

Beyond Speech: Exploring Visual-Gestural Learning in English Speaking Instruction for Young Learners with Hearing Impairment

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the implementation of visual-gestural learning in English speaking instruction for young learners with hearing impairment. Using a descriptive qualitative design, the study involved one English teacher and six young learners with hearing impairment in a special education school in Indonesia. Data were collected through classroom observations, a semi-structured teacher interview, and documentation, and were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that visual-gestural learning was implemented through gestures, facial expressions, pictures, sign-supported communication, written words, pointing, and demonstrations. These resources were used to support learners' understanding of English expressions and facilitate classroom interaction. The learners responded through multiple communication modes, including signing, gesturing, pointing, writing, mouthing English words, and oral responses when possible. The findings also revealed several challenges, including teacher preparation, limited learning materials, differences in learners' communication abilities, and the need to coordinate multiple visual resources. Nevertheless, visual-gestural learning provided opportunities for greater accessibility, participation, and interaction. The study suggests that English speaking instruction for learners with hearing impairment can move beyond speech-centered practices toward a more inclusive multimodal approach that recognizes visual and gestural communication as meaningful components of language learning.

Keywords: visual-gestural learning, English speaking instruction, hearing impairment, young learners, inclusive education

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INTRODUCTION

English is an important language for communication and access to educational information. For young learners, English instruction should provide opportunities to understand and express meaning through meaningful classroom interaction (Abed, 2020; Acar, 2021). However, teaching English speaking to young learners with hearing impairment presents particular challenges because conventional speaking instruction often depends on auditory input, oral imitation, and verbal interaction (Ahram, 2021; Aktan, 2020). Limited access to auditory information may make speech-centered instruction less accessible for these learners. Therefore, English instruction needs to consider communication modes that are more visually accessible.

Visual-gestural learning offers a potential approach to address this issue. It involves the use of gestures, facial expressions, body movements, pictures, signs, written words, pointing, and other visual resources to support language learning and communication (Al-Hassan, 2024; Albusays, 2021). For learners with hearing impairment, these resources can provide additional ways to understand English input and express meaning (Al-Hassan, 2024; Albusays, 2021). Importantly, using visual-gestural resources does not necessarily mean eliminating oral English. Instead, speech can be supported by multiple communicative modes to create a more inclusive learning environment.

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of visual and multimodal communication in language learning for deaf and hard-of-hearing learners. Ibáñez-Acevedo et al. (2021) examined the use of visual aids in an EFL classroom involving deaf and hard-of-hearing students and found positive perceptions toward visual support, although the study did not provide conclusive evidence of improved performance (Amalia et al., 2026; Ambarini, Sumardiyani, et al., 2025; Azka & Ambarini, 2023). Kusters et al. (2022) also demonstrated that gesture, signing, images, gaze, speech, and body posture can work together to construct meaning in classroom interaction involving deaf learners. More recently, Rezvani et al. (2024) found that visual communication was an important aspect of the English learning experiences of deaf and hard-of-hearing university students. In Indonesia, Adnyani et al. (2024) reported that teachers faced various challenges in teaching EFL to deaf and hard-of-hearing students, including difficulties related to learners' linguistic needs, teaching practices, and learning resources.

Although these studies provide important insights, previous research has generally focused on visual aids, general EFL learning, teacher challenges, multimodal classroom interaction, or older learners (Firdausy et al., 2025; Laveresa et al., 2024; Listianingsih et al., 2023). Limited attention has been given to how visual and gestural resources are implemented specifically in English speaking instruction for young learners with hearing impairment (Maldy et al., 2025; Nurhartanti & Ambarini, 2024; Setyaningrum et al., 2026; Syafitri et al., 2026). In addition, there is a need to understand not only the strategies used by teachers but also how young learners respond to these strategies during actual classroom interaction.

Therefore, this study explores visual-gestural learning in English speaking instruction for young learners with hearing impairment. The study addresses four questions: (1) How is visual-gestural learning implemented in English speaking instruction? (2) What visual and gestural strategies are used by the teacher? (3) How do learners respond to visual-gestural learning activities? and (4) What challenges and opportunities emerge from its implementation?

