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*Maestría en Segundas Lenguas y Culturas con énfasis en Inglés como
Segunda Lengua para el Comercio Exterior y para el Turismo Internacional*

*Curriculum Adaptations for Adult English Language Learners
in the School of Literature and Language Sciences at
Universidad Nacional*

Volume I: Students with Usual Impairment

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COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA PARA ALUMNADO ADULTO Y PARA ALUMNADO
INFANTIL

CURRICULAR ADAPTATIONS FOR ADULT ENGLISH LANGUAGE
LEARNERS IN THE SCHOOL OF LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE SCIENCES AT
UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL

VOLUME I: STUDENTS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

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HEREDIA, MARZO 2009

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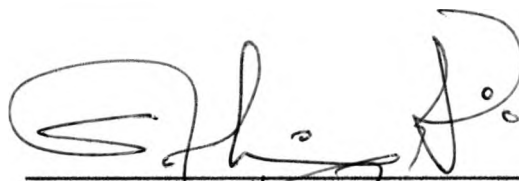
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Resumen

Trabajo presentado para optar al grado de Maestría en Segundas Lenguas y Culturas con Énfasis en Inglés como Lengua Extranjera para Alumnado Adulto, según lo establece el Sistema de Estudios de Posgrado de la Universidad Nacional. Heredia. Costa Rica.

Mi propósito en este estudio cualitativo e inductivo fue el investigar vías para mejorar la implementación de adecuaciones curriculares para estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera con discapacidad visual en la Universidad Nacional. Entrevistas informales y encuestas proporcionaron información no solo en cuanto a estrategias de enseñanza sino también en cuanto a las opiniones de los estudiantes, sus profesores y personal administrativo en referencia a la implementación de adecuaciones curriculares para estudiantes de inglés con discapacidad visual. Algunos resultados señalan la necesidad de capacitar a los profesores y establecer lineamientos concretos en la ELCL para regular el ajuste de la enseñanza y aprendizaje de estudiantes con discapacidad visual. Otros resultados se refieren a recomendaciones de expertos para diagnosticar, implementar y evaluar adecuaciones curriculares para la creciente población de estudiantes con discapacidad en contextos de enseñanza superior.

Palabras Clave: Adecuaciones Curriculares / Estudiantes Universitarios / Estrategias de Enseñanza / Discapacidad Visual

Abstract

Trabajo presentado para optar al grado de Maestría en Segundas Lenguas y Culturas con Énfasis en Inglés como Lengua Extranjera para Alumnado Adulto, según lo establece el Sistema de Estudios de Posgrado de la Universidad Nacional. Heredia. Costa Rica.

My purpose in conducting this qualitative, inductive study was to investigate ways to improve the implementation of curricular adaptations for adult English language learners with visual impairments at Universidad Nacional. Informal interviews and surveys provided information not only about language teaching strategies but also about the opinions of students, professors, and administrative staff at Universidad Nacional in regards to curricular adaptations. Several findings point to the need for training professors and establishing concrete guidelines at ELCL that regulate the accommodation of teaching and learning of English for students with visual impairments. Other findings refer to recommendations from experts on how to diagnose, implement, and evaluate curricular adaptations for the growing population of students with disabilities in higher education contexts.

Key Words: Curricular Adaptations / Accommodations / Adult English Language Learners / Visual Impairment / English Teaching Strategies

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List of Abbreviations

- ADA: Americans with Disabilities Act
- CASED: Centro de Asesoría Estudiantil
- CIDE: Centro de Investigación y Docencia en Educación
- EFL: English as a Foreign Language
- ELCL: Escuela de Literatura y Ciencias del Lenguaje
- ELL: English Language Learners
- JAWS: Screen Reader software technology
- NCDE: National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange
- ONU: Organización de Naciones Unidas
- UCR: Universidad de Costa Rica
- UNA: Universidad Nacional

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to provide information to adult education directors and instructors so they will be better able to accommodate adult learners with visual impairments who require a curricular adaptation or accommodation in the English class. Each adult educator can then become a better advocate for adult learners who may experience learning difficulties derived from a visual disorder.

This qualitative study reflects on the application of curricular adaptations in English classes at ELCL (Escuela de Literatura y Ciencias del Lenguaje) from the three main voices in the study: English students with visual impairments, their professors and several administrative entities at UNA (Universidad Nacional). In this way, all information was triangulated based on surveys and interviews with all three parties. The findings of the study mirror an analysis and discussion of the perspectives of these three participants.

The study took place in ELCL at UNA and was performed by Alina Castillo as required to comply with the requirements of the final project for the Master's program "Segundas Lenguas y Culturas" at Universidad Nacional. The researcher has a twelve-years experience in the field of teaching English as a second language and has taught in several public and private institutions in Costa Rica ranging from elementary to university levels. In addition, the education of the researcher includes studies in the bachelor's program of clinical psychology.

The sample population was chosen given that they represented the only two students with visual disorders enrolled in English classes at Universidad Nacional at the

moment of the study. Information was mainly gathered through interviews with these two adult English students with visual impairments at Universidad Nacional as well as through surveys and interviews with some of their professors and personnel from several institutional entities in charge of observing curricular adaptations in higher education institutions in Costa Rica.

Students A and B (as identified in the study) suffer from retinitis pigmentosa. However, student A is at an advanced stage of the visual disorder. He has a severe loss of vision as opposed to the partial loss of vision of student B. Student A was taking the course "Inglés Instrumental I." This course specializes in teaching reading skills to students of other majors. Student B, on the other hand, is a student in the bachelor's program of English teaching at Universidad Nacional. He was taking several courses of the program including Essay, Pronunciation II, Reading, Oral Expression and Advanced Grammar.

Both students were taking all courses at the building of the Faculty of Philosophy and Language Arts of Universidad Nacional in Heredia, Costa Rica. The building is relatively new, no more than 5 years old; therefore, the classrooms have modern commodities such as several electrical plugs, internet and telephone plugs, windows that when closed do not allow external noises in, new table-like-desks for the students, a desk for the professor with no drawers, white boards, and new plastic chairs.

The study is divided in seven main sections: introduction, literature review, research methodology, findings, conclusions, implications and recommendations. The first section, introduction, details an urgent need at ELCL to research types of foreign language teaching strategies to teach students who require a curricular adaptation. Such

need is derived from the lack of concrete policies at ELCL to face the constant growth of students with visual impairments at UNA as well as from the legal, moral, and pedagogical duties this implies.

The difficulties that a student with visual impairment may experience vary according to the severity of the medical condition. Some of these difficulties are: difficulty with visual discrimination, confuses letters, difficulty in comprehending what one sees, poor visual memory, reversing letters, and unable to follow a line on a page. The literature review overviews on research and experiences of national higher education institutions such as Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR) and other international institutions which have embraced the challenge of providing curricular adaptations to these adult students. Such institutions as well as experts in the fields of psychopedagogy, psychology, and language teaching strongly recommend not only to adapt teaching to the particular needs of the each student with a disability but also to provide empathy to those adults with psychical limitations who decide to enroll in a university academic program.

In addition, this section theorizes and conceptualizes aspects to be taken into account by higher education professors in order to adequately provide curricular adaptations in their language classes. These are: how to recognize a disability, a brief overview of diagnosing visual disorders, how to cope with disability disclosure, differences between visual impairments, learning styles and learning disabilities, accommodating teaching for the adult learner with visual disability, and how to evaluate the effectiveness of an accommodation.

The findings section of the study states that Costa Rican education institutions have traditionally used the terms and guidelines used by the ministry of public education (MEP) to describe types of curricular adaptations and act accordingly in their teaching practices. Among professors and administrative staff at UNA, interviews reveal that the types of curricular adaptations and their guiding principles remain unclear for this educational community.

The experience gathered from this study is additionally reflected in the findings section. This showed that when we focus in the classroom on the strategies and techniques that help these learners achieve more in the classroom, all learners in the class benefit. At the same time, by using specific technologies and teaching methods, professors may give this population a better chance to succeed in their language acquisition process.

The most noticeable conclusion derived from the study constitutes the need for administrative authorities at the school of literature and language sciences (ELCL) at UNA to formulate concrete policies so that English professors may suitably care for the needs of their students with visual impairments.

Even though such policies have not been yet created, some professors are making valuable efforts to provide an adequate learning environment to these students. When relating the teaching accommodations reported by professors with existing theoretical concepts and recommendations from experts in the fields of psychopedagogy and language teaching, the researcher found that such accommodations coincide with general guidelines to be followed when having a student with visual impairment in the

english class. On the other hand, both students reported to be generally pleased with the teaching-learning adaptations provided in their English classes.

Finally, the recommendations section identifies the need to create a specialized office at ELCL to handle curricular adaptations internally as traditionally done by other higher education institutions in Costa Rica such as UCR. This would eventually provide spaces for professors and students to train in the issue of learning disabilities, physical disabilities and the teaching of languages to adult students with special needs.

Statement of the problem

Costa Rican bill 7600 requires all public and private educational institutions in the country to "guarantee access to education, from elementary to higher education levels, to all people regardless of their limitations"(Bill 7600). Nevertheless, the researchers hypothesize that some university language professors are still unaware of the specific teaching techniques required to comply with the legal, ethical, and professional duty to adjust teaching to the needs of all students, regardless of their mental and physical capacities.

Acknowledging that society is constituted by different individuals has also led to recognizing that academic groups are also built by unique and different student populations (Pazos 11). In every adult-education setting, we may notice unsettling behaviors of students with learning disabilities, who despite their personal efforts do not seem to finish their work on time, hand in incomplete assignments, or do not manage to comply with the learning tasks required, thus bringing along low grades and negative emotional loads. Some professors may even have difficulties in keeping discipline in

class because of the disrupting behavior of these students who also affect the concentration of their peers.

Such behaviors in the English class have often been regarded as inappropriate to meet the class objectives; and some professors may even scold students over their bad performance. Unfortunately, this generates frustration in those students who struggle for change with no evident results.

Everyone has the right to learn and socialize without any restriction. According to Marie Claire Vargas from the project "Quality Education at UNA" (UNA Educación de Calidad, name translated by the researcher), a disability is the loss or abnormality of a psychological, physiological, or anatomical structure or function of a person. (Fontana, Vargas and Holtz, personal interview) In higher education institutions, students with learning disabilities may suffer from mistreatments caused by misunderstandings and their professors' lack of expertise on curricular adaptations.

"Quality Education at UNA" is the institutional entity in charge of counseling students with learning disabilities at Universidad Nacional. According to Quality Education at UNA "students with visual impairments and deficit attention disorders represent the two most frequently reported disabilities at "Escuela de Literatura y Ciencias del Lenguaje" (ELCL). Therefore, the researchers consider important to focus this study on these two populations. Nevertheless, this project report is based on research conducted by Alina Castillo on students with visual impairments. The case of students with attention deficit disorders can be consulted in the research report submitted by the other team member, Alvaro Bonilla.

Significance of the study

Much information can be found about children and adolescents' learning processes, styles, handicaps, and cognitive limitations and the specific teaching strategies and techniques to deal with them, such as the official governmental document entitled "Procedures to Apply the Regulations for the Access to Education of Students with Special Educational Needs" (Titled translated by the researcher) published by the Costa Rican Ministry of Public Education in 1997. On the other hand, the strategic methodological procedures to cope with curricular adaptations for adult learners have not yet been identified or established by national governmental entities.

At UNA, in 1999 professors Marie Clare Vargas Dengo, Ana Herrera Castro, and Guiselle Miranda Cervantes at Centro de Investigación y Docencia en Educación (CIDE) created the project "Quality Education at UNA." The purpose of this project is to provide students with disabilities with the adequate tools to adapt to the university and succeed in their learning process. At the same time, the project seeks to guarantee the application of law 7600 by providing specific technological resources and materials for students with any kind of disability; for example, books, interpreters, translators, and others. At this moment, this project is the only resource of information for professors and for students at UNA about curricular adaptations and learning disabilities.

In their book *Accommodations in Higher Education under the Americans with Disabilities Act*, Michael Gordon and Shelby Keiser explain the intrinsic consequences of having a national legislation about curricular accommodations in the United States:

A lesser-known but increasingly visible consequence of the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) concerns the pressures it has brought to bear on institutions of higher learning and on professional testing organizations. Because the law mandates that these entities are responsible for providing accommodations to disabled individuals, institutions across the country have been scrambling to comply. They have had to develop protocols for verifying that an individual indeed suffers from a disability. They also have been forced to determine what represents fair and reasonable accommodations for each potential form of impairment.

(Gordon and Keiser preface)

There is an urgent need to research which types of learning disabilities and physical limitations are the most representative among the English student population at ELCL. It is also relevant to describe the methodological procedures in those English courses that students with visual impairment and attention disorders are enrolled in during the second semester of the current year. According to the coordinator of the English Teaching program at ELCL, at UNA, there are no official guidelines on curricular adaptations for English professors.

