

CHOOSING BEST MATERIALS IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO DEAF STUDENTS

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Nodira Nabiyeva Rustamjon qizi

Independent researcher

Hearing impairment refers to the inability or limited ability to hear. Some hearing impaired students have mild hearing loss and may be able to use hearing aids to amplify sounds, while others have no sound perception in one or both ears. A person who has no sound perception in both ears is deaf. People may be born deaf or may develop hearing loss from disease, aging, exposure to noise, or trauma. Teachers may find it useful to know the origin or background of a student's hearing impairment.

Challenges of teaching English to the hearing impaired

In some schools, hearing impaired students are educated in a specialized setting with other hearing impaired learners or with other learners who have unrelated difficulties or disabilities. In other schools, hearing impaired students are integrated into classrooms with students who have normal hearing abilities. Teachers may or may not be specially trained to teach hearing impaired learners.

For deaf learners, communication is a daily challenge. Learning an additional language, especially in a foreign country, is more difficult for learners who do not have a strong base in their first language. This is often the case for hearing impaired learners who rely mainly (or entirely) on visual processing for learning. Some hearing impaired students use lip reading and/or sign language or finger spelling for communication in addition to print and visuals.

Trying to learn a new language (which is sometimes compared to the challenges of having hearing loss) is exhausting for those who suffer from hearing impairment. Teaching hearing impaired learners can also be stressful and tiring. Teachers need to adapt their expectations and seek assistance from both specialists and other students. Knowing what to expect can reduce some of the stress. Here are a few challenges that teachers of deaf learners can expect:

- learning how to read the student's facial expressions

- dealing with a student's social delays and emotional problems (fatigue, frustration, self-consciousness, and loneliness) in addition to the learning difficulty

- remembering to face the student as often as possible (keeping objects and hands away from their faces as they teach)

thinking about other students in the class (refraining from exaggerating sounds when speaking)

spending more time prepping (bringing in visual aids or adding captions to videos)

being sensitive to the challenges the student has in and outside the classroom

remembering to check in regularly to make sure the hearing impaired student is still engaged and understanding the content

searching for useful resources for the learner

Being sensitive to a learner's needs

Hearing impaired learners may not appreciate the term "hearing impaired". They may prefer the term "deaf" or "hard of hearing". Teachers should find out how their students would like their difficulties to be labeled as there will be times when you need to mention this challenge to other staff or students. Having a buddy system can be helpful. A buddy can take notes and answer questions and make a student feel more comfortable. A hearing impaired learner may be more comfortable telling his/her buddy that your lesson is too difficult or your body is too difficult to read.

Certain activities that teachers normally use in an ELL classroom, such as watching a video or listening to a recording will need to be modified for a student with hearing impairment. If you can't provide the script for an audio task or the captioning for a video, skip the task until you are properly prepared. Removing the script when it is time to do an exercise or task can be similar to turning off a recording.

Useful communication skills to teach the hearing impaired

In some classrooms, hearing impaired learners are also immigrants or refugees. Their reason for learning an additional language is to survive in an English-speaking country. Teachers should focus on survival skills that are needed most, including some of the following.

writing out instructions

writing point form notes

filling out forms

teaching gestures that English speakers recognize

showing others how to use basic universal signs

writing short form

researching useful sites, apps, or visual materials that come with transcripts or captioning

In the methodology of teaching foreign languages to deaf and hard-of hearing (D/HH) students (surdo-glottodidactics) usually general teaching and learning

strategies are used and regarded as effective. These strategies are varied and depend upon the students involved and a given teacher's characteristics and preferences, as well as the dominant teaching approach within the institution in question or contemporary methodological trends. This tendency is an adequate one, and there are actually no special methods or strategies of teaching and learning that should be used exclusively with a group of D/HH learners. On the other hand, we cannot presume that foreign language teaching should not be in any way modified in classes for D/HH students as this would mean denying this group proper educational support. The general methodological approach and teaching strategies should be carefully and extensively modified and adapted into teaching techniques, activities and classroom materials so as to meet the specific needs of this group. In the field of surdo-glottodidactics, there still exists a shortage of such methodologically modified ideas, techniques and materials that might be used and shared by the teachers of D/HH students. Therefore there is an urgent need for publications presenting particular methodological solutions and methodological empirical studies. The aim of this chapter is to present D/HH students' achievements and difficulties in learning foreign language vocabulary and a set of valuable teaching and learning strategies that might be used during foreign language classes with such a group. The source for the description of the difficulties and the strategies enlisted is the author's 14-year participatory research involving a group of 40 D/HH university students who had been learning English as their foreign language in the years 2000-2014. The program English for the deaf and hard-of-hearing was conducted by the author at John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. All of its participants had a hearing loss of 70 or more decibels, came both from hearing or deaf families and were educated either in mainstream schools or in special institutions for the deaf. None of these demographical characteristics differentiated the groups. Their advances in foreign language learning depended mostly on their personal characteristics: the level of motivation, educational expectations and the ability to structure their learning so as to achieve success. All of them successfully passed their university foreign language exams and reported achieving their personal goals as far as learning a foreign language is concerned.