

Impact of Bicultural Competence on Interpreting Dynamics among Freelance Sign Language Interpreters in Nairobi

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of bicultural competence on interpreting dynamics among freelance sign language interpreters in Nairobi, Kenya. The research involved 42 respondents from the Kenyan Sign Language Interpreters' Forum, which has 80 registered members. The findings reveal demographic patterns consistent with broader trends in the interpreting profession, including a higher representation of female interpreters and a concentration in the mid-range age groups. Notably, the study found more certified interpreters (27) than non-certified (15), highlighting the prevalence of professional certification. A key finding was the positive correlation between years of interpreting experience and interpreters' self-perception of being fully qualified, with more experienced interpreters considering themselves certified. Crucially, the study underscored the significance of formal training in Deaf culture, as interpreters who received such training demonstrated a higher level of respect and understanding for Deaf customs, values, and norms. The research also revealed a strong link between interpreters' ability to adapt their interpreting style to reflect cultural nuances and their adherence to ethical guidelines like confidentiality, neutrality, and professionalism. The study highlights the need for ongoing professional development focused on Deaf culture training and cultural competency, comprehensive Deaf culture curricula in interpreter training programs, clear certification standards, collaboration between stakeholders, regular assessments of cultural competence and ethical decision-making, and raising awareness about the importance of cultural sensitivity and ethical practices in sign language interpreting.

Keywords: Bicultural competence; Kenyan Sign Language Interpreter; Interpreting Dynamics

1. Introduction

It has been suggested that adaptation among people who experience two different cultures is positively correlated with biculturalism, which entails the development of bicultural identities and capabilities (Safa and Umaña-Taylor, 2021). The relationship between biculturalism and adjustment is contingent upon the cultural systems that people are navigating and the environments in which they are embedded, as per Ward & Geeraert (2016). Sam and Berry (2006) developed the concept of biculturalism, which is a dual-cultural adaptation that includes both enculturation and acculturation. The seminal work on strategies for adjusting to two cultures by John Berry (1974) is extremely important. These tactics represent how each person embraces their cultural system, which is influenced by two main elements: (a) how much a person stays true to their heritage culture or identity, and (b) how much a person builds strong bonds with the host society. (Taylor & Umaña-Safa, 2021). According to Safa and Umaña-Taylor, biculturalism is now a complex psychological construct that represents the extent to which people have internalized beliefs, identities, behaviors, and practices. Three characteristics of biculturalism were listed by Grosjean (2008): 1) participating in two or more cultures to varying degrees; 2) adopting the attitudes, behaviors, values, and languages of those cultures; and 3) combining and blending elements of those cultures.

In the Deaf community, interpreters and other hearing signers are sometimes met with hostility. They are perceived as outsiders, shielded (2004) because the hearing majority has a history of oppression and paternalism (Lane, 1984). Tensions between the Deaf community and interpreters have increased due to the professionalization of interpreting's historical trajectory, which has excluded the Deaf community as gatekeepers more and more (Cokely, 2005). However, sign language interpreters might be perceived differently from other hearing outsiders due to their proficiency in sign language and their function as access providers (Bienvenu, 1987).

According to the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) (wfdeaf.org), there exists a global population of approximately 70 million individuals who are afflicted with deafness. The KNBS (2019) census report for Kenya reveals that 2.2% (equivalent to 0.9 million individuals) of the Kenyan populace experience a disability, with a specific incidence rate of 0.9% for hearing impairments. Throughout history, the Deaf Community has traditionally relied upon sign language as a means of acquiring information, although it is important to note that sign language is not universally standardized, as each nation has adopted its own unique official sign language (Timmermans, 2005). Within the deaf community, it has been suggested by Forestol (2014) that interpreters play a significant role in facilitating the translation of auditory information into a visual language. Furthermore, Jaeger et al (2019) posits that the task of locating a proficient and well-received interpreter can be fraught with challenges. In light of a report issued by the Soko Directory team on August 20, 2021, it has been determined that there are approximately 500 qualified Kenyan sign language interpreters who cater to the needs of over 260,000 members within the deaf community in Kenya.

