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## Sign Language As a Teaching Strategy for Teaching English as a First Additional Language in South African Special Schools

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### Abstract

Deaf learners in South Africa are mainly exposed to South African Sign Language (SASL) in schools. Despite the introduction of English literacy in Grade 4, they are expected to become literate in English after nine years of additional instruction. However, SASL lacks a written form and cannot fully develop literacy skills. This study investigates how the use of an interactive digital storybook can support the development of English literacy skills among Deaf learners through SASL. Using an interpretive qualitative case study design, data were collected through interviews with Foundation Phase English teachers from three South African provinces. The findings reveal several challenges, including limited teacher curriculum knowledge, insufficient teaching strategies, and learners' inability to read English texts independently. These difficulties are linked to a gap between Deaf and hearing learners. The study highlights the value of SASL, especially when integrated with interactive digital storybooks and other visual technologies, in supporting literacy development. It also emphasizes the need for improved teacher training in Deaf-friendly methodologies and better resources to facilitate effective English instruction for Deaf learners.

**Keywords:** Deaf learners; English first additional language; Inclusive education; Schools; Sign language.

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## INTRODUCTION

South African Sign Language (SASL) is an official language and the language of instruction for the Deaf community. It has transformed the education of the Deaf learners (DL) in South Africa. The education of DL in South Africa was previously delivered through traditional methodologies, with limited recognition of sign languages for DL (James, 2019). The most recent official adoption of SASL, enshrined in the South African Constitution, has since positioned it as a medium through which DL can access quality education, participate meaningfully in classroom activities, learning, and achieve required academic outcomes (Mkama & Storbeck, 2023; Storbeck, 2023). This transformation aligns with the principles of Education White Paper 6 (EWP6) (Department of Education (DoE): 2001). This formal document forms the basis for South Africa's Inclusive Education Policy by mandating the right of all learners, including those with hearing impairments, to access quality education. An inclusive system acknowledges diverse

individual learning needs. Within this framework, the policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) (Department of Basic Education (DBE), 2014) contributes to ensuring the inclusion principle in all schools. SIAS provides guidelines for early identification of learning barriers, assessment processes, and necessary support to ensure that learners who experience educational barriers, such as DL, are included in learning, participation, and achievement.

Recognising SASL as an official language and a language of teaching and learning demonstrates progress in adhering to the educational rights of DL in South Africa (Magongwa, 2024). Despite the existence of this transformation policy framework, the education of DL in South Africa reflects a barrier-oriented perspective, particularly concerning literacy development (Magongwa, 2020). This study, therefore, sought to explore the teaching of EFAL literacy to DL in special schools, with a specific focus on understanding the pedagogical challenges and systemic limitations experienced by teachers in Deaf education.

The study aimed to contribute to understanding how educational practices, language policies, and teacher support strategies can be strengthened to enhance DLs' academic achievement within South African schools.

### *Literature Review*

While previous studies have explored the implementation of sign language (SL) in Deaf education (Magongwa, 2024), this study is novel in that it examines the effect of the recent constitutional recognition of SASL as an official language in South Africa (du Plessis, 2025) and investigates how policy shift is influencing teaching practices and resource development in special schools for the Deaf. Unlike earlier research, which largely focused on policy intentions or general barriers, this study provides current, content-specific insights into teachers' lived experiences as they navigate these changes.

International and South African policy frameworks form the foundation for SL use and rights in Deaf education. Globally, documents such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006) and the Salamanca Statement (United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 1994) mandate recognition and facilitation of SL in educational settings, aiming to secure equitable access and inclusion of DL. In the South African context, EWP6 (DoE, 2001) and the Eighteenth Amendment of the Constitution (du Plessis, 2025) have elevated SASL to official language status and underpin the right to education in a learner's primary language. The South African Language Practitioners' Council Act (Act No. 8 of 2014) regulates the accreditation of SASL professionals, further ensuring quality and professional standards (Wilsnach, 2020). Despite robust legislative support, studies note that the realisation of these rights remains challenged by implementation gaps in educational practice (Mkhize & Balfour, 2017).