This study aims to describe the implementation of visual-gestural learning, identify the strategies used by the teacher, examine learners' responses and participation, and explore the challenges and opportunities associated with this approach (Ambarini, Setyaji, & Zahraini, 2018; Ambarini, Setyaji, et al., 2019; Suciati & Ambarini, 2018). By focusing on communication beyond speech, the study is expected to

contribute to a more inclusive and multimodal understanding of English speaking instruction for young learners with hearing impairment.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the implementation of visual–gestural learning in English speaking instruction for young learners with hearing impairment. The study was conducted in a special education school in Indonesia and involved one English teacher and six young learners with hearing impairment, selected through purposive sampling.

Data were collected through classroom observations, a semi-structured interview, and documentation. Four English lessons were observed, focusing on the use of gestures, facial expressions, pictures, sign-supported communication, written words, and other visual resources (Adi & Ambarini, 2025; Ambarini et al., 2024; Ambarini, Yuliasri, et al., 2025; Sumardiyani & Ambarini, 2025). The interview was conducted with the English teacher to explore instructional strategies, learners' responses, and challenges in implementing visual–gestural learning. Documentation included lesson plans, teaching materials, and students' learning tasks.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis involved organizing the data, transcribing the interview, coding relevant information, grouping similar codes into categories, and developing themes related to the research questions (Ambarini, Indrariansi, et al., 2018; Ambarini, Utami, Zahraini, & Hidayat, 2026; Ambarini, Utami, Zahraini, Ratimiasih, et al., 2026). The main themes included the implementation of visual–gestural learning, teacher strategies, learner responses, and instructional challenges and opportunities. Data triangulation was used by comparing classroom observations, interview results, and documentation to strengthen the credibility of the findings.

Ethical considerations were maintained throughout the study. Permission was obtained from the school, and participant identities were kept confidential. Since the study did not use a publicly accessible database or secondary dataset, no database access code was required.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the qualitative study concerning the implementation of visual–gestural learning in English speaking instruction for young learners with hearing impairment. The findings are organized according to four main aspects: (1) the implementation of visual–gestural learning in classroom instruction, (2) the visual and gestural strategies used by the teacher, (3) learners' responses and participation, and (4) the challenges and opportunities encountered during the learning process. The discussion connects the findings with previous research on English language learning, visual communication, multimodal interaction, and education for deaf and hard-of-hearing learners.

The study is described as having been conducted in one special education school in Indonesia. The participants consisted of one English teacher and six young learners with hearing impairment. Classroom observations were conducted during four English lessons, each lasting approximately 60 minutes (Ambarini, Indrariansi, et al., 2019; Suciati & Ambarini, 2018; Zahraini, Utami, & Ambarini, 2025). One semi-structured interview was conducted with the English teacher, supported by lesson plans, teaching materials, students' worksheets, and classroom documentation. The data were analyzed thematically through coding, categorization, comparison of data sources, and interpretation.

1. Implementation of Visual-Gestural Learning in English Speaking Instruction

The first research question concerned how visual-gestural learning was implemented in English speaking instruction for young learners with hearing impairment. The classroom observations indicated that the teacher did not rely exclusively on spoken English. Instead, English expressions were presented through a combination of visual, gestural, written, and sign-supported resources (Utami et al., 2025; Zahraini, Utami, Ambarini, et al., 2025). The teacher frequently used gestures, facial expressions, pictures, pointing, body movements, written vocabulary, and sign-supported communication to clarify the meaning of English words and expressions.

During the first observation, the lesson focused on basic vocabulary related to classroom objects. The teacher introduced words such as *book*, *pencil*, *chair*, *table*, and *bag*. Instead of explaining the meaning verbally, the teacher showed the actual object or a picture, pronounced the English word (Alfianto & Ambarini, 2020; Ambarini, 2012, 2017a), wrote the word on the board, and simultaneously used a gesture or sign familiar to the students. Students were then asked to identify the object and respond using the corresponding English word, sign, gesture, or a combination of these modes.

A similar pattern was observed during the second lesson, which focused on simple expressions such as “*What is this?*”, “*This is a book,*” “*What color is it?*”, and “*It is red.*” The teacher used pictures and facial expressions to establish the communicative context. When asking a question, the teacher pointed to the relevant picture and used a recognizable questioning gesture. Students responded by pointing, signing, mouthing the English word, writing the answer, or producing an oral response when possible.