From the Helper-Model era to the bilingual-bicultural philosophy, the interpreter's role has evolved significantly over time (Alcorn and Humphrey, 2007). In actuality, interpreters serve as a bridge between the two cultures in addition to interpreting the language. As a result, interpreters are aware of the dynamics of physical communication, identify the speaker, position themselves appropriately, etc. Additionally, they are acutely aware of the inherent differences between the parties using interpreting services in terms of their languages, cultures, social interaction norms, and schema. (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007). according to Humphrey and Alcorn (2007), The interpreter is in charge of "cultural and linguistic mediation while accomplishing speaker goal and maintaining dynamic equivalency,".

1.1 Statement of the problem

It's unclear what the Deaf and interpreters think about interpreters' eligibility to be members of the Deaf community. As part of their language learning process, sign language interpreters—especially non-native signers who are learning Kenyan sign language—are often encouraged to interact with the Deaf community (Stuard, 2008; Witter-Merithew, 1999). Certain interpreters acknowledge that, as professionals operating within the community, they must gain trust through reciprocity and community involvement (Mindess, 2014). The research suggests that there are historical and present-day conflicts in the Deaf community's relationship with sign language interpreters, which are the basis for the debate over interpreters' eligibility to be considered members of the community (Cokely, 2005). Although deaf people's perspectives on hearing people are typically similar to others', interpreters stand out for being able to provide access. However, when interacting with the Deaf community, interpreters who are not deaf or native signers—especially students and freelancers—often encounter conflict. How these interpreters view themselves as part of the Deaf community—or not—probably influences their interpretations.

1.2 Specific Objectives of the study

1. To establish the level of understanding of Deaf culture awareness by freelance sign language interpreters
2. To Investigate how cultural competence influences interpreting dynamics
3. To Identify barriers to cultural competence among sign language interpreters

2. Literature Review Deaf Culture

2.1 Deaf Culture

According to Chao, Kung, and Yao (2015) and Fitzgerald, Mullavey-O'bryne & Clemson (1997), "culture" refers to the shared concrete and abstract meanings and patterns, such as the norms, values, and behavioral scripts that help people understand their surroundings and promote adaptation and coordination in society. Language plays a crucial role in fostering social bonds and cultural identification within a community, according to a report by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. The report highlights the close relationship between language and culture within the bilingual and bicultural deaf community.

Deaf culture refers to the unique beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and language shared by individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. It is a distinct cultural group that has its language and a strong sense of community and identity. According to Skelton and Valentine (2003), deaf culture serves as a foundation for deaf rights and is a vital source of information and support for those who are deaf. Scholars and theorists who share a cultural perspective, respect Deaf culture and acknowledge the contributions of the Deaf community to society. Deaf people are acknowledged as visual beings with their language and culture, including a rich history of art,

theater, sports, and language (Debbie G, Annie M, Elaine G, and Michele B 2021). This idea is known as Deaf Gain (Bauman and Murray, 2014).

A distinguishing feature of Deaf culture, according to Johnston and Schembri (2007), is the use of sign language. Given that Deaf culture uses sign language exclusively, communication within it differs from that of hearing culture in several ways. One must acquire visual attention before initiating communication. Typical methods include tapping or stamping a surface to create vibrations, touching someone lightly on the arm or shoulder, or waving within their field of vision (Johnston and Schembri, 2007). Next, during the conversation, visual attention must be maintained (vicdeaf, 2010).

