Current Issues in FL Learning and Teaching in the Context of the Visually Impaired Learners

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Abstract In the twenty-first century language competence is regarded as one of the key competences to be mastered by each EU citizen. This pertains to all people regardless of their impairment or disability. For visually impaired people a command of a foreign language is particularly important. Not only does language learning compensate for sensory deficit but also psychological, social and communication deprivation. Considering all the above and the fact that foreign language typhlomethodology is a grossly underresearched area, the present paper will highlight the most salient issues in foreign language teaching to blind and partially sighted students. The paper has an insight into legal and policy context of language education provision to SEN learners, and language programs and projects targeted at visually impaired learners. It also depicts how learners with vision loss or deficit function in FL classroom. Here, the role of holistic education and tailored language teaching is accentuated. Finally, the paper presents a review of the recent research reports pertaining to various facets of language learning and teaching in the context of the visually impaired.

Keywords Visually impaired · Special education needs · Foreign language learning · Foreign language teaching

1 Introduction

Nowadays, education provision is regarded as priority to create modern knowledge-based societies. To achieve the goal education policies are developed to promote full access to education to everyone, including students at risk of social marginalization and these with disability or impairment (Pronay et al., 2020, p. 93). The above also

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concerns equal access to FL (foreign language) education which is reflected in the EU education policy documents. For the visually impaired, learning a FL compensates for psychological, sensory, social and communication deprivation. A command of languages other than one's mother tongue paves the way for opportunities to experience cultural diversity, meeting people and enhancing sense of personal fulfilment. What is more, it opens more job opportunities in societies with a high degree of economic interaction and may contribute to the mobility of disabled or impaired people in the EU. The language that is particularly valued on the EU labour market is English. Therefore, the EU launches various programs and projects targeted at the visually impaired to promote FL learning and teaching.

The necessity of English language learning is stressed in all age groups starting from very young learners with vision impairment. Aikin Araluce (2005, p. 5) notes that children can particularly benefit from mastering English which increases their professional opportunities as well as enhances their integration into the world of the sighted children. Nowadays modern language is treated as a foundation subject included in school curricula. However in the past foreign languages were traditionally regarded as subjects appropriate for study only by the more able students.

From the existing literature related to language acquisition in visually impaired learners, it may be concluded that vision deficit is not an obstacle to successful FL mastery. Their aural auditory and memory abilities allow them to surpass sighted learners, particularly in FL pronunciation, provided there are adequate teaching methods and environment (Jedynak, 2011). Bearing in mind the great potential of visually impaired language learners and scarcity of research findings pertaining to visual impairment and FL learning there is an urgent need to address the issues in both research and education policies.

2 From Marginalization to Inclusion

For a long time impairments and disability were associated with subordination and a passive role in a society (Król-Gierat, 2020). In the past a person with visual impairment was frequently marginalized or excluded from education (Jedynak, 2015). After the years of isolation, the process of the visually impaired integration was started. This was mainly due to the 1824 invention of a series of embossed dots arranged in a specific manner and representing various letters commonly known as braille script (Tremblay, 2007). The script made use of the slate and the stylus for punching holes in it. The raised dots could be touched and read by the blind people, which opened a window into new ways of experiencing education including FL learning. Though the script became a universally accepted tactile system for reading and writing, the visually impaired were still excluded from mainstream education. To the late 1950s visually impaired children were frequently home schooled (Jedynak, 2018). In time governments included SEN (special education needs) children in public education, however they were separated from other learners. Mayberry and Lazarus (2002, pp. 5–6) describe this model of integration saying that SEN

children could only spend some time in a regular classroom while the overwhelming majority of time they spent in a special resource classroom. Undoubtedly such integration allowed for limited cooperation between visually impaired and non-deficit learners, promoted tolerance and diversity. Yet, as Tremblay (2007, p. 22) notes, despite many advantages the model had, visually impaired children could feel segregated.

In the twenty-first century equitable provision for visually impaired learners became a priority in education policies in countries associated in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the main goal of education shifted from *integration* to *inclusion* – a new education model fostering equity and social cohesion (Czerwińska & Kucharczyk, 2019). According to Kupisiewicz (2013; in Król-Gierat, 2020, p. 12) inclusive education assumes the reconstruction of a school system and a holistic approach to learners, bearing in mind their strengths and special needs in every sphere of their lives (psychological, physical, social).

