Enhancing Grammar Teaching for Beginner-Level Deaf and Hard of Hearing EFL Learners Using AI Tools: A Case Study at the Hope Center in Benghazi

Wafaa O. Elhaj

Mediterranean International University (MIU)
Department of English Language and Translation
w.elhaj82@miu.edu.ly

الملخص

إتقان قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية أمر أساسي لتحقيق الطلاقة والوضوح في التواصل، لا سيما بالنسبة لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL). تمتد هذه الأهمية لتشمل كلًّا من الطلاب العاديين وذوي الإعاقة. استكشفت هذه الدراسة أساليب تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، والتحديات التي يواجهها المعلمون في مركز الأمل للصم وضعاف السمع في بنغازي، والتأثير المحتمل للأدوات القائمة على الذكاء الاصطناعي في تحسين مهارات القواعد اللغوية لدى الطلاب المبتدئين. تم جمع البيانات من خلال مقابلات مع خمسة معلمين وملاحظات صفية لمجموعتين تتألف كل منهما من خمسة طلاب. تم تقسيم الطلاب إلى مجموعة تجريبية تلقت تعليم القواعد باستخدام أدوات الذكاء الاصطناعي، ومجموعة ضابطة تم تعليمها باستخدام الأساليب التقليدية. للمقارنة بين نتائج التعلم وأساليب التدريس بين المجموعتين، تم إجراء اختبار قبلي واختبار بعدي على الطلاب. أظهرت النتائج أن الطلاب في المجموعة التجريبية أحرزوا فهمًا أفضل بشكل ملحوظ للقواعد اللغوية، في حين أظهرت المجموعة الضابطة نتائج متدنية على نحو متساوٍ في كلٍّ من الاختبار القبلي والاختبار البعدي. كما أشارت مقابلات المعلمين إلى أن الاعتماد الحصري على لغة الإشارة لتدريس القواعد غالبًا ما يشكّل عوائق، ويترك الطلاب يكافحون لفهم المفاهيم بشكل كامل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: *اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL) ، الذكاء الاصطناعي (AI) ، الصم وضعاف السمع*

Abstract

Mastering English grammar is essential for achieving fluency and clarity in communication, particularly for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This importance extends to both regular students and those with disabilities. This research explored EFL teaching methods, challenges faced by teachers at the Hope Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Benghazi, and the potential impact of AI tools on improving grammar skills among beginner-level students. Data were collected through interviews with five teachers and classroom observations of two groups of five students. The students were divided into an experimental group, which received grammar instruction using AI tools, and a control group, which was taught using traditional methods. To compare the learning outcomes and teaching results of two groups, a pre-test and post-test was administered among the students. Findings revealed that students in the experimental group demonstrated significantly better comprehension of grammatical rules, while the control group had equally low results on pre-test and post-test. Teacher interviews highlighted that relying solely on sign language for grammar instruction often creates barriers, leaving students struggling to grasp the concepts fully.

KEY WORDS: *EFL, AI, Deaf and hard of hearing*

1.1 Background

To achieve successful language learning, significant focus must be placed on the importance of grammar in the English language. Grammar can be taught through various methods and principles, serving as a foundation for effective communication. Learning or teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is a lengthy process that guides learners through multiple stages. Grammar learning is a critical stage, as understanding grammatical rules empowers learners to control their expressions and boosts their confidence in communication (Dalil & Harrizi, 2013).

The debates about the relevance of teaching and learning grammar in EFL classrooms and its role in language acquisition have largely been resolved. Grammar continues to be an essential component of learning English as a foreign language, regardless of learners' stages or abilities. Once learners master a particular grammatical rule, they gain the ability to self-correct, which fosters independence and self-sufficiency (Savage et al., 2010). Acknowledging that language learning is a long and challenging process, it becomes evident that grammar instruction brings its own set of challenges for both learners and teachers in EFL classrooms. To achieve effective teaching, institutions must provide adequate resources to support learning (Banda, 2019).

Hearing learners often encounter difficulties in acquiring EFL, but these challenges are even greater for students with disabilities, such as those who are deaf or hard of hearing. Students with hearing impairments cannot depend solely on vocal or auditory means to understand instructions. Therefore, they require a tailored approach to achieve language acquisition compared to hearing students (Khasawneh, 2021).

