



Assessing English learning among deaf students: A case study of assessment practices at SLB Negeri 1 Buleleng

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Abstract

Instructing English to learners with hearing impairments presents unique challenges because communication largely depends on visual and non-verbal channels, including sign language, hand movements, facial expressions, and body gestures. Compared with hearing students, deaf learners frequently encounter difficulties in vocabulary acquisition, which can hinder their language development. This research investigates the assessment practices used to evaluate the English learning progress of students with hearing impairments at SLB Negeri 1 Buleleng. Employing a qualitative case-study design, data were collected through classroom observations and an interview with the English teacher. The results indicate that both ongoing and end-of-learning assessments are implemented. Ongoing assessment activities consist of vocabulary recall exercises and student presentations, while end-of-learning evaluations are conducted through visually supported multiple-choice tests designed to accommodate students' learning needs.

Keywords: portfolio assessment, writing skills, EFL learners, remote learning, authentic assessment

Introduction

English has become the dominant international language and plays a vital role in communication, education, business, and technological advancement across the world. Due to its global importance, English has been incorporated into educational systems in many countries, including Indonesia. The Indonesian government recognizes English as an essential subject that supports students' academic and professional development, making it an important component of the national curriculum (Heriyanti et al., 2023). Consequently, students with disabilities are also expected to learn English as a foreign language and are entitled to equal access to English education (Yunisari, 2021).

For students with special educational needs, English learning offers opportunities to broaden their knowledge, engage with diverse communities, and gain access to information beyond their immediate environment. Mastering English can improve social interaction, increase educational opportunities, and facilitate participation in a more interconnected global society. Therefore, providing effective English instruction for learners with disabilities is an important aspect of inclusive education.

Children with special educational needs may experience either temporary or lifelong conditions that affect their learning process. One category of permanent disability is hearing impairment (Maryanti et al., 2021). Hearing impairment refers to a partial or complete reduction in hearing ability in one or both ears, which may adversely affect communication and academic achievement (NICHCY, 2017). While some individuals with hearing loss can benefit from assistive devices such as hearing aids, others may have little or no residual hearing. These differences influence how students acquire language and interact within educational settings.

Teaching English to deaf and hard-of-hearing students requires specialized approaches because their language development differs substantially from that of hearing learners (Prasetya et al., 2023). Since access to spoken language through auditory input is limited, many deaf learners face difficulties in acquiring vocabulary, grammatical structures, pronunciation, and reading skills. Previous studies have shown that hearing-impaired students often experience delays in language development, particularly in vocabulary growth and syntactic competence (Cawthon, 2001). Unlike hearing students, who naturally acquire language through continuous exposure to spoken communication, deaf learners rely heavily on visual forms of communication, including sign language, gestures, facial expressions, and written texts.

The acquisition of spoken languages presents additional challenges for deaf learners because they cannot fully access auditory information such as sounds, stress patterns, and intonation. As a result, language learning may progress more slowly and require greater instructional support compared to hearing peers (Nugroho & Lintangari, 2022). Although some deaf individuals successfully develop high levels of proficiency in spoken and



written language, many continue to encounter difficulties in literacy-related skills, including reading comprehension and written communication (Nugroho & Lintang Sari, 2022). Language delays caused by hearing loss often create barriers to effective communication, making targeted educational interventions necessary to support their linguistic development (Razi et al., 2021). Despite these challenges, students with hearing impairments possess the same educational rights as other learners. They should receive equitable opportunities to participate in educational activities and achieve their academic potential. To accommodate their unique learning needs, specialized educational services are provided through special education programs (Zahro et al., 2023). Special education encompasses instructional practices specifically designed to address the characteristics and requirements of learners with disabilities. These services may be delivered in various settings, including schools, homes, or healthcare institutions, by educators who have received specialized training (Cook & Schirmer, 2003).

An essential component of special education is assessment. Assessment serves as a means of gathering information about students' learning outcomes, strengths, challenges, and developmental progress. The information obtained assists educators in making informed decisions regarding instruction, support services, and educational placement (Neild & Diane Clark, 2020). Continuous assessment is particularly important for students with hearing impairments because it enables teachers to monitor learning progress and adjust instructional strategies according to individual needs.

