

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.22108411

BARRIERS TO ACCESSING FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING COLLEGES FOR SOUTH AFRICAN SIGN LANGUAGE USERS IN KWAZULU-NATAL

Nqobile Lovable Sawula¹, Theophilus Adedokun^{2*}

¹ Department of Media, Language and Communication, Durban University of Technology, South Africa

² Department of Media, Language and Communication, Durban University of Technology, South Africa

Received: 23/05/2026

Accepted: 24/06/2026

Corresponding Author: Theophilus Adedokun

(theoday88@gmail.com)

ABSTRACT

Access to Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges for South African Sign Language (SASL) users in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) remains critically constrained despite a robust legislative and policy framework mandating inclusive education. This study investigates the factors impeding access for SASL users, examines measures taken by FET Colleges to accommodate Deaf students, and proposes targeted interventions to improve participation. Using a mixed methods research design, data were collected through structured questionnaires completed by 50 Deaf participants and semi-structured interviews conducted with two FET College management representatives. Findings reveal that 100% of college management acknowledged institutional inaccessibility for SASL users, citing the absence of government funding as the primary barrier. Furthermore, 82% of Deaf participants confirmed FET Colleges in KZN are inaccessible, and 80% identified SASL interpreter services as the critical support mechanism required to enable access. Grounded in the Social Model of Disability, this study demonstrates a significant gap between inclusive education policy and its implementation, and argues for urgent budgetary allocation, SASL staff training, and the full operationalisation of constitutional language rights for the Deaf community.

KEYWORDS: Deaf education, FET colleges, inclusive education, KwaZulu-Natal, SASL interpreters, South African Sign Language, social model of disability.

1. INTRODUCTION

Access to post-school education is widely regarded as a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of social and economic development (UNESCO, 2020). In South Africa, the post-apartheid democratic dispensation introduced significant legislative and policy reforms aimed at broadening access to education for all citizens, including people with disabilities. Despite these reforms, the participation of Deaf learners in higher education institutions, and specifically in Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges, remains alarmingly low (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2013). This study investigates the barriers to accessing FET Colleges for South African Sign Language (SASL) users in KwaZulu-Natal and examines what measures, if any, are in place to facilitate their inclusion.

The South African Deaf community communicates primarily through SASL, a natural and complete human language that is structurally and functionally equivalent to any spoken language (DeafSA, 1997; Penn, 1993). SASL is the primary language of an estimated one million Deaf people in South Africa (DeafSA, 2007). For the Deaf community, access to education is fundamentally a matter of language access: without SASL interpreting services, Deaf learners are effectively excluded from participating in mainstream higher education (Classen, 2025). At the time of this study, SASL had not yet been accorded official language status in South Africa, despite longstanding lobbying by the Deaf community (DeafSA, 2016b). This situation changed significantly when SASL was constitutionally recognised as South Africa's 12th official language, with the Constitution Eighteenth Amendment Bill signed into law on 19 July 2023 (Republic of South Africa, 2023; SAnews, 2023), a milestone that strengthens the legal basis for SASL inclusive educational provision and lends renewed urgency to the findings of this study.

FET Colleges occupy a critical position in the South African post-school education landscape, particularly for Deaf learners. Jacobson (n.d.) notes that only 12 of 43 schools for the Deaf in South Africa offer a National Senior Certificate (matric), and these schools are concentrated in only three of the nine provinces. In KwaZulu-Natal, only eight Deaf schools offer a matric certificate. As a consequence, the majority of Deaf school leavers exit the education system without the qualifications required to enter university (Kelly et al., 2022). Swift (2012) argues that FET Colleges represent an essential educational bridge for Deaf school leavers, enabling them to

improve their qualifications and gain entry into higher education. Whether these colleges are equipped to serve this population is therefore a matter of considerable urgency.

1.1 Theoretical Framework: The Social Model of Disability

This study is grounded in the Social Model of Disability, which holds that disability is not located within the individual as a medical or physical deficiency, but rather in the social structures, attitudes, and institutional arrangements that create barriers to participation (Oliver, 1990; Barnes and Mercer, 2010). Under this model, the Deaf student is not disabled by hearing loss per se, but by the failure of educational institutions to provide accessible communication and support services (Aljedaani et al., 2023). This framing is particularly relevant to the Deaf community, which does not universally perceive itself as disabled, but rather as a cultural and linguistic minority group whose primary language is Sign Language (Rotoli et al., 2022).

The Social Model stands in contrast to the Medical Model of Disability, which locates the problem within the individual and seeks to correct or manage the condition (Barnes and Mercer, 2010). The World Health Organization (2021) affirms that an inclusive education framework aligned with the Social Model requires institutional transformation rather than individual remediation. In the context of Deaf learners, this means that institutions must proactively provide SASL interpreter services, accessible communication systems, and appropriately trained staff, rather than expecting Deaf students to adapt to hearing centred environments.

Glaser and Van Pletzen (2012) explain that the Social Model highlights the necessity for accommodation and the normalisation of differences. Disability is thus perceived as the consequence of disabling environments, such as segregated social arrangements or structural barriers, whether physical, organisational, or attitudinal (Mitchell et al., 2022). In the FET College context, these disabling environments manifest as the absence of SASL interpreters, the inability of administrative staff to communicate in SASL, and the non-allocation of government funding for Deaf support services.

1.2 Deaf Education in South Africa

Since 1994, a number of policies have attempted to dismantle the barriers to education created by the apartheid government, including the Constitution of South Africa (1996), the South African Schools Act

(1996), and the White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education (Department of Education, 2001). These policies confirm the intention that Deaf learners be given adequate opportunity to progress into higher education. Historically, this intention has been undermined by the tension between oralism, which requires Deaf learners to develop speech and lip reading skills without Sign Language (De Klerk, 2003), and manualism, which recognises Sign Language as the Deaf community's natural first language and its rightful medium of instruction (Othman, 2024). Lip reading alone can only decode approximately 20 to 30% of spoken communication (Fernandez Lopez et al., 2017), making the oralist approach an unreliable basis for instruction. Contemporary Deaf education in South Africa has consequently moved towards a bilingual model in which SASL is the primary medium of instruction and English is taught as a second language (DeafSA, 2023), although practical implementation remains uneven and under resourced.

This gap between policy and practice persists chiefly because teacher SASL proficiency remains low. As Holness (2016) first noted, and as more recent evidence continues to confirm, only a small proportion of teachers in schools for the Deaf are fluent in SASL, despite the language's formal status as an official language (du Plessis, 2025; Sibanda and Tlale, 2025). Where teachers lack fluency, classroom communication is frequently reduced to partial signing, spoken language, or written text, compromising instructional quality and, for learners born to hearing parents in particular, delaying language acquisition altogether, since school is often their primary site of exposure to a full language model (Chauke et al., 2025). Teacher education programmes do not consistently prioritise SASL competence, and a shortage of SASL teaching and learning materials further constrains the bilingual model's implementation (du Plessis, 2025). The result, as Holness (2016) argued and subsequent literature reinforces, is that SASL continues to function as a barrier rather than a resource in practice, notwithstanding progressive policy intentions.

1.3 Access to FET Colleges for Deaf Students

FET Colleges in South Africa are governed by the Further Education and Training Colleges Act 16 of 2006 and are mandated to provide vocational and occupational education to learners who have completed Grade 9 or higher (Department of Education, 2006). The White Paper for Post School Education and Training (Department of Higher

Education and Training, 2014) requires these institutions to be inclusive and accessible to students with disabilities. However, a persistent gap between policy intent and implementation is documented in the literature.

