

A sign language interpreter in inclusive education: The view of deaf persons on their quality of life

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Abstract

In the last years an increasing number of deaf students are educated with hearing students in classrooms (Antia, et al., 2007; Marschark, et al., 2005). If deaf students gain access to education through an interpreter, it is assumed that they will enhance their future quality of life and be better able to fully realize their economic potential and thus contribute to society in equal measure (EU, 2010; Hintermair, 2008). In order for policy makers to design more long term effective regulations and policies, one must know the possible impact on the quality of life of receiving education through a sign language interpreter.

In this study a set of quality of life indicators was selected based on a literature review in the areas of quality of life, inclusive education, sign language interpreting in the classroom and the rights of sign language users. The study was limited to deaf sign language users in secondary and tertiary inclusive education. The selection contained five main domains: demographics, family, educational institution, interpreting services and employment.

The selected indicators were then tested on deaf Dutch sign language users through two online surveys; one for deaf persons currently in education and one for persons who had completed their education. To ensure accessibility the survey questions were presented in Dutch Sign Language as well as in written Dutch. A total of 70 persons responded to the surveys.

The results of the surveys were then compared to the findings in the literature on the selected quality of life indicators. The results revealed, among others things, that current students are less happy being in education with a sign language interpreter, than those students who were previously educated using an interpreter. In addition, persons in the group of former students who completed a higher degree of education are now all employed, versus those with a lower education who are unemployed. The degree of the parents' involvement with the school also appears to influence the overall happiness of the student. In the past parents were more involved with the students, resulting in more support services at school, and increasing the feeling of overall acceptance at school.