In recent years, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has developed rapidly, demonstrating its potential for seamless integration into various sectors, including education. The primary benefits of AI technology include its affordability, high accessibility, and ability to be personalized to meet

the needs of specific groups of learners (Zainuddin et al., 2024). For deaf or hard-of-hearing individuals, a specialized, unique, and universal approach to language, speech, grammar, and audiological rehabilitation is necessary. These students also need competent teachers who possess the skills to incorporate AI technology into the curriculum, enabling successful acquisition of English as a foreign language (Nugraha et al., 2023).

1.2 Definitions of key words

EFL: short for English as a foreign language, taught to students who do not have English language as part of their daily lives. Krieger, D. (2012) .

AI: Artificial Intelligence is a computer program designed to be as human – like as possible, and to have an ability to learn and self-correct in human - like manners. Ok, et al. (2009).

Deaf and hard of hearing: people who suffer from a complete or partial incompetence to hear. Brauer, et al. (1998).

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Learning EFL is crucial in today's globalized environment. Mastering a foreign language is a demanding and challenging process for people without disabilities. However, for those with certain disabilities, such as deafness or hearing impairments, it is at least twice as challenging. In Libya, there is a lack of specialized and skilled teachers who can effectively teach EFL to deaf and hard-of-hearing students, as well as a shortage of necessary equipment.

This research aims to explore the effectiveness of AI tools in teaching EFL grammar to beginner-level students and their potential to enhance grammar skills among deaf and hard-of-hearing students in Benghazi. It also seeks to provide information about the challenges faced by teachers when teaching EFL to deaf and hard-of-hearing learners and to identify possible solutions for overcoming these challenges through the implementation of AI tools in regular classes.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What methods of teaching EFL are currently applied at the Hope Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Benghazi?

2. What challenges do teachers face at the Hope Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Benghazi?
3. 2. How can AI improve EFL grammar learning at the Hope Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Benghazi?
4. What AI tools and strategies could be implemented to enhance grammar learning at the Hope Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Benghazi?

1.5 Research Objectives

- To identify the current teaching methods used at the Hope Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Benghazi.
- To determine the challenges currently faced by teachers at the Hope Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Benghazi.
- To explore the potential of AI tools for improving EFL grammar teaching at the Hope Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Benghazi.
- To provide a set of practical recommendations and AI tools that could support EFL grammar teaching at the Hope Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Benghazi.

1.6 Research Importance

This research aims to provide valuable insights into the current state of EFL teaching at the Hope Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Benghazi. It also aims to offer recommendations for improving the teaching of EFL grammar to deaf and hard-of-hearing students. The significance of this research lies in its potential to enhance the quality of education and, consequently, the quality of life for disabled students in Benghazi.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Background

Teaching grammar to young learners is important because of its helpfulness in learning a foreign or second language. Although educators might greatly disagree on that point, learning outcomes only confirm the statement that grammar is crucial in language acquisition. (Khan, 2007). Considering the value of the knowledge a foreign language holds affecting every area

of life, it can be stated that every person has to be taught the English language. People with disabilities cannot be discriminated or excluded from learning. Teaching English to deaf students is much more challenging than teaching English to hearing students. Accordingly, a different therapy and teaching methods must be applied.(Khasawneh, 2021).

2.2 Traditional methods of teaching English grammar to deaf students

According to the results from a research paper, "Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students in Indonesian Context", by Adniyani, et al. (2024), teachers would mostly apply sign language and grammar translation methods. The teachers would write the grammar rule and an example in English and then translate it to the mother tongue.

2.3 Challenges faced by the teachers when teaching EFL to hearing impaired students

Adniyani, et al. (2004), also examined the challenges faced by EFL teachers. The results have indicated several challenges. The teachers have no previous experience in teaching EFL to deaf or hard of hearing students, or no formal education in sign language, lack of equipment and lack of teaching or learning materials, and inappropriate classroom arrangements. Akbota Sultanbekova, in a research paper "Teaching English as a foreign language to deaf and hard of hearing students at one school in Kazakhstan", stated that the main challenge is lack of knowledge in deaf students' cognitive abilities, while traditional methods like grammar, translation, and alphabetical methods are proclaimed as ineffective by the author.