The relevance of the study lies in the type of foreign language teaching strategies that should be implemented in order to help students with visual impairments to acquire knowledge and perform suitably in the English classroom. Besides, it is essential to make the administrative authorities of this university aware of the need to design and implement more specific policies regarding learning disabilities.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this qualitative and inductive study is to discover, through the observation of adult English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at Universidad Nacional with visual impairments, how their limitations as EFL learners could be minimized through specific teaching strategies aimed at implementing curricular adaptations in their courses during the second semester of the current year. In so doing, the researchers intend to provide higher education directors and English instructors from ELCL at UNA with possible recommendations on how to manage curricular adaptations specially designed for these students. In this way, each adult educator can then be better prepared to help adult learners who may experience such disabilities.

Moreover, informal inquiry on the issue has revealed great misconceptions and misuse of terms related to disabilities and curricular adaptations. Therefore, relevant definitions will be provided throughout the study when needed.

Research Question and Sub questions

This study proposes to answer the following overall research question:

What teaching strategies can professors apply in order to assist those students with visual impairments at Escuela de Literatura y Ciencias del Lenguaje in their English acquisition process?

Likewise, several research sub-questions emerge from the overall research question.

These are:

1. What teaching strategies do experts recommend to be applied in language classrooms for students with visual impairment?



2. What English language teaching strategies do experts recommend to be applied in language classrooms for students with visual impairment?
3. What teaching strategies are language professors from Escuela de Literatura y Ciencias del Lenguaje who currently work with students with visual disorders applying?
4. What teaching strategies do adult English language learners with visual disorders at Escuela de Literatura y Ciencias del Lenguaje consider appropriate to help them in their language learning process?

Literature Review

Costa Rican education has integrated ideals of equity in educational opportunities since the creation of national bill 7600 in 1996. In recent years, there has been a debate regarding the degree to which the teaching practice in national adult education institutions lives up to these ideals. Paradoxically, in other parts of the world, an interest in addressing disabilities has been reflected in education literature since the 1970s and 1980s. This occurred almost thirty years before Costa Ricans considered protecting and supporting adult learners with disabilities by a national law in order to guarantee access and proper attention to their learning difficulties.

Surprisingly, Universidad Nacional, despite its vision of commitment to humanistic educational approaches, has not yet developed concrete official guidelines for language professors at School of Literature and Language Sciences (ELCL) in order to deal with these most necessary curricular accommodations for adult learners with disabilities in second language learning. Therefore, this study proposes to evaluate the current teaching practices as well as the strategies needed to cope with the learning requirements of one of the most frequently reported disabilities at UNA: students with visual impairments.

Recent literature reviewed points to three studies that represent some of the attempts made by national and international researchers in order to bring the issue of curricular accommodations in adult learning to the forefront of curricular planning, access to educational opportunities and teaching methodology implementation in the classroom.

Curricular Accommodations in Adult Learning Institutions in the USA

A research conducted by Polson & White in adult learning institutions in nine states of the United States of America concluded that one third of adult learners have some type of disability. The most frequently reported learning disabilities were mental retardation, multiple disabilities and health disabilities (Polson and White 15). The research reports that basic adult education centers face significant challenges in meeting the mandates established by the ADA.

Polson & White stated that diagnosing a disability does not guarantee that appropriate accommodations will follow the diagnosis. As a result, "the responsibility for identifying ways to help the adult with a disability learn must often be assumed by the education provider" (Polson and White 16). In Kansas, one of the nine states included in the research, adult education institutions have made efforts for professional development guided by findings of this research. "Over the past four years, many Kansas adult educators have gained additional knowledge about the ADA, improved their skills in identifying and implementing appropriate accommodations and acquired more positive attitudes about providing quality services to adult learners with disabilities" (Polson and White 16).

Some of the changes made by education providers have been programmatic changes. Such changes consist on providing adult students and educators with extensive information about the Americans with Disabilities Act in their orientations for new students. This includes the rights and responsibilities of persons with a disability and the rights and responsibilities of the adult education program. Finally, another

programmatic change is the commitment to identifying adults with disabilities as early as possible (Polson and White 17).

Inclusion Process and Curricular Accommodations at UCR

Marta Gross, a psychologist from Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR) states that the results of the Costa Rican national census of 2002 showed that eighty-seven percent of Costa Ricans with disabilities have gone through the formal educational system. This means that they are able to read and write. Gross explains that enrollment of disabled students at UCR has required this institution to make important efforts to strengthen their support services for adult learners with disabilities. UCR provides these services through the "Counseling and Assistance Center for Students with Disabilities" (CASED). Gross also affirms that this institution has provided support services for disabled adult learners since 1995, even before the creation of national Bill 7600 in 1996.

In order to guarantee disabled students to have access to accommodations at UCR, the institution has created administrative regulations and included guidelines for the inclusion and application of accommodations in the "Academic Policy Framework" (Gross 6). For instance, in the area of attention to visually impaired students, UCR offers services such as: access to software technology (JAWS and Duxbury screen readers), administrative support, accommodations in the admission test, curricular and access accommodations, coordination with professors, oral recordings of written texts, text scanning, direct reading, orientation and mobility, support services in libraries, and Braille transcriptions.



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Accessibility to Educational Opportunity at UNA

Bolaños et al. conducted the study entitled: Students' experiences with sensorial and motor impairments, in their inclusion process at Universidad Nacional, Campus Omar Dengo (5-23). This study focused on six different areas regarding adult learners with disabilities. First, they identified the student population at Universidad Nacional with learning disabilities. Second, they determined the type of support and adjustment that UNA offered to students with learning disabilities during the admission process. As a third result, they learned about students' perception regarding policies, curriculum, student services, infrastructure, and strategies on communication and information in order to approach this type of population. They explored the type of psychological support given to students with learning disabilities. They identified the strategies that the different academic areas have used to advocate the inclusion of learners with learning disabilities. And, finally, they researched the degree of awareness on the importance of implementing inclusion policies that favor students with learning disabilities.

The question that finally emerged from the study is: to what extent have students with learning disabilities been well guided through the inclusion process at Universidad Nacional? According to Bolaños et al, the inclusion of students with learning disabilities in higher education has been a very difficult process since society is reluctant to recognize learners' diversity at higher levels (8). However, higher education institutions have been making big efforts to diminish negative impacts of the inclusion process in students with special needs (Bolaños et al. 8).

This study makes an in- depth analysis about the inclusion process at Universidad Nacional, and it gives very specific details on how learners with special

needs have been diagnosed. Besides, it provides an exhaustive explanation about the policies applied by UNA regarding students with learning disabilities. According to this study, the process for elaborating institutional policies regarding the inclusion of learners with learning disabilities is conducted by the project "Quality Education at UNA" which is in charge of collecting all the necessary documentation regarding learning requirements of the students; then they analyze the information gathered and diagnose the possible curricular adaptations for the students. The members of this project send the necessary documentation about the students needs to the different university departments along with the diagnosis and suggestions regarding the types of materials, and the resources available for this type of students. (Bolaños et al. 23)

Literature consulted in the issue of curricular adaptations for adults with visual impairment points to the need for EFL instructors to take an "action approach." Schwarz and Terril propose to follow a sequence of steps: first, to identify or "diagnose" those adult learners who may have a disability and cope with the learners' disclosure (revealing information about a disability to another person for accommodation); second, the instructor must be well trained on how to address these learners' needs and types of disabilities; third, it is crucial to find those precise teaching strategies that are more suitable for the type of disability of the student. Likewise, the instructor must look for the kinds of materials that will enhance the learners' skills and accompany the proposed teaching strategies; and finally, to evaluate the teaching practice (par. 1-16).

Recognizing Disability

"Learning disabilities is a generic term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, mathematical abilities, or social skills" (National Institute for Literacy). Even though a learning disability may occur parallel to other handicapping conditions and with socio-environmental influences, a learning disability is not the direct result of those conditions of influences (National Institute for Literacy). University professors should acknowledge that a visual impairment is not necessarily accompanied by a learning disorder. Adult learners with visual disorders may be as cognitively capable as their peers with no impairments. Here, it is necessary to clarify that, when a student has a visual disorder, he/she suffers from a medical condition that reduces vision abilities. However, impairment or disability is only present when the learning context makes it difficult for the student to access education opportunities as his/her classmates do (Fontana et al). In this way, a person with a visual disorder may not be impaired or disabled if the learning context allows him/her to learn in the exact same ways as others. In this study, the terms visual impairment and visual disability are used indistinctively.

Accordingly, experts' opinions and information are important in order to find the exact type of problem the learner presents. Knowing this will allow instructors to have a higher probability of helping these learners to ease the language acquisition process. There are various types of learning disorders that can be found in a language class which need immediate and effective treatment from professors. The document entitled "Qualitative Education for all Students at Universidad Nacional" states that:

There is a special educational need when a deficiency (physical, sensorial, intellectual, emotional, and social or any combination of these) affects learning to such an extent that some special changes to the curriculum or some adaptations in the learning conditions are needed. These changes may occur at any point of a continuum that goes from a slight change to a more severe one. They can be permanent or temporary in any phase of the development of the student (Vargas et al. 161, translated by Castillo)

Diagnosing Visual Disorders

According to the American Foundation for the Blind, "visual impairment is the consequence of a functional loss of vision, rather than the eye disorder itself. Eye disorders which can lead to visual impairments can include retinal degeneration, albinism, cataracts, glaucoma, muscular problems that result in visual disturbances, corneal disorders, diabetic retinopathy, congenital disorders, and infection."

Instructors need to know that the effect of visual problems on a learner depends on the severity, type of loss, age at which the condition appears, and overall functioning level of the learner. Many students who have multiple disabilities may also have visual impairments resulting in motor, cognitive, and/or social developmental delays (Vargas et al. 162).

The project "Quality Education at UNA" at CIDE is the office in charge of making administrative arrangements to provide curricular accommodations to disabled adult learners at UNA. This office provides the following description of a visually disabled student:

Table 1. Characteristics of Visually Disabled Students

Characteristics	Adjustments
<p>Blind Persons:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can not see. 2. Have a slight perception of light. They can discriminate light from darkness but can not see objects. 3. Can only see near objects right in front of them. 4. Have a loss of central vision. 	<p>Rely on audio and tactile helps to understand the topic of a conversation or discussion. In most cases, they use Braille reading and writing systems and use a walking stick to move around.</p>
<p>Persons with partial visual impairment:</p> <p>Those who, with the use of optical correction devices (glasses), can see some objects in a range of 3 meters-distance from them.</p> <p>In the best conditions, they can read printed words which are big and clear enough.</p> <p>They have a blurry vision.</p>	<p>They require the use of glasses in order to recognize objects and people in a short distance. However, they are able to do this with great difficulty.</p> <p>They need large-size font, and sometimes bold font in order to read properly.</p> <p>It is recommended to provide as many opportunities to "see" as possible in order to exercise their visual capabilities.</p>

Source: Universidad Nacional, CIDE, Project Quality Education at UNA. Provided by Mary Claire Vargas. 2008. Translated by Bonilla and Castillo.



Coping with Disability Disclosure

As stated previously, disability disclosure stands for "revealing information about a disability to another person for accommodation, for relationship development, and to reduce anxiety" (Rocco 10). However, the way the disclosure is received and perceived by the instructor can make a difference in how the adult learner will approach the learning situation. "As seen in many cases, some of these adults are reluctant to disclose because of past educational experiences, low self-esteem, undiagnosed learning disabilities, and a general lack of understanding in education programs that disabled adults are capable students" (Rocco 12).

Accommodation requires the education organization to provide meaningful access in consultation with the disabled individual. The process of obtaining access to accommodations at UNA requires students to checkmark a "yes" or "no" need for accommodations during the university's admission test, before formally enrolling as a student at UNA. Later on, the adult learner must provide all medical and psychological diagnostics to the institution. Once the disability has been verified, the faculty is informed about the student's condition by a letter which contains the name of the student, the courses he/she is enrolled in, and the specific disability of the student along with several suggestions on how to provide the accommodation. (see appendix A on page 96). The process follows by requiring professors to fill out an initial report form and a final report form describing the methodological and evaluation accommodations applied to the disabled adult learner during the course (see appendix B on page 97 and appendix C on page 99). These forms will be later sent to the project "Quality Education at UNA" and kept in the student's file.

Adult students with disabilities understand their strengths and limitations better than their professors. This impersonal administrative procedure at UNA does nothing to foster discussion between the learner and instructor, which would increase understanding of the issues involved for both parties. Disclosure of the disability status is unquestionably essential in order to get access to a specific learning environment or materials which will be otherwise inaccessible for the student. Nevertheless, institutional regulations at UNA do not make any provisions for training disabled adults in disclosure issues. Careful consideration must be given to the student's and instructor's roles in whether, when, and how to disclose.

Several factors weigh in the disabled person's decision whether or not to disclose. Some reasons why a disabled person might not disclose are a concern for a right to privacy, fear of the other person's reaction and fear of discrimination (Rocco 12). When disclosing a disability, the instructor may react discriminatively. Denying access to an educational program is not a legal action according to Costa Rican education laws, especially Bill 7600. Discrimination from a professor or institution can take more subtle forms, like a change in attitude. In these cases, the person with disability is labeled as lazy, intellectually incompetent to master the contents of the course or trying to manipulate the system.

