

LANG
SKILLS



Deafinitely English:

Online materials for teachers of English
as a Foreign Language for Deaf, deaf and
hard of hearing students

Unit 1

**EFL for Deaf, deaf and hard of
hearing learners and study stays
abroad: **An Overview****



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This brief introduction into the area of international mobilities of D/d/hh students is closely connected to the whole idea behind the LangSkills project¹, funded by the Erasmus+, KA2 Cooperation for Innovation and the Exchange of Good Practice grant. The LangSkills project's aim was to support the foreign language education of D/d/hh students in higher education with a set of teaching and learning resources and events. The partners are convinced that the development of language and communication skills can enhance the readiness of D/d/hh students for engaging in study stays abroad, as well as their competitiveness in the labour market, and inclusion in European social life.

1/ LangSkills, acronym for the full title 'Language Skills of Deaf Students for EU Mobility', runs over three years, spanning the period from September 2017 to August 2020, receiving a four-month extension till December 2020 in view of the covid-19 pandemic.

1.1. PARTICIPATION OF DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING STUDENTS IN STUDY STAYS ABROAD: THE CHANCES AND CHALLENGES

Internationalization processes are usually regarded as a means to enhance the quality of higher education and to contribute to the future social and professional success of the students. Many universities across Europe have introduced a foreign language requirement into their curricula and motivate students to take part in study stays and internships abroad, international conferences and projects. There is also strong support for the instruction in foreign languages, though the policies in individual EU countries and universities differ. Such internationalisation projects and activities, including study stays and internships abroad the LangSkills project focuses on, offer plenty of benefits both for the higher education institutions and the students, but they can nonetheless be challenging.

On the positive side, studying abroad, for a semester or two, considerably contributes to the students' personal growth and independence, and provides a chance to compare education at their home university and the receiving institution (Beerkens, 2015). Study and work exchanges offer a unique window into the lifestyle of people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, rendering a firsthand cross-cultural experience. The cultural enrichment extends also to the proficiency in foreign languages, as the participants get a chance to practise their language skills in a variety of settings and communication scenarios. Another strong argument for taking part in mobility programmes such as Erasmus+ is the improved employability of those who successfully completed their one or two-semester study stay². Overall, research confirms that the impact of study stays abroad on those who took part in them is strong and long-lasting, providing the participants with knowledge and skills that are useful in their academic, personal as well as civic life (Paige, 2009). In view of these benefits, combined with well established administrative processes and a well-known brand, it is not surprising that the overall number of students experiencing Erasmus+ exchanges is increasing³.

2/ According to the Erasmus Impact Study of 2014, those who travelled on their Erasmus have better employability skills after a stay abroad than 70% of all students (2014: 3).

3/ In fact, Erasmus+ is the most frequently used student mobility programme worldwide (Erasmus Facts, Figures & Trends 2015: 6).

However, engaging in exchange programmes is also an undeniable challenge, as the students are facing an unfamiliar environment, new languages and new cultures. The challenge is even greater for students with special needs whose participation rates remain low and are, in fact, stagnating rather than increasing (Mapped project report, 2019: 2). Wit and Jones draw attention to the fact that there is a general lack of representation in mobility programmes in terms of income, ethnicity, migration history and disability (2018: 17).

1.1.1. D/d/hh student mobilities and language skills

One of the reasons behind the low engagement of special needs students in international mobilities may be related to the relatively high requirements of English language proficiency to take part in one or two-semester exchanges under Erasmus+. The required level tends to be a B2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This is because students are expected to attend the chosen courses at the host university, use the study materials and take the end-of-course exams, which are all delivered in the language of instruction indicated by the host university, typically English. In fact, limited language skills are cited by the European Commission as one of the main barriers to the participation in European education, training and youth mobility opportunities in all students (Erasmus+: Online Linguistic Support), which is also confirmed by further research (Beerens, 2015: 8).

