Effective English Teaching Strategies for Deaf Students: A Study at SMP SLB Negeri 1 Buleleng

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Abstract

This study explores the strategies used by teachers, how these strategies are applied in the classroom, and the challenges that appear during the learning process. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through interviews and classroom observations. The findings show that visual based methods such as the use of Sign Language SIBI, kinesthetic strategies, and various forms of visual media play an important role in improving students' understanding of English. Sign Language provides clear visual cues that help increase students' confidence and motivation, while visual and kinesthetic activities make lessons more engaging and easier to follow. However, the application of these methods is still limited by the lack of teaching materials, differences in language structure, and teachers' varying mastery of instructional techniques. This study highlights the importance of teacher preparation, the development of inclusive learning resources, and the use of technology to support the English learning needs of deaf students. Overall, the findings underline the need to create an inclusive learning environment that offers equal opportunities for students with special needs.

1. Introduction

Hearing impairment refers to a partial or complete limitation in the ability to perceive sound, and it remains one of the most common forms of disability worldwide. The World Health Organization (2021) reports that millions of children and adults experience disabling hearing loss, which influences their ability to communicate, participate socially, and access education. Because hearing plays a crucial role in processing sound-based information for interaction, students with hearing loss often require alternative modes of communication, including sign language, lip reading, or visual learning materials (Antia et al., 2002; Sriadi et al., 2025). These accommodations are essential to ensure that deaf learners can receive equal opportunities in educational settings.

Learning English presents additional challenges for deaf students because most English instruction relies on spoken communication and auditory cues. Crowe et al., (2017) explain that deaf learners often struggle with vocabulary and grammar because many linguistic features are presented through spoken exchanges, they cannot fully access. Furthermore, numerous English words do not have direct equivalents in sign language, making vocabulary learning more complex. Berent (2001) adds that deaf learners face significant difficulties with phonological aspects of English due to the absence of auditory experience. These limitations require teachers to adapt instructional approaches that can bridge the gap between visual learning styles and the structure of spoken English (Dewi, 2018).

Teachers therefore play a central role in developing effective and accessible learning experiences for deaf students. Tambunal and Ismail (2024) emphasizes that deaf students' learning abilities can be optimized when teachers intentionally apply suitable teaching methods, provide appropriate learning materials, and use visual based media that align with students' needs. Common approaches used in special education contexts include the use of sign language, multisensory learning, kinesthetic activities, contextual teaching methods, and visual aids such as pictures, videos, or interactive digital resources (Padmadewi et al., 2023; Silva, 2025). These strategies help make English instruction more engaging and easier to understand, especially for students who rely heavily on visual information.

English is recognized as a global language with important roles in education, technology, and international communication. Putra et al., (2024) notes that English serves as a universal medium for cross border interaction and academic exchange. For deaf students, mastering English opens access to a wide range of digital resources, international learning materials, and technology-based platforms that are not always available in Indonesian or local languages. Proficiency in English can also expand their opportunities for further education, participation in global programs, and competitiveness in the job market. Earlier studies, such as Padmadewi et al., (2024), highlight the importance of tailored teaching strategies to support the unique needs of students with disabilities, including deaf learners, so they can meaningfully participate in English learning.

SLB Negeri 1 Buleleng was selected as the focus of this study because it has a structured English program at the junior high school level and actively implements various adapted teaching strategies. The school uses the Independent Curriculum, which supports flexible, student centered, and inclusive learning approaches (Dewi et al., 2021). This curriculum allows teachers to modify learning materials and instructional methods according to students' needs, such as incorporating sign language, visual media, gestures, picture cards, and technology-based tools. While these strategies are regularly used, the extent to which they enhance students' understanding and the challenges teachers face during instruction still require deeper investigation to ensure the learning process is effective.

Despite the growing body of research on English instruction for deaf learners, several gaps remain in the existing literature. Previous studies have largely focused on identifying general strategies, media, or models used in special education contexts without providing detailed descriptions of how these methods are implemented in real classroom settings, particularly within Indonesian special schools. Moreover, many studies emphasize learning outcomes or theoretical recommendations, while fewer investigations explore teachers'

instructional practices alongside the practical challenges they encounter during the teaching process. There is also limited empirical evidence examining English teaching methods for deaf students under the Independent Curriculum framework, which allows greater flexibility but requires strong pedagogical adaptation. Consequently, there is a lack of context-specific research that documents both instructional approaches and teacher-related obstacles in junior high school settings for deaf learners. Addressing this gap is important to generate practical insights that can inform more effective and inclusive English teaching practices. Given these conditions, this study aims to analyze English teaching methods used for deaf students at SMP SLB Negeri 1 Buleleng and to identify the obstacles encountered by teachers throughout the instructional process. Understanding these aspects is essential for improving classroom practices and ensuring that deaf learners receive equitable access to quality English education.

2. Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach. Creswell (2014) states that this method describes situations or phenomena accurately and systematically based on real data. The study was conducted at SLB Negeri 1 Buleleng, Bali. The school, established in 2023, is a state special education institution that provides services for students with different types of disabilities. Although the school has several classes for various needs, this study focuses specifically on the deaf class. LBN 1 Buleleng has fourteen junior high-level students with hearing impairments, consisting of eight boys and six girls. The primary participants consisted of the English teacher who teaches deaf students at the junior high school level and the deaf students enrolled in the English classes. These participants were chosen because they were directly engaged in the planning and implementation of English instruction and experienced the teaching and learning process firsthand. All fourteen junior high-level deaf students at SLB Negeri 1 Buleleng were included as student participants to ensure a comprehensive understanding of classroom practices across grade levels. The inclusion of all students was considered appropriate due to the limited number of learners and the individualized nature of instruction. In addition, the English teacher was selected as a key informant because of their central role in designing instructional strategies, selecting learning materials, and addressing challenges during classroom implementation. This selection ensured that the data reflected both instructional practices and the practical constraints encountered in teaching English to deaf students.

In this study, the researcher used observation and interviews as the primary techniques for gathering data. Observation involves gathering data by directly watching events and behaviors in their natural setting. This study used participatory observation, where the researcher was present in the classroom to observe the teaching and learning process at SLBN 1 Buleleng. The researcher recorded how teachers interacted with students, the methods they used, the learning materials applied, and students' responses during English vocabulary lessons. This technique provided a real picture of how teaching strategies were implemented and helped validate data from interviews. The observation sheet is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Observation Sheet

Method for Teach English to Deaf Students (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011)	Indicators	Meeting		
		I	II	II
Visual Method	Use visual to communicate meaning (text, picture, diagrams, videos)			
Sign Language Method	Use sign language as a means of communication			
Multi-Sensory Learning Method	Combine Kinesthetic, tactile, and visual methods			
Technology Utilizing Method	Use of educational technology that facilitates multimodal education.			
Contextual Teaching Method	Use role-plays, everyday conversations and real word settings.			
Total Physical Response (TPR)	Promote a bodily reaction to spoken commands.			
Speech Read Method	Use reading lips and decipher facial expressions.			

The analysis of data in this study followed the interactive model proposed by Miles et al., (2014), which consists of three main steps: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. This model was used to analyze information obtained from observations and interviews with teachers and students at SLBN 1 Buleleng.

1. Data Condensation

Data condensation refers to the process of selecting, simplifying, and organizing the raw data. In this stage, the researcher transcribed the interview recordings, organized the observation notes, and reviewed all data repeatedly to become familiar with the content. The researcher then coded important information related to teaching methods and obstacles. Codes such as "use of visual media," "sign language explanation," "student participation," and "lack of materials" were created. These codes were grouped into categories based on Gilakjani and Ahmadi's (2011) teaching method framework and the challenges teachers reported.

2. Data Display

After the data were condensed and categorized, the next step involved displaying the data in a clear and organized form. The researcher arranged the findings into tables, matrices, and narrative summaries to make it easier to understand patterns that appeared during classroom observations and interviews. Teaching methods such as Visual Method, Sign Language Method, Multisensory Method, Technology Utilizing Method, Contextual Teaching, Total Physical Response, and Speech Read Method were displayed according to how they were used in the classroom. Challenges experienced by the teacher were also displayed in separate tables for clarity.

3. Conclusion Drawing and Verification

The final step involved interpreting the meaning of the data. The researcher compared the results of the observations with the interview findings to check for consistency. For example, if the teacher mentioned using sign language, the researcher verified this through observation notes. Through this process, conclusions were drawn regarding (1) the English teaching methods used for deaf students and (2) the obstacles faced by teachers. Verification

was carried out continuously by checking the accuracy of the data and ensuring that the interpretations were supported by evidence from both instruments.

3. Findings

The English Teaching Methods Used for Deaf Students at SMP SLB Negeri 1 Buleleng.