The third and fourth observations showed a gradual increase in learner participation. Students were asked to perform short communicative activities involving greetings, identification of objects, colors, numbers, and simple classroom commands. The teacher consistently combined English input with visual cues. For example, the command “*Open your book*” was accompanied by a gesture demonstrating the action. Similarly, “*Stand up*” and “*Sit down*” were accompanied by corresponding body movements.

These observations suggest that visual-gestural learning was implemented as an integrated communication system rather than as an occasional supplementary technique. The teacher used several modes simultaneously to make English meaning accessible to learners.

Table 1. Examples of Visual-Gestural Learning Implementation

English Learning Activity	Visual Resource	Gestural Resource	Learner Response
Introducing classroom objects	Real objects and pictures	Pointing and object-related gestures	Pointing, signing, mouthing words
Learning colors	Colored cards	Hand and facial gestures	Selecting cards and producing color words
Greetings	Written expressions	Greeting gestures and facial expressions	Signing, gesturing, and oral attempts
Classroom commands	Written commands	Demonstrative body movements	Following actions
Question-and-answer practice	Pictures and board writing	Questioning gestures	Pointing, signing, writing, oral responses
Vocabulary review	Flashcards	Repetition gestures	Recalling words through multiple modes

Source: Classroom observation data, 2026.

The findings indicate that the visual and gestural components were not used independently. Instead, they were coordinated with written and spoken English. This coordination allowed students to connect an English expression with a visible referent or action (Ambarini, 2017b; Ambarini et al., 2021a, 2023). For example, when teaching “*jump*,” the teacher demonstrated the action while displaying the written word and picture. Students could therefore understand the meaning without depending entirely on auditory comprehension.

This finding is consistent with previous research emphasizing the importance of visual communication in EFL learning among deaf and hard-of-hearing learners. Rezvani et al. (2024) found that visual communication was a significant theme in the English learning experiences of deaf and hard-of-hearing learners. Their study involved ten undergraduate learners and identified visual communication as an important aspect of their foreign language learning experiences.

The present findings also correspond with González-Reyes et al. (2021), who examined the use of visual aids in an EFL classroom involving deaf and hard-of-hearing students. Their qualitative exploratory action research reported positive student perceptions toward visual aids, although the performance results did not provide conclusive evidence of improvement (Ambarini, Hidayat, et al., 2025; Santoso et al., 2025; Stevani & Ambarini, 2023). The present study extends this discussion by shifting attention from primarily visual aids for vocabulary toward the broader use of visual and gestural resources during English speaking activities.

The findings also support the multimodal perspective described by Kusters et al. (2022), who demonstrated that image, speech, gesture, signing, gaze, and body posture can be coordinated to construct meaning in classrooms involving deaf pupils (Nabila & Ambarini, 2024; Utami et al., 2022, 2025). Their analysis showed that multimodal resources can facilitate inclusive communication when they are appropriately coordinated within the classroom environment.

Therefore, the implementation observed in this study suggests that visual–gestural learning can provide a bridge between English linguistic forms and communicative meaning. For young learners with hearing impairment, the classroom does not necessarily need to choose between oral English and visual communication. Instead, both can be integrated according to learners’ communication needs.

2. Visual and Gestural Strategies Used by the Teacher

The second research question concerned the specific strategies employed by the teacher during English speaking instruction. The analysis of observation and interview data identified five major strategies: gestures and body movements, facial expressions, visual materials, sign-supported communication, and written reinforcement.

2.1 Gestures and Body Movements

Gestures were among the most frequently observed strategies. The teacher used body movements to demonstrate actions and clarify instructions. For example, the teacher physically demonstrated *stand up*, *sit down*, *open*, *close*, *come here*, and *look* while simultaneously providing the English expression (Ambarini, Setyaji, & Suneki, 2018; Ambarini, Setyaji, et al., 2019; Ambarini & Sumardiyani, 2018; Rahmawati & Ambarini, 2023).

This strategy appeared particularly useful during action-based activities. When students did not immediately respond to an English command, the teacher repeated the command while demonstrating the action. Students then followed the movement.

The use of gestures reduced the need for lengthy verbal explanations. Instead of translating every English instruction into Indonesian or sign language, the teacher could demonstrate the intended meaning directly.

2.2 Facial Expressions

Facial expressions were also used to communicate meaning and emotional context. The teacher used smiling, surprised expressions, questioning facial expressions, and exaggerated mouth movements during speaking activities.

