the encouragement of interest, such as your attempt are great, or I trust your memory. I felt aware of the necessity of using different types of scaffolding to accomplish the lesson's objectives and deal with the unique needs of these students. Certain opinions expressed by the students were related to how helpful my modeling might be to one of them. For instance, the following extract is shared:

Ahh, now that you say it, what helps me the most is when your intonation sounds like a question or a surprise? Your voice is sweet and happy. For example, you told me the expression the other day: Of course, I did not know the meaning, but I associate it with Claro in Spanish. (Interview # 2)

I could infer that the student prefers my effective scaffolding to face records on his own because, at the level at which he is now, he feels more comfortable if I gradually provide the input. Simultaneously, I feel that I am controlling his frustration by using politeness in some way.

Figure 2. Emotional challenges recurrence in tutorial sessions with visually impaired students

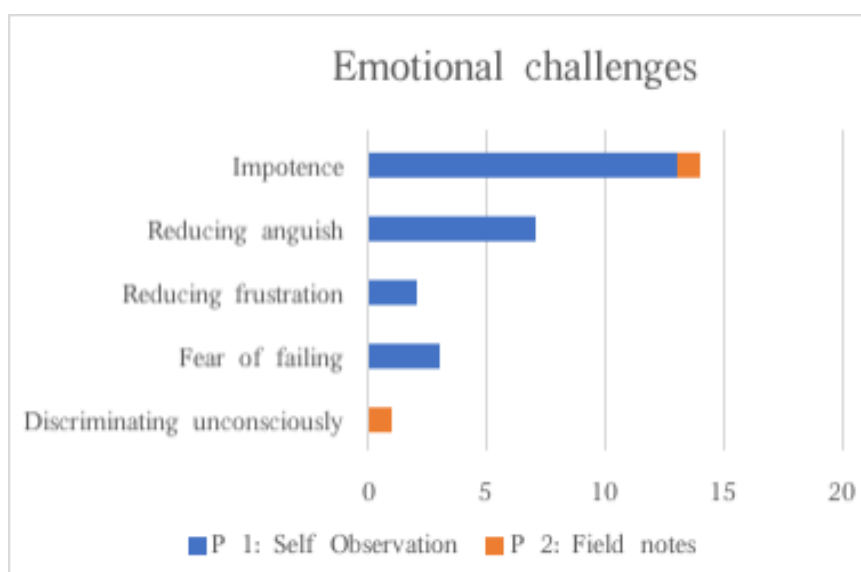


Table 1. Emotional Challenges Generated by Pedagogical Challenges

Impotence	Reducing anguish	Reducing frustration	Fear of failing	Discriminating unconsciously
Lack of institutional support	Redesigning lesson plans	Evaluating materials for VIS	Braille knowledge	Recognizing multi-sensory skills
Lack of devices	Adapting materials for VIS	Creating materials for VIS		Lack of inclusive education training
Time constraints				
Lack of accessible materials				
Curriculum components				

Moreover, by questioning the students, I could promote their leading role in their learning process and learn from them while maintaining dialogues. Another conclusion from the endless questions I addressed was that one tutorial session per week was not enough to help my blind students. I planned to work with him every Thursday for 2 hours to use the Moodle platform exercises as well. To guarantee time efficiency, I selected the following strategies based on the answers given by the blind students: translating instructions from Moodle to L1 and describing each virtual environment in detail (screen description) would be helpful for them. Finally, listing the steps to follow and eliciting from their visual residue (trusting what they remember when they could see before losing their sight) helped me to contextualize them quickly and give meaningful examples of the lessons or tasks given.

In this figure, it is appreciated the number of teaching strategies implemented and the frequency of use.

Figure 4 shows the strategies implemented to counteract some examples of both types of challenges at the same time. It also shows examples of pedagogical challenges that originate emotional challenge directly.

