Visual Impairment and Majoring in English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

This study is intended to investigate visual impairment and majoring in English as a foreign language (EFL). A qualitative approach is adopted to explore the experiences of five visually-impaired Palestinians during their BA program in EFL. Despite the difficulties they faced while studying at the university, the five participants managed to excel in a major that is not common to the visually-impaired in Palestine. Four key themes are highlighted in this study: why the participants chose to major in English, what challenges they faced during their BA program, how they coped with these challenges and what final results they obtained, and their recommendations for better inclusion of the visually-impaired in the Palestinian higher education context. As there is no specific research addressing the issue of visual impairment and majoring in EFL at the university level, this study is intended to fill a gap in the literature.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, higher education, visual impairment

Visual Impairment and Majoring in English as a Foreign Language

People with visual impairments are either blind or partially sighted, depending on the degree and type of their vision loss (Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2007). According to the World Health Organization, it is estimated that 39 million people in the world are blind and 285 million have significant low vision conditions (WHO, 2012). For educational purposes, students are considered to be visually impaired if their vision condition, even after correction, adversely affects their educational progress in a classroom setting (Spungin, 2002).

Extensive research has been conducted on first language (L1) acquisition by visually-impaired children (Bishop, 2004; Corn & Koenig, 1996; Dimnovic & Tobin, 1998; Dunlea, 1989; Everts, 2013; Gillion & Young, 2002; Holbrook, 1996; Jackson, 2007; Kekelis & Prinz, 1996; Landau, 1997; Milian & Erin, 2001; Pérez-Pereira, 1999; Rose, & Meyer, 2002; Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2007; Webster & Roe, 1998; Warren, 1994; Wolffe, 1999). It has been found that visual impairment does not seem to interfere with the development of basic interpersonal communicative skills. Speech production and the acquisition of vocabulary and syntactic structure have been found to be quite normal in visually-impaired children. However, it has been noted that the meaning of words for sighted children is richer and more elaborate than the meaning for children with visual impairments, and that certain semantic developmental areas seem to be problematic for visually-impaired children, such as deictic expressions (e.g., first and second person pronouns and demonstratives) and joint attention (i.e., shared focus of two individuals on an object by means of eye-gazing, pointing or other verbal or non-verbal indications).

Second language (L2) acquisition researchers have also investigated visually-impaired learners of foreign languages (Aikin, 2002; Barnes & Kashdan, 1998; Conroy, 2000; Eljevin, 2009; Gray, 1997; 1998; Guinan, 1997; Hamilton, 2008; Kashdan, 2002; Kashdan & Barnes, 2003; Ko, 2000; Kormos, 2001; Milian & Ferrell, 1998; Nikolic, 1987; Orsini-Jones, 2009; Wu, 1994). There has been a generalized assumption that visually-impaired and sighted students follow the same patterns of learning a foreign language; as literacy skills transfer across languages (Cummins 1984), it is argued that a second language is learned successfully provided that there is reasonable competence in the learner's mother tongue. In both types of research on L1 and L2 acquisition by the visually-impaired, it has been emphasized that these learners should have proper training and opportunity to achieve their potential for learning.

Although a significant body of literature on L2 acquisition has paid special scholarly attention to visual impairment and learning English, it seems that there are no specific studies addressing the issue of visual impairment and majoring in English as a foreign language (EFL) at the university level. In order to fill a gap in the literature, the present study was conducted; a qualitative approach was followed to explore in-depth the learning journey of a sample of visually-impaired undergraduates with a major in EFL. The study includes a discussion of the challenges these students faced during this program and how they coped with these challenges. It also provides recommendations for better inclusion of visually-impaired students in a tertiary EFL education context.

