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# **Minority within a minority: Stakeholders' perceptions of deaf education in Wales.**

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**I confirm that all authors approve the submission and that the paper is our original work and not under consideration elsewhere. The paper was completed as a part of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy) at Cardiff University.**

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## **Minority within a minority: Stakeholders' perceptions of deaf education in Wales.**

### **1.0 Abstract**

**Aim(s):** The number of deaf children and young people (CYP) being educated in inclusive mainstream settings rather than special schools has grown over recent years however, this has not been without its challenges. This qualitative study aims to address a gap in the research literature by investigating what stakeholders consider to be the implications for deaf CYP from Welsh-speaking homes when educated in English medium resource units.

**Method:** Eleven semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of stakeholders from five Local Authorities (LAs) across Wales. The stakeholders included one parent and a range of professionals: educational psychologists; teachers of the deaf (both peripatetic and based in specialist units) and a teaching assistant. Thematic Analysis was utilised to analyse the data following the guidelines of Braun and Clarke (2006).

**Findings:** The main themes constructed were: 'Being deaf', 'Being Welsh', 'The need for English' and 'The emotional impact of deafness'. The research highlights the challenges that Welsh-speaking deaf CYP and their parents encounter and the impact of being a minority within a minority.

**Limitations:** This research was small scale, which may not be representative of a broader group. The views of the central stakeholders, that of the children and young people themselves, have not been included in this study

**Conclusions:** The findings from this research further contribute to the broader understanding of issues within deaf education across the UK, adds a unique perspective of the Welsh context and highlights the complex relationship between language choice and educational provision, particularly for those whom English is a second language. The current findings provide an insight into perceptions of stakeholders and thus will be able to inform EP practice through supporting the educational choice and experience of deaf CYP in Wales.

**Keywords:** *deaf; hearing impaired; bi-modal education; deaf education; bilingual education.*

## **2.0 Introduction**

The aim of this research is to contribute further to understanding about the education of deaf children and young people (CYP) in Wales, through exploring the perspectives of stakeholders<sup>1</sup> on the education of deaf CYP from Welsh-speaking homes being educated in English medium resource units<sup>2</sup>.

### **2.1 Current issues in deaf education**

It is suggested that 95% of deaf CYP are born to hearing parents (Marschark, 2018) and current data shows an increase in deaf CYP being educated in inclusive settings rather than special schools (Swanwick & Gregory, 2007). In 2015, the United Kingdom (UK), statistics highlighted that 78% of school-aged deaf children now attend mainstream school without specialist provision (Consortium for Research in Deaf Education, CRIDE,

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this research stakeholders will be: Peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf, Teachers of the Deaf within an English medium resource unit, Learning Support Assistants working with deaf pupils, Educational Psychologists and parents.

<sup>2</sup> This term is used to describe one or several classrooms within a mainstream school which have been adapted to teach deaf children and are staffed by trained Teachers of the Deaf (National Children's Deaf Society, NCDS, 2016).

2015). However, this has not been without challenges and there continue to be barriers to accessing the curriculum for deaf CYP in a mainstream provision (National Deaf Children's Society, NDCS, 2008); communication difficulties (Jarvis, 2003) and feelings of isolation (Norwich, 2017; Nunes et al 2001). Moreover, deaf CYP in the UK continue to underachieve in all aspects of the curriculum (Department for Education, DfE, 2015; Hendar & O'Neill, 2016; Welsh Government, WG, 2017a), a pattern that is also seen in other countries (Hendar & O'Neill, 2016; Qi & Mitchell, 2012).

As a bi-modal<sup>3</sup> approach to deaf education has grown across the UK, it has provided deaf CYP access to the curriculum in their preferred modality (Swanwick, 2010). However, the same cannot be said for language. In many countries, including the UK there are a significant number of deaf CYP from multilingual homes (Thomas et al, 2008) and in the UK, 12% of deaf CYP are able to communicate in an additional language other than English at home (Consortium for Research in Deaf Education, CRIDE, 2015).

The importance of language for social and emotional development and the well-being of deaf CYP is well documented. Studies have demonstrated that early intervention and access to meaningful communication is critical to lessen the impact of deafness on language, social and emotional skills and academic performance (Calderon, 2000; Vohr et al., 2008; Vohr et al., 2010). Yet, governmental figures in the UK have shown that the prevalence rate of mental health problems in deaf CYP is high with 40% encountering difficulties compared to 25% for their hearing counterparts (Department of Health, DoH, 2005) Difficulties in accessing appropriate support services, such as Child and

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<sup>3</sup> The term 'bi-modal education' will refer to the way in which deaf children and young people receive education through the means of two or more modalities, such as sign language and spoken language (Swanwick, 2016).

Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) have also been highlighted (Joint Commissioning Panel for Mental Health, JCPMH, 2017).

## **2.2 Deaf education in Wales**

A reported 2,642 deaf children live in Wales which is an 11% increase over the previous year (CRIDE, 2017). The notion of bilingual education is a familiar concept within Wales, as there are two official languages Welsh and English (National Assembly for Wales, 2003). There has been a steady increase in the number of CYP attending Welsh-medium schools (Statistics for Wales, 2017) and 7% of deaf CYP use spoken Welsh in school or other educational settings (CRIDE, 2017).

In Wales there are no Schools for the Deaf or resource bases within Welsh-medium schools, thus provision is made either through peripatetic support within mainstream schools or through placement in an English medium resource unit (British Association of Teachers of the Deaf, BATOD, undated; CRIDE, 2015).

## **2.3 Stakeholders' perspectives on the education of deaf CYP**

Regardless of where deaf CYP are educated, they continue to face challenges that may not be experienced by their hearing peers. Whilst the majority of deaf CYP are being educated in a mainstream setting (CRIDE, 2015), there are some points to note regarding the claimed advantages of educational inclusion (Frederickson & Cline, 2015).

Previous research exploring stakeholder perceptions on the education of deaf CYP, has primarily focused upon the experience of mainstream teachers (Vermeulen et al, 2012), Teachers of the Deaf (ToD) (Lissi et al., 2017) and Teaching Assistants (TAs) (Salter et al 2017). Hadjidakou et al (2008) collectively analysed the perceptions of parents, teachers, head teachers as well as deaf CYP on their social and academic inclusion.

## **3.0 Rationale**

This research will aim to address the current gap in deaf education literature, through exploring stakeholders' perceptions on the education of deaf CYP from Welsh-speaking homes being educated in English medium resource units. It is hoped that the insight into perceptions of stakeholders will inform the practice of the profession of EPs in supporting and enhancing the educational experience of deaf CYP and their families.

#### **4.0 The current research**

Research has been conducted on deaf CYP's experience of their education (Sutherland & Young, 2007; Doherty, 2012), parental (Rasebopye, 2010) and stakeholders experience (NDCS, 2008), but to date no research has been conducted exploring the perspectives of stakeholders on the education of deaf CYP from Welsh-speaking homes being educated in English medium resource units.

#### **4.1 Research questions**

The research will be guided by the following overarching question and three subsidiary questions:

*What do stakeholders consider are the implications of deaf children from Welsh-speaking homes being educated in English mainstream resource units?*

#### **Subsidiary questions**

- a) What are the perceived challenges?*
- b) What are the perceived benefits?*
- c) How do stakeholders feel deaf pupils from Welsh-speaking homes could be best supported?*

### **5.0 Methodology**

#### **5.1 Inclusion/exclusion criteria**

Participants were excluded from the research if they did not meet the inclusion criteria outlined below<sup>4</sup>.