The timing of the disclosure is crucial. If the instructor feels the timing is inappropriate, this can impact negatively on the strategies chosen for accommodation and upon how the disabled person is perceived. When an adult student discloses disability before the language course begins, the instructor should ask the student what accommodations are needed. Some accommodations will require an adaptation of

language teaching styles. For instance, a blind student can ask an instructor to read aloud anything written on the board.

When a person with an invisible disability, such as ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder), discloses after the course has started, some instructors may immediately attribute the late disclosure to a student who is trying to excuse poor performance rather than looking for other possible explanations; such as fear or shame. This fear or shame is many times caused by the incorrect belief that an accommodation provides an advantage to the student rather than leveling the field for his/her learning. On the other hand, if the disclosure occurs at the end of the course, the instructor may be uncertain as to how to handle the situation. "Accommodations are not required retroactively, but, as recommended by some experts, discussing options with the student and possibly with the institution's disabled student service providers, administrators or the student's therapist would be advisable" (Rocco 12).

Visual Impairment and Foreign Language Learning

Throughout this research many definitions of learning disabilities have been found. From these, the researcher has gleaned the following as a working definition, keeping in mind the commonalities and the thread that it contains.

Visual Impairment, also known as a type of learning disability, is not due to limited intelligence, educational or economic disadvantage, nor mental difficulty. Visual Impairments vary both in the ways that they are manifested in the language class and in the degree of severity. Their presence does not mean that the individual can not learn. Visual

impairments in the language class simply signal differences in learning. It means only that, in one or more areas, learning must occur in a non-standard way (Shewcraft and Witkop 3).

On the other hand, the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE, USA) argues that "people with visual disabilities experience many types and degrees of visual impairment. A person who is legally blind (20/200 vision or less) may be able to read large print and navigate without mobility aids in many or all situations" (NCDE Online). This governmental institution states that some individuals are able to perceive light and darkness and perhaps even some color, while others are not. In addition, they affirm that people with visual disabilities from birth are more likely to have learned skills in reading Braille and using tactile orientation aids such as mobility canes for navigation. People who lose their vision later in life are typically less likely to use Braille, and may have visual memories of color and scale that make it somewhat easier for them to orient according to verbal descriptions or directions (NCDE Online).

Shewcraft and Witkop (10) call for a general recognition of five areas of learning affected by learning disabilities: Visual, Auditory, Motor, Organizational and Conceptual. Learning disabilities in these areas can affect the skills of reading, writing, listening, speaking, reasoning and mathematics. The difficulties that a student with visual impairment may experience vary according to the severity of the medical condition. However, some difficulties are: difficulty with visual discrimination, confuses letters, difficulty in comprehending what one sees, poor visual memory, reversing letters, and unable to follow a line on a page.

When talking about Learning Disabilities, people may say "Oh, we all have learning disabilities." But according to Shewcraft and Witkop, this is not true. Rather, humans share styles for learning at which some people may be more skillful than others, depending on their individual learning style. It is important to differentiate between a disability and a learning style.

"Learning styles are the different ways in which people take in, process, store, retrieve and express information" (Shewcraft and Witkop 4). Learning styles can be considered in three broad categories: Visual, language by seeing; Auditory, language by hearing; and Kinesthetic, language by doing (4). A more detailed inventory indicates six basic learning styles: reading, writing, listening, manipulating, visualizing, and speaking.

All styles are available to each person, but there is a tendency to feel more comfortable or skillful in one or more styles. Likewise, learning styles are available for the learner with a disability. In Figure 1, Schwarz introduces a short, yet complete inventory of types of language learners. This can help language professors to identify which areas of language students may experience difficulty with.

TYPES OF LANGUAGE LEARNERS

BASIC LINGUISTIC CODES OF LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT	Learner who is progressing poorly in all areas	Learner whose reading comprehension and writing skills may be OK, but has trouble with the sound system of the language	Learner who may have good listening skills, but whose reading and writing skills, especially grammar are poor	Learner who is progressing well in all areas (no suspicion of LD)
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
SEMANTICS (Comprehension)	Low	High or Low	Very Low	High
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
SYNTACTIC (Grammar)	Low	High or Low	High or Low	High
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
PHONOLOGICAL (Ability to decode words)	Low	Very Low	High	High

- Low skill in the semantic coding area do not affect language learning to any significant degree.
- These language learning deficits exist in the first language, but they might not manifest until the learner has encountered learning another language.
- There is another learner whose skills may be intact, but who don't learn for extrinsic reasons (has skills, but hasn't learned to use them i.e., educational deprivation, extreme lack of motivation).

SOURCE: Robin Schwarz, American University, based on the research of L. Ganchow and R. Sparks

Fig. 1. Types of Language Learners. Schewcraft, Dianne F. and Eileen L Witkop. Do My

ESOL Students Have Learning Disabilities? A Practical Manual for ESOL Instructors

Concerned about Learning. Boston: Massachusetts State Dept. of Education, 1998. 5.



Choosing Curricular Accommodations

There are two traditions for treating students with disabilities in an educational scenario: remediation and accommodation. The remediation model has been traditionally used in the Costa Rican public education system. This model proposes not to differentiate classroom instruction for learners with disabilities; but instead, devoting extra time outside the lesson to attend the disabled learner. As pointed by Polson & White, this may not be appropriate or realistic for adults with disabilities because some adults, despite their willingness and commitment to this extra time may never experience success due to the nature of their disabilities (16). For example, it may not be realistic to establish a goal of high reading proficiency for an adult with a serious reading disability, despite the amount of hours the student dedicates to the reading activity.

“The accommodation model is as a way to help adults reach their goals more quickly and with less frustration than the remedial model” (Polson and White 15). An accommodation means that the learning activity is adjusted to the functional need and ability of the student.

An accommodation may include use of special equipment, changes in the environments, procedures or attitudes such as: additional time to complete tasks; assistive devices; adaptive tools; taped, large print, or text in Braille; readers; taped, typed or dictated answers; private work areas; calculators; note takers; repeated instructions; oral or sign language interpreters; modification of existing equipment; written instructions; changes in desk height and/or changes in lighting (Polson and White 16).

The Costa Rican Ministry of Public Education (MEP) classifies curricular accommodations in three types. The first are those accommodations oriented to facilitate physical processes, called "Access Accommodations." The second are those that require mild modification of teaching activities and evaluation in order to adjust teaching and learning to the functional needs of the students consistent with their disabilities, called "Minor Accommodations." Finally, the third type of accommodations consists on those mainly for students with severe mental disabilities who require greater modification of teaching activities and evaluation. In most cases, such a modification consists in eliminating of contents, themes, and topics in the program's curriculum and course syllabi. This third type is called "Major Accommodations" (Peña 21).

According to information provided by participants in the project "Quality Education at UNA," the most frequently reported types of disabilities in students at UNA occur at the level of physical or mild cognitive, emotional or psychological disabilities" (Fontana, Vargas and Holtz, personal interview). This means that Access Accommodations and Minor Accommodations are the most needed. Access Accommodations require the institution and professors to provide special infrastructure, equipment, interpreters, software and strategies to help students with audio, motor, visual, or speech impairments. On the other hand, examples of Minor Accommodations are giving extra time in tests, repeating explanations, and providing written instructions for tasks.

Although the term "accommodation" is relatively new, these helpful procedures have been intuitively adopted by many adult educators for decades. Provided the new discoveries in the fields of medicine, psychology, and cognitive learning processes, many education institutions have attempted to help their disabled students with simple

but necessary adaptations such as additional time to take a test or purchasing computer software with speech recognition capabilities.

When dealing with learning disabilities in adult EFL learners, there are some cases in which these learning disabilities are not evident or even present in the first language because they are hidden by compensatory strategies such as finding the meaning of words or expressions through general information and using the context. However, when the learner faces a new language, these strategies may not be available to the learner in the new language (Ganschow and Sparks 32). Instructors must then be informed and understand about types of disabilities, their symptoms and complexities in order to plan for curricular accommodations in EFL classes.

Polson and White confirm that an accommodation may take many forms, depending on the learner and the context. It may involve a change in the environment or task that enables a disabled student to participate effectively in the learning process and gain benefits comparable to those enjoyed by adults without disabilities (17). They also state that relying on observation and trial and error is the best way to learn whether an accommodation is suitable for a disabled student. This does not contradict the regular well-known practice of observation and trial and error to determine the effectiveness and success of one teaching activity over another among levels and groups of students.

Accommodations for Adult Learners with Visual Disabilities


Gadbow affirms that meeting the diverse needs of adult learners with disabilities is possible by a premise that applies to all areas of adult education, and to all learners: "there are many ways to learn and to demonstrate that learning has occurred" (19). She

recommends several principles to be applied in curricular adaptations: first, an instructor must not assume that he or she knows what is needed to accommodate a learner with a particular disability: ask; second, some learners do not know about new assistive technologies. Students should be informed; third, it is very useful to know a person in the community that might have information or contact to the appropriate service providers; and finally, an instructor should be creative and engage into a learning process on curricular accommodations by him/herself (Gadbow 19). Lastly, Richard Felder, a professor at North Carolina State University, has found that cooperative learning techniques have proven to be very effective for learners with disabilities (qtd. in Gadbow 20).

Fontana, Vargas, and Holst from the project "Quality Education at UNA" recommend a list of possible accommodations for learners with complete or partial visual loss that will be later discussed in the findings section. This list is:

Access Accommodations

- The student should sit in the front row where she or he can hear clearly.
- The student should be familiarized with the physical environment of the classroom; arrangement of desks and chairs, board, doors, and others.
- If the disabled student is asked to come to the front of the class, he or she should be able to do so without others taking him to the front. This means that the professor should guide him "left," "right," or "to the front" in reference to the student's position rather than in reference to the body of the person speaking to him or her.

- There should not be objects that obstruct the movement of the student through the classroom.
- If the physical arrangement of the classroom is changed, this should be expressed to the student.
- Slide projections, charts, and materials written on the board should be read aloud.
- The support office can record, enlarge, or transcribe into Braille any reading material if requested by the professor.
- When other students in the group are performing in an oral presentation, they should:
 - Identify themselves orally to avoid confusion as to who speaks.
 - Speak clearly and loudly and naturally. Expressions such as “look at...,” “please observe...,” and “watch this..” should NOT be omitted.
- The professor should confirm that the disabled student understands instructions before completing a task. 
- Provide a Braille transcription of the syllabus of the course.
- Remember that visually impaired students rely heavily on audio and tactile experiences. Therefore, materials should be provided in Braille transcriptions, oral recordings, three-dimensional graphics, and others, if necessary.

Minor Accommodations

- Allow the student to take more time in achieving a learning objective.
- Reduce the amount classroom tasks.
- Allow the student to work in groups for projects and out-of-class assignments.

- Allow the student to record instructor's lectures.
- Assign a tutor classmate.
- If a blind person should walk in a new physical environment, he or she would feel more comfortable if guided by another person. However, one should guide the student instead of "pushing" him or her.
- Evaluations can be applied orally, with large-sized font, or in Braille transcriptions.
- If the student requires a "Braille percussion machine," this should not interrupt other students in the group.

Evaluating Accommodation Effectiveness

A study conducted in 1999 by Polson and White (15-18) on nine states of the United States of America verified the effectiveness of accommodations for disabled adults. They reported that once an accommodation was selected and implemented, adult education providers looked for a variety of indicators to determine if they were effective. Among the factors considered were student progress and improvement, student comfort, student attitude toward learning, accommodation accessibility, and time required to use the accommodation.

They found that common indicators were that an accommodation's effectiveness depends upon whether or not the student is able to complete the task successfully; shows improvement where none was seen before, and was able to raise skills; if they are not frustrated or stressed; if they have a positive attitude, and if overall the adaptation has decreased the effects of the disability (Polson and White 16). They concluded that "the complexity of determining an effective accommodation is echoed in

this response, "Does it work for the student? Does it make a visible difference in their performance? Is the student satisfied? Does the student enjoy the accommodation? Could the teacher set the accommodations in place in a reasonable time period? and What is the student's demeanor?" (18).

Research Methodology

This study used a qualitative and inductive research methodology with emergent design. That is, some themes emerged from the data analysis rather than through a *priori* determination. Responses and data collected underwent a process of triangulation and formative analysis. This was accomplished by applying interviews, surveys, and collection of artifacts from three entities involved in the processes of curricular adaptations for students with visual impairment at UNA: administrative staff, professors, and two visually impaired students. In so doing, this approach meets Creswell & Miller's validity criterion when defining triangulation as "a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (qtd in Golafshani 604).

Participants

The two candidates for the study were identified thanks to the aid provided by the coordinator of the English teaching program of the School of Literature and Language Sciences, UNA, as well as from the project "Quality Education at UNA." Its members kindly pointed out the only two students with visual impairments undertaking English courses during the time of the study, the second cycle of 2008. Moreover, those two persons willing to commit to interviews and observations were diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa at an early age. According to Stephen Daiger, PhD, from the University of Texas Health Science Center:

Retinitis pigmentosa (RP) is a group of inherited disorders in which abnormalities of the photoreceptors (rods and cones) or the retinal pigment epithelium (RPE) of the retina lead to progressive visual loss. Affected individuals first experience defective dark adaptation or "night blindness," followed by constriction of the peripheral visual field and, eventually, loss of central vision late in the course of the disease (Daiger, section Disease characteristics).