In view of the purpose of the study, the Islamic University of Gaza (IUG) was chosen for conducting this study. The IUG was established in 1978 as the first Palestinian university in the Gaza Strip. It has gained a reputation for its commitment to high quality learning, teaching, and training. The IUG English Department was founded in 1980 as part of the Faculty of Arts, and the admission to this department is highly competitive. It serves students who major in English from both the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Education. The students in the two majors study

almost the same English courses; however, those who join the arts English major take additional English courses (18 credit hours) which are substituted by educational courses in Arabic that help the education English major students be prepared to teach at school in the future. The arts English major students interested in teaching after graduation should take a diploma in education.

Research Questions

Four central research questions guided this study: (1) Why did the visually-impaired participants interviewed in this study choose to major in English? (2) What challenges did they face during their BA program and what final results did they obtain? (3) How did they cope with these challenges? (4) What recommendations did they suggest for better inclusion of visually-impaired students in the Palestinian higher education field?

Methodology

Participants

According to the IUG records, about three hundred Palestinian visually-impaired students have studied at the University since its establishment. These students were of different majors, such as Islamic Studies, Arabic, English, Journalism, Social Work, History, Geography, Mathematics, Law, and Information Technology. Only ten of these students have graduated from the English Department. The researcher, who is a lecturer at the Department and taught some courses to these ten alumni, managed to get contact information for eight of them (i.e., email addresses and telephone numbers) from the IUG Admission and Registration Deanship. In order to meet ethical requirements, the researcher sent each of them an initial email message with some background information and an invitation to participate in this project. Five alumni responded, confirming their interest in participation. These participants were three males (Munir, Ibrahim, and Nabil) and two females (Fatima and Huda); all are pseudonyms. Munir, Ibrahim, and Fatima are blind, whereas Nabil and Huda are partially sighted.

Like many other Palestinians with visual impairment in the Gaza Strip, the participants attended their first six grades at the Rehabilitation Center for the Visually Impaired (RCVI), run by the United Nations for Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA), and later, they attended the government Al-Nour School for the Blind until they finished their 11th grade. However, their senior high school study (i.e. grade 12) took place at their closest ordinary high school. This means that those who are visually disadvantaged in the Gaza Strip spend this school year within the general education program, normally without any special facilities to scaffold them in their areas of difficulties.

The participants came from middle socio-economic backgrounds and were at the age of 18 when they started their 4-year BA program in English. They speak Arabic as their mother tongue, and none of them had been to an English speaking country.

Data Collection

The researcher sent each of the five participants, who provided their informed consents, an email message with a list of questions to answer (see Appendix), which is a kind of a standardized, open-ended interview. The information sought from these questions included the reason for choosing English as a major, graduation time, grade point average or percentage, challenges encountered in the BA program, ways to cope with the challenges, support received, and recommendations to help other visually-impaired students.

Email interview, a computer-mediated communication, has been considered in literature as a research tool (Bowker & Tuffin, 2002, 2004; Hine, 2000; Illingworth, 2001; Madge & O'Conner, 2005; McCoyd & Kerson, 2006). According to McCoyd and Kerson (2006), email interviewing has its advantages and disadvantages. Advantages include responding at convenient times, no necessity to travel to geographically diverse locations, having sense of privacy or safety, and getting already written texts. On the other hand, the disadvantages of email interviewing include the researchers' inability to observe the subjects' clothing, body movements, tone of voice, and emotions, cues which could provide more clarification. Taking these issues into consideration, the researcher of this study complemented the email messages with follow-up telephone calls for further exploration of the participants' experiences. The language of the emails was English; however, the follow-up telephone calls involved a mixture of English and Arabic (and the researcher did the translation for the write-up).

Data Analysis Procedures

For the purpose of data analysis, hard copies of the participants' responses to the questions were used. These responses were read a number of times and highlighted in different colors for commonalities and themes that directly related to the four research questions guiding this study. The color-coded hard copies were used as a point of reference, and chunks of text from the soft-copy were copied and pasted to a spreadsheet of color codes. The data on the spreadsheet were organized into separate pages which were organized according to the study themes for discussion.

