

LANG  
SKILLS



**Deafinitely English:**

Online materials for teachers of English  
as a Foreign Language for Deaf, deaf and  
hard of hearing students

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# Unit 2

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**Teaching Deaf, deaf and hard of  
hearing learners in EFL settings**

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## **Deafinitely English: Online materials for teachers of English as a Foreign Language for Deaf, deaf and hard of hearing students**

### **Deafinitely English resource pack**

Unit 1: EFL for Deaf, deaf and hard of hearing learners and study stays abroad: An overview

Unit 2: Teaching Deaf, deaf and hard of hearing learners in EFL settings

Unit 3: Teachers' Guide to the Booklets for Students

Unit 4: Strategies for Reading. Student's Booklet

Unit 5: Strategies for Essay Writing. Student's Booklet

Unit 6: Developing Study Skills. Student's Booklet

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## 1.1 BACKDROP

The 21st century has witnessed many changes in Deaf, deaf and hard of hearing (D/d/hh) people's lives. Official recognition of sign languages as valid and true linguistic systems, alongside United Nations and EU policy guidelines enshrining the human rights of all groups of deaf people regarding inclusion, has led to increased self-advocacy and personal empowerment. Today, there is a new generation of mobile deaf Europeans participating in university exchange programs, graduating from European universities and entering workplaces where knowledge of English is a prerequisite.

The European dimension of education accentuates the importance of foreign language (FL) skills, which should become a part of citizens' lifelong learning and an important element of competitiveness in a multicultural environment (Varečková & Pavelková, 2018, p. 295). A strong support for foreign language learning has therefore become an intrinsic part of higher education studies, although policies in individual EU countries and universities differ. Graduates are usually required to achieve some level of proficiency in a modern foreign language, typically English.

D/d/hh individuals naturally feel the need for FL competence to successfully live in the globalized world of today, to raise their own occupational applicability, to enjoy travelling and meeting internationally, or to browse the Internet. In the majority of European countries, D/d/hh students are nowadays learning foreign languages on a par with their hearing peers and taking foreign language exams that are based on the same curriculum, but with an adapted format (Domagała-Zyśk & Podlowska, 2019, p. 157).

Historically, teaching strategies have varied depending on contemporary and national trends, together with the teacher's experience and knowledge of (deaf) learners' language acquisition processes. The predominant current methodology for teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) involves active teaching strategies centred on oral conversations, interactive group exchanges and individual role play. However, D/d/hh individuals have specific educational needs in the context of learning foreign languages. If these teaching methods are not adapted to incorporate the visual, non-auditory learning strategies of D/d/hh students, the result may be a learning experience of exclusion.

This unit provides some general characteristics of D/d/hh EFL learners, the communication methods used in TEFL, the adaptation of teaching and learning materials, as well as some principles of culturally-relevant pedagogy. All these sections contain basic tips and examples that will be of benefit to teachers of EFL to D/d/hh

students, particularly those at the beginning of their career as language teachers to learners with hearing loss. Further information on D/d/hh EFL learners in connection to reading, writing and the area of study skills can be found in Unit 3. Practical teaching and learning materials dealing with reading, academic writing and study skills can be found in Units 4, 5 and 6 respectively.

## 1.2 DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING INDIVIDUALS AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS

It is important for a teacher of D/d/hh adult learners to understand how their learners think and how they take in new knowledge throughout the course of their education. In a study of deaf children's academic achievements, Marschark and Knoors examined cognitive functioning among deaf learners, and advised that deaf students "differ significantly from hearing learners in ways likely to affect learning" (2012, p. 136). Lang and Pagliaro also conclude that, "Instruction that takes into consideration the deaf learner's cognitive organization and development will likely increase understanding, performance, and ultimately achievement" (2007, p. 459) and this should be taken into account during the planning stage.