2.4 AI in teaching English to deaf and hard of hearing students

Nugraha, et al. (2023), in "How Artificial Intelligence Can Be Effective for Teaching English to Hearing Impaired Learners?", stated that the solution for the problems of teaching EFL to Deaf and Hard of Hearing students lies in AI due to its flexibility and accessibility. The AI tool recommended by the author is Kahoot! Program. According to Cicharska, et al. (2024), in "AI in Deaf Inclusion: hear us out because we cannot hear you!", stated the AI-powered sign language translation systems have great potential for enhancing Deaf students' inclusion and comprehension. Michaud, et al. (2000), in "Intelligent Tutoring System for Deaf Learners of Written English", recommended ICICLE grammar program as the most effective in

teaching English grammar to Deaf students. According to the authors, ICICLE program has helpful features; broad coverage of sentences and grammatical rules and errors, and error identification. Strobel, et al. (2023), in "Artificial Intelligence for Sign Language Translation, a design science study", highly recommends SLT, Sign Language Translator. The tool simply demands a digital camera in order to record or monitor the person. SLT translates the sign language into text or audio. Authors also stated that the SLT tool not only teaches English to Deaf learners, but it also improves the possibilities and quality of communication between the Deaf and the hearing.

2.5 Challenges

Teaching English language and grammar is an altogether challenging process, but EFL grammar teaching gets much more demanding when teaching deaf and hard-of-hearing students. Traditional methods are highly ineffective and have poor results. AI has the ability to store great amounts of information and exchange it with the user in form of text, audio, or visual means. From the reviewed papers, it is evident that AI tools are getting developed in order to enhance their learning potentials. Reviewed articles recommended some AI tools, KAHOOT, ICICLE, and SLT as highly effective and efficient in teaching English grammar to deaf and hard-of-hearing learners. A combination of more AI tools would be the most efficient because different features offered by the tools supplement each other, and have the potential to achieve maximally good learning outcomes when teaching EFL grammar to deaf and hard-of-hearing learners.

3. Research methodology

Current research holds great significance for people with disabilities in our case, deaf and hard of hearing students learning English as a foreign language. The methodology applied for the purpose of the research, covered class observations, interviews, as well as pre and post testing of students' knowledge. The research is both quantitative and qualitative, examining and analyzing in descriptive and statistical manners.

3.1 Population and Sample

The population for this research consisted of teachers and students at the Hope Center for

the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Benghazi. The sample included five teachers and ten students, divided into two groups of five students each.

3.2 Data Collection

The data for this research were collected through interviews with five teachers teaching EFL at the Hope Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Benghazi, as well as through classroom observations of two groups of five students. Additionally, a literature review was conducted to gather relevant data from previous research, focusing on the methodologies used, the findings, and the recommendations provided by respected authors. Furthermore, pre-tests and post-tests were administered to both groups to assess their knowledge before and after the lessons.

3.3 Intervention

To ensure the collection of sufficient and reliable data, class observations were conducted with two groups of students: a control group and an experimental group. The control group received a lesson on the present simple tense for daily routines using traditional methods, including sign language and written notes on the school board. The experimental group received the same lesson, but with three different AI tools incorporated.

Additionally, data about the students' prior knowledge was collected through a pre-test, and the post-test data indicated the knowledge gained. The test consisted of several questions examining the students' understanding and practical application of the present simple tense.

The first AI tool used was Magic Light, an innovative application that transforms written text and stories into video animations. The creators promote it with the motto: "AI-powered creation that brings your stories to life." The second tool applied was VEED, an AI-powered application that uses speech recognition to convert audio recordings into written text. This tool has proven particularly useful in facilitating effective communication between teachers and students. The third AI tool was Hand Talk Translator, an advanced application that utilizes face and movement recognition to translate sign language into written text or audio.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data collected for this research were analyzed qualitatively, focusing on the most evident and significant results. Additionally, the interviews used in this study were adapted from a research paper by Akbota Sultanbekova, which focused on teaching English as a foreign language to deaf and hard-of-hearing students at a school in Kazakhstan. The reliability of the interview questions in that study was confirmed as significant. The AI tools used in the classes were official and highly-rated online applications and programs, proven effective in teaching English, capturing attention, and aiding in comprehension.

3.5 Results and Discussion

Interview Results:

As anticipated, the results from the interviews with the five EFL teachers at the Hope Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Benghazi aligned closely with the findings from the literature reviewed for this research. The teachers reported that they primarily relied on traditional methods for teaching EFL to deaf and hard-of-hearing students, such as using sign language, written notes, sentence examples, and grammar translations on the school board. However, they expressed several concerns regarding the traditional approach, citing its ineffectiveness, the students' low levels of interest, and slow comprehension rates. Furthermore, they highlighted their lack of knowledge and training in implementing AI tools for teaching EFL. These results are consistent with those found in the studies by Adniyani et al. (2024).