In educational contexts, assessment involves the systematic collection and interpretation of data related to students' academic performance, cognitive abilities, social development, emotional well-being, behavior, and functional skills (Bishaw & Jayaprada, 2012). Within deaf education, assessment practices must be carefully designed to ensure that they accurately reflect students' abilities while accommodating communication differences and learning characteristics. At SLB Negeri 1 Buleleng, English instruction for deaf students incorporates both formal and informal assessment procedures. Formal assessments consist of structured and standardized evaluation methods that allow teachers to measure student achievement, monitor progress, determine appropriate educational interventions, and maintain accountability within the educational process (Kurniawa & Kalimah, 2022). Informal assessments, on the other hand, involve ongoing observations, interviews, assignment reviews, and portfolio evaluations that help teachers gain a more comprehensive understanding of students' strengths and learning needs. These assessments complement formal measures by providing contextual information that may not be captured through standardized testing.

Although teachers attempt to adapt instructional materials to meet students' needs, several challenges remain. Difficulties arise from instructional approaches, learning media, and assessment techniques that may not fully accommodate students' communication preferences. In addition, the teacher's limited proficiency in sign language can hinder effective interaction and create communication barriers in the classroom. Given these circumstances, it is important to examine how assessment practices are implemented in English classes for deaf students. Therefore, this study aims to investigate and analyze the assessment methods employed by the English teacher at SLB Negeri 1 Buleleng to evaluate the English learning progress of deaf students.

Method

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of the assessment practices implemented in English instruction for deaf students. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for examining educational phenomena within their natural settings, as it focuses on understanding participants' experiences, perspectives, and behaviors rather than measuring variables numerically (Lambert & Lambert, 2013). Through this approach, researchers can explore how individuals interpret and respond to specific situations within their social and educational environments.

Specifically, this research employed a case study design. A case study enables an in-depth investigation of a particular individual, group, institution, or phenomenon within its real-life context (Lodico, 2010). This design was selected because it allows for a detailed examination of assessment practices used in teaching English to deaf students at SLB Negeri 1 Buleleng. By focusing on a single educational setting, the study sought to obtain rich and contextualized information regarding how assessments are implemented and adapted to meet the needs of students with hearing impairments.

Data Collection

Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. Classroom observation was conducted to obtain direct information about the assessment strategies employed during English lessons. During the observation sessions, the researcher remained a non-participant observer by sitting at the back of the classroom and monitoring the instructional activities without interfering with the teaching and learning process.



An observation checklist was utilized to systematically document classroom interactions, teaching procedures, and assessment activities. The information gathered from the observations enabled the researcher to describe in detail how assessment practices were integrated into English instruction for deaf learners.

In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the English teacher to gain deeper insights into the implementation of assessment practices. The interviews provided valuable information regarding the teacher's perspectives, experiences, and considerations in assessing the learning progress of deaf students. The combination of classroom observations and interviews allowed the researcher to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the assessment process and to triangulate findings from different sources.

Data Analysis

Following data collection, the researcher analyzed the data using the Interactive Model of Qualitative Data Analysis proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). This model consists of four interconnected activities: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

The first stage involved gathering information through observations and interviews. Subsequently, the researcher condensed the data by selecting, simplifying, organizing, and focusing on information relevant to the research objectives. This process enabled the researcher to identify significant patterns and eliminate irrelevant information. The condensed data were then displayed in a narrative form to facilitate interpretation and understanding. The presentation focused on describing the assessment practices employed by the English teacher at SLB Negeri 1 Buleleng. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the analyzed data, and the findings were continuously verified throughout the research process to ensure consistency and accuracy.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the quality and rigor of the study, the researcher applied trustworthiness criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Among these criteria, credibility was emphasized as the primary strategy for establishing the validity of the findings. Credibility refers to the extent to which the research findings accurately represent participants' experiences and the reality being investigated (Connelly, 2016). To enhance credibility, the researcher employed methodological triangulation. Triangulation is a technique used to verify findings through multiple sources or methods and is widely recognized as an effective strategy for increasing the trustworthiness of qualitative research (Stahl & King, 2020). Methodological triangulation specifically involves collecting data through different methods to examine the same phenomenon (Turner & Turner, 2010). In this study, data were obtained through classroom observations and interviews with the English teacher at SLB Negeri 1 Buleleng. Furthermore, supporting evidence such as photographs, observation notes, and field notes was collected throughout the research process. These additional sources provided multiple perspectives on the assessment practices being investigated and contributed to a richer understanding of the phenomenon. The findings were also compared and supported by relevant previous studies to strengthen the credibility and reliability of the research conclusions.

