

Experiences of Teaching an English for Specific Purposes Course to Students with Disabilities

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Abstract

To complete the master's program in Teaching English as a Foreign Language at the University of Costa Rica, the teachers designed and taught an ESP course for ten students enrolled in a master's program in Disability Studies. Three learners have visual impairments, and one has hypoacusis. Different curricular accommodations were made for them to work autonomously, but the results show that some could not always do so. However, their attitude towards learning English improved. This paper presents the challenges and outcomes of the lessons and materials used to raise awareness about the importance of inclusive classes, as well as recommendations to work with this population.

Key words: disabilities, visual impairment, hearing disability, autonomy, tasks, curricular accommodations, curricular modifications, inclusiveness, English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

Resumen

Para completar el programa de la maestría en Enseñanza del Inglés como Lengua Extranjera en la Universidad de Costa Rica, las docentes diseñaron e impartieron un curso de IFE para diez estudiantes en la maestría en Estudios sobre Discapacidad. Tres estudiantes tienen discapacidad visual y uno tiene hipoacusia. Se hicieron diversas adecuaciones curriculares para que ellos fueran autónomos, pero los resultados muestran que algunos no siempre lo lograron. Sin embargo, su actitud hacia el aprendizaje del inglés cambió positivamente. Este artículo presenta los retos y logros de las lecciones y materiales usados para crear conciencia sobre la importancia de clases inclusivas así como recomendaciones para trabajar con esta población.

Palabras claves: discapacidades, discapacidad visual, discapacidad auditiva, autonomía, tareas, adecuaciones curriculares, modificaciones curriculares, inclusividad, Inglés con Fines Específicos (IFE)

Review of the Literature

This project takes into consideration the characteristics of both English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT). ESP, as stated by Day and Krzanowski (2011), “involves teaching and learning the specific skills and language needed by particular learners for a particular purpose” (p. 5). ESP, according to Robinson (as cited in Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998), “is ‘normally goal-oriented’ and ESP courses develop from a needs analysis” (p. 3), which serves to determine, as precisely as possible, the tasks that the learners have to carry out “through the medium of English” (p. 3). For this reason, the Task-Based Approach is used as a complement to ESP because it seeks to encourage students to negotiate meaning and to use language in tasks that are meaningful and that involve real communication (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 224). These tasks should be carefully planned based on the learners’ field of study or occupation. For this reason, the concept of disability studies should be defined in order to get a better understanding of the basis of the academic and job-related tasks designed for the target population.

Disability studies constitutes an “active, integrative, interdisciplinary academic endeavor [that] analyzes disability from the perspective of the social sciences, humanities, and arts” (Rembis, 2010, p. 1). The term “disabilities” is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2013) as a complex phenomenon that involves impairments (problems in body function or structure), activity limitations (difficulties encountered in the execution of a task or action) and

participation restrictions (problems of involvement in life situations). Therefore, the aim of disability studies is to raise awareness of “the experiences of disabled people, and to advocate for social change” (Society for Disability Studies as cited in Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012, p. 71). One of the key characteristics of disability studies, according to Ferguson and Nusbaum (2012), is that it must be interdisciplinary; that is, it should involve a variety of academic disciplines. The advantage of interdisciplinary work is that it “allows [people] to develop a deeper and much broader understanding of disability as part of [their] shared, human experience” (p. 75).

Another essential aspect that should be considered in the field of study of this population is related to inclusive education. Inclusion serves to combat discrimination by fostering participation of all people in any context. Therefore, as Barton (n.d.) states, inclusive education should be regarded as “a means to an end, that of the realization of an inclusive society” (p. 5). It is not “about the assimilation or accommodation of individuals into an essentially unchanged system of educational provision and practice” (p. 5), but it should involve the decision-making of necessary changes that should be implemented and the way in which they should be made (p. 5). For this reason, the concepts of accommodations and modifications as well as the role that they play in the success or failure of a course must be addressed.

Curricular Accommodations and Modifications

While accommodations are adaptations in teaching strategies in order to

help students to succeed at different tasks, modifications are changes made to what is expected from or taught to learners; to be specific, these changes can be in terms of “content[s], level of skill or number of skills required by the program” (Beech, 2011, p. 13). Both modifications and accommodations contribute to making the teaching and learning process inclusive and motivating for students.

In Costa Rica, curricular accommodations are defined as adjustments made to the educational offering based on the characteristics and needs of each student, which aims at addressing individual needs (CENAREC as cited in Meléndez et al., 2012). There are three specific types of curricular accommodations. According to CENAREC (as cited in Meléndez et al., 2012) and Rodríguez and Solís (n.d.), accommodations that provide access are not only meant to create the necessary physical conditions to provide students with access to physical spacing and furnishing, but they also take into account the provision of resources, devices or materials that aid learners with motor, visual or hearing impairments. Non-significant accommodations are adjustments made to the teaching methodology and evaluations without changing the curricular objectives (Chaverri, 2009; Rodríguez & Solís, n.d.). Significant accommodations, in contrast, change the official curriculum by eliminating contents and general objectives in order to choose others that meet each student’s needs (CENAREC as cited in Meléndez et al., 2012). Knowledge of these types of adjustments is an essential requirement to help students in the process of learning a foreign language.

