

MA Independent Project Proposal Form

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1. Working Title

Supporting Deaf Students in Education: A Mixed Methods Investigation into Staff Training and the Role of BSL Communicators.

2. Project Type and Format

This independent project will take place via mixed methods research, combining quantitative research with the use of a survey and qualitative interviews looking at the professional experiences of communication support workers. The use of both qualitative and quantitative research will allow for statistical information on the training that is available to staff who work with Deaf students and their understanding of working with Deaf and hard of hearing students, the challenges the school staff face as well as the , whereas the qualitative research will allow a deeper delve into the role of a communication support worker, who support deaf students in education settings through British Sign Language, to gather information on their role in the education system, looking at what they consider to be the challenges in them completing their role and also what facilitates them in their role.

3. Rationale and Background

There have been many developments in British Sign Language in Wales in recent times with the introduction of BSL in the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2021) and the British Sign Language (Wales) Act 2026 (Welsh Parliament, 2025). Despite this, BATOD (2021) reported that for six years in a row, Deaf children achieved a grade less than their hearing peers. As deafness is not a learning difficulty, there should not be such a difference for Deaf students in their GCSE results.

With there being such a difference in the grades of the students throughout their education, it could lead to asking questions as to if the staff in the school know how to best support the Deaf students in their educational setting. Cride (2025) reported that in 2025 there were 2147 Deaf children in Wales, although acknowledging that there are gaps in their information indicating that there are likely more children who are not under the support of the local teacher of the deaf. Out of the 2147 children 73% of school aged Deaf children attend mainstream school, 5% attend provision for Deaf children in mainstream schools and 0% are educated in specialist Deaf schools in Wales. This information highlights the importance of mainstream teachers having a basic awareness of how to support a Deaf pupil in their setting.

4. Aims and Objectives

Aim:

To investigate the training, knowledge and confidence of education staff in supporting Deaf learners in mainstream education settings in Wales, and to explore the experience of communication support workers in facilitating Deaf students' access to education.

Objectives:

- To examine the type and extent of training received by school and college staff in supporting Deaf learners and promoting inclusive educational practices.
- To explore educational staff's knowledge, confidence and perceived challenges when working with Deaf Students and Communication Support Workers.
- To investigate the experiences of Communication support workers in supporting Deaf learners within educational settings
- To identify the barriers and facilitators that communication support workers encounter in their role and consider how these factors influence educational access and outcomes for Deaf students.

5. Literature Overview

The Milan Convention in 1880 decided that oral education was superior to sign language in the education of Deaf students in education settings, resulting in the ban of the use of sign language in schools (Gallaudet, 1881), this had severe consequences for Deaf students around the world for over eighty years, with the situation not improving until the 1960's (Moores, 2010). It could be suggested that this still effects the education of Deaf students today, with BATOD (2021) reporting that Deaf students have received lower grades in GCSE examinations than their hearing peers, With Deafness being a

sensory impairment, not a learning difficulty, with the correct support Deaf children should not be disadvantaged.

Knoors & Marschark, (2015) acknowledge that, like hearing students, Deaf students have individual needs and personal preferences on the support that they wish to receive. Jarvis (2003) looked at the support that was available to Deaf students and their personal preferences when it comes to support. Their study identified that Deaf students identified their need for support in education setting, however some of the students that participated identified the different challenges they faced that differed from their peers, for example the communication support worker always being there, implying that having a communication support worker interrupted time with their peers.

Roberts (2021) acknowledge that Deaf students are capable learners, however they require adaptations to meet their full potential, this is supported by Bunbury (2025), who emphasised the need for British Sign Language to be accessible for Deaf people in order to ensure they are able to access experiences, in this case education, to its full potential. With all of the literature stating that with appropriate support and intervention that a Deaf child can access education to its fullest potential, it would be fair to imply that school staff need to have an awareness of how best to support Deaf students in school, regardless of if they have a BSL communication support worker or not, in order to allow the Deaf student to experience education to its fullest and therefor have a comparable experience to that of their peers.

There is little literature available about the support and training that school staff have available to them when supporting a Deaf child in their education setting, however with the attainment gap still being present between Deaf and hearing students, the new legislation being put in place to support Deaf people and their rights to access BSL and the new curriculum allowing for the teaching of BSL in school settings, there appears to be a gap between the needs of Deaf children and the school settings having the knowledge and understanding of deaf awareness and how to best support the Deaf child to reach their full potential.

6. Methodology / Project Approach

This study will employ mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative data from surveys with qualitative data from semi-structured interviews. The integration of both data sources will provide a comprehensive understanding of school staff training and the experiences of Communication Support Workers in supporting Deaf learners.

Participants:

Approximately 50 school staff will complete an online survey. These participants will include a combination of primary, secondary and further education sector staff, including

teachers, teaching assistants and support staff. A smaller sample of around 5 communication support workers/signing teaching assistants will then participate in semi structured interviews.

Survey:

The survey will use multiple choice questions, rating scales, and Likert scales to assess the access to training teachers and school staff get when supporting Deaf Students in their school settings. The survey will use scales to gauge their level of deaf awareness and their understanding of how to best support the students in the school. The survey will also ask the participants the perceived challenges and benefits of working with Communication support workers in the school setting. The data from the surveys will be analysed using descriptive statistics (percentages and means) to highlight my findings.

Semi Structured Interviews:

The interviews will be looking at the experience of communication support workers when supporting Deaf children in education settings, what they perceive as supporting them in their role and the challenges that they face from school, peers, families of Deaf children and Deaf children themselves. The analysis for the semi structured interviews will be using Braun and Clark's (2006) thematic analyses, allowing for themes to be seen between the experiences of communication support workers.

Recruitment:

Recruitment for the surveys will take place through schools and my own personal network. The recruitment of communication support workers to participate in the semi structured interviews will take place through personal connections and links within the Deaf community.

7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval will be sought through the university's research ethics process prior to data collection. Given that the study involves both a survey of school staff and interviews with Communication Support Workers (CSWs), careful consideration will be given to issues of confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent. Participants will be provided with detailed information outlining the purpose of the research and their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study without consequence. No identifiable personal or institutional information will be collected or reported. All data will be stored securely and managed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR to ensure participant privacy and confidentiality.)

8. References

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