Bilingual Education for the Deaf: the Case of Flanders

Within the current educational setting in Flanders, there is no organizational form that fully complies with the right to education for deaf and hard-of-hearing children (UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 24). In Flanders, deaf and hard-of-hearing children can attend regular education or special education, but both forms face problems related to equal opportunities as addressed in the UN education law (Murray et al., 2018). In many countries, bimodal-bilingual education is limited to special schools and is rarely offered in inclusive regular schools. However, the Flemish Government is currently developing a framework to enable education with Dutch and Flemish Sign Language (VGT) as teaching languages within regular education.

We critically analyzed the existing organizational forms and examined how bilingual education Dutch-VGT can be implemented. Which organizational form(s) is (are) possible? How can a high-quality language development of both languages (Dutch-VGT) be guaranteed? To address these inquiries, a comprehensive review of pertinent literature will be presented.

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Beatrijs Wille is a postdoctoral researcher at Ghent University (Belgium). She has a background in speech, language, and hearing sciences, and in linguistics. Dr Wille conducts foundational work on deaf children’s language acquisition by focusing on the early development of Flemish Sign Language, the parental visual communication, and most recently on deaf children’s early literacy. Previously, she worked at KU Leuven, the Mayberry Laboratory for Multimodal Language Development and as a visiting researcher at the VL2 lab at Gallaudet University (USA) and the Language and Communication across Modalities Laboratory (Italy). Recently, together with Marieke Kusters, she examined the possibility of implementing bilingual education in primary education in Flanders.