

The CALA 2019 Proceedings Paper 13 - 2

*Narrative and Metanarrative, Paper 2*

**Teaching Vietnamese to Deaf Children Using Sign  
Languages: Situations and Solutions**

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# Teaching Vietnamese to Deaf Children Using Sign Languages: Situations and Solutions

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## Abstract

Human civilization has made tremendous progress, to improve its quality of life. However, there are still a number of people in society who suffer from grave disadvantages due to their disabilities. There are many reasons for this phenomenon, and even though science is rapidly developing, it is impossible to completely erase those causes. Ameliorating education and offering vocational training for the disabled are considered as effective solutions to provide these people with a satisfying life, especially children. For deaf children, the dream of normal schooling becomes great. Limited language proficiency leads to limited communication skills and reduces confidence when entering the first grade, adversely affecting their academic performance and later development. Therefore, in this article, we focus on first grade deaf children.

Like the impact of normal language on normal children, sign language plays an important role in language development of deaf children. They use sign language to think and communicate. However, to study in textbook programs as does a normal child, in the classroom of deaf children, both the teachers and students must use finger alphabets to teach and learn Vietnamese. We thus study teaching Vietnamese to deaf children and suggest games to draw their attention to the lessons.

*Keywords:* teaching, sign language, deaf children

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## Introduction

Human civilization has developed significantly, improving life quality. However, there is still a part of society with disabilities that must suffer from great disadvantages. There are many causes leading to this phenomenon. In spite of scientific advancements; these causes are not completely eliminated. Educating, raising cultural awareness and vocational training for people with disabilities are considered as effective solutions to provide lives with fun and to provide conceptions of life as useful, more so in children. Therefore, within the scope of the article, we discuss sign language teaching for deaf children starting in the first grade.

Like the impact of natural language on normal children, sign language also plays a crucial role in the linguistic development of deaf children. How do we teach deaf children sign language? Is the teaching of sign language for deaf children the same as that for normal children? Deafness can be caused by congenital abnormalities or post-natal infectious diseases (such as pneumonia, etc. Many 6-8 year-olds go to school when they do not acquire enough language to study so they have to learn language for two years. In this article, from the specific characteristics of deaf and dumb children and the survey results in school centres, we discuss the factors that

influence the effectiveness of language teaching for deaf children.

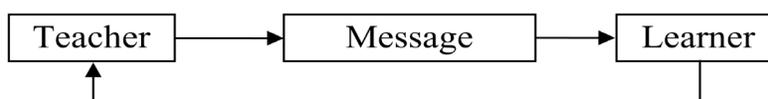
Education to raise the level of cultural and vocational training for people with disabilities is being seen as an effective solution to bring them a good life. Like the impact of normal language on normal children, sign language also plays a crucial role in the linguistic development of deaf children. However, to study in textbook programs like a normal child, in the classroom of deaf children, both teachers and students must use the finger alphabet to perform teaching and learning Vietnamese. This affects the quality of education. In this article, from understanding the physiological characteristics of deaf children and teaching practice, we propose solutions to help them overcome difficulties in teaching Vietnamese subjects.

Children with deafness are children who have problems in hearing organs, so the speech production will also faces many difficulties. But if deafness is detected early and have appropriate interventions, the language development of deaf children will be similar to the language development in normal children. According to the summary of IDEO Project, *Đạy ngôn ngữ kí hiệu cho trẻ điếc trước tuổi đến trường* (Teaching sign language for preschool deaf children), 255 children selected by the project are taught and be able to use sign language and develop effective communication skills. Thus, it can be said that sign language has become the native language of deaf children. However, when entering first grade, deaf children must learn culture, especially Vietnamese language. Deaf children learn Vietnamese like normal children learning a foreign language. The question for teachers is: What is the difference between teaching Vietnamese for deaf children and teaching Vietnamese for normal children? Therefore, in this article, we will deeply research on Vietnamese language teaching activities for deaf children, contribute to removing difficulties and improving efficiency for this activity.

