

Evaluating the impact of peripatetic Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People (ToDs) on deaf children's outcomes: a participatory research approach using a mixed methods design

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What are peripatetic Teachers of deaf children and young people (ToDs)?

Peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf (ToDs) are specially trained teachers who travel to different places (educational settings and children's homes) to support deaf children and young people.

Their job is to give direct teaching, as well as advice and guidance to teachers, parents, other professionals and children themselves so deaf children get the right support wherever they are.

What does the term deaf children refer to?

The term "deaf" refers to any level of permanent or temporary hearing loss, from mild to profound, in one or both ears. It's important to note that deafness is not just about not hearing. It can also influence how a child communicates, learns, and interacts with the world. Many deaf children use sign language, spoken language, or a combination of both to communicate.

What is a participatory research study?

This was a research project where researchers from the University of Birmingham and the Sensory Support team from the Sandwell Local Authority worked together on every part of the project. They were involved in:

- Planning what the research would look at

- Running the research activities
- Looking at the results
- Writing up the findings

In other words, everyone had a say and worked as a team to make sure the research reflected real experiences.

Why was this research needed?

Even though we know that deaf children in mainstream schools need specialist support throughout their schooling, and that travelling (peripatetic) ToDs can help schools create effective strategies for social inclusion and development, there is very little research showing exactly how ToDs affect deaf children's language, communication, social skills, and school achievement. Thus, real impact of ToDs on children's learning and outcomes had not been evidenced and documented before. This makes it harder to argue for funding and investment. The study was needed to strengthen the evidence and clearly show the difference ToDs make.

What were the aims of the study?

The study aimed to explore the impact of ToDs' work on deaf children's outcomes as perceived by ToDs themselves, parents and collaborating professionals and as measured by standardised language, literacy tests and other measures.

What did this research involve?

The study had two phases. In phase 1 we gathered insights from a total of 77 parents and professionals who work alongside ToDs, and deaf children and young people themselves (11- 25 years of age) exploring their perceptions of the influence of ToDs' work. A total of 11 participants from the above sample took part in online interviews to gain a greater depth of understanding of the role and impact of ToDs.

Phase 2 was twofold:

- i) We evaluated intervention plans and reviewed recommendations and annual reports of a total of 18 deaf children in their early years between 0-5 years of age and
- ii) using the value-added assessment model we evaluated the impact of ToDs on 13 deaf children's (5-11 years of age) language outcomes, demonstrated by standardised assessments.

Conclusions

Measuring ToDs' impact needs a whole-child approach, combining children's progress records, tests, and the views of parents, teachers, and other professionals. Models like the bioecological development model and dual access model help explain how ToDs support learning and communication.

In the early years (0–5), ToDs keep detailed records to show progress and use clear, achievable goals (SMART targets). They focus on early language support, often helping children learn sign language, which is easier to achieve at this stage than speech alone. ToDs also support families' wider wellbeing, especially in high-need areas, before focusing fully on language or academic goals. Tools like *Success from the Start* help track developmental progress when combined with detailed support records.

For children aged 5–11, more frequent and consistent ToD support leads to better language and academic outcomes. The study showed that ToDs' work has clear, measurable, and long-lasting benefits, helping children achieve academically and gain independence.

For young people aged 11–25, parents and professionals often see checking hearing equipment as a key role of the ToD. Beyond this, ToDs boost confidence, wellbeing, identity, and school inclusion. They also support teachers and parents, which indirectly improves children's learning and development. Families see ToDs as trusted partners and key early support figures, helping children navigate transitions, develop independence, and understand their needs. Strong leadership in sensory services helps ToDs make a bigger impact, while barriers like lack of deaf awareness among staff or families can limit effectiveness.

In short, the study shows that ToDs are essential for language development, academic success, independence, and overall wellbeing for deaf children and young people. Their impact is greatest when support is consistent, collaborative, and understood by everyone involved.

Recommendations

The study suggests several ways to strengthen the role of Teachers of the Deaf (ToDs) and improve outcomes for deaf children.

For the early years (0–5), ToDs should keep clear, consistent records to show progress and support collaboration. Early access to language, whether signed or spoken, is essential. Sign language support is particularly important for children who find speech more difficult, and additional government support is needed where local resources are limited. ToDs also play a wider role in supporting family wellbeing and emotional development, especially in high-need areas. Using SMART targets and combining different monitoring tools helps track children's progress more effectively.

For children aged 5–11, regular and targeted ToD support is important for improving language and learning outcomes. Consistent support over time helps children become more independent and reduces the need for extra help later on.

For young people aged 11–25, ToDs make a direct difference in areas like listening, confidence, wellbeing, independence, identity, advocacy skills, and academic progress. They also have an indirect impact by training teachers and supporting parents, helping create inclusive and accessible learning environments. More frequent visits and better collaboration with other professionals improve coordination and outcomes. Raising deaf awareness among educators and professionals ensures that all children get the support they need.

In short, the recommendations highlight the need for consistent, well-planned, and visible support from ToDs at every stage of a deaf child's education, combined with strong leadership, collaboration, and targeted training for those around them.