2.2 Cultural Competence

In the Global North and, to a lesser extent, in the Global South, cultural competence is a widely recognized framework for working across cultural divides (Betancourt, Green, and Carrillo, 2002; ICEPA, 2008; Stewart, 2006). The process of becoming more culturally competent is continuous and arises from the synthesis of numerous qualities (Burchum, 2002). The term "cultural sensitivity" pertains to the comprehension, expertise, abilities, and procedures that individuals, professions, institutions, and systems require to operate efficiently and suitably in culturally heterogeneous circumstances, particularly when interacting with people from different backgrounds (Bean, 2006).

As an alternative to Sue's multidimensional construct of cultural competence, there is a growing movement toward a more comprehensive understanding of cultural competence that takes into account the practitioner's background and prejudices in addition to their recognition of their limitations (Sue, 2001). Power struggles between and within cultures can and often do result from interactions between them, as well as from racism and domination (Bhugra, 2004). Frameworks for cultural competence frequently promote inclusivity based on ideas while ignoring the disparities in access and power among various cultural actors.

3. Methods

Nairobi County, Kenya, was chosen for the study because it has the greatest concentration of independent interpreters. This study is an example of a cross-sectional survey-based quantitative research project. The study's sample consisted of 42 freelance Kenyan sign language interpreters who were selected at random from among the 80 members of the Kenya Sign Language Interpreter's forum. According to Parsons (2014), a sample size must include 10% of the target population to

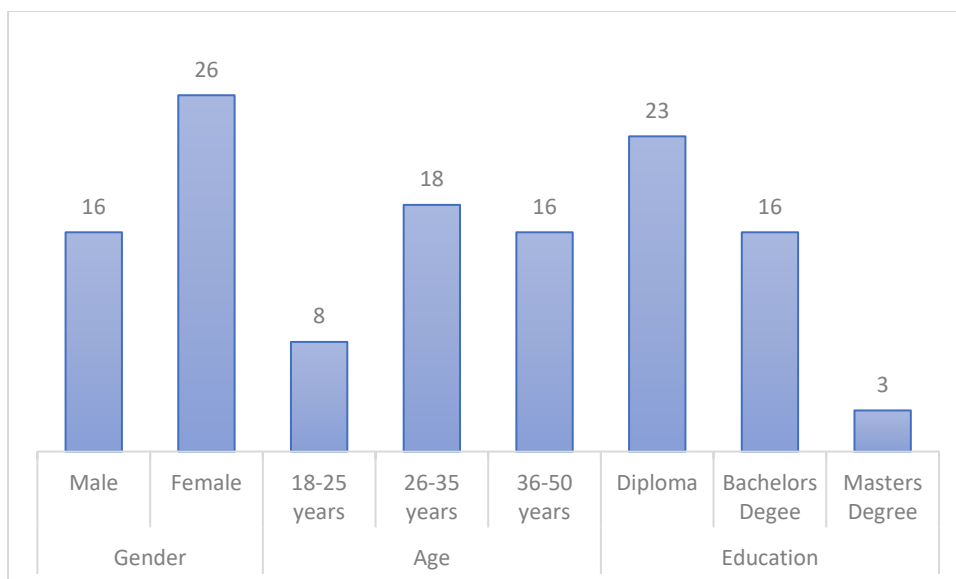
satisfy the necessary standards for observation and reference-making. In a similar vein, Kothari (2007) proved that a sample needs to include at least 30 elements. The main tool used to collect data for this study was an online questionnaire that included both closed- and open-ended questions. The quantitative descriptive analysis method is applied to the data analysis. Additionally, quantitative descriptive analysis techniques with score interpretation classification were used to analyze the gathered data.

4. Results and Discussion

A total of forty-two Respondents participated in the study drawn from the Kenyan sign language interpreter's forum with 80 registered members. The response rate for all the participants was eighty-six percent. Purposive sampling was used to identify the participants.

