



Inclusive Pedagogy in Practice: Teaching English to Deaf and Mute Students in Elementary School

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Abstract

This study explores the instructional procedures, challenges, and coping strategies involved in teaching English to deaf and mute students in an inclusive classroom. Although inclusive education continues to expand, English instruction for learners with hearing impairments remains difficult because of communication barriers and limited access to auditory input. This research uses a descriptive qualitative case study with participants consisting of two deaf and mute sixth-grade students, an English teacher, and a sign language teacher. Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews and were analyzed using an interactive qualitative model. The findings show that English instruction followed three stages, namely pre activity, whilst activity, and post activity. Sign language, visual aids, and clear multimodal explanations played an important role in supporting comprehension. Teachers experienced challenges related to communication, differentiation, and classroom management, while students struggled with pronunciation, social interaction, and tasks that relied on sound. The study concludes that effective English instruction for deaf and mute learners requires adaptive, visually oriented, and collaborative teaching practices. These findings contribute to a clearer understanding of how inclusive classrooms can support equitable and meaningful language learning for students with hearing impairments.

Keywords: Inclusive; Education; English; Deaf and Mute; Teaching

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1. Introduction

Historically, students with disabilities were frequently segregated from mainstream education and placed in separate institutions, a practice intended to provide specialized support but which often restricted their access to rich academic experiences and meaningful social interaction (Kwon, 2005). Such segregation reinforced societal assumptions that students with disabilities were fundamentally different or unable to participate in regular learning environments. As a result, these students commonly faced long-term educational disadvantages, limited peer relationships, and reduced opportunities for developing essential social and cognitive skills. The shift toward inclusive education marks a significant



transformation in how disability is understood within educational systems. Instead of treating disability as a deficit that requires isolation or special treatment, inclusive education frames it as a natural form of human diversity that can enhance the learning environment for everyone (Kaur et al., 2016). This perspective emphasizes that all students, regardless of ability, have the right to learn together and benefit from shared experiences (Padmadewi, Artini, et al., 2024). In practice, inclusive education requires schools to create flexible learning environments that respond to varied needs and promote active participation. This includes adapting teaching strategies, providing appropriate supports, and fostering classroom cultures that value collaboration, empathy, and mutual respect. When implemented effectively, inclusive education not only expands academic access for students with disabilities but also cultivates a sense of belonging and social cohesion among the entire student community.

Despite its growing acceptance, implementing inclusive education remains challenging, particularly when addressing the needs of students with specific disabilities such as deafness and muteness (Adnyani et al., 2021). Deaf and mute students often face communication barriers, limited access to auditory information, and social isolation, which can hinder their academic progress (Azzayati, 2023). However, with appropriate support, assistive technologies, and inclusive teaching practices, these students can thrive both academically and socially. Effective inclusive practices require teachers to adapt their instructional strategies, collaborate with specialists, and create learning environments that encourage participation from all learners (Padmadewi et al., 2023; Zahron et al., 2023).

Teaching English to deaf and mute students presents distinct challenges due to limitations in verbal communication, which often hinder their language acquisition and interaction with peers. These students require specialized teaching approaches that address linguistic, social, and emotional dimensions of learning. Smith (2023) emphasizes that inclusive teaching methods incorporating visual aids such as images, videos, and interactive technologies play a vital role in helping deaf and mute students grasp English vocabulary and structure. The use of visual tools not only enhances comprehension but also fosters peer interaction, encouraging a more collaborative classroom atmosphere. Furthermore, Johnson (2024) highlights the importance of teacher training in sign language and alternative communication strategies. Educators equipped with these skills can create more inclusive environments by effectively engaging deaf and mute learners, motivating them, and minimizing communication barriers. Brown (2022) further notes that project-based learning approaches can significantly benefit deaf and mute students, as they provide practical, real-life contexts that increase motivation and engagement in English learning. Activities such as poster creation, group presentations, and role-playing allow students to apply language skills in meaningful ways, making learning both interactive and enjoyable.

