

Deaf Community Gatherings and Bilingual Literacy Development in Oromia, Ethiopia

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Abstract

This case study investigates the profound influence of Deaf community gatherings on bilingual literacy development in Oromia, Ethiopia, within an inclusive education model utilizing Ethiopian Sign Language (EthSL) and Afan Oromo. While bilingual education is globally recognized for enhancing Deaf students' literacy and academic achievement, many Ethiopian Deaf learners, predominantly born to non-signing hearing parents, experience severe language deprivation and social isolation. This significantly hinders their early language acquisition and cognitive growth. Given the natural dispersion of Deaf individuals, forming intentional community spaces is paramount for language and cultural identity transmission. This study explores how formal and informal Deaf community gatherings, particularly around inclusive schools like KK School, serve as vital catalysts. These crucial gatherings provide essential peer interaction, authentic language-rich environments, and a vital sense of belonging, directly combating the pervasive sign language deprivation and lack of community support. Employing a qualitative case study with interviews, focus groups, and observations involving Deaf students, teachers, parents, and Deaf adults, findings reveal the absence of systematic assessment for Deaf students' linguistic needs. Crucially, the research highlights how these community gatherings empower Deaf learners to acquire fluent EthSL, fostering self-confidence, conceptual understanding, and ultimately, strong literacy skills. The study advocates for strengthening Deaf community engagement in and around schools and implementing culturally and linguistically responsive education policies, emphasizing the irreplaceable role of these gatherings in ensuring equitable education and positive identity formation for Deaf students.

Keywords: deaf culture; identity transmission; language deprivation, placement; Sign language