Despite these challenges, the teachers expressed satisfaction with the outcomes observed when AI tools were applied during the research. They noted improvements in learning outcomes among students and shared positive attitudes toward the efficiency of AI tools in teaching EFL to deaf and hard-of-hearing students. Moreover, they expressed a strong interest in incorporating AI tools into their future teaching practices. These results are consistent with those found in the studies by Nugraha et al. (2023), Cicharska et al. (2024), Michaud et al. (2000), and Strobel et al. (2023).

Class Observations Results:

The results of the class observations clearly demonstrated improved learning outcomes among students in the experimental group. These students exhibited greater interest in the lesson, better understanding of the teacher's instructions and the grammatical rule presented, and enhanced engagement with the material. Additionally, they paid closer attention to the lesson and participated more actively when AI tools were integrated into the teaching process.

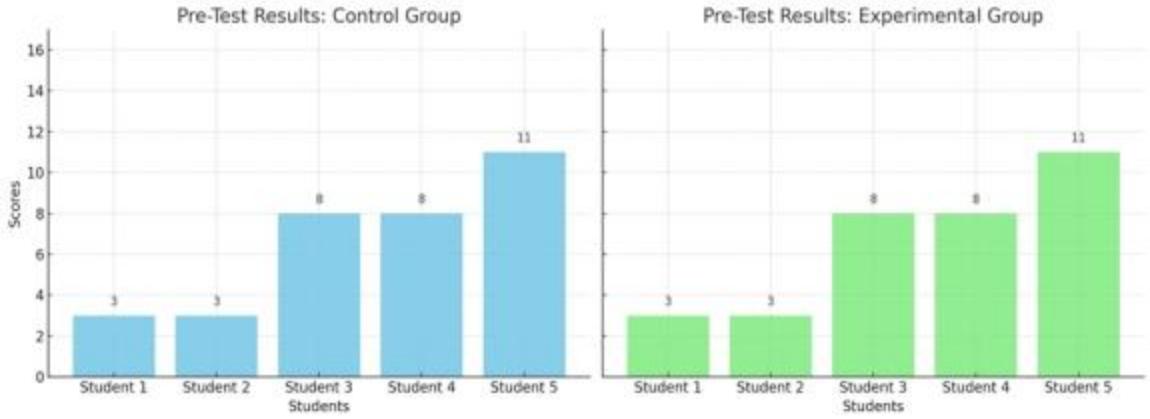
Pre-Test and Post-Test Results:

A pre-test examining the students' knowledge of the present simple tense was administered to both the experimental and control groups. The test aimed to assess their understanding of the present simple tense prior to the lesson. The results indicated that the students at the Hope Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Benghazi had a very low level of knowledge and skills in using the present simple tense.

After both groups received their respective lessons on the present simple tense, a post-test was administered to assess the learning outcomes. The pre-test results showed a very low understanding of the topic (verbs in the present simple tense) for both the control and experimental groups. However, the post-test results revealed that the use of AI tools significantly improved the learning process and outcomes. The experimental group achieved much higher results than the control group, whose results remained the same as the pre-test. This suggests that the traditional method of teaching requires repetition to ensure memorization and comprehension. Students in the experimental group demonstrated greater skill in using the present simple tense, answered exam questions more quickly, and showed more confidence. These results suggest that a single lesson with the help of AI tools can lead to better learning outcomes.

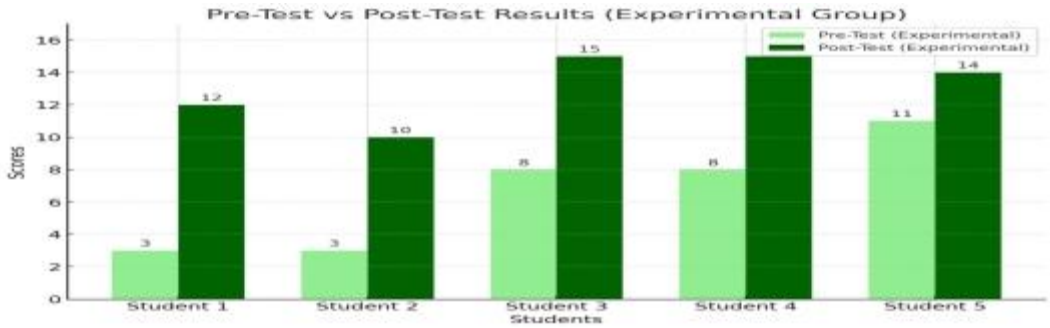
Control Group Pre-Test and Post-Test Results:

Out of the five students in the control group, two achieved 3/16, two achieved 8/16, and one achieved 11/16 on the test. These results indicated that they either failed or barely passed the exam. It is important to note that the post-test results for the control group remained unchanged after just one lesson using the traditional method.



