



Improving Communication between Public Services and Minority Language Speakers



Interventions to improve communications include interpretation services, foreign language training programs for public service workers, and translation of information materials.

What is the aim of this review?

This systematic review examines whether aids for communication are effective between public services and children and youth, or families with an immigrant background. The researchers analyse relevant studies, and the team included four comparative studies, three for health services and one for education.

The review in brief

No particular approach to interpretation (in-person, telephone, bilingual staff or ad hoc) works better than others for improving communication quality and patient satisfaction for people with a minority language background using public services. An enhanced English as a Second Language (ESL) class increased parents' involvement in childrens' school-work, and their English skills improved more than with a regular ESL-course.

What is this review about?

As a result of increased immigration, many people having a minority language background use public services. In principle, all people should have access to services, and equal access is sometimes required by law.

Well-functioning communication is important for effective help from public services. Mis-communication can lead to wrong decisions and poor results. Services may need to be able to provide communication tailored to people with limited skills in the main languages spoken in the country they are residing in.

The review includes studies in the United States, of aids used to improve communication between immigrant children, youth or families with a minority language background, and public services such as child welfare or health services.

What are the main results in this review?

Which communication aids are included?

Communication aids fall into three categories: (a) those to help verbal or direct communication such as different types of interpretation services; (b) those to help written communication, such as translation of case documents or information materials; and (c) broader aids to improve communication between service providers and service users. This category includes, for instance, second language



training for parents in order to improve their ability to communicate with their child's school.

How effective are communication aids used?

Three studies conducted within health services compare the effect of different types of interpretation service or of using bilingual personnel.

What was the main finding of this review?

There is no clear indication that any particular approach to interpretation works better than others. None of in-person, telephone, bilingual staff or ad hoc interpreting could demonstrate a clear advantage over other approaches. There is uncertainty about the reliability of this finding because the studies had limitations, including small scale.

One study of the effect of two different training programmes of ESL suggests that:

- An enhanced ESL class (where the course was tailored to immigrant parents) improved parents' involvement in students' school-work and parents' English skills more than a regular ESL course.
- There is uncertainty about the reliability of this finding because the study had important limitations, including small scale. Similar studies of more robust design are needed in order to draw firm conclusions.

What do the findings of this review mean?

There is in most cases no significant difference in communication quality and patient satisfaction between different means of aiding communication between people having a minority language background and public services workers. One study suggests that an ESL course integrating parent involvement knowledge with behaviour was more effective than standard ESL.

There is a need for additional studies of communication aids used between this population and public services, particularly for services outside health care, such as child welfare, school and early childcare, work and welfare services, and prison and probation services.

How up-to-date is this review?

The review authors searched for studies published up to January 2013. This Campbell Systematic Review was published on March 2, 2015.

About the Campbell Collaboration

The Campbell Collaboration is an international, voluntary, non-profit research network that publishes systematic reviews. We summarize and evaluate the quality of evidence about programs in the social and behavioral sciences. Our aim is to help people make better choices and better policy decisions.

About this summary

This summary was written by Eamonn Noonan (former CEO, Campbell Collaboration) based on the Campbell Systematic Review 'Effect of Interventions to Facilitate Communication Between Families or Single Young People with Minority Language Background and Public Services: A Systematic Review' by S Wollscheid, HM Munthe-Kaas, KT Hammerstrøm, E Noonan, (DOI: 10.4073/csr.2015.7). Anne Mellbye (RBUP) designed and Tanya Kristiansen (Campbell Collaboration) edited the summary.

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