

Hear Me: The Learning Experience on “Zoom” of Students With Deafness or Hard of Hearing Impairments

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Abstract : Over the years and up to the arousal of the COVID-19 pandemic, deaf or hard of hearing students studying in higher education institutions, participated lectures on campus using hearing aids and strategies adapted for frontal learning in a classroom. Usually, these aids were well known to them from their earlier study experience in school. However, the transition to online lessons, due to the latest pandemic, led deaf or hard of hearing students to study outside of their physical, well known learning environment. The change of learning environment and structure rose new challenges for these students. The present study examined the learning experience, limitations, challenges and benefits regarding learning online with lecture and classmates via the “Zoom” video conference program, among deaf or hard of hearing students in academia setting. In addition, emotional and social aspects related to learning in general versus the “Zoom” were examined. The study included 18 students diagnosed as deaf or hard of hearing, studying in various higher education institutions in Israel. All students had experienced lessons on the “Zoom”. Following allocation of the group study by the deaf and hard of hearing non-profit organization “Ma’agalei Shema”, and receiving the participants inform of consent, students were requested to answer a google form questioner and participate in an interview. The questioner included background information (e.g., age, year of studying, faculty etc.), level of computer literacy, and level of hearing and forms of communication (e.g., lip reading, sign language etc.). The interviews included a one on one, semi-structured, in-depth interview, conducted by the main researcher of the study (interview duration: up to 60 minutes). The interviews were held on “ZOOM” using specific adaptations for each interviewee: clear face screen of the interviewer for lip and face reading, and/ or professional sign language or live text transcript of the conversation. Additionally, interviewees used their audio devices if needed. Questions regarded: learning experience, difficulties and advantages studying using “Zoom”, learning in a classroom versus on “Zoom”, and questions concerning emotional and social aspects related to learning. Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed severe difficulties regarding the ability of deaf or hard of hearing students to comprehend during “Zoom” lessons without adoptive aids. For example, interviewees indicated difficulties understanding “Zoom” lessons due to their inability to use hearing devices commonly used by them in the classroom (e.g., FM systems). 80% indicated that they could not comprehend “Zoom” lessons since they could not see the lectures face, either because lectures did not agree to open their cameras or, either because they did not keep a straight forward clear face appearance while teaching. However, not all descriptions regarded learning via the “zoom” were negative. For example, 20% reported the recording of “Zoom” lessons as a main advantage. Enabling then to repeatedly watch the lessons at their own pace, mostly assisted by friends and family to translate the audio output into an accessible input. These finding and others regarding the learning experience of the group study on the “Zoom”, as well as their recommendation to enable deaf or hard of hearing students to study inclusively online, will be presented at the conference.

Keywords : deaf or hard of hearing, learning experience, Zoom, qualitative research

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