Findings and Discussion

In this study, a qualitative approach was adopted to provide a deeper understanding of visual impairment and majoring in EFL. In light of the guiding research questions, there are four key themes to be highlighted: why the participants chose to major in English, what challenges they faced during their BA program, how they coped with these challenges and what final results they obtained, and their recommendations for better inclusion of the visually-impaired in the Palestinian higher education field. Many of the findings are presented as forms of quotes from the participants in order to reflect their real, lived experiences during their BA program in EFL.

Why the participants chose to major in English

The participants finished their high school with very good results. Although none of them had joined the science section, their results in the arts section still opened several options to them to study at the university, such as Islamic Studies, Journalism, Law, History, Geography, Social Work, Arabic, and English. Nevertheless, they preferred to major in English.

As noted above, the IUG English Department was founded in 1980, two years after the establishment of the IUG. However, no visually-impaired student joined this department until 1998, when Munir was admitted to the IUG. In fact, Munir was the first visually-impaired student in the Gaza Strip majoring in English. The other four participants joined the Department in 2002.

When asked why they chose to major in English, the five participants had similar answers. Munir said, "I wanted to rebel against the concept that blind people should join a religious field." Nabil said, "Visually-disabled students should not be confined to Arabic, religion, and social studies; they should open new windows with regard to their university choice of specialization." Ibrahim said, "Blind students usually join Arabic majors, so I chose this

program [i.e., English] to challenge my disability. It gives me more acceptance in the society." Huda majored in English to "refute the conventional view that the visually disabled are helpless, careless, passive and narrow-minded." "We can do things like, and sometimes better than, normal students," Fatima commented.

These responses emphasize reactions to certain negative attitudes a lot of sighted people hold towards the visually-impaired, such as helplessness, passivity, and incompetence. These negative attitudes have been highlighted in literature and considered as stereotypical images that often lead to prejudice and stigmas (Aikin, 2002; Barnes. & Mercer, 2010; Covey, 1998; Lee & Park, 2008; National Federation of the Blind, 2013). The participants believed that those with visual impairments should not be viewed as inferior to sighted people; they have abilities that should be recognized.

In addition, the participants underscored the importance of learning English. They all believed that mastery of English is a valued asset in the Palestinian labor market. Although the unemployment rate is high in Palestine (PCBS, 2013), the participants brightly had the hope that graduating with a major in English would secure them a good job.

There were, however, other reasons why the participants considered learning English important. Good English would help Ibrahim "communicate with people from other countries." Munir wanted to be competent in English to "learn about other cultures and know how other societies perceive the issue of visually-impaired people." Nabil felt that his command of English would help him talk about the suffering of the Palestinian people over the past six decades, and that "being well-versed in English facilitates any possible future study in the English speaking communities, such as the USA and UK." He hopes that he would get a scholarship to pursue his study and get a Master's degree in Political Science from an American university.

A significant bulk of research has paid special attention to learning English as a second/foreign language as it has become the center of many globalization mechanisms (Canagarajah, 2007; Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 2006; Meierkord, 2004; Wardhaugh, 2006). There is no doubt that fluency in English has increasingly been viewed as a sign of upward mobility, especially in developing countries, including Palestine, the site of this study. Therefore, it is not surprising that more and more people, including visually-impaired ones, are engaged in learning this global language.

What challenges the participants faced during their BA program

In their learning journey at the university, the participants encountered different challenges. First, they felt that the society, including the university administration, did not easily accept the idea that visually-impaired students could join an English department. "We couldn't choose our majors like other normal students because of our disability," Huda said, "so we were restricted to very limited majors." Nabil and Huda were interested in majoring in English within the Faculty of Education; however, the university admission office did not allow them to do that. The dean of the Faculty made it clear for Nabil, "It is required that applicants to the Faculty of Education, who would be teachers in the future, be well-sighted in order to attend this faculty." Alternatively, the participants majored in English within the Faculty of Arts. It should be noted, however, that the Association of Visually-Impaired Graduates in the Gaza Strip discussed this matter with the Palestinian Ministry of Higher Education, and fortunately, this policy was changed in 2008, as Nabil said. That is, Palestinian visually-impaired students in the Gaza Strip can join a faculty of education. Mona (a pseudonym), for example, is a blind student who graduated in 2013 with a BA in English from the Faculty of Education at the IUG.