Equity as a core of inclusion has been thoroughly discussed in the international documents (see UNESCO, 2017; OECD, 2018, 2019) and available literature (e.g. Murray, 2018; Santos et al., 2020) which interpret the term equity in the four ways:

(i) equity in terms of equal learning environment provision (Are visually impaired learners provided with equivalent learning conditions? and Do they benefit from an environment in the same way as other individuals e.g. in terms of the level of teaching staff training)
(ii) equity of access or equality of opportunity (Do visually impaired learners have the same chances to progress in the education system?);
(iii) equity in production or equality of attainments (Can visually impaired learners master with the same degree of expertise like students without impairments both knowledge and skills designated as education goals?, Do visually impaired learners achieve equivalent results and have the same chances to earn the same qualifications?)
(iv) equity in using the results of education (Do visually impaired graduates have the same chance to use acquired knowledge and skills both in community life and employment?)

As it can be seen inclusive education capitalizing on equity aims at narrowing the gap between high and low performers. Though the aim is common to all OECD education systems most countries are only capable of partial inclusion and provision of equitable outcomes achievement for all. This is due to a lack of funds or SEN teacher training (Jedynak, 2015, p. 41).

3 Emergence of New Terminology

Education for All which is a global movement led by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), together with the principle of inclusion contributed to a change in perception of the visually impaired in society,

their more active participation in social and education domain, including FL education. The change is reflected in terminology used to describe a person with visual impairment. In the past the terms such as a *visually disabled person* or a *person with vision below the norm* were used not only in common language but also in literature. In the twenty-first century such terms are associated with discrimination and social prejudice. Newly coined terms such as *visually impaired* or *visually challenged* are devoid of negative connotations. They are used with such descriptors as *mild*, *moderate*, *severe* and *specific* (Jedynak, 2015, p. 21).

The changes can be also observed in terminology used in a school context. In the past blind and partially sighted learners were categorized with other disabled pupils described as pupils *eligible for special education.* Nowadays the term *students with special needs* is widely used. It should be noticed that *special education needs* is a broader concept than *cognitive disability* measured by IQ tests. Both terms are used, however, to describe levels of cognitive disability and special education needs which may lead to confusion. According to a definition developed by Bogdanowicz (1996) special education needs students are the ones who find it difficult to handle the curriculum of the typical school and consequently to make the same progress as their non-impaired classmates. It should be stressed that the term special education needs was also operationalised in a legal discourse which accentuates two main issues, namely problem and disability. The latter is defined precisely in the EU *Education for All* document as a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities" (Centre for Inclusive Education, 1990, p. 4).

The term *special needs* reflects the current trend in the EU policies which stress a departure from *inter-individual differences approach* (focusing on differences between impaired and non-impaired people) to *intra-individual differences approach* (focusing on differences within a population of people with one particular impairment). Nowadays the idea of streaming visually impaired pupils into special classes in line with the first approach is abandoned where possible and instructional procedures for each visually impaired learner are determined by the other approach.

A growing interest in education of the visually impaired, including language education gave rise to the emergence of a new scientific domain – *foreign language typhlomethodology*. As Krzeszowski (2001, p. 5) notes the newly coined term originating from a Greek word *tyflos* (blind) deals with teaching techniques and methods that can be implemented for the visually impaired. The term emerged in the last two decades and was adopted in Europe, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe where the domain gained a notable status. However, in the Anglos-Saxon culture the domain is barely known, which is reflected in the absence of the term in dictionaries. Typhlomethodology or typhlodidactics relies largely on research methods and instruments used for sighted learners. As it is an interdisciplinary domain it draws on various branches of sciences such as psychology, pedagogy, applied linguistics, sociology and even cultural studies. Its research scope concerns (1) foreign language, (2) visually impaired learners, (3) teachers of visually impaired learners, (4) teaching resources development, (5) learning and teaching context, (6) approaches, methods and techniques used for teaching (Jedynak, 2015: 23). It should be stressed

that FL typhlomethodology should be treated equally with FL methodology. According to Piskorska et al. (2008, p. 16) both domains offer the same teaching techniques which, in the context of visually impaired learners, need to be tailored to their needs.