Swift (2012) found that only 18.18% of South African higher education institutions are accessible to Deaf students requiring interpreter services, and that only three FET Colleges in South Africa accept Deaf students, even then only for limited courses. Van der Walt (2015) identifies several barriers preventing Deaf students from accessing higher education, including the absence of SASL interpreting services, inadequately trained lecturers and support staff, and negative institutional attitudes. This pattern is corroborated by more recent research into South African Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges more broadly. Muzite and Gasa (2024), in a phenomenological study of 40 students with disabilities across five TVET colleges in Gauteng, found that inaccessible infrastructure, inadequately trained staff, and intersecting socioeconomic disadvantage combine to marginalise students with disabilities within an institutional culture that treats TVET provision as secondary to university education. Mapungwana et al. (2025) similarly argue that the meaningful inclusion of Deaf students in TVET requires the systemic embedding of sign language across admissions, instruction, and assessment, rather than isolated interpreter provision. Disability studies literature more broadly shows that learners with disabilities are often marginalised within educational institutions, with their participation and perspectives frequently excluded or rendered invisible (Oliver, 2018; Shakespeare, 2013; Thomas, 1999), a sentiment that resonates with the experiences of SASL users seeking access to FET Colleges.

The financial cost of SASL interpreting services is frequently cited as a deterrent to institutional provision. Van der Walt (2015) notes that management at tertiary institutions often view interpreting services as prohibitively expensive and use this cost justification to discriminate against Deaf students, a position that is at odds with Section 9(3) and (4) of the Constitution of South Africa (1996), which explicitly prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability, including deafness. Various assistive technologies, including hearing loops, real time captioning systems, frequency modulated amplification systems, and cochlear implants, have been identified as supplementary aids for Deaf and hard of hearing students (Higdon, 2023; Gonçalves,

2024; Pinzón Díaz et al., 2025). However, the World Health Organization (2021) affirms that the provision of such technologies in low and middle income contexts remains insufficient, and that human interpreter services continue to represent the most effective means of ensuring communicative access for SASL users. The shortage of trained SASL interpreters in KwaZulu Natal further compounds this challenge, as there is no accredited body in the province responsible for training interpreters (Heap and Morgans, 2004).

1.4 Institutional implications of SASL's official language status

The recognition of SASL as South Africa's 12th official language carries direct implications for post school institutions that extend well beyond symbolic acknowledgement. Sol Plaatje University (2023) sets out four institutional obligations arising from recognition: curriculum development that integrates SASL and Deaf culture; accessibility of learning materials, including transcripts, captions, and interpreted content; continuing professional development for academic and support staff; and the physical and communicative accessibility of campus environments. The University of Cape Town's Disability Service has begun operationalising comparable commitments, including making standardised testing information available in SASL video format and training frontline reception staff in SASL (UCT News, 2023), illustrating that institutional obligations under recognition are already being interpreted concretely at some South African institutions, even as this study demonstrates that FET Colleges in KZN have yet to do so. At a national level, the Presidency has framed recognition as addressing access to education, economic opportunity, and public participation for the Deaf community (SAnews, 2023), while acknowledging that meaningful implementation depends on government making sufficient budget available (UCT News, 2023). This is precisely the budgetary gap identified by both FET College management respondents later on in the present study. Despite these developments, commentators caution that formal recognition of a sign language does not automatically translate into institutional accommodation unless accompanied by deliberate, funded implementation strategies (De Meulder and Murray, 2017), a caution that this study's findings substantiate.

Despite the critical role of FET Colleges in the post school education trajectory of Deaf learners, relatively little empirical research has examined the

accessibility of these institutions for SASL users in KwaZulu Natal specifically. This study seeks to address this gap by providing empirical evidence of the barriers experienced by SASL users in KwaZulu Natal and by proposing actionable recommendations for improvement. The objectives of this study are threefold. (i) To investigate factors impeding access to FET Colleges for the Deaf community; (ii) to identify measures taken by FET Colleges to accommodate Deaf students; (iii) to propose interventions to improve access for SASL users in KwaZulu Natal.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a mixed methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to generate a comprehensive understanding of FET College accessibility for SASL users in KwaZulu Natal. The mixed methods approach was selected because it enables the triangulation of data, combining the breadth of quantitative inquiry with the depth of qualitative insight (Creswell, 2003; Azorín and Cameron, 2010). This design is particularly appropriate for investigating complex social phenomena such as educational access for marginalised communities, as it avoids the limitations of a standalone methodological approach (Barbour, 2019).

The study adopted a descriptive research design, appropriate for systematically describing population characteristics without manipulating variables, enabling structured measurement and interpretation of observable conditions (Saunders et al., 2023; Creswell and Creswell, 2023). Purposive sampling was employed, involving deliberate participant selection based on predefined criteria to ensure respondents possessed direct knowledge of the phenomenon (Andrade, 2021; Scharrer and Ramasubramanian, 2025), and is increasingly applied in quantitative contexts requiring specific expertise (Ahmad and Wilkins, 2025). The study was conducted in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, a province characterised by a diverse population and significant socioeconomic heterogeneity, making it suitable for empirical investigation, with its accessibility to the researcher supporting efficient data collection while ensuring relevance to the study objectives.

2.1 Participant recruitment.

Two participant groups were identified. The first comprised 50 Deaf and hard of hearing individuals recruited through four KZN organisations, namely the KZN Deaf and Blind Association, the KZN Deaf

Association, SANDA, and Edeaf. Recruitment proceeded through direct engagement with each organisation's leadership, who assisted in identifying members meeting the inclusion criteria and in scheduling data collection sessions at organisation premises, a strategy consistent with recommended practice for accessing Deaf community samples through trusted community gatekeepers (Arnstein, 2025). Inclusion criteria required participants to be SASL users who had completed schooling and wished to pursue higher education; individuals who did not identify as SASL users, or who had not completed basic schooling, were excluded. The second group comprised two FET College management representatives from eThekweni FET College (Springfield Campus) and Coastal FET College, purposively selected on the basis of their institutional decision-making authority over accessibility provision. Attempts to recruit four FET College representatives and a DHET representative were unsuccessful, as only two FET College respondents participated and the DHET representative did not respond, despite repeated follow up requests over a six-week period.

2.2 Instrumentation and validation

Two primary data collection instruments were used. First, structured questionnaires with both closed ended and open-ended questions were distributed to the 50 Deaf participants. The questionnaire was developed in English and reviewed by the co-authors for content validity, ensuring alignment between individual items and the study's stated objectives. It was then pre-tested with 10 Deaf participants prior to full administration. During pre-testing, particular attention was paid to the clarity and translatability of question wording into SASL, since direct translation of complex or abstract phrasing can compromise both comprehension and response validity in Deaf samples (Arnstein, 2025; Palozzi et al., 2017). Ambiguous or unclear questions identified during pre-testing, together with items that proved difficult for the interpreter to render accurately in SASL, were revised in consultation with the co-authors and, where necessary, rephrased using more concrete, example-based wording. A SASL interpreter accompanied the researcher during all visits to Deaf organisations, both to explain the purpose of the study and to facilitate communication with participants, consistent with established guidance that research with Deaf signing populations requires interpreter mediated, rather than purely written, engagement to ensure genuine and informed

participation (Arnstein, 2025). Second, semi structured interviews were conducted with the two FET College management representatives. Interview questions focused on institutional accessibility policies, the availability of support services for Deaf students, funding provisions, and the challenges faced in accommodating SASL users. Responses were recorded in writing and subsequently transferred to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analysed using Moon-stats statistical software, which enabled the generation of descriptive statistics, frequency tables, and graphical representations of the data. All raw data entered into the spreadsheet were checked for precision and cleaned prior to analysis (Burns and Grove, 2001). Interview data were analysed thematically, with responses coded according to recurring themes relating to institutional accessibility, barriers to access, and existing support measures.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC) at the Durban University of Technology (DUT) with Reference number REC 151/15. All participants received full information about the study, signed informed consent forms, were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and were informed of their right to withdraw without penalty. As the Deaf community is regarded as a vulnerable research population, particular care was taken to observe ethical guidelines throughout the data collection process.

3. RESULTS

This section presents the results obtained from the questionnaires completed by 50 Deaf participants and the semi-structured interviews conducted with two FET College management representatives.

