

Organizing Integration I: Supporting Deaf Students at the University of Valencia

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Attention for students with disabilities is fundamental at all periods of schooling. In our education system this attention is regulated by law at primary and secondary educational levels. The Law of General Order in the Education System of 1990 (LOGSE), and the different legislative developments proceeding from it, reflect this fact. However, the same does not occur when we arrive at higher education, where the relevant general norms are very scarce, and those developed specifically by some universities are centred on very clear-cut aspects.

A new legal framework for University Education has recently been approved in Spain (Organic Law of Universities, LOU 6/2001, 21st December) in which, unlike preceding regulations, specific mention is made in allusion to attention for disabled students.

Article 46, concerning the "rights and duties of students", states the following: "... students shall have a right to: Equality of opportunity and non-discrimination, whether because of personal or social circumstances including disablement, in their access to university, entrance to university buildings, time spent in the university or the exercise of their academic rights".

As well as this call to attention on diversity in general, the additional twenty-fourth stipulation, is specifically directed at disabled students (Of the integration of disabled students in the universities) demanding the continuity of measures established in Law 13/1982 on Social Integration of the Disabled, and the Organic law 1/1990 on General Order in the Education System.

The cited norms oblige all Universities to renovate their statutes, and we may expect the prompt introduction of more concrete measures in those universities with greater sensitivity in this area.

In the particular case of our University of Valencia (UVEG), the regional government approved a series of measures back in April 1998 with the aim of supporting disabled university students during their time in higher education. These measures demanded the introduction of the General Principle of Equality of Opportunity into the UVEG Students' Charter of Rights and Duties, guaranteeing the reservation of 3% of vacancies in university student residences, allowing for the possibility of adaptations in the taking of exams, requesting modifications in the norms of attendance for disabled students, and allowing disabled students to draw up timetables in accordance with their special needs.

The needs posed by disabled students are in their majority related to the presence of auditory, visual and motion impediments, and the consequences of long term illness and/or special treatment. The number of students with these characteristics gaining access to the University is growing. This makes essential the planning of actions designed to ameliorate the conditions and barriers imposed by the university institution, in order to guarantee the principle of Equality of Opportunity. In accordance with Rivas (1997), guaranteeing the right to continue education beyond primary and secondary levels would form part of this principle, along with adaptation of media and resources to avoid the marginalisation of these people. We shall now turn to look at the endeavours that have been taking place in Spanish universities with the aim of responding to this right.

1. SUPPORT SERVICES FOR DISABLED STUDENTS AT SPANISH UNIVERSITIES.

Support programs aimed at disabled students have been becoming more widespread in Spanish universities from the decade of the 90s onwards. In 1994 only 2% of universities had a support service for any disabled student gaining access to higher education (Alcantud, 1995). Eight years later, according to data from the latest meeting of the support services at Spanish universities celebrated in November 2001 in Madrid, their presence has increased to currently stand at 75% of universities.

The support services have been emerging in two ways (Alcantud, Ávila y Asensi, 2000): either through the political will of the universities themselves, becoming integrated into the framework of services offered for attention to their students by vice-rectorships of students or studies, or through the impetus given by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), fundamentally through associations of volunteers, disabled persons and/or foundations.

In the first of these cases, the services of orientation aimed at all students in general within the university community have taken on the attention to students with some kind of disability (The Jaume I University in Castellón, The University of Alicante, The Carlos III University in Madrid, The University of Murcia, The University of Sevilla, etcetera), whilst in other cases specific services of attention have been set up for these people as is the case with our University along with others such as the Polytechnical University of Valencia, The Autonomous University of Barcelona, The University of Valladolid, etcetera. Specific services for a particular type of disability has not occurred in Spain as has happened in other contexts. This is the case of Gaudaliet University, for example, specialised in deaf students, or at the Tsukuba College of Technology in Japan, which attends specifically to students with visual and auditory impediments. There, furthermore, course enrolment takes place according to the impediment (in the specific case of auditory impediment; design, architecture, information technology, teaching and mechanical or electronic engineering).