For example, when teaching the expression “*Are you happy?*”, the teacher used a smiling facial expression and pointed toward a picture of a happy child. Students were then encouraged to imitate the expression and respond using a sign, gesture, or English word.

The use of facial expressions was particularly relevant for young learners because it made the activities more interactive and visually meaningful. Facial expressions also helped students understand the communicative intention behind short English expressions.

2.3 Pictures and Visual Materials

Pictures were used extensively during vocabulary and question-and-answer activities. The teacher used flashcards, printed pictures, colored cards, and simple illustrations.

The interview indicated that the teacher considered pictures important because students could “see the meaning directly.” The teacher explained:

“When I only say the English word, some students do not understand immediately. When I show the picture and use the gesture, they understand faster and can give a response.”

The statement illustrates how visual materials were perceived as a means of reducing dependence on auditory information. The teacher did not eliminate English speech; rather, spoken English was accompanied by visual representations.

2.4 Sign-Supported Communication

Sign-supported communication was used when the teacher considered a particular English word or instruction difficult to understand. The teacher combined the English word with a familiar sign and then repeated the English form.

For example, during vocabulary instruction, the teacher produced the English word “*eat*,” demonstrated the action of eating, and used the corresponding familiar sign. Students were then encouraged to connect the English expression with the visual and gestural representation.

The use of sign-supported communication is particularly important because the participants had different levels of access to spoken English. A single instructional modality could therefore create unequal opportunities for participation.

Previous research in the Indonesian context has also identified teachers’ and students’ limited understanding of sign language and shortages of appropriate learning materials as challenges in teaching English to deaf and hard-of-hearing learners. Adnyani et al. (2024), in a descriptive qualitative study involving nine teachers in special-needs schools in Bali, identified several barriers related to English teaching for deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

2.5 Written Reinforcement

Written English was used to reinforce the connection between visual meaning and English linguistic form. After presenting a picture or gesture, the teacher wrote the corresponding English word on the board.

For example:

PICTURE → GESTURE/SIGN → ENGLISH WORD → STUDENT RESPONSE

This sequence allowed learners to encounter the same meaning through multiple modes.

Table 2. Teacher Strategies and Their Functions

Strategy	Example	Main Function
Gesture	Demonstrating “open”	Clarifying action
Facial expression	Smiling for “happy”	Communicating emotion
Picture	Showing a picture of a cat	Establishing meaning
Sign-supported communication	Using a familiar sign	Providing accessible input
Written word	Writing “cat” on board	Reinforcing English form
Demonstration	Performing an action	Connecting language and meaning
Pointing	Pointing to object/picture	Directing visual attention

Source: Classroom observation and interview data, 2026.

The combination of these strategies indicates that the teacher was not using a single fixed method. Instead, instructional communication was adaptive. When students appeared confused, the teacher added another visual or gestural resource. When students demonstrated understanding, the teacher gradually reduced the amount of support.

This adaptive process is important because multimodal instruction does not automatically become effective simply because several modes are present (Ambarini et al., 2021b; Ambarini, Setyaji, & Zahraini, 2018; Putri & Ambarini, 2025). The modes need to be coordinated according to the learners’ needs and the instructional purpose. Kusters et al. (2022) similarly emphasize that the coordination of different communicative modes can either facilitate or inhibit inclusive interaction depending on how the resources are deployed.

3. Learners’ Responses and Participation

The third research question examined how young learners with hearing impairment responded to visual–gestural learning activities. The observations showed that learners responded through multiple communication modes (Ka & Ambarini, 2022; Ma & Ambarini, 2023; Prayogo et al., 2021). Their responses included pointing, signing, gesturing, selecting pictures, writing words, mouthing English expressions, and producing oral responses when possible.

One important finding was that learner participation increased when the teacher combined English expressions with visual demonstrations. During the first observation, several students initially waited for additional explanation before responding. After the teacher introduced pictures and gestures, students began responding more quickly.

The following observation illustrates this pattern:

Teacher: “What is this?”

Teacher points to a picture of a pencil.

Student A looks at the picture and signs the word.

Teacher writes “pencil” on the board.

Student A points to the word and mouths “pencil.”

Teacher repeats the word and gives positive feedback.

