THE EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS OF THE DEAF CHILDREN IN A SOUTH AFRICAN SIGN LANGUAGE CLASS

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Article Info	Abstract
	This paper is based on a Master's degree study that investigated the experiences of teachers in introducing English First Additional Language (EFAL) to the Foundation Phase Deaf learners in Tshwane North District in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. In this school, EFAL is used as a language of learning and teaching, alongside Sign Language, for the teaching of various subjects in the classroom of Deaf learners. In this instance, it is used to provide access to written texts, while SL is used for communication. However, teachers are unable to meet the educational needs of these learners due to their inadequate exposure to both SL and EFAL. To find answers to this research problem, these questions were asked: What barriers are there in the EFAL teaching of Deaf learners in the Foundation Phase? What are the best practices in the EFAL teaching of Deaf learners in the Foundation Phase? The purpose was to help teachers develop better approaches to EFAL teaching of Deaf learners. A qualitative research approach was employed, and data were collected using five methods: focus and individual interviews with four female teachers, observations with learners, documentation analysis (learners' books and reports) and field notes of teacher-learner interactions. Collected data were analysed using thematic analysis. The results revealed that team teaching, which pairs one Deaf and the other Hearing, gives learners full access to classroom communication and learning and can improve Sign Language and EFAL learning. Furthermore, the teachers will benefit as they would be informed about the best practices and approaches for learners who are Deaf.

INTRODUCTION

According to Woolfe, Herman, Ray and Woll (2010), children who are Deaf and are born to parents who use Sign Language (SL), have access to language during infancy and thus are spared the effects of language deprivation. Their early first language exposure is critical for communication and social interaction (Curtiss 1977), which provides a solid foundation for second language learning (Cummins 2008). However, the majority of Deaf children are born to hearing parents (Lillo-Martin 2008) who do not know Sign Language (Mitchell & Karchmer 2004). The period between birth and the start of schooling is spent in a non-Sign Language environment (Van Naarden Braun, Christensen, Doernberg, Schieve, Rise, Wiggins, Schendel & Yeargin-Allsopp 2015), as they do not meet with Deaf adults. Ultimately, they learn SL at school from their peers, not their teachers because they are not fluent signers and cannot provide them with rich language input (Golos, Moses, Roemen & Cregan 2018). The lack of a first language they bring to school affects their second language learning, EFAL which impacts negatively their overall academic progress (Landsberg 2005; Hoffmeister & Caldwell 2014; Hrastinski 2016). EFAL is used in teaching various subjects, like Natural Sciences and Numeracy, to mention a few. SL which is used for communication and EFAL for writing (DBE

2014) are introduced simultaneously for curriculum purposes, and this causes challenges not only to learners but their teachers too. Five percent of these children do not become fully literate in a written language, and they often have poorer reading comprehension and other literacy skills than their hearing peers (SAHR 2020). Hence the researcher saw the need to explore best practices to support and remove the language barriers experienced by Deaf learners and their teachers in order to improve EFAL learning. Studies on Deaf education recommend the use of Deaf adults in schools for the Deaf as SL role models and also for educational and social support.

The use of SL in schools for the Deaf has been influenced by the social and political factors that shaped Deaf education in South Africa. The next section provides background information on Deaf education in South Africa and its impact on the current state of Deaf education. The third section will describe the research design followed by an analysis of the data. Section four focuses on the findings and discussion of the research study. The concluding part will be summarised, and the limitation of the study will be highlighted and the recommendations thereof.

A brief history of deaf education in South Africa

The history of Deaf education discussed in this section is a summary of the information detailed by Martin and Storbeck (2010), researchers and leading advocates for Deaf education in South Africa. This section begins with the establishment of Deaf schools in South Africa, followed by details on how unequal treatment under the Apartheid government affected both language development and access to education by Deaf individuals. It continues to highlight the changes brought by the democratic government under a Black president in 1994 up until the present.

The origin of Deaf education in South Africa

According to Martin and Storbeck (2010), Deaf education in South Africa began in 1860 with missionaries from the Irish Dominican Order, a nunnery of the Catholic Order, and later, the Dutch Reformed Church. The Dominican Grimley Institution for the Deaf, founded in Cape Town in 1863 by the Irish Dominican order under the direction of Bishop Thomas Grimley, was the country's first school for the Deaf. It was considered common practice to welcome Deaf children of all races at this mission and religious school. Depending on the missionary order, several forms of Sign Language were utilised to communicate with the Deaf and teach them. The Irish one-handed alphabet and Irish signs were used by Irish Dominican sisters to translate church services for Deaf members of their congregations. To communicate with and instruct Deaf students, the German Dominican sisters employed oral methods, the two-handed European alphabet and German signs.