3.1 FET College Management Responses

Both management representatives held considerable experience in FET College management: one had between 10 and 20 years' experience, and the other between 20 and 30 years. This suggests that the institutional perspectives offered were grounded in substantial professional knowledge.

When asked whether their respective FET Colleges were accessible to Deaf students, both respondents (100%) answered in the negative. The sole reason provided by both was the absence of allocated funding for SASL interpreting services and related support resources. One respondent noted that although the institution admitted all students

who meet entry requirements regardless of disability, it does not provide SASL interpreters, and students are consequently required to supply their own interpreting services. This places an unreasonable financial burden on Deaf students and effectively transfers institutional responsibility for accessibility to the individual.

When asked what factors impede access for Deaf students, both respondents cited financial constraints: one identified the absence of dedicated funding, and the other the absence of a budget allocation for Deaf student support. One respondent

indicated that the institution had been writing to the DHET for years requesting funding but had received no feedback or response.

With respect to measures taken to enhance access, one respondent had attended workshops on inclusive education for students with disabilities, while the other reported awareness of applicable policies. Regarding systems in place to assist Deaf students, one respondent confirmed that no systems existed, while the other indicated that a request for DHET funding to implement the necessary services was under way.

Table 1 below summarises the responses from FET College management.

Table 1: Summary of FET College Management Interview Responses.

Question	Respondent 1 (eThekweni FET College)	Respondent 2 (Coastal FET College)
Is the college accessible to Deaf students?	No	No
Reason for inaccessibility?	No funding/support	No funding/support
Factors impeding access?	No funding	No budget
What has been done to enhance access?	Discussions held; workshops attended	Policies made; aware of disability policies
Systems in place to assist Deaf students?	No systems in place	In process of requesting DHET funding

3.2. Deaf Participant Responses: Demographic Profile

The demographic and educational profile of the 50 Deaf participants is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Demographic and Educational Profile of Deaf Participants (n = 50).

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age group	18–20 years	1	2%
	20–30 years	37	74%
	Above 30 years	12	24%
Highest level of education	Below matric	31	62%
	Matric	14	28%
	Above matric	5	10%
Currently enrolled?	Yes (Deaf organisations)	35	70%
	No	15	30%
FET Colleges accessible?	Yes	2	4%
	No	41	82%
	Unsure/N/A	7	14%

The majority of participants (74%) were between the ages of 20 and 30, with 24% above 30 years and only 2% between 18 and 20 years. In terms of educational attainment, 62% had not completed matric, 28% had completed matric, and 10% had studied at a tertiary or further learning institution. These figures are consistent with national data on Deaf educational attainment and reflect the limited availability of schools offering matric qualifications for Deaf learners in KwaZulu-Natal.

Of the 70% of participants enrolled in courses at the time of data collection, none were enrolled at an FET College. Instead, all were participating in Adult Education and Training (AET) or Information

Technology (IT) courses offered through Deaf organisations, principally Edeaf. The remaining 30% were not enrolled in any educational programme.

3.3 Applications to FET Colleges and Outcomes

Fifty-eight percent of participants reported having previously applied to an FET College in KwaZulu-Natal, while 38% had not done so, and 4% indicated that applications were not applicable to them. Of the 29 who had applied, only 7 were accepted, and of those 7, only 3 completed their courses. Table 3 details the experiences of the seven participants who were accepted.

Table 3: Experiences of Deaf Participants Accepted at FET Colleges.

Respondent	Experience at FET College
1	Accepted on condition of providing own interpreter, which was unaffordable; subsequently dropped out.

2	Accepted but had no interpreter during lectures; had to write questions to communicate with the lecturer.
3	Accepted at INTEC College; studied dressmaking part-time with a home tutor; had to write down all classroom communication.
4	Accepted at eThekweni FET College to study Public Administration; no interpreters; written communication was the only option.
5	Accepted but mixed with hearing students; unable to communicate with peers or lecturers due to absence of an interpreter.
6	Accepted but later withdrew due to absence of interpreter and difficulty communicating on campus.
7	Accepted and completed a course in refrigeration repair.

3.4 Awareness of Support Services and Perceptions of Accessibility

When asked whether they knew of any FET College offering support services for Deaf students in KwaZulu-Natal, 74% of participants initially responded affirmatively. However, upon further enquiry, all of these participants named Deaf organisations rather than FET Colleges, confirming that no participant was aware of any FET College in

KwaZulu-Natal offering SASL support services.

Regarding the accessibility of FET Colleges, 82% of participants stated that FET Colleges in KwaZulu-Natal are not accessible to the Deaf community, 4% considered them accessible, 8% responded that the question was not applicable to them, 2% were unsure, and 4% did not know.

Participants were also asked what support services they required from FET Colleges to enable access. Their responses are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Support Services Required by Deaf Participants to Access FET Colleges.

Support Service Required	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
SASL interpreter services	40	80%
Bursary/financial support	2	4%
Accessible/visible classrooms	2	4%
Bilingual SASL interpreter	1	2%
Not applicable	5	10%

Eighty percent (80%) of respondents identified SASL interpreter services as their primary requirement. Notably, not a single participant identified hearing aids, note-takers, assistive learning devices, real-time captioning, tutors, or other supplementary supports discussed in the literature as part of their perceived needs.

The 22 participants who were not accepted cited communication breakdowns with reception staff as a primary obstacle. One respondent stated that they did not know the outcome of their application because no one on campus was able to communicate in SASL. This finding is significant beyond its surface-level implication: it reveals that institutional inaccessibility for Deaf applicants does not begin in the lecture hall but at the very threshold of the institution, during the initial administrative encounter. The inability of reception staff to communicate in SASL effectively positions Deaf prospective students as uninformed participants in processes that directly determine their futures, stripping them of the basic right to timely and accurate information about their own applications. This is consistent with Matjila's (2024) evaluation of support services at a large South African university, which found that Deaf and hard-of-hearing students who sought out institutional services encountered language barriers at the point of first contact, with no

sign language options available and no staff equipped to communicate in SASL. Matjila (2024) further documented one respondent's account that "people who hear have everything they need; we depend on the interpreters, we are not catered to, and it is lonely." The pattern is therefore not unique to FET Colleges but reflects a systemic institutional culture in which SASL competence among frontline staff is treated as optional rather than as a basic accessibility requirement. This finding illustrates that the barrier to access extends beyond the classroom and into every aspect of institutional engagement, from initial enquiry through to enrolment. Percival and Ahmed (2025) similarly found, in their study of Deaf and hard-of-hearing students across four campuses at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, that attitudinal barriers, limited awareness of Deaf culture among peers, and inflexible institutional practices contributed to alienation and isolation, confirming that what is experienced by the individual student as personal exclusion is, in structural terms, the predictable outcome of systems not designed with Deaf users in mind.

The six most prevalent challenges encountered by Deaf participants when attempting to enrol at FET Colleges were: lack of SASL interpreters; administrative staff unable to communicate in SASL; lecturers unable to communicate with Deaf students;

the need to write down all classroom questions; inability to pay for tuition; and isolation from hearing peers and staff on campus. Taken together, these challenges do not represent discrete and unrelated inconveniences but form an interlocking system of exclusion in which each barrier amplifies the others, making full participation in FET College life effectively unattainable for many Deaf students.

The lack of SASL interpreters emerged as the most foundational barrier, as it is the one whose absence renders all other participation mechanisms insufficient. Without interpreter access, administrative processes, instructional delivery, and peer engagement all collapse into inaccessibility simultaneously. This is not a challenge unique to the institutions in this study. Bell (2024) noted that across South Africa, current demand for qualified SASL interpreters outstrips the available supply of suitably trained professionals and that real-time speech-to-text and captioning services remain extremely limited for Deaf students in post-secondary settings. The implication is that even where institutional will exists to include Deaf students, the professional infrastructure required to operationalise that intention is structurally insufficient. Chauke et al. (2025), in their study of Deaf learners in a rural Mpumalanga special school, reinforced this finding, reporting that a critical shortage of skilled interpreters compounded by limited SASL proficiency among educators and scarce supporting resources persistently undermined inclusive education, with participants emphasising the urgent need for structured SASL training and consistent access to SASL-proficient interpreters. The shortage of interpreters must therefore be read not merely as a resourcing problem but as a consequence of a historically inadequate pipeline of interpreter training at national level, one that has not kept pace with growing Deaf enrolment in post-secondary education.