SL plays a vital role in the academic, social and cognitive development of DL. Research emphasises that using SL as the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) is not merely an accommodation but a foundation for successful learning outcomes, supporting identity, cultural belonging and direct access to the curriculum (Bowman-Smart, Gyngell, Morgan & Savulescu, 2019; Holness, 2016). Linguistically, SL scaffolds the development of literacy, phonological awareness and facilitates transfer to reading and writing skills (Othman, 2024). Pedagogical approaches like visual aids, co-teaching and aided language stimulation enhance content accessibility and engagement (Chauke, Ledwaba & Motitswe, 2025), yet effective implementation is hindered by insufficient teacher training and limited curriculum resources (Majoro, 2021).

Teaching EFAL to DL is best facilitated through a sign-bilingual approach, where SASL mediates the delivery of EFAL content (Bianchini, 2021). This strategy addresses cognitive barriers, supports the transfer of metalinguistic knowledge and improves literacy outcomes (Gunnarsson, 2025). However, policy advances have not fully resolved practical challenges, as there is a notable shortage of teachers proficient in both SASL and EFAL pedagogy, limited availability of sign-mediated instructional resources and ongoing difficulties with standardising SASL for academic purposes (Mapepa & Magano, 2018; Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB), 2024)).

Barriers to effective SASL implementation include a lack of qualified teachers, insufficient curriculum materials tailored for SASL, variability in SASL academic vocabulary and a shortage of trained interpreters familiar with bilingual pedagogy (Aarons & Glaser, 2021)). There is momentum from recent constitutional changes and policy statements to address these gaps, with universities and Non-Government Organization's (NGO) piloting teacher training and digital-resource development (Anderson, 2025; Cai, 2024; Moodley, 2025). However, such solutions must be validated by native SASL users and Deaf communities to ensure linguistic and cultural authenticity (De Meulder, Kusters, Moriarty & Murray, 2019). Active community involvement in curriculum and resource development is critical for legitimacy and sustainable progress (Magongwa, 2024; De Meulder et al., 2019).

In conclusion, while significant legislative and policy advances have established the rights of DL and the status of SASL in South Africa (UNESCO, 1994; du Plessis, 2025), substantial challenges remain in bringing the gap between principle and practice. Addressing these issues require sustained investment in teacher education, curriculum and resource development and ongoing collaboration between government, educational institutions and the Deaf community to achieve inclusive, culturally-relevant and linguistically-accessible education (De Meulder et al., 2019; Kusters, Meulder, Friedner, & Emery, 2015).

### ***Theoretical Framework***

This study is grounded in the Context, Input Process and Product (CIPP) evaluation model by Stufflebeam and Coryn (2014), which provides a comprehensive framework for evaluating the implementation of SASL in the teaching of EFAL in schools for the Deaf in South Africa. Context evaluation focussed on identifying barriers, such as limited materials and inadequate facilities. Input evaluation addressed the suitability and the need for visual aids and differentiated curricula. The process component assessed how teaching strategies were implemented, emphasising multimodal and inclusive approaches. Finally, product evaluation considered equitable assessment outcomes, highlighting the importance of accessible, flexible and technology-supported assessment methods. Overall, the CIPP model enabled a systematic analysis of how EFAL instruction can be made more responsive and inclusive for DL (Madisha, 2025).

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

In undertaking the study, the interpretivist paradigm was adopted (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). This paradigm was appropriate for making sense of the feelings and experiences of Foundation and Intermediate special schools' teachers with regards to the teaching of EFAL to DL through SASL. A qualitative approach (Creswell, 2014) was followed to understand teachers' lived experiences of the phenomenon under study. Based on the focus of the research, a phenomenology research design was adopted, which provided an understanding of the experiences of teachers on the issue of the use of SASL during teaching (Creswell, 2013).

### ***Research Target/Subject***

The study was conducted in six schools for the Deaf across three South African provinces, Limpopo, Gauteng, and North West. The schools are in poverty-stricken rural areas and use SASL as a medium of communication and written English as a language of instruction. The first author was tasked with the selection of the sites because she had access to participants who shared her linguistic and cultural background in SASL. In addition, she identified participants who were readily accessible. Due to university policy, the authors were not allowed to contact participants without approval from the education district where they were stationed. Accordingly, permission from the University of South Africa (UNISA) Ethics Department, and the three education districts was sought to conduct the study. Letters were sent to principals, and the purpose of the study was explained to them during a visit by the first author. Based on the purposive sampling, participants were selected using the following criteria: 1) at least five years of teaching experience in public schools for the Deaf, particularly teaching EFAL, 2) competent in SASL, 3) qualified with a teaching degree, and 4) showed willingness to participate in the study. Seven female participants, aged between 35 and 55, showed interest and voluntarily consented to participate in the study.