Instruments

Two main data collection instruments were applied in this study: interviews and surveys. Each participant in the study was interviewed one time personally by the researcher. Interviews were made with: the director of the ELCL at UNA, the professor of participant student A, three professors of participant student B, members of the project "Quality Education at UNA," a representative of CASE office at UCR, and both adult students with visual impairments.

The questions developed for the interview protocols were originally grouped according to the three main categories of research sub-questions: strategies applied by the professors, strategies recommended by literature, and students' opinions and recommendations for strategies. However, as interviews and the research process evolved, and as the researcher became more knowledgeable about the subject, other categories emerged. The latter include administrative concerns and procedures for the implementation of curricular adaptations at the university level, assistive technologies, the role of students' disclosure and self-awareness on disability status, language-

oriented difficulties of students with visual impairment, and operationalization of learning disabilities and curricular adaptations.

These themes emerged along the way with such consistency that they had to be addressed during interviews as well. Therefore, the initial intended protocol became obsolete and interviews were applied in a more open, free style: with no pre-established questions. The ultimate goal of the interviews then developed into letting the interviewees, sometimes encouraged by prompts or open questions, to talk about their positions, experiences, and concerns. This accounted for a more in-depth, qualitative nature of research.

The participant students with visual impairment were interviewed on their disability status, language learning techniques, classroom interaction, and reactions to the curricular adaptations provided by their professors. Similarly, administrative entities such as the director of the ELCL, at UNA, representatives of CASED, counseling office for students with disabilities, at UCR, and members of the project "Quality Education at UNA" were interviewed about the administrative procedures of curricular adaptations at UNA and at UCR, as well as about their opinions, reactions, and general comments on the issue. Since none of these administrative officers speak English, these interviews were carried out in Spanish.

Given that the researcher is also a professor at ELCL, colleague professors were easily accessed at several times during the study. They were interviewed in a more informal manner and through short conversations. They were asked to comment about the type of curricular adaptations being applied to their students with visual impairment, the use of assistive technologies, the progression of their students in the course, and

other themes that equally emerged along the process. Professors were not interviewed as formally as other participants since most of the information needed from professors was collected through a survey.

The survey for professors (see appendix D on page 100) was designed by the researcher and included two main parts that aimed at providing answers to the emerging themes in the study. The first part of the survey was a likert scale in which professors marked their opinions about statements provided by the researcher. Here, professors marked strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree to a total of eight statements concerning criteria for choosing and designing the curricular adaptation, perception of the services provided by administrative entities at UNA in the area curricular adaptations, empathy towards the adult student with disability, coping with the student's disclosure, and previous training in curricular accommodations.

The second part of the survey consisted of three open questions about student's attainability of course objectives, types of curricular adaptations that have proven to be effective in the course, types of previous training in curricular adaptations and one final free space to write additional comments.

The survey was given personally to all professors of both students with visual impairments. They are the professors of the courses: Inglés Instrumental I (Reading course), essay, oral expression, pronunciation, reading, and advanced grammar. In order to avoid manipulation of professor's answers, professors were asked not to write their names in the survey and to leave the document at the researchers' locker in the office of the ELCL once they completed it. Unfortunately, only three professors completed and returned the survey.

In addition to interviews and surveys, which constituted the main source of information for the study, it was necessary to establish a more personal contact with the students and professors in order to get acquainted not only with the participants but also with the general contents of each of the courses. In this way, the researcher was able to make one lesson observation in the courses: Inglés Instrumental I, essay, oral expression, and advanced grammar.

Procedures

On the basis of emergent categories, these professors were contacted to obtain permissions to apply surveys and interviews. During this process, further clarification on the purpose of the study was also provided. As for the students, they were not aware of the fact that they were subjects of the lesson observation. This was consciously planned in agreement with the professors in order to obtain realistic, non-influenced information on their classroom interaction and behavior. They were informed about the research during after the lesson observations. Luckily, the two students were willing to commit to the research process.

The interviews consisted of one session per participant. Interviews lasted from twenty to forty minutes. In the case of the two students, these took place in a private meeting location. In the case of the administrative staff participants, the interviews were carried out at their individual offices. All participants were provided with an oral summary of the major purposes of the research prior the actual interview and asked to comment on their positions, reactions, opinions and experiences. Each interview was audio recorded to enable review by the researcher. This approach allowed for an in-depth

portrayal of each individual's perspective as well as commonalities and differences across individual interviews.

Ethical Considerations

In-depth data collection tools were applied to the participants in order to tap into their perceptions of the curricular adaptations provided by their professors. The minimal risk involved the reflection on unfavorable situations experienced in their English classes and negative opinions about professors.

It was made clear to participants that, if at any time they felt uncomfortable, they could discontinue the process. An informed consent was orally expressed by the participants before each interview session. This was also recorded in the interview tapes. At this point, it is worth mentioning that the researcher had exclusive access to these audiotapes.

Findings

From the wide range of information-gathering tools, the researcher was able to define several basic constructs and concepts in order to theorize on the behavior and opinions of the participants. The strategies to provide curricular adaptations for language learners in higher education are still unclear for many university professors. Much more information is available about the subject for elementary and secondary school scenarios. Such characteristic makes it difficult for any expert in psychopedagogy to provide comprehensive and in-depth recommendations for teaching adult language learners with visual impairments, not to mention a non-expert such as the researcher. However, the collection of artifacts and the interviews with the two students with visual impairment added to the surveys applied to their professors; and the interviews conducted with administrative staff at UNA and UCR offer a much clearer picture of the condition of curricular accommodations for visually impaired language learners at UNA.

As stated previously, this information was triangulated and several categories and themes emerged. Consequently, they will be discussed in separate sections.

Conceptualization of Curricular Accommodations at UNA

Much discussion and controversy has emerged around the terms accommodation and adaptation. The terms used by MEP to describe types of curricular adaptations do not necessarily correspond to those found in studies carried out in English language. In the latter, the words "adaptations," "accommodations," and "modifications" have been identified as commonly used in the English language context. Among professors and administrative staff at UNA, informal interviews reveal that these concepts remain unclear for this educational community. It is then imperative to clarify these terms. In so doing, Duvall states that:

"Adaptations" are the accommodations and modifications usually identified in a student's individualized education program ... "Accommodations" are the services or supports provided to help a student access the subject matter (e.g., tape-recorded books), access the instruction (e.g., visual displays or study guides) and enable the demonstration of knowledge without compromising the validity of what the student knows (e.g., extra time to complete a test or assignment). An accommodation does not change the content of the instruction nor the performance requirements, but it may change the timeline and sequencing as well as the method of instruction. (42)

Modifications, on the other hand, go a step further. They refer to explicit changes in content. While accommodations change *how* a student learns, modifications change *what* the student learns (Duvall 42). Examples of modifications are: using the same

literature but providing it at an adapted or lower reading level or having a student use a text that is several grade levels below his or her current placement.

This terminology, according to Mary Clare Vargas, member of the project "Quality Education at UNA" is very specific of the field of Special Education. She recalls an example: "In Germany, people do not generally use the term "Learning Disabilities" since it is associated with severe intellectual difficulties. On the other hand, in countries in Latin America and the United States, we use it indistinctively of the type of disability or impairment" (Fontana, Vargas and Holst, personal interview).

Vargas adds that the term "Curricular Adaptations" has been used since the Salamanca Conference in 1994, two years before Costa Rican bill 7600 was passed. With the enactment of bill 7600, the Ministry of Public Education published documents such as "Un Centro Eficiente" (An Efficient Center) which establishes MEP's policy and regulations on curricular adaptations. However, Fontana, Vargas and Holst remark that, "We began to find (in MEP's documents) that the specifications for implementing the adaptations are not specific enough. These are left to the consciousness of the professor, what he/she can do, his/her great ability, and his/her interest and dispositions" (personal interview).

Nowadays a new international convention held at ONU speaks of new terms. An international agreement on human rights emerged from this convention and was approved by the Costa Rican government through bill 8861. This was published in the official national newspaper "La Gaceta," number 187, on September 29, 2008. There, "curricular adaptation" and "accommodation" have been replaced for "reasonable adjustments" (Fontana, Vargas and Holst, personal interview).



The project "Quality Education at UNA" reveals there are no cases of students at UNA requiring modifications. This means that there has not been a need to reduce course contents or lower proficiency standards. Fontana, Vargas and Holst point out that "Most adaptations are in regards to methodology, evaluation, the way to carry out evaluations, the attention given to the student, and the resources that can be provided" (personal interview).

Moreover, the possibility of having students with disabilities who require modifications is subject to confusion and mixed reactions from professors and administrative staff. During an interview to the director of the ELCL, he expressed his concern about facing such situation at ELCL. He recalled a research carried out by students from CIDE in two national high schools. One of the main conclusions of this research was that professors consciously lower performance standards and teach contents of lower grade levels to their students in order to comply with requirements and avoid legal consequences. As the director of the ELCL recalls, "this high school professor taught the contents from fourth grade of elementary school to the student in tenth grade of secondary school. Evidently, the professor chose an easy way out" (Alfaro, translated by Castillo). The director of the ELCL concluded this example by posing two fundamental questions: What will happen if cases like these come to our university? and What about the high performance standards required by some academic programs in the university? (Alfaro, personal interview). With no official regulating laws or guidelines in terms of curricular adaptations at UNA, the scenario of a modification is not easy to foresee.

Administrative and Legal Implications of Curricular Adaptations at

UNA

This research study describes some of the curricular adaptations applied to two students with visual impairment in their language classes at UNA. Provided that there are no official guidelines as to how to handle these adaptations, the latter represent the professors' "voluntary" efforts to help this population of students.

When a student with a visual impairment seeks to study at UNA in any of its programs, the Institutional Committee for the Attention of Students with Disabilities (COAIED) makes the necessary adaptations to be applied during the admission process. This office, from "Vicerrectoria de Vida Estudiantil" (Student Affairs Office) proposes to follow two major steps in this process. First, this office gathers information on the students' disability when an adaptation is requested by the students. Next, this committee informs the academic department, in this case ELCL, the names of the persons with visual impairments who registered in any of the programs at ELCL. During the admission process of 2008, the university graded students by averaging their previous grades from high school together with the grade they obtained in the admission test. In this way, grades from high school are valued at forty percent and the admission test is valued at sixty percent.

The regular admission test at UNA is divided in several modules of abstract, spatial, perceptive, scientific, and naturalistic reasoning. Some items in this regular test include the evaluation of visual perception. Therefore, this office considers that it is discriminatory to apply the regular test to students with visual impairments (Picado). The alternative provided by the committee is to include two modules in the admission test for

students with visual impairments: verbal and mathematical reasoning, with a total value of 40%. The weight of the two modules (the percentage value of one module over the other) should be determined by ELCL according to the profiles of the program students are seeking to enter. In this way, the other twenty percent is evaluated through a structured oral interview with the student (Picado).

Nevertheless, once students enter the program at ELCL, the intervention of this institutional committee stops. Students with visual impairment are then forced to seek help from the project "Quality Education at UNA" coordinated by several professors at CIDE (Centro de Investigación y Docencia en Educación). As explained in previous chapters, this is the only office which can provide resources for students and professors at UNA regarding curricular adaptations.

The student with visual impairment seeking for a curricular adaptation may then approach Quality Education at UNA and be integrated as a participant into the academic project (Fontana, Vargas and Holst, personal interview). However, by doing this, the student is becoming a participant in a project carried out by professors at an academic department. There is no institutional office or department, other than this project, to guide students with disabilities through their years of study at UNA. This occurs since, as opposed to UCR and other higher education institutions in Costa Rica, UNA has not "institutionalized" or created internal guidelines or frameworks that clarify and establish administrative and legal procedures to cope with curricular adaptations.

Following established administrative procedures, members of the project "Quality Education at UNA" submit the information of the participant student to the director of ELCL via a letter. Likewise, the director of ELCL transmits this information to program

coordinators and professors of the student. In some cases, a meeting is addressed to discuss the student's needs. The director of ELCL, the professors, the student, the program coordinator, and members of the project may be present in the meeting. Through this process, a form is also attached to the letter sent to professors so that they can fill it out with descriptions of the curricular adaptations planned and applied to the students as well as with the results and comments on these adaptations (see forms in appendix A on page 96). According to Fontana, Vargas and Holst, members of the project, "we used to attach some recommendations for the implementation of adaptations into these letters; but we don't do it anymore since professors found them too simplistic and general. Nowadays, we rather have professors contact us so that we can provide the recommendations directly to them" (personal interview).

The director of the ELCL affirms that, "once the forms are filled by professors, they "send them directly to the project and sometimes give me a copy" (Alfaro). He has found that, in some cases:

There is an enormous disparity in the attention provided to the student by some professors who may fill in the forms just for the sake of it and some other professors who may be really interested. For example, a professor may write that he/she provides attention to the student during office hours. However, that says nothing in regards to the disability the professor is treating (Alfaro).