7. Discussion

The findings revealed how pedagogical challenges derived emotional challenges and how they are interrelated to the teaching strategies applied to cope with them. The first research question demands determining the challenges faced as a visually-impaired students’ teacher. In this

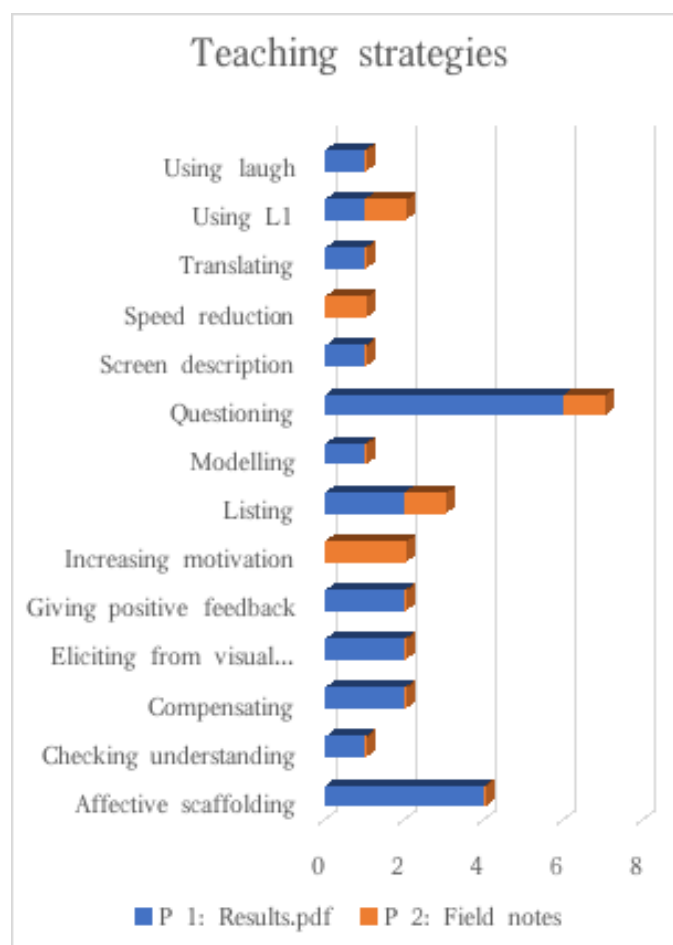
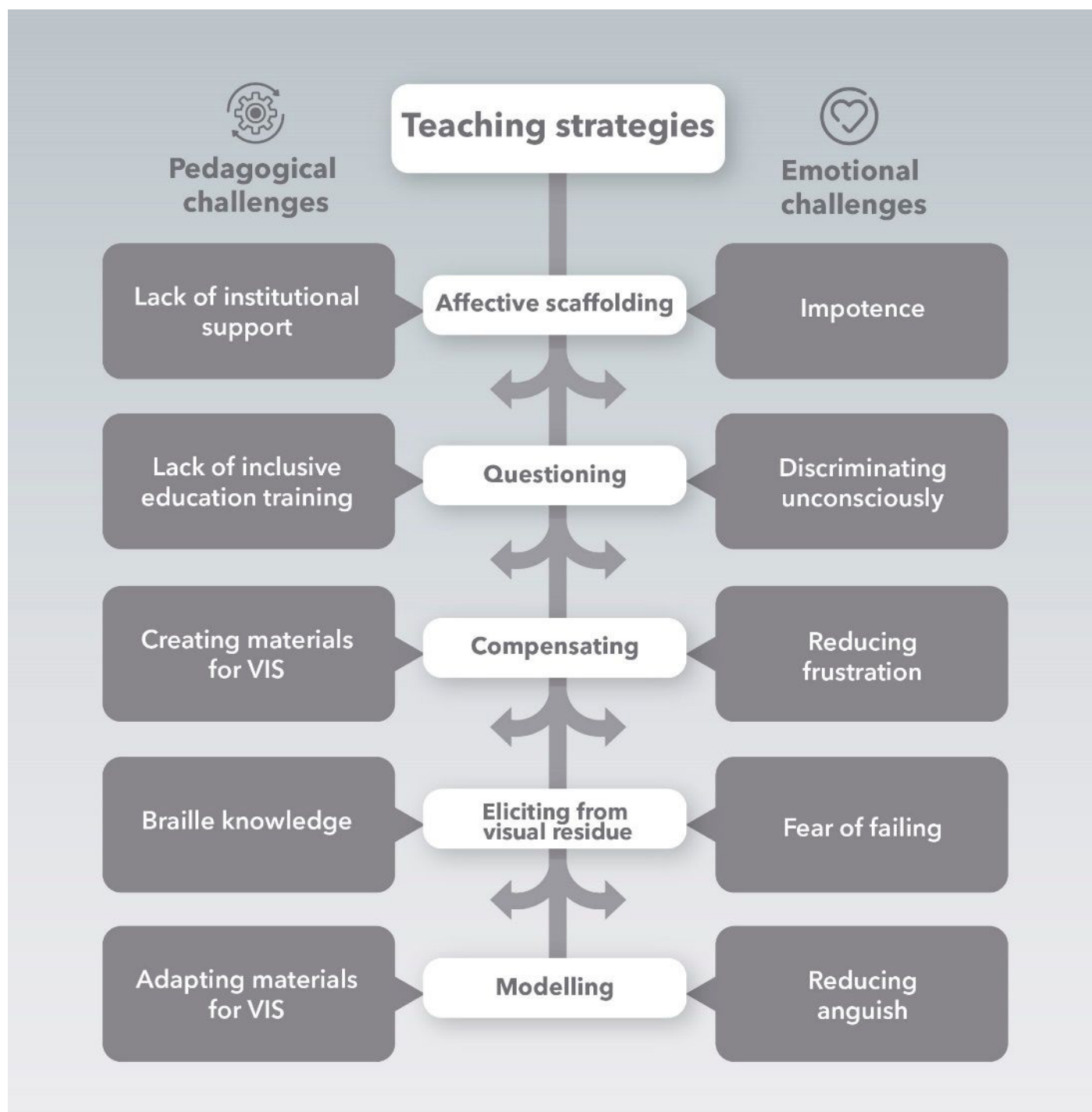
Figure 3. Teaching strategies implemented in tutorial sessions with visually-impaired students