In order to protect the rights of the participants and prevent harm, codes were assigned to each participant and the schools they were attached to.

### ***Instruments and data collection techniques***

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were held with individual teachers and were developed to gather insights into their perceptions, experiences and challenges. Each interview lasted for an hour, and the authors recorded the participants' accounts and responses using a video and audio recorder. Interviews were conducted in both English and SASL, and the signed versions were later transcribed in English.

To ensure the study's trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mukminin, 2012) and to validate the accuracy of data, findings, conclusions and interpretations (Creswell, 1998), the researchers collaboratively analysed the data. Verbatim excerpts from the transcribed interviews in the findings were included. Member checking (Merriam, 1998; Mukminin, Ali & Ashari, 2015) by sharing the interview data with the participants for their feedback was conducted. All participants consented to providing data and permitted its use in the final report. Another crucial factor in establishing the legitimacy of the study was that one of us shared the participants' linguistic, SASL and cultural backgrounds, facilitating a more nuanced interpretation of the results. The participants in every phase of data collection were engaged until the conclusions of the study.

### ***Data analysis technique***

The data analysis process followed the qualitative data analysis framework outlined by Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) and Miles and Huberman (1994), involving three activities: data display, data reduction and conclusion formulation. Analysis was conducted by categorising the data according to the dimensions of the CIPP evaluation model, Context, Input, Process and Product, to ensure coherence between empirical findings and evaluative frameworks (Stufflebeam et al., 2014). The data analysis occurred concurrently with data collection. After data collection, we presented information in tabular form to facilitate comprehension and organise ideas derived from participants' statements. Recordings were manually transcribed, including the signed versions of the Deaf participants, which were meticulously reviewed word-by-word and line-by-line, highlighting intriguing sentences from each participant. The objective was to identify patterns and themes to enhance comprehension and elucidation of our data among the participants. The transcripts from seven participants were analysed and compared to identify similarities and differences, organise and group noteworthy comments into themes and eliminate repetitive answers. After analysing the transcripts for thematic elements, we categorised and condensed them into a more manageable set of themes comprising a few key statements essential for our final report. To ensure the accuracy of our interpretation, we incorporated verbatim instances from the transcribed interviews.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

One of the objectives of this study was to determine the factors that contribute to the teaching of EFAL using SL. Transcribed data from interviews were coded, resulting in four themes, including 1) Teachers' curriculum knowledge, 2) Use of diverse teaching strategies to support language development, 3) Teachers' flexibility in the teaching of EFAL, and 4) Resource needs for effective EFAL curriculum adaptation.

### ***Teachers' curriculum knowledge***

The study's findings demonstrated that teachers comprehend the challenges to learning that DL face, as well as the relevance of the first language to English literacy development. This is echoed in PA1 statement,

*SASL facilitates engagement with a comprehensive curriculum, promoting the development of strong language skills.*

Teachers expressed their views on SASL as the primary language of DL and asserted that,

*It functions as an essential medium of communication in English teaching (PB2).*

They also claimed that possessing a primary language facilitates the acquisition of a second language and endorse its application in the EFAL teaching of DL, as reported by PC3,

*SASL use makes EFAL easier to teach, explaining concepts in SASL for comprehension. Remember, these learners are from homes where SASL is not available. They learn it here at school.*

These teachers are well-versed in the support needs of DL. Their application of SASL in teaching demonstrates their proficiency in the pedagogical approach, as they highlighted its advantages for the EFAL acquisition among DL. PE5, and PG7 reported, respectively,

*Deaf learners can benefit from instruction in both SASL and English, fostering a strong foundation for language acquisition (PE5).*

*I use SASL to explain difficult words, and also when reading, we start with signing the text, then back to English. We read English using SASL, and learners understand better that way, reported (PG7)*

This bilingual method is favoured in Deaf education due to its positive outcomes, as indicated by PD4, *Utilising both languages enhance the efficacy of teaching EFAL reading and writing.*

The strategy also improves the communication skills of DL. This was evident in PF6 statement,