To answer the first research question, the researcher carried out three classroom observations during the English learning process in classes VII B and IX C at SMP SLBN 1 Buleleng from October 7th to November 4th, 2025. Acting as a non-participant observer, the researcher documented classroom activities, teaching methods, instructional strategies, learning materials, student responses, and the challenges that occurred during the lessons. The Table 3 summarizes the results of the three observations:

Table 1. Supporting Factors

Method for Teach English to Deaf Students (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011)	Indicator	Metting					
		I		II		II	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Visual Learning Method	Use visual to communicate meaning (text, picture, diagrams, video)	✓		✓		✓	
Sign Language Method	Use sign language as a means of communication	✓		✓		✓	
Multisensory Learning Method	Combine kinesthetic, tactile, and visual method	✓		✓		✓	
Technology Utilizing Method	Use of educational technology that facilitates multimodal education.	✓		✓		✓	
Contextual Teaching Method	Use role-plays. Everyday conversations and real-world settings.	✓		✓		✓	
Total Physical Response (TPR)	Promote a bodily reaction to spoken commands.	✓		✓		✓	
Speech Read Method	Use reading lips and decipher facial Expresion		x		x		x

Research at SMP SLBN 1 Buleleng found that teachers use a range of visual and activity-based methods to teach English to deaf students. Data from three classroom observations and an interview with the English teacher show consistent use of visual aids, sign language, multisensory activities, technology, contextual tasks, and Total Physical Response to help students learn vocabulary and simple sentences. Each method contributed to student engagement and comprehension, while practical constraints limited full implementation. The visual learning method relied primarily on pictures, flashcards, short videos, and written cues. Observations showed that pictures paired with written words helped students connect form and meaning, increased attention, and improved word recognition. In the interview the teacher confirmed that pictures are easiest to prepare and most effective for this class. The main limits were scarce multimedia equipment, occasional student visual fatigue, and varied levels of visual literacy among students.

Sign language was used as the main communication medium in the classroom. Observation notes recorded frequent use of SIBI signs, facial expression, and eye contact to explain meanings. The teacher explained that SIBI is the formal system used in lessons, although some students are more familiar with BISINDO which created occasional comprehension gaps. Additional challenges included teachers' limited mastery of sign variants, differences between sign and English sentence structure, and a lack of sign based instructional materials. The multisensory approach combined visual, tactile, and kinesthetic activities such as matching games, real objects, and gestures. When fully applied, this approach increased participation and retention; when sensory channels were reduced, engagement dropped. Practical obstacles were limited tactile resources, the inability to use auditory supports, students becoming confused by simultaneous stimuli, and extra time needed for individualized repetition.

Technology was used to present images, slides, videos, and interactive quizzes. Observations showed that PowerPoint and online quizzes increased motivation and helped students practice vocabulary with immediate feedback. In the interview the teacher praised game-based platforms for maintaining interest. Constraints included limited devices, unstable internet, low digital literacy for some students, and reliance on visual screen time that can cause fatigue. Contextual teaching through role play, labeling real objects, and simple dialogues helped students use English in meaningful situations. Observed activities using real fruits, classroom items, and pair work produced greater confidence and more natural language use than rote drills. Constraints included limited authentic materials, some students' reluctance to perform, and difficulty explaining abstract vocabulary that cannot be easily demonstrated. Total Physical Response was effective for action vocabulary because students physically linked commands to movements. Observations showed high student responsiveness and improved recall when TPR was applied. Reported challenges were limited classroom space, variability in how quickly students followed instructions, the time demands on the teacher for repeated modeling, and difficulty applying TPR to abstract concepts. Overall, the combined evidence indicates that visual and activity-based strategies significantly support English learning for deaf

students at SLBN 1 Buleleng. However, persistent obstacles such as limited resources, variations in sign language familiarity, differences in sentence structure, classroom logistics, and occasional technology issues reduce consistency and effectiveness. The teacher emphasized the need for more tailored materials, additional training in sign and inclusive methods, and expanded technological support to strengthen practice and outcomes.