Moving into adult education brings further consequences for D/d/hh learners who need to access information through the visual channel due to the closure of the auditory channel. Marschark and Knoors note that deaf learners need to pay simultaneous visual attention to the teacher, to any visual aids being used, and to their own notes, and most mainstream settings cannot provide the extra time needed to enable this – they observe that one-to-one tutoring may compensate for this situation. It is crucial that this is understood in order that teachers of deaf learners can plan and deliver lessons that are conducive to "Deaf ways of knowing" (De Clerck, 2010). This not only improves the learning experience for deaf students, but also increases their chances of academic achievement.

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) to D/d/hh learners often involves the teaching of theoretical and abstract concepts and terminology. Among other strategies, these concepts should be conveyed visually to support D/d/hh learners' comprehension and ability to recall them. O'Brien and Kusters report that the visual nature of deaf sign language users is not only a sociocultural aspect of being deaf (in the sense that the visual language unites deaf people as a community), but that it is also a biological aspect of deaf ontologies, and is unique to "deaf people's visucentric way of engaging with the world" (2017, p. 266). Lang and Pagliaro note that deaf learners are more likely to recall concepts if they are taught them through imagery, and that teaching them concepts based on effective imagery enhances deaf learners' abilities to recall and understand complex concepts. They advise that, "Teachers with strong content knowledge, then, will likely facilitate the acquisition of mental imagery in their students with much more ease because they generally possess the ability themselves" (2007, p. 458). This is important for deaf learners, especially since teachers who know the academic content well have been found to be better able to express subject knowledge in sign language (Lang, McKee & Conner, 1993).

## 1.2.1 Characteristics of successful D/d/hh EFL learners

The following traits in particular seem to characterize most successful D/d/hh foreign language learners:

A good command of literacy skills in a written language familiar to the learner seems to be vital, according to the linguistic coding differences hypothesis proposed by Sparks and Ganschow (1991). These researchers believe that knowledge and skills from a learner's first language are used and reinforced, deepened, and expanded upon when the learner starts learning a second spoken language. This research was not made to reflect the situation of Deaf EFL learners, yet the idea of crucial importance of prior knowledge for subsequent learning was highlighted in a study into Deaf readers by Miller et al. The authors conclude that "Full access to language —including Sign Language — facilitates the acquisition of structural and semantic knowledge essential for the adequate processing of written language and, consequently, reduces risk of failure when prelingually deaf individuals are asked to read for meaning" (2012, p. 21–22), recognizing the key role of solid literacy skills.

A positive attitude towards reading is another contributing factor. Research supports the relationship between first language (L1) reading and second language (L2) reading as well as between L1 reading attitude and L2 reading attitude. In other words, those who generally believe that L1 reading is good for them typically have positive feelings toward it and are more likely to actually read more, and they may transfer the same attitudes to the L2 reading (Day & Bamford, 1998). In the case of Deaf learners, the attitude to and motivation for reading in EFL is typically subject to transfer from the written language at which they are most proficient and usually use for reading.

Feedback and assessment are closely linked with teaching and learning. In general, it is as pleasant to accept positive feedback as it is to give such feedback. Providing and processing negative feedback is not so easy, as it may make the learners feel uncomfortable or incapable. While a stress response to negative feedback is natural, successful learners can use the teacher's feedback as a springboard for improvement and growth (Allman, 2019). As suggested by Ávila Caica, D/d/hh students particularly enjoy immediate feedback, and feel that they learn better when they are actively involved in the learning process, having the opportunity to interact and work collaboratively (2011, p. 145).

Successful learners practise frequently and regularly, not just the day before an important exam, if the learning is to have some lasting effects (which applies to all foreign language learners). Not surprisingly, learners who practise regularly perform better than those who practise sporadically. What's more, Rohrer et al. highlight the importance of distributed practice across multiple sessions over concentrating the same amount of practice into one session as the spacing effect boosts dramatically long-term retention (2005, p. 372).

In accordance with Dornyei's assumption that "motivation is the one of the main determinants of second/foreign language achievement" (1994, p. 273), a high level of motivation and personal commitment is crucial for any learner's success. Czisér and Kontra rightly point to the importance of an encouraging environment and the role of the teacher in raising and maintaining motivation in D/d/hh learners (2020). The teachers should therefore help the learners see the value of English language skills and motivate them to persevere with their English studies while they choose appropriate methods and techniques for teaching (Sedláčková & Kontra, 2020).

