

TEACHER'S STRATEGY IN TEACHING VOCABULARY TO DEAF STUDENTS AT SMALBN 1 PALOPO

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the strategies used by the teacher in teaching English vocabulary to deaf students at SMALBN 1 Palopo. The research employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. Data were collected through classroom observations, interviews with the English teacher, and documentation in the form of photographs and videos of learning activities. The results showed that the teacher applied four main strategies: SIBI (Indonesian Sign Language System), lipreading, the use of flashcards and Grammar Translation Method (GTM). SIBI was the primary strategy used in the teaching process. This strategy was very effective in helping students better understand the vocabulary being taught because it was appropriate for students with hearing impairments, which caused communication limitations for deaf students. Lipreading enables deaf students to understand the teacher's explanation of the meaning of vocabulary taught through the teacher's lip movements. Flashcards helped deaf students to associate visual images with English words and reinforced meaning through sign explanation. Grammar translation method was very important in helping students understand the meaning of written English vocabulary and its relationship to word form in their native language. In conclusion, the combination of visual-based and text-based strategies proved effective in supporting vocabulary learning for deaf students. These strategies enabled the teacher to accommodate students' communication needs and enhance their vocabulary comprehension.

Keywords: Deaf student, special education school, teaching strategies, vocabulary.

1) INTRODUCTION

Teaching English vocabulary to deaf students is a challenge for educators. Students struggle to understand the pronunciation and meaning of new words due to hearing limitations. Normalita, Rosnija, & Sumarni (2023) state that to help students understand and remember vocabulary, teachers must use appropriate teaching strategies, such as the use of visual media, sign language, and drilling. These strategies have been proven

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effective in improving the vocabulary comprehension of deaf students in various special educational schools in Indonesia.

Although English is taught in Sekolah Luar Biasa (SLB), research on vocabulary teaching strategies for deaf students is limited. Due to the lack of specialized training and limited resources, teachers often face difficulties in delivering materials. For example, teachers at SMALB-B Dharma Asih Pontianak face problems such as students having difficulty understanding similar lip movements and students' lack of attention during lessons. They try to overcome these problems by using pictures as media, using sign language as an alternative to communicate, using drilling and giving special attention to students. (Prasetya et al., 2023).

Nugroho, Luvita, & Hanif (2021) explain that teachers must make learning tools that are adapted to the needs of students with special needs, especially students with deafness. It is inseparable from the spoken language (Lisan), sign language SIBI (Sistem Isyarat Bahasa Indonesia) and BISINDO (Bahasa Isyarat Indonesia) used by deaf students in their delivery. However, there are many variables that affect the success rate of the students' learning. However, teachers and schools try to make lessons easy for students to understand. In order to communicate, they must use SIBI and BISINDO sign language and lip reading. In addition, using body movements and facial expressions.

SLB students also have the right to a good English education, but the researcher realized that previous studies focused more on regular schools than SLB. Personal experience and observation show that deaf students have great potential to learn English if they receive the right teaching strategies. Therefore, researcher is encouraged to conduct research on the analysis of English vocabulary teaching to deaf students at SMALBN 1 Palopo.

The results of this study are relevant to the Indonesian government's efforts to support inclusive education. By understanding effective teaching methods for deaf students, the findings of this study can be used to improve the quality of education in SLB and support better policies that support inclusive education in the future. This research can also help teachers and policymakers create appropriate curriculum and training for English language education in SLB. (Adnyani et al., 2024). Despite the fact that a small amount of research has

been done on English language teaching in special education, previous studies have paid limited attention to methods for teaching vocabulary to deaf students at the high school level. Most of the existing research focuses on the elementary or junior high school level . (Kalora et al., 2022) So this study focuses on filling that void at SMALBN 1 Palopo.

This study will look at how SMALBN 1 Palopo teachers teach English vocabulary and the problems they encounter during the process. This study is important because it aims to improve the quality of English language teaching for deaf students. This quality of teaching has been given little attention in educational research and practice. This research is expected to help build better and more inclusive teaching strategies in special schools.