In the case of D/d/hh students the situation is yet more challenging. Deaf people from non-English speaking countries who use their national sign language as their first or preferred language, typically regard English as a third language to learn⁴, the second being the national written language of their country (Hilzensauer, 2010: 185); therefore, attaining the necessary level of proficiency in written English as well as learning a new sign language to follow the instruction at a host university and to take the final exams, is a significant challenge⁵. It is therefore fundamental to deliver sign language cultural pedagogy as part of the intercultural strategy (Clark & Lee, 2018). There are diverse communication scenarios which Deaf students encounter at the host university, such as attending a course with predominant frontal instruction, taking part in group discussions with their hearing classmates, using study materials, delivering presentations, submitting essays as well as communicating with people who

4/ It may even be considered as a fourth language, the third being the sign language they use for international communication with foreign deaf signers.

5/ The topic of English language skills of D/d/hh higher education students in relation to study stays abroad is expanded on in the section Needs analysis of the **About the course** guide that was prepared under the Langskills project as part of the resource pack for instructors working with the Online English for International Mobilities e-learning course. Please refer to the guide at www.teiresias.muni.cz/langskills/O3.

are outside the university, etc., in which different communication strategies need to be applied. Especially at the beginning of a study stay, the students may have difficulties communicating at the host university before they pick up the local sign language and may benefit from the services of local sign language interpreters.

D/d/hh students may find it challenging to be using speech to text transcripts in English in their classes at the host university. Typically, the students work with transcripts in the national language of their home university, and therefore are not used to dealing with transcripts in the English language. This may be quite a new experience for the student.

Hard of hearing students who rely on residual hearing and express themselves verbally similarly encounter specific communication situations. An example is lip reading in English: this skill is not typically trained in English classes at mainstream schools⁶, nor do the students have ample opportunities to practise lipreading a foreign language before the actual stay. This does not only relate to academic settings but also to situations outside the classroom, for instance during outings with friends, shopping or handling administrative formalities and so on. On the other hand, the students' experience of expressing themselves verbally in foreign languages is highly individual and some of them might feel uncomfortable contributing in a large classroom discussion, which is another aspect that needs to be considered in relation to their study abroad and other internationalization activities.

It is true that many universities and other institutions offer preparatory courses to those who are going on their Erasmus⁷. The Erasmus Commission does offer free online language support; however, these courses are typically not suitable for D/d/hh in terms of accessibility of instruction and materials, they may also not be relevant content-wise. To make sure the D/d/hh students get the most of their stay abroad and can fully participate in the study and free time activities, a sound language preparation is recommended before the actual exchange. In fact, enhanced language skills may help D/d/hh students engage better in different internationalization activities in general, whether they study abroad or take a course led by a foreign tutor at their home university, beyond their university years.

Apart from accessible instruction at a host institution, courses recommended to Erasmus+ students are typically provided in English, there is the important element

6/ This is observed at least in the Czech Republic, where the coordinating team of the LangSkills project is based.

7/ For instance, Masaryk university offers preparatory courses in English, German, French and Spanish, as of 2020/2021 (<https://czs.muni.cz/cs/student-mu/informacni-zdroje/jazykova-priprava-cjv>).

of communication outside the classroom. In the case of signing students, learning the local sign language seems a natural and preferred option. Acquiring the local sign language not only allows Deaf students to use the services of local interpreters in their classes and other administrative negotiations but it also enables them to connect with the local Deaf community, which helps to eliminate the feeling of isolation in a new environment. It might be beneficial for the student to start learning some basics of the sign language used by deaf students at the host university before the actual stay.

Students who lip read, on the other hand, might appreciate the opportunity to develop their lip reading skills in English before starting their study abroad programme. As Hirata and Spencer attest, studies have shown that even though adult learners struggle to learn to perceive certain phonemes of a second language, their perceptual capacities can be substantially improved by intensive training (2010: 298). Such classes would be worth continuing throughout the stay as this skill helps hard of hearing students follow the conversations in and outside the classroom when the speech-to-text reporting service is not available.