Access to an English learning environment, usually through travelling or studying abroad, also contributes to strengthening and developing foreign language skills in foreign language learners. In general, D/d/hh individuals are keen travellers and look for opportunities to meet internationally. Study stays abroad and other internationalization opportunities, therefore, play a major part in supporting the foreign language skills D/d/hh learners want to explore (see Unit 1). Apart from physical mobility and travelling, virtual interactions also count as extremely beneficial for practising English. While Deaf learners may have limited opportunities to interact directly in English, modern technologies and social media provide a wide range of possibilities for interacting in real time. It depends on learners' individual preferences whether they prefer to follow a famous YouTuber, play computer games, or chat with a friend over a messaging application.



## 1.2.2 'Deaf-English'

When deaf learners use a sign language as their first or preferred language, the grammar of that language may be reflected in their literacy output, as they produce the text in the sign language that is shaping their thinking at the time. This is referred to in English speaking context as 'Deaf English' and is often the way English is articulated by Deaf people who are not fully bilingual. Charrow (1975) documented this phenomenon after conducting a test on a group of deaf students:

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*An interesting result of this test was the clustering of the deaf students' errors: most of the deaf in each group committed the same errors, and the same sorts of errors, in the multiple-choice test. This result corresponded to a phenomenon that most teachers of the deaf notice among their students - "deafisms" and commonality of errors. If the deaf tend to make the same sorts of errors in their English usage (such as omission or overgeneralization of articles, certain prepositions, tense markers and other inflections), then there are grounds to suggest that the deaf have a dialect of their own - a "Deaf English" - different from Standard English.<sup>1</sup>*

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In the following example, the linear structure of American Sign Language is represented. Instead of "I'm going to lunch after I finish this report.", which may be a more natural English word order, the ASL influence might lead to the direct translation "First, report finish. I go lunch." or affect the word order.

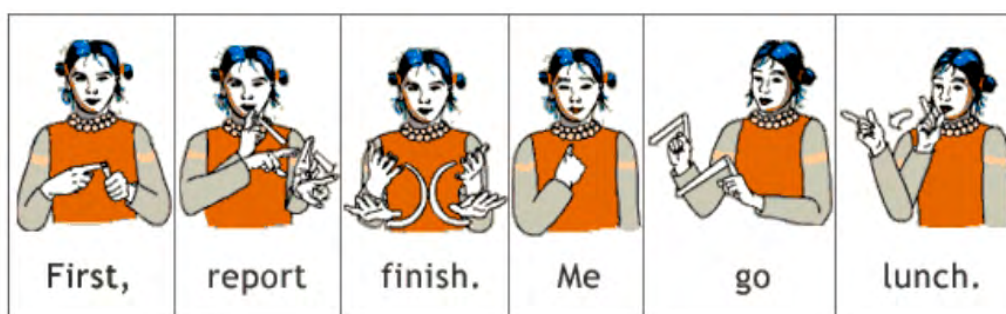


Figure 2: A sentence in Deaf-English<sup>2</sup>

Language transfer, i.e., the application of linguistic features from one language to another, is in fact a commonly discussed topic in the context of English language learning and teaching. While certain similarities between languages may help learners

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1/ (Charrow 1975, p. 140–141)

2/ Figure taken from <https://vidacff.blogspot.co.uk/p/historia-dos-surdos-gesticulando.html>

understand or apply correctly certain features (known as positive transfer), teachers are usually worried about the inverse procedure, i.e., when such transfer causes errors or misunderstandings (negative transfer). As in the acquisition of any language, mistakes that are based on interference from the first language also happen during the language instruction of deaf learners (Richards, 1985, p. 63). For instance, the written English language production of Czech Sign Language users will necessarily be affected by the structures of Czech Sign Language. Similarly, features typical of the Czech language can be observed in the written English language production of deaf and hard of hearing Czech learners.