The inability of administrative and academic staff to communicate in SASL is directly related to the interpreter shortage and is in many respects its institutional counterpart. Where interpreters are absent and staff lack SASL proficiency, Deaf students must navigate every interaction through improvised and inadequate workarounds such as writing, lip-reading, or relying on bystanders. This arrangement is not merely inconvenient; it is fundamentally disempowering, as it places the burden of communication access on the student rather than on the institution. Percival and Ahmed (2025) emphasised the need for recognising SASL as a legitimate language of instruction and

communication, and for embedding Deaf culture within the curriculum, with participants in their study advocating for sign language modules for hearing students and staff as a means of promoting broader linguistic inclusivity and reducing communication barriers. Their findings further confirmed that educators and administrators play a critical role in shaping the experiences of Deaf students, and that institutions must enhance accessibility through real-time transcription, sign language interpretation, and accessible learning materials. The failure to invest in SASL competence among institutional staff is therefore not an administrative oversight but a structural statement about whose linguistic needs an institution considers central to its operations.

The need for Deaf students to write down all classroom questions captures this disempowerment at its most visible. In a learning environment where spontaneous verbal exchange between students and lecturers is the dominant mode of intellectual participation, requiring Deaf students to write down questions imposes a time delay, disrupts the flow of discussion, and frequently results in questions going unanswered altogether. More fundamentally, it signals to Deaf students that the communicative conventions of the institution have not been adapted to accommodate them, and that their participation is conditional and circumscribed. Percival and Ahmed (2025) found that interpreter lag and partial communication during interactive classroom sequences exclude Deaf students from full participation in both the content and affective dimensions of classroom discourse, effectively reducing their engagement to passive observation rather than active learning. This finding is reinforced by Chauke et al. (2025), whose participants resorted to written instructions and gestural communication as substitutes for SASL precisely because formal communication infrastructure was absent. The reliance on written mediation in lieu of SASL interpretation therefore represents not a reasonable accommodation but a symptom of institutional failure.

The inability to pay for tuition situates the challenges faced by Deaf participants within the broader context of socioeconomic disadvantage, which is itself partly a product of the educational exclusion that precedes post-secondary enrolment. Deaf students who cannot access quality schooling, who face communicative barriers throughout their education, and who are isolated from career guidance and employment networks arrive at the gates of FET Colleges already economically

marginalised. Percival and Ahmed (2025) observed that limited access to higher education restricts career opportunities, reduces earning potential, and exacerbates economic inequality, creating a cycle in which the inability to pay tuition functions as both a cause and a consequence of systemic marginalisation. Palmer et al. (2024) further noted that the cumulative burden of securing and managing accommodations at post-secondary level is itself experienced as exhausting by many Deaf students, a phenomenon some researchers describe as the "deaf tax," which adds an invisible layer of labour and stress to an already challenging financial situation, contributing to a broader sense that Deaf students are not welcome on campus even before financial considerations arise.

Isolation from hearing peers and staff, the sixth and final challenge identified by participants, is in many ways the experiential sum of all the preceding barriers. Where interpreters are absent, where staff cannot sign, where participation is mediated through written notes, and where financial precarity undermines stability, Deaf students are left navigating a social and academic environment in which meaningful connection with others is consistently obstructed. The loneliness that results is not incidental to institutional life but is the lived consequence of a campus environment that has not been designed with Deaf students as full members of its community. Percival and Ahmed (2025) found that a lack of understanding among peers and educators about the challenges faced by Deaf and hard-of-hearing students constitutes a significant barrier to inclusion, and that a comprehensive approach incorporating awareness raising, inclusive practices, and targeted accommodations is necessary to address it. Palmer et al. (2024) similarly documented that Deaf college students frequently encounter instructors unwilling to implement accommodations, classmates who lack awareness of Deaf communication needs, and insufficient institutional support, all of which reinforce the separateness that Deaf students in FET College environments consistently report. Skrebneva and Fordham (2024), writing specifically about the South African context, further highlighted that student-identified approaches to inclusion must be centred in any institutional response, arguing that interventions designed for rather than with Deaf students are unlikely to dismantle the isolation they are meant to address.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 FET Colleges Are Not Accessible to SASL

Users

The most unequivocal finding of this study is that FET Colleges in KwaZulu Natal are not accessible to SASL users. This conclusion is supported by the unanimous confirmation of both FET College management representatives and the responses of 82% of Deaf participants. The finding is consistent with a broader body of evidence on Deaf access to higher education in South Africa (Swift, 2012; Van der Walt, 2015; Glaser and Van Pletzen, 2012; Muzite and Gasa, 2024). UNESCO (2020) defines inclusive education as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning and reducing exclusion within education. By this definition, the FET Colleges examined in this study fall outside the parameters of inclusive educational provision. The constitutional guarantee of equal access to education enshrined in Section 29 of the Constitution of South Africa (1996) appears to remain aspirational rather than operational for SASL users in KZN.

The recognition of SASL as South Africa's 12th official language in 2023 significantly strengthens the legal foundation for demanding SASL inclusive educational provision. As discussed in Section 1.3, institutions such as Sol Plaatje University and the University of Cape Town have already begun translating recognition into concrete curriculum, staffing, and accessibility commitments. That neither FET College examined in this study had made comparable progress by the time of data collection suggests that implementation capacity, rather than legal obligation, is the binding constraint. De Meulder and Murray (2017) caution that the formal recognition of a sign language does not automatically translate into meaningful access or institutional accommodation, rather, recognition must be accompanied by deliberate, funded implementation strategies if it is to benefit Deaf communities in practice. This observation is particularly salient in the South African context, where constitutional and legislative frameworks frequently outpace institutional capacity and political will. The failure of FET Colleges to provide SASL support services not only contravenes the constitutional right to basic education but also represents a direct contradiction of the principle of linguistic equity enshrined in the recognition of SASL as an official language.

4.2 Absence of SASL Interpreting Services as the Primary Barrier

The absence of SASL interpreting services emerged as the central and overriding barrier to access in this study. This finding is consistent with

Van der Walt (2015), who asserts that for Deaf students, access to higher education is primarily contingent on the availability of SASL interpreting services. Eighty percent of Deaf participants in this study identified SASL interpreter services as the single most important support service required to make FET Colleges accessible to them. The narratives of participants who were accepted by FET Colleges but failed to complete their studies are particularly illustrative of this gap. Multiple respondents were accepted on the condition that they provide their own interpreters, a condition that effectively transfers institutional responsibility for accessibility to the individual student. This practice directly contradicts the Social Model of Disability, which locates responsibility for accessible provision within the institution and the state rather than the individual (Oliver and Barnes, 2012; Barnes and Mercer, 2010), and conflicts with Section 9(3) and (4) of the Constitution (1996), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability.

The right to communication support in education is not merely a policy aspiration but a binding international legal obligation. The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016), in its General Comment No. 4 on Article 24 of the CRPD, explicitly states that educational institutions are required to provide reasonable accommodation and specific support measures to ensure that persons with disabilities can access learning on an equal basis with others. The Committee further identifies sign language as a legitimate medium of instruction and emphasises that states must ensure the availability of qualified sign language interpreters in educational settings. The failure of FET Colleges in KZN to provide SASL interpreters is therefore not merely an institutional oversight but a breach of South Africa's obligations under international human rights law.