Traveling from home to university and vice versa was a further challenge to the participants. They acknowledged that due to visual impairment, they are less mobile than sighted people, which necessitated them making special commuting arrangements. They had to invest more time and sometimes more money than sighted students in order to get to class on time. They all except Munir used public transportation for commuting; their journey took them about an hour. However, Fatima reported that her family sometimes sent her to university in a taxi with a sighted sister. Munir's family house was within walking distance from university; nevertheless, he had to walk for twenty minutes, using his cane or with the help of a friend or relative.

In addition, the university environment was also a hard experience for the participants, especially at the beginning of their program. "The new world was much larger than school," Fatima said. The participants found it difficult to get acquainted with the place. They said that no orientation session was conducted to make them familiar with the campus map: lecture rooms, library, administration offices, and other facilities. Munir, Ibrahim, and Fatima reported that they had to use their canes or receive support from others to get around campus. The other two participants, Huda and Nabil, voiced less complaint about commuting. Being partially sighted, both of them managed to move on their own, but still not as fast as sighted people.

Moreover, the participants had difficulty being updated with the news of the university. Different offices (e.g. Academic Affairs, Student Council, departments) had their events and activities printed in 'small-font' notices posted around the campus. These activities included exam schedules and invitations to attend conferences, workshops, or special lectures. As these notices were not designed with visually-impaired students in mind, the participants felt they were often marginalized.

The university classroom itself created an additional burden for the five participants. Classrooms at the IUG traditionally had bench-style seating for two or three students with a table in front of them. As a general education environment, almost all the students were well-sighted, and the teachers seemed to know little about the challenges of students with visual impairments or the resources necessary to support their needs. The participants reported how lectures were board-centered, which required reading (something beyond the participants' capacity). Huda, a partially sighted participant, said, " Although I could see my way and could move easily by myself, I faced problems inside the class as I couldn't see what was written on the blackboard and needed someone to read for me." This was a problem for all the participants; each had to sit next to a colleague student who told him or her what the teacher wrote on the board. However, it was very difficult for the participants to fully process and comprehend modules that include a lot of drawings like sentence tree diagramming in Syntax and phonetic transcription in Phonetics and Phonology. Moreover, the participants found it difficult to take notes, and when they wanted to record the lecture, some teachers, disappointedly, did not let them do that. Ibrahim said, "Some teachers prevented me from recording the lectures; my recorder is the main source of my study." Commenting on such an experience in his freshman year, Nabil said, "It was very frustrating for a freshman student like me, who was in a pressing need for support from his professors to cope with the initial demanding days of his university study." On the other hand, when permitted to record a lecture, sometimes the participants did not fully understand what they had recorded due to some noise they experienced in the classroom or the low quality of their recorders.

Furthermore, studying for their courses was a significant challenge for the participants. The amounts of their assigned reading and writing were so much that they could not study as independently as their sighted peers. It should be noted, however, that the IUG offers some

educational accommodation services to its visually-impaired students through the university Assistive Technology Center (ATC), such as adapted materials (i.e. large-print, Braille, text-to-speech), training courses on using assistive technology devices, and access to the Internet. Although the participants expressed their appreciation of such facilities, they reported that sometimes there were certain technical problems and the ATC could not transform course materials to meet the participants' needs. In addition, as Fatima reported, it was difficult to use the library resources designed for well-sighted students, and alternative versions in digital or Braille form of such resources were not available. Moreover, Nabil said that librarians were not qualified enough to support the research needs of visually-impaired students.

