

# Teaching English to Visually Impaired Learners

## Session 1. Understanding your Learners

# Where to Start? A Teacher's Perspective

The main goal when teaching is helping our learners understand specific knowledge. There is no one way of achieving this goal as it depends on the learners and their needs.

Each learner has different abilities and characteristics, all of which are important. Therefore, we should not only focus on those learners who are labelled as 'special needs' but understand that all needs are equal and all of them require support.

Thus, as teachers we need to:

- remember that our learners are teenagers as well as being visually impaired. We should not focus on their disabilities alone, but also on their age as this could also affect their behavior and learning processes.
- know and understand the needs of our learners. This is important as by knowing about them and understanding their needs, we will be able to adapt our materials accordingly and choose the best way to teach them in each context.
- coordinate with learners and/or families to know what the learners' specific needs are, and therefore, take them into consideration when adapting material and tasks.
- find out if our visually impaired learners have other co-occurring conditions such as ADHD, hearing impairment, dyslexia, etc.
- assess the accessibility of the classroom and material. Asking learners about their needs, opinions and suggestions will be very beneficial.
- coordinate with other teachers and work together on adapting the materials and setting learning aims.
- find out about accessible resources for our learners (technological devices, online resources etc.)

- not underestimate what our learners are capable of. They will probably need more time to become familiar with the material but with our help and patience they can achieve everything the other learners in the class do.
- Ask always for advice if you feel your student is not being understood or you feel lost.
- Focus on the main objectives of each activity. This will help you to adapt material and make it easier to understand the process of the task.
- Talk to the family, learners and other colleagues about how the materials or tasks could be adapted. It is important to focus on accessibility as well as on the task's objective.
- Once we know how to work with visually impaired learners and how the materials need to be adapted, we should also think about assessment, tests and official exams. Learners with visual impairment will need, among others, extra time or visual information adaptation.

**\*\*check document “Adapting Tasks and Materials BC\_ONCE” session 3.**

Finally, teaching a visually impaired learner is a perfect moment to work with themes such as respect, cooperation and equality. Use this as a chance to make the rest of the class aware of the need for patience, help and the importance of accessibility. This does not mean focusing only on the visually impaired student, but rather explaining why we try to adapt and make the whole classroom environment accessible. Students will eventually normalize this and, in the future, the teaching and learning process will be easier for everybody.

**\*\* Have a look at the document of session 3: “Specific Tips for Teaching Visually Impaired Learners Face to Face BC\_ONCE”.**