It is therefore very helpful for teachers who are not proficient sign language users to familiarise themselves with the grammar patterns of the sign language their students use. It is very useful to compare the grammar patterns in both languages and draw learners' attention to possible differences and similarities. This knowledge is also practical when providing feedback on the learners' written assignments.

### 1.3 COMMUNICATION METHODS USED IN TEFL

Up until the 1950s, the teaching aims, methods and guiding principles of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) concentrated primarily on grammatical features and reading ability as opposed to the use of English as a practical, communicative tool for everyday life, which is achieved through the Communicative Approach. This student-centred method aims to deliver EFL through learning in context. Today, this is the most widely-used method within TEFL practice and its student-centred principles adapt favourably to addressing the learning strategies of D/d/hh learners.

D/d/hh learners acquire language primarily through the visual channel. Instruction delivered via “the oral channel only” may be inaccessible for these learners due to their having no auditory perception or limited auditory perception. This can apply to hearing aid and cochlear implant users also. The European Commission (2005) stipulated that curricular adaptations must be made for this group in the learning-teaching process of acquiring a foreign language. This would include, for example, adapted resources/texts, delivery methods and assessments. The 2005 European Language Policy document promoted and encouraged the use of visual resources, an emphasis on writing skills to utilize strong visual skills, and recommended the use of a sign language interpreter to reinforce and clarify visual input. Employing the most effective methods for the target group of learners is the most effective way for teachers to ensure that their teaching input transforms into practical output skills, thereby accelerating the rate of language acquisition.

There are many ways that D/d/hh students can be taught English, and teachers can choose different approaches. D/d/hh persons make use of various communication methods such as the national spoken language, the national sign language, the written form of the national spoken language, the signed versions of the national language, lip-reading, finger-spelling and other supporting systems, such as cued speech or Visual Phonics, that have been developed to facilitate the comprehensibility of spoken language through visual means. Each learner therefore brings a different set of communication needs, skills and preferences to the foreign language classroom, based on the nature of their hearing loss, their feeling of belonging to either the deaf or the hearing community, their family history, as well as the setting and purpose of the interaction (Sedláčková, 2016, p. 12).

Despite such scenarios being very varied, D/d/hh learners can be separated into two main target groups: Those who communicate through speechreading language practices, and those who communicate through sign language – although such a distinction is necessarily rather simplistic.

### **1.3.1 Students who communicate through speechreading language practices**

Students who are referred to as ‘deaf’ or ‘hard of hearing’ may prefer to use speechreading communication methods. That is, they may still have sufficient residual hearing and be able to hear some of the spoken language that is produced in a conducive environment by fully-informed communicators (using the principles of good practice). Having residual hearing does not imply that the deaf or hard of hearing student can function through speaking and listening in the same way that a person with full hearing capacity can, and it is important to remember this point during all teaching, learning and assessment activities.

The fact that residual hearing is limited in some ways correctly implies that the deaf or hard of hearing student will still require adaptations to be made and that predominance be given to a fully-accessible written form of text, rather than to the speech and hearing elements that present some accessibility difficulties. It is important that the teacher not rely on speech and on residual hearing, for communication purposes, as the student’s access to the oral language will still be limited. Hence, the most important aspect of the ‘show and tell’ principle is still the ‘show’ element; hard of hearing learners will benefit from access that is primarily visual, through print and text, from attention to checking their understanding, and to addressing any difficulties that result from pronunciation issues.

There may also be students in the classroom who do not have any residual hearing and who prefer to communicate through speechreading for other reasons. They will also require the teacher to use all of the principles and practices recommended in the following section, but they may require additional gestures or clues to the dialogue through fingerspelling. There are now Speech to Text Apps that can also help facilitate communication with deaf or hard of hearing learners who prefer this communication method.

### 1.3.2 Students who communicate through sign language practices

For students who prefer to communicate through a sign language, successful communication is the most paramount issue, and the teacher will need to ascertain the method of communication to be used immediately upon the commencement of the course, if not before.