In summary, the different cultural aspects, communication strategies as well as academic settings and requirements create a dynamic scenario. Therefore, careful planning involving the receiving institution, the sending university as well as the student is needed to ensure a positive experience for all parties involved.

1.1.2. Student mobilities and special needs services

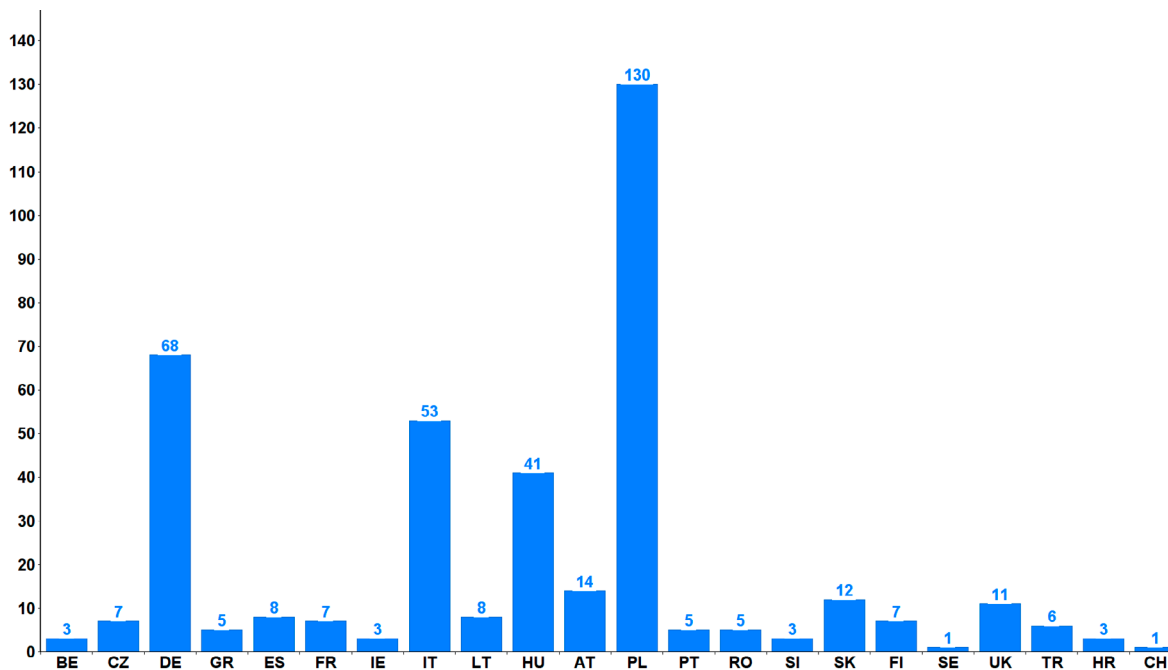
Having clear communication lines inside and outside the university as well as accessible study materials is a matter of crucial importance for a successful study abroad, as mentioned above. This relates to administration and negotiation of adequate services abroad that are necessary to ensure the accessibility of instruction as well as of other academic events and activities held at the foreign university for the incoming D/d/hh students. Based on Masaryk University's team experience of coordinating mobilities for students with special needs, the policies of administering provision of note taking, sign language interpreting, speech to text reporting, etc. differ greatly across European Union and each university observe their own guidelines. Typically, the service may be acquired either through the foreign university who has their own team of service providers or liaises with a reliable local provider, or the service may be provided through third parties such as the city council, NGOs, local deaf and hard of hearing associations. In some cases, the students themselves may be invited to bring their own service provider(s). In any case, negotiating and securing the right service providers may take some time. Administration of these accommodations can be both time consuming and stressful for the students.