As hinted above, ELCL and the project "Quality Education at UNA" make great efforts to help students with visual impairment through their education process at UNA. However, once language professors are informed about their students' disability status,

there are no offices, departments, or staff assigned at ELCL to look after the adaptations and accommodations applied to the student, nor are there institutional legal frameworks to compel reluctant professors into the implementation of actions recommended.

The legal consequences for professors not applying curricular adaptations at UNA are definite provided some national and international laws against discrimination of students with learning disabilities such as law 7600. Fontana et al. state that professors are compelled to implement such adaptations by a requirement stated in administrative regulations of UNA. Marie Claire Vargas, member of the project "A Quality Education at UNA" describes such an administrative process as:

This is an internal process carried out by the project. Some professors care about their students while others don't... There is no way. I'm not the boss of them... What we do, we do via the direction (of the program) so that the direction may be responsible to watch over the adaptations. Therefore, the student is the first to supervise, the direction is second to be supervising, and we come third because our office is external to the academic department. We can not demand neither professors nor academic departments (to implement adaptations) since we have no corresponding authority to do so" (Fontana, Vargas and Holst, personal interview).

Therefore, the project relies on the authority of the directors of the academic departments at UNA to compel their professors into implementing the necessary adaptations for students with visual impairment. In this way, members of the project add that:

The director may say "I received a letter, sent it to the professor and the professor had to take actions"... an internal administrative procedure demands from me to answer the letters. A director may not say "I did not see this or I forgot that." He/she can not do that because he/she is administratively forced to answer the letters (Fontana, Vargas and Holst, personal interview).

At the moment, members of the project Quality Education at UNA affirm that they watch over the proper implementation of adaptations given and that the students are in constant communication with the project. They inform that the project at most times whether an adaptation or accommodation is being applied to them or not. On the other hand, the director of ELCL emphasizes that:

As a director, I feel powerless given the lack of training of some regular professors (on the issue of curricular adaptations)... I mean, I can not report professors (levantar expediente, administrative procedure at UNA carried out in order to start a penalization trial) because the professor does not know how to handle the attention disorder of a student ... Why am I to assume that the professor has any special ability or previous training to attend the student? (Alfaro, personal interview).

Fontana, Vargas and Holst add that when a student with a disability files an appeal, he/she does so taking legal action against the university as opposed to the professor. Nowadays, provided the recent convention on human rights in September 2008, the student may go to the international human rights courts.

Professors' Positions and the Curricular Adaptations They Implement

"Quality teachers are progressive, take into account students' past experiences, diagnose difficulties, permit remedial activities, and liberate learners" (Simpson qtd in Quesada 3). At ELCL, professors have been usually perceived as collaborative and creative into the implementation of curricular adaptations. For instance, Fontana, Vargas and Holst believe that, "In ELCL we have seen very accessible professors. They even go beyond by creating brilliant adaptations. Therefore, at ELCL, they have great disposition."

From a total of six surveys distributed among the language professors of both visually impaired students, only three of them were returned to the researcher. Table 2 displays their answers to the first part of the survey. The numbers in each column represent the number of professors who circled the option.

Table 2. Professors' Answers to Survey.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. The first step in the application of a curricular accommodation is to ask the student what he/she needs.		2	1	
2. When I learned about my students' condition, I met with an expert to discuss particular curricular accommodations.		3		
3. UNA provided me with the necessary services to administer curricular accommodations for my student with physical impairment and/or learning disabilities.	1		1	1
4. Adult students with physical impairments and/or learning disabilities use their condition to manipulate the educational system.	2		1	
5. My student with a physical impairment and/or a learning disability should seek other more suitable job opportunities rather than becoming a language teacher.	1	1		1
6. It is the responsibility of my student to supervise the curricular accommodations I apply to him/her in the course.		1	2	
7. I avoid talking to my student about his/her physical impairment and/or learning disability.		1	2	
8. I have been trained in curricular accommodations in higher education.		1		2

In the second part of the survey, professors answered open questions regarding the particular adaptations they use in their lessons and the criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of such adaptations. They also stated their opinions as to whether the visually impaired student is likely to succeed in achieving course objectives and their particular needs in terms of training.

There may be discrimination from professors on students with disability. Although this is a strong affirmation, it is fortunately not the predominant viewpoint of professors at ELCL. Nevertheless, in this survey, one professor provided consistent answers that may be interpreted as discrimination towards his/her student with visual impairment. This one professor, as showed in Table 2 strongly agrees that his/her student with visual impairment should seek other more suitable job opportunities rather than becoming a language teacher. Even before his/her teaching practice, this student with visual impairment is being discriminated against by a professor that believes Teaching is not for him/her. In addition, a basic principle of language teaching is not being applied by this professor: that of considering the needs of students for learning a foreign language.

When asked: "Is your student with physical impairment and/or learning disability likely to achieve all of the learning objectives stated for the course? Why?" this one professor answered "*No because of his reading difficulties. He can hardly see.*" It is then evident that multiple forms of teaching are not being considered. This professor is likely to base teaching in the ability of the student to read course compilations and other text materials.

Again, discrimination takes subtle forms. First, this one professor believes the student with visual impairment is incompetent to master the contents of the course

because *"He can hardly see."* The professor is not taking into consideration the student's intellectual abilities to learn by alternative methods. Secondly, another professor reported to agree that his/her student with visual impairment is using his disability condition to manipulate the education system.

On the contrary to this professor, other education professionals at ELCL have different points of view in regards to their students with visual impairment. It was positive to find answers from professors that said: *"This particular student is disciplined and very smart. However, his impairment does get in the way of learning sometimes, but I have tried to make adequate adjustments"* or *"I first ask the student for suggestions and then we get to an agreement."*

There is a contradiction among professors' answers regarding the issue of training in curricular adaptations. On the one hand, two professors strongly agreed as to receive training in the past. On the other hand, professors provided answers to another question in the survey that indicated their eagerness to learn many aspects of the subject. These professors answered the question: "What specific aspects of curricular accommodations would you like to receive training in?" In so doing, they wrote: *"Dealing with blind, deaf students," "How to present instruction and practice. How to assess learner's performance. How to use technological resources," and "Use of computer programs for specific disabilities (I am particularly interested in voice recognition).Development of special materials for students with specific needs in second language learning."* The variety of their answers indicates that, generally speaking, professors lack training in many areas of implementation of curricular adaptations.

Therefore, it is probable that whatever kind of training they received before was not specialized in teaching students with visual impairment.

In order to facilitate learning in their students with visual impairment, the type of accommodations these professors at ELCL reported to apply in their foreign language classes are:

- Use font 20 in the material.
- Provide texts in original ink, no photocopies.
- Record teacher's explanations to revise at home.
- Have the support of a classmate with whom he can discuss exercises/ tasks.
- Verbalizing the material
- Reading out loud
- Having a peer read to and work with the visually impaired student.
- Sending materials and exams by e-mail.

All these strategies are valid and reasonable adjustments for teaching the student with visual impairment. Nevertheless, the criteria for choosing such accommodations are not clear. Two out the three professors said they do not ask the student what he/she needs as a first step in the implementation of a curricular accommodation. In addition, all professors disagreed as to meeting with an expert to discuss particular curricular accommodations for the student. Finally, two professors agreed as to avoid talking to their student about his/her physical impairment and/or learning disability. Therefore: How did they choose the accommodations to be implemented for their student with visual impairment in the language class? Do they ask their students with visual impairment what they need or would like?

As stated before, it is probable that previous training of these professors was not specialized in teaching the visually impaired. The only possible answer to the previous questions can be inferred from their responses to item number three in the first part of the survey. Here, two professors agreed that UNA provides them with the necessary services to administer curricular accommodations. In this way, professors are proving that they rely on such services. However, UNA has no specialized services as to suggesting specific strategies for curricular adaptations in Language Teaching.

Provided this last finding, along with the type of accommodations reported by professors, it can be concluded that these English language professors at ELCL are not using specific language-oriented teaching strategies to implement curricular adaptations. The adaptations they have implemented may rather be limited to accommodations (access adaptations). Nonetheless, as will be discussed in the section "Strategies to Teach Language to Students with Visual Impairment," these are not at all negative. On the contrary, many of the adaptations required by students with visual impairment consist of facilitating access to content by adapting space, time, materials and resources for learning the language.

When establishing criteria to measure the effectiveness of curricular adaptations, these professors declared that:

- "I first ask the student for suggestions and then we get to an agreement"
- How well student grasps the content of the reading.
- How well student could react to that content.
- Whether or not student develops strategies for reading comprehension according to his particular learning style



- Learning results.
- Type and degree of impairment.
- Student's personality.
- Learning tasks (reading, writing, speaking, reacting)

Moreover, two professors agreed that it is the student's responsibility to supervise these curricular accommodations. This last statement agrees with motivating students to develop independence and control over their own learning. Simultaneously, since students are given a voice in the process. This promotes self-awareness on their disability status and their individual capabilities. It may even force students to make greater efforts to comply with the performance standards of the class. The National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE) stipulates that:

A foreign language professor should hold the same high standards for blind students as he or she would for all of the students in the class. Faculty do not serve blind students well by lowering expectations, but rather by understanding blindness as an aspect of their identity. The student is above all a learner and in recognizing this, faculty should ask not whether one can teach this student, but how to assist the student to learn (NCDE).

A last word from the professors recalls their overall concern for training in the issue of curricular adaptations. They stated that: "It is not fair for teachers to plan twice without any training at all," "UNA should take seriously the idea of training teachers to help students with special needs. This population will grow and teachers must be updated," and "I believe that both teachers and students need counseling and training."

This concern is shared by the director of the ELCL as well. He explains that, "I believe that we (at UNA) need training. We must have a certain level of rigorous training so that professors can adequately respond to these students' needs" (Alfaro, personal interview).

Students' Disclosure and Self-awareness on Disability Status

Disclosure of the student's status, as previously defined, is necessary to provide adequate curricular adaptations. Disclosure has the objective of finding out about the student's disability and difficulties. It is, by no means, a type of screening of students' language competence or performance. From literature reviewed and experts' opinions, it can be concluded that a first key element in the implementation of a curricular adaptation is to ask the visually impaired student what his/her needs are, and how they should be addressed by the professor. As stated previously, some students may feel reluctant about disclosure. Therefore, an interview professor-student arises as the best possible means to learn about this student's particular condition. "The instructor will need background information on the student's learning history to help determine why the student is experiencing difficulty in making progress; if at all possible, the interview should be conducted in the student's native language" (National Institute for Literacy).

Nevertheless, as observed in Table 2, two out of three professors of the two visually impaired students observed indicated otherwise. This may hint that these professors consider other actions as more adequate to carry out as a first step in the implementation of the curricular adaptation. However, meeting with an expert to discuss possible curricular accommodations was neither one of the actions carried out by these

professors. Unlike the previous result, the latter position is supported by all three professors. Such results may seem unexpected. However, as stated by members of the project "Quality Education at UNA," some professors go on reluctantly about consulting with the project after learning the news on the disability of their student sent to them by the corresponding documentation. At this office, they would eventually obtain essential information on availability of assistive technology, materials, and other resources, as well as recommendations from the members of the project for the proper implementation of the curricular adaptation.

A second key element that needs to be addressed at this point is that of students' self-awareness of their disability status. Students can play a significant role in choosing and using accommodations by providing professors with accurate information about: their disability, needs for learning, and possible strategies for accommodation. However, none of this information may seem available to the student him/herself. Thompson argues that:

For students with disabilities, understanding their disabilities and learning self-advocacy strategies are critical for success in school...Speaking out about their preferences, particularly in the presence of "authority figures," may be a new role for students, one for which they need guidance and feedback" (section Including Students in the Decision Making Process).

Teachers can play a key role in working with students to advocate for themselves in the context of choosing and using accommodations. Students need to know what accommodations are possible based on knowledge of their personal strengths and limitations. The more input students provide whether voluntarily or at the professor's

request, the more adequate accommodations will be provided. In addition, as stated by Thompson, self advocacy skills become critical, "students need opportunities to learn which accommodations are most helpful for them, and then they need to learn how to make sure those accommodations are provided in all of their classes" (section Including Students in the Decision Making Process).

At UNA, some students are surprised when they find out that the only way they can receive accommodations is by asking for them. There is no special education teacher assigned to take care of individual student needs. The project Quality Education at UNA provides the necessary services, but only for students who request them. Self-awareness on disability status becomes essential for the college-survival of the visually impaired student, especially if confronting professors who do not understand how or why a person should be given special treatment.

Two Sides of a Coin: The Cases of Two English Language Learners
with Visual Impairment at ELCL

The first student with visual impairment has a severe loss of his vision. He has retinitis pigmentosa and has gradually been losing sight. He walks around with the help of a guide dog. He talks about his experiences and reminiscences about times when he could see well. For example, he said he used to paint and likes this type of art but he is not able to paint anymore. He is a student in the program of Special Education. During this cycle, he is taking the course "Inglés Instrumental I" which is a reading course required for most students at the university. The course is taught on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:00 a.m. to 11:40 a.m. at the School of Philosophy and Languages at UNA.

During the lesson observed, he sat in the front row, next to the aisle. His dog lied down under his chair and between his legs. It remained quiet and still during the whole lesson. His tutor classmate, Ana Luz, is also a student in the course and is studying in the major of Special Education. Ana sat next to him. She was assigned to be his tutor as part of her scholarship requirements.