*SASL use enables Deaf learners to broaden their communication abilities, thereby augmenting their capacity to engage effectively in various contexts.*

It can be seen from the statements that teachers position SASL as the prerequisite for all learning. Data show SASL serves three functions: 1) makes curriculum content accessible by converting English print into a comprehensible linguistic form; 2) operates as the medium of instruction for teaching English, not as a replacement for it; and 3) provides the cognitive and linguistic foundation for bilingual development and lifelong inclusion. Teachers enact an additive bilingual model where SASL secures comprehension, and English expands participation. The theme establishes that SASL is treated as the learners' home language (L1) and a gateway to English literacy, consistent with CAPS policy and international best practices.

### ***Use of diverse teaching strategies to support language development***

The study's findings demonstrated teachers' curriculum expertise, as seen in their referencing of approaches pertinent to DL. Teachers understand effective techniques that benefit their DL and how to implement them to address individual needs, interests, proficiency levels, and language barriers. Upon inquiring about the types of visual materials utilised, PD4 mentioned that,

*In my teaching, I use flashcards, posters, charts, photos, videos, and DVDs on a daily basis.*

PC3 highlighted the influence of visual materials on the teaching of EFAL to DL in their classrooms, and reported that,

*Visual materials facilitate Deaf learners' comprehension and vocabulary concepts.*

PF6 added,

*They make teaching and learning easier as learners can see what you are talking about.*

These teachers take into account their learners' learning interests when integrating visuals into their instruction. PB2 explained her reason that,

*Because of their visual learning orientation, videos are effective in instructing them.*

Nonetheless, PA1 provides an engaging lesson by employing both visuals and SASL, asserting that,

*SASL, when combined with visual material, enhances the lesson's significance and promotes participation.*

PG7 added,

*If my learners watch videos or pictures during lessons, it becomes easier for them to understand and the lesson is more easily remembered. It's not only words when we see pictures. The story pictures help them a lot.*

However, signed videos are unavailable in schools. The video teachers are referring to use audios. They use them for learners to watch, and then explain them afterwards. Two teachers who usually combine their Grade 1 classes during reading reported,

*They become attentive and ask that we pause the video so that I can explain what is happening, who said what, etc. I then allow them to ask questions when they get lost (PE5).*

*I do not have signed videos, but by watching only, some learners may understand because we use captions, and I pause now and then for them to ask questions (PA1).*

Theme 2 revealed that teachers select visual resources deliberately to match DL's visual orientation. The data reveal that flashcards, posters, charts, and videos are not used generically but are matched to specific linguistic goals. The critical finding is that visual materials only acquire instructional value when mediated in SASL. Teacher accounts describe a three-part process: visual input to SASL explanation for comprehension, then English print. This demonstrates that visuals plus SASL, not visuals alone, facilitate vocabulary growth and participation. The theme defines current best practice as SASL-visual-English sequence, where SASL is the mediating language that makes visual input meaningful.

### ***Teachers' flexibility in the teaching of EFAL***

Teachers demonstrated flexibility through their creative methods by making use of old reading materials. Teachers utilised outdated resources to construct pocket dictionaries for vocabulary enhancement. These dictionaries consist of images accompanied by relevant words and signs. A teacher remarked and said,

*What I appreciate about the existing old books is that they contain illustrations of sign words. I copy, cut, and paste images into my learners' books to compile a small dictionary, and they like it (PB2).*

PE1 reported why she likes the old books they have at her school, thus,

*I like them for vocabulary enhancement and for the abilities they foster in reading and writing, as they significantly aid vocabulary and linguistic development.*

When English sign language is limited, these teachers find alternative ways to convey EFAL information effectively to Deaf learners. This is echoed by PA1,

*I create my own sign for learners to understand.*

The frustration of limited resources is shared by PG7,

*I use equivalent EFAL words.*

As special needs teachers, they recognise the necessity of administering tests tailored to individual learners' language needs and level of understanding. PF6 reported,

*I adapt assessments as I know how Deaf learners learn.*

These teachers sign question by question until the end of the question paper, as they are aware of their learners' challenges with reading written text. PD4 remarked,

*I group my learners and sign each question. It's tiring, nevertheless, I must assist them in comprehending the questions.*