Learner Autonomy

Fostering autonomy in a class is fundamental to help students to assume active and responsible participation in and outside the class, which in turn will lead to the accomplishment of goals. Autonomy is “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (Holec as cited in Aliponga, Gamble & Ando, 2011; Dinçer, Yeşilyurt & Göksu, 2010; Reinders, 2010). As Jacobs and Farrell (2001) point out, the learner plays a primary role in the process, and learner autonomy “encourages learners to develop their own purposes for learning and to see learning as a lifelong process” (Learner Autonomy, para. 2). Fostering autonomy does not mean expecting the learners to do everything on their own. Reinders (2010) argues that the learners need instruction and “support before they are comfortable with and able to assume greater responsibility for their learning” (p. 42). Therefore, the teacher’s role is to make use of scaffolding to foster autonomy (Lacey, 2007, p. 8), and she/he should also offer the learners “opportunities to make significant choices and decisions about their learning” (Nunan, 2003, p. 290). The teacher also has to focus on designing lessons based on differentiation (Turloiu & Sif Stefánsdóttir, 2011, p. 12); in other words, she/he should address the learners’ needs by acknowledging their differences, abilities, skills, and backgrounds (p. 12) because these aspects exert an influence on their acquisition of knowledge (Tomlinson, 2001). However, to determine the success of a course, it is also important to pay attention to students’ behaviors and actions that indicate that they are gaining autonomy.

Based on all the above, the following research question was posed: How effective were the curricular accommodations provided by the student teachers to increase student learning autonomy in order to perform the tasks in the course?

Object of Evaluation

General Information

English for Disability Studies was an ESP course required for an interdisciplinary master's program in disability studies at a public university. This was a 60-hour course which consisted of 30 sessions of two hours each. It was a team-taught course aimed at teaching reading, listening, and speaking strategies that could help students to carry out academic as well as some professional tasks.

In this course, two units were developed. Eighteen sessions were devoted to develop the first unit, "Reading to Succeed Academically!" This unit focused on helping students to show understanding of texts about disability-related topics. Ten sessions were devoted to teaching the second unit, "What an Interesting Lecture about Disabilities!;" this was focused on listening and speaking skills.

Population

This course was taught to a group of ten Costa Rican learners enrolled in a master's program in Disability Studies. These students needed to read texts in English from different sources in order to write their graduation project or

thesis in Spanish. In this group, there were two students with low vision, one student who is blind, and one student with hypoacusis (a hearing impairment). Additionally, there was a student with autism, and another with dyslexia. This group was very heterogeneous in terms of their level of proficiency in English, as well as in terms of their needs and preferences.

Methodology

Procedures

In order to design the course, the researchers had to conduct a needs analysis in which different stakeholders were interviewed to get information about the target population. The learners participated in these interviews, and they also completed two questionnaires in order to gather more data about their needs, lacks, preferences and other aspects that were considered necessary to analyze in this first stage of the process. Based on the results of these interviews and questionnaires, the researchers designed and administered a diagnostic test; this was aimed at identifying the students' level of proficiency in different aspects of the language such as listening, vocabulary, reading, grammar and speaking in order to design tasks and activities for the course that matched their proficiency levels.

After this second stage, the third stage corresponded to the design of the course syllabus. To do this, the instructors used texts and videos about disability-related topics according to their students' interests. In the fourth stage, the instructors taught the

course. During this process, students completed two self-assessment sheets and two course evaluation forms. The learners did different reading, listening and speaking tasks; they also took written and oral quizzes along the course. Moreover, thirteen out of thirty sessions were observed by three supervisors; these were three university instructors in the field of English teaching who were appointed to provide the student teachers with feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of the classes observed. These supervisors completed two evaluation forms during the development of each class, and then they met with the student teachers afterwards to give them feedback.

Instruments

Since this project focuses on the outcomes of the course, the only instruments that will be described are the ones used in the fourth stage of the whole process. In order to answer the research question, seven instruments were used to collect data from the participants in this study: a midterm course evaluation, a final course evaluation, two self-assessment instruments, two evaluation forms used by the supervisors, and an observation form given to the supervisors to assess learning autonomy. Each student was assigned a code to complete their corresponding instruments. Some of the instruments were adapted, so that the students with visual disabilities were able to complete them.