Figure 4. Teaching strategies interrelated to pedagogical and emotional challenges



autoethnography, there were five main pedagogical challenges out of twelve:

- Lack of institutional support
- Lack of training in special education
- Lack of Braille knowledge
- Adapting materials for VIS
- Redesigning lesson plans

The first three challenges exposed the fact that actions that affect people’s lives make them disabled, as Moser mentioned (2006). The sociocultural approach clarifies the errors made by institutions while offering a diminished version of the curriculum and education and ignoring the inclusion plan. Here, the university was ignoring this critical aspect, and the VIS should not be forced to use a virtual course that is inaccessible. This approach indicates the misconceptions toward disability as a simple medical problem because it outlines how the person deals with the restrictions of their environment regarding the disability itself.

The last two challenges revealed what Carter, Nunan & Credo claimed about material design. In materials development, should materials be driven by theory or practice, or should syllabus needs drive them? Learner needs? or market needs? (2011). These unresolved issues affected the blind students’ rights since the online materials were not accessible. The alternative sensory channels such as the auditory channel and tactile devices suggested by Harper & Yesilada (2008) were not available either. This situation reveals that other interests, such as political ones, were over the VIS needs.

There were five emotional challenges encountered: impotence, reducing anguish, reducing frustration, fear of failing, and discriminating unconsciously. From this group, the most common ones were the feelings of impotence and attempted to reduce the anguish. One factor that could have increased the levels of anguish and impotence were the social implications of sensory disabilities since barriers from the negative imaginaries and the biomedical view that endure in society cause exclusion (Oviedo et al., 2021) that even might directly affect teachers and instructors around them who found themselves trapped.

The fear of failing and discriminating against VIS unconsciously were also relevant findings since these are initial misconceptions to blind people that any instructor might face, such as the ones Monbeck refers to as idealized views and wrong impressions such as helpless, maladjusted, or rejected people (1996). These emotions were normal and

could be overcome by questioning students to learn from them and increase self-reflection toward them.

However, previous studies that are focused on the techniques and materials EFL teachers use to teach VIS, body movement experience, and language learning in VIS and the challenges both blind students and teachers faced in their learning or teaching processes (Başaran, 2012; Kashdan & Barnes, 2002; Kocyigit & Artar, 2015), have not determined yet to what degree the challenges and restrictions met can affect the VIS learning experience. This could be considered a limitation of the study and lead other researchers to explore this issue deeply.

