



Rethinking Deaf Education: Identify, literacy, And Community in Lagos: A Case Study of Sign-Language- First Pedagogy at Wesley School

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Abstract

Forget the well-funded laboratories and the latest technology for a moment. The most powerful innovations in deaf education are happening in a bustling neighbourhood in Lagos, Nigeria, where limited resources are matched by an abundance of community spirit. This paper pulls back the curtain on the Wesley School for the Hearing Impaired in Surulere, where a bold, sign-language-first approach is reshaping what is possible for deaf learners. While many education systems globally have historically prioritised assimilation, integrating deaf students into hearing environments through spoken language (Silvestri & Hartman, 2022), Wesley flips the script.

Drawing on classroom observations and conversations with students and teachers, we document a cultural and academic transformation. Classrooms buzz with signed conversations, peer mentoring, and a growing sense of identity, rejecting the idea that deafness is a deficit. The outcomes are striking: in 2024, Wesley achieved a literacy rate of 78% compared to the national average of 15% (LASUBEB, 2024). This case study demonstrates that true progress in deaf education comes not from making students hear but from ensuring they are seen, understood, and empowered. The findings offer practical lessons for educators and policymakers, highlighting the transformative potential of sign-language-first models in Nigeria and beyond.

Keywords: Assimilation; Belonging; Cultural transformation; Empowerment; Nigerian Sign Language