Comparative international evidence reinforces the centrality of interpreter provision to Deaf access. A study of higher education accessibility for Deaf and hard of hearing students across Arab Gulf states similarly found that interpreter shortages, rather than legislative gaps, were the principal obstacle once admission had been granted (Albash, 2023). This suggests that the pattern documented in this study, in which institutional willingness to admit Deaf students outpace the interpreting infrastructure required to support them, is not unique to South Africa but reflects a broader challenge facing under resourced interpreter training pipelines internationally. Marschark et al. (2005) further note that while sign language interpretation represents a critical access tool for Deaf learners, there is a

significant shortage of research on the effectiveness of interpreting in educational settings, which suggests that even where interpreters are provided, ongoing monitoring and evaluation of their impact is necessary. Napier and Leeson (2016) corroborate this concern, arguing that effective sign language interpreting in educational contexts requires not only linguistic competence but also content specific knowledge and an awareness of the Deaf learner's communicative preferences, the absence of specialist training for educational interpreters therefore compounds the access barrier even in institutions where interpreting services nominally exist. For KwaZulu Natal, this issue is exacerbated by the documented shortage of trained SASL interpreters in the province and the absence of an accredited body to train and certify them (DeafSA, 2016b).

4.3 Financial Constraints and Policy Implementation Failure

Both FET College management respondents attributed the inaccessibility of their institutions to a lack of funding and the absence of a dedicated budget for SASL support services. This finding reflects a systemic failure at the national level, as the DHET has not allocated specific budgetary provisions for the inclusion of Deaf students in FET Colleges. The experience of one respondent, who reported that their institution had been writing to the DHET for years without receiving any feedback, is revealing of the bureaucratic inertia perpetuating educational exclusion.

The perception that SASL services are prohibitively expensive is a recurring theme in the South African Deaf education literature (Van Zijl and Combrink, 2006; Setshekgamollo, 2024). However, this perception must be contextualised within the framework of South Africa's constitutional obligations and international human rights commitments, most notably the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (United Nations, 2007), which South Africa ratified in 2007. The CRPD explicitly requires states to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to inclusive, quality education, and failure to do so on grounds of cost is inconsistent with the spirit and letter of this international obligation. Critically, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016, para. 26) clarifies that the obligation to provide reasonable accommodation is an immediate duty and that states may not invoke resource constraints to defer compliance indefinitely, the cost of non-implementation, measured in terms of the systematic denial of fundamental rights, must

be weighed against the cost of provision.

The DHET's own statistics on post school education and training (DHET, 2022) confirm that enrolment of students with disabilities in FET and TVET colleges remains disproportionately low. The DHET (2018) Strategic Policy Framework on Disability for the Post School Education and Training System acknowledges the need for targeted institutional support for students with disabilities, including the provision of assistive technologies and communication support. Yet the evidence of this study, together with Muzite and Gasa's (2024) findings across five Gauteng TVET colleges, suggests that these policy commitments have not been translated into funded operational mandates at the institutional level. This corroborates the empirical findings of this study and indicates that the gap between policy aspiration and institutional reality is not confined to KwaZulu Natal but reflects a national pattern of implementation failure across the TVET sector.

4.4 Low Educational Attainment as a Compounding Barrier

The finding that 62% of Deaf participants had an education level below matric reflects the cumulative effect of systemic barriers in Deaf education. Aarons and Akach (2002) report that Deaf education in South Africa has long been undermined by inconsistent access to schools offering matric level qualifications, a pattern that continues to characterise the sector. In KwaZulu Natal, only eight schools for the Deaf offer a matric certificate, and nationally only 12 of 43 Deaf schools do so (Jacobson, n.d.). Birch (2016) contextualises this pattern within a global framework, observing that Deaf learners consistently achieve lower levels of formal educational attainment than their hearing peers not because of cognitive limitations but as a consequence of the structural and communicative inadequacies of educational systems that have historically failed to accommodate sign language as a medium of instruction. Research from Hong Kong on sign bilingual and co-enrolment classrooms shows that Deaf and hard of hearing students taught within a genuinely bilingual model can achieve normative academic standards in core subjects, falling behind hearing peers only in a third, additional language (Yiu, 2024). Read against the South African evidence, this suggests that the low attainment documented among this study's participants is not an inevitable feature of deafness but a specific consequence of the limited implementation of bilingual SASL instruction in South African schools, reinforcing that low

attainment among Deaf learners is a product of institutional failure rather than individual deficit.

These structural constraints make FET Colleges an indispensable point of re-entry into formal education for Deaf school leavers, as FET Colleges admit students from Grade 9 regardless of whether they have completed secondary school (Department of Education, 2006). The findings do not suggest a lack of motivation or capability among Deaf participants, as 70% were enrolled in educational programmes through Deaf organisations and 58% had previously applied to FET Colleges, which demonstrates active engagement with the education system. The barriers are structural and institutional, not individual. This understanding is central to the Social Model of Disability, which locates the source of exclusion in social and institutional arrangements rather than in the characteristics of the Deaf person (Oliver and Barnes, 2012).

Richardson et al. (2010) provide important comparative context, finding in their study of Deaf and hard of hearing students in the United States that those placed in mainstream higher education settings without dedicated support structures faced significantly greater access challenges and academic disadvantage than their peers in institutions with specialised provision. A study of deaf children's access to learning opportunities in Tanzania similarly found that the phasing out of specialised Deaf schools in favour of mainstream placement, without corresponding investment in sign language support, deepened rather than reduced exclusion (Kimaro and Kileo, in a review by Mtavangu, 2025). Read together, these studies reinforce the argument that the mere enrolment of Deaf students in mainstream FET Colleges, without concomitant structural support, is insufficient and may in fact deepen educational disadvantage by exposing students to environments that are linguistically and communicatively inaccessible.

4.5 Communication Barriers Beyond the Classroom

The challenges identified by participants extended beyond the classroom environment to encompass interactions with administrative staff and the broader campus experience. Participants reported that reception staff were unable to communicate using SASL, making the process of enquiring about or completing enrolment applications inaccessible. One participant noted being unable to ascertain the outcome of their application because no campus staff could communicate in SASL. This finding is supported by

Tannenbaum Baruchi et al. (2025), whose case study of Deaf and hard of hearing students in higher education found that dependence on interpreters, transcribers, and technological accommodation persisted throughout participants' academic careers, and that inconsistent institutional provision produced ongoing frustration even where accessibility measures nominally existed. The barriers they encountered were rooted in the complex interplay between communication, language access, and learning, thereby necessitating comprehensive, institution wide responses rather than isolated accommodations.

Richardson et al. (2010) similarly identify administrative inaccessibility as a frequent first point of exclusion for Deaf students, noting that barriers encountered during enrolment and registration prevent many from progressing to the stage where academic support would be needed. Percival et al. (2025), in a South African study of Deaf and hard of hearing university students at the University of KwaZulu Natal, found that attitudinal barriers, limited awareness of Deaf culture among peers, and inflexible institutional practices contributed to alienation and isolation, and specifically recommended that reception, financial aid, counselling, and examination staff, not only lecturers, receive basic SASL training. These findings point collectively to the necessity of a whole institution approach to accessibility, in which all points of student contact are equipped with appropriate SASL communication capabilities, a recommendation this study's findings independently support.

It is widely documented in Deaf studies and interpreting research that Deaf individuals continue to face significant communication barriers when accessing public institutions, largely due to the inconsistent availability of qualified sign language interpreters. As a result, Deaf people frequently rely on informal communication support, including assistance from hearing relatives or friends with varying levels of sign language proficiency, particularly in institutional contexts such as healthcare and public services (Gee et al., 2022; World Health Organization, 2021). Within these constrained communication environments, Children of Deaf Adults (CODAs) often assume informal language brokering roles, mediating communication between Deaf parents and hearing institutions, despite lacking formal interpreting training (Napier, 2021; Gee et al., 2022). Research on CODAs entering interpreting training pathways highlights that although they may possess strong bilingual

competence, they still require formal instruction in interpreting standards and professional practice to function effectively in institutional contexts (Papin and González Montesino, 2023). Contemporary evidence therefore strongly indicates that this informal system is irregular and insufficient as a substitute for institutional provision of qualified sign language interpreters.