4.1 Demographic profile

Analysis of the data provides insights into the demographic characteristics of the respondents based on gender, age, and education level. This study revealed a higher representation of females (26) than males (16), suggesting a predominant presence of females in the sign language interpretation field. Concerning age distribution, the majority of respondents (18) fall within the 26–35 age group, followed by the 36–50 age group (16), whereas the 18–25 age group is the least represented (8), indicating a tendency towards an older population in the sample. As regards education, the highest proportion of respondents have a diploma (23), followed by those with a bachelor's degree (16), with only a few respondents having a master's degree (3). This suggests a lower proportion of respondents with higher education qualifications.



The findings presented in the research are consistent with broader trends and patterns observed in the demographics of sign language interpreters across different contexts. Studies examining the demographics of sign language interpreters often report a higher proportion of females compared to males, reflecting a trend of greater female representation in the profession. Similarly, the distribution of age groups among sign language interpreters typically shows a higher concentration in the mid-range age groups, with fewer individuals in the younger age brackets. This aligns with the notion that sign language interpretation may attract individuals who have gained some experience or maturity in the field.

4.2 Cross-Tabulation of Experience and Certification Status

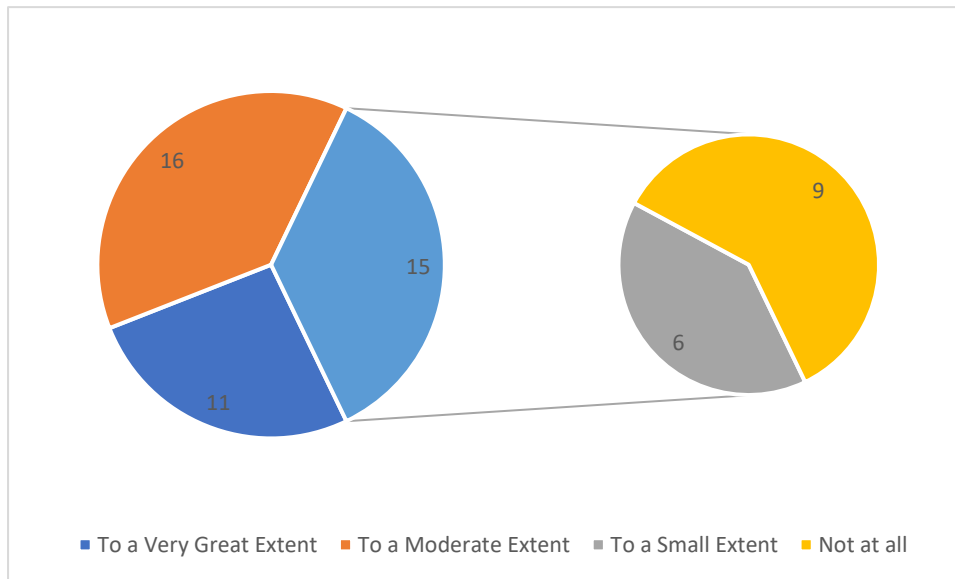
Table 1: cross tabulation on Years of Experience as a sign language interpreter and Certification Status

Years of experience	Certification Status		Total
	Yes	No	
Less than one year	0	11	11
1-5 Years	8	2	10
6-10 Years	10	2	12
Overs 11 Years	9	0	9
Total	27	15	42

This study investigated the link between experience as a sign language interpreter and official certification. Among the respondents, those without certification tended to have less experience. For example, none of the 11 respondents with less than a year of experience have been certified. Similarly, the majority of interpreters with 1-5 years of experience (8 out of 10) are certified. This trend continued for those with more experience (6-10 years). In this group, 10 out of 12 interpreters were certified. Overall, the study found more certified interpreters (27) than non-certified interpreters (15). Additionally, the research showed a connection between experience and confidence in holding full certification. As the number of years of interpreting increased, respondents were more likely to believe that they were fully qualified interpreters.