## Content

About Teaching Activities For Deaf Children and Survey Results at Some Schools for Deaf Children

Factors in deaf children teaching



In fact, teaching activities are also a special case of communication. We will have the following diagram:

Teacher => Message => Learners

In particular, the message is the content of knowledge that teachers need to convey to learners. That content is an encoded signal chain. For learners to understand the content of the lesson, there must be a common code between the teacher and the learners. Code is a term in the field of information, that means the system of words, letters, and signs representing other things, used in confidential notices or to present, or briefly record, information. Linguistics uses this term to mean that the system of signals can convey information. In a classroom of normal students, code is the signal system of speech sound, which is transmitted through the

auditory channel. Teachers and learners are communication characters in teaching activities. In that classroom, both teachers and students have the same audio language code, where the teaching activity will be effective. But in a teaching activity for deaf children, the code of the lesson content is Vietnamese, which is a 'sound' language. According to communication theory, that kind of teaching activity will not be effective. Because deaf children use sign language to think and communicate, the lesson content is taught by the teacher in audio language. The deaf community in Vietnam has used sign language to communicate, and today, many schools teach deaf children in sign language. However, through the actual survey, we found that the learning results are not high in most training institutions.

### Some Initial Investigation Data

We choose simple, common words, used by children in daily activities. Word table (1) has 100 words of 10 familiar topic groups.

Table 1: Groups of topic-related words

	Topic	Words
1	A: Baby's belongings (20)	Backpacks, books, pencil sharpeners, rulers, notebooks, eraser, pants, combs, shorts, cap, socks, scissors, crayons, shirts, toothbrushes, helmets, ballpoint pens, blackboard, skirt.
2	B: Fruit (15)	Papaya, pineapple, lychee, banana, strawberry, watermelon, orange, grapefruit, dragon fruit, mango, grapefruit, rambutan, longan, apple, grapes, guava
3	C: Animal (15)	Cows, rabbits, crabs, butterflies, dogs, giraffes, roosters, hens, shrimp, cat, snake, bear, elephant, shark, bee
4	D: Food Nutrition (15)	Chicken, eggs, pork, tomatoes, zucchini, corn, spinach, potatoes, sweet potatoes, carrots, kohlrabi, beef, bread, noodles.
5	E: Vehicles (6)	Motorcycles, bicycles, cars, airplanes, ships, trains
6	F: Antonyms (14)	High, low, awake, sleep, hot, cold, lots, little, clean, dirty, fast, slow, long, short
7	G: Shape, color (5)	Circles, squares, triangles, red, black.
8	H: Natural phenomenon (10)	Wind, storm, river, sea, spring, summer, autumn, winter, sun, moon.

We use painting cards for children to look at, and ask them to make signs and write their names in Vietnamese. Below we present the survey results:

Table 2: Results of survey of ability to use sign language and Vietnamese language

Topic	Student 1		Student 2		Student 3		Student 4		Student 5	
	Sign	Name of the sign	Sign	Name of the sign						
A(20)	11	3	18	5	20	15	15	4	16	7
B(15)	8	2	10	4	13	10	10		10	3
C(15)	9	3	13	5	15	11	1	3	14	9
D(5)	5	2	7	3	9	6	6	3	7	3
E(6)		2	3	4	6		6	2	6	3
F(14)	11	5	12	7	14	12	1	4	10	6
G (5)	3	3	4	2	5	4	4	1	4	2
H(10)	3	3	6	3	8		3	2	5	3
Total 100 words	56 56%	23 23%	73 73%	33 33%	90 90%	76 76%	70 70%	2 2 22%	7 2 72%	36 36%

Regarding the sentence table, we also write simple sentences, which are familiar to children:

Table 2: Some simple Vietnamese sentences

	Vietnamese sentence
1	The baby is sleeping.
2	I eat rice.
3	I like to drink milk.
4	I do not like to eat guava fruit.
5	I eat three custard apples.
6	Why did not you go to school yesterday?
7	What time is it?
8	My father is a teacher.
9	My brother is in grade 5.
10	It is raining today, I am not going out.