To motivate and support the participation of students with special needs, the Erasmus+ agency offers a supplementary grant to cover the increased expenses related to the required services and arrangements, called the [The Erasmus+ Funds for Students and Staff with disabilities grant](#). This grant provides additional funds to cover the costs associated with the special needs services such as interpreting, speech to text reporting, barrier free accommodation, etc. Depending on the type of the required services and accommodations, these may be more or less costly. The applicants are requested to submit an application with additional documents such as medical certificates and an overview of the estimated special needs related expenses for the duration of the study stay. Therefore, careful planning and an accurate quotation needs to be produced at the time of the grant application. In addition, the grant receivers need to be well-organised and keep all receipts for the grant related expenses and reimbursements for the purpose of grant administration after the student's return. Nevertheless, it needs to be said that there are many variables at stake in each EU country that impact the administrative, financial and service arrangements, which need to be carefully explored.⁸

The administrative burden related to this grant is not insignificant, however, it is of great benefit to the students and covers the extra costs associated with the required services abroad. This is particularly important in the context of general financial concerns which are in fact classified among the major barriers to taking part in mobilities (Beerkens, 2015: 8). This grant option is only available for Erasmus+ mobility programmes. Those who wish to travel with other programmes need to seek other grant opportunities, which may also be impacting the low interest rates among higher education students with special needs.

8/ At Masaryk University, this is done in collaboration with the student interested in the study or work stay, the home and as well as the host International Relations Office and the receiving and sending Special Needs Centre and the local service providers in the host country (sign language interpreters, speech-to-text reporters etc.).

The following graph indicates the number of special needs students taking part in Erasmus+ programme with the supporting grant.



Graph 1: Number of grants for students with special needs in 2013–14 (Erasmus: Facts, Figures & Trends, 2015: 33)

Note: Only countries with at least one special needs grant are displayed in the chart.

The number of students who requested their special needs grant in 2009–2010 was 257 which is a percentage of 0.12% (both studies and traineeships). In 2013–14, some 401 students with special needs received additional funding to participate in Erasmus, which is a 3 % increase on the previous year (Erasmus: Facts, Figures & Trends, 2015: 6). However, between 2014 and 2016 there was no further increase as the numbers were oscillating between 323 and 412 for a percentage varying between 0.13% to 0.17% (Inclusive Mobility Alliance, 2019: 7). There is no available data⁹ on the percentage that D/d/hh students occupy in these stats; however, given the low numbers of special needs students in general, it may be assumed that the percentage of D/d/hh students may be proportionally low.

1.1.3. D/d/hh students and short-term academic stays abroad

Wit and Jones suggest that encouraging more short term mobilities is one attempt to increase the numbers of students in general (2018: 17). Short-term programmes, such as summer schools, work placements, internships or language courses are becoming increasingly popular with higher education students particularly thanks to their flexibility and less strict regulations (Antonova, Gurarii & Vysotskaia, 2020: 131). Such short stays abroad retain, although in different grades, the general positives of one or two-semester study stays abroad (Wit & Jones, 2018: 17): the chances to meet other young people from different countries who express themselves in different languages and have different communication preferences, the opportunity to attend stimulating lectures and workshops and to enjoy seeing the world from a different perspective.

This fact plays an important role in motivating D/d/hh students to take part in short-term mobility opportunities, considering that student motivation is the key starting point for most prospective participants (Berken, 2015: 4). For many D/d/hh students the study of the English language remains bound to school or university premises; therefore, attending these events can give the D/d/hh students a taste of studying abroad in a safe and supportive environment, without the pressure of achieving credits, passing the end of course exams and the threat of losing the scholarship if they do not meet the credit requirement. This experience can instill academic confidence in the attendees as they might feel empowered to engage in longer study stays after doing well in a shorter one.

9/ Although it is highly interesting to observe these data, they actually tell us relatively little about the real situation. Looking at the numbers, several important questions remain, eg. Why are there so few grant applicants in the countries that report less than ten grant applications? Is it because they have a different system of granting students with special needs the necessary service, is it because the students in these countries lack awareness about this grant possibility, or because they prefer other mobility programmes, and so on.