Several researchers have examined teachers' strategies in teaching English to deaf students, each with different focuses and contexts. Nur Hamidah and Dede Nurdiawati (2021) investigated the use of Total Physical Response (TPR), grammar translation, and SIBI at SLB Manunggal Slawi–Tegal, with an emphasis on reading and writing skills for elementary school students. Although their study and this research share a qualitative design and focus on strategies for deaf students, this study narrows the scope to vocabulary teaching, making the language component more specific. Similarly, Kalora et al. (2022) investigated vocabulary teaching strategies at SLB-B Karya Ibu Palembang, using visual media, SIBI, and subtitled films, which aligns with the focus of this study; however, their study involved two teachers in different environments. On the other hand, Siti Suharsih (2022) researched English language learning for students with special needs using contextual and expository approaches, facing challenges such as behavior management and simplification of materials. Although her work also discusses teacher strategies, it is not specific to deaf students nor limited to vocabulary teaching. Meanwhile, Tahang et al. (2023) analyzed repetition and visual aids for deaf junior high school students in Sorong, with a general focus on English language learning as a whole rather than just vocabulary, unlike the more focused approach in this study. Finally, Mahmuda et al. (2024) investigated vocabulary teaching for deaf junior high school students at UPT SLB Negeri 1 Bulukumba using SIBI, visual media, gestures, and repetition—strategies similar to this study but with different research contexts and participants. In summary, although all these

studies share a core theme of teaching strategies for deaf students, this study distinguishes itself through its exclusive emphasis on vocabulary development in the learning process at the high school level.

Nation (2001) emphasize that vocabulary is a critical part of language proficiency and determines how well learners speak, listen, read, and write, mastery of vocabulary involves understanding word form, meaning, and use. This idea backs up the study's emphasis on vocabulary as a crucial aspect of language competency. Adger et.,al (2018) state that vocabulary encompasses not only the meaning of words but also the structure of vocabulary in a language. It implies that it has to do with how people learn words, how they use and retain them, and how words relate to one another as well as to other categories of words and phrases. This means that in order to learn vocabulary, we must comprehend the meaning of each word as well as be able to employ it in a sentence.

The definition of deaf refers to a hereditary term that includes a range of hearing disabilities, from mild to profound, including the subset of people who are deaf and hard of hearing. The optimal communication techniques and interventions may vary depending on each person's unique requirements and circumstances, as does the level of hearing loss (Tan et al., 2003). Deafness is a state in which a person's hearing is impaired to the point where he is unable to perceive different sound stimuli or other stimuli through his ears. Consequently, the term "deaf" refers to a broad range of deafness, from mild to severe. As a result, deaf people hear sounds differently than others. (Suharmini, 2009).

Teaching strategy is a method or plan that teachers employ to help students learn in a classroom or other educational setting. Teaching strategies are designed to help teachers motivate students, effectively communicate information, and enhance their comprehension and recall of the subject matter. (Muslaini, 2017). Strategies, ideas, and tactics teachers employ to support teaching and learning in the classroom or other educational setting are known as teaching strategies. Teaching strategies should be adapted to learners' characteristics and learning needs (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Husna & Kalora (2023) state that there are several effective strategies used by teachers in teaching vocabulary to deaf students. Visual media are particularly beneficial for teachers when teaching new terminology. visual aids that can assist teachers in organizing deaf students' vocabulary. This is so that deaf people can actively study as visual media offer learning that is visible to the naked eye. Using visual aids when teaching deaf pupils can help them retain the words they acquire (Ashadi et al., 2021). The deaf community uses sign language, a natural language that employs visual-gestural modalities. For the deaf and other speechless people, sign language is a natural language that mimics motions of the hands, head, and every other part of the body (Schembri et al., 2018). SIBI and BISINDO are the two sign languages that are spoken in Indonesia. Although both use visual media, such as hand movements, facial expressions, and body positions, they have different structures, roles, and acceptance in society. SIBI is a sign language system officially created by the Indonesian government and designed to follow the structure of standard Indonesian grammar. This system is widely used in formal education, especially in special schools (SLB), because it is considered to facilitate the delivery of teaching materials in accordance with the national curriculum. BISINDO is a sign language that has grown and developed naturally within the Deaf community in various regions of Indonesia. This language has a different grammatical structure from Indonesian and places greater emphasis on meaning and visual context in communication.

Heriyanti et al. (2023) state that speech reading is an instructional approach that helps deaf students interpret spoken language by observing lip movements, facial cues, and other nonverbal cues. The goal is for students to identify speech patterns without relying on auditory input. In English education, this method is often used as a support technique to improve students' understanding of the pronunciation of words and phrases. Arsyad (2011) states that flashcard is a card that contain text and images. A flashcard is a tiny card with organized images, such as numbers, animal series, colors, fruits, and clothing, for example, or symbols. the image's text. Flashcards are therefore used by teachers to teach vocabulary to deaf children. This is due to the fact that flashcards can be utilized for vocabulary development in

several areas of language development and aid pupils in understanding the content and remembering new words.

