

English Teachers' Challenges and Strategies in Teaching Deaf Students in Bengkulu City

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Abstract

English teachers can have unique challenges in teaching English to deaf students. They need to utilize special strategies and resources. Gaining insight about the teachers' challenges and strategies in teaching English for deaf students is important to enhance English language education for deaf learners. This research is intended to find the challenges of English teachers in teaching deaf students, besides to find out the strategies practiced by English teachers to overcome the challenges. The design was a qualitative research design. The data for this study were obtained from classroom observations and interviews conducted in-depth with two English teachers from two special schools (SLBN) located in Bengkulu City. The instruments were an observation sheet and an interview guidance. The results also show that teachers faced various challenges, including adapting the teaching material, encountering communication barriers and maintaining the motivation of the students. They used visual aids, interactive media, clear nonverbal communication, and student-centered approaches to overcome these challenges. The study also highlighted that resource limitation and the variety of sign language systems impacted the effectiveness of teaching. Deaf students face great challenges and English teachers use a wide range of effective strategies to overcome them. The outcome underscores the value of visual, interactive and relational pedagogies. It is important to better understand these issues in other contexts and with a greater diversity of disability.

Keywords: Challenges; Deaf Students; Strategies

Introduction

Education constitutes a fundamental human right inherent to every individual, equivalent to other basic rights enshrined in national and international legal frameworks. Every child within the nation is entitled to receive an education free from all forms of discrimination, including those based on gender, age, or social

status. This entitlement extends unequivocally to children with disabilities, encompassing those with visual, auditory, intellectual, physical, learning, behavioral impairments, giftedness, health challenges, or social interaction difficulties. The constitutional guarantee of education, as stipulated in Article 31, Paragraph 1 of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, mandates the provision of equitable educational opportunities that enable children with special needs to participate fully and meaningfully as valued members of society (Rahmawati et al., 2017).

In recognition of the critical role of education in human development and the increasing importance of English proficiency in the global era, governmental regulations require the inclusion of English language instruction for students with disabilities. Specifically, Article 6, Paragraph 1c of Government Regulation Number 19 of 2005 concerning National Education Standards mandates that English be incorporated as a compulsory subject within the curriculum for students with special educational needs. However, children with developmental psychological and physical limitations often exhibit distinct communication modalities, which necessitate tailored pedagogical approaches. While oral communication is conventionally regarded as the primary and most accessible medium for language acquisition, children with special needs frequently encounter significant barriers in this domain. Consequently, educators must adapt instructional methods to accommodate these unique communication challenges (Suryanti, 2016).

Children with exceptional needs demonstrate characteristics that differentiate them from their typically developing peers, including variations in cognitive functioning, sensory processing, neurological or physical conditions, social behaviors, communicative fluency, and the presence of comorbid health conditions (Kismawiyati, 2018). Among this population, individuals with hearing impairments, such as those who are deaf, experience irregularities in speech articulation and auditory perception, which impede effective oral communication within their environments (Aisyah et al., 2023). Hearing-impaired children often confront difficulties in speech and language development attributable to dysfunctions in speech organs—including the oral cavity, tongue, palate, and vocal cords—as well as auditory system impairments that delay linguistic acquisition (Akhmad et al., 2021). Speech disorders encompass challenges related to voice quality, pronunciation, and fluency, resulting in deviations in linguistic form, content, or function (Linda & Muliarsari, 2021).

Given these complexities, the instructional process during the developmental stages of children with special needs must be meticulously adapted to their physical, cognitive, emotional, and social capacities. Special schools bear the responsibility of delivering optimal educational services tailored to these requirements. The efficacy of the educational system is contingent upon the interplay of teachers, students, curriculum, and facilities, with teachers serving as the pivotal element within this framework. Educators bear the primary responsibility for the academic and developmental progress of children with special needs and must therefore possess the requisite competencies to execute their roles effectively and efficiently (Prasetyo, 2015).

Teaching English to deaf students presents significant challenges due to the communication barriers and behavioral characteristics inherent to this group. Educators must implement specific accommodations to address these challenges effectively (Mpofu & Chimhenga, 2013). For instance, to capture the attention of deaf learners at the outset of lessons, teachers may employ nonverbal cues such as shoulder taps or hand waves. Communication should be delivered clearly and naturally, avoiding exaggerated lip or hand movements that may distract students. Furthermore, teachers' positioning facing students without standing against a light source facilitates lip-reading and enhances comprehension (Mpofu & Chimhenga, 2013).