Another teacher, PC3, stated,

*If I do not adapt their assessment, they will fail. With extra time added, they perform more effectively.*

Based on the teachers' accounts above, teachers engage in reactive adaptation across three domains due to systemic gaps: 1) material improvisation: teachers create learner dictionaries from old books because standardised Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM) is absent, 2) linguistic negotiation: teachers and learners co-create signs for academic terms in real time because academic SASL vocabulary is not standardised, and 3) assessment modification: teachers manually interpret examination questions and add time because assessments are not designed in SASL. The data frame these adaptations as necessary compensation rather than pedagogical choice. Flexibility functions as emergency infrastructure, revealing that assessment validity and curriculum delivery currently depend on individual teacher labour.

### ***Resource needs for effective EFAL curriculum adaptation***

Despite EFAL teachers' proficiency in accommodating the late language delay among DL, this study reported that they encounter challenges with limited and resource materials appropriate for teaching. School resources, including digital and multimedia materials, significantly enhanced teachers' ability to deliver the EFAL curriculum, particularly during assessment administrations. Teachers felt overwhelmed by the scarcity of teaching resources, thus noting,

*Digital signed English assessments work best, as the learners can rewind the videos just like hearing learners turning pages. (PA1).*

PD4 added,

*Digital assessments provide a visual representation of the information that is easily understood by a Deaf learner because learners can see the signs and facial expressions used to convey the information.*

PB2 reported,

*Additionally, they enable teachers to concentrate on other important tasks while the learners are engaged in writing.*

This procedure gives teachers time to plan their lessons, but these lesson preparations need multimedia dictionaries. PE5 explained her reason,

*Since I experience challenges with signed English words, it will help me expand my vocabulary.*

PG7 indicated her frustration and said,

*My school does not have any, and lesson planning is a struggle as well.*

In this theme, teachers identify two missing resources as the root cause of current adaptation practices. 1) digitally-signed assessments: teachers specify that rewindable video is the functional equivalent of print for hearing learners, providing learner anatomy and linguistic completeness through facial grammar and spatial referencing and 2) multimedia dictionaries: teachers report complete absence of SASL-English dictionaries, creating barriers to lesson preparations and standardised vocabulary. The data position these resources not as accommodation but as baseline infrastructure. The theme establishes that the absence of digital assessments and multimedia dictionaries forces manual interpretation, sign creation and material improvisation documented in Theme 3.

Across the four themes, the study emphasises that SASL is foundational for learning, visual pedagogy is most effective when mediated through SASL and current bilingual teaching practices are sustained only by teachers' ongoing efforts to compensate for systemic resource gaps.

## DISCUSSION

This qualitative study explored how teachers use SASL as a strategy to teach EFAL in South African schools for the Deaf. In this section, we discussed the findings that explicitly reference alignment with both South African and international policies, including the literature sources that support our findings.

EFAL teachers have a comprehensive understanding of the curriculum, enabling them to adapt lesson plans to meet diverse learners' needs. As the findings show, their use of SASL as both a medium of communication and a teaching strategy reflects a commitment to leveraging the mother tongue in English instruction, a factor widely recognised as crucial for academic achievement (Bohringer & Storbeck, 2025; Makalela, 2014; 2019). Teachers' proficiency in SASL supports the effective application of a bilingual approach, aligning with research that shows the benefits of using both SL and English for DL (DoE, 2014; Bohringer et al., 2025). As Holcomb (2023) highlights, proficiency in SL is essential when implementing bilingual methods; however, as also noted in the findings, many Deaf learners begin school without adequate SL exposure, which can hinder their progress (Grace, 2023; Madisha, 2025; Magongwa, 2024; Kelly, McKinney & Swift, 2022).

The EWP6 of South Africa (DoE, 2001) and the constitutional amendment acknowledging SASL as an official language (du Plessis, 2025) necessitate inclusive education and the use of learners' primary language. The UNESCO Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) promotes the right of all children to receive education in a language and method of communication suited to their needs. Teachers' understanding of the significance of SASL and their use of it as a primary medium of instruction aligns directly with both national and international policy mandates. This practice aligns with the Salamanca Statement's emphasis on linguistic accessibility and supports EWP6's vision of inclusivity. However, the continued delay in learners' exposure to SASL highlights persistent implementation gaps, suggesting that while policy frameworks are strong, practical execution is inadequate. This indicates the necessity for enhanced early language development activities, as advocated by South African and UNESCO policy.