During this lesson observation, he listened carefully to the professor's instructions. While other students read, the professor walked around. Ana Luz read the texts aloud to him. It was also noticed that the professor verbalized all classroom procedures. For example, when the professor referred to pictures and subtitles in the text, she verbalized the content of the material so that her classmate with visual impairment could have a clear idea of what she was talking about. Moreover, since he declares to record lessons on tape, he can later review the lesson's contents at home.

He seemed to react as any other student in the class. He was caught several times by his professor not paying attention to an explanation because he was talking to his tutor, Ana. Nevertheless, whenever he noticed the professor is close to him, he remained quiet and seemed to follow the professor with his head. According to him, he still retains some vision as in being able to recognize shadows.

According to his professor, the following accommodations are applied to this student:

- The professor sends written materials to him beforehand by e-mail. In this way, he can read the texts for the next lesson through his voice recognition software.
- The student audiotapes all lessons.
- The professor has not met with people from CIDE or ELCL to discuss this case, but the student is doing well in the course.
- The use of technology such as voice recognition software helps him in his learning process.
- When the professor got the student's documentations on the curricular accommodation, they said the professor should send materials beforehand by e-mail.
- The professor talked to him when she first met him and he requested to have materials sent beforehand by e-mail.
- The professor has some experience in curricular accommodations.

During the interview with this student, he revealed interesting information on his perception of the curricular adaptations he has been subject of during this course. The student states that the "Instrumental" course is made easy thanks to the help of assistive

technologies. He believes that if he were in other English language-learning contexts, such as in a grammar or spelling class, learning would have been much more difficult for him. As stated by the student:

Most of my learning and work occurs outside the classroom. In the classroom, I get a partial picture of the contents. While other students interact with texts in the classroom, I have to take home the ideas I listened to and start connecting them to the text in my computer. For me, learning is not as immediate as it is for others through class work. (Rodriguez).

As hinted by his words, this student has mixed reactions as to his participation and work in class. On the one hand, he expresses gratefulness for having assistive technologies that make his learning possible; but on the other hand, he might be implying that his learning in this course occurs mostly at home, making his classroom interaction with content minimal or not as active as he would want it to be.

Assistive technologies are one of the most helpful resources for a student with visual impairment. However, they are only accessible outside the classroom. In his case, one may ask What if he gets home and he does not remember? Who does he ask questions to at home? At this point, the use of another smaller and less complex technology comes in handy for him: the tape recorder. It is thanks to his recording of class discussions, professor's interventions, other students' questions, and the professor's answers to these questions that he is able to "connect" all the information at home and interact successfully with texts.

A second issue addressed by this student is that of his opinions about having a tutor classmate. Regarding this he stated that:

I have a tutor but she sometimes is not precise in pronunciation, so both of us stop and she has to tell me the exact spelling in Spanish of the word she is trying to read aloud. It is kind of tedious. My tutor goes at my rhythm so that sometimes we can not finish the exercises. (Rodriguez).

Having a tutor classmate can definitely ease the workload of the professor and help the student interact with another peer in equal learning condition; consequently reducing anxiety and lowering affective filter. However, this student may be missing his independence in class work since he implied feelings of "guilt" for delaying the speed of his tutor's class work. As a matter of fact, the project "A Quality of Education at UNA" recommends that professors allow students with visual impairment to be independent as often as possible. Therefore, when working with the "tutor strategy", professors must be careful to assign a certain amount of individual classwork to the student with visual impairment. Overtly assisting the adult student with disabilities in every single step of learning should be avoided since it does little to foster self-confidence and independence.

An additional consideration in this first case concerns the evaluation methods he has been complying with. According to this student and his professor, all reading comprehension tests have been e-mailed to him allowing him to read them with JAWS screen-reader software. He is then able to write his answers through a word processor and send them back to the professor. Nevertheless, the student recommended that professors e-mail text-formatted scanned readings such as those written or scanned for

Microsoft Word. He explained that readings in image-like programs such as Adobe Acrobat can not be read aloud by JAWS nor does this software recognize images, pictures, charts, or tables. All parts of the assignment must be in text formats only.

The types of tests he reported to take in this course, and other courses at UNA, account mostly for open questions and yes-no questions. He has also experienced positively with multiple choice items. Nevertheless, he explained that matching items are too complex and tiring for him. This is so since JAWS can not read tables. Even when the item is designed in simple text, this also represents difficulties for him since the software reads one line at a time; for instance, JAWS will read the first line of column A and Column B continuously. That implies reading both columns at the same time and advancing one line at a time. With a matching exercise, professors will be evaluating his memory capacities rather than his language competence.

Although the student did not mention negative reactions from his classmates during the interview, a professor of his did. According to this professor, his classmates once complained because his dog was "smelly." When asked for recommendations to the professors, he said:

Sensitize others in the group. For example, when classmates are presenting orally to the class, they could verbalize and explain to me the visual aids they are using. This verbalization is a job for professors but if I tell my classmates about this they could react negatively. If I suggest it to them, they could take it wrong (Rodriguez).

When mentioning this student, Fontana, Vargas and Holst add that:

For example, you have (name of the student omitted), a blind student at the university that not only has impairment, but that impairment leads to a disability given the barriers of his environment. If he did not have a computer with JAWS and a dog, he would probably be lying in bed” (Fontana, Vargas and Holst, personal interview).

The second participant student in this research is now in his second year of the bachelor’s program of English Teaching at UNA. He is taking courses in reading, essay writing, advanced English grammar, pronunciation (consonants), and oral expression. He attends classes at the School of Philosophy and Languages from Monday to Friday, mostly in the mornings. He also has retinitis pigmentosa. However, he retains more visual abilities than the first student. For example, he does not use a guide dog or a mobility cane to walk and he can still read and see some types of printed materials. When professors walk around the group, as in monitoring their work, he seems to follow them with his head. According to him, he can see shapes, shadows and other elements. He is able to visually recognize when people are close to him but he can not see small features such as the color of their eyes. For example, when he reads, he places papers very close to him, almost touching his nose.

During lesson observations, he sat at the back row of the room. He declared to prefer this location because windows are usually at the back of the room, and there he can get the most sunlight. He said that artificial light is not as good as natural light for him; and anyways, he can not see the board even if he were to sit in the front row of the class.

He likes to make jokes to his classmates and talks a lot to them during lessons. He has a healthy sense of humor. For instance, during a class at the language laboratory, a student next to him raised his hand to participate but he hit his elbow in the lateral panel of the cubicle. Although the student with visual impairment was not looking in that direction, he seemed to have noticed his classmate's "ouch!" and the sound made by the cubicle. He laughed out loud at this and made pranks on his classmate for some time during the lesson. He seems to be comfortable around his classmates.

However, he states that he participates little in class discussions since he is shy when speaking out loud to the professor or the group. He reports to speak mainly when asked by professors to participate orally. He can articulate well-organized ideas. His grammar is understandable, though it needs refinement. However, when he speaks, there are noticeable marked Spanish transfers in his oral English pronunciation.

According to this student, when he took his first course on pronunciation, last year, he was not able to read the course compilation given the small font of the material. In addition, he states that most or all class discussions in this course evolved around the readings done at home. Some of the classroom exercises in the pronunciation course dealt with phonetic transcriptions, which he was not able to complete with since he could not see the symbols written in the course compilation or on the board (Student B). Therefore, he was not able to learn how to transcribe or produce certain sounds appropriately. Now that he is taking the second pronunciation course, he thinks he is not doing well. Most of the phonetic metalanguage (e.g., terms referring to points and manners of articulation) was studied in the previous course. Whenever the professor uses this metalanguage to explain pronunciation of new sounds, he declares to feel

"lost." He mentioned that some transcription exercises require the use of the dictionary in class, thus making it difficult for him to complete the tasks. Nevertheless, when talking about this professor, the student expressed his appreciation for all the help this professor has provided to him. He affirmed that his learning in this course could be improved only by relying on material he could "read."

Peer support is a key learning strategy for this second student with visual impairment. It was observed that some professors gave the group handouts with questions for discussion. In the case of one professor, verbalizing the questions or reading them aloud was not part of the lesson's dynamics. When this occurred, he relied on his classmates to read the handouts aloud. He seemed to rely heavily on his classmate's help in order to accomplish learning activities and follow the sequence in the lesson. He states that some professors do not provide any special material, instruction or teaching strategy for him and that he is able to participate in some class discussions thanks to listening to his classmates and inferring ideas from them.

When he is listening to others, his arms are crossed and his head down (e.g., when listening to classmates presentations). In such case, he lied forward and listened quietly to his classmates. As for his own oral presentations, this student affirms he can prepare power point presentations in his computer at home. He is able to do so by reversing the configuration of his computer. For example, when working with Microsoft Word software, he changes the backgrounds to black and the fonts to white. Nevertheless, when it is time to present in class, he said can not read the slides projected by the video beam. Therefore, he chooses to memorize all his oral presentations.



According to the student, reading classes are among the most difficult for him. He must read the texts sent by the professor at home and complete the quiz in class, which requires memorization of the material. He states that he usually can not finish reading the materials in class on time if he is left to read by himself. He acknowledges that the size of font is important; and the type of font is equally important. Besides being big, the font should be clear and dark for him to be able to see it. He adds that, when working in pairs, a classmate may help him by reading the material aloud making it faster for him to finish class assignments.

He would rarely stand from his seat during class. In the writing class, the lesson's dynamics called for students to approach the professor's desk from time to time to check on their advance, he would not approach the professor at the desk. Instead, the professor went to his place from time to time to monitor his work.

After almost an hour of writing activity, the professor discovered this student had only written a few words in a list of causes and effects. Although the professor did not say anything particularly negative to him, the researcher could notice the student had been showing little interest in the writing task. He had been text messaging on his cell phone and talking to the classmate on his right most of the time. He and his classmate had been talking about having a beer at lunch. He laid back on his desk. He looked up and down. He would say things to his classmate such as "I'm stuck." He made several attempts to write. He wrote at a normal speed, then stopped, and after a moment continued writing. He seemed to take longer pauses than the rest of his classmates.

Finally, when asked for recommendations for his professors, this student pointed out to the need of three elements; first, to get training for his professors so that they

“know what they are dealing with”; second, “they should ask me what they should or should not do;” and finally, professors should communicate with professors of previous courses. For example, “it is a good idea for the professor now teaching Pronunciation II to talk to the professor of Pronunciation I.”

He has not had as much luck as the first student with visual impairment in regards to the access and use of assistive technologies. Nevertheless, his visual impairment is not as severe as that of the first student. The same fact that he can still see may have had a direct effect in the way his professors plan and understand the curricular adaptations they consider for him. At times, because he makes an effort to exercise his remaining visual capabilities, professors seemed to forget that these same capabilities are minimal and that he does require an adaptation of teaching and learning.

Strategies to Teach Language to Students with Visual Impairment

In the absence of cognitive and mental learning disabilities, language students with visual impairments follow the same language acquisition processes and apply similar strategies to other students in the same group. It is then necessary to identify if such cognitive learning disabilities are present within the student with visual impairment in order to choose from an accommodation for learning or a modification of content. When diagnosing a learning disability, “the teacher should keep in mind that some ESL students may have some of the characteristics of learning disabilities due to their temporary problems with learning a second language, as well as their cultural differences” (National Institute for Literacy).

Moreover, a cognitive or mental disability is evident after observation of repetitive patterns of consistent learning difficulty. It is only when these patterns have been identified that professors could consider the possibility of dealing with a cognitive or mental deficit (Moore Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act). Potential classroom problems leading to the diagnosis of a learning disability include disruptions by the special-needs student and/or other students; teacher frustration after trying alternative teaching strategies; and the inability of the learning disabled student to cope with the material and keep pace with the class, eventually leading to academic failure.

If a student exhibits several of these characteristics over a period of time, to the degree that they are interfering with his/her learning, then s/he may have a learning disability. "The professor must keep in mind that beginning-level ESL students will have difficulties in many of these areas until they acquire some language proficiency but that, in the absence of learning disabilities, these difficulties will be temporary" (National Institute for Literacy). Likewise, when referring to the application of section 504 of the Americans with Disability Act, Moore affirms that:

Given the variety of student needs, it is advisable to use multiple modality instructional practices such as Total Physical Response, suggestopaedia, and other kinesthetic or haptic approaches to ensure that, during any given lesson, information is received and processed by more than one sense. For example, an entire class devoted to reading comprehension would appeal only to the visual learner, thus denying the visually impaired student the opportunity to participate. Similarly, listening to tapes and

doing dictations for fifty minutes would appeal primarily to the auditory learner” (Moore)

Moreover, NCDE explains that people who have visual impairments use a wide variety of adaptive equipment or formats depending on their needs and personal preferences. This institution provides examples that include:

- audiocassette tapes, CDs, MP3s, or digital audio recordings
- Braille documents (Braille uses a raised six or eight dot system that can be read by touch)
- large print, monoculars, magnifiers, closed circuit TVs
- people who act as readers and/or scribes
- electronic adaptations (scanners that change print text to electronic text, software that allows electronic text to be accessed through Braille display equipment, enlarged text on a screen or a computer voice output)

According to Fontana, Vargas and Holst, new definitions of disability argue that a person may have difficulties, but his/her disability will be determined by the conditions of the environment. Sometimes, it is the context of the environment which decides whether the student should be identified as “disabled.” Mary Clare Vargas declares that “this means that if I can do things well, with no support or special resources, then I do not have a disability; but if I need a special bus to get to the university or I may have too many resources to get to the university, then streets and transportation within the university should be accommodated” (Fontana, Vargas and Holst, personal interview). In this way, the environment should be changed to fit the needs of the student with

disabilities. As long as the environment is adjusted, the person will no longer be "disabled" within the context of the institution.