In a sign-bilingual situation, the student may use either sign or speech but may need the reply to be given in sign language, either from the teacher directly or through a sign language interpreter. In this situation, predominance should again be given to visual strategies for making the teaching and the classroom conversations fully accessible.

The written form of text will be essential, and the teaching should be example-driven, as this provides the student who is a sign language user with visual explanations of the teaching content. Working through examples will enable the students to invoke visual images of the content before learning the theory that they exemplify. It is also beneficial for the teaching to involve text and videos that reflect everyday life situations that the students can connect with through their own life experiences. Access to communication and culturally relevant teaching, then, is a central aspect of this visual learning strategy.

For learning new vocabulary and sentence structures, sign language users will benefit from online multimedia platforms, such as the [Spreadthesign](#) online platform, run by the European Sign Language Centre (2018) and its accompanying mobile phone application. This allows users to select their native sign language (if it is included) and look up signed sentences and their English equivalents. There is also a quiz that enables the learner to watch a signed phrase or sentence and select the correct equivalent from a choice of four.

Some of the learners may have very little self-consciousness about interacting with English during travel and interaction in a foreign country. This is partly because D/d/hh people in general are often used to dealing with communication barriers when interacting with hearing people, and because in social contact, D/d/hh people from one country have very little difficulty in communicating with D/d/hh people from another country.

### 1.3.3 EFL classroom implications

Therefore, whilst D/d/hh students do not make up a homogenous group, there are some common traits communication-wise that have implications for the teaching of foreign languages to them:

All of the students have some level of hearing loss, though the age of onset will vary among the group. Many students will not have enough residual hearing to be able to hear the national language being spoken, and many students will struggle to hear unfamiliar English words. Also, many D/d/hh individuals gain some level of competence in speaking the national language but might require specialist teaching in order to learn to speak English.

In general, D/d/hh learners can access the teaching of English through their own listening skills, if possible, or by translating from their first language. Some students will be able to hear enough if the teacher talks slowly and clearly, while other students will require alternative interaction methods, such as communicating directly with the teacher by writing the conversation down or using a live chat application, through sign language, or using interpreters if the teacher is not a fluent sign language user.

It is worth noticing that students who are struggling to acquire their first language might struggle to learn English and will need additional teaching support, as the literacy development in one language supports literacy development in subsequent languages learned, according to the Linguistic Coding Deficit Hypothesis by Sparks and Ganschow (1991).

Some learners welcome the idea of using a sign language to support their learning EFL. Based on the research findings among Norwegian EFL learners presented by Pritchard, Deaf learners feel an affinity with other Deaf people and their languages. Learning a foreign Sign Language (in Pritchard's case, BSL) to support teaching and learning English is considered a highly motivating factor and is not seen as an overwhelming task (2013).

Increasing visual resources and offering student field trips to English-based environments will compensate for the learning shortfall and will increase D/d/hh learners' motivation and understanding (Sedláčková & Kontra, 2020, p. 348).

The small size of such a class/group, bearing in mind adequate sizing and seating, is an important consideration. Small classes have been found to be optimal in foreign language classes for D/d/hh learners, but purely individual instruction is not necessarily the most appropriate choice; while individual tutoring is undoubtedly greatly beneficial, research shows that learners appreciate group work, classroom interaction, and benefit considerably from group dynamics (Cziser & Kontra, 2020; Ávila Caica, 2011) to allow the students to learn from one another.

For these reasons, the ELF class may be composed of learners with very different communication preferences, needs and skills, and the teaching strategies may need to be as flexible and adaptable as the communication strategies being employed. However, even in more or less heterogeneous classes it is beneficial to use a wide range of different communication methods during foreign language instruction (Machová, 2014, p. 63).

Some EFL teachers use their national spoken language, or sign language, while teaching D/d/hh students, and present English through written materials only. It is very rare that teachers use spoken English in this context, as the learners cannot hear the speech, and need support from speech-to-text reporters or sign language interpreters. Nowadays, teachers make broader use of computers and teach in English using online chats or text messengers. In any case, teachers of EFL to D/d/hh learners will benefit from being multilingual, including being fluent in sign language, and deaf teachers teaching deaf learners using the local sign language may be an important approach. This also reduces the need for sign language interpreters in the classroom and enables more direct teaching and learning.