Experimental group pre and post test results:

The experimental group also consisted out of five students, who answered both the pre-test questions, and the post-test questions. The results from pre-test by experimental group students were identical to the results from a pre-test by controlled group of students: two achieved 3/16, two achieved 8/16, and one achieved 11/16. The results from the post-test by the experimental group were drastically different and higher: the two students who at the pre-test achieved 8/16, on post-test achieved 15/16, one of the students who had the pre-test result of 3/16, on the post-test achieved 10/16, and the other 12/16 marks. The student who had a result of 11/16 marks at the pre-test, improved the marks onto 14/16 marks on the post-test.



Percentage of Correctness Table

Group	Student	Pre-Test Score	Pre-Test %	Post-Test Score	Post-Test %
Control	1	11/16	68.75%	11/16	68.75%
	2	8/16	50.00%	8/16	50.00%
	3	8/16	50.00%	8/16	50.00%
	4	3/16	18.75%	3/16	18.75%
	5	3/16	18.75%	3/16	18.75%
Experimental	1	11/16	68.75%	14/16	87.50%
	2	8/16	50.00%	15/16	93.75%
	3	8/16	50.00%	15/16	93.75%
	4	3/16	18.75%	10/16	62.50%
	5	3/16	18.75%	12/16	75.00%

The above table shows the percentage of correctness in answers by both groups.

Chart Representation

Below is a bar chart representation of the average percentage of correctness for both groups:

Group	Average Pre-Test %	Average Post-Test %
Control	41.25%	41.25%
Experimental	41.25%	82.50%

4. Conclusion

Following the completion of this research and based on the results obtained, it is evident that implementing AI tools in teaching EFL to Deaf and Hard of Hearing students plays a crucial role in enhancing grammar skills among beginner-level learners. The findings highlight the significant potential of AI tools to simplify and support the efforts of EFL teachers in teaching hearing-impaired students.

Raising awareness among educators about the effectiveness of these tools is essential, particularly for those working with students with disabilities. Emphasizing the integration of AI tools can lead to improved communication in students' daily lives and contribute to more effective teaching and learning processes.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to improve the use of AI tools in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to deaf and hard-of-hearing students in Libya. AI tools should prioritize accessibility by integrating features such as sign language recognition, visual prompts, and customizable text-to-speech options. It is also essential to localize the content to reflect Libyan dialects and cultural context, ensuring that the tools are engaging and relevant.

Additionally, we recommend designing a new, customized AI-powered application specifically for EFL instruction for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. This app should include interactive lessons with visual aids, sign language translation, and real-time transcription features to support diverse learning needs.

Teacher training is another critical aspect, with educators needing to be equipped not only in the technical use of AI tools but also in adapting them to meet the individual needs of students. To assess the long-term effectiveness of AI tools, further research should be conducted to evaluate their impact on language retention and academic achievement.

Lastly, the success of these tools depends on institutional and governmental support. Policymakers must allocate resources for infrastructure, teacher training, and inclusive education policies to ensure equal access to educational technologies for deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