Midterm and final course evaluations. These instruments (not included in the Appendixes, but available upon request) are three-page-questionnaires

which have five sections intended to gather data about the students' perception of the teachers' performance, the topics and skills addressed in the course, the materials and activities used in the course, the evaluations administered in class, and general recommendations that the learners thought the teachers might adopt. Students filled out the midterm course evaluation in class. The final course evaluation was sent by email, and the learners were given a week to send their responses back.

Self-assessment instruments. These instruments (they are also available upon request) are four-page-questionnaires which have two sections intended to gather data about the students' perception of their performance on the first and second units of the course and in class. The same procedures that had been followed to complete the course evaluations were implemented for the self-assessment forms. The first self-assessment was not adapted for the three students with visual disabilities because two observers from the master's program and a classmate helped them to read and to complete the instrument.

Supervisors' evaluation forms. These two forms were designed by the supervisors of the practicum. The first one focuses on the individual work of the student teacher in charge of the lesson observed (see Appendix A). It consists of a list of 21 aspects related to her/his personal characteristics, teaching, class management, and interaction with the students. The second form focuses on teamwork (see Appendix B), and it consists of a list of 12 aspects related to lesson planning and materials. Both forms include a grading

scale which ranges from “excellent” to “poor,” and space for the supervisors to write strengths and weaknesses observed in class.

Observation form about learner’s autonomy for the supervisors. This form was designed to measure the frequency with which learners showed 10 characteristics related to autonomy in class (see Appendix C). It has a Likert scale with an option indicating “does not apply,” and five levels of frequency: always, usually, sometimes, rarely, never. The supervisors completed it by taking into account either the whole group or only students with disabilities (one of the supervisors wrote the name of the person in the corresponding box indicating the perceived frequency).

Curricular Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Several accommodations were made especially to help students with disabilities to complete the tasks assigned in this course more effectively and independently. Each of the accommodations was suggested by the students and improved throughout the course. To help the student who has hypoacusis, the re-arrangement of the desks in the classroom enabled him to read the lips of his classmates and instructors. However, this student was sometimes busy reading instructions or using other materials, and for that reason, he missed many oral instructions. Therefore, it was essential to provide him with all the information and instructions in written form. In the second unit, he was given the script of the audios used in class. Since he was a high achiever, the student

teachers challenged him by teaching him other reading comprehension strategies in class. It was necessary to create additional handouts for him to continue working at a more advanced level while his classmates were finishing the tasks. This accommodation was not implemented from the very beginning of the course because it took some weeks to find out what he was able to do.

In order to help three students with visual impairments, all their materials were sent by e-mail before each class so that they could save the documents in case they wanted to study or otherwise prepare beforehand. However, these learners commonly received the materials just the night before or even only a few hours before each class because of the limited time that the student teachers had to plan the lessons. This situation reduced the effectiveness of this accommodation because they were not always able to read or save the materials before the class. Moreover, this digital material had to be different in format because these three students used screen readers to complete the exercises. Therefore, numeric symbols and asterisks were used to help them to find the words or phrases that were highlighted in the texts or sentences. These symbols were also used in gap-filling exercises instead of parentheses to enclose the words or phrases that they had to use to complete sentences or dialogues. Additionally, the texts that they had to read in the first unit and their corresponding exercises were saved in different files to help them go easily from file to file instead of scrolling up and down when reading the text and answering each of the exercises. Furthermore, tables, figures, bullets,

images, or text boxes were not used because their screen readers do not identify those elements, or sometimes provide confusing and inaccurate information. When pictures were used in a quiz to evaluate vocabulary, the target terms were provided in Spanish for them to translate to English.

Regarding the two students with low vision, one of them told the student teachers that she was not going to bring her computer to classes. Thus, she asked for printed materials in bold Arial 22. This version could include tables, text boxes, enlarged pictures, and lines for her to write answers on. Nevertheless, she also had access to the digital version described above to use outside of class.

In the case of the listening exercises, students with visual disabilities had difficulties in completing outlines because they had to listen to the audio as well as to the screen reader reading the instructions and hints to do the exercise. Consequently, the format of the exercises was simplified by giving them freedom to write main ideas and supporting details. This adaptation was also made for the student with low vision who required print documents in Arial 22 because she read at a slow pace.

The blind student required more curricular accommodations because of his very low proficiency level of English. The teachers decided to change and even to eliminate some of the exercises prepared for the rest of the students in order to help him complete the tasks assigned in class. Moreover, all the instructions were written in both English and Spanish in every handout for him not to have to depend on the instructors.

Curricular Accommodations for all the Students

Regarding general curricular accommodations, there were others made for the whole group, such as giving extra time to finish exercises and quizzes, eliminating and simplifying exercises, reducing cognitive load, choosing partners to work in pairs, and developing group activities in order to help students with visual impairments to play games or to read information that was not otherwise accessible for them. Instructions and explanations were simple and straightforward (e.g. describing pictures in presentations, as well as being clear and specific when giving explanations instead of using vague terms such as demonstratives). These accommodations were provided because most of the learners had a low proficiency level in English, so they needed more support to complete the tasks in the course.

