



ORIGINAL

A study on the approaches of teaching English for deaf and hard-of-hearing (DHH) students in the special higher secondary schools (HSS) in south India

Un estudio sobre los enfoques de la enseñanza del inglés para estudiantes sordos y con problemas de audición (DHH) en las escuelas secundarias superiores especiales (HSS) del sur de la India

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ABSTRACT

Everybody is very much aware of the essentiality of the English language in the lives of 21st-century students for their further studies and successful careers. However, it's found that society does not pay much attention to the language development of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (DHH) students and their future by neglecting them as dumb. The majority of people in the deaf community remain at the threshold, which indicates the least number of deaf in the mainstream. The inability to receptive language prevents them from acquiring natural language through communication. Several special schools exist in India for the deaf community, but their effectiveness in language teaching remains to be seen. Considering this fact, the researcher conducted a study to identify suitable English Language Teaching (ELT) approaches for DHH students, to test whether current methods are fruitful or are there any discrepancies, etc. The study was conducted at four special higher secondary level schools for DHH in South India. The data was collected quantitatively by conducting a survey. A writing assessment and a questionnaire were given. After analyzing the results, it was found that many Indian special schools are following oralism and the students are forced to follow lip-reading. Still, the teachers and the school authorities are not supporting Indian Sign Language (ISL), the first language of the Deaf. The study proposes a hybrid way of combining structural approaches with bilingualism and suggestopedia.

Keywords: Deaf And Hard-Of Hearing; English Language Teaching; Oralism; Lip-Reading; Structural Approaches; Bilingualism; Suggestopedia.

RESUMEN

Todo el mundo es consciente de la importancia de la lengua inglesa en la vida de los estudiantes del siglo XXI para sus estudios y carreras profesionales. Sin embargo, se ha constatado que la sociedad no presta mucha atención al desarrollo lingüístico de los estudiantes sordos y con dificultades auditivas (DHH) y a su futuro, al descuidarlos por considerarlos mudos. La mayoría de las personas de la comunidad sorda permanecen en el umbral, lo que indica el menor número de sordos en la corriente principal. La incapacidad para el lenguaje receptivo les impide adquirir el lenguaje natural a través de la comunicación. En la India existen varias escuelas especiales para la comunidad sorda, pero su eficacia en la enseñanza del lenguaje está por ver. Teniendo en cuenta este hecho, el investigador llevó a cabo un estudio para identificar enfoques adecuados de enseñanza de la lengua inglesa (ELT) para estudiantes DHH, para comprobar si los métodos actuales son fructíferos o existen discrepancias, etc. El estudio se llevó a cabo en cuatro escuelas especiales de enseñanza secundaria superior para alumnos con discapacidad intelectual del sur de la India. Los datos se recogieron cuantitativamente mediante una encuesta. Se realizó una evaluación de la escritura y se

entregó un cuestionario. Tras analizar los resultados, se descubrió que muchas escuelas especiales indias siguen el oralismo y los alumnos se ven obligados a seguir la lectura labial. Sin embargo, los profesores y las autoridades escolares no apoyan la lengua de signos india (ISL), la primera lengua de los sordos. El estudio propone una forma híbrida de combinar los enfoques estructurales con el bilingüismo y la sugestopedia.

Palabras clave: Sordos E Hipoacúsicos; Enseñanza Del Inglés; Oralismo; Lectura Labial; Enfoques Estructurales; Bilingüismo; Sugestopedia.

INTRODUCTION

Deaf education began in India in the late 1980's with the establishment of the first deaf school in Mazagoan in the Bombay Presidency in 1884 by a Roman Catholic mission and the Calcutta Deaf and Dumb School in 1893 and the first school for the deaf in the South India at Palayamkottah was succeeded in 1886.⁽¹⁾ Even after a hundred decades, English education for the deaf is still in a primitive state in many of the established and segregated institutions for the Deaf in India.

Many studies point out the struggle of deaf students to come up to the mark of reading and writing fluency in English language like hearing population as it's a reality. Acquiring writing skills in a foreign language like English, is unquestionably the most essential and, sometimes, the only manner of formal expression of the Deaf community, which is critical to provide them with possibilities to succeed. However, achieving writing fluency in a second language has often been tedious for the deaf community in the absence of auditory input. Somewhat as a result, they form a distinct demographic population, one that has significant difficulties in writing properly and fluently. The researchers have identified several reasons for the writing difficulties of the deaf.