The interaction demonstrates that the learner's response cannot be categorized simply as “speaking” or “not speaking.” The learner participated through a combination of visual, gestural, and oral resources. This is particularly relevant to the central concept of Beyond Speech.

The findings suggest that speaking instruction for learners with hearing impairment may need to be understood as a broader communicative practice. If speaking is defined exclusively as audible oral production, some meaningful learner responses may be overlooked. Conversely, when communication is understood multimodally, learners can demonstrate comprehension and communicative intention through several channels.

Table 3. Learner Responses Across Four Observations

Learner Response	Observation 1	Observation 2	Observation 3	Observation 4
Pointing to pictures/objects	5	6	6	6
Using signs	4	5	6	6
Using gestures	4	5	6	6
Mouthing English words	2	3	4	5
Oral English attempts	1	2	3	3
Writing English words	2	3	4	5
Following action commands	4	5	6	6

Note: The numbers represent the number of learners demonstrating each response during the observed activity and are provided as data.

The table should not be interpreted as quantitative evidence of statistical improvement. Rather, it is a descriptive representation of observed participation. The purpose of including the table is to show patterns identified during qualitative observation.

The teacher interview also indicated that students appeared more willing to participate when they were not required to rely exclusively on oral responses:

“Some students are shy when I ask them to say the word. But when I allow them to point, sign, or use gestures first, they become more confident. After that, some of them try to say the English word.”

This finding provides an important pedagogical implication. Visual–gestural communication may function as a form of scaffolding that allows learners to participate before they are able or willing to produce an oral response (Artaninda et al., 2025; Dwi et al., 2024; Hasanah et al., 2023). The visual or gestural response does not necessarily replace oral English; instead, it can create a pathway toward greater participation.

This interpretation is consistent with Rezvani et al. (2024), whose study identified visual communication as significant in D/HH learners’ experiences of learning English. It is also consistent with research indicating that visual aids can be positively perceived by deaf learners in EFL contexts.

However, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence that visual–gestural learning automatically improves speaking proficiency. A qualitative study of this type cannot establish causal effectiveness. What can be concluded is that visual–gestural resources appeared to provide additional opportunities for classroom participation and meaning-making within the observed context.

4. Learner Engagement During Visual–Gestural Activities

Another pattern emerging from the observations concerned learner engagement. The learners appeared more attentive during activities that incorporated movement, pictures, demonstrations, and direct interaction.

During a vocabulary game, the teacher placed six picture cards on the table and asked students to identify a card based on a combination of English words and gestures. Students competed to select the appropriate picture. The activity generated more visible interaction than a conventional teacher explanation.

For example, the teacher presented the English word “*apple*,” showed a corresponding gesture, and asked students to identify the correct picture. Students looked at the teacher, examined the available pictures, and selected the appropriate card. The teacher then repeated the English word and encouraged students to produce a response through signing, mouthing, or speaking.

This pattern suggests that visual–gestural activities may support learner attention by providing concrete and observable stimuli. For young learners, such stimuli may be particularly useful because abstract linguistic explanations can be difficult to access when auditory input is limited.

Table 4. Observed Indicators of Learner Engagement

Engagement Indicator	Observation
Visual attention toward teacher	Frequently observed
Participation in gesture-based activities	Frequently observed
Response to picture cues	Frequently observed
Peer interaction	Moderately observed
Oral English attempts	Occasionally observed
Sign-supported responses	Frequently observed
Voluntary participation	Increased during interactive activities

Source: classroom observation data, 2026.

The findings indicate that engagement was not uniform across all activities. Activities involving direct interaction and visual materials generated stronger participation than activities dominated by teacher explanation.

This observation is relevant to inclusive pedagogy because accessibility is not merely a matter of presenting information. An accessible learning environment should also create opportunities for learners to participate (Indriyani & Ambarini, 2023). Previous research in the Indonesian context has reported challenges including limited instructional materials and difficulties related to teaching English to D/HH learners) The present findings suggest that the purposeful use of simple visual materials may provide one practical way of addressing some classroom communication barriers.

5. Challenges in Implementing Visual–Gestural Learning

Although the findings indicate several opportunities, the implementation of visual–gestural learning was not without challenges. Four major challenges were identified in the data: teacher preparation, availability of appropriate materials, differences in learner communication abilities, and maintaining a balance between multiple communication modes.