- Peripatetic Teacher of the Deaf (ToD) in Wales
- ToD within an English medium mainstream resource unit in Wales
- Teaching Assistants (TAs)/ communication support workers for deaf CYP within an English medium mainstream resource unit in Wales
- Educational Psychologists (EPs) working in Wales
- Welsh-speaking parent(s) (both hearing and deaf) of deaf children (aged between 8-16 years) who attend an English mainstream resource unit

## **5.2 Participants**

A purposeful sample was sought to generate an in-depth understanding of the research topic (Patton, 2002). This form of sampling involves selecting participants that can provide “information-rich” (Patton, 2002, p. 230) data. The participants were selected through a two-stage process as outlined:

### **Stage 1: Recruitment of Parents**

A gatekeeper letter was sent to all Sensory Impairment Services (SISs) and/or Educational Psychology Services (EPSs) in Wales. Recruitment posters were also shared on social media sites.

Of those that responded, three authorities identified Welsh-speaking parents of deaf pupils. Of the parents identified, one parent contacted the researcher and agreed to take part in the research.

### **Stage 2: Recruitment of Professionals**

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<sup>4</sup> Due to the nature of the research investigating perspectives of stakeholders within a Welsh context, all potential participants had to work in Wales.



An additional gatekeeper letter was sent to all SISs and/or EPSs in Wales as well as identified schools with a hearing impairment resource base to recruit stakeholders' perspectives on deaf education in Wales. Recruitment posters were also shared on social media and sent to relevant agencies (e.g. BATOD). An additional 10 stakeholders consented to take part from five different Local Authorities in Wales.

A total of eleven participants took part in the research from five different Local Authorities (LAs) across Wales. The demographics included: one parent, one ToD based in a primary resource base, two ToD based in a secondary resource base, four peripatetic ToD, one teaching assistant based in a secondary resource base and two EPs. Of these participants all were female, five identified themselves as fluent Welsh speakers and two of the interviews took place through the medium of Welsh.

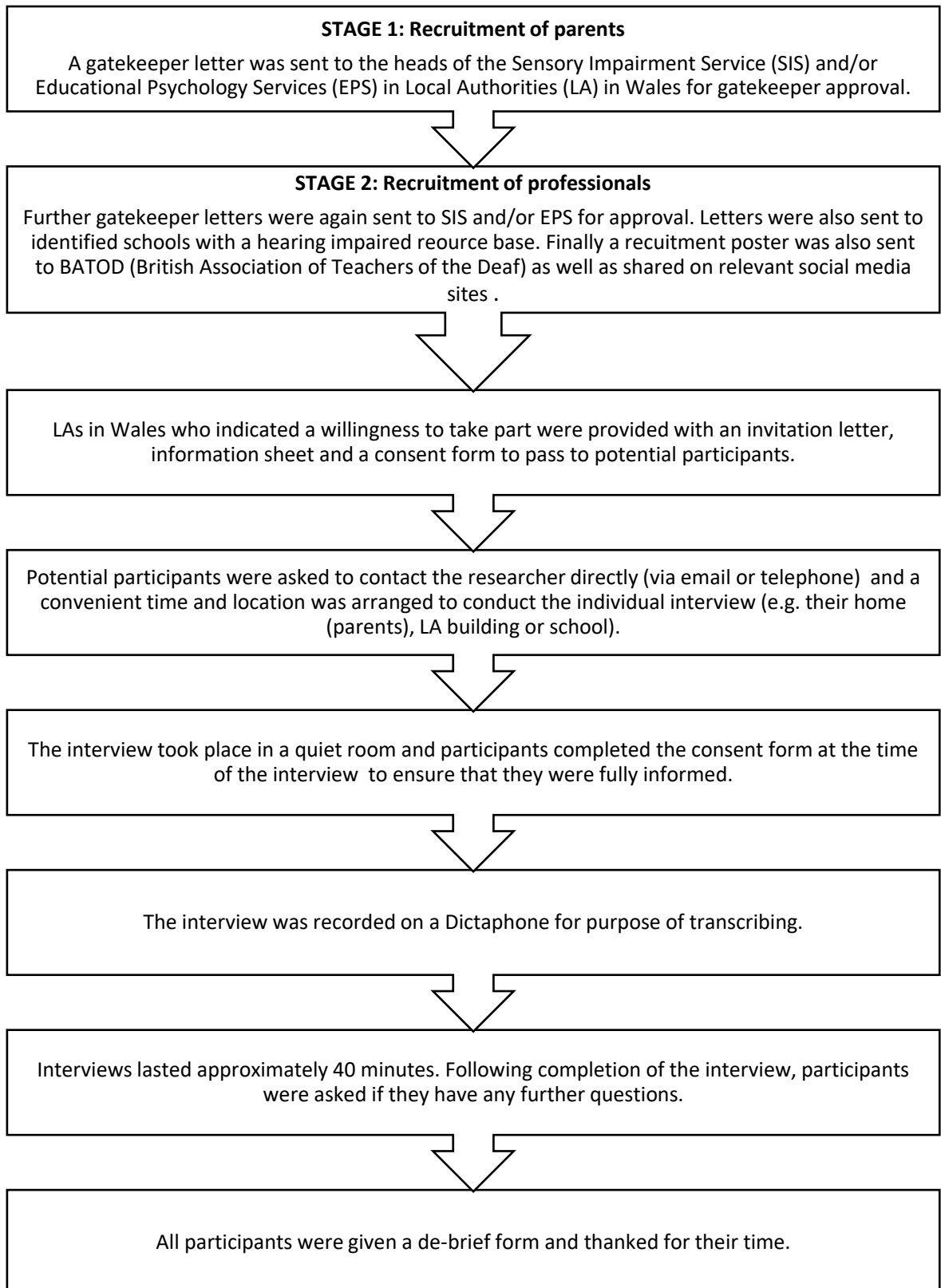
### **5.3 Materials: Semi-structured interview schedules**

Two semi-structured interview schedules were devised for the individual interviews: parents and professionals. The interview questions were designed to encourage the participants to provide an in-depth view of the research area. The schedule was semi-structured, allowing natural conversation to flow and unpredicted areas to be explored (Coolican, 2004) thus permitting a range of detailed responses from participants. The full interview schedules are provided in appendices 1 & 2.

### **5.4 Procedure**

The research procedure can be seen below in Figure 1

**Figure 1: *Research procedure***



## 5.5 Pilot

The semi-structured interview schedules were piloted to ensure they were appropriate for the target population and that the questions would elicit rich information relating to the

research topic. These were initially discussed with an independent research colleague and subsequently piloted on a parent and a ToD. Following the piloting, minor amendments were made through changing the wording to improve clarity. As no major amendments were made to the questions and the pilot participants met the inclusion criteria it was decided it would be appropriate to include the data in the analysis.

### **5.6 Transcription and translation**

Interviews took place in the preferred language of the participant (Welsh or English) and the audio-recordings were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Interviews that were conducted in Welsh were transcribed and analysed in Welsh. This was done in an attempt to “preserve conversational style” (Aronsson & Cederborg, 1997, pp. 85). For this report, relevant quotes in Welsh were translated to English within the results section. Pseudonyms were used to replace specific personal names to ensure anonymity.

### **5.7 Ethical considerations**

An ethics application was submitted to Cardiff University, School Research Ethics Committee (SREC) and approval granted. Health Care Professionals Council (HCPC) Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics adhered to throughout, along with The British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2010). Ethical considerations were given to confidentiality and anonymity, informed consent, do no harm, data management and retention and privacy and safety. Participants were treated with respect; informed consent was sought and participants were not placed in a situation where they were at risk of harm.

