

Language Therapy in British Sign Language: A study exploring the use of therapeutic strategies and resources by Deaf adults working with young people who have language learning difficulties in British Sign Language (BSL).

Available at <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10022827/>

Abstract

Deaf Language Specialists, with varied backgrounds, training experience, roles and qualifications, currently work with deaf children who have difficulties in their development of sign language. With the long-term aim of improving practice, three questions were addressed:

1. How do Deaf Language Specialists (DLSs) currently work with deaf children who have language difficulties?
2. Can language therapy strategies and resources developed for spoken language be adapted for language therapy in BSL?
3. Can therapy strategy and resource use bring observable change to DLSs' therapeutic skills?

The study had three phases. In Phase 1, questionnaires and focus groups asked DLSs about current practice. In Phase 2, 4 DLSs and the Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) researcher collaborated to deliver language therapy in BSL. Questionnaires, observation schedules and discussion gathered feedback from DLSs. Phase 3, based on findings from Phases 1 and 2, comprised a training course for 17 DLSs and SLTs. Theoretical information, with examples from Phases 1 and 2, provided a basis for the training. Course participants provided information about their knowledge and confidence about language therapy in BSL before and after the course with their reflections on the usefulness of the information presented.

In summary, the study confirmed that DLSs have varying skills, knowledge and confidence. There are challenges for DLSs, including accessing information on language disorder, language context, language mixing, and bilingualism. The roles of DLSs and the availability of other professionals, such as SLTs, for co-working can make it challenging for practitioners to provide therapeutic intervention. DLSs reported training and co-working helped their work.

Participants identified a need for shared terminology to discuss language difficulties and intervention in English and BSL. A shared framework for assessment, goal setting, therapy and evaluation is needed. More accessible information, resources, training and supervision would support DLSs and SLTs in this work.