This finding aligns with previous research by Nicodemus and Swabey (2014), who observed a similar trend among sign language interpreters, where increased experience was associated with higher levels of confidence and competence in interpreting tasks. This underscores the importance of ongoing professional development and experience accumulation in the interpreter profession, ultimately contributing to enhanced confidence and proficiency among certified interpreters (Nicodemus & Swabey, 2014).

4.3 Specialized Training on Deaf Culture



According to the findings, 11 respondents said they had received training to a very great extent, while 16 respondents said they had received formal training on Deaf culture. Fifteen respondents, though, said they had not had any particular instruction on Deaf culture. Bontempo and Napier's (2011) study revealed that interpreters who received cultural sensitivity training exhibited enhanced linguistic fluency and cultural mediation abilities, resulting in more effective communication with Deaf clients. According to Mindess (2014), interpreters who had received formal training in Deaf culture also demonstrated a higher level of respect and understanding for Deaf customs, values, and norms. The study underlined the significance of this kind of training, noting that interpreters who are not culturally aware run the risk of inadvertently offending or misinterpreting their Deaf clients.

4.4 Bicultural Competence Assessment

The mean and standard deviation descriptive statistics were employed to ascertain the freelance interpreters' overall level of bicultural competency. The 5-point Likert scale was cumulatively divided into three subgroups to determine bicultural competence. In this study, low levels of bicultural competence are represented by 1.1–2.33, moderate levels by 2.34–3.66, and high levels by 3.67–5.0. The overall level of bicultural competence among independent translators is displayed in Table 1 ($M = 3.681$, $SD = .974$).

Table 2: cross tabulation on Years of Experience as a sign language interpreter and Certification Status

Bicultural competence statement	N	Mean	Standard deviation
1. The interpreter demonstrates a deep understanding of Deaf culture, including its values, norms, and linguistic nuances.	42	3.81	.969
2. Kenya Sign Language interpreter exhibits awareness of the diversity within the Deaf community, recognizing and adapting to variations in communication preferences and cultural practices.	42	3.79	.813
3. Interpreters actively engage in ongoing learning about Deaf culture, language, and community dynamics to enhance their cultural competence.	42	3.71	.944
4. Interpreters have a high capacity to adapt their interpreting style to reflect cultural nuances, ensuring a culturally appropriate interpretation for Deaf individuals.	42	3.42	1.106
5. Interpreters actively seek input from Deaf individuals and collaborate with them to enhance the effectiveness of communication.	42	3.90	1.020
6. The interpreter consistently follows ethical guidelines, including confidentiality, neutrality, and professionalism, in their interactions with Deaf individuals.	42	3.43	1.107
7. The interpreter consistently follows ethical guidelines, including confidentiality, neutrality, and professionalism, in their interactions with Deaf individuals.	42	3.71	.864

Table 2 above presents the Kenyan sign language interpreters' perception on Bicultural competence knowledge and skills with an overall mean of 3.681 (SD=0.974), described as High levels of competencies. The indicator that interpreters actively seek input from Deaf individuals and collaborate with them to enhance the effectiveness of communication obtained the highest mean of 3.90 (SD=1.020). This was followed by the indicator, that the interpreter demonstrates a deep understanding of Deaf culture, including its values, norms, and linguistic nuances with a mean of 3.81 (SD=.969). This implies that Kenyan sign language interpreters who seek inputs from the deaf community have a deep understanding of Deaf Culture, including its values, norms, and linguistic nuances thus able to enhance the effectiveness of communication utilizing the Bicultural competence knowledge and skills.

Research findings indicate a significant correlation between actively seeking input from Deaf individuals and collaborating with them to enhance the effectiveness of communication. According to Taylor and Turner (2019), sign language interpreters who actively engage with Deaf individuals and involve them in the interpreting process demonstrate a higher level of bicultural competence, leading to improved communication outcomes. This collaborative approach fosters a deeper understanding of Deaf culture, linguistic nuances, and communication preferences, resulting in more accurate and culturally appropriate interpretations. Additionally, involving Deaf individuals in the interpretation process promotes mutual respect, trust, and rapport between interpreters and Deaf consumers, ultimately enhancing the overall quality of communication experiences (Taylor & Turner, 2019).