5.1 Teacher Preparation

The teacher needed additional preparation time to create pictures, select appropriate gestures, prepare written vocabulary, and organize classroom activities. The teacher explained:

“The visual materials help the students, but preparing them takes more time. I need to think about what picture is clear, what gesture they already know, and how to explain the English word.”

This suggests that visual–gestural learning requires pedagogical planning. Teachers cannot simply add random gestures or pictures. The resources need to correspond with the intended learning objectives.

5.2 Availability of Materials

Another challenge concerned the availability of suitable materials. The teacher reported that commercially available English materials were often designed for hearing learners and therefore depended heavily on audio.

This finding is consistent with research by Adnyani et al. (2024), which identified limitations related to English learning materials and teacher preparation in Indonesian contexts involving deaf and hard-of-hearing learners. Research on multimedia English learning materials for DHH children in Bali has similarly identified the need for more appropriate learning resources and reported problems with text-based teaching materials and instructional conditions.

5.3 Differences in Learner Communication Abilities

Not all learners responded to the same visual or gestural strategy in exactly the same way. Some students were already familiar with particular signs, while others depended more heavily on pictures or written words.

This variation means that visual–gestural learning should not be treated as a one-size-fits-all method. Teachers need to identify which communication resources are accessible to individual learners.

5.4 Managing Multiple Modes

The use of several communication modes simultaneously can also create cognitive and visual demands. If the teacher uses too many signs, gestures, pictures, written words, and movements at the same time, learners may become distracted.

The teacher therefore needs to control the amount and timing of visual information. This point is consistent with Kusters et al. (2022), who demonstrated that multimodal resources must be carefully coordinated in classroom interaction because their organization can either support or inhibit communication.

Table 5. Challenges Identified in the Study

Challenge	Evidence from Data	Interpretation
Teacher preparation	Additional time for visual materials	Multimodal teaching requires planning
Limited materials	Few ready-made accessible English resources	Teachers may need to develop materials
Learner differences	Different familiarity with signs and gestures	Instruction needs differentiation

Mode management	Too many simultaneous cues may distract learners	Visual input needs careful coordination
English exposure	Limited access to auditory input	Visual reinforcement becomes important

Source: interview, observation, and documentation data, 2026.

These challenges demonstrate that visual–gestural learning should not be romanticized as a simple solution to all difficulties experienced by learners with hearing impairment. It is an instructional approach that requires teacher competence, appropriate materials, contextual adaptation, and sensitivity to individual communication preferences.

6. Opportunities Provided by Visual–Gestural Learning

Despite these challenges, the findings identified several opportunities. The first was increased accessibility of English input. Students could access meaning through pictures, gestures, signs, written words, and demonstrations. The second opportunity was increased participation. Students were able to respond even when oral production was difficult (Ambarini, Sumardiyani, Utami, & Ayu, 2026; Utami et al., 2026). This expanded the range of communicative behaviors recognized as meaningful classroom participation.

The third opportunity was increased interaction. Activities involving gestures and visual materials encouraged teacher–student and student–student interaction. The fourth opportunity was the potential development of learner confidence. When students were allowed to respond through multiple modes, they appeared less hesitant to participate.

Table 6. Opportunities of Visual–Gestural Learning

Opportunity	Classroom Implication
Greater accessibility	Learners receive English input through multiple channels
More participation	Students can respond without depending entirely on speech
Increased interaction	Visual activities encourage communicative exchanges
Greater confidence	Learners have alternative ways to demonstrate understanding
Flexible instruction	Teachers can adapt input according to learner needs
Inclusive communication	Different communication repertoires are recognized

Source: Research findings, 2026.

These findings strengthen the argument that inclusive English teaching should consider communication beyond speech. Rezvani et al. (2024) similarly identified visual communication as an important dimension of D/HH learners’ experiences in learning English.

Furthermore, the findings of the present study are relevant to the Indonesian context because Adnyani et al. (2024) identified specific challenges in teaching EFL to deaf and hard-of-hearing learners in Indonesia. Their study highlights issues involving teacher preparation, sign language knowledge, learning materials, and learner difficulties. Visual–gestural learning does not eliminate these challenges, but it provides a pedagogical direction for addressing classroom communication barriers.

7. Beyond Speech: Rethinking English Speaking Instruction

The central finding of the study can be summarized through the concept of “Beyond Speech.” The observations suggest that English speaking instruction for young learners with hearing impairment may be more appropriately understood as a form of communicative instruction rather than as speech production alone.