Results and Discussion

Supervisors' perceptions of the curricular accommodations for students with disabilities. To find out the supervisors' perceptions of the autonomy of the students with disabilities, one instrument was used in the last supervised session. However, using this instrument only once reduces the validity of the results since more data from the supervisors was needed to compare students' achievements in different class sessions. Table 1 shows that the two students with low vision were the most autonomous learners in this subgroup. They worked independently, participated and asked

questions, listened to the instructors' explanations, and cooperated with the student teachers and their classmates. Nevertheless, one of them was more autonomous than the other. The learner who worked during the whole semester with her computer took more risks and showed confidence when communicating in English. The other student took risks and sometimes or usually showed confidence based on the data collected

by the supervisor; this happened during most of the classes of this course, as observed by the student teachers. Student teachers agreed on the fact that not having access to her computer prevented her from becoming as autonomous as her classmate because the screen reader could have helped her to complete tasks faster and without visual fatigue.

Table 1
Supervisor's Perceptions of the Autonomy of Students with Disabilities
in One Supervised Class, November, 2013

The student:	Frequency and Student				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
1. Works independently without requesting the instructor's help.		Dyslexic St.	<i>Blind St.</i>		Low vision Ss. Deaf St.
2. Actively participates in the activities.		Dyslexic St. <i>Blind St.</i>	Deaf St.		Low vision Ss.
3. Asks questions when needed.	Dyslexic St. <i>Blind St.</i>				Low vision Ss.
4. Pays attention to the explanation provided by the instructors.		Blind St.	Dyslexic St. Deaf St.		Low vision Ss.
5. Takes risks to communicate in English.		Dyslexic St. <i>Blind St.</i>	Low vision St.		Low vision St.
6. Cooperates with the instructors in the process of teaching and learning.		Dyslexic St. Deaf St. <i>Blind St.</i>			Low vision Ss.
7. Cooperates with other classmates when working in the class activities.	<i>Blind St.</i>	Dyslexic St.	Deaf St.		Low vision Ss.
8. Shows confidence when sharing ideas in English.	Dyslexic St.	<i>Blind St.</i>		Low vision St.	Low vision St. Deaf St.

As Table 1 shows, the blind student was rarely autonomous in the ESP class. This is because he seldom

participated in the activities, paid attention to oral instructions, took risks to communicate what he thought,

cooperated with the instructors, or showed confidence when sharing his thoughts. These situations were all repeated throughout the course. As mentioned before, his proficiency level was very low, and he preferred not to participate or cooperate with his classmates. He seldom worked independently.

Even though the student teachers tried to simplify work for the blind student and to help him as much as possible, his performance was not always the optimum. On several occasions, the supervisors recommended encouraging this student to participate, taking him into account in more than one activity, and asking him to speak in English. However, his attitude towards the target language was not always positive, and he worked at a slower pace compared to his classmates. Therefore, it was not easy to integrate this student into class activities as suggested by the supervisors.

Compared to this learner, there was another student who faced different challenges to learn English;

this student was a senior citizen with dyslexia. The difference is that her attitude was positive, which helped her to participate more in some class activities. She was very studious and committed, but her proficiency level in the language was very low. Thus, she was seldom autonomous. Regarding the student with a hearing impairment, according to the data in Table 1, he was not very autonomous that day. Nevertheless, he did not attend classes for two weeks, and that is probably the reason that his performance was not the best. Since he was the most proficient learner in the group, he understood and finished the exercises very fast and, in most cases, correctly.

Supervisors' perceptions of the curricular accommodations for all the students. To analyze the students' general performance and autonomy, a similar instrument was used by another supervisor in only one class. It includes general information about the learners. In Table 2, it can be seen that students were usually autonomous during

Table 2
Supervisor's Perception of All Students' Autonomy
in One Supervised Class, November, 2013

The students:	Frequency
1. Work independently without requesting the instructor's help.	Usually
2. Actively participate in the activities.	Always
3. Ask questions when needed.	Usually
4. Pay attention to the explanation provided by the instructors.	Usually
5. Take risks to communicate in English.	Sometimes
6. Cooperate with the instructors in the process of teaching and learning.	Always
7. Cooperate with other classmates when working in the class activities.	Always
8. Show confidence to share ideas in English.	Usually
9. Give suggestions to improve activities.	Rarely
10. Use the strategies taught in class.	Usually

the development of the class. Nevertheless, the supervisor suggested that the speaking task that they were performing should have combined reading and speaking because most of them were just reading the information on the handout instead of expressing their ideas spontaneously. Indeed, the supervisor pointed out that these learners could have been more autonomous by performing their roles without reading. However, the proficiency level of most of them did not enable them to participate in that way because they needed guidelines to express what they were thinking, or to give an answer effectively.