Regarding the second research question, fourteen teaching strategies were applied. The questioning was the most used strategy since there was a necessity to understand what the VIS wanted, their previous experiences, and learning styles. Additionally, for redesigning the lesson plans, adapting the materials, or simply creating new ones, a dialogic exercise with VIS was appropriate to listen and understand what fits their demands. From this exercise of questioning VIS, it could be inferred that differentiated instructional strategies are a way to respond to the variance among learners. Teaching EFL 4 macro-skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) appear to require some degree of differentiated instruction (Lewin-Jones & Hodgson, 2004). As such, content must be carefully selected, and a social component is mandatory since UDL involves:

- Action and expression for demonstrating what VIS knows.
- Engagement.
- Interaction with other members of the group.

Suppose the course fails at it, as Bohman claims. In that case, it is necessary to incorporate standards into a social debate to describe changes (2005) that can eventually incorporate social and cultural aspects of language learning into the English course. According to the answers given, VIS finds listening and writing less interactive and demands little social interaction due to phonics and spelling recognition difficulties and forum collaboratively work (overwhelmed by visuals without descriptions). Therefore, exploring the principles of universal learning design would eventually shape the way English is taught to VIS. It allows students with disabilities to access courses without adaptation. It allows the coursework to be available in various formats for the non-disabled, making it easier for everyone to access. It is an approach that recognizes many instructional pedagogies that facilitate accessibility for diverse learners (Burgstahler, 2009).

Effective scaffolding was also one of the main features in this process since this strategy guarantees encouraging students to advance to the next step in learning a language and avoid negative emotions that can hinder their learning (Boekaerts, 2007). This offers more confidence and sets the affective scenario for self-improvement as an EFL teacher under a humanistic perspective.

Several other teaching strategies were influenced by the affective and polite character mentioned from this selected strategy. For instance, the way modeling was shared through the incorporation of laugh, positive feedback, and motivation enhancement guided the learning process to meet the VIS needs. With the growth of undergraduate students with disabilities, teachers need to be confident in their communication tactics by incorporating politeness and face-negotiation theories (Myers et al., 2012). Perhaps, the selection of strategies has had another component equally relevant to the research. The necessity of compensation and minimizing both types of challenges require teachers to cover socio-affective, cognitive, and context-based or emerging strategies to respond to the situation.

8. Conclusion

The lack of guidelines and institutional support represents a significant concern beyond teachers' performance. From the autoethnographic perspective, I evaluated what I could determine as challenges and teaching strategies, but the implications that remain external and directly affect my work were approached rapidly. However, the impact of what the government and universities do about inclusion and web accessibility meaningfully modifies the situation. The sense of frustration and abandonment established in the emotional challenges list could gradually be modified with more support. Finally, it would be another topic for research to understand the critical situation of inclusion in South American countries that will help us have a clear picture of the relationships of dominance that do not contribute to the optimal participation of disabled learners.

Colombia has started the inclusion journey by not denying access to education to blind people and those with any visual impairment. Nevertheless, it is still far from including them and supporting them appropriately in public higher education institutions. English as a subject could be that flexible field in which the first steps could be given due to language and the skills implied, which are not necessarily attached to visual aids or the graphic nature of virtual environments.

The journey toward universalization of virtual courses has started, and I feel encouraged by what web accessibility could eventually bring to the field of special education and the opportunities that could bring to blind learners. There must be a balance of teamwork between web designers and instructors who have the responsibility to translate scaffolding to the digital area.

I could recognize through this experience that what I needed to do was far beyond that, and I needed to look for more options to expand my new portfolio of redesigned learning activities based on their particular needs. Then, my self-reflection went over the adaptation of materials and the recognition of multisensory skills in the way that the theory behind universalization and accessibility indicated. Subsequently, I started evaluating what web accessibility meant and how the creation of my materials could compensate for that. Finally, what blind students are doing, in general, is looking for comprehensive support after being segregated from their virtual environments. Then, recognizing this is the starting point of a humanistic virtual course design for them.

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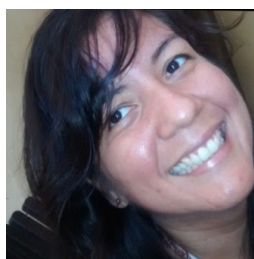
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