Testing also caused certain troubles for the participants. Although they usually had writers to whom they dictated their answers in a separate testing room, the participants were not fully satisfied with this service. The writers were often not English majors, whose unfamiliarity with certain technical terms (e.g., in linguistics and literature) negatively affected the participant's flow of ideas and answers to the exam. For example, Fatima had a writer specializing in engineering to write for her on the Literature of the 20th Century exam; as a result, the writer was not familiar with many of the concepts and names Fatima was dictating. Similarly, on his Metaphysical Poetry exam, Nabil got frustrated as his writer asked many times about how to spell certain technical terms. In addition, the participants felt that they may have lost some marks because of the bad handwriting and misspelling of some of their writers. Furthermore, as they were often tested in a separate room, the participants reported that their course instructors did not visit them while going round other testing rooms to clarify points related to the exam, which the participants considered a violation of the principle of equal opportunity. On the other hand, the participants took some of their exams in the same room with the other non-disabled students. Commenting on this hard experience, Huda said, "In Listening and Speaking 1, I had to take the exam in the same room with the well-sighted students. This negatively affected my grade."

The participants also complained that the time pressure on some of their exams negatively impacted their performance. "Due to the length of the final exam of my Writing 1 course, I could not concentrate and did not do well," Fatima commented. A considerable body of literature has explored the test accommodations which visually-impaired examinees should receive, and it has been recognized that they are likely to require more testing time than the non-disabled people receiving the test under standard conditions (Shute, Graf, & Hansen, 2005). The 1985 and 1999 S*tandards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, produced by the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education, note that the provision of extra time is a test accommodation strategy intended to compensate for the information-processing deficits of learners with disabilities. The participants in this study reported that they almost never received such an accommodation. In order to seek clarification, the researcher contacted the ATC. The center director said that generally the visually-impaired students are not offered extra testing time, and they have adapted accordingly; however, he pointed out that, in few cases and after consultation with the course instructor, about ten minutes may be provided in a two-hour exam to the visually-impaired examinees as an additional testing time.

How the participants coped with their challenges

The participants acknowledged that they received valuable support from different people, which contributed to their coping with the difficulties they had throughout their university study.

First, the participants' families were strongly supportive; they tried their best to address the participants' social, financial, and academic needs. For example, despite the high price of computers and recorders in Palestine, the participants' families bought them these vital educational tools. Munir's brother scanned materials for him so that he could study them through his text-to-speech software program. Fatima's father, a school teacher of Arabic, helped her with the Arabic modules, and he asked one of his friends, a teacher of English, to help her with some difficult English subjects like Phonetics. Moreover, one of Fatima's sighted sisters sometimes accompanied her to university, attended lectures with her, and took notes for her. Huda's family were proud of her and never treated her as a disabled person. On his admission to the IUG, Nabil's mother gifted him a talking dictionary; "it's an extremely valuable reference for blind and visually-impaired learners," he commented. In general, the participants' families encouraged them and did not underestimate their abilities. The participants concluded that this supportive behavior motivated them and added to their self-confidence.

The IUG was another source of support for the participants to cope with their challenges in several aspects. On the one hand, the IUG granted the participants four-year scholarships. These grants relieved the participants from significant financial obligations as university tuition fees are considerably high in Palestine.

Not only does the IUG provide financial support to students with visual impairments, but also it offers them educational accommodation services through the ATC. As the first university-based assistive computing center in Palestine, this ATC was established in 2000 with the mission "to enable people who are blind or partially sighted to achieve their full potential" (Elaydi and Shehada, 2007: 178). The services provided by the ATC include adapted materials (i.e. large-print, Braille, text-to-speech), training courses on using assistive technology devices, and access to the Internet. Furthermore, in cooperation with the IUG Academic Affairs Office, the ATC holds special exam sessions for blind and partially-sighted students. Moreover, in cooperation with the IUG e-learning Center, the ATC has been working on developing computer-based instructions, which would help students to independently participate in activities related to the curriculum (Elaydi and Shehada, 2007). Munir was in his junior university study when the ATC was established; however, he, like the other participants, appreciated the services they received at this center.