Based on the prior explanation, the researcher is firstly interested in knowing the challenges in teaching English for deaf students, secondly, to know the teachers' strategies implemented in teaching deaf students in Bengkulu City. There are two previous studies used as references in this research. The first one is *Teaching Special Students: English Lessons for deaf students in Indonesian Special Junior High Schools* by Adi et al. (2017). The second one is *Teacher Challenges of Teaching English for Deaf Students in SLB-BYRTRW in The Academic Year 2019/2020* by Azizah (2020).

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design with a descriptive analytical approach to systematically and comprehensively understand the phenomenon under investigation. Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and document analysis as the primary instruments for obtaining relevant and in-depth data. The subjects of this study were two English teachers who were

selected based on specific criteria, including certification and sufficient experience in teaching English to deaf students. The selection of these participants was conducted using purposive sampling to ensure that the respondents met the requirements relevant to the research objectives.

The researcher used two types of research instruments to obtain data about challenges and strategies English teachers faced in teaching students with deaf disabilities. The instruments help the researcher collect data to answer the research questions (Sugiyono, 2017). The instruments used were observation sheets and interview guidelines. The researcher created an observation sheet and interview guideline that adopted indicators from the theory by Thompson (2012). The researcher used data triangulation techniques by comparing data obtained from interviews with observation and documentation results, and by comparing the results of observations with the research topic.

Data analysis was carried out in two stages, namely preliminary analysis in the field, where the researcher collected various references from secondary data sources to illustrate the research focus. The second stage was the field analysis stage. Miles & Haberman (2014) classified field data analysis into three stages, namely: a) Data reduction b) Data presentation (data display) c) Drawing conclusions (verification).

Findings and Discussion

Findings

The Interview with teachers were conducted using an interview sheet with fifteen questions. From interviews, researcher obtain data to answer research problems. However, researcher need to make observations to cross-check interview data with observation data as part of data triangulation. The interview questionnaire contains questions 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 11, and 15 to identify the challenges faced by teachers when teaching deaf students. Questions 2, 4, 7, 12, and 14 aim to discover the teaching methods and languages used by teachers. Lastly, questions 9, 10, and 13 delve into the motives behind these actions, shedding light on teachers' strategies in teaching English to deaf students and the rationale behind their decisions.

Challenges Faced by English Teachers in Teaching English for Deaf Students.

In this part, the researcher presents the challenges the teacher faced in teaching English to deaf students. The data were collected from the interview and the observations. However, after going through the data triangulation process, namely the process of cross-checking data from both interviews and observations, there were only three challenges faced by teachers.

The first, Teachers faced several challenges when teaching deaf students, including the need to adapt materials and media since students could not access audio-based content. Yet, teacher A did not prepare or use a clear lesson plan, and the teaching activities were less organized. Meanwhile, Teacher B did not apply sufficient support techniques to assist deaf students in the writing process. As a result, students seemed disengaged and struggled to actively participate in the writing.

The second challenges was the difficulties in optimizing class potential due to limited teaching methods used, where not all methods commonly applied in regular schools are suitable for teaching deaf students. From the observation, teacher A used only one teaching method, namely, using body language and giving appreciation. Meanwhile, teacher B experienced difficulty in getting the students' attention at the beginning of the lesson. To gain their attention, the teacher gave a signal by tapping the blackboard.

The last challenge was that a significant effort is required to manage word repetition. Teaching deaf students through word repetition demands considerable effort and intentionality from educators due to the unique communication and learning needs of these learners. However, effectively implementing this method involves more than simply repeating words; it requires careful planning, patience, and adaptation to ensure that repetition is meaningful and accessible. These challenges impacted student engagement, understanding, and skill development, while also demanding more time and energy from teachers.

Strategies Used by English Teachers in Teaching English for Deaf Students.

This section describes the strategies employed by the teacher in instructing deaf students, based on data gathered through interviews with the teacher and classroom observations.

The first strategy focused on pedagogy. Both teachers utilized visual aids to facilitate deaf students in learning the English language. For instance, Teacher A utilized pictures from textbooks, while Teacher B incorporated interactive quizzes

using technology. Teacher B's method emphasized interactivity, enabling student participation and enhancing the learning experience.