### **5.8 Quality assurance**

A number of steps were taken in order to demonstrate the quality of this study. Use was made of the Braun and Clarke (2006) 15 point checklist so ensuring key steps were taken in every area of transcription; coding; analysis and the final report. Other measure

included a critical review against the Yardley (2000) core principles and criteria for validity of research. Piloting ensured that the interview questions were clear, independent and relevant and during the interviews, care was taken not to lead participants through ensuring questions were open-ended. Member checking was conducted where an independent research colleague matched data excerpts to themes without having seen the data or themes before. A success rate of above 70% was achieved.

## **6 Results and Analysis**

### **6.1 Qualitative analysis**

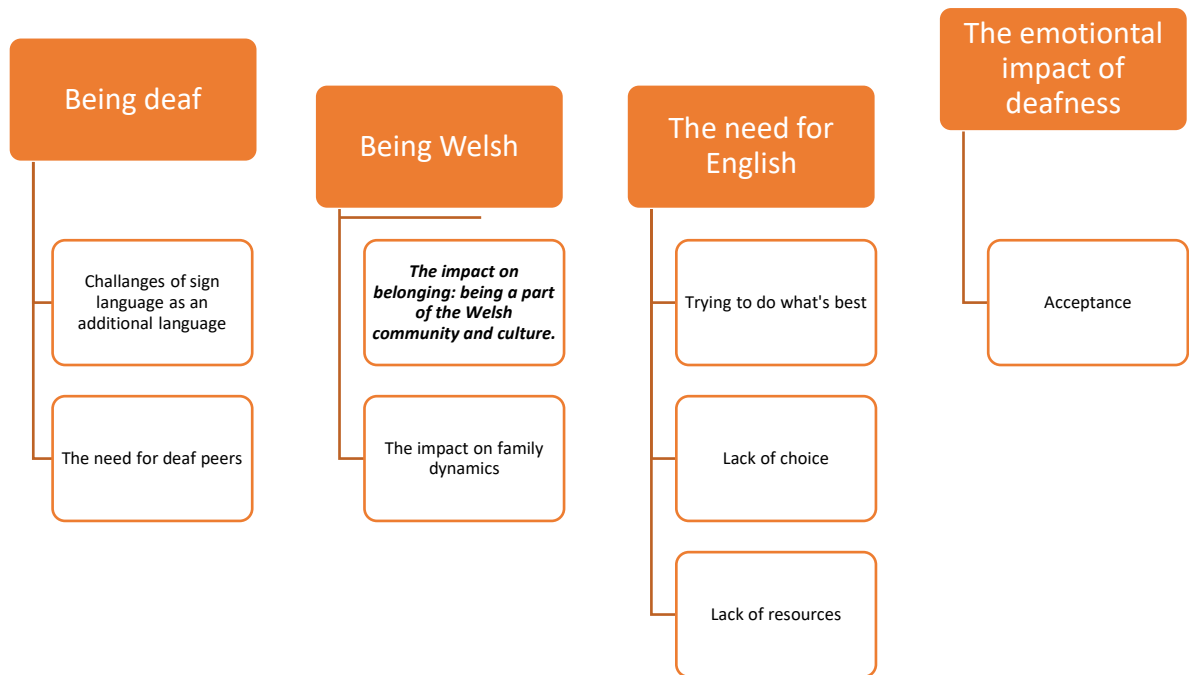
TA, as described by Braun and Clarke (2013), was identified as the method of analysis most appropriate for this study. The six-step process was adhered to, so the researcher ensured that they familiarised themselves with the interview content before codes were generated. This was followed by a process of gradually generating themes that were then subjected to review, naming and defining the themes to result in interpretation and the drawing of conclusions. The themes identified related to the overarching research question as well as to the secondary research questions.

### **6.2 Qualitative results**

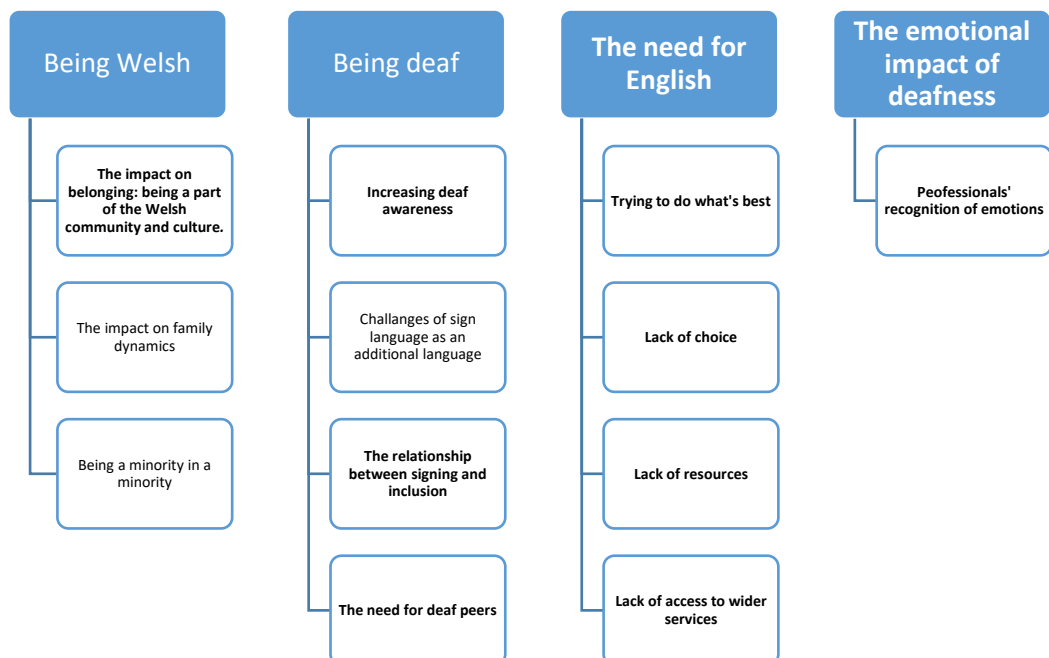
#### **6.2.1 Thematic maps**

Three separate thematic maps are given to illustrate the results of the TA. In an attempt to capture the unique experiences of both parent and professionals, Figures 2 and 3 present the individual thematic maps, respectively. However, due to significant overlap between the different maps, it was felt that one overarching thematic map would be valid in presenting the overall themes of the analysis, representing the findings obtained from all stakeholders, including four themes and thirteen sub-themes (Figure 4).

