



CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT SUPPORT OF COMMUNICATION FOR DEAF STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT. This study employed a case study design to explore classroom environment support for communication for deaf students at the University of Education, Winneba. The study sampled 20 participants which comprised ten deaf students, five interpreters, and five lecturers. A one-on-one semi-structured interview was used to collect data from participants. Data was analyzed using themes. Findings from the study revealed that classroom environment support for communication for deaf students involves, the relationship among deaf students, interpreters, and lectures about communication at the lecture hall; and the student's participation at the lecture hall. Based on the results from the study, it was recommended that the management of the University of Education, Winneba, and the Department of Special Education should collaborate to ensure a supportive environment for effective classroom communication for deaf students. The Department of Special Education should facilitate continuous professional development seminars and in-service training for lecturers and interpreters on the education of deaf students to enable them to come up with more innovative ways of communicating with deaf students.

Keywords: Deaf; Support; Communication; Environment

INTRODUCTION

Deaf students are typically evaluated academically on the material they have learned, and exams are also made more difficult when Sign Language interpreters are not present, according to a study done by Adu (2021) on the social and academic experiences of deaf students at the University of Education, Winneba (UEW). This suggests that effective communication in the lecture hall has a big impact on the education and academic success of deaf students. Additionally, deaf students favour particular interpreting approaches, and some interpreters lack the skills necessary to interpret all subjects, including Math, Science, and English, because of the lack of these subjects. Deaf students typically rely on sign language interpretation, note-taking, and tutoring services in Ghana for academic and social information. There is no national policy on the modes of communication for deaf students, so there have been fluctuations over time in those modes of communication, which hasn't really helped deaf education in Ghana in terms of classroom communication (Fobi & Oppong, 2019). The foundation of classroom communication in the mainstream of education is the notion that deaf students' access to information in the classroom depends on a trained sign language interpreter who serves as a voice and allows them to communicate with hearing students (Marschark et al., 2005). However, a sizable num-

ber of obstacles to learning in the classroom were faced by deaf students. Since students' perceptions of language and communication styles in the classroom vary, these barriers are mostly related to interactions among deaf students, interpreters, and lecturers. These numerous obstacles that they encounter weaken them and continuously put them at a disadvantage compared to other students. The majority of tertiary-level deaf students' academic performance has been impacted by this (Bell & Swart, 2018).

According to research, communication barriers in the classroom or during class time have caused deaf students to consistently perform worse academically than their hearing counterparts (Marschark et al., 2006; Adoyo, 2002).

Study Objective: To ascertain the classroom environment support of communication for deaf students at the University of Education, Winneba.

Research Question: How does the classroom environment support communication for deaf students at the University of Education, Winneba?

Significance of the Study: The result of the study would help the University of Education, Winneba and the Department of Special Education to ensure a supportive classroom environment for communication for deaf students at the university which makes evening lectures more conducive for both lecturers, interpreters and deaf students. Finally, the

results of the study would reveal the strategies and resources to ensure classroom communication for deaf students and, this will enable the Department of Special Education to ensure training programs or seminars for lecturers and interpreters.

Delimitation: This study was delimited to deaf students of the University of Education, Winneba.

Theoretical framework: The study adopted Gunther Kress's Multimodality theory. The multimodality theory, developed by Gunther Kress, provides a framework for examining how people interact and communicate with one another through modes of expression other than writing. Language is only one of many resources for meaning creation, according to Kress' Multimodality. Accordingly, it is necessary to view the modal resources for meaning-making that are present in culture as a single coherent field of disparate yet complementary resources. A multimodal approach seeks to move beyond previous methods in which a theory or discipline and a mode were intimately connected, frequently in mutually defining ways. According to these methods, linguistics dealt with writing, art history with images, etc. All modes are framed as belonging to one field or domain in a multimodal approach. Members of a social group at a specific time treat them collectively as one connected cultural resource for the purpose of (representing) meaning-making.