## 1.4 ADAPTING TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIALS

There are a lot of online teaching materials currently available, but the most important consideration is how relevant they are for teaching English to D/d/hh learners. Teachers usually need to adapt the existing EFL and ESL resources, or they create their own resources, as many generic publications and online resources are not suitable. This includes adapting the main text, the learning objectives, the teaching tips for teachers, and some of the comprehension and grammar exercises for students. Available resources also contain reflective tasks for writing skills and supplementary texts in the students' native language or plain English.

In terms of teaching English to D/d/hh learners, the difference between the EFL and ESL settings is important, particularly when devising teaching and learning resources.

**The English as a Foreign Language (EFL)** classroom comprises a situation where English is taught in non-English speaking countries.

**The English as a Second Language (ESL)** classroom comprises a situation where English is taught in English-speaking countries (e.g., in the UK or USA).

An ESL learner is naturally surrounded by the target language outside the classroom and there is a plethora of naturally-occurring materials to enhance learning outside the classroom. In an EFL setting, strategies for providing extra materials and the choice of such resources need to be considered.

Whilst hearing EFL learners have access to auditory input in order to support their learning of the English language, the teaching and learning materials for D/d/hh learners who do not have access to this auditory support will need to be supplemented with videos, pictures, and other visual stimuli that compensate for their lack of access to the sounds of the language. Also, the teachers may need to seek culturally-relevant inputs and examples to respond to learners' needs and interests. That is, teachers of EFL to D/d/hh learners using ESL and EFL materials need to adapt them to create teaching and learning resources that fill the gap not just in terms of accessing an English environment or the auditory means by which hearing EFL learners progress, but also in creating culturally appropriate, meaningful materials.



In general terms, the following should be considered when adapting EFL and ESL materials:

- **Some materials should contain deaf-related topics in order to motivate D/d/hh learners. The content of these texts would need to be related to native English speakers' cultural issues, or relevant to the Deaf world in some way.**
- **Videos need to be captioned.**
- **The teaching and learning resources should contain pictures and subtitled video materials in line with the visuality of D/d/hh learners.**
- **The materials should encourage learners to compare content in the first language with the translated versions of that content. Students may be interested to see the differences between a version produced directly in English and one that is produced in a written language familiar to the learner and then translated into English.**
- **The text of these materials should be in line with the proficiency of the D/d/hh learners and should be clearly structured.**

## 1.5 CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY

D/d/hh students from countries in which English is not the majority language choose to study English for exactly the same reasons that hearing people might want to undertake foreign language study. There is a dire need for language education providers to adequately inform themselves so as to address the diverse needs of this group of learners. A qualitative study conducted by Kontra, Csizér and Piniel (2014) and a survey by Csizér, Kontra and Piniel (2015) established that despite experiencing previous unfavourable learning circumstances, D/d/hh learners still have the self-efficacy and determination to learn foreign languages, especially English.

Based on years of experience with teaching English to D/d/hh higher education students, the following practices and approaches have been found to be helpful:

- **Barrier-free learning (through visibility).**
- **Teachers who are preferably sign language users.**
- **Teachers who are deaf aware and who understand a visual way of learning.**
- **Non-integrated foreign language lessons.**
- **Regular 1:1 tuition and support from the teacher.**
- **Meeting the unique learning needs of individual students.**
- **A collective attitude among students and teachers and a class ethos of encouragement, praise and positivity.**

Taking into consideration the teachers' view, there are several complementary variables at stake, such as:

- **Lack of research into and empirical evidence of appropriate course materials and methods to guide teachers.**
- **Great variation in the teaching priorities and expectations for this group of learners.**
- **No consistent standards established.**
- **Great variation in the level of teachers' deaf awareness and knowledge of the national sign language.**