**Figure 2: Parent Thematic Map<sup>5</sup>**

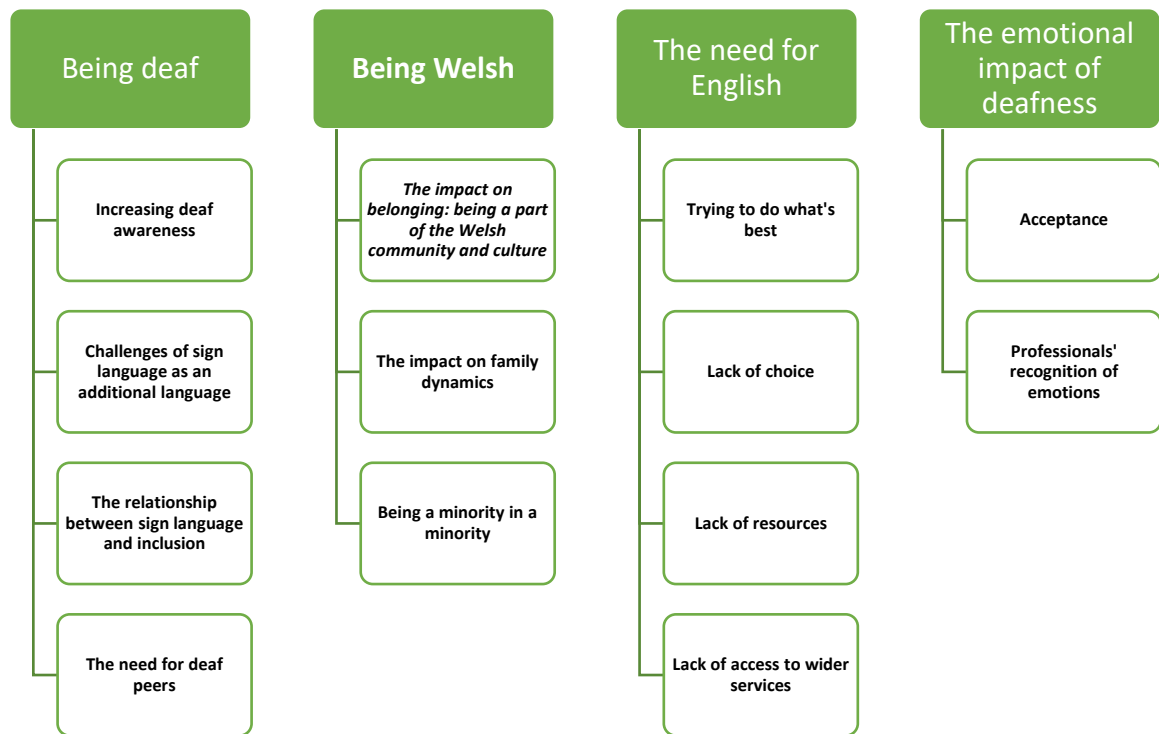


**Figure 3: Professionals' Thematic Map**



<sup>5</sup> A separate extra-ordinary theme ('Acceptance') was identified from Parent<sup>5</sup> due to their unique experience as a parent.

**Figure 4: Overall Thematic Map**



### **6.3 Theme 1: Being Deaf**

This theme reflects some challenges that arise from the deafness itself, with four sub-themes: sign language, deaf awareness, inclusion and the need for deaf peers.

#### **6.3.1 Increasing deaf awareness**

Participants spoke about the importance of increasing deaf awareness among society. For example, one ToD provided a detailed account of how a service for deaf CYP is more than merely providing the same service with an interpreter but providing a meaningful service with professionals that understand their experiences and culture. There was also an emphasis on having access to a qualified interpreter that deaf CYP can relate to.

*“You have to have an understanding of that if you are going to deliver a service that is meaningful and helpful for them. It is not the same as offering them a CAMHS service or*

*an adult mental health service. There needs to be a thorough understanding of their culture as a deaf adult or as a deaf young person, and it's quite specific really.” (ToD)*

Others spoke about the lack of awareness within a mainstream school setting and the lower expectations that are placed on deaf children due to their deafness.

*“...you do find that there is stigma going on, especially in secondary with some of the teachers that I come across that they think ‘oh well they are deaf’ and they won’t be able to do as well as their peers. So you know, I find that some teachers aren’t pushing as much as what they should do and children aren’t achieving to what is expected of them. And the expectations are lower because they have a hearing impairment.” (ToD)*

One ToD discussed her experiences that highlighted a general lack of awareness of how deaf CYP are taught.

*“Well we had a visitor once that came to see us and she said ‘tell me my dear how do you teach these children?’. And I thought they are deaf. They haven’t just come off a space ship. They are deaf.” (ToD)*

### **6.3.2 Challenges of sign language as an additional language**

The majority of participants’ spoke of the challenges families faced in learning sign language as an additional language in order to have meaningful interactions with deaf children. A participant as a parent conveyed her experience of learning BSL without any prior experience.

*“I didn’t know where to start, I was like oh my god. You know you have to teach a new language to your child that you don’t even know yourself” (Parent)*

Learning and introducing BSL as an additional language to the family was seen as something outside parental control but important so that the deaf child could have a strong language base.

*“...in order to have a really strong language and communication base has been perhaps either BSL based or through the medium of English and you have this dual language and the second language is often not the language you would choose. You don't want and you didn't ask to have a deaf child where you perhaps would have to introduce other languages.” (ToD)*

ToD discussed her experience of parental differences and the importance of meaningful communication between parents and their deaf child.

*“I think it's very difficult for them....the mother tends to go to signing classes whilst the father looks after the children. And I can always remember, this isn't to do with the Welsh language but I will share, I met parents and a child and the dad had said to me, 'when I get home from work every day I want to say to my son, what have you been doing today then boy' and he said 'if he told me I won't be able to understand anyway and it breaks my heart'. And I said 'you need to go to sign class it's easy once you get into it'. And he said he hasn't got time because he's shift work. And the dad didn't really have a meaningful relationship with their child, and that's not to do with Welsh or English but because he couldn't sign.” (ToD)*

Others spoke about the difficulties encountered when the child's signing skills surpass their parents and the impact of this on the child within school.

*“...But I know one child, she comes to school on a Monday and she is full-time signing. She will not stop because most of the weekend she hasn't been signing and so when she comes to school then on a Monday she has to tell you everything, all in one go.” (TA)*



### **6.3.3 Relationship between signing and inclusion**

TA discussed experiences and challenges faced and the impact of a lack of deaf and sign awareness.

*“...it doesn’t happen very often but sometimes you can have a teacher who thinks that signing is distracting the other children.” (TA)*

It was recognised by ToD that BSL is a first language for many deaf CYP and having BSL on the curriculum and taught as a language would allow them to be able to communicate with a wider group of people within their school setting, thus promoting an inclusive ethos.

*“I’ve signed quite a few petitions to have BSL on the curriculum. I do think that it is something that is needed. It is a language and for quite a few of our pupils it is their first language and they are quite keen to come to school and be comfortable and speak to others in their first language....how wonderful would it be if they could communicate and just have a little conversation.” (ToD)*

### **6.3.4 The need for deaf peers**

Having access to deaf peers was seen as an influencing factor when parents are making choices about educational provisions. ToD noted that some parents chose to send their child to a resource base within a different county to have a deaf peer group.

*“We do have one pupil from XXX County and he travels down as he is a BSL user and parents wanted him to have a peer group and he makes the journey down.” (ToD)*

A parent reflected that whilst her daughter does attend a mainstream resource provision she doesn’t have access to deaf peers of the same age. There was recognition that peer relations change with age and adolescence was seen as a critical period.

*“Yes I’m not sure, children can be so cruel when they are teenagers, especially girls. I don’t know. There’s no one the same age as her at the moment in the unit, yes I don’t know. Perhaps going to a specialist deaf school would suit her as she is so deaf, I don’t know. I don’t know really, oh (sigh)” (Parent)*

Participants spoke about the difficulty that deaf CYP face in communicating with their peer group or mishearing what is said, and the impact of this on the deaf CYP relations with deaf and hearing peers. ToD described this in detail.

*“And the issues we find, socially, is social relationships, and children with moderate loss it’s not getting it quite right or miss hearing something. And socially that can impact on relationships where they think someone has said one thing but they’ve said another thing. Or they think people are talking about them and they are not, so they become upset about that because they feel they’ve been excluded but they haven’t been.” (ToD)*

## **6.4 Theme 2: Being Welsh**

This theme reflects the importance of Welsh as a language and also Welsh as a culture. Three sub-themes arose which reflected the impact on belonging, family dynamics and of being a minority within a minority.

### **6.4.1 The impact on belonging: being a part of the Welsh community and culture.**

A parent reflected the dilemma faced of choosing a spoken language for her daughter and also managing the cultural expectations of education through the medium of Welsh.