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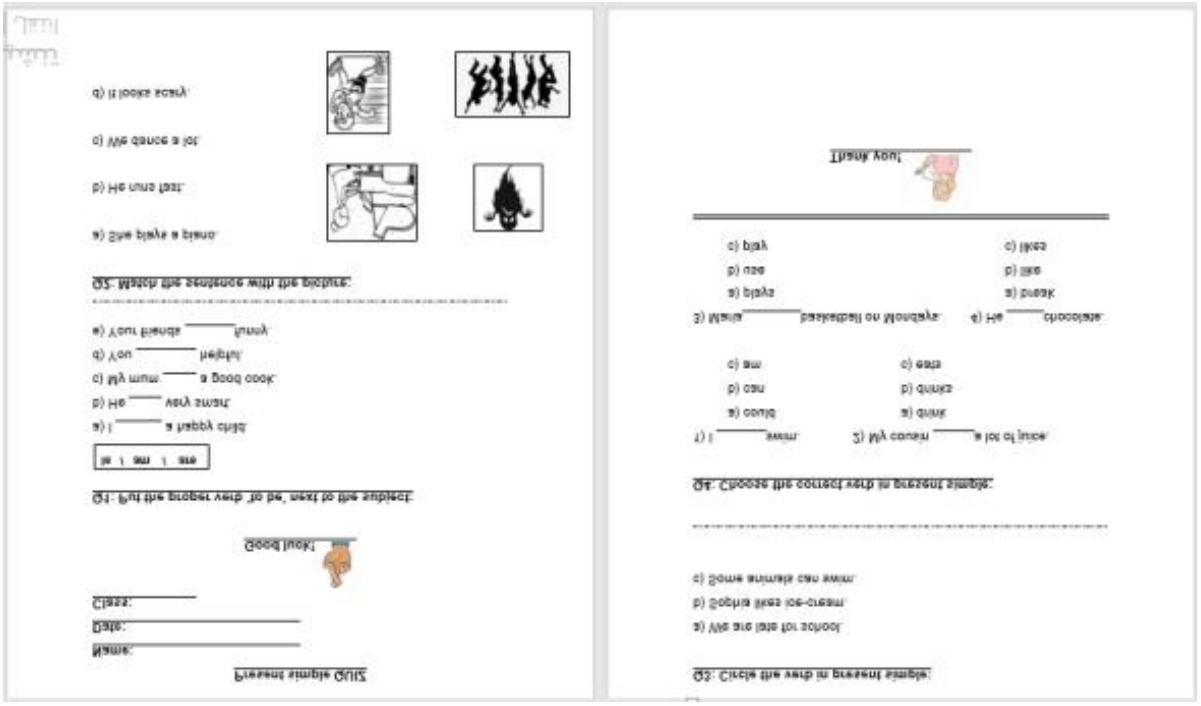
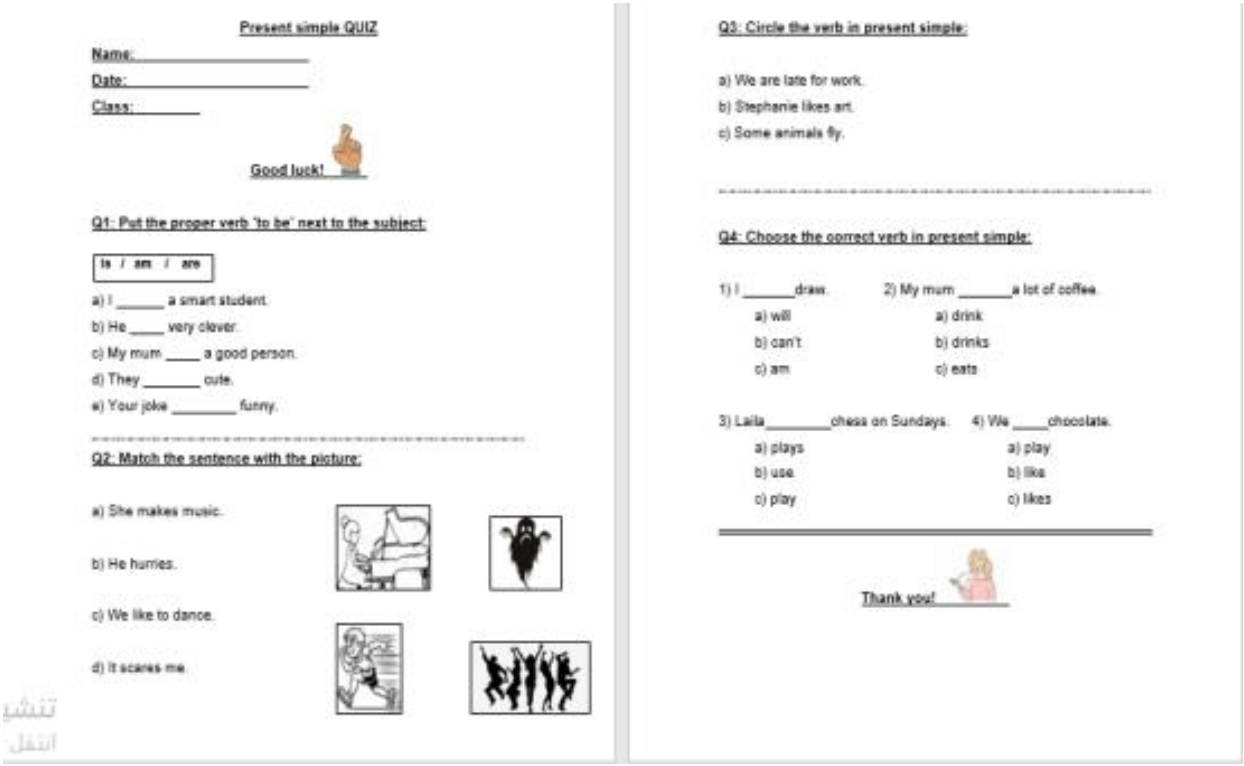
Appendices