While following the needs of the student with visual impairment, professors should adjust teaching to the student's particular learning style. "A student with a learning disability will find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to learn in a style in which s/he is not proficient" (National Institute for Literacy). In the cases of the two students with visual impairments mentioned in this research, their particular disability is related only to their visual capacities, not to their mental or cognitive competence. At this point, professors should keep in mind that accommodations for students with visual impairments call for a higher emphasis on stimulating their remaining visual ability (if there is slight impairment) and using eclectic strategies directed towards hearing, touching, and stimulating other senses.

Furthermore, Krashen stresses that the student who is learning a second language gradually moves into the production of the new language thanks to comprehensible input and a comfortable environment that has a positive impact on the student's emotions, as stated in his comprehensible input and affective filter hypotheses (qtd in Wenner 103). Therefore, placing a visually impaired learner into a stressful classroom situation would do nothing but inhibit and delay his/her acquisition of the foreign language. On the other hand, Cummins (1986) adds that educators must add context to instruction in order to make it comprehensible (qtd in Wenner 103). In a university classroom, language use tends to be cognitively demanding given the nature of the contents discussed. Therefore, adding context supports the student's understanding of academic language demands (Wenner 104). Professors at UNA may

seize the opportunity of having a student with a visual impairment to implement several teaching methodologies and techniques that will enhance the learning of their visually impaired students and in the other students as well.

The National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE) establishes specific strategies to help foreign language professor prepare for a student with a vision disability, to adapt teaching style, to modify class activities, and to accommodate testing. These, as described by NCDE are:

Strategies to Prepare for a Student with a Vision Disability

- Talking to the student early (preferably before the course begins) and offering to learn from one another. The student can describe how he or she has learned in the past.
- Asking the student to explain what kinds of adaptive or assistive technology works well, how he or she prefers to take notes, and how he or she studies at home.
- Showing the student the classroom, orienting the student to where tables, chairs and other objects relevant to the class are located in relation to the front of the room and doorway.
- Discussing the best place for the student to sit; a student with low vision may favor a specific kind of lighting or distance to the blackboard or whiteboard.
- Providing a student with bibliographical information for texts to be used in the class as early as possible to allow enough time for the student to obtain alternate formats such as Braille or electronic versions.

- Asking the student if there is anything else the student would like to share, (and checking in periodically throughout the course on how the accommodations are working).

Strategies for an EFL Professor to Adapt his or her Teaching Style

- Putting the class agenda on the board and going over it orally. At the end of class, returning to the agenda and summarizing the material covered.
- Saying aloud or writing in large letters anything that is being written on the blackboard or whiteboard.
- Describing aloud any visual aids or props or making any visual aids big with high contrast.
- Refraining from pointing to things on the blackboard or whiteboard and saying "this" or "that" or "here" and "there".
- Spelling out unfamiliar words.
- Using a magnifying program if projecting something onto a large screen or doing lessons in a computer language lab.
- Going over any handouts verbally.
- Giving students a CD-Rom with electronic versions of materials, such as class notes, PowerPoint shows, syllabi, vocabulary lists, etc.
- Repeating and recycling material multiple times to assist with memorizing material.
- Reviewing strategies from other teachers.

Strategies to Modify Class Activities

- Asking all students to identify themselves as they speak so visually impaired students can follow conversations better.
- Pairing a sighted student with a blind or visually impaired student who can explain nonverbal actions in the classroom or information that is missed in other ways.
- Conferring with the student with a visual impairment to determine how the student wishes to handle such in-class activities such as using poster board or other visual ways of gathering input.
- Allowing a blind student to use his or her computer or adaptive note-taker in class.
- Ensuring that websites and PDF documents necessary for the class are made accessible.
- Engaging the class in oral/aural exercises to strengthen conversational skills and encouraging blind or low vision students to be active participants.
- Engaging sighted students in the class to produce taped recordings of assigned texts. Two or more students can read the dialogue or story aloud so that it can be offered to the student who is blind. The blind student will then have the text from which to learn and study, and the sighted students will have a meaningful opportunity to practice pronunciation and inflection. Some blind students will supplement this with the same audio books professionally recorded by advanced speakers of the language.
- Using oral realia (music, radio, interviews, newscasts, documentaries) more than visual realia (film, television). If using film/video, choosing films with more narration or highly descriptive (vs. subtitled) films. Inquiring what "descriptive narrative" or "audio

described" films, which are adapted for blind audiences, are available in foreign languages.

Strategies to Accommodate Testing

- Including oral and aural testing as an assessment tool for all students.
- Considering the importance of strictly requiring proper spelling from the blind student if pronunciation is correct. (Will he or she be using the written language? Is oral accuracy sufficient for the student's goals? There are ways for a blind student to learn accurate spelling if they plan to do written correspondence.)
- Working with the disability office or blind resource center on getting the tests put into large print, audio or Braille in advance of the exam.
- Having a student take the test on his or her computer, so it can read or enlarge the test for the student. Students can then type in answers.
- Allowing the student to take the test orally rather than in writing by providing someone who speaks the language to read the test to the student and then writing down the student's answers.
- Arranging a separate location and extended time for test taking (a reader or having a computer read the test aloud takes longer than silent reading).
- Asking the student which testing methods are most comfortable for him or her. Some students prefer written exams, while others access better oral exams. Some prefer alternative formats, while others may not mind working with a reader or scribe. For students with some vision, closed-circuit TV systems that are portable or other

magnifying equipment can be brought to class to enlarge tests, and markers on unlined or wide-lined paper may be used for writing the answers.

Planning Strategies for Teaching Language Learners with Visual Impairments

When planning strategies for teaching English to learners who are visually impaired, the literature consulted for this study recommends following some basic principles such as those stated by the NCDE. First of all, use predictable routines. This is one of the easiest ways to reduce anxiety. Because visually impaired students do not always understand what is happening around them, establishing a lesson routine will help them relax and not worry about being able to follow the sequence of events in the classroom. This will also turn their energy toward more specific language learning-oriented tasks. The specific routine to be applied will depend on the nature of the course. For example, in a reading class such as that of the student with visual impairment discussed in the first case, establishing a discernible pattern of pre-reading, reading, and post reading exercises will make it easier for the student with a visual impairment to know where in the lesson routine he is at. In an oral expression class, where students often make oral presentations, establishing a time at the beginning or at the end of the lesson for the students' presentations will also help the student with visual impairment keep track on the timing and sequence of the lesson's activities.

Secondly, use realia, kinesthetics, and/or concrete elements to teach. As stated previously, in the absence of vision or in the case of partial loss of vision, students with such impairments rely heavily on their other senses for learning. Touching, hearing, and smelling are their tools to receive language input. It is true that the use of such elements

requires advanced planning from the professor in creating or gathering the objects to be used. However, this technique will not only help the visually impaired student, but also enhance learning in the other students in the group as well.

It was unfortunate to find out that, in the survey, a professor stated that his/her student with visual impairment was not likely to achieve the course's objectives because of his disability condition. Consequently, the use of alternative teaching strategies becomes a key element here. For example, in a reading course, professors must ultimately accept that a blind student can not read printed material unless he/she uses the Braille system. Therefore, if reading comprehension is the ultimate goal of the lesson, other alternatives should be explored for the student to receive the information provided in the content of the text such as the use of reading-aloud software, or having a peer in the classroom read the material and allow recording of this such as the case of the first participant student with visual impairment.

Additionally, existing software at UNA (JAWS) does not recognize text scanned in image format; an alternative text-format should be used to scan and e-mail readings to the student. In addition, just as other students might go back to the text to scan for specific information when answering reading comprehension exercises, the student with visual impairment should also be allowed to have this same opportunity; and recording the material stands out as the most appropriate technique.

In the case of a student with partial loss of sight, experts recommend encouraging students to exercise their visual capacities. However, a word of caution must be provided to professors since these students can not interact successfully with all kinds of printed materials. In the case of the second student with visual impairment described in

this research, he clearly stated that he can see only fonts sized 14 and up; and only when the type of font is clear (sometimes bold is needed). He recommends that professors provide course compilations and classroom materials originally printed in this type of font, not zoomed by a photocopier machine. He clarifies that when interacting with original materials, his reading is made easier and faster given the clear layout and proportions of fonts and images. Therefore, when having a student with a partial loss of vision, the student should recommend what types of materials would be suitable for his/her particular condition.

Another useful technique is to preview and review. Provided that some students with visual impairments, such as the second participant student, use their memory capacities to retain content, pre-teaching key vocabulary and elements before an activity and recalling these same elements later helps the student to learn and remember content.

Direct Teaching Strategies

A fear that some professors expressed during interviews is that flexibility to teaching and learning may lower the standards of the curriculum. Nevertheless, as stated by Gadbow, "an underlying premise (when dealing with curricular adaptations) is a belief that applies to all areas of adult education, and to all learners: there are many ways to learn and to demonstrate that learning has occurred" (19). The following strategies are suggested by Wenner (105-8) and they are presented here since they clearly fit the theoretical foundations and findings of this research according to the particular learning contexts of the two participant students.

Cooperative Learning

Various research studies have shown that teacher-centered methods are inferior to approaches that involve active and cooperative learning (Felder qtd in Gadbow 20). Cooperative learning is a collection of strategies in which students work together to accomplish a task. The task is structured so that each member of the group is expected to perform an assigned task. From all other teaching methods, cooperative learning is one of the most effective when working with students with visual impairment. It allows each member to be assigned a unique task and the student can participate at the level at which he/she is capable and with the tools he/she requires with no negative interference over the group's dynamics or fluent course of the lesson.

Richard Felder, Professor Emeritus at North Carolina State University affirms that "use of cooperative and other group learning approaches with a wide range of learners, including those with a wide range of disabilities, may entail consideration of additional factors such as use of various assistive technologies and other accommodations" (qtd in Gadbow 20). As a result, students with visual impairment can easily be included in these groups when the individualized planning allows for providing materials in large print or Braille. In this way, the student is individually allowed to perform tasks that will contribute to his/her own learning and to the group's product. Further examples of cooperative learning activities that may work for students with visual impairment are small group discussions, and working in the language laboratory, computers or other equipment in pairs.

Whatever the language skill being emphasized or the objective of the cooperative learning strategy being applied, two main principles rule the

appropriateness and effectiveness of these types of activities. First, as stated by Kaufman:

Cooperative learning is an instructional paradigm in which teams of students work on structured tasks (e.g., homework assignments, laboratory experiments, or design projects) under conditions that meet five criteria: positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, appropriate use of collaborative skills, and regular self-assessment of team functioning” (Johnson, Johnson, and Smith qtd in Kaufman introduction).

On the other hand, the second principle is to keep in mind that cooperative learning strategies account for the correct and fair assessment of individual work. The visually impaired student who works in groups or pairs should work as hard as other team members. Most cooperative learning experts agree that this approach works best if team grades are adjusted for individual performance. “If this adjustment is not made, students who do little or no work may receive the same credit as those who do a great deal of work, which is unfair and works against the principle of individual accountability” (Kaufman 134).

Interactive Read Aloud

Interactive Read Aloud (Wenner 105), involves reading aloud, with expression, different voices for different characters, gestures, and the active participation of the listener through predicting, discussing, and checking for understanding. The readers demonstrate verbally how they gain meaning from the text. This strategy, according to

Wenner (105), produces a strong English-language model and reduces anxiety because students can listen and comprehend through the use of voices. "This technique is appropriate for students with visual impairments because they can identify the characters by the tone of voice (auditory clue) rather than by relying on picture clues" (Wenner 106). Therefore, this strategy would be especially helpful to enhance learning of those students with visual impairment enrolled in reading and/or literature classes.

Writing Workshops

Writing workshops allow students to choose the writing topics and prewrite, draft, revise, edit and publish their work as if they were professional authors (Graves qtd in Wenner 106). This strategy may well fit the standards of any writing course at the university level since it encourages students to discuss their ideas, work with a partner or group in revising and editing, and interact verbally with others. In order for this activity to work for a student with visual impairment, the researcher suggests allowing the student to prepare the essay or writing piece at home, or in class, with the help of assistive technologies. Once in class, all students may be given the opportunity to provide peer assessment, revision and editing which can be recorded by the student who will later review the tape and make the necessary re-writing at home.