Dedicated teachers in this educational field have expressed a sense of isolation in terms of research, information and support. To overcome these feelings, researchers across Europe specializing in TEFL to D/d/hh and Deaf teachers have implemented and begun to publish deaf-led, effective teaching and learning strategies.<sup>3</sup>

### 1.5.1 Environmental aspects

There is a relation between learner motivation and the learning environment, and Wlodkowski and Ginsberg suggest that we should “foster an optimal environment” for learning (2017, p. 44). According to Radovan and Makovec, the term ‘learning environment’ usually defines “the social, psychological, or psychosocial environment in which learning or, as the case may be, teaching takes place” (2015, p. 118). However, studies such as Cleveland & Fisher’s also note “the important role that physical space plays in educational settings” (2014, p. 1).

Having deaf learners, and perhaps also a sign language interpreter, in the classroom has implications for the seating arrangements, as it is important that the people accessing the information through the interpreter can see the interpreter, the lecturer and the Smartboard, while also feeling like part of the student group. For deaf learners, Pagliaro suggests that the classroom should be arranged to accommodate “maximum visual acuity”, proposing that “seating arranged in a horseshoe shape allows the Deaf student to locate the speaker easily and to be involved in group discussions” (2001, p. 175). Working in smaller oval seating of 3–4 participants is also practical as it ensures that faces, lips and hands are visible at all times. The interpreter, if present, should be placed at the front, at the other end of the Smartboard from the lecturer if the lecturer is using speech, so that the deaf learners can see the teacher, the interpreter and the Smartboard simultaneously (see picture below).

The seating arrangements, however, serve more than the purpose of making the teaching visible. Guardino and Antia studying young learners observe that there is “a functional relationship between the physical environment and both an increase in levels of academic engagement and a decrease in levels of disruptive behaviour” (2012, p. 518). In this respect, regular 1:1 instruction may also be conducive to building learners’ trust in the teaching-learning process. As Albertini and his colleagues (2012) showed, attitudes to teachers and low opinion of education in general play a negative role in D/d/hh students' academic success.

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3/ One example of these initiatives is the International Research Group on Teaching English as a Foreign Language to the Deaf and Hard/of Hearing, coordinated by Ewa Domagała-Zyśk ([https://www.kul.pl/english-for-deaf-and-hard-of-hearing,art\\_74431.html](https://www.kul.pl/english-for-deaf-and-hard-of-hearing,art_74431.html)). This group of dedicated teachers and researchers is active in this area, conducting research, sharing best practices, and meeting regularly.

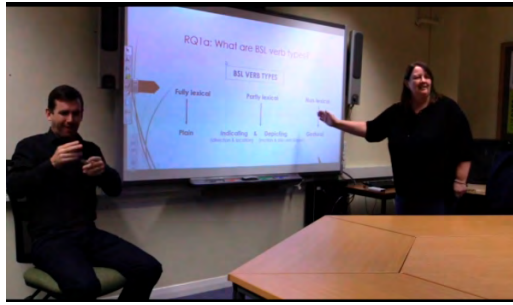


Figure 1: Seating arrangements

As well as the layout of the room, it is important to consider other aspects of the physical environment when the learners are deaf or hard-of-hearing. For example, rooms should be well-lit with minimum background noise. Also, teaching in an open space, where people come and go frequently, can cause a lot of interruptions to the teaching. Interruptions can impact on the level of concentration and cause the teacher to have to back-track several times.

In a study of visual attention in deaf children and adults, Dye, Hauser and Bavelier found that deaf sign language users “show a compensation in the visual modality for the lack of auditory input. In such individuals, a selective enhancement for stimuli that are peripheral or in motion and require attentional selection has been demonstrated” (2008, p. 254). For this reason, it is best if the teaching room does not contain too many cluttered shelves and large patterned wall coverings that can easily be distracting for a sign language user or a lip-reader who is concentrating visually for so long, as this ‘environmental noise’ can be very distracting.