The most affected area of the deaf and hard-of-hearing students is their cognitive domain, which causes the reading and writing dilatory in the English language.⁽²⁾ According to the findings of Berninger et al.⁽³⁾, lower working memory in deaf people is one of the reasons for undeveloped writing elements like spelling, grammar, morphology, translation skill, etc. commonly find in them. Moreover, Sign language is considered as the mother tongue of the deaf community, which doesn't have a written form. Enns et al.⁽⁴⁾ stated in their study on bilingualism that deaf and hard-of-hearing children learn Sign language as their first language and they regarded English as their second language having a written form. The sign language is not a sort of actions or gestures which has its own grammar and sentence structure.⁽⁵⁾ Sentence structure and grammar of the English language is entirely different from the Sign languages. Subject, Verb, Object (SVO) pattern is used as the basic sentence pattern of English language, however the pattern of Sign language isn't same as English, which comply with Object, Subject and Verb (OSV) pattern that detrimentally affects the writing skills of deaf children in English.⁽⁶⁾ Therefore, applying a rigorous and systematic teaching approach to enhance writing skills for deaf and hard-of-hearing students becomes essential and crucial.⁽⁷⁾ Some researchers proved this by carrying out the Test of Written Language-3⁽⁸⁾ to 110 hearing impaired students ranging in grade level from 3rd to higher secondary to determine their level of contextual language and efficiency in sentence patterns, vocabulary, and grammatical structures. The study proved that 45 percent of deaf students have very low contextual language, and the overall findings show that deaf students' syntactic development is lower than that of their hearing peers.⁽⁹⁾ Therefore, the language teaching approaches. The teachers of English in deaf schools or mainstream schools are committed to find materials to meet the unique needs of their special students.⁽¹⁰⁾ The limited language exposure of deaf children makes their teachers more perplexed to adopt a perfect teaching approach to nourish writing skills. Briggles⁽¹¹⁾ states in his study that most deaf and hard-of-hearing children join the schools with no language base. They are language delayed due to various reasons, including lack of parent support if they are not sign users. Hearing parents force them to use verbal language and relay the oral cues, even if that is impossible for a deaf child to speak and receive oral language. This is the reason for language delay and language deprivation in deaf children, which is common in 90 % of them. Before the age of five, hearing students use verbs, nouns, adverbial and adjective phrases to communicate with others, but the case of deaf children is the polar opposite and truly tragic if hearing students might not be suitable for the special group to enhance writing skills the most pertinent skill of the English language. On account of the above mentioned realities, the researcher aims to investigate on the approaches and of English language teaching in the special schools for DHH students and to identify the deficits if any; not only that the study intends to find out the most suitable approach for teaching English for Indian DHH students.

English Language Teaching Approaches

Method, Approach, and Technique are three key terms used frequently and interchangeably in English language teaching pedagogy. English teachers in India use the Grammar-translation method, the Direct Method, the Audio-lingual method, the Bilingual method, Dr Michael West's new method, and Suggestopedia frequently.⁽¹²⁾

The Grammar-Translation Method

The Grammar-Translation Method is a structural method that is regarded as a traditional method of teaching English language. According to this method, a foreign language can be learned through translation. Each English phrase or sentence is supposed to teach here by translating it into the student's mother tongue, which helps students to learn grammatical structures while also providing direct translations of vocabulary to memorise.⁽¹³⁾ Reading and writing skills are more emphasized and unnecessary mistakes are avoided in sentences due to the thorough knowledge of the rules of grammar.⁽¹⁴⁾

Direct Method

The direct method is an interactive method. In assent with the method, students gain the English language similar to their mother tongue by usage naturally through communication, demonstration, dramatization, or role-play, since it's called the natural method as well. It's clear that by comparing the principles of these two methods, the Grammar-Translation method is a better ideal for DHHS than the direct method, which emphasizes language acquisition by auditory information through communication. Due to the absence of the auditory system, acquiring a verbal language like English is absolutely impossible for the deaf. Thus, the first method is more appropriate for the DHHS, as it emphasizes sentence structure and grammar in the English language by enhancing the reading and writing part, the only possible skills of the DHSS.

