

Adapted Pedagogical Strategies in Teaching English to Young Learners with Hearing Impairment

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Abstract

Teaching English to young learners with hearing impairment requires instructional approaches. The various strategies can be adapted in the teaching and learning process. This article aims to explore strategies for professional teachers to teach English to young learners with hearing impairments. The method used is a qualitative case study that employs interviews, observations, and document analysis to collect data. The findings indicate that a total communicative approach is an appropriate strategy for communicating with the learners. Moreover, the teacher's creativity and professional training are also included in the teacher's improvement. However, during implementation, the teacher faces several challenges, both internal and external. Therefore, the collaboration from many stakeholders is essential to maximise the targeted learning outcome. This article is expected to provide readers with in-depth information to help them develop strategies for teaching English to young learners with hearing impairments.

Keywords: hearing impairment, teacher strategies, young learners

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INTRODUCTION

Students with hearing impairment experience varying degrees of hearing loss that significantly influence their access to spoken language, communication development, and academic learning. The diversity of hearing conditions, ranging from mild to profound and from congenital to acquired, results in heterogeneous language and learning profiles among deaf learners (Ndibalema, 2025). Although students with disabilities are increasingly recognized and provided access to educational services alongside their peers without disabilities (Bakken, 2019), learners with hearing impairment differ fundamentally in how they access information. Unlike hearing students, they rely predominantly on visual channels such as written language, gestures, lip-reading, sign language, and visual representations to construct meaning (Marschark & Knoors, 2020).

In the context of English language learning, these characteristics pose additional challenges, particularly in Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language and structurally differs from

Bahasa Indonesia. English instruction for deaf students is shaped by limited access to auditory input, restricted exposure to phonological features, and varying levels of first-language proficiency, all of which complicate vocabulary development, grammatical accuracy, and the comprehension of abstract concepts (Suryanto et al., 2025). Consequently, English learning for students with hearing impairment is more cognitively and linguistically demanding than in mainstream classrooms, requiring instruction that is highly individualized and responsive to learners' sensory and cognitive needs.

Communication practices among students with hearing impairment further reflect this diversity. Learners may use Indonesian Sign Language (BISINDO), lip-reading, finger spelling, written language, or a combination of these modes. BISINDO, which functions as a first language for many deaf individuals in Indonesia, plays a crucial role not only in communication but also in shaping identity and social belonging (Fadlilah et al., 2024). However, inconsistent mastery of sign language and limited Bahasa Indonesia vocabulary often create communicative gaps between teachers and students, affecting instructional delivery and classroom interaction. This reality underscores the pedagogical relevance of Total Communication approaches that integrate oral, manual, and visual modalities to maximize accessibility and comprehension (Nugraha et al., 2024).

Given these learning and communication characteristics, English teaching for students with hearing impairment cannot rely on conventional ELT strategies designed for hearing learners. Research consistently emphasizes the need for visually oriented, scaffolded, and flexible instructional strategies supported by adapted materials, multimodal communication, and continuous assessment (Suryanto et al., 2025). Within this framework, teachers function not only as language instructors but also as mediators who bridge linguistic, cognitive, and communicative gaps, aligning with principles of adaptive pedagogy that emphasize responsiveness to learner diversity (Putri et al., 2024). Understanding these learner characteristics is therefore fundamental for designing effective English instruction in Sekolah Luar Biasa Negeri (SLBN) contexts.

At the national level, health surveillance data indicate that approximately 0.4% of Indonesia's population aged 1 and older experiences some degree of hearing loss. Despite this recognition, disaggregated and context-specific data on school-aged children with hearing impairment, particularly those enrolled in SLBN, remain limited. Existing datasets provide only partial insights and fail to capture the instructional realities of special school settings. At the classroom level, English instruction in SLBN is frequently constrained by limited English-specific materials, insufficient teacher preparation in deaf education, and heterogeneous classrooms that include students with multiple disabilities. These conditions compel teachers to rely heavily on personal experience and adaptive decision-making rather than systematic pedagogical guidance.

Despite these conditions, a clear research gap remains. Existing studies predominantly address inclusive education in general terms or focus on English instruction in mainstream or single-grade special education settings. Empirical research on how English teachers adapt instructional strategies in multi-grade classrooms for students with hearing impairments in Indonesian SLBNs, particularly in non-metropolitan contexts, remains scarce. Consequently, there is limited understanding of how policy expectations are enacted in daily practice and how teachers navigate compounded challenges, including mixed-grade instruction, limited resources, and varying levels of language accessibility.

To address this gap, the present study adopts a qualitative case study approach to explore English teaching practices in their natural context (Yin, 2018). Focusing on an A-accredited SLBN in Tasikmalaya, where English is taught by an experienced teacher with extensive training in special needs education, this study examines a pedagogical context that is rarely represented in existing research. By investigating this single, information-rich case, the study aims to generate contextualized insights that contribute to a deeper understanding of English language teaching in special education and inform both policy implementation and teacher professional development for deaf and hearing-impaired learners in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the instructional strategies used by an English teacher in teaching students with hearing impairment, the challenges encountered during the teaching and learning process, and the adaptive responses developed in classroom practice. A qualitative approach was chosen to allow an in-depth examination of pedagogical practices in their natural classroom context and to capture the complexity of teacher–student interactions that cannot be adequately represented through quantitative methods.