1) The pre-test sample:



2) The post-test sample:



Present simple QUIZ

Name:_____

Date:_____

Class:_____

Good luck!

Q1: Put the proper verb 'to be' next to the subject:

is / am / are

a) I _____ a smart student.
b) He ____ very clever.
c) My mum ____ a good person.
d) They _____ cute.
e) Your joke _____ funny.

Q2: Match the sentence with the picture:

a) She makes music.
b) He hurries.
c) We like to dance.
d) It scares me.

Q3: Circle the verb in present simple:

a) We are late for work.
b) Stephanie likes art.
c) Some animals fly.

Q4: Choose the correct verb in present simple:

1) I _____draw.
a) will
b) can't
c) am

2) My mum _____a lot of coffee.
a) drink
b) drinks
c) eats

3) Laila_____chess on Sundays.
a) plays
b) use
c) play

4) We ____chocolate.
a) play
b) like
c) likes

Thank you!

3) Interview questions:

A semi- structured interview questions extracted from the research paper " Teaching English as a foreign language to deaf and Hard -of-Hearing students at one school in Kazakhstan." by Akbota Sultanbekova , 2019. :

Q1: Have you had any previous experiences in teaching English to deaf learners?

Q2: What is your general opinion on teaching English to deaf and hard of hearing students?

Q3: What are some successful teaching strategies in class?

Q4: What are main challenges in teaching English to hearing impaired students?

Q5: Do you think students have difficulties in learning English? What are the challenges?

Q6: Which resources do you use?

Q7: How do you teach grammar comprehension?

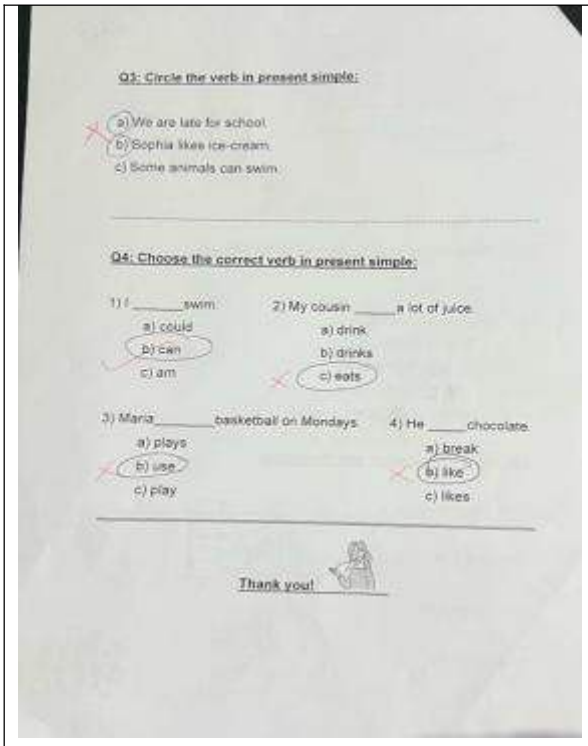
Q8: How do you assess the students?4)

4) Classroom observations checklist:

Observation Focus	Criteria	Yes/No
Learning Interest	Students demonstrate enthusiasm and curiosity during the lesson.	
	Active participation in discussions and activities is observed.	
Attention	Students maintain focus throughout the lesson without frequent distractions.	
	Instructions and explanations are followed attentively.	
Attitudes Towards Lesson and Teacher	Students exhibit positive body language and facial expressions towards the lesson content.	
	Respectful interactions between students and the teacher are evident.	
Comprehension Level	Students accurately respond to questions, indicating understanding of the material.	
	Ability to apply learned concepts in practice exercises is demonstrated.	
Learning Outcomes	Lesson objectives are met as evidenced by student performance.	
	Assessments reflect a grasp of key concepts taught during the lesson.	
Classroom Management	The classroom environment is orderly and conducive to learning.	
	Transitions between activities are smooth and efficient.	