Findings and Discussion

Effective assessment of students with hearing impairments requires evaluation practices that are responsive to their communication characteristics and learning needs. At SLB Negeri 1 Buleleng, the teacher employs a variety of assessment techniques to obtain a comprehensive understanding of students' learning development and achievement. One of the primary assessment approaches observed was formative assessment, which was implemented throughout the instructional process.

The purpose of formative assessment was to continuously monitor students' progress and provide timely feedback to both the teacher and the learners. The information obtained from these assessments enabled the teacher to adjust instructional strategies according to students' needs while helping students identify areas for improvement. Several formative assessment activities were incorporated into classroom instruction, including vocabulary memorization exercises and classroom presentations. These activities were designed to strengthen students' language acquisition, improve vocabulary mastery, and encourage active participation in learning. Moreover, they provided opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge and communication abilities

through assessment formats that accommodated their learning characteristics and promoted greater confidence in using English.

The formative assessment was conducted at the end of the instructional session. After introducing and discussing sports-related vocabulary, the teacher wrote the target words on the whiteboard and asked the students to memorize them. The teacher explained that each student would later be required to demonstrate their understanding by presenting the vocabulary individually in front of the class. To support this activity, students were provided with five minutes to study and memorize the vocabulary items. Once the preparation time had elapsed, the teacher invited students to come forward one by one. During the assessment, students were asked to demonstrate their mastery of eight sports-related vocabulary items using two sign language systems. They were first required to express the vocabulary through Sistem Isyarat Bahasa Indonesia (SIBI) and then provide the English equivalent using American Sign Language (ASL). This activity enabled the teacher to assess both students' vocabulary retention and their ability to connect concepts across different language systems.

Positive reinforcement was consistently provided throughout the assessment process. When students successfully demonstrated all vocabulary items correctly, the teacher acknowledged their achievement through encouraging gestures, such as giving two thumbs up. In cases where students struggled to recall a sign or made an error, the teacher did not immediately provide the answer. Instead, students were encouraged to think carefully, recall the sign independently, and repeat the sequence from the beginning. This approach promoted active learning, strengthened memory retention, and fostered students' confidence in using sign language to express English vocabulary.



Figure 1. The student came forward to mention eight sports vocabulary as a form of assessment by the teacher

In addition to implementing formative assessment, the English teacher also employed summative assessment to evaluate students' overall learning achievement. The summative assessment was conducted at the end of a learning unit or academic term to determine the extent to which students had achieved the intended learning outcomes. To accommodate the learning characteristics of deaf students, the teacher designed assessment tasks using multiple-choice questions supported by visual representations. The incorporation of visual aids helped students better understand the questions and facilitated the retrieval of previously learned information. Beyond measuring factual knowledge, the assessment was intended to evaluate students' ability to apply what they had learned and demonstrate their understanding of English concepts within meaningful contexts.

Based on the interview data, the teacher explained that classroom-based assessment was prioritized over traditional homework assignments. Rather than relying heavily on take-home tasks, the teacher preferred to monitor students' comprehension directly during instructional activities. For example, after presenting a lesson for approximately thirty minutes, students were asked to identify vocabulary through pictures or illustrations. The teacher would then ask students to provide the corresponding English word for the visual stimulus. This approach allowed the teacher to obtain immediate feedback regarding students' understanding and vocabulary mastery.

Regarding summative assessment, the teacher stated that deaf students participated in end-of-semester examinations similar to those administered in mainstream schools. The examination covered all materials taught throughout the semester and consisted primarily of multiple-choice items with four answer options. However, the

questions were adapted to suit the students' communication needs by incorporating visual supports. One example involved presenting four different sign language illustrations and asking students to identify the sign that represented a particular English vocabulary item. Through these adaptations, the teacher sought to ensure that the assessment accurately reflected students' knowledge while minimizing communication barriers.

The interview further revealed that the teacher did not view test scores as the sole indicator of student achievement. Recognizing the challenges that deaf students face in learning English, the teacher adopted a more holistic perspective when evaluating student performance. In addition to examination results, considerable attention was given to students' classroom behavior, learning attitudes, participation, and engagement during instructional activities. These aspects were considered essential indicators of students' progress and effort throughout the learning process.