Applying inclusive and adaptive teaching strategies is therefore essential to support deaf and mute students in mastering the English language. Through the integration of visual learning tools, sign language communication, and interactive pedagogical approaches, teachers can help these students overcome linguistic and social challenges. Such practices not only promote academic achievement but also foster confidence, participation, and social inclusion, which are core values of inclusive education. Empirical evidence thus supports the idea that inclusive education, when supported by well-trained teachers and adequate resources, can



enhance the learning experiences of all students while promoting equity and diversity within the educational system (Padmadewi, Sukadana, et al., 2024; Padmadewi, Sukma, et al., 2024).

In the Indonesian context, efforts to implement inclusive education have expanded, yet effective instructional practices for students with hearing and speech impairments remain inconsistently understood and applied. SDN 2 Bengkala has often been cited in previous studies for its long-standing experience in educating students with hearing impairments and for its integration of sign language into classroom interactions (Narayana, 2024; Suputra, 2024; Suwastini, 2021). Rather than positioning the school as an exemplary model, this study views it as a meaningful site for examining the complexities of implementing inclusive English instruction in a real-world setting where teachers must negotiate diverse linguistic and communicative needs.

Although several studies in Indonesia have explored inclusive education for students with disabilities, most have focused on general classroom practices, school policies, or the use of sign language for facilitating communication. However, research specifically addressing English language instruction for deaf and mute students remains limited. Existing studies tend to overlook how teachers adapt the stages of English teaching, how they collaborate across roles, and how they cope with the unique challenges of teaching a foreign language to learners who rely primarily on visual modes of communication. In particular, there is a lack of empirical work that examines the interplay between instructional procedures, communication strategies, and classroom challenges within an inclusive English classroom. This study therefore investigates how inclusive English instruction is carried out at SDN 2 Bengkala, the challenges encountered by teachers, and the strategies they employ to address these challenges. By examining these aspects in depth, the study aims to fill the gap in the literature concerning pedagogical practices for deaf and mute learners in English language contexts. The findings are expected to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of inclusive education in Indonesia and offer practical insights for teachers, policymakers, and stakeholders seeking to improve learning opportunities for students with hearing impairments.

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative case study design. The case study approach was chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of the process and meaning of English teaching in inclusive classrooms. Qualitative methods were used to capture descriptive data in the form of spoken and written language from participants (Creswell, 2014). The focus of the study was on understanding the teaching process, identifying challenges, and exploring the meanings behind teachers' and students' experiences.

The research was conducted at SDN 2 Bengkala, located in Buleleng Regency, Bali Province, specifically in the sixth-grade inclusive classroom. The school was selected because it implements an inclusive education model where students with special needs learn alongside regular students, supported by specialized teachers. SDN 2 Bengkala is recognized as one of the pioneer schools in Bali practicing inclusive education, making it an ideal setting for this study. The participants consisted of sixth-grade students who are deaf and mute, their English teacher, and a sign language teacher. These participants were selected to provide comprehensive perspectives on the teaching and learning process in inclusive classrooms. The



teachers represented varying levels of experience and specialization in inclusive and special education, while the students provided firsthand insight into their learning experiences.

Data were collected using two main techniques: observation and semi-structured interviews. Classroom observations were conducted to examine the procedures and methods used during English instruction, focusing on pre-activity, whilst-activity, and post-activity stages. An observation checklist was used to systematically record classroom interactions, teaching behaviors, and student responses. In addition, semi-structured interviews were carried out with both the English teacher and the sign language teacher to gain deeper insights into their experiences, the challenges they faced, and the strategies they applied in inclusive teaching. The interviews followed a flexible format that allowed for open-ended responses and the exploration of emerging themes. To ensure data accuracy, the researcher used field notes, an observation guide, and an interview guide, and documented relevant classroom activities through photographs and recordings.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles et al., (2014), which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and organized data relevant to the research objectives. During data display, the information was presented in descriptive text supported by tables and direct quotations to make the findings clearer and more comprehensive. In the final stage, conclusions were drawn and verified through repeated examination of the data to ensure accuracy and consistency. To establish the trustworthiness of the study, triangulation was applied by combining data from both observations and interviews. This approach enhanced the credibility and validity of the findings (Creswell, 2014). Credibility was ensured through direct classroom observation and detailed documentation of teacher–student interactions, while interviews provided complementary perspectives to strengthen the data interpretation. Transferability was achieved by providing a detailed description of the school context, participants, and teaching conditions, allowing other researchers to determine the applicability of the findings in similar settings. Dependability and confirmability were maintained through systematic documentation and the inclusion of direct evidence from the field to support the conclusions drawn.