The check list was designed in accordance with the following research paper: Reños, G., & Pontillas, P. (2024). Classroom observation and teachers' professional development activities: Basis for intervention plan. American Journal of Arts and Human Science (AJAHS), 3(3). https://doi.org/10.54536/ajahs.v3i3.3077

5) Samples of pre and post tests



Q3: Circle the verb in present simple:

a) We are late for school.
b) Sophia likes ice-cream.
c) Some animals can swim.

Q4: Choose the correct verb in present simple:

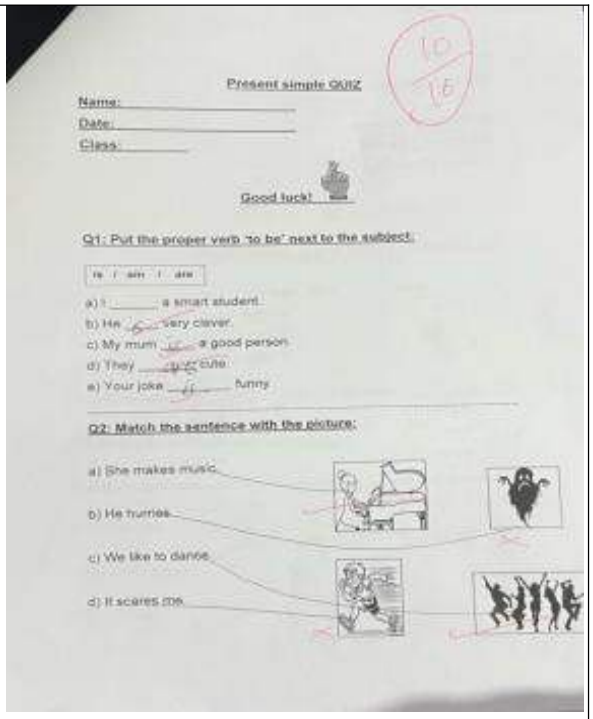
1) I _____swim.
a) could
b) can
c) am

2) My cousin _____a lot of juice.
a) drink
b) drinks
c) eats

3) Maria_____basketball on Mondays.
a) plays
b) use
c) play

4) He _____chocolate.
a) break
b) like
c) likes

Thank you!



Present simple QUIZ

Name:
Date:
Class:

Good luck!

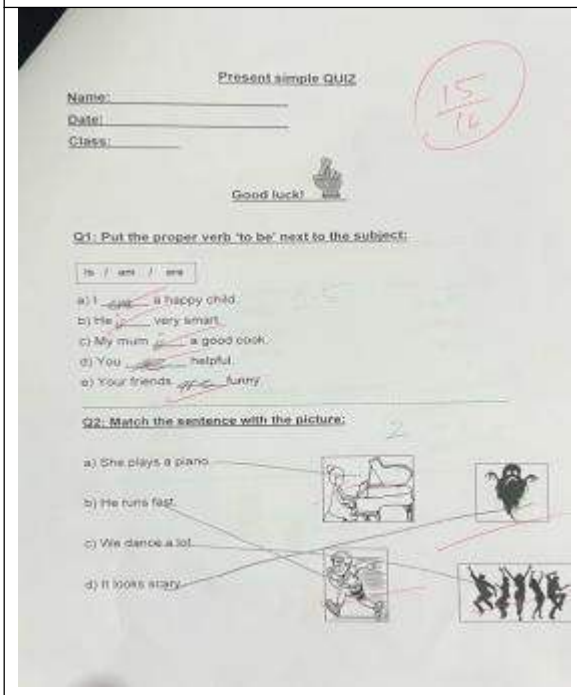
Q1: Put the proper verb 'to be' next to the subject:

is / am / are

a) I _____a smart student.
b) He _____very clever.
c) My mum _____a good person.
d) They _____so cute.
e) Your joke _____funny.

Q2: Match the sentence with the picture:

a) She makes music.
b) He hurries.
c) We like to dance.
d) It scares me.



Present simple QUIZ

Name:
Date:
Class:

Good luck!

Q1: Put the proper verb 'to be' next to the subject:

is / am / are

a) I _____a happy child.
b) He _____very smart.
c) My mum _____a good cook.
d) You _____helpful.
e) Your friends _____funny.

Q2: Match the sentence with the picture:

a) She plays a piano.
b) He runs fast.
c) We dance a lot.
d) It looks scary.