Using Assistive Technologies

For students using adaptive software, accessing websites or other class material may depend on the software understanding the foreign language. A synthetic speech program that recognizes foreign languages rather than just reads them is preferable,

such as the JAWS program available at libraries in UNA. ELL students with visual impairment find helpful learning tools in assistive technologies. For example, an MP3 or tape recorder would work to record speakers pronouncing words correctly and reviewing pronunciation at home.

For students who use Braille, the NCDE states that some foreign languages are more phonetic in their spelling methods (e.g. the vowel has the same sound every time), and these can be easier to write accurately than other languages like English that has silent letters or more than one way to spell the same sounding word (NCDE). This institution recommends students to use "uncontracted Braille," a form of Braille writing in which words are spelled letter by letter. In so doing, the spelling of the foreign language will be easier to learn.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to do research on teaching strategies applied in the implementation of curricular adaptations to EFL students with visual impairment at UNA. It was hoped that this exploratory study would enrich the literature on positive strategies for curricular adaptations, and help gain insight into the current experience of two individuals with such a disability enrolled in English language courses at UNA.

An additional purpose was to identify alternative strategies to provide curricular adaptations linked to language teaching. By consulting previous research studies, gathering information from the participants, and analyzing elements such as theory on curricular adaptations, learning disabilities, language acquisition, and language teaching, it was possible to report on classroom practices proposed by the professors and the two students' reactions to these practices.

According to representatives from both higher education institutions, UNA and UCR, there are no cases of "modifications" in these institutions. Most adaptations needed refer to strategies to provide adequate spaces and timing to enhance learning in students with visual impairment. In language teaching, curricular adaptations will therefore require no major changes in teaching styles and methodologies. Implementing adequate adaptations does not require much knowledge on psychology, medicine, or psychopedagogy. In most cases, professors would only need to communicate effectively with the student in order to develop a basic comprehension of the student's needs and apply teaching strategies in order to satisfy these needs.



When beginning a foreign language class, a student who is blind or has low vision will benefit greatly from describing his or her capacity for vision to the professors. As pointed out by members of the project "Quality Education at UNA," faculty members are often unable to assist with classroom adaptations until they know that a student has specific needs. Even though this project sends a letter reporting the accommodation, students should take responsibility for communicating their needs to professors. This, as reported by experts, is better done through an in-depth interview with the student in his/her native language.

Two cases of students with visual impairment were studied. In the first case of a student with severe visual loss, learning is possible thanks to the aid of assistive technologies. The professor reported to apply adaptations that fit the needs of the student provided the nature of the language skill being taught. The use of the "tutor strategy" proves effective for the professor since it gives her time to assist other students in the group. However, the student with visual impairment finds it helpful but at the same time, being assisted by his tutor in every step of the learning process takes away his independence and does little to prepare him for future competitive job markets.

As emphasized by members of the project "Quality Education at UNA," enhancing independence in the student with visual impairment is essential for their learning and interaction in class. Experts affirm that adult students with disabilities do not want to be assisted in every step of learning (Fontana, Vargas and Holst, personal interview). Therefore, professors should seek for those language teaching strategies that "adapt" learning rather than be condescending with the student to an extent that less is usually expected from him/her.

In the second case, little or no accommodation for learning is provided to the student with visual impairment by some professors. However, this situation emerges not because of professors' reluctance to help students, but from a profound misapprehension of protocols to be followed and strategies to apply such accommodations. Certainly, a call for training professors emerges for coordinating and administrative offices at UNA.

Language professors at UNA must remember that teaching for the visually impaired is teaching for all students in the class. Methods based on multiple modalities enable many students with disabilities to succeed, but at the same time, provide diverse opportunities for other students in the class to approach contents in different ways. These practices enhance concepts and theories of language acquisition as those by stated by Krashen and Cummins that are applicable for most language learners. As stated by Moore:

An instructor using a multisensory, multiple modality approach, especially in a general education foreign language course emphasizing reading, writing, listening, and speaking, will enable many learning disabled students to succeed. This approach is inherently a form of accommodation. Not only will the special needs student achieve success in this kind of classroom, but so will the average foreign language student. And, after all, isn't that our ultimate goal? (Moore 60).

A final word goes to the planning and teaching of languages to students with disabilities. Administrative authorities at ELCL can not afford to assume that all professors are knowledgeable in the implementation of curricular adaptations in

language classes. "It is our responsibility as educators to guarantee that our courses contain requirements that measure material taught and retained, not a student's disability. Schools with no clear policy on accommodation must face the issue and formulate coherent, fair, and legal policies. These policies should be directed by the faculty, not legislated by the administration. Faculty members see the problem daily and are the curriculum experts in the fields" (Moore 62).

"The day our world is ready for everyone, there will be no more disabilities"

Mary Clare Vargas

Implications

This research has been conducted around the cases of two students with visual impairment. Therefore, all data gathered from artifacts, interviews and surveys evolved around their two particular cases, giving this study an in-depth perspective on their specific situation. Nevertheless, most of the information found in this study can be highly correlated to the macro context of the implementation of curricular adaptations and accommodations for language learners at UNA.

In the ELCL at Universidad Nacional there is not much or any information on how to deal with this kind of disability in a language classroom. This study is relevant as a source of information about the type of language teaching strategies that should be implemented; as they would help these students to acquire knowledge and perform suitably under the high performance standards of a university class. At the same time, it is important to raise awareness among administrative authorities of this university about the urgent need to create official policies to regulate the implementation of curricular adaptations at UNA. Without these policies, neither administrative offices nor professors have concrete guidelines or tools to address the issue of curricular adaptations.

If the legal department, "Defensoria del Estudiante" (Student Advocacy Office) and student affairs office at Universidad Nacional, get together and analyze these students' cases, they might provide some insights to motivate these students to continue with their academic programs, so that the students will not be at disadvantage in relation to the other students.

On the other hand, the researcher is most willing to share the findings of this study and provide informed recommendations for teaching strategies that will reinforce one of the institution's missions: to give the opportunity to all the students, no matter their particular necessities, to get a university degree.

Recommendations

A cognitive or mental disability is evident after observation of repetitive patterns of consistent learning difficulty. It is only when these patterns have been identified that professors could consider the possibility of dealing with a cognitive or mental deficit. In the cases of the two participant students with visual impairment described in this study, their particular disability is related only to their visual capacities, not to their mental or cognitive competence.

On the one hand, several recommendations for professors account for the implementation of accommodations for learning rather than shortening or lowering performance standards in the class for these two students. Partial visual loss will make it difficult for the student to detect differences in forms, letters, and words and to retain a full mental image of what s/he has seen. Therefore, it is recommended for professors to take into account several techniques that enhance the use of materials with simple visual layouts; make sure print is large enough; use checklists, graphs, or other visuals, color for visual impact, simple drawings, highlighting, underlining, drawing arrows or pictures; using assistive technologies; teaching visual patterns in words, numbers, and pictures and others using visual aids.

When visual loss is severe, experts recommend assistive technologies. "Computers have proven to be particularly useful. In fact, adult ESL learners who have had limited success in learning English report that working one-on-one in the computer lab with a teacher seems more comfortable and productive than being one of many students in a crowded classroom" (ERIC Development Team). An additional benefit of

assistive technologies is that it builds self-esteem in the visually impaired student who would be otherwise unable to comply with the learning task.

On the other hand, the legal implications of not implementing adaptations to students with special needs are many and severe. It is recommended for authorities at ELCL to provide concrete institutional policies so that language professors can appropriately handle such adaptations in their classes. If these guidelines are created, they should also explicitly inform on the position of ELCL in regards to the implementation of curricular adaptations that may require major modification of content and curricular programs. In addition, such a specific policy should demand professors at ELCL to follow precise steps when dealing with a student with visual impairment. These guidelines may include: meetings with the student to discuss disability disclosure, specific teaching strategies to be implemented during class, and the role of assistive technologies in the student's work (in and out of class), among others.

As stated by members of the project "Quality Education at UNA," they do not always have the administrative capacity to provide immediate and in-depth attention to all cases of students with disabilities at UNA. Although this project has made significant efforts to "institutionalize" and regulate curricular adaptation throughout UNA, their recommendations are not specific to the teaching of languages nor do their letter reports provide deep insights into the disability status of a student. Sometimes, because of a mere administrative process, professors may get these letter reports late, once the course is almost over.

Following the example provided by other higher education institutions in Costa Rica such as UCR, UNA may find effectiveness and appropriateness in handling

curricular adaptations internally from each faculty or specialized academic department. It is therefore the recommendation of the researcher to implement specialized administrative units to follow the cases of students with special needs from the inside of each academic program or department, as UCR does through "CASE" units.

These units would allow not only to provide specialized training for professors at ELCL in the implementation of language-oriented strategies for curriculum adaptations but also to offer students with disabilities a more accessible and familiar environment to discuss their needs, opinions and/or complaints directly to their professors and program coordinators. If such units are implemented, each academic department will then have access to students' files that compile information about their disability status and adaptations implemented by their previous professors.

Finally, there are several suggestions for the adult foreign language learner with visual impairment. Foreign language classes are not all the same in how they are taught. The course objectives, the teaching philosophy, the types of activities and assessments may vary. For classroom settings, conversational classes will not be enough to develop fully a student's foreign language proficiency. Nevertheless, writing and reading assignments may pose particular difficulties. For classes where the professor often writes on the whiteboard, the professor should be requested to verbalize contents written on the board.

Regardless of the language course, teaching often incorporates course compilations and visual aids such as charts, tables, graphs, and illustrations. Braille or screen readers may or may not have the capacity to access these materials, so students

may need to work with the professor to seek out methods for making reading materials and visual aids accessible to the student.

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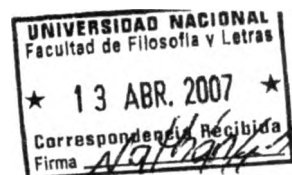
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Appendixes

Appendix A. Sample Letter on Students' Disability Status.

Ileana

12 de abril del 2007
CIDE-DEB-UEC-042- 07

UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL
Escuela de Literatura y Ciencias del Lenguaje

13 ABR 2007

CORRESPONDENCIA RECIBIDA
Firma [Signature]

M.A. Jorge Alfaro Pérez
Director
Escuela de Literatura y Ciencias del Lenguaje
Universidad Nacional

Estimado señor:

Le envío el nombre de un estudiante que recién ingresó al Proyecto UNA Educación de Calidad, el cual presenta necesidades educativas y está inscrito en la Escuela que usted dirige. Sirvase informarle al profesor respectivo, y hacer entrega del formato del Informe inicial y final de aplicación de las adecuaciones, ajustes y apoyos (I Ciclo, 2007) que se requiere los académicos completen para cada estudiante matriculado en sus cursos y envíen a la Dirección de la escuela con copia al Proyecto para consignarla en los respectivos expedientes.

Me despido esperando su colaboración y poniéndome a sus órdenes a la extensión 3479/3370 para cualquier consulta o asesoría.

Atentamente,

Angélica Fontana H.

M.Ed. Angélica Fontana H.
Proyecto UNA educación de calidad
División de Educación Básica
CIDE



Appendix B. Initial Report Form

Informe inicial de la aplicación de las adecuaciones, ajustes y apoyos
_____ ciclo _____

Nombre del estudiante _____ carne _____

Nombre del docente _____

Curso _____

Carrera _____

Fecha _____

Dificultades que presenta el /la estudiante

Adecuaciones o ajustes en la metodología del curso

Adaptaciones o ajustes en la evaluación del curso

Adaptaciones a los recursos didácticos y materiales del curso

Ajustes al espacio físico (solo para estudiante con discapacidad visual y física)

Horario de atención y seguimiento _____

Appendix C. Final Report Form

Informe final de la aplicación de las adecuaciones, ajustes y apoyos
_____ ciclo _____

Nombre del estudiante _____ carne _____

Nombre del docente _____

Curso _____

Carrera _____

Fecha _____

Alcances logrados con la aplicación de las adecuaciones

Limitaciones u obstáculos

Resultados

Nombre del/la profesora _____
Cédula _____

Nombre del/la estudiante _____
Cédula _____

Appendix D. Survey to Professors of Students with Visual Impairment

Dear Professor,

This survey intends to gather information about curricular accommodations at Escuela de Literatura y Ciencias del Lenguaje, UNA.

The following statements represent opinions, and your agreement or disagreement will be determined on the basis of your particular beliefs. Kindly check your position on the scale as the statement first impresses you. Indicate what you believe, rather than what you think you should believe.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. The first step in the application of a curricular accommodation is to ask the student what he/she needs.	1	2	3	4
2. When I learned about my students' condition, I met with an expert to discuss about particular curricular accommodations.	1	2	3	4
3. UNA provided me with the necessary services to administer curricular accommodations for my student with physical impairment and/or learning disabilities.	1	2	3	4
4. Adult students with physical impairments and/or learning disabilities use their condition to manipulate the educational system.	1	2	3	4
5. My student with a physical impairment and/or a learning disability should seek for other most suitable job opportunities rather than becoming a language teacher.	1	2	3	4
6. It is the responsibility of my student to supervise the curricular accommodations I apply for him/her in the course.	1	2	3	4
7. I avoid talking to my student about his/her physical impairment and/or learning disability.	1	2	3	4
8. I have been trained on curricular accommodations in higher education.	1	2	3	4