

Understanding the Hearing-Impaired Students: A Teacher's Lived Experience in Teaching English

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Abstract

Teaching EFL is not easy. The inadequate initial learning, the learning facilities, and the communication gap between the teacher and the students create delicate factors. They need more understanding from the teacher especially when teaching Hearing-Impaired Students (HIS). The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe, narratively, the teacher's lived experiences in teaching English to HIS. Several stages as the preparation for this study involved the observations at the school, the students, the teachers, and the teaching-learning processes. The data were gained by conducting in-depth interview. The guided interview focused on: understanding of the students, the teaching, and the treatment. The collected data were classified and coded. In conclusion, the data reveal that, the teacher understands that her students are very unique because of their hearing impairment. It makes them have difficulty in writing and speaking but they still can learn.

Keywords: Hearing-Impaired Students, EFL, Lived experience.

INTRODUCTION

The students who have a hearing impairment are called the Hearing-Impaired Students (here after HIS). Hearing-impairment can be defined as one's condition of losing hearing ability which causes someone cannot receive several stimuli especially by his/ her sense of hearing (Somantri, 2007). This study focused on the students who have hearing difficulty or in Indonesian term is *tunarunggu*. The HIS cannot process sound as effective as student with no hearing impairment. Nevertheless, the previous study from Marshack (2010) shows that the HIS can retain linguistic information through nonverbal materials such as objects or pictures in memory. However, having students with this condition needs is not an easy job for the teacher.

Becoming a teacher is a choice. However, becoming a teacher for the HIS is more than a choice. It needs a deep understanding to love and teach them. This profession is not for everyone since it takes a great willingness to choose this way of life.

On the other hand, teaching EFL especially towards HIS is challenging. Setyawan (2019) considers that English is "alien language" in West Borneo because of its difficulties to learn. The inadequate initial learning, the learning facilities, and the communication gap between the teacher and the students create delicate factors. This gap of communication becomes wider when the teacher has to teach it to HIS.

Understanding is the main aspect in this study. This is what the researcher wants to explore deeply. According to Gardner in Weggins (1998), understanding is a sufficient grasp of concepts, principles, or skills that one brings to bear in certain situations. Understanding the EFL teaching towards HIS may give the teacher new perspectives on the students and the teaching. It becomes her lived experience. Referring to Dilthey in Manen (1990), lived experience is interpreted as the manifestation of experienced meaning.

The framing of the teacher's lived experience in this study captures the teacher's understanding in teaching EFL towards HIS. The research has been conducted in one of public *Sekolah Luar Biasa* in Landak in the academic year of 2019/2020. The students belong to severe to profoundly hearing losses. Referring to Widiyanto (2008), this special classification for educational purposes has been made by International Standard Organization to classify HIS based on the level of the hearing-loss. It means they cannot hear sound less than 70 decibels. In the real school life, these students are not bothered by loud noises, have difficulty to speak even to say simple words, and their speech is very difficult to be understood. Surprisingly, the teacher has been teaching these students for three years. During those periods of teaching, she must have advance understanding of teaching experiences. This rich understanding of reasoning is the essence of this study. According to Sokowloski (2008), reasoning comes to rest in understanding since it since it serves ultimately to show forth what things are. The narration of the teacher's understanding is the manifestation of the findings in this study.

Most studies on vocabulary teaching in EFL are for normal students. Many studies on HIS do not focus on the teacher's lived experience on vocabulary teaching. As an example, the use of cochlear implant and its relation to psychological development in Danish population is investigated Dammeyer (2010) in Danish population. Another researchers Fernandes and Myers (2010) focus on barriers and pathways in inclusive studies. Nevertheless, my previous study on vocabulary teaching towards HIS shows that visualization such as pictures, lip reading, gestures, and sign language are the important tools for students to understand meaning from both hearing and silent worlds (Setyawan, 2013).