Furthermore, the teacher emphasized the importance of developing competencies associated with twenty-first-century learning, particularly collaboration and teamwork. According to the teacher, students demonstrated strong social awareness and were willing to support one another during classroom activities. Learners who possessed stronger academic abilities frequently assisted classmates who encountered difficulties in understanding the lesson. The teacher regarded this collaborative culture as one of the strengths of the classroom environment. To further encourage cooperation and reinforce vocabulary acquisition, pair-work projects were occasionally assigned, especially for topics containing a substantial amount of new vocabulary. These collaborative activities not only enhanced students' understanding and retention of English vocabulary but also enabled the teacher to assess their ability to communicate, cooperate, and work effectively with peers. Consequently, the assessment process extended beyond measuring linguistic achievement and included the evaluation of important interpersonal and collaborative skills.



Figure 2. Example of summative assessment

Assessment is a fundamental component of the teaching and learning process because it provides evidence of students' academic development, language acquisition, participation, and overall learning progress. Through assessment, teachers can identify students' strengths and areas for improvement while adapting instructional practices to better meet learners' needs. Recent studies in language education emphasize that assessment should function not only as a tool for measuring achievement but also as a means of supporting learning through continuous feedback and instructional adjustment (Zhang, 2024; Yadi, 2025).

The findings revealed that the English teacher at SLB Negeri 1 Buleleng implemented both formative and summative assessment strategies. Formative assessment was integrated into classroom activities and aimed to monitor students' understanding throughout the learning process. Vocabulary memorization and individual presentations were frequently used to evaluate students' mastery of English vocabulary. Such practices align with recent findings that formative assessment contributes to improved language learning outcomes by providing



opportunities for continuous monitoring, feedback, and learner engagement (Zhang, 2024; Systematic Literature Review of Formative Assessment in Language Teaching, 2025).

The use of pair projects as part of the assessment process also enabled the teacher to evaluate students' collaborative skills in addition to their language competence. Collaborative learning activities encourage active participation and create opportunities for students to learn from one another. In the context of deaf education, peer interaction is particularly valuable because it promotes communication, social engagement, and shared problem-solving experiences. These findings support recent studies highlighting the importance of collaborative and interactive learning environments for students with hearing impairments.

The study further found that summative assessment was conducted at the end of the semester through multiple-choice tests accompanied by visual supports. The inclusion of sign language illustrations and visual cues made the assessment more accessible to deaf learners. Previous research has demonstrated that visual resources play a significant role in supporting comprehension, vocabulary development, and information retention among students with hearing impairments because they rely primarily on visual channels for learning (Yasin & Mohamad, 2024; Suriani, 2025).

Another important finding was the teacher's holistic approach to assessment. Although examination results were considered, they were not viewed as the sole indicator of student success. Classroom participation, effort, attitude, and engagement were also taken into account when evaluating students' progress. This approach reflects contemporary perspectives on assessment, which advocate for evaluating learners' development through multiple sources of evidence rather than relying exclusively on test scores (Zhang, 2024; Yadi, 2025).

Overall, the assessment practices implemented at SLB Negeri 1 Buleleng demonstrate an inclusive approach that accommodates the learning characteristics of deaf students. The integration of formative and summative assessments, together with attention to classroom participation and behavior, provides a comprehensive picture of students' development. Such practices support not only academic achievement but also communication skills, confidence, engagement, and collaboration, which are essential components of successful English learning for deaf students. Recent studies on English instruction for deaf learners similarly emphasize the importance of visual supports, interactive learning activities, and adaptive assessment strategies in promoting meaningful learning experiences (Duniangella et al., 2024; Askurny, 2025).

Conclusions

The findings revealed that the English teacher at SLB Negeri 1 Buleleng implemented a combination of formative and summative assessment practices to monitor and evaluate the learning development of deaf students. Formative assessment was integrated into classroom activities through vocabulary memorization tasks and individual presentations. These activities enabled students to strengthen their vocabulary retention, improve their confidence, and demonstrate their understanding of the lesson content. At the same time, they provided the teacher with opportunities to identify students' strengths and learning difficulties and to provide appropriate support when needed.

In addition, summative assessment was conducted through multiple-choice examinations supported by visual materials. The inclusion of visual elements was intended to accommodate the communication and learning characteristics of deaf students, making the assessment more accessible and easier to comprehend. This type of assessment measured not only students' mastery of the instructional content but also their ability to apply the knowledge and skills acquired throughout the learning process.

The integration of formative and summative assessment created a comprehensive framework for evaluating student achievement. Through this approach, the teacher was able to obtain a broader understanding of students' academic progress and learning needs, thereby facilitating the adaptation of instructional practices to support individual development. Consequently, the assessment process contributed to creating an inclusive learning environment that encouraged students to achieve their full potential and supported their overall educational growth.

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