AMERICAN JOURNAL OF EDUCATION AND LEARNING
ISSN: 2996-5128 (online) | ResearchBib (IF) = 10.91 IMPACT FACTOR
Volume-3| Issue-9| 2025 Published: |30-10-2025|

IMPROVING READING SKILL TO DEAF PUPILS IN THE CLASS

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17439458

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Annotation

This article highlights the current problems of reading skills in teaching English to deaf students. Issue is solving to use best innovative methods by author. Also it is given some practical methods for English teachers who has desire to teach deaf students.

Keywords

innovative methods, reading skills, pre-reading materials, while-reading materials, post reading materials.

Reading is an essential skill in our modern, information-driven society. In recent years, educators and the general public have focused their attention on children with dyslexia, who struggle with reading and rarely catch up with their peers, even as adults. But there□s another segment of our population that also suffers from high levels of illiteracy□those who are deaf.

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Educators and psychologists alike have long debated the reasons why the vast majority of deaf children struggle with reading. As reading researchers Natalie Bélanger and Keith Rayner point out in their recent article in the journal Current Directions in Psychological Science, there□s still no consensus on the reasons for the high levels of illiteracy found in the deaf population.

There is, however, one very obvious□though often overlooked□reason why deaf individuals so frequently struggle with reading. For the vast majority of deaf individuals, American Sign Language is their native language, not English.

ASL isn□t just English in signed format. Rather, it□s an independent language with its own vocabulary and grammar. Consider, for example, the English word □right,□ which has two unrelated meanings, one being □opposite of left□ and the other being □opposite of wrong.□ ASL has different signs for each meaning. Word order is also quite different between the two languages.

When hearing individuals read, they decode written symbols into speech sounds to recreate a spoken text. Learners read out loud, but even proficient

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readers create a □voice in their heads.□ Accessing the meaning of a written word, then, is a two-step process: first convert the written item into spoken format, and then access the meaning of that spoken word.

Since deaf readers generally don□t speak English, they can□t sound out words to access their meaning. Instead, they need to try and associate each written English word with a signed ASL word. I□ve observed young deaf readers signing as they read. Perhaps proficient deaf readers experience □inner sign□ just as proficient hearing readers experience □inner voice.□

I□ve also observed young deaf readers get frustrated at the mismatch in vocabulary and grammar between written English and ASL. What educators need to keep in mind is that they□re trying to teach deaf children to read a second language that they do not speak. This means that the methods used to teach reading to hearing children may not work with deaf individuals.

Certainly people can learn to read a foreign language without speaking it. (My reading comprehension in French and German exceeds my ability to speak either of these languages.) But achieving college-level reading skill in a foreign language you don□t speak is a remarkable feat. Nevertheless, about 5% of deaf Americans do learn to read English at a twelfth-grade level or above.

Studies of proficient deaf readers yield some surprising results suggesting that they are, in some ways, more efficient readers than their hearing counterparts. This has to do with the way in which the visual system of deaf people adjusts to compensate for their loss of hearing.

When you cast your gaze, whether at a written word on a page or at some object in the world, you only have clear, detailed vision in a small region right before your eyes. This is known as foveal vision, and it□s about the size of your thumbnail held at arm□s length. The rest of your peripheral vision is a blur.

As we focus our visual attention, we rely mainly on hearing to detect sudden changes in the environment. (This is just one reason why you shouldn□t text and drive□you don□t hear oncoming traffic inside your car.) Since deaf people can□t listen for unexpected events, they need to rely on their peripheral vision to monitor their surroundings as they focus their attention on a specific spot. As a result, they process information from their peripheral vision much better than hearing people do.

When you read, the subjective experience is the eye moving smoothly along a line of text. But this is an illusion. In fact, your eyes jump from content word to

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content word, skipping over function words like □of□ and □is,□ which can easily be filled in from context. (This is also one reason why it□s so hard to catch misspellings of these words when proofreading.)

Only one or two words will fit within foveal vision at one glance. While hearing readers can take in some information from the periphery, deaf readers take in much more. This means that they can skip farther ahead each time they move to a new section of the text, and they don□t need to skip back as often as hearing readers do. As a result, deaf readers can go through a text somewhat faster than hearing readers while achieving the same level of comprehension.

In sum, learning to read poses particular challenges for deaf individuals, but they also bring special skills to the task that can give them an advantage. The task for educators is to find ways to leverage these advantages while finding ways to help deaf students overcome the difficulties inherent in learning to read a language they don□t speak.

The work in progress described in this paper explores some of the practical and theoretical challenges of the teaching and learning of English as a second language within a bilingual approach. By way of introduction some key practical challenges regarding the teaching of English have been identified, which are evident from working with teachers and children in schools and which will undoubtedly be familiar to many deaf and hearing professionals working in this area.

How can we provide the right kind of exposure to English?

We know that the right kind of exposure to language is essential for successful language learning. Learners need experience of the language they are trying to learn as a complete language, being used for real purposes in meaningful contexts. Hearing children learning English as a second language gain this exposure through the experiences of speaking and listening in that language and this is then consolidated through the written form. In the context of deaf education this exposure is obviously problematic because of the barriers experienced by the learners in accessing the full spoken form. One of our challenges therefore is to develop English teaching strategies and methods which respond to this need for meaningful and accessible exposure to English.

How much formal teaching of English grammar should we do?

We also know that exposure alone is not enough to enable the learners to achieve high levels of competence in their second language and that language also needs to be explained. Learners need to be taught formally how language works, how different language structures carry different meanings and how language fits

together. Deaf children learning English as a second language are likely to rely even more heavily on this more structured formal teaching and so we have to consider how much formal teaching of English we actually do and what types of approaches we will use.

How can we keep the languages of BSL and English separate in our teaching?

In the wider field of second language learning the importance of keeping the two languages separate is stressed as it is argued that this will avoid confusion for the learner. This is another significant issue for the context of deaf education because of the unique form of language mixing we engage in where we use signs selected from British Sign Language (BSL) as a support for the spoken form. There are various systems of coding spoken English which can be collectively referred to as Manually Coded English (MCE). It is likely that in our teaching of deaf children we both shift languages (stop signing and start speaking) and mix languages (use MCE). We need to examine the implications of this and consider whether or not it can realistically be avoided.

How can we enable the children to become more successful language learners?

It is clear from these three practical challenges identified that deaf children are in a very unique language learning situation. They are not only working with two languages but with two very different language modes (a visual/spatial and a linear/spoken/written mode). There are practical difficulties surrounding the issues of exposure to English as a complete language and concerning language separation. Given these challenges we have to develop our knowledge and skills so that we can enable them to become successful and independent second language learners.

This work in progress is driven by these very practical questions but there is also a more theoretical line of enquiry underpinning this work which focuses on the children themselves as language learners. I suspect that it is only by finding out more about their experiences and strategies as English language learners that we will be able to tackle the above questions more confidently. We need to explore the relationship between deaf children's knowledge and use of BSL as a preferred language and their learning of English as a second or foreign language.

We often talk about the transfer of skills from a first to second language but we have not examined this theory in relation to BSL and English in any great depth. The goal of this research is to increase our understanding of the processes involved in learning English as a second language for the deaf child.

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