4.6 Awareness Gaps Regarding Assistive Supports

A notable finding is that no participant identified the need for hearing aids, note-takers, assistive learning devices, real time captioning, tutors, or other supplementary supports widely documented in contemporary literature on Deaf students in higher education (Borgestig et al., 2021). This gap in awareness likely reflects the fact that most participants had never been enrolled in a formal higher education setting and had not yet encountered the broader ecosystem of academic and technological supports designed to enhance access beyond their immediate reliance on SASL interpretation. Existing literature consistently shows that Deaf students often enter post school education with limited prior exposure to institutional support structures, resulting in underutilisation of assistive technologies such as captioning systems, speech to text tools, note taking applications, and digital learning platforms (Wendel et al., 2015). This lack of awareness is not unique to this study but reflects a broader systemic challenge in transition planning for Deaf learners entering higher education contexts (Hodge, 2024).

Importantly, this finding does not diminish the significance of supplementary assistive technologies. Rather, it underscores the urgent need for structured awareness campaigns and pre-entry orientation programmes that actively introduce prospective Deaf students to the full range of available academic supports. Furthermore, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) continues to be widely recognised as a robust framework for addressing such systemic gaps. Contemporary studies emphasise that UDL promotes proactive accessibility by embedding multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression into curriculum design, thereby reducing reliance on individualised, reactive accommodations (CAST, 2018; Bray et al., 2024). Within TVET contexts specifically, UDL has been shown to improve accessibility outcomes for Deaf and hard of hearing students by integrating accessibility into teaching, assessment, and digital learning environments from the outset (Cumming and Rose, 2022; Mapungwana

et al., 2025).

4.7 Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. First, the sample of 50 Deaf participants and two FET College management representatives, while adequate for the descriptive and exploratory aims of this study, is relatively small and was drawn from a single province. The findings should therefore be understood as illustrative of the KwaZulu Natal context rather than generalisable to FET College provision across all nine South African provinces, particularly given documented regional variation in Deaf school availability and interpreter density (Jacobson, n.d.; Heap and Morgans, 2004). Second, only two of six intended institutional respondents (four FET Colleges and one DHET representative) participated, which constrains the study's capacity to represent the full range of institutional perspectives on accessibility and funding constraints; the non-response of the DHET representative in particular limits insight into national level budgetary decision making. Third, data collection relied on self-report questionnaires and interviews, which are subject to social desirability and recall bias, and quantitative responses were analysed descriptively rather than through inferential statistical testing, limiting the extent to which observed associations, such as that between educational attainment and application outcomes, can be interpreted as robust relationships rather than descriptive patterns. Finally, although a SASL interpreter facilitated data collection and the questionnaire was pre-tested for clarity, the instrument was originally conceived in English, and some conceptual nuance may not translate perfectly across languages despite the mitigation steps taken. Future research would benefit from a multi-province sample, a larger institutional respondent pool secured through formal DHET endorsement, and instruments co-developed from the outset with Deaf researchers or SASL linguists.

4.8 Implications for Policy and Practice

This study reveals a significant gulf between the inclusive education policies enshrined in South African legislation and their practical implementation within FET Colleges. The policy framework is substantive. The Constitution of 1996, the FET Colleges Act of 2006, the White Paper for Post School Education and Training of 2013, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 2006, collectively require that public institutions provide equal access to education

for all, including Deaf students. Yet both FET Colleges in this study were effectively inaccessible to SASL users at the time of data collection.

The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016) draws a fundamental distinction between integration, which places the burden of adaptation upon the individual with a disability, and inclusion, which demands the systemic transformation of educational institutions themselves. The findings of this study confirm that FET Colleges in KZN are operating closer to the integrationist model, expecting Deaf students to navigate institutionally inaccessible environments rather than transforming those environments to accommodate Deaf learners. This distinction is critical to the policy response, as it demands not incremental accommodation but structural reform.

Rieser (2006) supports the Social Model in arguing that inclusive education requires the elimination of physical, intellectual, and cultural barriers rather than the rehabilitation of the individual. The DHET (2018) Strategic Policy Framework on Disability for the Post School Education and Training System provides an existing policy platform from which such transformation could be driven, and the institutional roadmap set out by Sol Plaatje University (2023), curriculum integration, accessible materials, staff training, and physical accessibility, offers a practicable template that FET Colleges could adapt to their own context. However, the evidence of this study indicates that this framework has yet to be implemented with the urgency and resourcing that South Africa's constitutional and international obligations demand.

The DHET must translate this commitment into concrete budgetary and operational action. An institution that acknowledges inaccessibility but remains unable to act without government funding is not a recalcitrant institution but rather a symptom of a system that has failed to implement the policies it has authored. The constitutional recognition of SASL as an official language (Republic of South Africa, 2023), read in conjunction with the binding obligations of the CRPD and its General Comment No. 4 (UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016), provides an unambiguous legal mandate for immediate and sustained investment in SASL inclusive provision within FET Colleges. Continued inaction is no longer defensible as an administrative or financial oversight. It constitutes a failure of constitutional and international legal duty.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has provided empirical evidence that FET Colleges in KwaZulu Natal are not accessible to

South African Sign Language users and has identified the absence of SASL interpreter services and the lack of dedicated government funding as the primary barriers to access. The Social Model of Disability provides a compelling conceptual framework for understanding these barriers as institutional and systemic failures rather than individual deficiencies, and places responsibility for accessible educational environments firmly within institutions and government departments.

The findings of this study carry several important implications for policy and practice. The DHET must urgently allocate dedicated funding for SASL interpreting services and disability support within FET Colleges. Institutions must develop comprehensive disability access policies that specifically address the needs of SASL users, treating SASL access as a constitutional obligation rather than a discretionary cost. All FET College staff, including administrators, lecturers, and support personnel, should undergo basic SASL training to enable communicative accessibility across all institutional functions. Furthermore, the DHET should collaborate with universities and universities of technology in KZN to develop training programmes for SASL interpreters, addressing the current provincial shortage of qualified practitioners.

The constitutional recognition of SASL as South Africa's 12th official language in 2023 must be

accompanied by concrete implementation measures in the post school education sector, including regulatory amendments that mandate SASL access services in all public educational institutions. This recognition represents a historic opportunity to translate constitutional rights into lived realities for the Deaf community.

Areas identified for further research include the effectiveness of learning through SASL interpreters in formal FET College settings, the extent of FET College inaccessibility across all nine South African provinces, and the reasons why Deaf students do not identify supplementary assistive supports beyond interpreter services as part of their educational needs.

In conclusion, the Deaf community in KwaZulu Natal demonstrates a clear and demonstrable desire to access further education and to contribute to the social and economic development of South Africa. The barriers preventing them from doing so are not insurmountable. They are the product of policy inaction, inadequate funding, and institutional neglect. Addressing these barriers is both a legal obligation and a moral imperative in a democratic South Africa that guarantees equal rights for all citizens. SASL is access for Deaf people, and until this access is guaranteed within FET Colleges, the promises of the Constitution remain unfulfilled for the Deaf community in KwaZulu Natal.