There are also several other factors to consider when administering mobilities of D/d/hh students; however, despite the possible difficulties, the challenge of going on a study abroad is a unique opportunity for the students to be immersed into a multilingual and multicultural setting that the language classroom alone cannot facilitate. Moreover, this experience brings an interesting comparison of the different approaches towards ensuring accessibility in the different countries as well as of the different approaches to deliver the services, which is part of the international experience of these stays for D/d/hh students.

1.2. INTRODUCTION TO THE *DEAF* DEFINITELY ENGLISH RESOURCE PACK

1.2.1. Introducing the LangSkills project

This set of teaching resources forms part of the materials which were designed under the LangSkills project (www.teiresias.muni.cz/langskills). The LangSkills project focuses mainly on increasing the language skills of D/d/hh learners studying at European higher education institutions to encourage their participation in international mobilities and other internationalization activities. The Teiresias Centre at Masaryk University, Czech Republic, in cooperation with Loránd Eötvös University, Hungary, the University of Central Lancashire, UK, the Service Centre GESTU at the Technical University of Vienna, Austria, and the non-profit organisation Deaf Studies Trust, UK, developed a series of activities and learning opportunities with this goal in mind.

The project outputs are outlined below:

The first output is an empirical research into the foreign language learning experiences, motivation and needs of Austrian, Czech, and Hungarian higher education D/d/hh students. The results of the investigations are published in leading national and international journals in English and in Hungarian (see more about Output 1 [here](#)).

The project team also produced an e-learning course titled Online English for International Mobilities which provides learners with a hearing loss an accessible English language course containing plenty of authentic materials related to studying abroad. The course is an opportunity for the learners to improve their English language skills with a focus on the academic environment and to simulate the experience of going to study at a foreign university (see more about Output 3 [here](#)). The teacher materials provide relevant background information that will be of benefit to teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to D/d/hh learners. The self-access materials are designed for individual learners interested in taking the course.

Next, the LangSkills project offers another e-learning course, designed for signing students who want to acquire basic knowledge of British Sign Language (BSL). Although there are numerous BSL online courses, they are typically addressed to course participants who express themselves verbally. This course meets the needs of deaf BSL learners and therefore it includes instructions in International Sign and uses suitable teaching approaches (see Output 4 [here](#)).

Finally, the project partnership created a set of materials for teachers of English who work with D/d/hh learners to build suitable teaching resources and provide inspiration for the teachers.

1.2.2. About the *Deafinitely* English resource pack

The context for which the online materials were designed is post-secondary D/d/hh learners who would like to prepare for study abroad programmes such as Erasmus+ and/or to increase their English language competence.

[What does the resource pack contain?](#)

This resource pack includes the following parts:

- **Unit One, EFL for Deaf, deaf and hard of hearing learners and study stays abroad: An Overview**
- **Unit Two, Teaching Deaf, deaf and hard of hearing learners in EFL settings**
- **Unit Three, Teachers' Guide to the Booklets for Students**
- **Unit Four, Strategies for Reading. Student's Booklet**
- **Unit Five, Strategies for Essay Writing. Student's Booklet**
- **Unit Six, Developing Study Skills. Student's Booklet**

These materials have benefitted from the data collected through the research phase, the trial runs of e-learning course of written English, and during the International Summer School in 2019¹⁰, which was held as part of the project activities. The teachers' feedback was collected and assessed, comparing the set content with their experiences and knowledge. The national meetings of teachers of EFL for D/d/hh learners held in the partner countries, in which the teachers shared their experiences and methodologies, also enhanced the quality of these materials.

10/ Unfortunately the Summer School 2020 had to be cancelled due to the covid-19 situation in partner countries.

Who are the resources for?