The indicator that Interpreters have a high capacity to adapt their interpreting style to reflect cultural nuances, ensuring a culturally appropriate interpretation for Deaf individuals. And that the interpreter consistently follows ethical guidelines, including confidentiality, neutrality, and professionalism, in their interactions with Deaf individuals: obtained the lowest mean of 3.4 (SD=1.11), described as moderate levels. This implies that some Kenyan sign language interpreters can't adapt their interpreting style to reflect culturally appropriate interpretation for Deaf individuals thus following ethical guidelines, including confidentiality, neutrality, and professionalism becomes a challenge to them.

Research findings suggest a strong correlation between interpreters' capacity to adapt their interpreting style to reflect cultural nuances and the consistency of ethical guidelines adherence, including confidentiality, neutrality, and professionalism, in interactions with Deaf individuals. According to Hauser et al. (2010), interpreters who demonstrate cultural sensitivity and adaptability in their interpreting approach are more likely to provide culturally appropriate interpretations that resonate with Deaf individuals. Additionally, adherence to ethical guidelines, such as maintaining confidentiality and neutrality, is paramount in fostering trust and rapport between interpreters and Deaf consumers (Hauser et al., 2010). The combination of cultural adaptability and ethical conduct enhances the quality of communication experiences for Deaf individuals, facilitating meaningful interactions and effective information exchange during interpreting sessions.

5. Conclusion:

The study involving 42 respondents from the Kenyan Sign Language Interpreters' Forum, with 80 registered members, provides valuable insights into the demographics and characteristics of sign language interpreters. The findings are consistent with broader trends observed in the interpreting profession across different contexts.

The study revealed a higher representation of female interpreters compared to males, reflecting a common pattern in the field. Additionally, the age distribution showed a higher concentration in the mid-range age groups, with fewer interpreters in the younger age brackets. Notably, the study found more certified interpreters (27) than non-certified interpreters (15), highlighting the prevalence of professional certification within the sample. Furthermore, the research highlighted a positive correlation between years of experience and interpreters' self-perception of being fully qualified. As the number of years of interpreting experience increased, respondents were more likely to consider themselves as fully certified interpreters.

Importantly, the study underscored the significance of formal training in Deaf culture for interpreters. Interpreters who had received such training demonstrated a higher level of respect and understanding for Deaf customs, values, and norms. Failure to acquire cultural awareness could lead to inadvertent offenses or misinterpretations during interactions with Deaf clients.

Additionally, research findings suggest a strong correlation between interpreters' ability to adapt their interpreting style to reflect cultural nuances and their adherence to ethical guidelines, including confidentiality, neutrality, and professionalism. This combination of cultural adaptability and ethical conduct enhances the quality of communication experiences for Deaf individuals, facilitating meaningful interactions and effective information exchange during interpreting sessions.

6. Recommendations:

- 1) Promote and support ongoing professional development opportunities for sign language interpreters, with a particular emphasis on Deaf culture training and cultural competency.
- 2) Encourage interpreting organizations and educational institutions to incorporate comprehensive Deaf culture curricula into their training programs for aspiring interpreters.
- 3) Establish clear guidelines and standards for certification and recertification processes, ensuring that interpreters maintain up-to-date knowledge and skills, including cultural awareness.
- 4) Foster collaboration between Deaf communities, interpreting organizations, and relevant stakeholders to develop best practices and ethical guidelines that prioritize cultural sensitivity and effective communication.
- 5) Conduct regular evaluations and assessments of interpreters' cultural competence and ethical decision-making to identify areas for improvement and tailor training programs accordingly.
- 6) Raise awareness about the importance of cultural competency and ethical interpreting practices among organizations and individuals who frequently utilize sign language interpreting services.

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