In order for the survey to have accurate results, we use painting cards, create context, and then ask a deaf collaborator to communicate with the children, to make their answers similar to the sample sentences in the table. The result are shown here:

Table 3: Ability to use Vietnamese sentences and sign language sentences

Sentence	Student 1		Student 2		Student 3		Student 4		Student 5	
	Sentence in sign language	Vietnamese sentence								
1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Total 10 sentences	10	5	10	3	10	7	10	6	10	6

According to the survey results, we found that their sign language vocabulary is quite rich. Our word table consists of 100 words, equivalent to 100 signs of familiar topics, all of whom used 361/500 (72%) relatively well. Similarly, they also have no difficulty expressing the sample sentences placed in the context of communication, 100% of the students correctly expressed the sentences according to the communication syntax of deaf people. However, when writing these signs in Vietnamese, the results were very low, (190/500 (38%)). When students were asked to write sample sentences in Vietnamese syntax, they were embarrassed and only achieved 27/50 (54%) . This result is lower than that of normal children at the same age (100% write the correct name of images and reach 100% in writing the correct sentences). This is also a concern for the quality of Vietnamese language education for deaf children. This fact also significantly affected their study results, especially in Vietnamese subjects.

### Characteristics of High-level Nervous System Activities and Thinking in Deaf Children

#### The Operation of the High Nervous System

Due to hearing problems, the acquisition of spoken language in deaf children is limited. But unlike other types of disabilities, deaf children are perfectly healthy children. Therefore, if the language development process of deaf children develops normally, high-level neurological activities of deaf children will be similar to those of normal children. To confirm this opinion, we will analyze the function of the senses on the cerebral cortex that directly affects thinking, specifically, the activity of receiving cultural knowledge of deaf children.

Mai Van Hung's research on human physiology, proposes that the cortex has four functions:

thinking, language, feeling, movement. These functions are in specified regions of cortex [12] (figure 1.1). However, the cortex is a unified body, so if there is any active function less efficiently, that function will be offset in other functions to ensure the most important functions of the brain, which is thinking.

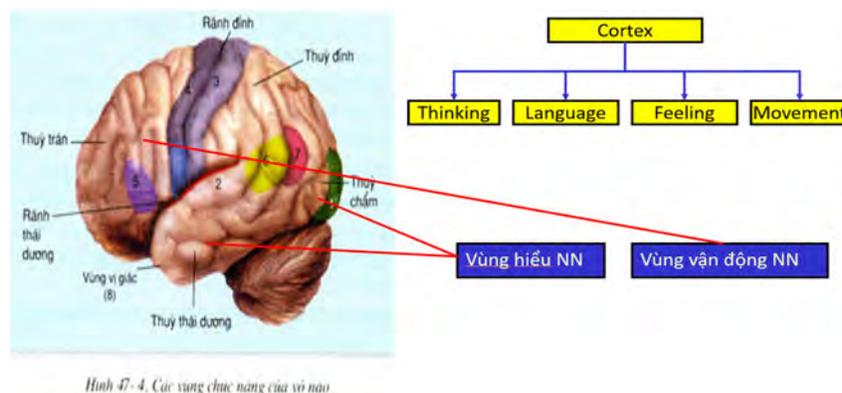


Figure 1. 1: Brain cortical regions and functions

Therefore, deaf children have outstanding development of the optic nerve, and the ability to receive body language through vision replaces auditory language acquisition.

### The Relationship between Thinking and Language

Language is not only an important means of human communication, it is also a thinking tool. Thinking is a high level activity of the nervous system. The function of thinking is to help the nervous system recognize the world around and orienting activities of living and development. Language, as the second signal system, becomes the main communication tool between people and people. It is only for humans and only for the people who share the same language. People with different languages cannot have the same signal system This is very important in teaching Vietnamese language for deaf children. Because even though they are Vietnamese, deaf people and normal people belong to two different language communities, have different language thinking. Therefore, if person who teaches deaf children does not understand the scientific nature of the sign language system and characteristic thinking in sign language of the deaf community of Vietnam deaf community, the teaching will not work.

### Language formation and development of deaf children

The physical characteristics of deaf children are not different to those of normal children. If their language ability is correctly identified and timely intervened, the level of language development of deaf children can be the same as that of normal children of the same age.