Literature review: The mode of communication is crucial to inclusion, making the situation of deaf people's inclusion special (Kermit, 2019). In this context, "communication" refers to all spoken or sign language used by deaf students to engage in social interaction. It is crucial to identify the best communication strategies that can support deaf students in engaging with others, maintaining interactions, and forming friendships with hearing students in order to improve the learning of deaf students and thereby make education inclusive (Xie et al., 2014). For students who are deaf or hard of hearing, support services are required to remove obstacles to learning (Mapepa & Magano, 2018). This includes offering suitable teaching resources, such as visual aids like images, diagrams, and illustrations to improve students' comprehension. Support for the curriculum is also crucial, and it should be adaptable and available to all students, including those who are deaf (Guardino & Antia, 2012). In self-contained classrooms, changing the physical setting can improve deaf or hard-of-hearing students' academic engagement and reduce disruptive behaviour. Organizing the classroom differently, adding more visual stimulation, and improving the acoustics can all create a more encouraging environment (Wambui, 2015). The school's communication philosophy is essential in developing a welcoming environment

for deaf students (Aljedaani et al., 2023). For instance, in some schools, all instruction is delivered in sign language through the use of American Sign Language (ASL) immersion. Teaching strategies for deaf or hard-of-hearing students include using visual aids, speaking directly to the student, and using closed captioning or transcripts for videos. It's essential to make sure the classroom promotes students' success, for example, by offering good lighting and reducing background noise (Mohd Hashim & Tasir, 2020). For deaf and hearing-impaired students, online learning can present difficulties with technical support and accessibility of the learning environment. When creating online courses and offering support services, it is important to take these students' needs into account (Zahirah & Sukyadi, 2018).

In conclusion, providing suitable teaching materials, adaptable curricula, communication strategies, and social support, taking into account the communication philosophy of the school, and utilizing online resources all contribute to creating a supportive classroom environment for deaf students. These methods and tools can support efforts to guarantee that deaf students have equal access to education and can achieve academic and social success.

METHOD

Research Approach: The study adopted a qualitative research approach because, the study explored the classroom environment support communication for deaf students and the strategies and resources that can contribute to classroom communication for deaf students at the University of Education, Winneba. The qualitative approach was deemed suitable for the study because the study participants were interviewed.

Research design: The study adopted an exploratory case study design and conducted an in-depth investigation of the phenomenon under study. A case study can determine and report things the way they are and describe what is in a social system such as a school (Orodho, 2009).

Population and Sample: The study population was 35 comprising 17 deaf students, seven interpreters, and 11 lecturers. The sample size for the study was 20 participants, comprising 10 deaf students who have spent more than two semesters in the university, five Lecturers who were available and showed interest during the time for the data collection, and five Interpreters who were present during the time of the data collection for the study. A purposive sampling technique was used by the researchers to select the deaf student participants for the study.

Instrumentation: The instrument for data collection was a semi-structured interview guide. The in-

terview offered the researchers the opportunity to gather and explore relevant data about classroom communication among deaf students, interpreters, and lecturers.

Ethical consideration: The study ensured or took into account ethics for each participant because it is important when conducting research where participants are guaranteed privacy and anonymity. They consist of a set of values. Voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, the possibility of harm, and results communication that was placed by the researcher are some of these principles.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the data, analysis, and discussion of findings based on the research question of the study. The data were gathered and analyzed to reflect the themes generated. Deaf Students were coded as DS, Interpreters as ITP, and Lecturers as LT.

The classroom environment supports communication for deaf students

The research question was meant to explore the supportiveness of the classroom environment on effective communication for students who are deaf at the University of Education, Winneba. Two themes emerged to elicit data to support this objective for the three categories of participants. The themes included; the relationship among deaf students, interpreters, and lectures about communication at the lecture hall; and the students' participation at the lecture hall.

Theme 1: Relationship among deaf students, Interpreters, and Lecturers

Concerning the relationship among deaf students, interpreters and Lecturers had different narration or experiences. When the deaf students were speaking about this issue, most of them emphasized only the positive relationship between Interpreters and Lecturers. The majority of the students indicated that they feel good when they are with interpreters since they will give them the information that they need to know. Others also revealed that communication with interpreters is fine, though some of the interpreters are not all that good which sometimes makes communication difficult. One also stated that it depends if the interpreter explains with examples and the understanding comes to feeling better. Concerning the relationship between students and Lecturers, it was revealed some of the deaf students that, feel happy because some of the Lecturers try to learn Sign Language. Some of the Lecturers can't communicate, sometimes they can but they don't have time for us. It was analyzed that when communication is done right among students, Inter-

preters, and Lecturers, students feel good but when is vice versa, deaf students are the most disadvantaged. The views of interpreters concerning the relationship among deaf students, interpreters, and Lecturers had different narration. The interpreters expressed diverse views concerning the relationship between lecturers and students who are deaf at the university. Some of the interpreters indicated that the interpreter serves as an intermediary for the students and the lecturers because the interpreters interpret what they hear from the Lecturers for the students who are deaf. The lecturers indicated that they do the natural signs and give out course materials to the deaf on time. Below were some comments made:

"I feel happy because some of the Lecturers try to learn Sign Language, especially after Lectures. Some of the Lecturers can't communicate, and some also can but they don't have time for us. Some will also ask you how are you. Some too will neglect the deaf students" (DS 2).