Due to the fact that data about learners' autonomy was gathered from only two observations, it is also important to analyze the results obtained from the evaluation form that the supervisors regularly used. Table 3 shows to which extent the lessons of this course led to participants' autonomy.

Table 3
Supervisors' Perception of the Students' Autonomy in 13 Supervised Classes, 2013

The class led to student autonomy	
Number of Observations	Obtained Points
5	10
3	9
2	8.5
2	8
1	7

As displayed in Table 3, the student teachers obtained either nine or ten points in eight out of 13 supervised classes; that is, most of the grades are either "excellent" or "above average," and the average grade of all observations

is nine; this suggests that most of the lessons designed for the course were properly planned to foster students' autonomy. Some of the comments made by the supervisors were the following: "they are not afraid of speaking English in the class," "most students were able to work individually," "great effort to help students by adapting handouts and incorporating all of them in the class," and "students seemed more comfortable with the lesson, and communicated more." These positive comments seem to indicate that the student teachers provided their learners with useful tools to help them to work individually and confidently.

Nevertheless, there are other aspects that hindered learner autonomy. For example, the supervisors suggested on many occasions that the student teachers had to work hard on "balancing the cognitive load" because, at the beginning of the semester, the students were asked to do many tasks in a short time, and they were not prepared at that moment to complete complex and challenging exercises. Furthermore, the student teachers were advised to "keep working on simplifying instructions on handouts" and oral instructions as well. Also, it was necessary to "keep working on making the activities inclusive for people with disabilities" and to "give them enough time to complete the tasks." However, the group was very heterogeneous, and sometimes it was very difficult to have all the students interact with others, participate actively, and finish their work on time. These recommendations were taken into account to improve the quality of the ESP course, and to help the participants to achieve the objectives of the course and to learn as efficiently as possible.

Not only were the previous suggestions taken into account, but the students' recommendations to help them to be more independent were also followed. This information was collected in the midterm course evaluation, and it was also provided orally by some students during the course. For instance, in that course evaluation only three students with visual disabilities asked the student teachers to "give explanations of the topics developed in class more slowly," "give more time based on each student's level of proficiency and to ask them to work with another person whose level is similar to their own," and "improve time management because there were a lot of materials to complete and people with visual disabilities were not able to finish on

time." These students added these suggestions in the "Teacher's Performance" section. Even though this section was not related to learners' autonomy, these were aspects that needed to be improved to help students become more autonomous.

The most relevant suggestions offered by the students are shown in Table 4. Time management was an issue in the development of this course. Many students thought that there was not enough time to complete the tasks, the post tasks, and the quizzes. Therefore, the student teachers decided to simplify the lessons. However, when vocabulary was activated to read a new passage or to listen to a new audio, these learners took more time than expected.

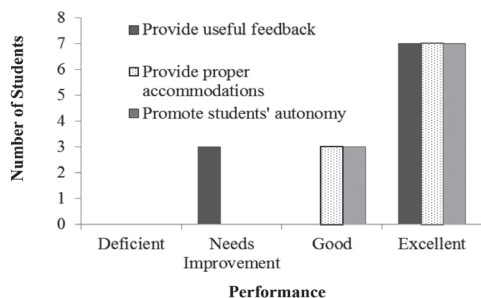
Table 4
Students' Recommendations for the Student Teachers to
Include Adjustments that Can Promote Students' Autonomy
while Learning English. Final Course Evaluation, November, 2013

Recommendations	Number of Students	Examples
Improve management of time and give extra time if necessary.	4	Give enough time to complete the tasks in class. Start classes by taking the quizzes. Give time to interact and clarify doubts among students.
Give clearer instructions and in Spanish for students with a low proficiency level in English.	2	Write the instructions of the handouts in Spanish. Give instructions slowly.
Improve accessibility for students with visual impairments to understand and perform better in the classroom.	2	Describe images in detail. Take into account the amount of light in the classroom.
Take into account the proficiency level of each student in every class.	2	Help very proficient students because they seemed bored waiting for slower students. Help students with a low proficiency level of English because they seemed confused.

Furthermore, some of the participants stated that they wanted to take the quizzes at the beginning of the class; however, it was not possible because many of these learners customarily arrived late. The problem for some students was that the ones who needed an accommodation or had a low proficiency level of English spent a lot of time completing the quiz, perhaps 30 minutes more than the rest of their classmates. This issue generated annoyance among some students because spending more time at the end of the class meant having to wait for another bus, and thus getting home later.

Instructors' performance when fostering autonomy. As shown in Figure 1, most of the students considered the instructors' performance while fostering their autonomy as "excellent." Providing useful feedback, proper accommodations, and promoting students' autonomy are three relevant and necessary aspects to help students to work independently while learning English.