REFERENCES

- Aarons, D., & Akach, P. (2002). South African sign language: One language or many? In R. Mesthrie (Ed.), *Language in South Africa* (pp. 127-147). Cambridge University Press.
- Ahmad, M., & Wilkins, S. (2025). Purposive sampling in qualitative research: A framework for the entire journey. *Quality & Quantity*, 59(2), 1461-1479. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-024-02022-5>
- Albash, N. I. (2023). Evaluating the accessibility of higher education programs for deaf and hard of hearing students in the Arab countries. *Heliyon*, 9(3). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e14425>
- Aljedaani, W., Krasniqi, R., Aljedaani, S., Mkaouer, M. W., Ludi, S., & Al-Raddah, K. (2023). If online learning works for you, what about deaf students? Emerging challenges of online learning for deaf and hearing-impaired students during COVID-19: A literature review. *Universal Access in the Information Society*, 22(3), 1027-1046. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10209-022-00897-5>
- Andrade, C. (2021). The inconvenient truth about convenience and purposive samples. *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 43(1), 86-88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0253717620977000>
- Arnstein, K. (2025). Making research accessible for Deaf participants. *Kainos Design*. <https://medium.com/kainosxd/making-research-accessible-for-deaf-participants-992f77cb17a8>
- Azorín, J. M., & Cameron, R. (2010). The application of mixed methods in organisational research: A literature review. *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods*, 8(2), 95-105. <https://academic-publishing.org/index.php/ejbrm/article/view/1257>
- Barbour, R. S. (2019). *Introducing qualitative research: A student guide* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526485045>
- Barnes, C., & Mercer, G. (2010). *Exploring disability* (2nd ed.). Polity Press.
- Bell, D. (2024, June 25). South Africa has advanced the use of sign language. But there are still gaps. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/south-africa-has-advanced-the-use-of-sign-language-but-there-are-still-gaps-168424>

- Bell, L. I. (2003). Strategies that close the gap. *Educational Leadership*, 60(4), 32–34.
- Birch, H. (2016). Teaching deaf learners: Psychological and developmental foundations. *Deafness & Education International*, 18(4), 218–219. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14643154.2016.1245026>
- Bray, A., Devitt, A., Banks, J., Sanchez Fuentes, S., Sandoval, M., Riviou, K., & Terrenzio, S. (2024). What next for Universal Design for Learning? A systematic literature review of technology in UDL implementations at second level. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 55(1), 113–138. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.13328>
- CAST. (2018). Universal design for learning guidelines version 2.2. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/static/udlg2.2-text-a11y.pdf>
- Chauke, M., Ledwaba, R. G., & Motitswe, J. M. (2025). Teaching deaf learners in multi-grade classes: Perceptions from a rural Mpumalanga special school. *African Journal of Disability*, 14, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ajod.v14i0.1710>
- Classen, M. L. (2025). Experiences of inclusive education by teachers at an under-resourced school for the D/deaf [Doctoral thesis, University of Johannesburg].
- Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996. (1996). Government Printers.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Cumming, T. M., & Rose, M. C. (2022). Exploring universal design for learning as an accessibility tool in higher education: A review of the current literature. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 49(5), 1025–1043. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-021-00471-7>
- De Klerk, N. L. (2003). Spoken/sign language as a criterion for school readiness among deaf pre-schoolers [Unpublished thesis]. <http://hdl.handle.net/11660/844>
- De Meulder, M., & Murray, J. J. (2017). Buttering their bread on both sides? The recognition of sign languages and the aspirations of deaf communities. *Language Problems and Language Planning*, 41(2), 136–158. <https://doi.org/10.1075/lplp.41.2.04dem>
- Deaf Federation of South Africa. (1997). Education for the deaf: Proposed policy. DeafSA.
- Deaf Federation of South Africa. (2005). Bilingual education. <http://www.deafsa.co.za/asp/education.asp>
- Deaf Federation of South Africa. (2007). Memorandum towards recognition of South African Sign Language as the 12th official language. <https://static.pmg.org.za/docs/2007/070216memorandum.htm>
- Deaf Federation of South Africa. (2016a). DeafSA marches for SASL to become official. <https://www.pressreader.com/south-africa/the-witness/20160902>
- Deaf Federation of South Africa. (2016b). Deaf education. https://static.pmg.org.za/180912Deaf_Education.pdf
- Deaf Federation of South Africa. (2023). DeafSA submission/presentation document. Parliamentary Monitoring Group. https://static.pmg.org.za/230307_DeafSA.pdf
- Department of Education. (2001). White Paper 6: Special needs education: Building an inclusive education and training system. Government Printers. https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/educ61.pdf
- Department of Education. (2006). Continuing Education and Training Act 16 of 2006. Government Printers. <https://www.gov.za/documents/further-education-and-training-colleges-act>
- Department of Higher Education and Training. (2013). White paper for post-school education and training. Government Printers. <https://www.dhet.gov.za/SiteAssets/Latest%20News/White%20paper%20for%20post-school%20education%20and%20training.pdf>
- Department of Higher Education and Training. (2014). White paper for post-school education and training. Government Printers. https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/37229gon11.pdf
- Department of Higher Education and Training. (2018). Strategic policy framework on disability for the post-school education and training system. Government Printer. <https://www.dhet.gov.za/Social%20Inclusion/Strategic%20Policy%20Framework%20on%20Disability%20for%20the%20Post-School%20Education%20and%20Training%20System%20-%202018.pdf>
- Department of Higher Education and Training. (2022). Statistics on post-school education and training in South

- Africa: 2020.
<https://www.dhet.gov.za/Information%20Systems%20Management/Statistics%20on%20Post-School%20Education%20and%20Training%20in%20South%20Africa,%202022.pdf>
- du Plessis, C. (2025). Deaf students and South African Sign Language in teacher training: Avoiding a Procrustean “BEd”. *Journal for Language Teaching*, 59(1), 1–22.
<https://doi.org/10.56285/jltvol59iss1a6682>
- Fernandez-Lopez, A., Martinez, O., & Sukno, F. M. (2017). Towards estimating the upper bound of visual-speech recognition: The visual lip-reading feasibility database. *Proceedings of the 2017 12th IEEE International Conference on Automatic Face & Gesture Recognition (FG 2017)* (pp. 208–215). IEEE.
- Gee, A., Wright, B., Napier, J., Ackroyd, V., Phillips, H., & Hayes, R. (2022). Language brokering between deaf signing parents and healthcare professionals. *Communication & Medicine*, 18(2), 136–152.
<https://doi.org/10.1558/cam.20385>
- Glaser, M., & Van Pletzen, E. (2012). Inclusive education for deaf students: Literacy practices and South African Sign Language. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 30(1), 25–37.
<https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2012.693707>
- Gonçalves, C. L. (2024). Design methodology applied to the communication needs of the deaf community [Unpublished thesis]. <http://hdl.handle.net/10400.26/50472>
- Hasselbring, T. S., & Glaser, C. H. W. (2000). Use of computer technology to help students with special needs. *The Future of Children*, 10(2), 102–122. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1602691>
- Heap, M., & Morgans, H. (2004). Language policy and SASL: Interpreters in the public service. In B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Schneider, & M. Priestley (Eds.), *Disability and social change: A South African agenda* (pp. 134–147). HSRC Press.
<https://hpod.law.harvard.edu/pdf/SocialChange.pdf#page=146>
- Higdon, C. W. (2023). The role of the speech-language pathologist and audiologist in life care planning. In T. Rutherford-Owen, M. Barros-Bailey, & R. O. Weed (Eds.), *Life care planning and case management across the lifespan* (5th ed., pp. 409–466). Routledge.
- Hodge, G. (2024). Understanding the access and inclusion experiences of deaf people who use Auslan: A review of the Australian research literature. *Deaf Australia*. <https://www.deafaustalia.org.au/accessibility-inclusion-toolkit/understanding-the-access-and-inclusion-experiences-of-deaf-deafblind-and-hard-of-hearing-people-who-use-auslan-a-review-of-the-australian-research-literature>
- Holness, W. (2016). The development and use of sign language in South African schools: The denial of inclusive education. *African Disability Rights Yearbook*, 4, 141–172.
https://www.adry.up.ac.za/images/adry/volume4_2016/adry_2016_4_chapter7.pdf
- Jacobson, L. (n.d.). Deaf people? Is South Africa listening? The Writer Studio.
<https://www.writerstudio.co.za/lana-jacobson-portfolio/health-writing/70-deaf-people-is-south-africa-listening.html>
- Kelly, J. F., McKinney, E. L., & Swift, O. (2022). Strengthening teacher education to support deaf learners. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 26(13), 1289–1307.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2020.1806366>
- Lima, M. A., Garcia-Valcárcel, A., & Meirinhos, M. (2025). Inclusion in higher education: An analysis of teaching materials for deaf students. *Education Sciences*, 15(10), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15101290>
- Mapungwana, M. C., Matsilure-Cheure, M., Chisiri, B., Mutongoreni, N. A., Chikozho, M., Mutumwa, A., ... & Manhanga, S. (2025). Recognition of deaf students in promoting TVET access: Inclusion of sign language in higher education. *International Journal of Studies in Inclusive Education*, 2(2), 22–30.
<https://doi.org/10.38140/ijisie.v2i2.1928>
- Marschark, M., Sapere, P., Convertino, C., & Seewagen, R. (2005). Access to postsecondary education through sign language interpreting. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 10(1), 38–50.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/deafed/eni002>
- Matjila, T. N. (2024, May 21). Deaf and hard-of-hearing students need more support from their universities: South Africa study. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/deaf-and-hard-of-hearing-students-need-more-support-from-their-universities-south-africa-study-229816>
- Mayer, C., & Trezek, B. J. (2018). Literacy outcomes in deaf students with cochlear implants: Current state of the knowledge. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 23(1), 1–16.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/deafed/enx043>