Consistent with recent scholarship, this study emphasises the value of translanguaging as a dynamic and inclusive pedagogical process. Rather than treating languages as separate systems, translanguaging enables DL to draw on their full linguistic repertoire for meaning making (Otheguy, Garcia & Reid, 2015). Teachers' reports of using both SASL and visual material align with findings that these strategies foster engagement and inclusivity in the classroom. However, as literature suggests and the findings confirm, SASL proficiency alone is insufficient for effective curriculum delivery; targeted training in relevant pedagogical approaches is required (Kelly et al., 2022). Ongoing professional development is thus vital to ensure teachers can recognise and support the broad range of linguistic repertoires their learners bring to the classroom (Wolbers, Holcomb & Hamman-Ortiz, 2023).

EWP6 promotes differentiated teaching strategies and the modification of instructional materials to meet the diverse learning needs of learners, while the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (UNESCO, 1960) and the Salamanca Statement emphasise the need for appropriate teaching aids and methodologies for learners with disabilities. The South African Language Practitioners' Council Act (Act No.8 of 2024) establishes professional requirements for language practitioners, encompassing SASL teachers and interpreters. The use of visual aids and diverse educational methods by teachers directly embodied the inclusive pedagogical practices advocated in EWP6 and UNESCO principles. Their efforts to modify materials and cater to individual needs exemplify adherence to the policy's learner-centred methodology. Nonetheless, the ongoing shortage of resources and tools, as indicated by the data, underlines a gap between policy aspirations and tangible assistance. This signifies that although legislation establishes a foundation for adaptability and inclusion, more investment in classroom resources and teacher training is crucial to attain the desired results.

The flexibility and resourcefulness of EFAL teachers, such as adapting old reading books into visual dictionaries and tailoring assessments, highlight their commitment to equitable learning despite resource constraints. These adaptive strategies, as noted in the findings, are supported by research showing that learner engagement and motivation increase when instruction aligns with learners' interests and needs (Tomlinson, 2017). Nevertheless, the ongoing shortage of tailored educational resources and adapted assessments remains a significant barrier, as documented in this study and in previous research (Kelly et

al., 2022; Mapepa & Magano, 2018). The reliance on teachers and interpreters to bridge communication gaps during assessments stresses the need for both language and subject-matter expertise, and the acute shortage of qualified SASL interpreters exacerbates these challenges (Deneke, 2017; Majoro, 2021).

EWP6 (2001) emphasises the necessity for flexibility and responsiveness in curriculum implementation to address the unique needs of individual learners, including appropriate assessment modifications, whereas the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) advocates that educational institutions accommodate the varied needs of all learners rather than expecting them to conform to pre-existing frameworks. The policies advocate eliminating barriers to education and establishing support services. The adaptability exhibited by teachers, including the development of modified tests and utilisation of alternate instructional resources, reflects the policy's mandate for responsive, inclusive education. These actions demonstrate that teachers are implementing the EWP6 concept in the classroom. Nonetheless, the need for teachers to adapt to resource constraints and the absence of formal frameworks indicate a lack of systemic support and policy implementation, implying a need for stronger institutional endorsement and resource allocation.

Digital media resources, as discussed by participants, offer promising avenues to enhance EFAL instruction and assessment. Their potential to increase accessibility and support independent learning aligns with prior studies on multimedia learning for DL (Astuti, Pertiwi & Santoso, 2022). However, these resources remain scarce, and teachers' reliance on personal devices highlights ongoing systemic gaps.

Policies including EWP6, the SASL constitutional amendment and the South African School Act (1996), along with the international policy, UNESCO Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), emphasise the significance of equitable access to quality education, appropriate learning support materials and the use of SASL for DL. The EWP6 explicitly emphasises the imperative of allocating resources for inclusive education. The necessity for enhanced digital, multimedia and SASL-specific teaching resources, as indicated by teachers, highlights a significant gap in policy implementation. Although legislative mandates the provision of accessible and appropriate resources, the reality in classrooms, as evidenced by teachers' reliance on personal devices and improvisation, shows a disconnect between policy and practice. Addressing these resource deficiencies is essential for meeting the obligations of EWP6 and constitutional acknowledgement of SASL, as well as guaranteeing that DL have equitable opportunities to access the curriculum. It is essential to realise the objectives, as outlined in both EWP6 and UNESCO frameworks, ensuring that DL are not marginalised.

