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## Foreign Language Teaching for Visually Impaired Learners in Uzbekistan: Problems and Suggestions

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### ABSTRACT

It is a common thinking that teaching and learning foreign languages, especially English, is becoming increasingly important all around the world. Teaching foreign languages, especially to language learners with disabilities, is one of the issues that require research for the coming future. This article discusses the theoretical and practical aspects of teaching methods that are useful for teaching language learners with visual impairments in the classroom and developing their language skills.

### Keywords:

Visual impairment, blind student, modern methodology, practical assistance, special equipment, special needs.

English is now taught and studied as the main foreign language in Uzbekistan, like in other countries of the world. The importance of learning this language is increasing day by day. In Uzbekistan, English is taught at all levels of education, from kindergarten to higher education institutions. People are learning English for both academic and professional development, and English proficiency is the most important criterion for applying for jobs and getting into university. In addition, as English plays an important role in science, technology, business, commerce, international travel and tourism, it is used as a key to better career opportunities and further studies. Nowadays, most public and private companies require candidates with good English and relevant qualifications. For this reason, the role of English in school curricula is crucial, and the government pays great attention to teaching English in schools and universities of Uzbekistan. English is taught as a compulsory subject in universities and schools of Uzbekistan, and the government is making great

efforts to promote quality teaching and learning of English.

On the other hand, despite the large-scale reforms, innovations and changes in the field of teaching foreign languages, there are a number of problems that prevent the improvement of the quality of education in the higher education institutions of our country. Teaching a foreign language seems both exciting and challenging at the same time. The number of blind students in the classes throughout Uzbekistan has increased recently because of the opportunities that have been created for the learners in educational settings. It is true that working with students who have special needs require teachers a lot of effort and hard work. This article outlines some challenges that foreign language teachers may face while working with blind students in English classes. According to the decision of the Republic of Uzbekistan PQ 3775 "On additional measures to increase the quality of education in higher education institutions and ensure their active participation in large-scale reforms implemented in our country" the process of

organizing teaching in the higher education system and the system of evaluating student knowledge do not meet today's requirements. Especially in the higher education system, the conditions for the disabled are not sufficiently created, and the teaching of English to students with disabilities is not well established. Research and studies on improving conditions for students with disabilities, such as blind students, in Uzbekistan's higher education institutions are limited only to primary and secondary education. Today, in the 2021/2022 academic year, a total of 6,321 persons with disabilities, including 1,040 blind students, are studying in higher education institutions in our country. In each educational institution, significant work is being done to provide them with social assistance, material and moral support, to take their place in society, and to create a comfortable educational environment. However, teaching English to blind university students and assessing their language skills still needs to be developed. At the same time, it is true that issues such as evaluating the language skills of blind students using modern advanced pedagogical methods and tools have become one of the urgent issues of today. In turn, there is a need to determine the perspectives of blind people by studying their individual characteristics, studying them and analyzing the results.

Vision problems can occur in different people for different reasons. These can be vision problems caused by genetic causes, congenital defects, diseases acquired at a young age, viral infections, various injuries, tumors, and infectious diseases. There are several different causes of vision problems. It is inevitable that visually impaired people face some difficulties in various aspects of life development, such as social, emotional development, cognition and understanding of the world, and even language learning [1].

Regarding the educational process, the visually impaired can be divided into two categories. These are low vision, i.e. limited to a certain extent, and blindness, i.e. absolute limitation of vision. Students with some degree of visual impairment can use printed materials, but additionally use materials and various tools and

equipment. Visibility can also be affected by various other factors. These may be insufficient lighting of the environment, physical fatigue and other conditions. Therefore, each visually impaired person may have unique individual characteristics. One of the main challenges faced by visually impaired students is that the available materials are not in a suitable form for them based on special conditions. The fact that many educational materials are in a visual, i.e. graphic form, creates difficulties for the visually impaired in their assimilation. Also, the fact that many materials are created in the form of video, computer and television has created more difficulties for the visually impaired to acquire them [2].