- Mitchell, R. J., Ryder, T., Matar, K., Lystad, R. P., Clay-Williams, R., & Braithwaite, J. (2022). An overview of systematic reviews to determine the impact of socio-environmental factors on health outcomes of people with disabilities. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 30(4), 1254–1274. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.13665>
- Muzite, P., & Gasa, V. (2024). Experiences of students with disabilities in technical vocational education and training colleges. *African Journal of Disability*, 13, 1477. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-ajdis_v13_n1_a1477
- Napier, J. (2021). *Sign language brokering in deaf-hearing families*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Napier, J., & Leeson, L. (2016). Sign language in action. In *Sign language in action* (pp. 50–84). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ndibalema, P. (2025). Perspectives on barriers to learning opportunities among deaf children in Tanzania. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, 9, 100468. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2025.100468>
- Oliver, M. (1990). *The politics of disablement*. Macmillan Education.
- Oliver, M., & Barnes, C. (2012). *The new politics of disablement*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Othman, A. (2024). Sign language acquisition and education. In *Sign language processing: From gesture to meaning* (pp. 57–74). Springer Nature Switzerland.
- Palmer, J. L., Ivanko, T., Kinast, L., Lewandowski, K., & Bloom, C. L. (2024). Supporting deaf college students: Perspectives from disability services professionals (2023–2024). National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes, The University of Texas at Austin. <https://nationaldeafcenter.org/dss2024>
- Papin, S. M. M., & González-Montesino, R. H. (2023). The training of sign language interpreters: The case of CODA (sons and daughters of deaf parents). *Sendebare*, 34, 162–181. <https://doi.org/10.30827/sendebare.v34.27141>
- Penn, C. (1993). Signs of the times: Deaf language and culture in South Africa. *South African Journal of Communication Disorders*, 40(1), 11–23. https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/AJA03798046_739
- Percival, K., Ahmed, M., & Khan, N. B. (2025). Adjustment to the learning environment among university students who are deaf or hard of hearing. *South African Journal of Communication Disorders*, 72(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajcd.v72i1.1114>
- Pinzón-Díaz, M. C., Martínez-Moreno, O., Castellanos-Gómez, N. M., Cardona-Posada, V., Florez-Montes, F., Vallejo-Cardona, J., & Correa-Ortiz, L. C. (2025). Technologies and auditory rehabilitation beyond hearing aids: An exploratory systematic review. *Audiology Research*, 15(4), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.3390/audiolres15040080>
- Republic of South Africa. (2023). Constitution Eighteenth Amendment Act, 2023 (Act No. 3 of 2023). *Government Gazette*, 697(49041). Government Printer. https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202302/b1-2023constitution18th.pdf
- Richardson, J. T., Marschark, M., Sarchet, T., & Sapere, P. (2010). Deaf and hard-of-hearing students' experiences in mainstream and separate postsecondary education. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 15(4), 358–382. <https://doi.org/10.1093/deafed/enq030>
- Rieser, R. (2006). Disability equality: Confronting the oppression of the past. In M. Cole (Ed.), *Education, equality and human rights* (pp. 152–174). Routledge.
- Rotoli, J. M., Hancock, S., Park, C., Demers-Mcletchie, S., Panko, T. L., Halle, T., & Jones, C. (2022). Emergency medical services communication barriers and the deaf American sign language user. *Prehospital Emergency Care*, 26(3), 437–445. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10903127.2021.1936314>
- SAnews. (2023). Sign language officially the 12th official language. South African Government News Agency. <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/sign-language-officially-12th-official-language>
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2023). *Research methods for business students* (9th ed.). Pearson.
- Scharrer, E., & Ramasubramanian, S. (2025). *Quantitative research methods in communication: The power of numbers for social justice*. Routledge.
- Setshekgamollo, M. (2024). *Vision-based automatic translation for South African Sign Language (SASL)* [Doctoral thesis, University of Cape Town].
- Shakespeare, T. (2013). *Disability rights and wrongs revisited*. Routledge.
- Sibanda, P., & Tlale, L. D. (2025). Increasing participation in education of deaf learners in South Africa and Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Educational Development in Africa*, 10, 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.25159/2312-3540/17217>

- Skrebneva, I., & Fordham, L. (2024). Nothing for us without us: Student-identified approaches that can support the inclusion of deaf students in South African secondary schools. *Deafness & Education International*, 26(3), 213-231. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14643154.2024.2336943>
- Sol Plaatje University. (2023). Embracing inclusivity: Sign Language now the 12th official language in SA. <https://www.spu.ac.za/index.php/embracing-inclusivity-south-african-sign-language-as-the-12th-official-language/>
- Swift, O. B. (2012). The roles of signed language interpreters in post-secondary education settings in South Africa [Doctoral thesis, University of South Africa]. <https://ir.unisa.ac.za/handle/10500/6302>
- Tannenbaum-Baruchi, C., Ahad Ha'am, B., & Harari, R. (2025). Accessibility and support in higher education: a case study of deaf and hard of hearing students' perceptions. *Higher Education*, 1-20.. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-025-01586-x>
- Thomas, C. (1999). *Female forms: Experiencing and understanding disability*. McGraw-Hill Education.
- UCT News. (2023). Thumbs up: UCT welcomes Sign Language as SA's 12th official language. University of Cape Town. <https://www.news.uct.ac.za/article/-2023-08-10-thumbs-up-uct-welcomes-sign-language-as-sas-12th-official-language>
- UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. (2016). General comment No. 4 (2016) on article 24: Right to inclusive education (CRPD/C/GC/4). United Nations. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no-4-article-24-right-inclusive>
- UNESCO. (2020). Global education monitoring report 2020: Inclusion and education – all means all. UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373724>
- United Nations. (2007). Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>
- Van der Walt, A. (2015). Why are there so few Deaf university students – is it really a disability issue? *Word and Action = Woord en Daad*, 54(426), 27-34. <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC169208>
- Van Zijl, L., & Combrink, A. (2006). The South African sign language machine translation project: Issues on non-manual sign generation. In *Proceedings of the 2006 Annual Research Conference of the South African Institute of Computer Scientists and Information Technologists on IT Research in Developing Countries* (pp. 127-134). <https://doi.org/10.1145/1216262.1216276>
- Wendel, E., Cawthon, S. W., Ge, J. J., & Beretvas, S. N. (2015). Alignment of single-case design (SCD) research with individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing with the What Works Clearinghouse standards for SCD research. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 20(2), 103-114.
- World Health Organization. (2021). World report on hearing. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240020481>
- Yiu, C. K. M. (2024). Measuring academic attainment and progress of deaf and hard of hearing students in Sign Bilingualism and Co-enrollment (SLCO) classrooms: A case study. *Deafness & Education International*, 26(1), 90-124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14643154.2024.2303198>