4 Legal Policies and Frameworks: International and EU Perspectives

The above mentioned changes in the perception of handicapped people required both political decisions and legislative support. It should be noticed that the education systems in the EU member states have been developing within very specific contexts, both in terms of policy and practice. Consequently specific countries in their educational legislation and policymaking do not rely on externally operationalised definition of SEN but rather define the term on their own. In some education systems only one or two SEN categories exist while in others there are as many as ten. According to the report *Special Education across Europe in 2003* these differences, may be attributed to procedural, financial and administrative regulations (European Agency for Development in Special Education Needs, 2003, p. 126). What all EU countries share, however, is the approach they take for SEN defining, assessment and provision. Nowadays the approach is based on a social model and not a medical model which was prevailing in the last two centuries. According to the *Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training-ET* 2020, there are three broad cross-national categories of learning problems based not on medical causes but on perceived causes of educational failure: (i) *the disabilities category* (clear organic reasons for difficulties in education e.g. learners with vision impairments), (ii) *the difficulties category* (emotional and behavioural difficulties or specific difficulties in learning), (iii) *the disadvantaged category* (additional resources are necessary to compensate for problems caused by cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds).

With regard to education for SEN students, it is guided by the principles included in the legislation of individual EU member states. Yet, the underlying philosophy of particular Education Acts is based on international documents concerning the rights of disabled people. These international documents underpinning all countries' national policies encompass various conventions, resolutions, declarations and statements. The key international document affecting special education is the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UNESCO, 1948) issued by the UNESCO. In line with the declaration human rights are vested in all human beings; everyone is entitled to the enjoyment of all human rights and that entitlement extends to people with disabilities and impairments. The second point of Article 26 is particularly relevant to special education as it outlines the main goal of education which is respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms together with promoting understanding and tolerance. There are also four international conventions with

the United Nations guidelines on general and special education: (i) the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), predominantly Article 28 related to education, (ii) the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Diversity in Cultural Expressions* (UNESCO, 2005), (iii) the *Convention against Discrimination in Education* and Articles 13 and 14 (right to education) of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Economic Rights* (UNESCO, 1966), and (iv) the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNESCO, 2006), particularly Articles 7 on children with disabilities and 24 on education. The last convention is of paramount importance for ensuring equality in education. The principles outlined in the conventions guarantee three fundamental rights, namely the right to education, the right to equality, and the right to be a part of society which are forcefully reaffirmed in the *World Declaration Education for All* (UNESCO, 1990), a UNESCO document, which in Article 3, point 5 devotes much attention to the issues crucial for students with disabilities such as universalising access to education and promoting equality in education. The perception of the rights of persons with disabilities and their access to education was also largely shaped by the United Nations *Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities* (UNESCO, 1993). The document specifies the main prerequisites for equal participation of disabled people in different spheres of life and the target areas for their equal participation. It also outlines the measures which should be implemented to achieve equality in various domains including education at primary, secondary and tertiary level (Jedynak, 2015, pp. 39–41). The 1993 document initiated the UNESCO conference whose participants adopted the *Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education and a Framework for Action*, known as *Salamanca Declaration for Special Education Needs* (UNESCO, 1994).

According to Król-Gierat Salamanca Declaration was a milestone in the conceptual framework of the SEN policies which were developed in many European countries (Król-Gierat, 2020, p. 9). It needs to be stressed that the declaration not only affirms the *Education for All* principle and inclusive education but also curriculum flexibility, assessment, technology assistance and preparation for adult life, all of which are of primary importance for visually impaired pupils. With regard to inclusive education, mainstreaming disabled students should be an integral part of national policies aiming at education for all. Furthermore, schools should respond to students' diverse needs by accommodating different styles and rates of learning. As to curriculum flexibility, it should be adapted to students' special needs and not vice versa. It needs to be stressed that visually impaired students like other SEN learners should not receive a different curriculum but a regular curriculum tailored to their individual needs and accompanied by instructional support. With regard to assessment, summative assessment aiming at monitoring educational outcome for purposes of external accountability should not be implemented; rather its formative form is advocated. In the era of technology one can hardly imagine effective teaching without technology-based resources. This is even more relevant in the case of visually impaired students for whom access to appropriate and affordable assistance technology guarantees learning success. An important aspect of education is also preparation for adult life. For visually impaired pupils transition from school to

adult working life is possible if schools provide them with practical skills allowing economically active and independent life.