*“After she had therapy we realised that we didn’t know what her ability would be in one language, apart from two! Therefore if that language was going to be Welsh that might limit her so we decided on English. But it was really hard because we are both from*

*really Welsh families and I work for (name of company) and their mandate is education through the Welsh language, so it was a really hard decision to make.” (Parent).*

ToD reflected on the impact of being Welsh on her personal and professional beliefs and the emotions associated with this decision.

*“...it was difficult, and from my point of view as well it threw me into a bit of upheaval as well as I feel very strongly about families following their heart, and as a Welsh speaker your heart is that you really want your children to go to a Welsh school.” (ToD)*

ToD recognised the importance of Welsh culture and language to Welsh families. She reflected on the professional relationship when providing information to families and how this information is conveyed when professionals do not speak Welsh.

*“...what you don't want is for families to think because you're English you don't see the Welsh language as important because you're an English speaker so you want to be able to give fair information.... so it's very important to be able to give balanced and unbiased information...” (ToD)*

Similarly, ToD expressed similar views of the importance to Welsh-speaking families of having someone to converse with through the medium of Welsh.

*“I'm the only teacher of the deaf that is able to provide support through the medium of Welsh within the county. Um which is quite important as a lot of pupils on my caseload are coming from Welsh-speaking families and they are happy to have someone that they can converse with through the medium of Welsh.” (ToD)*

#### **6.4.2 The impact on family dynamics**

ToD spoke about the impact of language on the family dynamics and the instinct for Welsh-speaking parents to converse through Welsh. There was recognition of the

potential impact of this on deaf CYP if they are unable to understand the Welsh language.

*“I think it actually changes the whole dynamic of the family really at the end of the day. Everyone needs to speak English so that the child is able to lip-read and to they need to use signed support through the medium of English rather than through the medium of Welsh. Um and I think the whole dynamic of the family does change, and what I’ve noticed is, obviously for Welsh-speaking families, they tend to converse back into Welsh and then the deaf child is then slightly excluded... The most natural thing is to turn to Welsh.” (ToD)*

Due to this, there was recognition that language choice needs to be a whole family decision.

*“And the impact that may have on the rest of the family and if it’s going to isolate the child even more. So it has to be a whole family decision.” (ToD)*

There was also awareness among participants of the impact of deaf CYP not being able to access Welsh as the language of the home and the potential impact of isolation, as the quote above demonstrates.

For Welsh-speaking families that have chosen English as a spoken language for their deaf child, the impact of changing the family home language from Welsh to English was discussed concerning the change in family dynamics.

*“I think it changes the whole family dynamics, and I’m very sympathetic and aware of that. Um because I know the whole ethos of the family, the grandparents on both sides are all Welsh and I think they struggle then to switch. And of course when the language has been established as a baby, they speak Welsh to this child and to then suddenly have to switch and un-establish that language must be really really difficult.” (ToD)*

*“And the impact that may have on the rest of the family and if it’s going to isolate the child even more. So it has to be a whole family decision.” (ToD)*

A parent also recognised this and having to change and switch the family language to make sure her daughter was included.

*“Sometimes people forget and I feel that Olivia is sometimes excluded” (Parent)*

#### **6.4.3 Being a minority within a minority**

There was recognition within the data sets that the combination of Welsh and being deaf was a minority within a minority, in terms of Welsh and BSL being minority languages and deafness as a minority disability.

*“I do think when you have a minority disability and then you have a minority language, I would like to think it’s not a minority in Wales but you know what I mean, it’s almost like a double. You’ve got these two things that are working against you.” (ToD)*

There was also recognition that Welsh sign language doesn’t have the same status as BSL and due to this, there were limited resources available through Welsh sign language. This adds to the dilemma that parents face in choosing a spoken and signed language for their deaf child.

*“And the difficulty I think there is for Welsh-speaking families is that there isn’t a recognised Welsh sign language. There are families I believe that use Welsh sign language but it’s not recognised in the way that you have Irish sign language or American Sign Language.” (ToD)*

A limited number of people use Welsh sign language which reduces the potential peer group through the medium of Welsh sign language for deaf CYP.

*“Across Wales there are so few children who use Welsh sign that you would ask the question ‘actually where is my child going to actually find other Welsh signers that they are going to use that with’.” (ToD)*

### **6.5 Theme 3: The need for English**

This theme reflects the need for English language to access services and resources and parents choosing English spoken language due to the need to ‘do what’s best’. It is divided into four sub-themes as outlined below.

#### **6.5.1 Trying to do what’s best**

There was recognition in the data sets that some Welsh-speaking parents of deaf children are faced with the dilemma of choosing English or Welsh as a spoken language for their deaf child. A parent reflected on her daughter’s language outcomes and the ability to cope with two spoken languages.

*“It was a really hard decision for us to make but it was definitely what was best for her as she wouldn’t have been able to cope with two languages” (Parent)*

Whilst parents make this decision based on what they think would be the best for their child, a parent noted some questioning her choice.

*“And you know some people say ‘why are you talking English to her’ but they have no idea. We’re just doing what’s best for her and that is what’s best for her” (Parent)*

#### **6.5.2 Lack of choice**

This sub-theme primarily relates to the lack of Welsh-medium education for deaf CYP and thus Welsh-speaking parents are faced with the additional dilemma and challenges of choosing an appropriate educational setting.

*“They’re a vulnerable group as such and most of the communication is in English. If you need a specialist provision, there’s very few provisions in Wales in Welsh, or at least within this authority... I suppose if you’re from a Welsh-speaking family and, I’m hypothesising and I wouldn’t know, have a child who’s deaf, there’s limitations on the educational pathways.” (EP)*

If parents chose a Welsh mainstream school, there was recognition that whilst support would be available it would not be to the same level as what would be available within a resource base.

*“...I did say if they decided on a Welsh school I would be there supporting, but we couldn’t offer the level of support that would have been available in a unit placement.” (ToD)*

ToD reflected on the difficulty of this decision for Welsh-speaking parents and suggested a way forward would be to offer a resource base through the medium of Welsh. However, an additional challenge would be the limited numbers of Welsh-speaking deaf CYP.

*“I would say that perhaps one of the challenges again for parents that the vast majority of children attending a specialist placement come from first language English families. And that again I would think is quite a difficult thing for parents to get their head around when they want their child to have, you know when their child is a first language Welsh speaker. There is a real dilemma there and I wouldn’t say it’s ideal. The ideal would be to have two bases, one where the focus would be specifically on Welsh language, but unfortunately we don’t have the numbers that would warrant that.” (ToD)*

### **6.5.3 Lack of Resources**

This sub-theme relates to the lack of Welsh-speaking professionals and physical resources through the medium of Welsh as well as the decline in the number of ToD

within Wales. There was acknowledgement throughout the data sets that there was difficulty finding and accessing Welsh-speaking support staff.

*“The biggest problem was finding a Welsh-speaking teaching assistant that could do sign language, because the school was a Welsh school. We didn’t find anyone...and you then you realised how little support is available through the Welsh language” (Parent)*

Not only was accessing Welsh signers a challenge but also accessing information and resources through the Welsh language.

*“And most of the support and information is provided through the medium of English. Um and I know the NDCS do have some information through the medium of Welsh but Welsh speakers are quite limited within this specific field. Um and I think looking around most of the support available is through the medium of English and parents tend to sway towards the English side then rather than the Welsh side.” (ToD)*

Participants that were ToD, recognised the challenges that their profession face due to the lack of a supply pool and also the limited number of Welsh-speaking ToD. Providing a bilingual service was seen as an important factor and ToD conveyed a sense of uncomfortableness if this could not be provided.