- **Unit 1, 2 and 3** are intended particularly for teachers involved in TEFL to D/d/hh learners. These units address the area of international mobilities of D/d/hh university students, particularly in connection to language skills, draw attention to some of the characteristics of TEFL to D/d/hh learners, and provide a Teacher's Guide to the Booklets for Students.
- **Units 4, 5 and 6** are designed particularly for D/d/hh university students who are planning to study abroad; however, engagement in a mobility programme is not a condition. Learners can use these resources to develop their skills in reading, studying and essay writing, either on their own or with their teacher in general English or academic English classes.

These materials focus mainly at the independent user levels, i.e. at B1 and B2 levels, and the proficient C1 level of CEFR. The teacher's instructions in the booklets are written predominantly at the B1 level of CEFR, as students should be capable of reading instructions at this level.

The booklets are designed to be accessible and useful to Deaf, deaf and hard of hearing learners in both content and form.

The universal character of the materials indicates possible differences in the approach in teaching English that may occur between partner organisations. The teachers are welcome to choose the activities and ideas that suit their teaching environment and the needs of their students.

1.2.3. Aims of the materials

The intention of this resource pack is to contribute to the language education of D/d/hh students in post-secondary education. In general terms, the materials provide theoretical background for teaching languages to D/d/hh students and their engagement in study stays abroad as well as practical booklets, which focus on the possibilities of teaching reading, writing and developing study skills to D/d/hh learners. In giving a variety of teaching methods in practice, the materials provide tips on teaching EFL to D/d/hh students. The materials include hints and lesson materials, lesson plans, a series of activities, teaching tips, etc.

The booklets may also be used independently by the learners who wish to improve their English language proficiency.

1.2.4. Related beliefs

The created materials build upon the following views of the language, learning and teaching:

- Providing a variety of teaching methods through many different communication channels (e.g., posters, interactive aids, games, synchronous chat, or discussion fora) can benefit learners' individual differences as well as motivate them to use English.
- Access to instruction and information through visual means, particularly sign language, is paramount in deaf education.
- Exchanging and sharing good practices across national borders in teaching to the learners from the target groups is of crucial importance.
- The universal character of the content is useful for teachers and learners independent of their nationality.

1.2.5. Format and content of the resource pack

Unit One:

The first unit provides an introduction to the area of international mobilities of D/d/dd students, introduces the LangSkills project and the resource pack drawing the reader's attention to the aims, beliefs and principles that underlie the chosen approach in this set of materials.

Unit Two:

Unit 2 looks at D/d/hh students as EFL learners, focusing on general characteristics of D/d/hh EFL learners, the main communication methods used in TEFL, the adaptation of teaching and learning materials, as well as some principles of culturally-relevant pedagogy. It includes tips and best practices that will be of benefit to teachers of EFL to D/d/hh students, particularly those at the beginning of their career as language teachers to learners with hearing loss.

Unit Three:

This Teachers' Guide sets the scene for Units 4, 5 and 6 offering further information on D/d/hh EFL learners in connection to reading, writing and the area of study skills. The unit provides direction in how to use the teaching and learning booklets, including a brief introduction to each online booklet, its content and goals.

Unit Four:

The Strategies for Reading booklet comprises a set of online teaching and learning materials produced through collecting good practices, experiences and ideas on methods of teaching reading skills. It brings a series of activities that the learners can use to practise the presented effective reading strategies.

Unit Five:

The Strategies for Essay Writing booklet focuses on the possibilities of teaching and practising essay writing with D/d/hh learners. Using plenty of examples, the booklet encourages learners to think about how they can improve their essay writing in English, as well as to learn what the major mistakes are that students make when writing essays, and provides tips on avoiding them.

Unit Six:

The Developing Study Skills Booklet aims to help learners approach academic tasks and assignments in a strategic manner, as plenty of learners fail to perform on academic tasks due to inappropriate or ineffective study strategies. This Booklet motivates them to reflect on their own study patterns, and equips them with tips to improve their time-management skills.

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