There are also some documents issued at the European level which set out objectives for EU countries in relation to special education. The Report from the Education Council to the European Council *Concrete Future Objectives of Education and Training Systems* (European Commission, 2001) outlines a comprehensive and consistent approach for education policies in the context of the EU. The Communication from the Commission *A Coherent Framework of Indicators and Benchmarks for Monitoring Progress towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training* (European Commission, 2007), in turn, identifies special needs education as being one of the 16 priority objectives to be considered within the Lisbon 2010 objectives. Also ET 2020 – A *Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training* (Council of Europe, 2009) emphasizes the imperative that education systems in Europe should provide successful inclusion for all learners.

5 Languages for All

Legal policies and frameworks brought about changes not only in general education but also in language education. This change is reflected in the *Language for All* principle which was thoroughly discussed by McColl in *Modern Languages for All* (McColl, 2000). The publication shows numerous benefits of FL learning provision to SEN students, both in mainstream and special schools. In the report *Special Educational Needs in Europe: The Teaching and Learning of Languages* it is pointed out that people with all abilities have the potential to learn foreign languages. If they are provided the right opportunity and conditions they can also achieve success. In the report one can also read that FL success is realistic as SEN learners already achieved success in their first language, which is indisputably their potential. The question that arises, however, is how close to that potential educators and teachers can enable SEN learners to get.

For visually impaired people FL learning is not only an opportunity for success in a different curriculum area but also, as Mason et al. (1997, p. 253) note, a chance to practice a range of basic skills related to their life, social and educational functioning. Nowadays a command of English is particularly stressed. Not only does it allow a visually impaired person to compensate for sensory deprivation in various spheres of life (psychological, social, professional) but also to develop creativity, communicative skills and engage in entertainment activities e.g. using social media and online applications. With regard to psychological compensation, Asher et al. (1995) point out that visually impaired students who may have learning difficulties or even fail in other curriculum areas may at the same time experience a fresh start while learning a FL. Woods (1995), in turn, makes a reference for enhancement of visually impaired learners' self-confidence and self-esteem. Further benefits of opening up FL learning to visually impaired people are also well documented in

literature and they concern greater vocational mobility or increased opportunities for tourism (Deane, 1992; Fox & Looney, 1993).

One of the visible manifestations of Languages for All policy is introducing foreign language as an obligatory subject to school curriculum for all SEN learners. Along with the change of FL status in schools, FL teaching to visually impaired adults started to be promoted by such organisations as the European Blind Union (EBU) and International Council for Education of Visually Impaired (ICEVI). One of their aims is to improve accessibility to FL learning through adaptation of teaching infrastructure to the needs of people with vision deficit. In Poland, there are two organisations, which actively promote FL learning by visually impaired people, namely Polish Association of the Blind Union and Foundation Institute of Regional Development. A growing emphasis on FL teaching to the visually impaired gave rise to a variety of initiatives in a form of EU-funded programs and projects such as *LangSen Project, Per Linguas Mundi ad Laborem, Listen and Touch*, *Accessible Language Learning for Visually Impaired People, Pedagogy and Language Learning for Blind and Partially Sighted Adults in Europe*, *Eurochance*, *European Language Portfolio for the Blind and Visually Impaired*.

6 FL Learning and Teaching: Findings, Recommendations

The available literature in the field of visual impairment and FL education shows that both researchers and practitioners' interests revolve around determinants of visually impaired learners' FL success. Two main facets may be distinguished here, namely didactic process and affective-cognitive traits. Undoubtedly they pose a challenge for contemporary language education in the context of learners with vision deficit.

FL success is an attainable goal if certain conditions are met. The inclusion policy requires from language teachers to introduce all necessary adaptations aimed at minimising the barriers to FL learning. This may be achieved by implementation of appropriate teaching methods and the choice of special didactic devices.