3. Findings

This study revealed three main findings related to the implementation of English language teaching in an inclusive classroom, particularly in a sixth-grade class consisting of two deaf and mute students and eight regular students at SDN 2 Bengkala. These findings highlight the learning experiences of the students as well as the instructional approaches adopted by teachers in delivering English lessons to deaf and mute learners. The results include three major aspects: the procedures used in teaching English, the challenges encountered by teachers in inclusive settings, and the strategies applied to address these challenges.

Table 1. English Teaching Procedure

Procedures	Meeting 1	Meeting 2	Meeting 3
Pre-Activity a. Greeting b. Praying c. Check Attendance d. Assessing Students' Prior Knowledge e. Setting Clear Learning Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opening greeting and group prayer Attendance check (6 regular students, 2 with hearing and speech impairments) Introduction to "Weather Effects" through -----Q&A for regular students Sign language teacher asked same questions to hearing and speech impaired students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greetings and prayer led by class leader Attendance check (all students present) English teacher asked about future aspirations in Q&A session Sign language teacher conveyed question to deaf and mute students -Teachers introduced lesson focus on future activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers greeted students upon entering Prayer led by class leader Attendance check (6 regular, 2 hearing and speech-impaired students present) Teacher asked about students' future dreams in Q&A session Sign language teacher asked same question to hearing and speech-impaired students
Whilst-Activity a. Interactive Teaching b. Scaffolding c. Monitoring and Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weather images shown via LCD and related vocabulary introduced Sign language teacher explained images and vocabulary to hearing and speech-impaired students English teacher focused on pronunciation practice Paired pronunciation practice for all students, with special support for impaired students Written assessment on whiteboard questions, reviewed by teacher Q&A session and additional explanations to ensure understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LCD projected images of professions; students read vocabulary aloud Sign language teacher explained images and vocabulary to deaf and mute students English teacher guided pronunciation practice Students practiced pronunciation in pairs; deaf and mute students practiced with sign language teacher and peer Teacher wrote questions on whiteboard; students answered in notebooks Answers checked and confirmed by teacher Q&A session with additional explanations as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LCD displayed profession images; regular students read vocabulary aloud Sign language teacher explained images to hearing and speech-impaired students Teacher confirmed pronunciation and guided practice Students practiced pronunciation in pairs; impaired students practiced with sign language teacher and peers Questions about professions written on blackboard; students answered in notebooks Teacher checked answers, confirmed correctness, and held Q&A with additional explanations

Post-Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English teacher summarized the lesson Sign language teacher gave summary for hearing and speech-impaired students Teacher emphasized discipline in reflection Session closed with group prayer led by class leader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English teacher summarized the lesson Sign language teacher summarized for deaf and mute students Teacher emphasized discipline in reflection Lesson ended with group prayer led by class leader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English teacher summarized lesson Sign language teacher summarized for deaf and mute students Teacher emphasized discipline in reflection Lesson closed with group prayer led by class leader
a. Reflection and Review			
b. Closure			

During the pre-activity stage, the teacher consistently used five procedures: greetings, prayers, attendance checks, assessing prior knowledge, and stating learning objectives. The greeting and prayer routines were carried out collaboratively by the English teacher, the sign language teacher, and students, fostering a welcoming and respectful classroom atmosphere. Attendance checks were conducted inclusively using both verbal and visual cues to ensure full participation. Assessing students' prior knowledge and clearly presenting learning objectives helped activate background knowledge and establish clear expectations, allowing all students to understand the purpose and direction of the lesson.

