

The New BA program in Ethiopian Sign Language and Deaf Culture in the Department of Linguistics, Addis Ababa University

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This paper describes the BA program in Ethiopian Sign Language and Deaf Culture which was launched by the Department of Linguistics, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia, in 2008/2009. This paper will introduce the content, the challenges encountered so far and the importance of establishing this program. The establishment of this program has been an inspiration to both deaf and hearing individuals in Ethiopia and is intended to improve the overall situation of the deaf in society in the country.

Deaf Education in Ethiopia has been a neglected area that was limited to Secondary Education. It has been constrained by two basic problems: the lack of trained teachers in Ethiopian Sign Language and the absence of research and interest in the issue. These challenges have effectively blocked the promotion of Sign language by the relevant stakeholders. As a result of the absence of Sign language schools there has been poor performance and very high drop out of deaf students. Besides, only a handful of deaf people have been successful in enrolling in tertiary education institutions where they face challenges in competing with their hearing peers for acceptance into Universities and colleges.

This study includes both primary and secondary sources. Primarily, the study will gather the opinions and ideas of various key informants. It will also include the personal experience of the writer in developing a new Sign Language program for the first time. Secondly, supportive published and unpublished documents will be reviewed to strengthen some theoretical assumptions.

By describing the importance of this program, the study is hoped to be an inspiration to many Deaf people and others who are interested and would like to set up a similar program in their respective countries, particularly elsewhere in Africa where similar challenges to deaf education persist. It will also explain the intended future directions of the program and stakeholders both inside and outside of the country. Moreover, it will explain the major Sign language activities that are being carried out at Addis Ababa University and propose a model for other African Universities.