*“...we are very aware of the lack of Welsh-speaking teachers of the deaf and that for me is a big problem, I do feel that is a big problem. I feel very very fortunate that we have a very good Welsh-speaking teacher of the deaf here, and I would be extremely uncomfortable not to be able to offer that... So that is something that Welsh Government are definitely aware of is the lack of Welsh-speaking teachers of the deaf.” (ToD)*

An EP also recognised the challenges faced by ToD due to the ageing workforce and difficulty recruiting people into specialist roles and the potential impact of this due to the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) reform that is taking place in Wales currently.



*“And also the workforce I think there has been concerns around an ageing workforce and retirement and how they can actually recruit others into these specialist roles. Because it’s still going to be a statutory team, and that’s recognised in the ALN reform.”*  
(EP)

#### **6.5.4 Lack of access to wider services**

There was recognition of the discrepancy between services in England and Wales, especially in relation to mental health services. Whilst National Deaf Child Mental Health Service (NDCMHS) has developed in England the same service isn’t available in Wales and thus Welsh deaf CYP would have to travel to England to access this specialist service.

*“Um yes I think to access deaf CAMHS at the moment I think a child would have to go to England which is not good.”* (ToD)

ToD highlighted the need for deaf CYP to have access to appropriate mental health services due to the high prevalence rate among this group of people.

*“I do feel that appropriate mental health services for deaf children and young people is needed just because we know the incidences are high. And I certainly think when you are struggling with your identity as a deaf person the last thing that you need to struggle with is identity linguistically and so I think that again is something that needs looking at.”*  
(ToD)

Access to other services was noted within the data set, such as EP and Audiologists. ToD describes the importance of having Welsh-speaking professionals but also professionals with an awareness and understanding of deafness.

*“...they might have a Welsh-speaking Educational Psychologist, but perhaps not someone that knows a little more about deafness. And perhaps another challenge might be that you don’t get those Welsh-speaking audiologists... if they are so used to speaking Welsh together and going to a hospital and actually speak in English and listen to somebody using all these different vocabulary about deafness, so you’re out of your depth anyway, let alone being immersed in English.” (ToD)*

#### **6.6 Theme 4: The emotional impact of deafness**

This theme reflects the emotional impact of deafness, for both parents and professionals.

Two sub-themes were identified which are outlined below.

##### **6.6.1 Acceptance**

This extra-ordinary theme related to the experience as a parent. The parent conveyed her experience of learning her child was deaf as a sense of overwhelming shock.

*“Um (sigh) devastated really. There’s no history in the family at all. It was, it was a real shock. It’s enough of a shock having a child, but then finding that out. It was, it was, oh my gosh, horrendous really” (Parent)*

A parent reflected on the impact of the diagnosis on the wider family network including grandparents and their journey to accepting the diagnosis.

*“Um well Gavin (Dad) was in shock obviously. And everyone else was in shock really. It was interesting because my parents reacted totally different to Gavin’s, may be because they are a bit more old fashion in their ways. But my parents accepted it straight way, ok in shock. But Gavin’s parents were more ‘are you sure that she is’. And my mum caught Gavin’s mum knocking on the door to see if Olivia would turn her head. And*

*months ahead, and that was hard to deal with. Everyone deals with things differently”.*  
(Parent)

Through the interview, Parent spoke about the initial shock of the diagnosis and process of “getting through it” (Parent).

### **6.6.2 Professionals’ recognition of emotions**

Professionals referred to many emotions which conveyed the possible or learnt emotions associated with the experience of learning about a child’s deafness from a second-hand perspective.

*“I think it must have been a very traumatic for the parents. I really sympathise with them” (ToD)*

*“Yes, there was a lot of resentment and frustration and a lot of disappointment um in that particular family” (ToD)*

ToD noted the impact of emotions associated with the diagnosis, on communication and school choices.

*“Um it gets tied in with the emotions and stress of having a diagnosis and if people are upset and not accepting of the diagnosis it changes they have to make with regards to communication and schools are poisoned by that disappointment and the stresses. Whereas if a family have accepted it and come to terms with it, they are able to make changes and make those changes positive ones.” (ToD)*

There was also a recognition of the emotions associated with the impact of a minority disability and a minority language, and the dilemma this proposes for parents with regards to language use and educational placement.

*“So, I think there is a huge dilemma for families, there’s a real dilemma and I think unless you are that family, I think it’s very difficult, I can only say what I think it’s like through what I’m told and what I feel”. (ToD)*

## **7. Discussion**

### **7.1 Overview**

Findings from the individual interviews are discussed below in relation to the subsidiary research questions, referring to previous research and literature in this area.

### **7.2 What are perceived challenges?**

Within the theme ‘Being Deaf’ there was an awareness of the challenges that deaf CYP face within a mainstream setting such as low expectations, weaker academic attainment, difficulties with social interaction and the impact on well-being. These were reflected throughout all sub-themes and support previous literature which has continually highlighted these challenges (NDCS, 2008; Norwich, 2017; Nunes et al., 2001; Qi & Mitchell, 2012). Moreover, there was recognition of the challenges faced when learning a new language, BSL, and the implications of this on communication with hearing parents, wider family members, the community and in particular with their peers. The notion of deaf CYP signing skills surpassing their parents has also been noted in previous research (Lederberg & Everhart, 1998) as have the implications of poor communication on the well-being of deaf CYP (Wallis et al 2004). An additional challenge recognised was that BSL is not taught in schools and the impact of this on inclusion for deaf CYP, as highlighted within the sub-theme ‘The relationship between sign language and inclusion’.

Within the theme ‘Being Welsh’ there was recognition of the importance of belongingness with Welsh culture for Welsh-speaking families. This was seen as an

important factor from the initial diagnosis and having access to Welsh-speaking staff but also support when making decisions regarding educational choices. The relationship between educational provision and language choice is consistent with previous research (Crowe et al, 2014; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, 1994).

There was an acknowledgement of the challenges that 'being a minority within a minority' brings, specifically with Welsh sign language. Both Welsh language and BSL have minority status in the UK (Atherton, 1999) and Welsh sign language is not recognised as a language in its own right. Coupled with this is the challenge that arises from lack of deaf awareness, as recognised within the sub-themes 'increasing deaf awareness' and 'lack of access to wider services". This is consistent with previous findings which suggest there is a lack of deaf awareness among professionals (Salter et al, 2017) and mainstream services lack an understanding of how to meet deaf people's needs, specifically with regards to mental health services (JCPMH, 2017).

Moreover, the theme 'Being Welsh' and particularly the sub-theme 'being a minority within a minority' has links to psychological theory such as Erickson's Stages of Development Theory (1968), and specifically to the stage of 'identity v role confusion' during adolescence. During this stage, Erickson argues that adolescence search for a sense of self and identity, and arguably for deaf CYP searching for a sense of identity within the hearing and deaf world which has been documented in previous research (e.g. Kunnen, 2014; Schlesinger, 2000). However, for Welsh deaf CYP, there is an added dimension and complexity of identity with the 'Welsh world'.

The theme 'The need for English' highlighted the lack of choice that Welsh-speaking parents and Welsh deaf CYP face specifically with regards to Welsh-medium education.

Whilst this dilemma is unique to Wales, the challenges of finding the best placement educational placement for deaf CYP is evidenced throughout the literature (Knors, 2007; Marschark, 2018). There was recognition within the sub-theme ‘lack of choice’, the lack of not only Welsh-speaking support staff but also Welsh-speaking support staff with signing skills. Participants also made reference to the small population of ToD in Wales which was attributed to an ageing population and also the fact that there is no longer a ToD university course in Wales.

The theme ‘The emotional impact of deafness’ highlighted the experiences of parents and also information shared with professionals of the emotional challenges of deafness, specifically concerning decision making on matters such as communication mode, language and education. This impact was also contextualised in terms of minority language and a minority disability and the emotional impact of both factors. These feelings have also been evidenced within the literature (e.g. Marschark, 2018) and also attributed to models of grief and bereavement (e.g. Kurtzer-White & Luterman, 2003).