Education

The Milan Congress fully accepted the oral technique for Deaf education in 1880 with just eight resolutions. Oral education, sometimes known as "oralism," is a concept of education that forbids Deaf students from utilising "manual" signals, which are thought to be a crude method of communication and inferior to spoken language. As manual methods of sign language were marginalised as a means of communication and education, teachers were taught using oral methods, which were seen as the more sophisticated and elitist approach to Deaf education. This led to a disagreement known as the "modality dispute," in which people argue about whether or not to adopt sign language and the oral approach. The argument is still being held today. Deaf people, educators, extended family and anyone interested in Deaf education are all involved in the modality issue. In reaction to the Milan Conference decision, the Dutch Reformed Church founded the Worcester School for the Deaf and Blind in the Western Cape Province in 1881.

The Worcester employed both hand and spoken techniques. Using only oral techniques of Deaf teaching, German Dominican nuns founded a school in King William's Town, Eastern Cape Province, in 1884. Other races were not taught in these institutions; they were only for Deaf youngsters from Europe. It was not until 1933 that the Nuwe Hoop School for the Deaf established by the Dutch Reformed Church opened for the Colored Deaf children. The first school for Black Deaf students, Kutlwanong School in Gauteng Province, originally opened its doors in 1941. The Paget-Gorman signing system, which was developed in Britain, was used in Kutlwanong. Due to the homeland's policy, which was a product of the Apartheid system, the National Party government, and the Bantustan separate development programme, there was greater isolation and fragmentation of the Deaf communities. By ethnicity and spoken language, other schools for African Deaf children were founded in different provinces. Kutlwanong School moved to Rustenburg and served the Setswana, South Sotho and Sepedi speakers. In Transkei, Efata School was established for isiXhosa speakers, Bartimea School at Thabanchu for Tswana and South Sothos and Vuleka School at Nkandla for Zulus. The other established schools include, St Thomas in King William's Town that served the Xhosas, Tshilidzini School at Shayandima for Venda and Tsongas, Thiboloha at Witsieshoek for Southern Sothos, the Dominican School in Hammanskraal was for Sothos and two schools in Soweto and Katlehong which catered to urban Deaf Black children.

The manual system of instruction predominated in Black, Colored and Indian schools, whereas systemic segregation led to the reinforcement of oralism in white schools, which also had the resources for advancements in acoustic technology aids. Because non-white schools lacked the funding for acoustic technology, some Deaf advocates believe that Black, Colored and Indian students fared better academically than White students. Unexpectedly, the superior results of segregation and the use of visual signing or manual instruction in these institutions had two main advantages: firstly, a deeper sense of Deaf cultural identity was developed, and secondly, signing skill or inventiveness was developed to the fullest extent.

The influence of the democratic government

After 1994, South Africa became a democratic country; a new language policy was adopted, and teaching approaches were developed to teach Deaf children. Policies and a new curriculum for Deaf education were drafted. The democratic transition in South Africa brought recognition of the status of children with disabilities as equal to their non-disabled peers. Laws, policies and constitutions were changed, but South African Sign Language was denied recognition as a language of teaching and learning for Deaf children. By so doing, Deaf children were denied their rights to basic education. This was in contrast with the constitution of South Africa, Section 29(2) which states that everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or language of choice.

Organisations representing the Deaf

The Deaf Federation of South Africa (DeafSA), which was established in 1929 as the South African National Council for the Deaf, represents the South African Deaf community on a national level. After apartheid was abolished in 1994, the organisation decided to redefine itself as a democratic organisation, which led to the name change. DeafSA campaigns for the cultural acceptance of the Deaf and equal opportunities in career and education. In 2007, the Deaf Federation of South Africa handed a memorandum to parliament to recognise SASL as a twelfth language. It stressed the fact that the use of SASL by a member of parliament to communicate required a standardised and a recognised language. Unfortunately, this did not spur the government into action. DeafSA asserted the injustice and unfair discrimination because the only language that can be the first language for Deaf learners is not offered as a school subject (DeafSA 2010). DeafSA lobbied for the recognition of SASL to be a subject in Deaf schools, but the Department of Education denied that SASL was necessarily a recognised

sign language. They referred to the Schools Act and that it was not an official language as the Constitution did not render it such but merely required the Language Board to promote and create conditions for the development and use thereof. The reason is the absence of a single version of SASL, a standardised SASL and an approved curriculum for SASL, and these factors make it difficult to recognise SASL as a subject.