The data illustrate a paradigm characterised by robust legislative purpose and teacher engagement, yet deficient systemic resourcing. Teachers are advocating for DL's rights to education using bilingual, visual and adaptable methodologies; however, they are simultaneously accommodating institutional deficiencies. The policy frameworks of DBE, the officialisation of SASL EWP6 and the international framework established by the UNESCO Salamanca Statement compel change. The data illustrate the practical implementation of the necessary change: SASL-proficient teachers, standardised academic signs, visual and digital LTSM and assessment designed for SASL-medium learners from the outset.

### ***Limitation of the study***

Several constraints may present opportunities for further inquiry. This study is limited in scope, encompassing only seven teachers from six schools for the Deaf across three regions in South Africa. Subsequent studies ought to encompass a more extensive sample with more data collection tools for cross-checking from all nine provinces of South Africa. It would be beneficial to examine teachers' use of SASL as a teaching strategy for the teaching of EFAL across 47 diverse schools for the Deaf in nine provinces and the benefit of the strategy in improving literacy among DL, including the challenges they encounter during EFAL instruction.

### ***Implications***

Implication for classroom practice - The findings require a shift from ad-hoc adaptation to structured bilingual routines. Teachers need to implement concept-first instruction where SASL explanation precedes English print and adopt 3-step visual protocol ensuring all visual materials are mediated in SASL

before English tasks. To reduce inconsistency, schools should establish shared sign banks for academic vocabulary and scripted assessments protocols for manual interpretation. Low-tech workarounds such as tablet-based SASL dictionary stations and teacher-created video banks can approximate missing multimedia resources while maintaining Theme 1 and 2's bilingual, visual model.

Implications for policy and DBE provision – Teachers' flexibility currently substitutes for system design. The data indicate that two resources are baseline infrastructure, not accommodations: digital signed assessments with learner-controlled video to ensure autonomy and linguistic completeness and multilingual SASL-English dictionaries to standardised academic vocabulary and enable lesson preparation. Procurement must prioritise these as core LTSM alongside textbooks. Additionally, corpus planning for academic SASL requires urgent Department of Basic Education (DBE) and PanSALB collaboration to prevent classroom-level sign creation documented in Theme 3.

Implication for teacher education and support – Professional development should focus on SASL-mediated pedagogy rather than generic differentiation, training teachers in SASL linguistics, visual-SASL-English sequencing and bilingual bridging techniques evidenced in Themes 1 and 2. In-service support must include time and resources for collaborative sign bank development to reduce individual teacher burden.

Implications for research – Further research is needed on the validity of manually interpreted assessments versus digitally-signed assessments and on the impact of standardised academic SASL vocabulary on learner outcomes across schools. Longitudinal studies should examine whether providing multimedia dictionaries reduces the improvisation documented in Theme 3.

In summary, sustainable curriculum adaptation depends on resourcing the system, not retraining teachers. Providing digital assessments and multimedia dictionaries would convert teacher flexibility from survival to innovation and align classroom practice with inclusive education policy.

## CONCLUSION

A gap in the implementation of SASL in the teaching of EFAL to DL was highlighted, requiring support through the provision of adequate and appropriate LTSM. LTSM is an inhibiting factor to the teaching of EFAL to DL. Teachers have a positive attitude towards the use of multimedia resources, incorporating both SASL and English in teaching EFAL to DL. They are also flexible in their teaching, as they develop their own materials and apply the limited ones to facilitate the EFAL curriculum with ease. Their knowledge of SASL enabled them to adapt assessments according to the D's learning needs. As primary school teachers, they are faced with DL who start school with no SASL skills, which is why they request multimedia materials. Their availability will create a positive classroom environment that makes it easier for learners to learn and promote EFAL learning, where learners feel included and supported. The study highlights that the lack of teaching and learning support materials reduces access to information, resulting in limited access to curriculum content. Inadequate resource provision hinders language acquisition, exacerbating existing language gaps in DL. All the mentioned challenges put teachers in a position where they need resources to facilitate the implementation of the EFAL curriculum for DL in schools for the Deaf in South Africa.

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