Figure 1. Pre-Activity



In the whilst-activity stage, three main techniques were applied: interactive teaching, scaffolding, and continuous monitoring with feedback. Interactive teaching emphasized student collaboration through discussions and group work, supported by visual materials and sign language to ensure equal participation. Scaffolding was provided progressively, with the teacher and sign language interpreter offering step-by-step guidance early in the lessons and gradually reducing support as students gained independence. Continuous monitoring and feedback were also integrated, allowing the teacher to observe students' responses, provide

immediate assistance, and adapt teaching based on observed needs. These techniques supported language comprehension and encouraged active participation among deaf and mute students.

Figure 2. Whilst Activity



In the post-activity stage, the teacher conducted reflection, review, and closure activities to consolidate learning. Students were guided to summarize key concepts, reflect on their progress, and connect the material to real-life contexts. Deaf and mute students participated using written responses, drawings, or sign language. The lesson closure consistently reinforced understanding and highlighted the practical relevance of English in daily communication.

Figure 3. Post Activities



This study identified three essential instructional strategies that effectively support English language learning for deaf and mute students in an inclusive classroom at SDN 2 Bengkulu: sign language integration, the use of visual aids, and clear instructional delivery.

First, sign language emerged as a central pedagogical tool consistently applied across all teaching phases. Its use ensured accessibility and full participation for deaf and mute students throughout the learning process. During the pre-activity stage, sign language was used to communicate learning objectives and activate prior knowledge. In the whilst-activity phase, it facilitated concept clarification, peer interaction, and instructional scaffolding through signed explanations and visual-spatial grammar. In post-activities, sign language supported lesson summaries, feedback, and reflective questioning. The integration of sign language enhanced student engagement, vocabulary retention, and social inclusion, as hearing students also began using basic signs. These outcomes highlight sign language not as a compensatory tool but as a transformative pedagogical strategy that fosters equitable language learning.

Second, visual aids played a vital role in supporting comprehension and engagement. Visual tools such as illustrated vocabulary cards, timelines, diagrams, and interactive whiteboards were used consistently across all learning stages. In pre-activities, visuals introduced new concepts and built context; in whilst-activities, they clarified grammar and guided interactive exercises; and in post-activities, they reinforced understanding through visual summaries and reflection charts. Visual supports strengthened comprehension, improved vocabulary retention, and encouraged independent learning among deaf and mute students. The study concludes that systematic and well-aligned visual aids are fundamental to inclusive English instruction, serving as both instructional scaffolds and independent learning tools. Finally, clear instructional delivery was found to be essential for ensuring comprehension and engagement. Teachers used simple and structured language, visual and tactile demonstrations, and repeated key points using both verbal and signed formats. Comprehension was verified through gestures, modeling, and visual confirmation systems. This multimodal approach minimized misunderstandings, promoted smoother task transitions, and built students' confidence. The effectiveness of this approach was supported by teacher collaboration with sign language interpreters, adequate resource provision, and specialized training in multimodal communication.

Figure 4. Sign Language Use





The observation results indicate that teaching English in an inclusive classroom presents several challenges, with communication emerging as the most significant. Teachers must ensure that all students, including those with hearing and speech impairments, attain the same level of understanding of the lesson content. This requires the use of clear, adaptive, and effective communication strategies that accommodate diverse learner needs. A central factor in overcoming communication barriers is the active involvement of the sign language teacher, who serves as a bridge between hearing students and those who are deaf or mute. Their collaboration ensures that lesson information is accurately conveyed and that all students can participate meaningfully. However, this reliance on interpretation can sometimes slow the pace of instruction and disrupt lesson flow. Another key challenge relates to vocabulary pronunciation. Deaf and mute students often experience difficulty articulating words correctly, necessitating additional practice and individualized feedback from teachers. Providing such targeted support can be demanding in a classroom where instructional time and teacher attention must be shared among all students. Teachers also face difficulties in assessing students' comprehension levels, as varying abilities and communication modes can lead to misunderstandings. To address this, teachers must employ multiple assessment approaches, such as visual aids, interactive activities, and peer collaboration, to accurately evaluate understanding and reinforce learning.

