

Literacy development with deaf communities using sign language, peer tuition, and learner-generated online content: sustainable educational innovation

Lead Research Organisation: [University of Central Lancashire](#)

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Abstract

In much of the world, English instruction is delivered to deaf signers by teachers who cannot sign themselves. This makes deaf people's English acquisition, which is very difficult (Kempt & Maxwell 1989; Schmitz & Keenan 2005), virtually impossible in many locations. This pilot project aims to provide English-language teaching for members of the deaf community in India including deaf young people in high poverty contexts, and draft a model of effective language-teaching interventions for them, to guide policy and further innovation. The focus is improving the quality of educational outcomes for a specific community which may not derive adequate benefit from traditional interventions. Peer education can lead to improved academic and cognitive abilities for both learners and tutors, and decreased absenteeism and isolation (Bruffee 1978; Falchikov 2001). The project proposes a model which departs from existing traditional language teaching practices in India, and takes an ethnographic approach which will see the development of materials and teaching led by local deaf tutors supported by trainers both in-country and from the UK, to ensure responsiveness to learner needs. It is an interdisciplinary collaboration between specialists in (applied) sign linguistics/Deaf Studies, TESOL, cross-cultural research on literacies, and learning technologists. The development of a virtual/mobile learning platform (Sign Language to English by the Deaf - SLEND) combined with the use of sign language and support from deaf peer tutors constitute a learner-driven, innovative methodology based on a functional approach to learning that will emphasise using language to do things (rather than grammar-driven). Adaptation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) for the expression of learning outcomes will allow achievements to be expressed in terms of an internationally understood tool. To examine transferability across cultures,

Funding
details

small-scale investigative fieldwork will take place in Uganda and Ghana to reveal literacy needs there and pave the way for future South-South collaboration.

Using mixed methods from action research and ethnographic research, the project addresses the following research questions:

1. How can we develop and implement a deaf-led, community based, learner-focussed teaching programme that meets local community needs in a sustainable way?
2. How can we capture and measure, in a standardised way, the effectiveness of the combination of peer tuition, a dedicated virtual learning environment, and a staged training programme on teaching English literacy in this particular socio-cultural context?
3. How can we best understand and conceptualise the interrelated elements that characterise this approach and how they interact to facilitate effective teaching in this context? Qualitative data including classroom observations, analysis of interactions on the SLEND, and interviews inform the answers to this question. Community teachers/peer tutors will be trained in data collection and analysis, enhancing the research capacity of the deaf community.

In India, the study has four overlapping phases: (1) Ethnographic study into existing literacy practices to identify the types of communication which are valued by deaf sign language users proceeds alongside (2) content development based on this needs assessment. Course delivery (3) is then carried out by local tutors with pre- and post- assessment to measure learner attainment. Compiling the interim and final quantitative-qualitative evidence for dissemination (4) informs national policy and ensures the project's on-going influence.

In Uganda and Ghana, smaller case studies into literacy needs and practices will be carried out using the same ethnographic research tools. Focus groups in these countries alongside dissemination workshops will review the SLEND and discuss possible adaptation/scalability to teaching situations in deaf communities in sub-Saharan Africa.

Planned Impact

At present, much of the human and intellectual potential of India's one million deaf signers is being wasted because their instructors teach in spoken language, and thus they are unable to attain basic English literacy, a vital component of economic and career success in modern India and globally. The programme benefits deaf people who have inadequate interpreter provision or who lack the funding or skills necessary to access traditional education. Peer education by deaf signers, and course materials in sign language, will give these individuals full access to learning English. Skills in written English open a multitude of doors for deaf people in terms of exploiting technology, further education, employment, and an enriched social life, as suggested by previous work with deaf Indians carried out by iSLanDS under the UK-India Education and Research Initiative. This will extend the pedagogy flexibly in India, with potential for South-South collaboration among deaf learners in Ghana and Uganda. National, regional and local policies will be recommended by the research team in order to support and scale up sustainable educational initiatives, based on real-life literacies in deaf communities. The economic and societal impact of this project is maximised through the involvement of deaf individuals in every aspect, from researcher to learner. Deaf people, especially in the developing world, have a high unemployment rate and low educational attainment. By improving their employability, this programme is of social and economic benefit to each of the countries. It builds capacity by giving the peer educators valuable job experience and increasing access to education and employment for all both tutors and learners. The peer educators will gain a deeper understanding of English, enabling them to act as role models. The Indian staff will receive technical training and research experience. By having the data collection carried out by local deaf people, the project capitalises on grassroots expertise and capacity growth. National policy will be influenced and on-going impact secured through assessment evidence and publications, and the investigation of scalability for extension. Publications, evidence from assessments and programme evaluations can be used to demonstrate to policy makers the validity and effectiveness of the methodology in terms of achievement and learner reaction. Publications will focus on literary practices in the target community, development of literacy needs

and the use of the CEFR to guide teaching and record learner achievement of deaf learners. Cross-cultural comparisons of literacy practices and drafts of implementation models will be presented to policy-makers and practitioners, and later refined in a larger-scale project. Adapting the CEFR will enable internationally comparable assessment and empirical measurement of the programme's effectiveness, and provide evidence that learners can use to demonstrate their achievement levels to employers. Partnership with the NAD and other deaf organisations is central to engagement with stakeholders, to verify that deaf people in the target countries have the opportunity to benefit from the project. At our dissemination workshops in India, Ghana and Uganda and an international conference in India, we will plan sustainable, deaf-led communicative channels to manage the project's legacy and ensure the capacity-building and policy impacts have lasting value.

Data

The data on this website provides information about publications, people, organisations and outcomes relating to research projects

APIs

The data is accessible programmatically using one of three application programming interfaces [GtR](#), [GtR-2](#) and [CERIF](#)



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