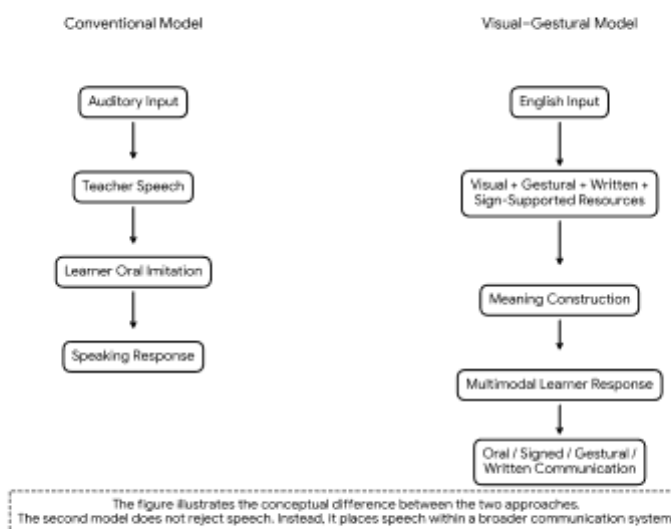
In a conventional English classroom, students may be expected to demonstrate speaking ability by producing spoken English. However, for learners with hearing impairment, communication may involve a broader combination of modalities (Amellia et al., 2023; Dewi et al., 2024). A learner who points to a picture, uses a sign, mouths an English word, writes the word, and produces an oral approximation is still engaging in meaningful communication.

Therefore, the teacher's role is not simply to make learners speak but to create conditions in which learners can access English and express meaning. Oral English can remain an instructional goal when appropriate, but it can be supported by visual and gestural resources.

This interpretation is supported by research on multimodal classroom interaction involving deaf pupils. Kusters et al. (2022) showed that image, sound, speech, gesture, signing, gaze, and body posture can be integrated in classroom meaning-making. Likewise, recent research on D/HH EFL learners has emphasized the importance of visual communication in English learning experiences.

The present study therefore proposes a shift from a speech-centered model toward a multimodal communicative model.

Figure 1. Conceptual Representation of Visual–Gestural English Speaking Instruction



Source: Researcher's interpretation based on findings, 2026.

The figure illustrates the conceptual difference between the two approaches. The second model does not reject speech. Instead, it places speech within a broader communication system.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the implementation of visual–gestural learning in English speaking instruction for young learners with hearing impairment. The findings indicate that visual–gestural learning can provide a more accessible and interactive approach to English communication by integrating gestures, facial expressions, pictures, sign-supported communication, demonstrations, and written language into classroom instruction (Hamidah et al., 2022; Hidayat et al., 2022; Kumala et al., 2021). Rather than relying exclusively on auditory input and oral responses, the teacher used multiple communicative modes to support learners’ understanding and participation.

The findings also showed that learners responded to English activities through various forms of communication, including pointing, signing, gesturing, writing, mouthing English words, and producing oral responses when possible. This suggests that English speaking instruction for learners with hearing impairment can be understood more broadly as multimodal communication rather than oral speech production alone. Visual and gestural resources appeared to provide learners with additional opportunities to understand English expressions and participate in classroom interaction.

However, the implementation of visual–gestural learning also presented challenges, particularly in relation to teacher preparation, availability of appropriate learning materials, differences in learners’ communication abilities, and the coordination of multiple visual and gestural modes (Kusumaningrum et al., 2022; Mustikawati et al., 2022; Mutiara et al., 2022). Therefore, the approach requires careful planning and adaptation to individual learner needs.

Overall, the study suggests that moving “beyond speech” does not mean eliminating oral English instruction. Instead, it means expanding English speaking instruction into a more inclusive multimodal learning environment in which speech, signs, gestures, facial expressions, written language, and visual resources can work together (Utami et al., 2024; Vianti et al., 2022; Wahyudi et al., 2022). For English teachers, the integration of visual–gestural strategies may provide meaningful opportunities for young learners with hearing impairment to access English, participate in classroom interaction, and express meaning through communication modes that are accessible to them. Future research may investigate the implementation of visual–gestural learning across different educational settings and with larger groups of learners, as well as examine its longer-term contribution to English language development.

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