Figure 1
Student teachers' performance while fostering learners' autonomy



Final Course Evaluation, November, 2013

Regarding feedback, at the beginning of the course it was very difficult

for the student teachers to provide learners with immediate feedback. The main reason was that the student teachers felt pressured to finish all the activities planned to complete the task cycle, so whenever their students took more time than expected to do the exercises, the student teachers continued the class by assigning other tasks instead of making corrections. The student teachers worked on that throughout the course by correcting words or phrases that were misused and asking students to repeat and drill when necessary. Nevertheless, it was not enough, as shown in the figure above. Three students out of 10 considered that the performance of the teachers when providing feedback needed improvement. Probably, this aspect affected the performance of those three students who needed more feedback to work more independently.

The participants in this course evaluated providing proper accommodations as "good" and "excellent," which shows that the learners considered that many of the curricular accommodations were effective. However, some other accommodations should have been improved, especially for the students with disabilities. These learners needed much more help to become more independent in the classroom. Specifically, they needed to be given enough time to complete the tasks. Some of them also needed a more reduced cognitive load to perform the tasks easily. Compared to the students' opinion about the accommodations made during the course, the same opinions were given for the item concerning promoting learners' autonomy. These students expressed their anxiety about the course and of the target language before starting the course

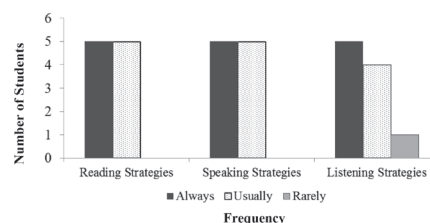
and during the first weeks of class. Little by little, they gained confidence and improved their skills in English; this is why many students at the end of this course showed a more positive attitude towards it and towards English. They seemed more autonomous during the last classes; this was a major goal of the course. Consequently, not only did curricular accommodations help students to be more autonomous, but also the participants' patience and effort, the instructors' performance, and the strategies taught in the class.

Strategies that helped to foster autonomy. Teaching learning and communication strategies is fundamental in ESP because students need tools and techniques to learn and to understand a foreign language. By learning different strategies, these students are better prepared to participate in a discussion, to read a text more efficiently, to understand a conversation or audio more easily, and to express what they feel or think more freely. This is why the student teachers were encouraged to include strategies in every class and to practice them several times until all the learners were able to understand how and why they needed to use them.

For the first unit, which was the longest, the students were taught seven strategies (schema activation, predicting, using cognates, scanning, summarizing, paying attention to collocations, and identifying referents) because it was essential to have students read effectively and understand each of the passages about disability-related topics. Then, for the second unit, five new strategies (back channeling, asking for clarification, asking for repetition, asking for confirmation, and note-taking) were taught, and two strategies were

recycled (schema activation and predicting) to help the learners to identify relevant information from audios and to express their ideas about the content of the audios. In the final course evaluation, the students were asked about the frequency with which the reading comprehension strategies, the oral communication strategies, and the listening comprehension strategies taught in the course fostered their autonomy during the process of learning English. As Figure 2 shows, their perceptions are generally positive. Only one student stated that the listening strategies rarely fostered her autonomy; this might be related to the complexity of the note-taking tasks.

Figure 2
Students' perceptions of the frequency with which reading, speaking and listening strategies fostered their autonomy in the process of learning English

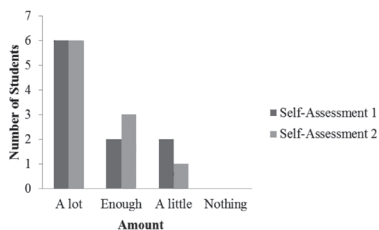


Final Course Evaluation, November, 2013

In the self-assessment instruments, the students were asked how much they were using the strategies taught in the course to work independently. Figure 3 shows that more than half of the students claimed that they used the strategies a lot or enough to work independently.

After analyzing information about the students' perceptions of their general

Figure 3
Students' perceptions of how much they used the strategies taught in the course to work independently



Self-Assessment Forms, 2013

performance in the course and the comments from the supervisors' observations and evaluation forms, one might conclude that the strategies taught in the course, and the curricular accommodations made, sometimes helped students to perform tasks autonomously. However, because of the lack of information collected, one cannot draw definite conclusions about the effectiveness of curricular accommodations to foster learner autonomy. Actually, the small number of observations from the supervisors in this regard may constitute a limitation for the validity of these results. The problem was that when the student teachers came up with the evaluation question on autonomy and started to look for information to design the instruments for the supervisors, more than 75% of the sessions had been taught. By the time the observation sheet was created, their professors had already observed most of their classes since they had to continue supervising other groups that were also doing the practicum. It is important to highlight the fact that none of the groups knew the specific dates that they were going to be supervised. Therefore, the student teachers were unaware that their

supervisors had already completed the required number of observations for this particular population.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In terms of the effectiveness of making curricular accommodations to increase learning autonomy, the analysis of the learners' perceptions of their general performance in the course as well as of the supervisors' observations about the students' autonomy to perform the tasks in class seems to indicate that the strategies taught in the course and the curricular accommodations made were sometimes helpful. Nevertheless, as previously stated, lack of information from the supervisors constitutes a significant limitation in this project.