The research was conducted in a special secondary school in Indonesia that provides educational services for students with hearing impairment. The participants consisted of one English teacher and students with hearing impairment at the secondary level. The students demonstrated diverse characteristics, including varying levels of hearing loss and learning abilities, and some exhibited co-existing conditions such as mild intellectual disabilities. The teacher had experience teaching English in special education settings and was responsible for planning and implementing the observed lessons.

Data were collected through classroom observation. The researcher acted as a non-participant observer and focused on teacher–student interactions, instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement during English lessons. Observation data were recorded using observation sheets, field notes, and observation transcripts. Particular attention was given to verbal and nonverbal teacher actions, including the use of visual supports, body language, lip-reading, and simple sign language, as well as students' responses to instructional activities. During the observation stage, the researcher systematically recorded instructional practices and classroom dynamics as they naturally occurred. After the observation, the collected data were organized and prepared for analysis. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that the English teacher employed various adaptive pedagogical strategies to facilitate learning for students with hearing impairment. The most frequently observed strategies included repetition, visual supports, body language, lip reading, and simple sign language. These findings are consistent with recent studies emphasizing the importance of multimodal and visually mediated instruction for learners with limited auditory access (Marschark et al., 2018; Alasim, 2020). Repetition was used to reinforce vocabulary and grammatical structures, particularly possessive pronouns, which aligns with recent research highlighting repetition as a key strategy in supporting language retention among students with hearing impairment (Ald et al., 2025; Yusof & Nordin, 2021).

Several instructional challenges were also identified. Students experienced difficulties in understanding abstract grammatical concepts, showed fluctuating attention during lessons, and were affected by limited instructional resources. These challenges reflect findings from recent research on inclusive education, indicating that grammar learning remains a significant barrier for learners with hearing impairments due to reduced linguistic input and limited exposure to spoken language structures (Knoors & Marschark, 2019; Szarkowski & Brice, 2022). Attention loss and disengagement observed in this study further support evidence that inaccessible instructional input may lead to reduced participation in classroom activities (Antia et al., 2018; Cawthon et al., 2020).

To address these challenges, the teacher demonstrated adaptive responses through intensified scaffolding and individualized support. The use of step-by-step guidance, immediate feedback, and multimodal communication reflects contemporary views on adaptive pedagogy, which emphasize instructional flexibility and responsiveness to learner diversity (Florian, 2019; Tomlinson, 2023). The teacher's approach of approaching students individually and using gestures and sign language to clarify meaning aligns with recent findings that personalized support enhances engagement and comprehension among students with hearing impairment (Luckner et al., 2019; Luft et al., 2021).

The observed instructional practices also resonate with current interpretations of the Total Communication approach, which continues to be recognized as an effective framework for language instruction by integrating spoken language, visual cues, and sign-supported communication (Marschark & Knoors, 2020; Spencer et al., 2023). Rather than relying on a single communication mode, the teacher flexibly adjusted instructional delivery to ensure accessibility, confirming recent arguments that hybrid communication practices are essential in inclusive English classrooms (Al-Ahdal & Alqasham, 2020).

Limited instructional resources further shaped the teacher's pedagogical decisions. Similar to findings from recent studies in resource-constrained educational settings, the teacher compensated for institutional limitations through improvisation and maximized use of available materials such as the blackboard and students' notebooks (Sharma et al., 2018; Singal, 2020). This highlights the critical role of teacher agency in sustaining inclusive instruction when institutional support is insufficient.

Overall, the findings suggest that effective English instruction for students with hearing impairment depends not only on the availability of resources but also on the teacher's capacity to implement adaptive pedagogical strategies. By integrating repetition, scaffolding, and multimodal communication, the teacher created a more accessible and meaningful learning environment. These findings extend recent inclusive education research by illustrating how adaptive pedagogy operates in real classroom contexts and by emphasizing the intersection of adaptive pedagogy, Total Communication, and sociocultural learning principles.

The implications of this study are twofold. Theoretically, the findings reinforce recent scholarship advocating adaptive and multimodal approaches to inclusive language education. In practice, the study underscores the need for professional development programs that equip teachers with adaptive instructional skills and strategies for teaching English to students with hearing impairments. Additionally, educational institutions are encouraged to enhance instructional resources and classroom conditions to better support inclusive English learning.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that English instruction for students with hearing impairment relies heavily on the teacher's ability to implement adaptive pedagogical strategies that ensure instructional accessibility and learner engagement. The findings indicate that adaptive pedagogy, characterized by flexible instructional delivery, multimodal communication, and responsive classroom interaction plays a central role in addressing the instructional needs of students with limited auditory access. Through the integration of visual support, repetition, and individualized scaffolding, English learning can be made more accessible and meaningful, even in contexts with limited institutional resources.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The research focused on a single classroom and relied primarily on classroom observation, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study did not examine students' learning outcomes or longitudinal instructional effects. Future research may expand the scope by involving multiple schools, employing diverse data collection methods, or exploring the long-term impact of adaptive pedagogical strategies on English language development among students with hearing impairment.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Intan Sri Wardani: Conceptualization, Methodology, and Validation; **Intan Sri Wardani:** Methodology, Formal Analysis, Resources, and Writing - Original Draft; and **Lusi Nurhayati:** Data Curation, Project Administration, and Writing - Original Draft.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare no known financial conflicts of interest or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this manuscript.

DECLARATION OF ETHICS

The authors declare that the research and writing of this manuscript adhere to ethical standards of research and publication, in accordance with scientific principles, and are free from plagiarism.

DECLARATION OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

The authors declare that Generative Artificial Intelligence and other assistive technologies were not excessively utilized in the research and writing processes of this manuscript.

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