Audio-lingual Method

Audio-lingual method is a verbal approach similar to direct method. Instead of focusing on vocabulary, it enhances the speaking skills of the students through dialogues based on the structure or patterns.⁽¹⁵⁾ Language learning happens through classroom drills where the teacher inspires the students to repeat sentences that the teacher produces.⁽¹⁶⁾ This method emphasizes verbal communication and situational dialogues, so it may not be suitable for students with listening and speaking difficulties, even a structural approach.

Bilingual Approach

The bilingual approach allows teachers and students to use two languages in the classroom; one is the target language and the other is the native language which has to be achieved that is English. With respect to DHH students' target language shall be English and the mother tongue is Sign language. A vast number of studies exist in the area of Deaf Bilingualism which values their culture and Sign language as well.⁽¹⁷⁾ It gives the students an opportunity to practice Sign language and acquire the English language together. According to Nisha.⁽¹⁸⁾ Sign language has twenty-six hand gestures for twenty-six alphabets in English and signs for seventy-five percent of words. Considering all these facts, the bilingual method can be effectively used for teaching the English language for DHH students. The use of their first language shall be played as a motivating factor to think ideas to transform into the second language. Hence, it may be one of the effective methods for DHH students, but this method isn't focused on the structure or grammatical part for writing enhancement that is essential for strengthening writing skills. Though, bilingualism is widely acknowledged by deaf educators and proponents of the Deaf community which aims to develop children's communication skills, provide them with a higher level of education and bring them into the life of the community.⁽¹⁹⁾

Dr Michael West's New Method

This teaching approach is very special for all Indians as it was exclusively developed for the reading enhancement of Indian children, by Dr. West, the principal of training college ar Dacca who finds reading is the primary skill and writing as secondary.⁽²⁰⁾ Silent reading is encouraged using attractive reading matters and vocabulary in special books according to this approach and it is hailed as a successful approach for strengthening reading skills in all over India.⁽²¹⁾ One has to understand the meaning of a sentence through the understanding of vocabulary and structure of a sentence for reading a book. The DHH students may not be able to understand the basics due to their inability of incidental learning through communication and usage. Hence, the basics should be taught by a teacher to the DHH students in their pace and medium to read and understand English sentences.

Suggestopedia

Suggestopedia is a very active approach to teaching English as a second language, which helps students learn a foreign language more effectively and quickly by making them feel relaxed, interested, and motivated with a motivated and positive mind.⁽²²⁾ Interesting activities such as dialogues, situations, music, visuals, and relaxation exercises can be used to make the process more enjoyable and productive,⁽²³⁾ the same course may not be suitable for DHHS students because it relies on dialogues and situational conversations to help students learn English. Effective communication happens easily in the Deaf through sign language without any barriers, but teaching English must be done through written compositions at the primary level in order to be viable.

Statement of the problem

There are a number of language teaching approaches to enhance basic skills of the English language. Majority of them are aimed to the typical developed normal students.⁽²⁴⁾ The current state of DHH students in the schools of India shows the deplorable state of language teaching and acquisition, even if they know the reality that there is a vast difference in language learning between those who hear and those who can't hear. This can be seen as a big downfall on the part of the authorities in choosing appropriate approaches to teaching a second language such as English, the language of career and education. To assess the actual fall and determine the appropriate approach for teaching English, the study was conducted by selecting Higher Secondary School (HSS) students from the select schools for the deaf in South India

Objectives of the study

To reexamine the English language teaching approaches in the special HSS of DHH students in South India.

METHOD

A survey method was adopted throughout the study. The sample was collected from the four special HSS for the Deaf in South India, three of them in Kerala and the rest in Tamil Nadu. The researcher visited all four institutions since the sample population was from deaf community so required communication in Sign language that the researcher aware as a special educator of DHH students. Approximately one-hundred students from the selected four HSS in South India were participated. The plus one and plus two students in those special schools for Deaf were selected for the survey. The total duration of the study, encompassing school visits, data collection, and result analysis, was three months. In the first part, the participants were asked to make sentences using given three words. Subject, verb and an object or an adjective or an adverb etc. were provided in every five questions for making basic level sentences. The next five questions were to choose the correct sentence from the options. All the questions were from beginner level, such as concord, parts of speech etc., which were prepared by the researcher and provided them. After evaluating their writing skills, a questionnaire consisted of eight statements was given to the participants. Only percentage analysis was conducted for analyzing the collected data. All ethical considerations such as confidentiality of the responses of students, their anonymity and voluntary participation in the survey were ensured during the course of the study.