In line with the current language education recommendations communication is the main aim of modern language teaching. This may imply that speaking and listening should be prioritized, which works at advantage of visually impaired learners as they rely primarily on aural input. Yet, it should be emphasised that all four skills must be given equal weighting. Visually impaired students should be able to use Braille in a FL they are studying though they may be some students whose literacy skills cannot be assessed. As Mason et al. (1997) state reading and writing should be regarded as reinforcement skills rather than as means of access and assessment, particularly in the early stages of learning. The authors give a few practical tips to teachers who introduce writing and reading skills, namely they should concentrate on the spelling of individual words and phrases and then on the sounds of the words and the relationship between sound and shape. To achieve the abovementioned aims in teaching four skills both in mainstream and specialized settings, FL teachers need

to adapt their teaching style to encourage students' maximum access. The adaptation may involve the elements of cooperative language teaching which is particularly beneficial for students with vision loss and deficit. This type of teaching allows them to develop communication skills during peer-peer and team interactions without competing with each other. Apart from developing social skills the cooperative teaching method contributes to enhancement of visually impaired learners' sense of responsibility and building a positive emotional bond between classmates (p. 255). Kalnbērzina (2008) who investigated the method in the specialized setting proved its high effectiveness, particularly in FL grammar learning. The method affected not only students' academic attainments in grammar but also the level of social skills, enjoyment of learning and self-confidence. The researchers noticed, however, that cooperative language teaching did not appeal to all visually impaired students, particularly to introvert, inhibited ones at initial stages of their learning. Such learners were reported to express dissatisfaction with the method and reluctance to work in collaboration with other classmates.

Apart from cooperative language teaching the holistic approach to teaching the content is also advocated. Wyszyńska (2013) implemented such an approach in her experiment. The *psycho-linguistic method Touching the World,* as the author called it, treats a visually impaired learner as a whole together with their emotions and mental blockers. The researcher developed two stages in her innovative way of teaching a FL to learners with vision deficit. The first stage – mental stage – affects psyche through the implementation of the sandtray therapy, controlled breathing practice, the Brain Linkage Method, and the edu-kinaesthetic method. In the second stage lexis and grammar are introduced by the Re-charged Direct Method, supported with collage and water clusters, involving the media of sand and water, and techniques used for tactile-audible perception. The psycho-linguistic method based on holistic and humanistic approaches proved to be highly effective in the context of visually impaired children learning English as a FL. The researcher reports that apart from increase in language competences the method involving manipulating sand and water encouraged the learners' self-expression and enhanced their self-growth.

Tailoring didactic process would not be possible without adaptation of language materials and resources adaptation. In a comprehensive study by Aikin Araluce (2005) an attempt was made to investigate the effectiveness of the instructional materials used for teaching English to the visually impaired children in the mainstream Spanish schools and the experimental summer camp. The researcher developed a tactile resource pack with an interactive storybook introducing and practicing basic English grammar and lexical structures commonly found in textbooks designed for children. The implementation of the tactile resource pack turned out to correlate positively with language attainments. In the follow-up study another resource pack called the dinosaur pack was designed to evaluate the effect of the tactile instructional materials on motivation to learn English. The post-questionnaire results indicate that the experimental pack contributed to the improvement of motivation in all children.

In the twenty-first century, tactile resources are coexisting with various devices and new technologies which enhance learning and teaching process. Among a variety of optical devices that can be used by the visually impaired there are bifocals, prism lenses, contact lenses, magnifiers, and telescopes. As to non-optical devices they include large-print language course books and materials or bold-line paper to facilitate seeing the lines on regular writing paper. There are also devices used for tactile learning which allow a learner creating tactile graphics to convey non-textual information by means of raised images (tactile pictures, diagrams, maps, graphs). Such devices include raised-line paper (lines are embossed to allow students to explore the lines with fingers), raised marks (special markers, adhesive-backed materials, and glues that leave raised marks to create lines or dots which can be felt), raised-line drawing boards covered with rubber and equipped with a sheet of acetate (used for writing or drawing with a pen or other pointed object; it produces raised lines that can be explored with fingers).

FL learning also requires some devices for auditory input processing and recording. In the twenty-first century such specialized devices are usually portable. Among them there are voice organisers and recorders for recording short notes at school and listening to them at home, audio books and colour identifiers. Nowadays it is difficult to imagine successful language learning and teaching without advanced technological devices for the visually impaired. Among them there are (i) computer screen readers to navigate through dialog boxes, menus, and editing fields, (ii) speech synthesizers which speak a text sent from the screen-reading programme installed on the computer, and (iii) a Braille display (soft paperless or refreshable Braille display) which is a tactile facility placed under a conventional computer keyboard enabling a user to read the contents of the computer screen by touch in Braille (Zdobylak, 2009, p. 28). A discussion on language materials would not be complete without mentioning the issue of audiovisual translation. Audio description also known as video description or visual description can be used both by visually impaired learners for autonomous FL learning and FL teachers as a stimulus for speaking or pronunciation and grammar practice. Its effectiveness in education was proved in numerous research (e.g. Walczak & Rubaj, 2014; Krejtz et al., 2014).