### **7.3 What are the perceived benefits?**

Within the theme ‘Being deaf’ it was recognised that access to resource units provides deaf CYP with a peer group and this was seen as an important factor when parents are making a choice regarding educational provision. This supports previous research that deaf CYP value the importance of accessing both deaf and hearing peers (Jarvis, 2003; Sutherland & Young, 2007) which arguably a mainstream resource provision provides.

Within the sub-theme ‘lack of choice’ there was recognition by ToD that the level of support and access to specialist staff wouldn’t be replicated within a solely mainstream provision due to physical difficulties of providing this service (e.g. lack of time). This

theme supports previous findings that identify the need for regular access to ToD (Lissi et al., 2017).

The findings of this research highlight that many services are aware of the challenges faced by deaf CYP in Wales. However, there is a need for a collaborative force to work together to improve and address these problems for deaf CYP in Wales.

#### **7.4 How do stakeholders feel deaf pupils from Welsh-speaking homes could be best supported?**

The theme 'Being deaf' highlighted the overarching view that there is a need to increase deaf awareness and understanding, not only communication and academic challenges but also culturally amongst professionals, schools and the wider community. Stakeholders felt that this could be achieved through greater awareness of deafness and also to increase skills such as sign language amongst staff and the wider pupil group. There was recognition of the relationship between sign language and inclusion which supports previous research (Heslinga & Nevenglosky, 2012) as well as the impact of communication on pupil well-being (Grosjean, 2010; Hadjidakou & Nikolarazi, 2008). Arguably, 2018 was a ground-breaking year in raising the challenges faced by deaf CYP with the film 'The Silent Child' winning an Oscar (Oscars, 2018).

Within the theme 'The need for English' there was recognition of the lack of choice faced by Welsh-speaking parents of deaf CYP, specifically as there are no Welsh-medium resource bases for deaf CYP in Wales and that Welsh-speaking signers are a scarce resource. NDCS research recognises that deaf CYP should have access to appropriate specialist staff (NDCS, 2016) but there is a lack of staff that are able to converse with deaf CYP in a minority language (Turner, 1996; Powers, 1996).

Arguably this could be achieved through building the capacity of Welsh-medium schools in meeting the needs of deaf CYP in Wales, by providing an inclusive setting with access to staff that are able to converse fluently through both Welsh and sign language.

Moreover within Wales, the WG has the ambition to increase the number of Welsh speakers to one million by 2050 (WG, 2017b). The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 outlines that there must be proven evidence that reasonable steps and adjustments have been taken to provide CYP in Wales with a bilingual service and provision (WG, 2018). However, it appears that this Act is not actively considering the needs of this specific group who are a minority within a minority and further guidance is needed to address this basic right of those in minority groups.

The theme 'lack of access to wider services' highlights the difficulties that deaf CYP in Wales have in accessing appropriate services such as NDCMHS which is particularly important given the high prevalence rate of mental health difficulties in deaf CYP (DoH, 2005). The theme also referred to the importance of appropriate interpreters that deaf CYP can relate to and which would comply with duties under the Equality Act (2010). In Wales, the challenge could be the relatively small size of the LAs and Health Boards, who individually are trying to meet the needs of deaf CYP with very low population numbers. Previously WG has considered merging LAs (WG, 2014); merging or further collaboration between LAs could be viable options to improve the delivery of services in meeting the needs of deaf CYP in Wales.

## **8.0 Limitations of this study**

It is acknowledged that there are limitations inherent in a study of this type. For example, whilst attempts were made to recruit participants from across Wales, those who offered to participate came from South and Mid-West Wales. A questionnaire method design



could have been adopted which may have increased participant uptake. Due to uneven sample sizes across sub-groups of participants (e.g. ToD, TAs, EPs and parents), it was not possible to compare differences between groups. A participant limitation is that only one parent took part. Moreover, views of participants that chose to take part in this research may differ in comparison to those that did not take part. Thus, debatably their commitment and passion for deaf education in Wales may be reflected within this research, which may not have been so strongly reflected in a broader group.

Finally, and arguably most significantly, it is important to note that the views of the most important stakeholders, that of the children and young people themselves, have not been included in this study

## **9.0 Future research**

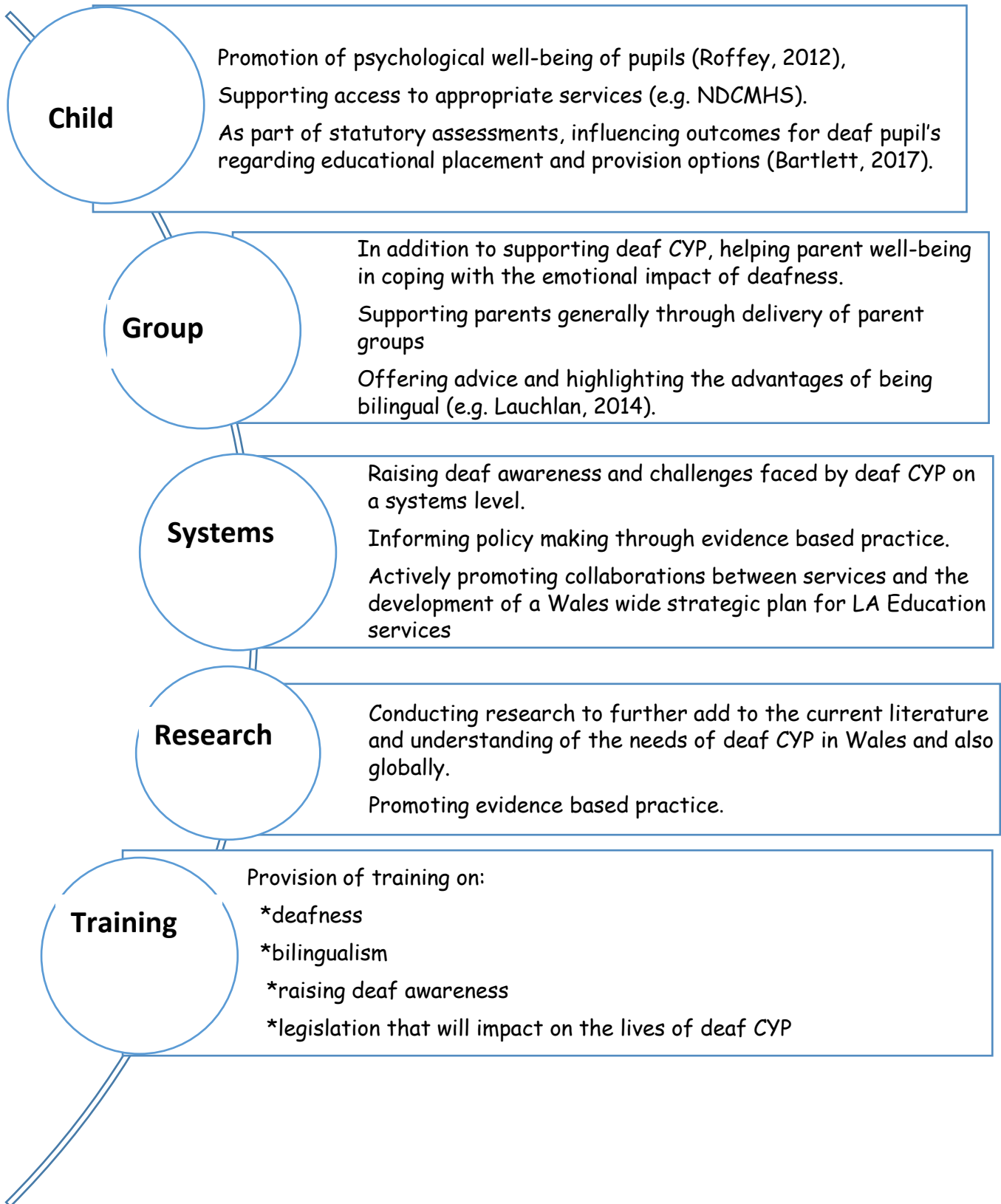
Researching the views of deaf CYP in Wales would highlight personal aspects of inclusion and areas of development needed to best support deaf CYP educational experiences. Moreover, gathering the experiences of additional parents would also enhance future research.