Moreover, the five participants highly valued the support they received from some of their teachers at the English Department who drew upon the participants' strengths, provided them with materials in digital form, let them record lectures, and met with them in their offices for clarifying certain difficult points. For example, writing English poetry was among Fatima's hobbies. She frequently showed her poems to her teacher of English Poetry to comment on, and she was very happy with the positive and encouraging feedback he gave her.

A further source of support to the participants came from their student colleagues. The participants' natural abilities gained them much admiration from their peers, and strong friendships were maintained. They easily found colleagues to sit next to in order to know what the teachers wrote on the board. They also had colleagues to form study groups. Huda had colleagues who lent her their notes and explained to her what she could not understand in the class. Similarly, Fatima had colleagues who recorded her some lecture notes at their homes. As one of the participants' university teachers, the author of this article could feel the intimate relationship between the participants and many of their colleagues.

In addition to these main sources of support, the participants referred to some resource assistance that they received from the Palestinian Ministry of Social Affairs (e.g. Braille paper,

recorders, and some blank audio tapes), and from the Association of Visually-Impaired Graduates (e.g. having some of their textbooks recorded).

What final results the participants obtained in their BA program

There is no doubt that the support the five participants received from different people alleviated the hardships they endured during their BA program in English. However, the participants' hard work and dogged perseverance were the key to their success in this unusual specialization for the visually-impaired in Palestine. Huda said, "I always have the will to succeed in my study and change my life to the best."

Throughout their university program, the participants invested great efforts not only to avoid falling behind, but also to surpass many of their peers. As noted above, Munir finished his BA program in 2002, whereas the other four participants graduated in 2006. Regarding their final results, all the participants, except Ibrahim, had very good grades. The following table presents the participants' final results in percentage terms.

Participants' final results in their BA program

Munir	Ibrahim	Fatima	Nabil	Huda
82.7%	77.8%	87.8%	83.8%	84.3%

It should be noted that graduating with an excellent grade (i.e., 90% or higher) in this challenging major is rare at Palestinian universities. According to the IUG records, 47 students finished their BA in English (Arts section) in 2002. However, only one of these students graduated with an excellent grade. Similarly, in 2006, only one out of 45 finished the program with an excellent grade.

As one of Ibrahim's teachers, the researcher was impressed by his intelligence, dedication, and active participation in the class discussions. However, worried about Ibrahim's 'low' result (i.e., 77.8%), the researcher called him for clarification. Ibrahim explained that he finished his high school as the second top student in the school, which had about 250 students. In addition, he did very well in his freshman and sophomore years. However, the sudden death of his mother while he was a junior was a traumatizing experience for Ibrahim. His father remarried and had a new baby, and Ibrahim struggled hard to cope with the new situation. When he was a senior, it was suggested that Ibrahim himself get married. He got engaged to a girl and the wedding was planned to take place after Ibrahim's graduation. However, a few weeks before his senior study finals, he had a problem with the girl and the decision was to break up the affair. Ibrahim stated that these miserable experiences posed critical adaptive problems for him. Although his 77.8% final result did not meet what was expected from him, it was still an achievement that was much better than the grades of many of his sighted peers.

Recommendations for better inclusion of the visually-impaired in the Palestinian higher education field

The participants were asked to make recommendations on how to help other Palestinian students similar to them. The recommendations can be classified as: to the society as a whole, to the government, and to the university.

To society. The participants recommended that the Palestinian community should change the prevalent negative attitudes towards blind and partially sighted people. An attitude of acceptance of the visually-impaired should be fostered in the Palestinian community. Let's hear some of the participants' voices on this issue:

The society should change the prevailing idea associated with the visually impaired; they are perceived as helpless, careless and narrow-minded. Accordingly, they are viewed with a sense of mercy and pity from the surrounding people (Nabil).