In the second case, the non-governmental organisations co-operate with the different universities offering particular types of service: help for dependent persons, study support or note taking, for example. Progressively, the universities are establishing frameworks of co-operation between the already constituted support services and some non-governmental organisations, by means of various official agreements.

The professionals who carry out these services have quite varied training. We can find psychologists, pedagogues, social workers, speech therapists, university professors from various fields who dedicate themselves part-time, and even some technicians without any specific training. Such diversity could be the result of a lack of legal regulation in relation to these kinds of services in university education.

Independently of the origin of the services or the professionals who compose them, all the programs tend to have one fundamental goal: "the normalisation of university life for disabled students", achieved with the aim of fulfilling the principles of integration and equality of opportunity.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VALENCIA.

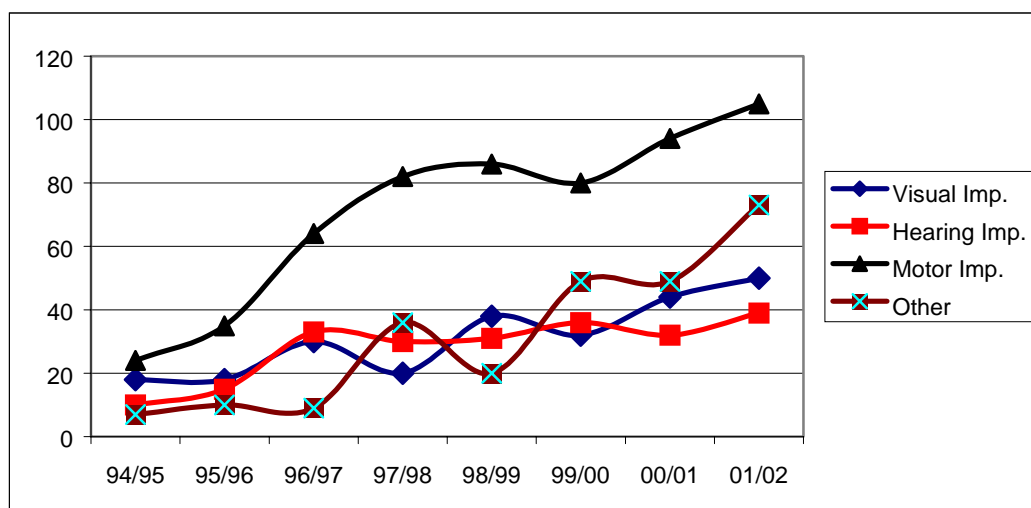
The majority of European universities consider to be amongst the categories of disability those brought about by motive impediments, sensorial impediments (auditory and visual) and chronic diseases. In some countries conditions are added such as dyslexia, although this is not recognised as a disability in Spain since it does not merit the concession of a disability certificate. In order to be able to benefit from the university support services, disabled students must possess such a certificate, legally established by the specialised *IMSERSO* evaluation centres, an entity dependent on the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs, reaching a degree of disability of 33% or over.

Obviously, not every kind of disability implies the same type of needs: the main inconvenience for students with visual impediments is the limitation they experience with normal ink printed texts, whilst those possessing auditory impediment are affected in any communicative process, essence of any teaching/learning process. For their part, students with motion impediments are confronted by problems derived from their difficulties in moving from one place to another, and, principally, difficulties of manipulation. Another main category is that constituted by those suffering chronic illness such as severe heart problems, epilepsy, Crohn's disease, etcetera. These imply long periods of absence as a result of medical treatment, which makes continuation on academic courses difficult.

In spite of all these difficulties, the number of people who declare themselves to be disabled students on their enrolment form has increased in the same measure that the programs offered by the services of support have normalised. In graph 1 we can observe this increase in the case of our University. It should be pointed out that it is precisely the persons with auditory impediments that are the least represented within the community of students at our University, and those whose level of access has least increased.

In order to give a solution to the needs of these students a series of programs have been constituted and dispersed from which it is hoped to provide the necessary support. Generically, the support given is centred in the following areas:

- the field of attendance, responding to needs related to accessibility to the physical medium, transport, accommodation and personal assistance.
- the learning process, with the aim of allowing access to all the information necessary to achieve an optimum performance: use of sign language interpreters, transcription of notes into Braille etcetera.
- evaluation: carrying out the necessary adaptations to different tests or exams.



Graph 1. Evolution of disabled students enrolling at UVEG.

3. MODEL OF ACTION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VALENCIA

The model followed on the part of our University is an attempt to bring together all the agents who participate in the institution agglutinating tasks around the following programs of action:

- Academic advice, based fundamentally on the planning of their studies, development of techniques of adapted studies and materials, carrying out curricular adaptations, and, in some cases, vocational orientation.
- Technical assistance. Technologies of support are incorporated with the aim of mitigating or lessening the disability should the student solicit it at the beginning of each course. The personnel of the support service evaluate the characteristics of the user making a recommendation which will accompany the student in his or her

application, whose concession will be considered by a commission together with the data on the academic curriculum and their financial resources. The support services offered are: FM transmitters, 4-track recorders, modems, speech recognition programs, self-copying notebooks, sticking labels with enlarged characters for computer keyboards, sticking labels for the reservation of first row seats.

- Volunteers. The advisory body has a reserve of volunteers made up of other university students who carry out support functions for the disabled students. During this course, 124 volunteers have participated in three main lines of work: academic support, (audio recordings of notes, study support, taking notes, collecting auto-copying notebooks, collecting lap-top computers for the exams, support in the exams and in the computer room), personal support (accompanying students on public transport and getting around the university buildings, help with meals and clothing) and awareness-raising tasks (putting up posters, handing out leaflets, participating in the preparation of campaigns etcetera).
- Elimination of architectural barriers and obstacles. The problems presented by architectural barriers are diverse and their complexity is such that we must attend to the demands made by the students in this area and pass them on to the competent authorities within the University.
- Sensibility and awareness. These campaigns are directed towards students, administration and services personnel, and teaching and research staff, using various different channels. In some cases these may be leaflets and posters, in others, conferences, talks and training courses.
- Relationships with other institutions. The UVEG campus is located in different geographical zones making co-ordination with the various municipal areas involved essential. Our support service has participated in write-ups, communications and demands made through the competent vice-rectories with the aim of obtaining adapted traffic lights in all campuses, more reserved parking spaces and a sufficiently frequent service of low platform buses.

4. THE SITUATION OF STUDENTS WITH DEAFNESS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VALENCIA

For university students who have an auditory sensorial deficit, the greatest obstacle lies in the limitations regarding access to verbal information. Additionally, in some cases the deficient reading level with which deaf students begin their course presents great difficulties with regard to autonomous progress.

It should be pointed out that the reservation of 3% of university places for persons with legally established disabilities has in many cases enabled access to middle grade studies for disabled students who had not passed the relevant entry exams, an essential requirement for any other student. This has made possible an increase in the quantity of deaf students who have entered University in recent years, although their academic performance may be inferior, which could be contributing to the known fact of a greater number of years spent in the institution than their fellow students.

Currently, our University has 39 students with deafness amongst a total of 269 students who have some kind of disability. As pointed out earlier, attention must be paid to the fact that this is the collective of disabled persons which has least increased in number in the courses where the service has been established. Of these 39, 36 students possess a hearing loss between light and severe, all of whom use auditory prostheses with the exception of one case. The remaining three have profound deafness, one has a cochlear implant, one uses good quality hearing aids and the other does not use any kind of help. The majority use oral language as their mode of communication, with the exception of two cases who prefer to use Spanish Sign Language (SSL from now on), even though in the family environment they communicate via oral language.

Based on the outcome of interviews about needs held with deaf students, the following factors stood out as the main perceived sources of difficulty in their academic development, in addition to the generic factors regarding access to oral and written information already mentioned:

- The design of some lecture halls imposes an excessive distance between teacher and student making for difficulties in following the class via the use of lip-reading and hearing aids.
- The megaphone systems are in some cases deficient, and even on occasions non-existent.

- In the case of students with auditory prostheses which include a magnetic induction spindle, such features cannot be used owing to the absence of lecture halls equipped with magnetic loops.
- Students dependent on lip-reading have the problem of not being able to divide their attention, so that the visual reading of the oral message impedes them from writing notes.
- When the classes adopt a participative structure, the deaf students find it difficult to follow the established dynamic.
- From the point of view of attitude, they encounter barriers owing to the low level of understanding of the university community in general, including teaching staff, services personnel and fellow students who do not know the real implications of deafness, their ideas being based on stereotypes.

Within the general framework of action described earlier, the actions directed to answering the needs outlined by students with deafness are concentrated in the following areas:

- In the case of deaf persons who have the possibility of using some auditory remains, first row seats in the lecture halls are reserved by means of adhesive stickers whenever requested by the student, interviews with their lecturers to orientate them with regard to basic conduct to follow for students who use lip-reading. In some cases it is the student him or herself who explains the correct manner of interaction to the lecturers.
- In the case of students who use auditory prostheses, and cannot make use of them because of the problem of distance, they are informed about the possibility of evaluation and the concession of an FM transmitter. In these cases the transmitter can resolve the problem of divided attention, as the student can take his or her own notes without any other kind of additional help.
- Those students who cannot take their own notes usually do so by means of self-copying notebooks provided to fellow student volunteers who can give a copy of their notes at the end of the class, thanks to this aid.

- The case of the volunteer group in relation to university students is centred on this task of note taking and, additionally as fellow-student tutors who advise their deaf companions on the study process.
- In relation to awareness raising amongst the teaching staff, informative meetings are usually held with the group of lecturers who have deaf students in their lecture halls. In addition to this, they are provided with orientative advice, also accessible through the web page maintained by the support service (<http://acceso.psievo.uv.es/centro/>) and which are outlined in the appendix at the end of this document.
- In relation to the volunteer group of students, these students receive training courses relevant to the general characteristics of different types of disability, including amongst these the case of deafness.
- The use of interpreters in Spanish Sign Language has not been a widely used resource owing to problems related to its funding. During the 96-97 course two students had SSL interpreters on the teaching and physiotherapy diploma courses, thanks to funding through the European HORIZON initiative. We currently have two students requesting their presence, but the lack of economic resources is impeding their use.

From that experience that was evaluated (Alcantud y Asensi, 1997), we can underline that the two students considered this help to be the most appropriate to their needs, an opinion not entirely shared by their teachers, who agreed that thanks to the presence of the interpreter they had been able to follow the class and even participate, acquiring greater knowledge. However, they believed that there were still gaps to be filled: the specific subject vocabulary could not be covered in terms of equally specific signs. This goes to demonstrate the need for legal recognition of these languages in order to help their revision, normalisation and diversity of usage.

Going on the results obtained, it would seem evident that SSL is a valuable and irreplaceable instrument of communication for some university students with deafness who cannot accede to the verbal information given in the lecture hall via any form of technical support.

5. AN APPROACH TO THE SITUATION OF STUDENTS WITH DEAFNESS IN THE SPANISH UNIVERSITY CONTEXT

A questionnaire was developed as part of the work presented here, which was administered via e-mail and/or telephone to all Spanish universities with support services. Through this we endeavoured to gauge the total number of disabled students enrolled, paying special attention to the needs and solutions offered to students with deafness. Of the 42 universities surveyed (there exist 48 universities in Spain), we have received data from 26, which can help us describe the real situation of the said students with greater precision.

The number of students with deafness enrolled at each of the surveyed universities is quite variable, ranging from the National University of Long Distance Education (UNED) which has the highest number (91 out of a total of 1997 disabled students) to universities such as the Polytechnic of Barcelona, who have no deaf students registered in their support services. It is notable that following on from the UNED, it is our University which has the highest number of students with deafness enrolled (39 out of a total of 267 students with disability), or in other words, it is amongst the universities imparting present courses with the largest number of students with deafness in its classes, followed by Granada (35 out of 224) and Salamanca (25 out of 130).

As we pointed out earlier in the evolution of students with disabilities enrolling at the UVEG, it is also the case that students with deafness in these 26 universities are the collective within the group of disabled persons with the lowest presence. Summing up this data we find that this group constitutes 7.78% of students with disability attended (327 out of a total 4,202).

Regarding the kind of services offered to this collective, we found that only 8 universities offered the possibility of lending out FM transmitters. Self-copying notebooks are also conceded in a total of 8, with their classmates generally being the ones responsible for taking the notes on a voluntary basis. Only 3 of the universities have the figure of "grant-funded co-operators", that is, paid for the tasks they do. In two of the cases this serviced is financed by the university itself (Universities of Seville and Granada), whilst the other is shared between the University and the Murcia Federation of Deaf People, which takes on 60% of the expenses.

Finally, we shall turn to the use of SSL interpreters. It must be underlined that only nine universities are currently making possible the entry of interpreters into their lecture halls, with a total of 35 persons benefiting from this resource, that is to say 10.7% of the deaf university students concerning us. The universities in question are Granada, Seville, La Laguna, Gran Canarias, Valladolid, Alicante, Murcia, Malaga and La Coruña. To these it should be added the University of Zaragoza, which traditionally offers this service although during this course it has not been required by any student. It must also be underlined that in five of the universities, there have been requests for interpreters which have not been able to be satisfied on the grounds of lack of funding.

In no case do the interpreters cover all the teaching hours received by the student, with Malaga being the University offering greatest coverage at 7 hours daily to 2 students, followed by Seville (to 13 students) and Granada (6 students) who get to receive 10-15 hours weekly, about half the classes they attend.

With regard to the funding, in 4 of the cases the cost is entirely covered by the university itself, in 2 exists co-funding between the relevant regional Deaf Persons Federation and the university, in another 2 the regional government puts up funds thanks to established agreements, and in one case (University of Valladolid) there are no expenses owing to the fact that the service is sustained by students in the Advanced Training Course for SSL interpreters in their practice module. In any case, all the interpreters limit themselves to the task of interpretation, without dedicating any additional time to the task of some kind of academic support.

There does not exist any specific training for interpreters who carry out their task in the university environment. In some universities the interpreters themselves comment on the necessity of having a specific vocabulary, above all in courses of a technical nature. In this line, some interpreters dedicate prior time outside the class with the students to whom they give support in agreeing signs for words and /or concepts specific to the area of knowledge in question.

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7. APPENDIX: GUIDELINES FOR IMPROVEMENT IN COMMUNICATION WITH DEAF PEOPLE. (Explanatory material offered to university lecturers giving classes to students with deafness at the University of Valencia)

- With the objective of making the most of the deaf person's remaining auditory faculties, it is convenient to be in lecture halls with good lighting and acoustics.
- The ideal position is to be situated facing the student in order for him or her to be able to lip-read, and at a distance of between 1 and 3 metres. For this reason the student will sit in the first rows. To this end, the student possesses adhesives for the reservation of seats.
- It is necessary for the lecturer's face to be sufficiently illuminated. In the case of darkening the hall to show slides or videos, remember to move near the student in order that he/she may follow via lip-reading.
- When speaking, use a normal tone of voice, speak slowly and try to achieve a correct vocalisation but without exaggerating.
- It is useful to give the student a script of themes to be dealt with in class.
- In the case of black- or whiteboard explanations, it is better to write first and then explain so that the student can follow at each moment.
- Insofar as is possible videos used in class should be subtitled. If this is not the case, try to provide a script with the most relevant information.
- If possible, organise the classes in a U-shape, so that the student can lip-read his or her classmates when they make contributions. Students should speak in turn given that in this way the person with auditory deficit can locate the person speaking and try to read their lips.
- Provide written norms or instructions for examinations.
- Some people who use hearing aids and where their level of auditory loss allows it, are lent a modulated frequency transmitter, with which they may even be able to take their own notes. This technical aid brings the lecturer's voice nearer, even if he/she is 6 or 7 metres away.
- Some deaf persons use Sign Language to communicate, and they may on some occasions be accompanied by a Sign Language interpreter. The interpreter's main function is to translate. He or she does not explain or expand the information. He/she is the voice and hearing of the deaf person.