

T12 - TEACHING ENGLISH TO DEAF STUDENTS IN THAILAND: SUCCESS, CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD

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ABSTRACT

Classes of deaf students generally consist of the teacher, sign language interpreter, note taker and a camera man so that students can borrow video tapes to review what has been taught in the class. English classes are similar to other classes in term of the people working in the classes and the setting of the class. Ideally speaking, the person who can teach English to Thai deaf students should be someone who is fluent in English and Thai Sign Language. However, such person is rare to find. What we can do is to find somebody who is fluent in both English and Thai and also know some Thai Sign Language, especially its structure and linguistics. It is not recommendable to teach English to deaf students by comparing Thai Sign Language with spoken or written Thai. First, the structure of these two languages is quite different. Trying to compare the two languages will do nothing but cause more confusion to students. Second, deaf students in Thailand are not good at Thai language. According to the study on literacy of deaf students in Thailand, it was found that the reading capacity of deaf students is much lower than hearing students of the same ages and grades. There is also a challenge if the teacher tries to compare Thai Sign Language with English because there are fewer vocabularies in Thai Sign Language. Adverb of frequency is one example. In English, there are several words to describe something that do not happen regularly such as: seldom, rarely, hardly and scarcely. However, in Thai Sign Language, there is just one sign that has the same meaning with these three words. Abstract nouns are another challenge. In order to teach English to deaf students, teachers not only need to understand the structure of Thai Sign Language but they also need to understand deaf culture. They can learn from deaf students, deaf communities as well as sign language interpreters. Some interpreters have long experiences working with deaf communities. Some of them have deaf people in their families. Some are children of deaf adults (CODA). So they have good knowledge and understanding on deaf culture. Teaching method is another crucial part. Aside from teaching materials, role play is another method that helps students to understand English in different contexts such as family trees. It can encourage more participation from students and create more pleasant learning atmosphere. The evaluation of deaf students is also different from hearing students. Written exam is not

the only way to check their understanding. Deaf students do better if they can explain in Thai Sign Language. If the teachers want to give written exam, make sure the students understand what they are required to do. In many cases, students cannot give proper answers just because they do not understand the instructions. In order to solve this problem, the instructions need to be explained in sign language and enough examples should be given in order to make sure the students can follow the instructions. In conclusion, to be a good English teacher for deaf students, one needs to be knowledgeable, well experienced and creative.

Keywords: teaching English, deaf students, deaf classrooms