In the case of learners with and without physical disabilities whose level of language proficiency is very low, tasks and materials must be simplified to help these students succeed in them. Moreover, instructions have to be clear and concise to help them complete the tasks assigned. Teachers should also plan the lessons by considering the time that these students might require to complete work. This suggestion also applies when administering quizzes and tests. Moreover, if there are students who are more proficient than others, they need to be challenged, so that they can participate more in class. Feedback should be constantly provided, so that students know what their strengths and weaknesses are; if not, they will continue making the same mistakes, and they will likely not have the opportunity to experience the

sense of achievement that rewards the effort made when learning.

If teachers have the opportunity to teach a group of students with disabilities, the best suggestion for them is to establish good communication with these learners. Nevertheless, each student has different needs, and even when instructors make a major effort to meet every person's needs, a fully inclusive class will not likely be feasible. Moreover, the instructor should be clear with these students about their rights and duties to avoid misunderstandings because they may complain about certain adaptations, especially the ones related to time.

When working with students who have visual disabilities, some recommendations must be considered while using multimedia presentations. For example, everything included in the slides needs to be described during the presentation, especially images, tables and figures. Moreover, teachers should pay careful attention to what they say. They cannot use vague language such as "as you can see here" "that is an example of..." while pointing at something. They have to specify what they want people to see. If the learners have low vision, the background of the slides has to be black and the text should be white. Instructors have to ask them about the type of font and size they can read. Moreover, the information provided in this format can be saved in a word-processing document. This recommendation was very useful because the blind student was not able to read the information in the text boxes in Power Point presentations. The lighting of the room also matters; fixtures in the area where the presentation is projected should be turned off.

Teachers have to make an effort to learn and to understand how the text-to-speech software works to find effective solutions to adapt and design suitable documents for such learners because the adaptations are not just a matter of eliminating elements that can confuse the students; they actually require careful planning. In addition, if PDF files are used, they must not be saved as images because the text-to-speech reader does not scan the information in that format. Another important aspect to consider is sending the materials to be used in class by e-mail at least one or two days before the class so that the learners can download them and study them. If they are not given this chance, teachers should invest time in class to allow them to save the documents in their computer otherwise these students will fall behind compared to their classmates. This delay could affect their performance in classroom activities.

In the case of the student with hypoacusis, one of the stakeholders who was interviewed to design the course stressed that the teachers needed to wear their hair tied back, and that they had to avoid wearing colorful lipstick because these are distractors. However, our student said that these recommendations were irrelevant because accessories and makeup did not distract him. Hence, educators should always ask learners about recommendations that can be implemented in class so that they actually meet their students' needs. Furthermore, instructors have to provide explanations while facing a learner with a hearing impairment, so that this person can read the teacher's lips. The desks may be arranged in the shape of a half-moon so that the person

can read everybody's lips. Moreover, the use of scripts when videos are used in class is necessary. It is also helpful to provide students with hearing impairments with instructions and other relevant information in print to make sure that they can follow the teacher. When listening tasks should be carried out in class, teachers can adapt the exercises by asking such learners to do reading comprehension exercises that go beyond literal information and that contribute to their academic and professional growth. For example, the student teachers taught their learner the difference between the three types of inferences that people can make. He was pleased because he felt challenged, and he was acquiring new knowledge. In fact, discourse analysis was a very useful and interesting topic for him because of his proficiency level.

In order to help students to become autonomous, curricular accommodations are not enough. Instructors should be sensitive to diversity as well as flexible in order to make changes when needed, especially when the adaptations do not work well. A negative attitude towards the difficulties encountered in the process constitutes a barrier when working with students with disabilities. Each class is a trial and error opportunity to grow personally and professionally by making improvements.