A collaboration between services is stressed within the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0- 25 years (DfE, 2014) and Draft Additional Learning Needs Code (WG, 2017c), thus future research incorporating the views of a broader group of professionals (e.g. third sector, school staff and headteachers) and relevant health professionals (e.g. Speech and Language Therapists and Audiologists) would be beneficial.

## **10.0 Implications for EPs**

The importance of the current research to EP practice is particularly relevant at different levels (Mackay, 2002, 2006) as outlined below.

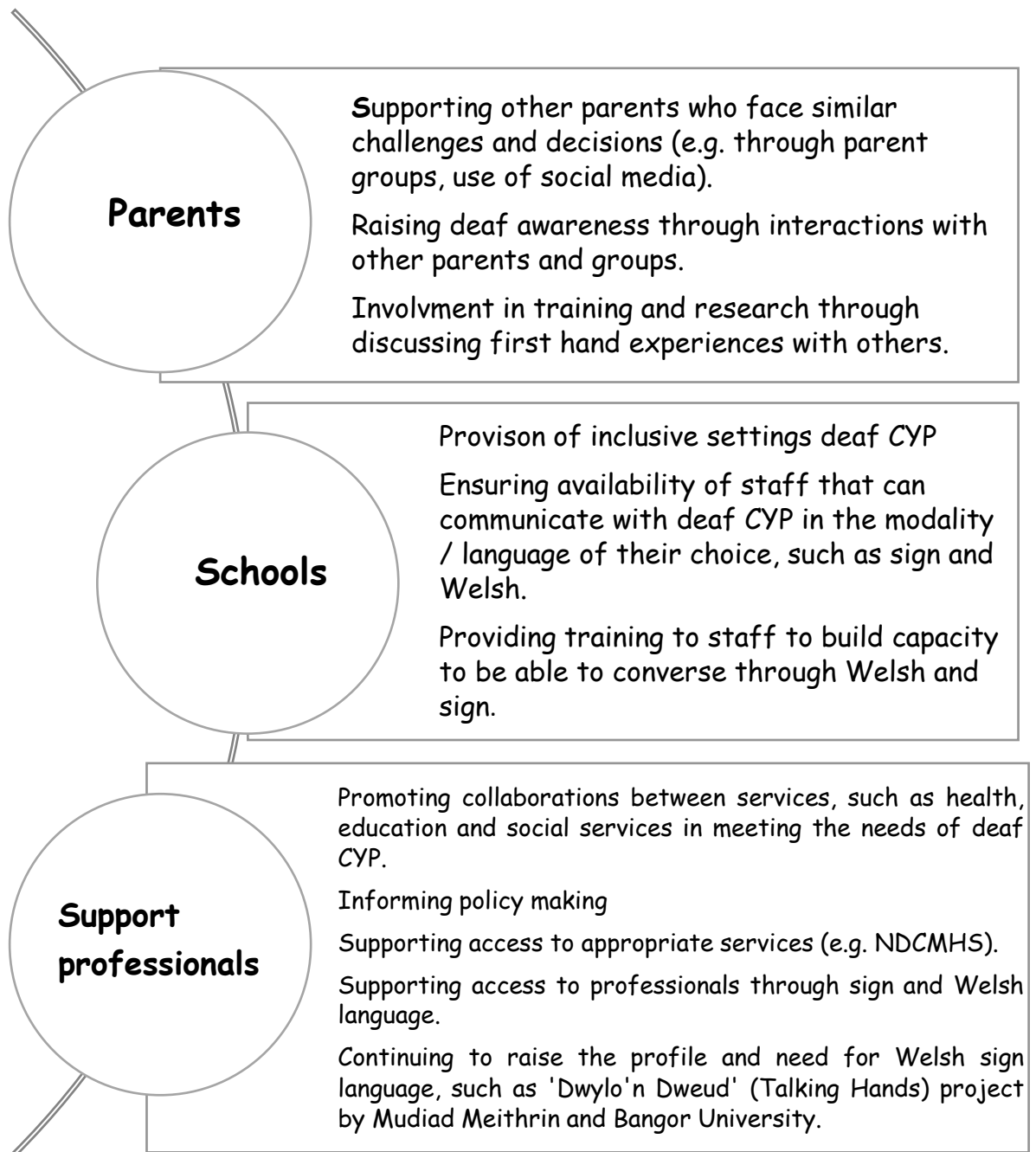
**Figure 5: *Implications for EPs***



## 11.0 Implications for stakeholders

In addition to EPs, this research also raised a potential implications for other stakeholders as summarised in Figure 6 below.

**Figure 6: Implications for stakeholders**



## **12.0 Conclusion**

The results from this research have been discussed in relation to the subsidiary research questions. A number of challenges were identified for children (e.g. academic placement, access to peers, being a minority within a minority and access to services and support staff through the Welsh language), parents (e.g. impact of the diagnosis, learning a new language, communication and educational choices) and stakeholders (e.g. lack of the awareness and impact of deafness and ensuring access to services). Stakeholders discussed several ways that deaf CYP in Wales could be best supported which would ensure that the needs of these CYP are identified and met appropriately.

A key finding was the need to increase deaf awareness among professionals but also within the wider community. As noted by Marschark (2018) “deaf children are not hearing children who can’t hear” (pp.1) and attention should be given to these differences, especially with regards to communication and language issues, academic attainment and well-being.

Finally, the study has highlighted the complex relationship between language choice and educational provision and the potentially adverse impact on well-being. It is hoped that the current findings provide an insight into perceptions of stakeholders and thus will be able to inform EP practice through supporting the educational choice and experience of deaf CYP in Wales.

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### **Appendix 1: Semi-structured interview schedule - Parents**

1. I would like to learn a little bit more about yourself and your family?
2. Can you tell me a little bit more about your child?
3. Can you tell me about communication at home?
4. Can you tell me about your child's education?
5. Can you tell me about the process of deciding on the school?
6. Can you tell me a bit about the language used in school?
7. Can you tell me a bit about your child's experience at school?
8. Thinking of the future, how do you see deaf education in Wales?
9. If you had one piece of advice for a parent in a similar position to yourself, what would you say?
10. Do you have anything else to add or say something that we haven't discuss?

### **Appendix 2: Semi-structured interview schedule- professionals**

1. Before we go into more depth and focus on your experiences, first of all I would like to learn about your work.
2. What kind of educational provision is available in your area for deaf pupils?
3. Can you tell me a little about your experiences of working with deaf children from Welsh-speaking homes?
4. Can you tell me a little about the implications (both positive and negative) for deaf pupils from Welsh-speaking homes being educated in English?
5. Can you tell me a little about how you think communication choices influences educational choices for deaf pupils from Welsh-speaking homes?
6. What do you think are the main benefits and challenges faced by deaf pupils from Welsh-speaking home?
7. Thinking of the future, what are your feelings about how deaf children in Wales are educated?
8. Do you have anything else to add or say something that we haven't discuss?