RESULTS

The assessment was done to understand the language efficacy of the sample population. The results were analyzed and found that 98,7 % of participants couldn't clear the first part without making a single mistake. Sentences in SVO, SVC and SVA patterns were expected by giving words from each part, but 53 % of the participants scored zero marks on it. In the second part, 86 % of the participants made at least one mistake. It was further found that 98,7 % students don't know the very important part of a language that is subject-verb agreement. This is a stunning result and points to the very low language efficiency of deaf and hard-of-hearing students in India. The second part of the test, it's found that majority of mistakes are from subject-verb agreement, nouns, verbs, use of subject and predicate, verb forms, sentence structure or patterns, use of adjectives and adverbs etc. They couldn't even choose the correct sentences from the choices while doing the second part. The complete assessment analysis is conveyed through the figure 1.

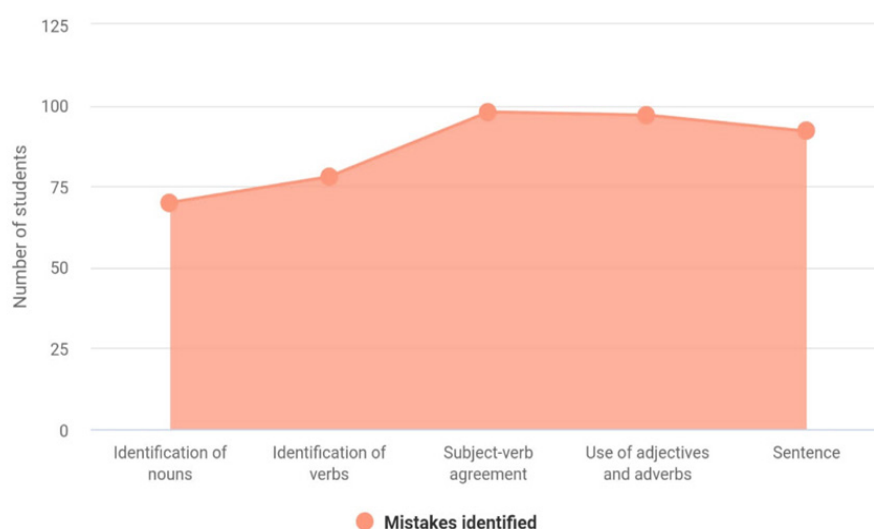


Figure 1. Mistakes Made

In the third section, seven statements were given and the students expressed their opinion as agree or disagree. Statements are marked as S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6 and S7.

S1: Sign language is used in the classroom.

S2: Lip reading and gestures are used in the class room for teaching

S3: I am confident to construct English sentences I learned English grammar and sentence structures from the classroom.

S4: Visuals and videos are used in the classroom for teaching English.

S5: Activities and practice questions are given in the classroom connecting all English topics.

S6: I am happy about my English teaching way and classes getting from my school.

S7: I am very much like to learn English from the basics clearly without any barriers.