"The interpreter is only serving as an intermediary for the students and the Lecturer, so I do interpret what I hear, what is left is for the students to go and learn more. The lecturers give us the course outline and that is all. I don't have access to the Lecturers notes or slide" (ITP 1).

"Yes, I do outside interaction like how are you, the basic signs with the students. I do give the interpreter's course outline and during a lecture, I brief them with every information they need. I do lecture with the interpreters" (LT 1)

It is obvious from the comments from the deaf students that they were content with how interpreters and some lecturers related with them during lesson hours. Comments from the deaf students indicate that they are comfortable with the presence of interpreters at the lecture hall and they can understand whatever has been taught with the assistance of the sign language interpreters.

Theme 2: The student's participation in the lecture hall

Classroom participation indicates the student's ability to join classroom activities and discussions. From the data, it was revealed that students who are deaf do take part in class lessons, assignments, and group discussions with the assistance of some of their college students and interpreters. The interpreters noted that students who are deaf participate in the lecture hall and students who have difficulty communicating in the classroom may choose not to participate in classroom activities, which may in turn affect their learning and their academic success. This requires that deaf students have direct ac-

cess to lecturers and students' communication, discussions and other activities should be structured in a manner that allows the student to participate. Some lecturers posit that deaf students are lazy because they have note-takers and resource personnel. Below are some expressions from participants:

"I do participate in group discussions; the hearing students do write the keywords on the board so that when an interpreter comes around, he/she explains them to me. Sometimes they will explain but still, the understanding is not there so if there could be videos and pictures in addition to the oral and theories" (DS 1).

"When I ask questions the response, they give helps me to know if the students are getting what I am signing. They do take part in class discussions. (ITP 1).

"Some of the deaf students are very lazy due to the perception that interpreters and note takers are available the effort they put towards their academics is so poor. (LT4)

The study revealed the relationship between Lecturers, Interpreters, and deaf students in the lecture hall. Most of the deaf students emphasized only the positive relationship between Interpreters and Lecturers. The majority of the students indicated that they feel good when they are with interpreters since they give them the information that they need to know, also communication with interpreters is fine, though some of the interpreters are not all that good which sometimes makes communication difficult. This agrees with Kress who noted that Multimodal resources are indicators that are both motivated and conventional. In order to deliver a certain message that is dependent on the learning and social settings, the interpreters or lecturers may use a variety of methods during the teaching-learning process. It was also revealed that, if interpreters interpret with examples, deaf students understand it easily, and they feel better. Zahirah and Sukyadi (2018) researched that the multimodal resources implemented in the teaching-learning process for deaf students can allow them to interpret as well as to make a request, command, argue, and persuade, even express feelings and tell jokes. Concerning the relationship between deaf students and lecturers, it was revealed that some of the deaf students do feel happy because some of the lecturers try to learn sign language which serves as an encouragement. Some of the lecturers don't even talk since they can't communicate with sign language; others too can communicate but they don't have time for deaf students. From the study, it came to light that when communication is done right among deaf students, interpreters, and lectures, students feel good but

when is vice versa, deaf students are the most disadvantaged. Wambui (2015), stated that Classroom instruction that produces positive results, and acknowledges the need for liberal use of non-verbal cues, learner's involvement, and team communication, it was pointed out that learners' performance was usually defined by a learner's success in an academic discipline, an exhibited level of competency on some type of standardized test. The activities and environment in the classroom are what students interact with most frequently, and they are the means by which educational interventions are most likely to result in the desired improvements in students' performance.

The study revealed the relationship between deaf students, interpreters, and lectures about communication at the lecture hall; the student's participation at the lecture hall. Deaf students participate during lesson hours and group discussions with the assistance of interpreters. It was also revealed from the interpreters that, the interpreter is only serving as an intermediary between deaf students and the Lecturer, so they interpret what they hear, and the rest is left for the deaf students to go and learn more.

CONCLUSION

The classroom environment does not support classroom communication at the University due to the size of the class number and the lighting systems which do not favour evening lectures. It was also concluded that the negative attitude of some interpreters and lecturers does not support classroom communication between deaf students and interpreters.

Recommendation: The management of the University of Education, Winneba and the Department of Special Education should collaborate to ensure a supportive environment for effective classroom communication for deaf students. The Department of Special Education should facilitate continuous professional development seminars and in-service training for lecturers and interpreters on the education of deaf students to enable them to come up with more innovative ways of communicating with deaf students.

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