The implementation of SL

The Department of Education suggested that a committee be appointed to develop the SASL curriculum with the help of the Language Board. In April 2010, the Minister of Basic Education appointed a committee, a Curriculum Management Team to oversee the development and implementation of SASL as a subject to be taught in schools (DBE 2014). The Department of Basic Education conducted an audit of 35 schools for the Deaf in 2013. The findings revealed that a majority of schools were not ready to implement the curriculum due to issues of teacher capacity and availability of resources. It was recommended that the implementation commences in 2015. The SASL curriculum policy was approved in July 2014 (DBE 2014). Thus, SASL has the status of an official language for purposes of learning in public schools for the Deaf. On 20 August 2014, Deaf learners were allowed to choose SASL as a subject like any other subject, following Section 6(4) of the South African Schools Act, but it was not recognised as the 12th official language. DeafSA continued to lobby for its recognition until 2017 (Holness 2016:141-190).

Learners with disabilities were granted opportunities to attend the school of their choice, even mainstream schools. Due to the nature of the disability of Deaf children and their intense level of support, special status was accorded to them. It was suggested that they be educated in existing special schools, which served as resource centres where teachers with sign language skills were available as resources. Irrespective of the opportunities and availability of resources, Deaf learners leave schools without national certificates. This is the case because teachers of Deaf children are not skilled or trained to teach Deaf learners, and most children start schooling at a late age (Glaser 2007; Magongwa, Parkin & Storbeck, 2009:136). This was proven in Van Dijk, Hugo and Louw's (2004) study which was conducted with 32 schools for the Deaf in South Africa with a total number of 664 teachers and 6215 Deaf learners. Only twelve schools were found to be using SL as the communication instructional approach because the majority of those 664 teachers have limited or no skills in SASL. This results in Deaf children's inability to reach higher education, as they are functionally illiterate - they cannot read or write (Storbeck 2010). South African Deaf teaching is firmly grounded on the oral approach (Van Dijk, et al 2004; Glaser 2007; Ngobeni & Maimane 2020).

After examining the above history of Deaf education, it became clear that both Deaf education and language of instruction use are complex issues in South Africa and have a complicated history that influences the current state of Deaf education. Deaf children were denied their right to quality education. Like other children, they should be taught in a language and environment that maximises their potential (Manuel 2013). Sign Language is critical for Deaf children and depriving them of the opportunity to learn in Sign Language can cause cognitive problems that they carry throughout their lives (Barringa 2013). Sign Language is regarded as the first or home language of deaf children, therefore, it carries the same status as any other official language and the educational benefits. Research findings consistently show the benefits of teaching learners in their home language. Using the home language of the learners creates a productive learning environment that leads to a better understanding of the curriculum content (Kioko, Ndungu, Njoroge & Mutiga 2014:1-11). Home language also boosts a child's confidence, as he/she becomes actively involved in a language barrier-free environment. The absence of Sign Language in Deaf children affects their learning of English and their overall academic performance.

RESEARCH METHOD
Research Design
        A qualitative approach was used in conducting the study and interpretivism research paradigm enabled the researcher to observe and interview the teacher participants. The study stemmed from a phenomenological approach and it aimed to explore the experiences and perceptions of teachers in a South African Sign Language class. Research design guides the researcher as he/she collects, analyses and interprets data. It is regarded as a plan of enquiry (McMillan & Schumacher 2001:72) to provide answers to the research questions. Because this study is qualitative, the phenomenological approach was found relevant, as I was trying to understand a particular phenomenon, teachers and their experiences in introducing EFAL to Deaf learners, the factors affecting the English language development of their learners and the strategies they are using in teaching EFAL.

Research Subject
        The school consisted of 250 Deaf learners but only two classes of fifteen learners each were observed during the research study. These learners had been enrolled in preschool classes since the age of four. The majority are born from hearing mothers and had not been exposed to Sign Language prior to school. These learners are taught by teams of teachers, a qualified hearing teacher, and a Deaf assistant teacher. The school is a primary school starting from pre-school, Foundation, Intermediate, and Senior Phases. This school includes learners who are Deaf and hard of hearing, however, the language of communication is SASL for all irrespective of their degree of hearing loss. All classes were team-taught but only for SASL as a subject.
        Data were collected to answer the research questions by interviewing four [1] teachers and their assistants. These teachers were working in a public special school for learners who are Deaf. The teachers had been paired with teacher assistants since the introduction of SASHL as a subject in 2015. Three teachers who were hearing and one Deaf were selected to participate in this study. Each teacher's experience, paired with a Deaf assistant teacher, and knowledge in teaching Deaf children were aspects considered for selection. Three teachers were qualified teachers with degrees in Education, while the third had a certificate in grade R teaching. The three Deaf teaching assistants had grade 10 as their highest grade passed but they were not interviewed. The three pairs were teamed for SASL teaching only.

Research Instruments
        To collect the data required for this study, the researcher used four instruments: observations, focus and individual interviews (with teachers), documentation (school and individual reports) and field notes (of classroom observations). Approximately one and a half hour of team-taught classrooms with selected teams was conducted by the researcher prior to the interviews. Deaf learners were observed interacting with their teachers.Focus group interviews were developed for the three teachers to obtain information on their perception of their work, their challenges in introducing EFAL, and their perceptions about teaching Deaf learners working in pairs. Interviews were videotaped with participants using English and Sign Language while interviewing the participants.
        The researcher interviewed each participant. These interviews allowed participants to discuss their experiences and perceptions about teaching children who are Deaf, with confidence and without any pressure from their colleagues. The researcher videotaped the interviews and transcribed them from SASL to English. The researcher made throughout the lesson from observations of classroom interaction between learners and their teachers. She wrote these notes in a log book and transcribed them from SASL to English. The researcher collected learners' progress reports for the two previous years prior to the study including each child's psychological, audiogram report. This was done for the purpose of triangulation. CAPS Policy document was collected for reference purposes.

Data Analysis

The researcher used qualitative data analysis to collect data. Teachers' videotaped interviews were transcribed verbatim by the interpreter. Interviews were transcribed from spoken English to written English by the English Language editor, and the Sign Language part was transcribed by a qualified Sign Language interpreter. To verify the accuracy of the transcription, a copy was sent to each participant asking them to confirm the written document. The transcripts were then sent back to the researcher for analysis. The researcher began with the initial interviews, having each transcribed and reread. With the videotapes the researcher collected, she watched them, rewound, paused and watched over and over again to see how teachers and their learners interact and the strategies used by the teachers. The researcher made notes on auditory transcripts of visual occurrences with the help of my interpreter and also used my log book to jot down emerging themes and ideas. The transcripts were then analysed and organised into categories, and patterns were identified among them. Data were then consolidated for interpretation which led to the results and recommendations.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Research Findings

Throughout this qualitative investigation, the following major trends evolved: all the participants at various times and in different contexts said they were unable to teach EFAL to Deaf learners. However, they wanted to learn more from Deaf adults who have expertise in teaching Deaf children. They gave different motives for wanting to be paired with qualified Deaf teachers. The fundamental finding of the investigation was the theme of bilingualism which necessitates team teaching. The researcher explored this theme through all the data collected.

Belief in Deaf Education

During interviews, participants were asked to share their beliefs regarding the teaching of Deaf children. Their understanding was centered around bilingualism which they believe to be an effective instructional method they deem beneficial in supporting the EFAL teaching of their learners. Participants described bilingualism and its relation to Deaf education. Their responses revealed some common patterns and their understanding and concerns centered around team teaching as a teaching approach and the use of modified assessment tasks. They believed that as teachers with limited Sign Language knowledge, their role to provide instruction in a manner that fits the needs of Deaf children is unfair to them. Bella commented:

> *I had to depend on someone to teach me. Learning Sign Language is difficult. My principal gave me an assistant to teach me Sign Language. I am failing these learners, and it's unfair to them.*

They believe that Deaf children are equally capable academically as their hearing peers, however, they cannot provide them with the quality education they deserve. Participants stated that Deaf learners were presented with a regular curriculum similar to that of the mainstream schools, which they see as important to their future studies. Anna commented:

> *I am not saying early exposure to language makes a child a good reader but at least it makes a difference. Our learners would have been on the same par as their hearing peers.*

They believe that the possibility of such requires competency in both the teacher and her teaching partner. These participants mentioned that being teamed with Deaf assistant teachers is beneficial to SASL as a subject. Unfortunately, other subjects do not get the same treatment at their schools. Busi commented:

We are paired with Deaf adults, for SASL only. Does it really mean the department doesn't care about other subjects? SASL is a language of learning and teaching. What about Numeracy, Life Skills, how am I supposed to teach these learning areas? We need to team in all of them, with qualified Deaf teachers!.
Reading and writing is required in all other learning areas, it should be encouraged but with limited SASL, I'm not coping at all, commented Ella.

They mentioned that teachers on the team were there for each other for a common goal. They realized that they could not work well as teams with Deaf assistant teachers in other subjects like Natural Sciences due to their limited content and vocabulary knowledge. They decided to team up on their own as Foundation Phase teachers, however, the challenge is the language of learning and teaching, as they have limited SASL vocabulary knowledge. However, with Busi being there, as a qualified Deaf teacher, they utilize her expertise, unfortunately, alone, she cannot do much.

Team Teaching and Its Benefits

Participants highlighted the importance of teaming two qualified teachers, one Deaf, and the other hearing. Ella commented:

Bilingualism on its own is difficult and it will take me forever to learn SASL, and my learners are struggling. We need to team up, that is the only way I will learn SASL and produce good results.

When asked why there was a need to team two qualified teachers in one class, why not a qualified Deaf handle her class because she is capable of working on her own? What would her role be in team teaching if she needed a Deaf teacher to be qualified as her? Bella said:

My understanding of team teaching in this regard is not only based on language proficiency but expertise and abilities to transfer content knowledge to the learners. This is the opportunity to teach based on strength and expertise."

Anna commented:

Let me say it this way. Each of us will have a different role in the classroom. It is not only the language that is at stake here, expertise too. Methodology in teaching children who are Deaf. These children relate better to teachers who are Deaf like them. I think they feel confident to learn in their presence.

Student learning can be enhanced by team teaching. By sharing a shared vision for the class, team teachers cooperate. The study's data sources unanimously concluded that teachers could benefit from one another. Teachers were asked to describe how they saw themselves as team members. Their responsibilities were determined by their backgrounds and hearing abilities. The most frequently mentioned criterion for role division was areas of expertise, although it might be thought that responsibilities within a deaf/hearing team are determined by the hearing status of the participants. Participants said that each team member's task type was defined by their personal preferences and skills. Participants cited the ability to teach using each team member's area of knowledge and strength as one of the main advantages of team teaching. For instance, the part teachers played in class planning and instruction depended on their familiarity with and expertise in a particular academic field. Ella said:

Mathematics is my major subject. As a result, I'll sit down and draft a preliminary outline of what I want to do and what I believe is crucial for whatever subject we are studying. Busi and I will then sit down and discuss the many conceivable activities.

Knowing where to find and how to use the right materials for various academic subjects was another *personal* skill. Busi noted that Ella had a variety of tools at her disposal for teaching

numeracy and that it was frequently her duty to provide them as needed.Through collaborative preparation, team members were able to educate one another and teach with flexibility in a particular topic area. Despite teaching different classes, Busi and Ella worked together on lesson planning. Busi donated her expertise to EFAL language instruction. Their difficulties stemmed from their reduced ability to instruct their students due to their bilingualism. Anna mentioned that she learned SASL from seasoned teachers, therefore it was clear that understanding the system and experience were additional elements influencing teachers' roles.

Deaf Teachers as Mentors and Role Models

One of the most experienced teachers at the school served as the team's mentor. Ella had been employed at the school for almost fifteen years. The Deaf team members will assume the position of Sign Language experts, providing the hearing teachers and Deaf students with this knowledge. The obligation for Deaf teachers to act as role models for visual communication, including behaviors that involve knowing how to draw a child's attention visually and when to time the display of visual cues.

Everyone who took part in the study asserted that collaborative teaching was beneficial to both them and their pupils. Access and expectations, social and emotional benefits, academic benefits, and language and cultural benefits were all considered advantages for their students. One of the benefits for Deaf kids was interacting with teachers who had high expectations for them. Each participant in the debate stated that they anticipated their students to achieve social, intellectual, and linguistic success on par with their hearing classmates. All of the participants believed that it was crucial to provide a deaf-friendly learning environment in the classroom to guarantee that students perform to the best of their abilities. According to Ella, having Deaf people in the classroom changed how all adults perceived the needs of the Deaf population.

> *The presence of a deaf teacher alters the behavior of every adult in the classroom. Due to a lack of awareness of deafness among hearing teachers and communication barriers, deaf children are no longer mistakenly believed to be unintelligent.*

All the participants stressed the language advantages for Deaf children who were exposed to an ongoing model of good conversation between two individuals and who were given access to incidental learning. Busi claims that the majority of their Deaf students come from hearing homes and infrequently get the chance to listen in on adult conversations:

> *The only places where children see people interacting with one another are at home or on television, neither of which is always an accurate representation of what might actually happen. Deaf youngsters in particular cannot see or hear what is being said between two adults. Kids might observe their parents conversing, but they won't understand because they often don't sign at home. It doesn't happen at home. So, kids become excited and feel included as they become aware of what is happening when they see us here at school chatting to each other.*

In this school, peer language learning has also been seen as advantageous. The presence of two teachers allowed for group settings where students could engage and share knowledge. Throughout the interviews, it was brought up multiple times how beneficial academics were. According to Busi, Deaf learners had "quite strong growth in academic metrics" according to formal test results. With the accessible learning environment and academic content, teachers anticipated their deaf learners to perform on par with their hearing counterparts. Everyone who took part in the discussion expressed a strong belief in the capacity of Deaf pupils to learn the conventional curriculum and gain a quality education.

All of the participants agreed that the range of teaching strategies used within a team was advantageous to the learners. Also, having a teacher trained in deaf education guaranteed that

the Deaf learners' unique needs, such as communication tactics and visually oriented course presentations, were met. Says Bella

> *Because of their lack of prior exposure, deaf children do not have the same background knowledge or general awareness of things that hearing children do. As a result, deaf children must always be on the lookout for concepts that they do not grasp. Regular teachers frequently presume a level of knowledge that Deaf students really don't have, and as a result, they frequently sit in class without understanding what you are saying.*

Advantages to teachers include the fact that team teaching provided the participating teachers with immediate advantages. Three types of advantages of team teaching were commonly addressed, including the chance to share tasks, the chance for professional development for teachers, and the benefit of receiving nurturing support from one another.

Regrettably, in the participants' instance, teacher assistants are solely hired based on their SASL proficiency. Due to their low material understanding, they are only present to assist during SASL classes, not other subjects, as mentioned by Anna:

> *Along with a Deaf teaching assistant, I am employed. We must collaborate on lesson plans and present them. When it comes to technology issues, she is quite capable, but her subject matter expertise is very restricted. She occasionally remains mute when I ask for a sign for a certain word. The results of my Google search will reveal that I am communicating using American Sign Language.*

In terms of Deaf education in South Africa, team teaching places a greater emphasis on SASL competency than on topic matter. Due to a lack of vocabulary knowledge in Sign to replace the content terms, learners continue to do poorly in areas like English and the natural sciences, among others. The only thing they are worried about is their lack of SASL vocabulary. Participants team-taught their grades according to their areas of expertise.

Modified Examination Papers

In this study, learners were given access to a standard curriculum and were expected to use their language in the same way as their hearing classmates. However, participants stated that because the exam papers are not changed to accommodate each student's unique academic needs, their children are unable to follow the standard curriculum. Ella stated:

> *Deaf students need to write deaf-friendly exams. It is stipulated in the policy of assessment and concession.*

The sentiments here suggest that there is a lack of curriculum support for effective learning and teaching in this school. The department of education is not assisting the school. The lack of teaching materials negatively impacts the academic achievement of these students.

I then went back to the issue of adaptation of question papers. I asked what difference it makes if their Deaf children were to write an adapted paper and how the papers are modified. I gave them a modified paper from the previous years to see if it was what they expected. Anna reported:

> *The test for Deaf students should be an altered version of the test used in regular schools. Picture compositions and description compositions must be altered when using visual representations. Language ought to be clear and concise. I believe you must comprehend the goal of assessment in order to receive a satisfactory response to your query about the impact of a modified article. Why do you assess? Exams must be rigorous in terms of criteria to ensure that all students are examined against an academic benchmark because the goal of assessment is to ascertain a student's academic achievement and skills. Students should be given the chance to showcase their*

> *accomplishments. Are the exam questions that our students get flexible? They are not,*
> *though. Are they taking the proper measurements?*

Bella reported:

> *Reading passages for comprehension shouldn't be too long. The sentences should be*
> *succinct and direct, with no unnecessary or window-dressing jargon. I propose that*
> *composition questions include gap-filling. Deaf students should be given the option to*
> *sign their comments on videotapes, if possible. I am pleased that we offer them,*
> *interpreters, during exams and that they are given more time. The same teachers from*
> *the school, nevertheless, serve as interpreters. They are incompetent interpreters.*
> *Although they speak sign language and are knowledgeable about the subject, they lack*
> *an interpretation license. The alteration of the exam paper is a more worrisome*
> *difficulty.*

Busi commented:

> *I request the involvement of teachers of the Deaf during the development of examination*
> *papers from the initial stage.*

Participants' responses indicated that they are well informed on curriculum modification. What they need is support from the department of education.

Discussion

Based on the goals and issues of the study, a theme approach was used in the debate. Results showed that while all of the participants were certified teachers, they lacked the necessary training to instruct Deaf students. It is claimed that teachers who lacked the proper qualifications also lacked the theory of handicap, the learning style, and the skills of educating children who are Deaf, notably the teaching of Sign Language. Interviews with the teachers revealed that while they are capable of working well in a team-teaching environment, they require the support of qualified Deaf teachers to give Deaf children a high-quality education. Also, it was discovered that the department of education did not know how to adapt exams for Deaf students and as a result, created exams with mainstream students in mind. Participants possessed a sufficient understanding of what Deaf learners required to benchmark their performance as well as sufficient experience to support effective teaching.

Team Teaching

The study's findings showed how important Deaf teachers are to both the staff and the classroom community. These personalities were seen to be crucial in helping all learners grasp the capabilities of Deaf people. While both teachers sign to one another constantly while team teaching, it has been observed that this creates a pleasant teaching and learning environment. Because they could observe the regular interactions between their teachers, this helps Deaf learners develop their social skills and work with their peers. This promoted their verbal growth. Children that are Deaf need to acquire their language from the living examples of Sign Language, which Deaf teachers provide them as language role models (Kanda & Fleischer, 1988). Till they are of school age, these kids do not acquire proficiency in any language. However, when they start school, they generally already lag behind peers with normal hearing in crucial domains like linguistic competence, world factual knowledge, and socio-emotional adjustment (Solit, Griffin & Border-Johnson, 1991).

Having Deaf language role models (Deaf teaching assistants) in schools is necessary since it appears that the school is the first and only location where Deaf children of hearing parents have access to Sign Language (Magongwa, 2010). In this regard, Magongwa argued that the role model should emphasize both academic and social benefits to children who are Deaf. These role models have a protective influence on Deaf individuals as they navigate barriers to full access at school. Nonetheless, the participants expressed their worry about Deaf

teaching assistants who were hired based on SASL fluency rather than subject-matter knowledge. They do have an understanding of the challenges Deaf individuals face, and knowledge gained from their experiences but they have limited knowledge on matters related to curriculum. Participants shared their expectations for their Deaf partners' teaching styles. One of the most significant benefits of having a team of two teachers—one Deaf and one hearing—was that they were on an equal footing. The learners were exposed to a setting where diversity was valued and acknowledged rather than belittled.

Everyone who took part agreed that it was essential for Deaf pupils to observe two adults in equal roles in the classroom. As stated by the participants, hearing adults' perceptions of deafness were altered by the presence of a Deaf adult in the classroom. The teachers in the teams appeared to expect more of them than the teachers who operate separately in a remote setting, which created a pleasant learning environment for the Deaf pupils. Nevertheless, they frequently lack the methods to set up a visually-oriented learning environment and the use of sign language. On the other hand, hearing teachers at this school have a practical understanding of what children are capable of at a specific stage of development. In this instance, team teaching encourages an environment where the knowledge and skills of both teachers are merged. Students in this study received the same standard academic program as their hearing peers. Their instructors supported this by designing demanding lesson presentations, giving students chances to apply their knowledge, and utilizing instructional strategies that encouraged language use among students. The issue, though, was the absence of exam papers that had been amended.

The use of modified question papers

Participants disclosed that the department's test materials were not adjusted for Deaf students. Also, the vocabulary employed in the question papers was too challenging for their Deaf students, and teachers of the Deaf were not included in the process of designing the question papers. They thought that hearing persons were considered when creating the exam questions. Because it supports numerous barriers, this has a detrimental effect on the performance of deaf learners. The 2016 Procedure Manual for Assessment of Learners who Experience Barriers to Assessment from Grades R to 12 calls for the revision of test questions to make them more accessible to Deaf students. The goal is for the students to demonstrate their understanding of the curriculum as effectively as possible.