Tailoring didactic process to the unique needs of each visually impaired learner also entails a development of *Individual Educational Programme* (IEP). In a FL classroom an IEP may be in a form of a contract between language teachers, other professionals, and parents. A typical IEP should contain the information on a learner's current level of language performance, the planned timeframes of language provision, and additional services which need to be provided (e.g. Braille classes, mobility instruction or psychological consultation).

Paluch (2022) draws attention to another important issue, namely adaptations of educational requirements in English language classes for SEN students to meet examination requirements. As the author notes, the main and almost only adjustment for such students is extended time to write an exam. Based on the case study she points out to a main problem related to language testing and assessment i.e. lack

of coherence between the different regulations at school and national level, which affects the results achieved by the students in their final language exams (p. 241).

The last two decades faced a growing interest in investigating affective and cognitive traits of visually impaired learners. The traits, as Czerwińska and Kucharczyk (2019) note in their book, are of a paramount importance to be considered while teaching in the context of students with visual impairment. The authors prove effectiveness of a modern approach to teaching in which the main emphasis is placed on the assets of a visually impaired learner and not primarily on deficits. This paradigm is recommended not only in relation to vision loss but also to other disabilities.

The research done in the area of language education and visual impairment intends to work out implications for language teachers, school counsellors and parents on various ways of improving visually impaired learners' language attainments. In the mixed-method study conducted by Jedynak and Wesołowska (2014) an attempt was made to establish vocabulary language learning strategies used by three groups of learners who were studying English as a FL, namely non-blind, fully blind, and partially blind. The researchers' intention was to indicate the strategies shared by all the learners, regardless of the degree of sight loss and these which were unique for one particular group of learners. The study based on retrospective accounts provided by learners indicated there was a relationship between the use of FL vocabulary learning strategies and vision. The keyword strategy was favoured by all the groups, yet only partially blind and fully blind learners selected the strategies related to representing sounds in memory. The partially blind group, who could still rely on their vision, opted for the keyword strategy in which they used auditory impressions rather than visual ones. Surprisingly enough, the group also tended to rely more on the sense of hearing than the fully blind learners who appeared to have developed other skills, rather of a mental nature, which they used to comprehend our visual reality and learn new lexical items. The above findings not only provide some insights into cognition and language acquisition of learners with vision impairment but also allow formulating some implications for FL teachers who should adjust their language strategy training to a degree of learners' vision deficit. Strategies based on sounds in memory and mental should be prioritized in such a training (Jedynak & Wesołowska, 2014, p. 327).

Another determinant of language performance which in the case of visually impaired learners may be even more significant than for fully sighted learners is motivation. This affective-cognitive trait was investigated by Jedynak (2010). The researcher established that visually impaired learners like their sighted counterparts recognized a great importance of FL learning and developed their own personal goals. Yet the learners with vision deficit were reported to have more pessimistic attitudes towards possible perspectives related to the potential application of English in the future. This gloomy vision is partly justified if one takes into consideration the statistics on the unemployment rate of visually impaired people.

7 Conclusions

As presented above promotion of equality and diversity in education is essential for both visually impaired learners and FL teachers. Nowadays modern education systems should create such environments in which students with and without disabilities can thrive together. Yet, the transition from the integrative school to inclusive school system is counter-productive in some European countries (e.g. in Germany or Poland). Consequently, many visually impaired students are still schooled in special schools. It seems that implementing inclusion is the most important issue which should be addressed by policy and decision makers in the following years.

As it has been pointed out advanced new technologies may compensate for a lack of vision. Visually impaired people can learn foreign languages using such technologies for professional and entertainment purposes. This has been of much value in the global pandemic time. However, for some visually impaired people the pandemic has had a detrimental effect manifested in helplessness, frustration, lack of motivation to learn a FL and autonomy. It seems that at this stage language teachers, apart from new technology use, should focus primarily on enhancing visually impaired students' well-being and motivation.

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