The observations from Meetings 1, 2, and 3 revealed that differentiation in learning poses considerable challenges for teachers in inclusive classrooms. One of the main difficulties lies in designing materials and activities that are accessible and meaningful for all students, including those with hearing and speech impairments. This process requires careful planning to ensure equal engagement and comprehension. Teachers noted that visual aids, such as images projected on LCD screens, are vital for enhancing understanding among deaf and mute students. However, preparing suitable visual materials that align with lesson objectives can be time-consuming and demands additional resources. The effectiveness of these materials also depends on their clarity and relevance to individual student needs.

Differentiation further challenges teachers when designing paired or group activities. Teachers must carefully balance varying levels of ability, comprehension, and social dynamics to ensure that all students receive appropriate support while maintaining opportunities for independent learning. Managing time effectively is another key concern, as students learn at different paces. Some require additional time and scaffolding, while others complete tasks quickly and need further enrichment. Teachers reported that adapting lessons spontaneously to meet these varying needs can be stressful and occasionally disrupt the lesson flow. These findings underscore the need for continuous training and institutional support to help teachers apply differentiated instruction effectively in inclusive classrooms.

Classroom management also emerged as a significant challenge. Maintaining active participation among students with diverse abilities requires flexible teaching methods, varied learning materials, and constant monitoring. Teachers often struggle to engage both hearing and deaf students simultaneously, particularly during vocabulary practice or pronunciation



activities. Managing classroom behavior and maintaining focus can be complex, as teachers must accommodate different learning needs while promoting an inclusive and supportive environment.

Establishing clear routines and behavioral expectations is essential but often difficult in inclusive settings, where students' comprehension and communication abilities vary. Teachers emphasized the need for consistent reinforcement and patience to ensure that all students understand and follow classroom rules. Despite these challenges, the observations indicated that structured routines, collaboration with sign language teachers, and adaptive strategies can promote a positive classroom atmosphere. Overall, the challenges of differentiation and classroom management in inclusive English teaching highlight the importance of ongoing professional development, collaboration, and institutional support. Addressing these areas will enable teachers to manage diverse classrooms more effectively and ensure that all students, regardless of ability, can participate meaningfully and achieve success in their English language learning.

4. Discussion

The teaching process observed in this study is systematically organized into three phases: pre-activity, whilst-activity, and post-activity. Although this structure aligns with common instructional models in EFL teaching, its implementation at SDN 2 Bengkulu reveals unique adaptations shaped by the needs of deaf and mute learners. In the pre-activity phase, routines such as greetings, prayer, and attendance not only establish classroom order but also serve as foundational socialization moments that reinforce a sense of belonging for students with hearing impairments. The early collaboration between the English teacher and the sign language teacher is especially significant. Rather than simply functioning as translation support, this collaboration reflects a co-teaching dynamic that supports multimodal meaning-making, consistent with inclusive pedagogy principles emphasizing shared expertise and distributed responsibility.

During the whilst-activity phase, the use of visual media, scaffolding, and interactive tasks directly supports students' learning within their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). These practices confirm findings from earlier studies showing that multimodal instruction is essential for bridging communication gaps and promoting active engagement among deaf learners (Marschark & Spencer, 2010). However, the present study extends that literature by demonstrating how multimodal strategies are integrated across entire instructional cycles—not only as supplementary aids but as core pedagogical tools. Students' responses during classroom observation also suggest that visual scaffolds, such as picture cues and modeled signing, help reduce cognitive load and facilitate comprehension, especially when learning new vocabulary and sentence structures.

The post-activity phase illustrates how reflection and consolidation are adapted to an inclusive context. Summaries delivered through sign-supported communication ensure that deaf and mute students can internalize the lesson content alongside their hearing peers. This



finding resonates with Napier and Leeson (2016) who argue that accessible forms of review and feedback are crucial for reinforcing linguistic and conceptual understanding in deaf learners. At the same time, student interviews indicate that some learners still rely heavily on the sign language teacher for clarification, suggesting that the current scaffolding, while helpful, does not yet fully promote independent comprehension.