4. Discussion

The teacher at SLBN 1 Buleleng reported selecting the sign-language approach because it allows deaf students to comprehend English vocabulary more readily. Because students are already familiar with sign communication, they grasp new words faster when sign language is combined with visuals (pictures or text). For example, the teacher stated: *"I use the sign language method to teach English because students can learn the material more easily since they already understand sign language."* This choice aligns with recent research indicating that integrated sign-language instruction supports vocabulary acquisition and literacy for deaf learners. For instance, a 2025 scoping review found that sign-language use in literacy interventions for deaf students significantly improves reading and vocabulary outcomes (Dostal et al., 2025)

Observations in the classroom showed that student engagement and active participation increased when sign language was prominently used: students responded via signs, showed visual feedback, and engaged in class tasks. This is consistent with constructivist learning theory, which posits that active, interactive learning leads to deeper understanding. In a recent Indonesian study of English teaching to deaf students, the structured multimodal approach (including sign, visuals, and repetition) was found to enhance engagement and comprehension (Duniangella et al., 2024) The teacher supplemented sign-based instruction with group activities and sign-based games to maintain motivation, which supports findings from multisensory learning research such as Shams and Seitz (2008) on the value of combining visual and kinesthetic channels.

However, implementation of sign-language instruction revealed significant challenges. The teacher noted that students come from different sign-language backgrounds some use BISINDO and others use SIBI and this variation sometimes leads to misunderstanding of English vocabulary when signs differ. This is in line with findings reported by Bintoro et al., (2023), who documented that teachers of deaf students frequently struggle with inconsistent mastery of sign dialects and differentiated student proficiency in sign languages. n our study, the teacher needed to repeatedly clarify using visuals and gestures, extending instruction time and increasing demand on resources.

To enhance comprehension further, the teacher incorporated technology-based visual aids. For instance, she used PowerPoint slides, images, videos, and interactive quizzes. As she noted: *"When I use pictures or video instead of just text, students are more engaged and grasp the material more quickly."* This aligns with Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer, 2024), which argues that combining text, images and interactive media

strengthens understanding. Recent research confirms this benefit for deaf learners: for example, the study at SLBN 1 Karangasem found that digital tools combined with sign and visuals improved student retention and motivation (Duniangella et al., 2024). Nonetheless, the teacher flagged that technological limitations such as unstable internet connections, lack of devices, and low digital literacy among students remained impediments. The 2025 study on English curriculum implementation for students with special needs likewise reported that infrastructure and resource gaps impede full use of technology (Bedah et al., 2025; Wijayanti et al., 2025)

Additional observations showed that the teacher occasionally combined total physical response (TPR) and contextual teaching methods to anchor vocabulary in movement and real-life situations. For example, students role-played everyday contexts or responded to simple commands in English accompanied by gestures. This approach corresponds with Contextual Learning Theory (Johnson, 2002), which emphasizes that linking learning to real-world contexts boosts relevance and retention. The Indonesian study likewise found that simulation and role-play helped deaf learners use English more confidently.

In summary, the teaching methods used at SLBN 1 Buleleng—particularly sign-language instruction and technology-supported visuals—are clearly supported by recent empirical literature on deaf education. While they achieve positive outcomes in student participation, comprehension, and motivation, persistent obstacles remain, especially regarding sign-dialect differences among students, limited facilities, and resource constraints. To strengthen practice, it is recommended that teacher training be expanded (consistent with Kelly, McKinney & Swift, 2022 on strengthening teacher preparation for deaf learners) and that schools enhance infrastructure and resource availability to enable full realization of multimodal methods.

5. Conclusion and Suggestion

This study concludes that the English teacher at SMP SLBN 1 Buleleng used several strategies adapted to the needs of deaf students. The Sign Language Method was the main approach because it helped students understand vocabulary through visual and kinesthetic cues and increased their participation. The teacher also used Contextual Teaching, such as role-play and simple conversations, to connect English to real-life situations. Technology-based tools, including PowerPoint, videos, and Quizizz, made learning more engaging, while the Multisensory Method supported comprehension through visual and movement-based activities. Although these methods were effective, challenges remained, such as limited facilities, differences in sign-language proficiency, and a lack of specialized learning materials. Overall, English teaching for deaf students requires flexible, multimodal strategies supported by adequate resources and teacher training.

Teachers should continue using multimodal strategies that combine sign language, visual media, technology, and contextual learning. Professional development and collaboration with other educators are recommended to improve teaching skills and sign-language mastery. Students are encouraged to participate actively, practice using new vocabulary through sign

language, and take advantage of visual and digital learning resources. Working in pairs or groups can help build confidence and communication skills. Schools should provide sufficient facilities, such as projectors, visual materials, and technology tools. Support for teacher training and access to digital or sign-based learning materials is essential. Collaboration among teachers, parents, and special education specialists should be strengthened to ensure a supportive learning environment.

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