I do recommend the society to deal with the visually impaired people in an active way by trying to let them participate positively in different life aspects (Munir).

I hope that the society would change its attitude toward us because we are not disabled; we are *enabled*. Of course we need their help and support, but we don't want them to think that we depend on them to do everything for us (Huda).

The society should respect the rights of the blind and the disabled in general, as they are part of the society (Fatima).

To the government. With regard to the government, Nabil recommended that the Palestinian government should work on the implementation of the disability rights law, which states that every institution either governmental or non-governmental should include in its body 5% of the disabled people. Nabil believed that this integrating practice would "lead to more understanding, harmony, and cooperation in the society." Munir suggested that "a rehabilitation project should be established in the Gaza Strip to help the visually-impaired people to market themselves actively." For Ibrahim, in order that the visually-impaired people can overcome their disability, it is imperative that the government provide them with certain services, such as special libraries and computer audio programs." Huda believed that "the visually-impaired can really be so creative if they have the chance, encouragement, and facilities."

To the university. Finally, the participants' recommendations to the Palestinian universities represented an accommodation system that would ease the visually-impaired students' life at the university. The suggestions included the following: (1) Orientation sessions targeting visually-impaired students should be conducted to familiarize them with the university services and regulations. (2) University newsletters and announcements should be emailed (or sent in Braille language) to visually-impaired students. (3) In order to get an accurate picture of the capacities of these students, teachers should carefully consider the materials and tools available to their students in the classroom. The participants reported that they had difficulty with certain modules, such as Syntax and Phonetics and Phonology. Such a difficulty has been addressed in literature (Englebretson, 2009; Jackson, 2007; Wells-Jensen, 2005). Jackson (2007) suggests that the curricula of such modules should "undergo myriad transformations (e.g., Braille and large print) and translations (e.g., visual concepts pre-taught by a teacher of the visually impaired) in order to be made palpable for the student with visual impairment" (p.32). (4) When testing visually-impaired students, visual questions should be minimized, a Braille version of the exam should be used, good writers should be provided, and extra time should be given when necessary. The participants' recommendations provided above are of significant pedagogical value, particularly in the area of teaching EFL to visually-impaired students.

Conclusion

This qualitative study used computer-mediated interviews to explore visual impairment and majoring in EFL. Five visually-impaired Palestinian EFL undergraduates participated in the study, and the major findings were presented, reflecting the participants' real, lived experiences.

The study included a discussion of the challenges the participants encountered during their university study and how they coped with these challenges. In addition, the participants offered their perspectives on how to better include visually-impaired students in the Palestinian tertiary education context. Certain pedagogical implications can be deduced from the study. Although the sample surveyed here has its size limitations, this study can enhance our understanding of visually-impaired EFL students, particularly as no specific research has addressed this issue.

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Appendix

Dear Participant,

Thank you very much for accepting to participate in my research study about visual impairment and majoring in English as a foreign language. For the purpose of data collection, could you please answer the following questions at your earliest convenience? Use as much space as necessary.

I do appreciate your time, effort, and consideration!

Best regards,

Hassan El-Nabih

Questions

1. What caused your vision problem?

2. Why did you choose English as your major? Did this major meet your needs?

3. When did you finish your BA program? What was your grade point average (or percentage)?

4. What challenges did you face as a university student?

5. What support (from university teachers and administrators, family, peers, etc.) did you get to minimize your problems?

6. Describe how you coped with the challenges you were facing during your university study.

7. What have you been doing since graduation from the IUG?

8. What difficulties have you faced in your new career? How can you manage such difficulties?

9. Are you happy with this job? What are your future plans/dreams/ambitions?

10. What suggestions/recommendations (to university, society, government, etc.) do you have that can help other people of your case?