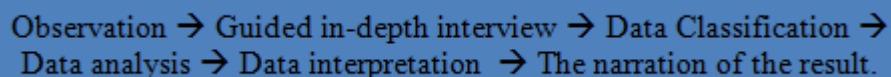
METHOD

The framing of the teacher's lived experience captures the teacher's understanding towards her HIS. Purposive sampling was used in selecting the participant among all the teachers in the school because the teachers have various educational backgrounds. This is in line with Lavrakas (2011) that purposive sample is referring to expert sample. The participant of this research is a bachelor in English education. Her understanding towards HIS is her lived experience. According to Bradley (2002), past experience such as understanding accumulates over time, teaches us lesson, and shapes our response towards the world.

The data in this research was gathered by guided in-depth interview. The interview guidelines had been prepared before conducting the in-depth interview.

The data were classified and analyzed based on these three understanding criterion, they were: the students, the teaching, and the treatment.

In brief, the procedure of the research which is simplified from Setyawan (2013) can be described as follow:



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graph LR; A[Observation] --> B[Guided in-depth interview]; B --> C[Data Classification]; C --> D[Data analysis]; D --> E[Data interpretation]; E --> F[The narration of the result];
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Figure 1. Procedure of the research

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are classified under these following themes, they are: understanding of the students, understanding of the teaching, and understanding of the treatment.

Talking about the understanding of the students, the teacher realized that her HIS were very unique. They are similar to normal students unless on apart from their hearing ability. Their hearing loss was genetically heredity. Most of them were severe to profound loss which gives them a big obstacle to the hearing world. The teacher told the unfairness reality happened towards her HIS. People kept thinking that HIS could not learn language. However, the teacher knew her HIS were eager to learn since they were curious about new things including names of things and numbers (vocabulary).

The biggest understanding of teaching HIS was the needs of having extra patience. The teacher recognized that most of her students were slow learner because of their hearing impairments. They could learn visually since the school could not afford to provide the assistive technology for better and clearer hearing such as sophisticated hearing aids and cochlear implants. Talking about the teaching materials, mostly the standards had to be decreased. Teaching English towards these HIS was not an easy job. Achieving low competence in English was a big achievement for the students. It might also bring a great satisfaction for the teacher. As an example, in teaching numbers, understanding one to ten was very easy for normal students with no impairments. On the other hand, teaching it towards the HIS took a lot of time. It might need three until four meetings to teach simple words/ numbers.

However, the teacher underlined that the most principle needs to be taught towards these students was not the subject materials but merely on basic life skills. It became a bias function between the teacher as an educator and as a sitter. Somehow, this condition played an important role on the students' life because they need those basic life skills.

The most important thing to teach the HIS as the previous study showed was the use of real media because visualization conquered their hearing loss. Setyawan (2013) said that pictures, lip reading, gestures, and sign language are the important tools for students to understand meaning was Bringing them the real things in the classroom was the best method in teaching them. They needed to see and touch something to help them having better memorization. Considering

about the understanding on the treatment towards HIS, the fact that the HIS need to be taught basic life skill was the effect of the parents' treatment at home. They kept feather bedding them. It made their life skills hardly developed. It blocked them for being independent. It took an extra effort to lead the students become more autonomous.

The teacher understood that the parents should let their hearing-impaired children try to do everything on their efforts even though they find difficulty to do it. In fact, most parents did not have a big heart to let them finding troubles when doing the efforts. They just loose their patience to know that the hearing loss made their lovely HIS became a slow learner.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, teaching English towards the HIS is possible. However, the teacher must strive hard and patience in teaching them. The fact that they are separated from the hearing world is true but this is not the dead end; they can learn language visually. Realia is the most accesable things to be displayed in front of the class if the school does not have internet and interactive-modern gadgets. By bringging realia in the class, the HIS can touch, feel, and smell it to get the conceptual knowledge that help them coping better memorization of meaning especially in teaching vocabulary. It is the best media ever to show them the real example in teaching.

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