Suparno & Purwanto (2007) explain that Special Education School (SLB) is education for kids who may be intelligent and have particular talents but struggle to follow the learning process because of physical, emotional, or social mental issues. In Indonesia, SLB are categorized based on students' specific needs, such as SLB/A for visually impaired students, SLB/B for students with hearing impairments, SLB/C for students with intellectual disabilities, and other classifications according to different conditions, SLB/D is a school specifically created for students with orthopedic conditions, SLB/E is a school specifically created for students with social anxiety, SLB/F is a school specifically created for students with supernormal aptitude (talented, brilliant, and exceptional).

2) METHODS

This study used qualitative research with a descriptive design with the aim of describing how vocabulary teaching strategies for deaf students at SMALBN 1 Palopo. Qualitative research was used to understand complex situations by examining patterns, themes, and correlations in rich descriptive data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The qualitative method was considered suitable as it allowed the researcher to analyze in depth the strategies used by the teacher considering the needs and learning styles of the deaf students such as visual learning, sign language and total communication, which are commonly used based on their abilities and characteristics. The main subject of the research was 1 English teacher at SMALBN 1 Palopo and the supporting participants were 4 Deaf students at 11th Grade Level.

This research was conducted at SMALBN 1 Palopo Academic Year 2025/2026. Collecting data was locating and selecting research participants, obtaining their agreement, and gathering information through observation, interview and documentation (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018). Observations were conducted over 3 meetings, the interview was conducted with the English teacher at SMALBN 1 Palopo, as she was the only teacher responsible for teaching English to deaf students. By focusing on her perspectives, the researcher hoped to gather clear and concrete information about the approaches, adaptations,

and strategies used in teaching deaf students and the researcher took some photos during the interview with the English teacher, and took photos and videos when the teacher taught in the class.

Data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing were the steps involved in data analysis. A data verification technique was required to verify the data's reliability (Miles et al., 2014). According to Denzin (1978), triangulation is the use of more than one method or source of data in the study of social phenomena to improve the credibility of the findings. Methodological triangulation refers to the use of different data collection techniques to examine the same phenomenon and source triangulation refers to checking the consistency of information obtained from different data sources.

3) RESULTS

Teacher's strategy in teaching vocabulary to deaf students

The findings of this study showed that the teacher applied four main strategies in teaching English vocabulary to deaf students at SMALBN 1 Palopo. These strategies included sign language, lipreading, flashcards, and the Grammar Translation Method.

Sign language

The findings indicated that sign language was used as the main strategy during the teaching and learning process. Throughout all observation sessions, the teacher consistently used SIBI (Sistem Isyarat Bahasa Indonesia) to deliver instructions and explain vocabulary.

In the first meeting, sign language was used together with lip movements when introducing new vocabulary. During the second meeting, the teacher continued using sign language and added translation activities, where students were asked to translate words or sentences. In the third meeting, sign language remained the primary strategy, supported by the use of visual media such as flashcards. This finding was also supported by the interview.

The teacher stated:

"In the learning process, I use SIBI sign language to communicate and teach vocabulary because students have been familiar with it since they entered school." (Ulva Hasan S.Pd.Gr.)

Lipreading

The observation from the first to the third meeting results showed that lipreading was used to support the explanation of vocabulary. While presenting the material, the teacher demonstrated clear and repeated lip movements. Students were observed paying attention to the teacher's lips when receiving information. Lipreading was applied alongside sign language, especially when new vocabulary was introduced. The teacher also repeated lip movements several times to make the explanation more understandable. There was no specific data on lipreading from interviews with teachers.

Flashcard

Flashcards were identified as one of the strategies used to introduce new vocabulary, particularly in the third meeting. The teacher presented several flashcards related to occupations and asked students to identify the meaning based on the pictures. After that, the vocabulary was written on the board in both Indonesian and English. Students were then guided to repeat the words using sign language and lip movements. At the end of the session, the teacher conducted a game using flashcards. Students were divided into groups and asked to match vocabulary items with the pictures shown. During this activity, students actively participated in the task. This finding was also supported by the interview.

The teacher stated:

“Using flashcards is very effective because students can only grasp information visually, so flashcards are very effective and students can easily remember new vocabulary.” (Ulva Hasan S.Pd,Gr.)

Grammar Translation Method (GTM)

The data from observation showed that, during the second meeting, the teacher used GTM as a strategy for practicing and evaluating students' understanding of the vocabulary they had learned. At the end of the lesson, the teacher wrote a one-paragraph text about birthday greetings to friends in English, and then asked the students to translate it into Indonesian and then the teacher discussed it together on the blackboard. In this research, the

GTM strategy was only obtained from observation results. There was no specific data on GTM from interviews with teachers.

4) DISCUSSION

Based on the results of research conducted at SMALBN 1 Palopo, teacher used four main strategies in teaching vocabulary to deaf students, namely: (1) sign language (SIBI), (2) lipreading, (3) flashcards, (4) grammar translation method.

