

# Strategies for Teaching Reading Skills to Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students

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## Introduction

Reading skills are crucial for most people worldwide. Learning to read is vital for individuals, including those who are deaf, to participate in society (Daza, Phillips-Silver, Ruiz-Cuadra, and Lopez-Lopez, 2014); Hoffman and Wang, 2010; Hermans, Knoors, Ormel, and Verhoeven, 2008). However, deaf people require special methods to acquire reading skills. Thus, the ways deaf people are imparted reading skills differs from that of hearing students. As such, teachers who teach deaf people require special pedagogical skills.

According to van Staden (2013), reading skills of many deaf children lag several years behind those of hearing children. Hoffman and Wang (2010) indicated that the academic achievement of students who are deaf or hard of hearing often falls significantly below their typical hearing peers on many measures and across many domains. Kyle and Cain (2015) demonstrated that the reading comprehension of children with hearing loss is poorer than predicted from word-reading skills. In addition, children with hearing loss struggle with integrating their outside knowledge with information in texts (Kyle and Cain, 2015). Mich, Pianta, and Mana (2013) revealed that deaf children have significant difficulties in comprehending written text due to the hearing loss, which prevents them from being exposed to oral language as infants.

Dimling (2010) argued that intense, targeted interventions that use evidence-based approaches are imperative for students with a disability such as hearing loss to minimize its impact

and maximize language development. Likewise, Shanahan (2017) suggested that the teaching of reading comprehension and learning from text should focus on how to help students overcome cognitive, linguistic, and intellectual barriers and that major attention should be spent on reading and making sense of texts rather than answering particular types of questions about texts. Kyle and Cain (2015) emphasised that learning strategies before and during reading can help deaf students overcome challenges that they face when gaining access to and attempting to understand text.

### **Strategies for teaching reading skills to deaf and hard of hearing students**

In making sure that deaf children are acquiring reading skills as hearing children, scholars have put forward various strategies for teaching the skills to deaf students. These strategies have shown various impacts when used at various areas and circumstances as discussed below.

Mich, Pianta, and Mana (2013) proposed simplifying and illustrating the story as significant strategies for teaching reading skills to deaf and hard of hearing students, as this demonstrated a positive impact on the comprehension of all students examined, including deaf and hard of hearing students. Based on this, many researchers recommended adding visuals to texts to support reading comprehension skills among students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Nikolarazim, Vekiri, and Easterbrooks (2013) revealed a positive correlation between added visuals and reading comprehension and indicated that students appreciated the use of visual resources. Gentry, Chinn, and Moulton (2004/2005) highlighted that the use of pictures is a powerful factor in the transfer of factual information during the reading process. Girgin (2013) pointed that shared reading can be useful for developing reading skills among deaf and hard of hearing students and provided guidelines for applying the strategy. Furthermore, Girgin highlighted that shared reading was more

applicable and effective among deaf and hard of hearing students when teachers determine students' language levels before and summarize the text for children if needed. In addition, the stories within the text should be engaging and include repetitive elements to facilitate reading and support children's motivation (Girgin (2013)).

Moreover, Teaching Reading Comprehension to Deaf Students (2018) showed that mental preparation is important before exposing deaf and hard of hearing students to reading tasks. Thus, teachers need to activate and enhance students' prior knowledge before they start reading, which can be accomplished by using K-W-L charts. As such, teachers should make students share everything they know about a particular topic, then ask questions about what they want to know. This helps them prepare conceptually to read about a particular theme or topic and then share what they learned. Teaching Reading Comprehension to Deaf Students (2018) argued that after activating students' minds, teachers can use strategies such as asking students to write a brief summary of what they read and encouraging students to write one or two questions at the end of each page to push their inferential thinking to develop comprehension abilities. In addition, teachers need to ask students to take notes in visual form and drawing illustrations and diagrams to go along with what they are reading. Furthermore, teachers could encourage students to work with a partner to act out a particular scene or build a model to help envision texts and ask each other questions and debate the text as they move through it (Teaching Reading Comprehension to Deaf Students, 2018).

Berrett (2012) stated that teaching reading skills to deaf students requires asking students to use their existing sign language skills to read as their hearing peers do. After mastering sign language, teachers are advised to **use** picture books that make children link signs and pictures representing words. Berrett (2012) advised teachers to consolidate the

above technique that he suggested with the use of **letter cards** by demonstrating how individual letters form words. Lastly, teachers need to build students' **vocabulary** through introducing new vocabulary daily and using it in conversations as well as displaying it on a wall next to a picture of its signed letters (Berrett, 2012). Similarly, Schleper (1997) suggested introducing the cover of the book and fingerspelling and signing the title, author, and illustrator to build reading skills among deaf and hard of hearing students. Schleper argued that teachers should discuss what the book is about, show the pictures and print, and encourage students to talk about the book while reading. After reading, teachers should help students connect the concepts in the book to the world (Schleper, 1997).

## **Conclusion**

Identifying effective strategies for developing reading skills among deaf and hard of hearing students can be challenging, as it may be difficult to determine specific strategies for various areas and circumstances. However, it should be noted that no any single strategy can be applied on its own and work effectively to develop reading skills among various deaf and hard of hearing students in different settings, as the learning needs of students differ. Thus, multiple teaching strategies are required to accommodate the various learning needs of students. Teachers should understand the learning needs and learning styles of the deaf and hard of hearing students in their class when choosing strategies.

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