Teachers should not limit themselves to plan their lessons. If they, for example, have students with visual disabilities, they could try using materials such as visual aids or games because other learners can benefit from these tools. All students are equally important, and each person learns differently. Hence, variety and dynamism

are necessary to catch their interest. Moreover, the use of different grouping techniques is helpful for lower achievers to play a more active role in class and to effectively complete tasks. Some research and even exchange of ideas with other colleagues can be very useful to design inclusive activities. Patience and creativity are also essential to address the professional challenges that instructors face when planning for such a heterogeneous group of students. Even though all experiences and groups are different, these recommendations could help to bring success to a course.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

Supervisors' Evaluation Form to Assess Student Teachers' Individual Work

Bolaños, Marín, & Rodríguez

Student Teacher Observation Form

Name: _____ Grade: _____

Observer: _____ Date: _____

GRADING SCALE

10: Excellent **9:** Above average
8: Average **7:** Needs Improvement
6.9 or less: Poor **NA:** Not applicable

Important Notes:

1. After the grade has been calculated, up to two full points might be deducted for problems in language use, and / or errors in subject matter being taught. The following scale will be used to grade your teaching session after the grade has been averaged:

- 0. 50 : one to three errors
- 1. 00 : four to six errors
- 1. 50: seven to nine errors
- 2. 00 : Language problems in subject being taught

Errors which have already been corrected by an observer

2. After the grade has been calculated, up to two full points will be deducted if a student teacher arrives late.

3. Positive / professional attitude toward feedback from observers is a must. One foil point will be deducted if a disrespectful attitude is shown during feedback sessions.

PERSONAL

CHARACTERISTICS

1. Communication skills:

Clarity, tone, and audibility of voice

Eye contact with the students

Body language

2. Interest in and enthusiasm for the class being taught

3. Initiative, resourcefulness, and creativity to adapt to unanticipated situations

4. Well informed about the field

TEACHING

5. The class material and objectives were explained in an understandable way.

6. The lesson followed a logical,

smooth sequence (progressively building toward the objectives).

7. The lesson was well paced.

8. The teacher followed appropriate procedures to carry out tasks.

9. The teacher helped the students develop different strategies required for their specific needs.

10. The teacher asked and answered questions carefully and satisfactorily.

11. The teacher promoted English for real communication, focusing on the students' field.

12. The class led to student autonomy.

13. The teacher provided enough comprehensible input with vocabulary presented in context.

14. The teacher elicited student responses effectively.

15. The teacher perceived and corrected salient errors appropriately, taking in to account the students' needs.

16. The teacher took into account the students' input and comments.

a. students were given the chance to provide their input and make
 b. suggestions regarding field-related functions.

CLASS MANAGEMENT

17. The instructions were clear and concise, and students were able to follow them.

18. The teacher set up activities appropriately (grouping, distribution of materials).

19. The teacher provided useful language to effectively carry out group work.

TEACHER/STUDENT INTERACTION

20. The teacher encouraged and ensured full student participation in class.

21. The teacher showed awareness of individual and group needs by responding accordingly. _____

STRENGTHS WEAKNESSES

Appendix B

Supervisors' Evaluation Form to Assess Student Teachers' Individual Work

Bolaños, Marín, & Rodríguez

Student Teacher Observation Form

Name: _____ Grade: _____

Observer: _____ Date: _____

GRADING SCALE

- 10:** Excellent **9:** Above average
- 8:** Average **7:** Needs Improvement
- 6.9 or less:** Poor **NA:** Not applicable

TEAMWORK

LESSON PLANNING/ MATERIALS POINTS

- 1. The objectives were clear and precise. _____
- 2. The objectives, materials, and activities (as a unit) work toward students' needs with a clear ESP focus. _____
- 3. The task cycle was appropriately designed (pre-task, task, post-task, feedback, evaluation). _____
- 4. There was balance and variety in activities to provide for individual learning styles. _____
- 5. Activities integrate the language skills when appropriate. _____
- 6. Materials and activities are appropriately designed or adapted

according to students' proficiency level. _____

7. Materials and activities show authenticity in purpose, sources, and outcomes. _____

8. The instructions in the handouts are clear, short, and contextualized.

9. The lesson plan shows clarity, conciseness, coherence, and an appropriate use of language. _____

10. The language corresponding to the teaching points, functions, materials, and activities is correct and appropriate. _____

11. The designated assistant effectively supported the instruction. _____

12. Suggestions from preceding lesson plans were incorporated here. _____

STRENGTHS WEAKNESSES

Appendix C

Observation Form about Learner's Autonomy for the Supervisors

D. Barrantes & N. Díaz

LEARNER AUTONOMY

Read each statement and mark with an X the frequency that best shows how often the student carries out each activity. Mark **only one** option for each item.

The student(s)...	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always	Does not apply
1. Work(s) independently without requesting the teachers' help.						
2. Actively participate(s) in the activities.						
3. Ask(s) questions when needed.						
4. Pay(s) attention to the explanations provided by the teacher.						
5. Take(s) risks to communicate in English.						
6. Cooperate(s) with the teacher in the process of teaching and learning.						
7. Cooperate(s) with other classmates when working in the class activities.						
8. Show(s) confidence to share ideas in English.						
9. Give(s) suggestions to improve activities.						
10. Use(s) the strategies taught in class.						

Comments: