Tips to facilitate the eLearning of Students with Special Educational Needs

After eLearning is adopted, students with special educational needs (SEN) have shared that they encountered some difficulties in adapting to this new mode of learning. Below are the challenges and some suggestions for course instructors to facilitate the adjustment and learning of these students.

I. Visual Impairment (VI)

Challenges
Difficulty of reading and performing some computer tasks using the text-to-speech software Some functions of the eLearning platforms (e.g., shared screen and slides, chat box messages, polling questions and results) cannot be accessed by the assistive software used by students with VI and hence students sometimes fail to follow the class flow and activities. **Difficulty of performing more than one computer tasks at the same time** For example, when students are instructed to perform immediate online research and discuss with classmates during online lessons, students with VI are difficult to do the research task while listening to the instructor and classmates due to overlapping voices from the text-to-speech software. **Difficulty of understanding and maintaining conversations with classmates during online discussions** Classmates may not be aware of the students' SEN when they do not meet face-to-face. Sometimes students with VI are confused when classmates do not provide more detailed verbal descriptions in their conversations but simply point to something and say "this" and "that" etc. **Concerns of reading and responding to the online test and examination papers** Students are worried that they cannot read or give response to the online assessments due to the format of the test/ examination materials.
Suggestions for Course Instructors
Provide appropriate verbal instructions For example, verbally repeat the instructions/ words/ questions on the shared screen, chat box messages and polling questions/ results. **Introduce the student with SEN to other group members** Briefly describe the student's limitations (e.g., take longer time to give response and perform other computer tasks at the same time) before students begin their group discussion/ work. **Check the accessibility of online learning and examination materials** Departments may send the online lecture/ examination materials to OSA for conversion to make sure students with VI can read the questions/ materials. The test/ examination papers will be kept confidential. Please allow <u>at least one week</u> for the conversion task.

II. Hearing Impairment (HI)

Challenges

Difficulty of listening to the speakers from the computer
Students shared that they have difficulty of listening to the instructor/ classmates when there is more than one source of sounds at the same time and/or when speakers do not speak in the direction of the microphone.

Concerns of missing information in online lessons by simply relying on listening
Due to limitation of the size of computer screen, students cannot refer to the speaker's body language as an aid to understand his/ her speech. In addition, it is helpful to use the mouse cursor when the speaker refers to the main points of the slides. However, it is reported that sometimes the mouse cursor appears too blurred/ small to be seen on the screen.

Difficulty of following verbal announcements and instructions during the test/ examinations
Students are worried that important messages would be missed if the announcements/ instructions are only provided verbally.

Suggestions for Course Instructors

Consider using an ear hook microphone and/or speak more directly to the microphone
Students indicated that these would enhance the sharpness of the speakers' voice.

Consider doing a sound check with students at the beginning of the class and encourage all students to speak close to the microphone
Students are also encouraged to notify their lecturers if they do not hear clearly.

Mute the notification sound of other computer programmes when possible
This helps minimize the distraction caused.

Make use of the mouse cursor and adjust the mouse cursor to a larger size
Students with HI reported that this would help.

Record the lecture
If there are concerns about the use of recording, ITSC can arrange limited sharing of files to students with SEN only. For this arrangement, please contact Judy Lo (ITSC) on 3943 1711/ judyl@cuhk.edu.hk.

Provide written instructions and announcements in the test and examination papers
This facilitates students to follow and complete the online assessments.

III.   Other types of SEN
(e.g., Attention-deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Mental Illness)

Challenges
Difficulty of maintaining concentration on the computer screen for the entire lecture Students are easily distracted by the surroundings and/or their own emotions. **Difficulty of writing notes and/or important information related to the assessments** Students reported that they have a hard time writing notes/ information provided in the lessons due to the difficulty of performing multiple tasks when listening to the speaker(s). **Difficulty of organizing their study plan and assignment schedule** When students are studying at home, they reported that there are less direct support from peers/ course tutors. Some of them would experience a hard time in planning for their study and assignment schedule on their own.

Suggestions for Course Instructors
Include interactive components in online lessons Students indicated that they can focus better in an interactive class. **Record the lecture** If there are concerns about the use of recording, ITSC can arrange limited sharing of files to students with SEN only. For this arrangement, please contact Judy Lo (ITSC) on 3943 1711/ judyl@cuhk.edu.hk. **Provide more detailed requirements of the assignments and/or marking criteria** With more detailed guidelines, students will be more capable of completing the assignments independently. **Highlight the information of academic support and encourage students to seek support** Encourage students to take the initiative to seek advice and support from the teaching assistants or course tutors when needed. **Check with the students with SEN during the term** Where possible, it is helpful to maintain communication with the students with SEN and ask whether they can follow the class flow and teaching pace.

For further enquiry, you are welcome to contact us:

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