Sign Language (SIBI)

The results showed that SIBI sign language played a central role in the teaching process. It functioned as the main medium of communication between the teacher and students, especially considering the students' hearing limitations. Through SIBI, vocabulary could be explained more clearly, allowing students to access meaning in a way that suits their learning needs.

This finding supports previous studies which emphasize the importance of visual access in learning for deaf students. As noted by Ulfah and Ubaidah (2023), sign language provides direct visual representation of linguistic information, making it easier for students to understand new vocabulary. Similarly, Kirk et al. (2015) highlight that visual communication is essential in teaching students with special needs. In addition, Marschark and Spencer (2010) argue that sign language contributes not only to communication but also to cognitive and language development.

In classroom practice, the use of SIBI appeared to help students connect vocabulary with meaning more effectively. The teacher's use of clear gestures and structured signs enabled students to follow explanations and recognize word forms. This suggests that consistent use of sign language can support both comprehension and retention of vocabulary.

Lipreading

Based on the observation, the teacher used lipreading by moving her lips slowly and repeatedly when explaining vocabulary. This indicates that the teacher intended to help students understand pronunciation visually. Deaf students rely on visual-phonological input

such as lip movements to interpret spoken language (Cates et al., 2022). In deaf education, lip reading is considered part of “total communication” or multimodal input. Lip movements (visual-phonological) provide a visual representation of the spoken form of a word, helping students understand how words are pronounced even if they cannot hear them (Marschark, 2007). According to some researchers, combining sign language with lip reading and visual media increases student input and approximates a more natural form of communication for deaf people (Suryanti et al., 2023).

Flashcard

Flashcards helped deaf students who can only receive information visually. They can associate images of objects with words in English (and use SIBI to explain). In addition, the use of flashcards increased student participation and motivation. The effectiveness of this strategy is closely related to the learning characteristics of deaf students, who rely more on visual input than auditory information. Visual representations help students process and retain new vocabulary by linking words with images that can be directly observed. As stated by Marschark and Spencer (2010), visual input plays a significant role in supporting language comprehension for deaf learners. Therefore, the use of flashcards not only facilitates vocabulary understanding but also strengthens students’ ability to remember and use new words in appropriate contexts.

Grammar Translation Method (GTM)

Based on observation, the teacher applied the Grammar Translation Method by asking students to translate sentences into Indonesian. This suggests that the teacher aimed to help students understand vocabulary meaning through their first language. Translation activities help learners process meaning deeply and strengthen vocabulary retention. GTM is often criticized for its lack of communicative components and is generally associated with text and cognitive focused learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Translation activities such as this encourage deeper meaning processing because students must really think about the meaning of each word in the context of the sentence and

how that word is translated into another language. In addition, their memory of vocabulary is strengthened by this exercise. This means that the words learned are not only remembered for assignments or tests, but become part of an active language repertoire that they can use in everyday communication. Translation activities combine understanding of meaning, analysis of language structure, and memory reinforcement, making them an effective learning tool (Nation, 2001).

This study has pedagogical implications, particularly for English teachers in special education schools. The findings indicate that combining visual communication strategies such as SIBI, lipreading, flashcards, and Grammar Translation Method can effectively support vocabulary learning for deaf students. These strategies accommodate the visual learning characteristics of deaf students and help them understand word meaning, form, and usage more clearly. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to apply adaptive and visually supported strategies in teaching English vocabulary.

5) CONCLUSION

There were several strategies used by teacher in teaching vocabulary to deaf students at SMALBN 1 Palopo, namely: SIBI sign language; lipreading; flashcard; and Grammar Translation Method. First SIBI sign language was the primary strategy used in the teaching process. This strategy was very effective in helping students better understand the vocabulary being taught because it was appropriate for students with hearing impairments, which caused communication limitations for deaf students. Second, lipreading enables deaf students to understand the teacher's explanation of the meaning of vocabulary taught through the teacher's lip movements. Third, flashcards helped deaf students who could only receive information visually. They were able to associate image of objects with words in English and used SIBI to explain. Fourth, grammar translation method, was very important in helping students understand the meaning of written English vocabulary and its relationship to word form in their native language.

Teachers are advised to keep combining several teaching methods such as SIBI, lip reading, flashcards, translation, and visual media, while giving clear explanations, simple

examples, and regular feedback to support deaf students in learning vocabulary. Future researchers are suggested to involve more participants and schools, and to explore other methods like digital tools or interactive videos, as well as consider longer research periods and supporting factors such as family support, school facilities, and teacher competence in sign language.

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