At the first stage, when babbling, children use single words. Children can successfully use a word when they can connect the sound of that word to the object. So, for children to use exactly one word, adults must allow the babies to

- + listen to that word

- + see the object which refer to that word
- + see the object being used
- + hold that object
- + use that object
- + feel that object
- + often in situations related to that object

In addition, language is the second signal system, and to use it correctly, children have to practice. Children must take steps to properly use a word, so as to understand the meaning of the word, and to imitate adults using that word in the context of specific communication.

Next is the step of using grammar. Children know how to combine words together to communicate. Children will say short sentences, for example, “I eat,” “Mother holds” or “Hold me.” First, children say simple sentences, and sometimes sentences with only the main predicate: eat, drink, go. They then try to use more complicated sentences. For example, they begin to use additional predicates beside the main predicate, such as lost already, eaten already, or gone already. From sentences with only one main predicate, children’s sentences are given additional predicate. For example: Mom goes, I drink, after which, the sentence has additional predicates, for example: I eat candy, dad drives car...

Language formation and development in deaf children basically traverses the same steps. However, in the process of helping deaf children to develop communication skills, the most important thing is that children must be identified and their actions intervened early. If a child is found to be deaf after three years of age, later development is severely affected.

### Characteristics of Vietnamese Language and its Influence on Language Development of Deaf Children

Vietnamese is an isolating language with a tone system. A single word can be a completed word but also can be a part of a completed word. This feature has both positive and negative effects on the development of sign language and Vietnamese language learning in deaf children.

- Positive effects

One of the most obvious positive effects is the creation of a new sign. Creating a unified sign by combining two single signs, or one sign and a letter referring to the other factors, which has no sign, contributes to enriching vocabulary for sign language. Not only does this creation enrich the capital of the deaf community, but also many similarities with the characteristics of Vietnamese. Therefore, it facilitates communication between two communities: Sign language communities and Vietnamese-speaking communities. It also helps deaf children to develop language, especially learning culture.



Sign group HUSBAND, BROTHER, UNCLE (father's younger brother), UNCLE (father's elder brother) is made up of combining basic signs: MAN and add another sign or finger letter.

Example:

HUSBAND = MAN + RELATIONSHIP

BROTHER = MAN + HIGH

UNCLE (father's younger brother) = MAN + C

UNCLE (father's elder brother) = MAN + B

- Negative influence

However, the way to create one word by combination of Vietnamese words sometimes lacks a scientific basis. Those are new signs, or it is the thing that deaf people are not interested in, such as in the case of Sino-Vietnamese words, which are highly abstract words in the field of political economy. Ví dụ:

ROCKET = NAME + FIRE

GROUND = FACE + LAND

REPORT = NEWSPAPER+ FOX

## Solution

### Improve the Level of Sign Language for Teachers who Teach Deaf Students

In education for the deaf, there is the fact that most teachers can hear. This helps Vietnamese children to have many advantages. However, for deaf children, learning Vietnamese is like learning a foreign language. In order for children to learn Vietnamese well, they must first understand sign language. Meanwhile, deaf children enter the first grade program with a limited vocabulary. In order to develop vocabulary for children, teachers need to understand the characteristics of word formation in sign language, and to learn the language of deaf people.

### Design Language Games Integrated with the Lesson

The stage of 6 - 7 year olds (the age of the first grade) is the period in which the child's brain

develops. Children love to explore the world, and they are able to learn new words quickly. But this is also the stage in which the thinking of children, in general, is intuitive and lively. Due to the effect of functional impairment in the hearing organ, the thinking of deaf children becomes stronger. To help children learn sign language and Vietnamese effectively, teachers need to design teaching programs that contain some content lessons that are language games. Such lessons will make the lecture lively and attractive, making the lecture content less stressful, and highly effective.

## Conclusion

Compared to normal children, deaf children, as well as other children with disabilities, suffer many disadvantages. Understanding the factors that enhance the effectiveness of teaching activities in schools of deaf children needs to be the concern of larger society. This article only exposes the reality of teaching Vietnamese language to deaf children. Further work must be conducted to explore the methodologies of teaching Vietnamese and other languages to deaf children.

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