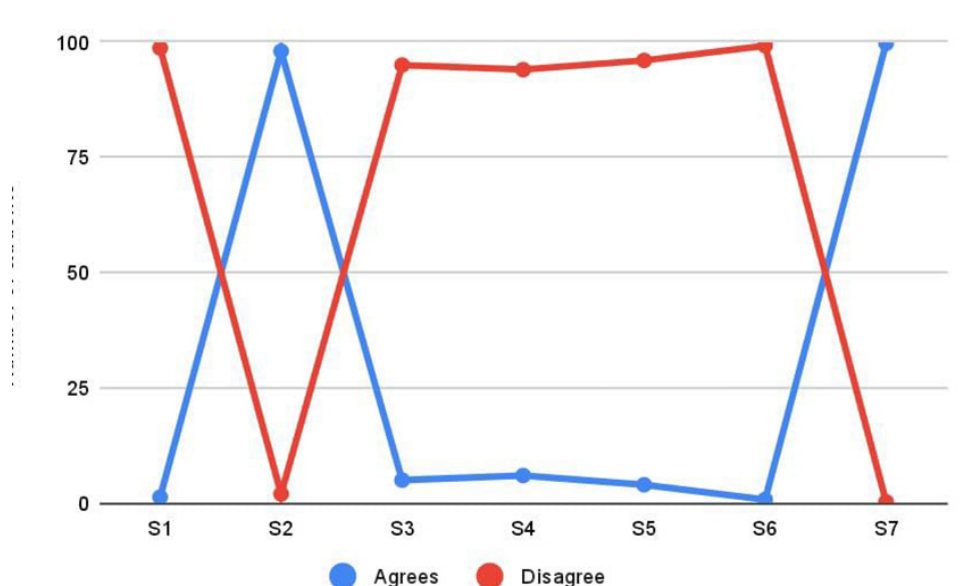


Figure 2. Responses of students

The results prove that DHH students don't get classes according their needs and pace. As visual learners⁽²⁵⁾ they are not even getting resources from the computer or smart class facilities. From the graphical representation of the study it is understandable that South Indian special schools for Deaf promote DHH students to the higher classes without giving even the basics of English language. Analysis of the questionnaire reveals that the major flaws may be happened in the application of teaching approaches, strategies and even the medium of delivery.

DISCUSSION

The majority of special schools for DHH students encourage oralism and lip-reading. This is the plight of DHH students in Indian schools. Students cannot understand what the teacher is saying, and teachers cannot understand whether the students are happy with the way they teach, deliver content, and communicate in the classroom. This condition will be continued until the teachers of DDH students learn Indian Sign Language and understand their needs.

The study found that DHH students find it difficult to comprehend what is taught in the English language classroom by the teachers. The Hindustan Times, a leading newspaper in India, had a spectacular article in which HSS students in India frankly opened up. One of them said that it's too hard to understand what the teacher teaches in the classroom since the sign language isn't known by the teachers and she doesn't feel like the school supports the deaf. Another child said that any special facilities for DHH isn't provided by the school and they force them to speak and follow lip-reading.⁽²⁶⁾

The present study also found that the sampled students do not have basic English proficiency. The findings of a study by Kodiango et al.⁽²⁷⁾ indicated that students with hearing impairments encountered a range of difficulties, including limited vocabulary, deficiencies in organizational and creative abilities, subpar spelling and handwriting skills, reliance on sign language structures rather than English language structures, difficulties in reading fluently, and overall weaknesses in reading proficiency. The study by Karasu⁽²⁸⁾ found that hearing-impaired students who are enrolled in public schools exhibited improved writing skills from the provision of support services tailored to their specific requirements, as well as from early exposure to cochlear implants and prompt integration into educational settings. Birinci and Sariçoban⁽²⁹⁾ found that using pictures and sign language is more effective than using only sign language in enhancing the vocabulary of DHH students. The

results of the present study and the studies discussed here clearly revealed that conventional method of teaching English is not suitable to DHH students.

CONCLUSION

The study was conducted to reexamine the English language teaching approaches going on in the higher secondary level special schools for DHH students in South India and to identify the deficiencies if any and to identify the most appropriate language teaching methods that take into account the needs of DHH students to teach English. Analyzing the results, researchers found that DHH students aged 16-18 years, that is, students who passed the 10th criterion and are about to take the 12th exam, do not have basic English proficiency. That can be interpreted as a major sign of inadequacy of very rigid special education system in south India. Since they are known as a special group, they need to be treated as a special listening group by providing adapted teaching methods and strategies.

Therefore, the traditional teaching approach may not be suitable for hearing children in this 21st century. Grammatical Translation Method can be adapted to DHH students with certain modifications by incorporating Indian Sign Language (ISL) as the first and native language of the deaf. According to this approach, the native language is effectively used to improve English writing, and ISL can be used to explain the meaning and importance of vocabulary and sentence patterns. Looking at the number of studies on bilingualism, it can be said that bilingualism is also sufficient to convey all grammatical and structural concepts through detailed explanations. Dr Michael West's New Method can be used for DHH students by including more visual stimuli along with bilingualism. Suggestopedia can also be combined with Grammar Translation Method and Bilingualism to achieve better results.

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