Of course, there are guidelines here that teachers working with a group or class with a blind or visually impaired student should pay attention to.

- It is good that the teacher announces it aloud to the group when entering or leaving the classroom.
- When addressing students, it is better to address them by their name or surname rather than using different gestures.
- When the teacher wants to show the direction and the location of objects, instead of pointing or using vague words like "there it is", "this is it", "there it is", "it's here" It is recommended to use specific words such as "on your left".
- It is better to try to clearly describe graphic and pictorial materials in class.
- Introduce things that can be seen and felt by touch and hands, and the classroom in this way.
- Ensure verbal delivery of instruction and classroom changes and instructions.
- Ensure that written information is readable for delivery.
- Always speak your name in a way that is recognizable to a student with a disability.
- Offer to help and arrange equipment in a convenient position for the visually impaired to be safe.
- When you are talking, remind them that you are finished or that you are finished because they will not be able to understand it even by your actions.

- When speaking to a visually impaired person, it is not necessary to speak very loudly. They have learned to listen carefully.

There are aspects that a teacher should pay attention to when presenting teaching materials, and they can be the following.

- You will be helping the visually impaired student and others by pronouncing each word clearly or spelling it out if needed.

- It is possible to help students with partial vision problems by presenting the texts in enlarged form or presented in three-dimensional form.

- When using a projector, make sure that the writing is large enough and cover up unnecessary parts.

- Ensure that all information written on the class board is communicated orally.

- Consider that the delivery of information in graphical form through audio and video recordings is an effective method.

- Make extensive use of three-dimensional and tactile objects.

- Arrange for group presentations to be tape-recorded for the visually impaired.

In teaching foreign languages, English is one of the main parts of the field of education. Foreign language courses and lessons have always been seen as another necessary field for all majors and industries. In addition, the methodology and methodology of teaching foreign languages is constantly changing. Teaching a foreign language to visually impaired people with its complexities also requires new research for language teachers.

The fact that foreign language teaching is based mainly on graphics and visual materials creates difficulties in teaching foreign languages to language learners because of the limited ability to see. Because it is impossible for the visually impaired to master visual information, maps and drawings, and information displayed in diagrams. Students with disabilities who are unable to absorb information miss many opportunities. In such a case, the enthusiasm for independent learning may disappear among them [3]. Difficulties in reading comprehension

and writing skills can be common in all fields, but in the field of foreign language learning, it can be a particularly big problem. Information in documents, content of text, accentuation of words are not reflected in the correct way, especially for those with disabilities. The fact that Braille has accents and some other symbols may help them, but there is still a lot of confusion.

The results of the study show that the English teachers who were interviewed and whose classes were observed used almost the same teaching methods and materials to teach blind students in Uzbekistan, which means that the visual ability contradicts previous research on the teaching of disadvantaged students. Also, they encountered several difficulties or problems and did not know what to do to solve them and just continued to use the same techniques and materials. This is because none of the participants had any formal training in teaching English to students with visual impairments. The most important conclusion for Uzbek national and local education administrators and higher education policy makers is that in-service programs for teachers of English working in schools of the blind need to be revised and made more effective. Also, EFL teacher training programs should be revised and include courses on teaching students with special needs. Such courses should focus on the characteristics of visually impaired students, such as their use of verbalism, and emphasize the importance of digital technologies in the development of listening and speaking skills. It is clear that blind people have more employment opportunities if they have good listening and speaking skills in English. An important claim made by the participants was that each student group had several students with multiple disabilities, making it difficult for them to select appropriate teaching techniques and materials for all students in each class. This problem can be overcome by forming small homogeneous groups by placing students with similar characteristics in the same class. Teachers should adopt a more student-centered approach and adhere to the principles of student autonomy. Given the tendency of visually impaired students to interact more with

their blind peers, it is necessary to create an inclusive educational environment for visually impaired children.

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