The second strategy involved maintaining student engagement. Teacher A engaged students directly through nonverbal communication, whereas Teacher B incorporated short breaks within the lessons. Both instructors effectively kept their deaf students focused and engaged in the classroom.

The third strategy revolved around utilizing facial expressions and body language for clarification with deaf students. Teacher A conveyed instructions through gestures and relevant expressions, while Teacher B used clear lip movements with strong expressions. This approach aided in facilitating a better understanding of the lessons for the deaf students.

In the fourth strategy, both teachers assessed students' comprehension levels. Teacher A asked questions and provided further explanations when necessary, whereas Teacher B engaged students in discussions about their daily lives to foster a strong teacher-student relationship. This approach created a relaxed and conducive learning environment for the students.

The final strategy focused on speaking clearly and distinctly. Both instructors recognized the importance of clear lip movements for deaf students, emphasizing clarity over volume. Teacher A articulated her lip movements for better readability and highlighted key words on the board, while Teacher B prioritized pronunciation and spoke at a slower pace. These strategies enhanced the understanding and retention of lessons for deaf students.

These strategies included written communication, nonverbal cues, physical instructions, and visual aids. Teacher B used a variety of strategies, while Teacher A focused on just one or two strategies. These results emphasized how important it was to implement multimodal strategies to successfully meet the many needs of children with hearing difficulties.

Discussion

The findings showed that English teachers at SLB N A and SLB N B in Bengkulu City encountered challenge when adapting teaching materials and media in the implementation of teaching English for deaf learners. Teacher A had challenges in providing a variety of contextual visual media, while teacher B had challenges in providing teaching materials and facilitating students to master the spoken competencies to the written competencies.

Recent research conducted by Birinci & Sarıçoban (2021) also corroborates this finding, stating that visual materials were more beneficial compared to only containing the sign language that doesn't contain any visual items in instruction when teaching vocabulary items to deaf learners who learn English as a foreign language. Similarly, other researchers found that the use of fit visual media would make deaf students achieve better in reading and writing (Nonci et al., 2022). According to the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, the materials must reflect multiple means of representation and should be flexible and adaptable to the unique needs of the learner (Gauvreau et al., 2019).

Another major obstacle that was indicated was the lack of diversity in teaching methodologies. Teacher A explained that she struggled with maximizing learning because there was not enough variety. Teacher B explained, Her challenge is moving students to a place in their minds and hearts that allows them to be ready and able to absorb what you are teaching.

These findings align with work by Niksiar et al. (2025) that the e-learning through authentic themes is very effective, and that is based on authentic sign language e-learning setting an increasing deaf learner's satisfaction and motivation on the first experience of e-learning. Too much of the same style will make the students unmotivated in the classroom making a lack of such diversity lead to decrease in student participation. Vygotsky's Social Development Theory emphasizes the role of social interaction and scaffolding in learning, while also proposing that teachers employ a diverse array of methods to promote student development (Barnett, 2019)

It was mentioned that the biggest challenge was the need for frequent repetition and visuals for every single task. Teacher A explained that deaf students best learn vocabulary and concepts only after they have seen them multiple times, most often in written and visual forms. Teacher A viewed these activities as consuming more time in the teaching process. Additionally, Teacher B also took into account the value of repetition and offered the same activities to assist the scholars in learning.

The study conducted by Ikasari et al. (2019) also support this finding, show that multimodal text and instruction are critical for deaf learners to internalise new structures of language. But this method takes up plenty of time and can be tiring for teachers, especially if there are larger class sizes or limited resources. Extensive

repetition without variation can lead to cognitive overload, which has been shown to hinder instruction (Machado & Luchini, 2018) This means that teachers must find the sweet spot between repeated exposure and fun, interesting learning activities.

The results of observation tests from SLBN A and SLBN B in Bengkulu City show that there were several strategies used by the English teacher in response to the needs of deaf students. The focus for Teacher A was visual aids from the students' English textbook. On the other hand, Teacher B actively engaged technology in his teaching and learning process. For practice, she presented each object from the textbook to the students and pronounced its name in English, linking a spoken word with visual reference.