Despite the strengths of this structured and collaborative approach, several challenges persist. Communication delays caused by reliance on sign interpretation confirm longstanding concerns raised in the literature regarding pacing and interactional flow in classrooms that depend on mediated communication (Wijayanti et al., 2025). Differentiated instruction also remains difficult to implement effectively, echoing Dewi et al., (2025) observation that inclusive teaching requires considerable time and resource investment. From the students' perspective, pronunciation challenges and limited auditory exposure create barriers to learning phonological aspects of English. These difficulties mirror findings from Antia et al., (2002) , yet this study adds nuance by showing how students' struggles with pronunciation also affect their participation, confidence, and peer interactions.

Although teachers at SDN 2 Bengkala demonstrate adaptability through the use of visual cues, tactile strategies, individualized support, and peer collaboration systems, these solutions do not fully resolve the structural limitations of teaching a sound-based language to learners without auditory access. The buddy system, for example, enhances social inclusion but depends heavily on the willingness and capability of hearing peers, creating variability in support quality. Similarly, visual and tactile methods help approximate pronunciation practice but cannot replace experiential learning through hearing.

These findings carry broader implications for inclusive education practice and policy. First, they highlight the need for sustained teacher training in multimodal and bilingual approaches that combine sign language with written and visual representations of English. Second, they point to the importance of institutional support, such as reduced class sizes, specialized instructional materials, and time allocations for collaborative planning. Finally, the challenges observed suggest that policy frameworks should consider more explicit guidance on how foreign language curricula can be adapted for students with hearing impairments, ensuring that inclusion is not merely structural but pedagogically meaningful. Overall, the study shows that while SDN 2 Bengkala has developed promising practices that support participation and comprehension, significant gaps remain in achieving equitable linguistic outcomes. These insights contribute to a more critical understanding of what inclusive English teaching looks like in practice and offer a foundation for further research on pedagogical innovations for deaf and mute learners in Indonesia.

5. Conclusion and Suggestion

This research examined the procedures, challenges, and coping strategies in teaching English to deaf and mute students within an inclusive classroom at SDN 2 Bengkala. Inclusive education plays a vital role in ensuring equal access to quality learning for all students,

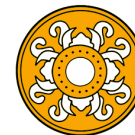


including those with special needs. However, deaf and mute students face distinct challenges in language learning due to auditory and communication barriers, making English instruction particularly demanding. Findings revealed that English teaching at SDN 2 Bengkala follows three structured phases: pre-activity, whilst-activity, and post-activity. The pre-activity phase establishes inclusivity through greetings, prayer, and attendance routines. The whilst-activity phase emphasizes interactive learning, scaffolding, and continuous feedback using sign language and visual aids. The post-activity phase reinforces learning through reflection and review, ensuring comprehension through multimodal support. Collaboration between the English and sign language teachers is central to the process, enabling deaf and mute students to participate fully.

Despite these effective practices, several challenges persist. Teachers face communication barriers that sometimes slow lesson flow, difficulties in differentiating instruction to meet varied needs, and challenges in classroom management. Meanwhile, deaf and mute students struggle with pronunciation, social interaction, and recognizing auditory elements of language. To address these issues, teachers employ adaptive strategies such as integrating sign language and visual aids, offering individualized instruction, and using non-verbal signals for classroom control. Targeted pronunciation exercises, visual-tactile learning techniques, and a buddy system for peer support further enhance inclusion. In conclusion, effective inclusive English teaching for deaf and mute students requires a structured, adaptive, and multimodal approach. Success depends on clear communication, individualized support, and strong collaboration between teachers. While challenges remain, the commitment of teachers at SDN 2 Bengkala demonstrates that inclusive education can promote equitable participation and meaningful learning for all students. Future research should explore broader contexts and the role of technology in enhancing inclusive English instruction for students with hearing and speech impairments.

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