Spaces for deaf and hard-of-hearing learners, then, need to be effective both in terms of language use and of the physical environment around them. While an educational institution’s architecture may be difficult to adjust to facilitate appropriate Deaf Spaces<sup>4</sup>, efforts can be made to make the learning environment as appropriate, and as safe, as possible. Developing more effective learning landscapes is possible in some small ways, such as ensuring that the teacher is seated against a wall with no visual distractions. Placing the deaf learners, the teacher and the computer (or other relevant technologies) in the most effective places can help maximise the teaching and learning results.

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4/ DeafSpace is an approach to architecture that is intended to “guide and inspire the design of environments for deaf people that are completely responsive to, and expressive of, their unique ways of being” (Bauman, 2010, p. 10). This design concept can be applied to both public and domestic spaces, recommending wall and furniture colours, lighting, acoustics, sloping walkways instead of stairs, curves instead of sharp corners and other principles which, ultimately, benefit everybody who uses these spaces.

## 1.5.2 Importance of cultural awareness for teachers without sign language proficiency

Deaf Awareness training (prioritising communication), learning basic sign communication skills, and some theoretical concepts of access to language learning should be provided for new EFL teachers who work with D/d/hh learners. There are many online resources related to the Deaf community and Deaf culture that teachers can watch and learn from, and they can then recommend appropriate resources for students, for example:

- **World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) website** [www.wfdeaf.org](http://www.wfdeaf.org)
- **European Union of the Deaf (EUD) website** [www.eud.eu](http://www.eud.eu)
- **BSL Zone website** [www.bslzone.co.uk](http://www.bslzone.co.uk)
- **The Limping Chicken (the world's most popular deaf blog)** <https://limpingchicken.com/>

Nowadays, some higher education institutions publish guidebooks and tip sheets to provide teachers with advice and tips on organizing instruction in a more deaf-friendly way, such as the guide entitled *Teaching Strategies to use with Deaf Students: Advice for Lecturers in Higher Education*, published by the University of Central Lancashire, that can be of benefit to novice teachers:

<https://ifhohyp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Teaching-Deaf-Students-Lecturers-Guide.pdf>

Teachers should be aware of and familiar with using key terminology around working with D/d/hh learners:

- **Deaf**
- **deaf**
- **Sign language users**
- **Oral deaf**
- **Fingerspelling**
- **Lip-reading**
- **Hard of hearing**
- **Cochlear Implant users**
- **Hearing aid users**
- **Deaf identity**
- **School for deaf children**
- **Mainstream education**
- **Inclusive education**
- **Sign Bilingualism**
- **Accessibility**
- **Speech to text**
- **Note-taker**
- **Subtitles (open/close caption)**

New teachers working with D/d/hh learners may also be confused as to the terms to be used when referring to deaf and hard of hearing individuals. The culturally inappropriate term 'hearing impaired' should not be used.

There are some other important factors to consider:

## **Use of sign language**

There are many advantages of bringing sign language into the EFL classroom. Using sign language as a tool for teaching English provides the teacher with the visual illustration that the visual modality of sign languages provides naturally. Some teachers therefore choose to learn (or already use) the national sign language for direct instruction, as a visual language is perfectly accessible to Deaf learners.

Teachers without sign language proficiency should consider learning to fingerspell. Fingerspelling – use of the sign language manual alphabet – is quick and easy to learn and can be a great asset in relation to teaching new words and terminology.

## Teaching equipment

- **Interactive Smartboards can allow the teacher to project the reading text/materials onto one central board for all students to view on the same visual line as the teacher, and this avoids students having to switch their gaze from a printed text on their desk up to the teacher and back continually.**
- **In a multimedia learning resource room, a teacher-controlled desktop system can be connected to the students' computers, allowing the teacher to reinforce lesson information by using the Internet to display additional visual information and send one-to-one or group feedback.**
- **A user-friendly online text messaging system, such as 'Live Chat' and WhatsApp, can be used as a form of real-time chat when practicing spontaneous utterances and role-play within context-based learning.**
- **The use of Speech to Text apps for supporting D/d/hh students' access to spoken English communication are beneficial particularly for those students who wish to communicate orally.**

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