On the flip side, Teacher B used technology as a tool through quizzes and school Chromebooks. These methods are aligned with contemporary scholarship demonstrating that tangible and technology-enhanced education are effective for members of the deaf community (Niksiar et al., 2025). Additionally, hands-on and interactive methods assist in connecting abstract linguistic principles to tangible comprehension, facilitating English learning for students dealing with hearing challenges.

Another strategy both classrooms used was student focus. Teacher A controlled attention with subtle movements, direct involvement, and eye contact, frequently asking students to write on the board. Teacher B took a flexible approach, permitting short pauses during interactive lessons to check phones or just regroup. This flexibility fostered a calm and respectful learning environment and honored students' individual needs. For D/HH students, inclusive setting promotes their self-esteem, social engagement, and academic success, (Alshutwi et al., 2020). And they also need to be placed in a "good inclusion setting."

Nonverbal forms of communication, like facial expressions and body language and enunciating clearly while forming clear lip movements, became a foundational part of both teachers' instructional pedagogy. Teacher A adapted her facial expressions and gestures to be clear Teacher B stressed the need for articulation and supportive body language. Beaujard & Perini (2022) also support this finding, indicating that in deaf education, effective teaching comes from an use of multimodal communication that combines visual, gestural, and written cues and enhances comprehension as a compensatory means to the lack of auditory input.

Active communication and relationship-building was also at the heart of the teachers' strategies. Both teachers frequently checked for understanding, increased student participation, and initiated personal conversations to establish trust and rapport. Teacher A asked students a lot if they understood the material, but Teacher B also asked them about their daily lives, making students feel comfortable and valued. Relational strategies such as these are essential for creating a supportive classroom climate and improving student well-being. Recent research has shown that teacher-student bonds are positively associated with all types of student engagement and negatively associated with behavioural and cognitive disengagement (Pérez-Salas et al., 2021)

One of the most important strategies noted in teaching English to deaf students is to speak clearly, and to make sure articulation is visible, rather than just to speak loudly. Teachers A and B acknowledged that for deaf learners, articulation and facial expression are more critical than volume because many learners utilize visual access to spoken language (i.e. lip-reading). Recent evidence strongly supports this approach by highlighting that visual access to language through clear lip movements, facial expressions, and written support greatly aids language acquisition and understanding for deaf learners (Mayer & Trezek, 2020) Teachers can ensure clarity of speech and an emphasis on visual accessibility, making even less-clear speech accessible to a deaf student in the same classroom.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Conclusion

Teachers faced the challenges of having significant difficulty in adapting teaching materials to suit deaf learners, the need for a lack of methodological diversity, and the frequency of repetitions and visual support, which were extremely difficult to maintain in the class environment. These were compounded by a lack of resources coupled with the need to address the wide range of student abilities in a single classroom.

The English teachers used different approaches to tackle these challenges. They used different visual images, interactive digital tools, and visual representations to facilitate understanding for students. They also stressed the importance of enunciating clearly, using facial expressions, and utilizing body language to aid one's ability to communicate. Key strategies included student-centered approaches

such as building personal relationships and creating a supportive classroom environment. In addition, teachers employed interactive and hands-on learning experiences to create a more dynamic and relevant experience for deaf students. The above strategies demonstrate how deaf learners can be effectively taught English using visual, interactive, relationship-based methods.

Suggestion

Suggestions for Schools Regarding Students with Disabilities. The researcher strongly recommends that schools, in collaboration with the government, place greater emphasis on addressing the unique learning needs of students with disabilities. This can be achieved by providing supportive and accessible learning media tailored to these students' requirements. For example, the integration of interactive whiteboards in classrooms can significantly enhance student engagement and improve the overall effectiveness of the learning process. Interactive whiteboards offer dynamic and visual learning experiences that cater to diverse learning styles, including those of students with special needs such as hearing impairments, visual impairments, or cognitive challenges. These tools facilitate interactive lessons, allowing students to participate actively and receive immediate feedback, which is crucial for their understanding and retention of material.

Future research may conduct a comparative analysis of the challenges and strategies faced by English teachers working with deaf students across various regions within a country. Additionally, future studies should investigate the potential benefits of digital tools and interactive media in aiding deaf students' English language acquisition. These studies could assess the effectiveness of different technologies, how educators can integrate them into the classroom, and the necessary support for teachers.

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