An unmodified curriculum that gives erroneous assessments of the Deaf learner's knowledge and language skills hinders development (Marschark, 2001). The Education White Paper 6 further states that all students should receive the required help depending on their learning difficulties and that education is learner-paced and based. Given that Deaf children do not naturally have access to the first language, which hinders their ability to learn English, it is advised to utilise a modified question paper, an interpreter, and extra time. Since all of their exam question papers are written in English, translation in the form of an interpreter is necessary (Landsberg, 2005).

Instructors said that there are no qualified interpreters available in schools to help with exams. They presumptively believe that students signed agreements when taking exams. There was a concern about how impartially the interpreter would act if a sign language teacher was doing the job. Also, it is against policy for teachers to not check their   work (Invigilation Procedure Manual, 2022). Nobody is sure that there are no biases during exams because the teachers are not certified interpreters. Also, it was disclosed that the school employs a Deaf assistant teacher. How would these Deaf folks sign for a candidate if they couldn't pass the test themselves at that level? How would these Deaf folks sign for a candidate if they couldn't pass the test themselves at that level? Such a signing would probably harm candidates.

Another difficulty is the pace of the translator, who may go slowly or quickly. Signing questions one at a time delays the faster learners while signing chunks at a time hurries the

slower ones. Exam papers that have previously been signed are advised by the literature. According to the UCLan Declaration Assessment Processes and BSL (2012), deaf students should have the same freedom to move their question sheets back and forth as hearing candidates do when selecting which questions to answer or trying to better comprehend a question. For each candidate who is deaf, they advise presenting the exam questions via video.

Based on the goals of the study, a theme approach was used in the debate. Results showed that while all of the participants were qualified teachers, they lacked the necessary training to instruct Deaf students. It is claimed that teachers who lacked the proper qualifications also lacked the understanding of deafness (Storbeck 1998) and its impact on EFAL learning, the learning style and the skills of educating children who are Deaf, notably the teaching of Sign Language. Giaouri, Hatzopoulou, Karipi, Alevriadou & Kourbetis (2022)

argue that SL knowledge should be a prerequisite for practitioners involved in the education of Deaf children. Presently, this is not the case in schools for the Deaf in South Africa. Instead, Deaf adults are used as language providers. However, the literature supports this notion, as it is argued that when Deaf adults connect with young Deaf children regularly, their cognitive development is positively enriched (Gale, Berke, Benedict, Olson, Putz & Yoshinaga-Itano 2021) The researcher recommends that the Department of Education should employ Deaf qualified teachers to team teach with hearing teachers who lack proficiency in SASL. Literature also highlighted the involvement of Deaf adults as models of language and that hearing teachers will also benefit from this contact in terms of accepting SL as a variant approach based on the visual aspect of mutual communication Gaouri et al. (2022)

Interviews with the teachers revealed that while they are capable of working well in a team-teaching environment, they require the support of qualified Deaf teachers to give Deaf children high-quality education. Also, it was discovered that the Department of Education did not know how to adapt examinations for Deaf students, and as a result, they set examinations with mainstream students in mind. Therefore, the solution is for the Department of Education to involve teachers of the Deaf when setting examination papers. Unfortunately, most of these teachers have limited proficiency in SL, and Deaf adults who are available in schools for the Deaf have no teaching qualifications. The solution to this problem, according to Gaouri et al. (2022), is the establishment of formal training programmes at the university level for deaf adults' professional development.

The researcher further recommends that the Department of Education should modify the curriculum of children who are Deaf ,not only focusing on the modification of examination question papers. Department of Education should employ licensed interpreters who are knowledgeable of the subject matter to assist during examinations. In case where a learner finds it difficult to comprehend an English text, the Department of Education should consider alternative formats of presenting question papers to learners who are Deaf, for example, the use of video-taped question papers. Fortunately, participants possessed a sufficient understanding of what Deaf learners required to benchmark their performance, as well as sufficient experience to support effective teaching, thus their skills can be used when setting common examinations.

The study's findings showed how important Deaf teachers are to both the staff and the classroom community. These personalities were seen to be crucial in helping all learners grasp the capabilities of Deaf people. While both teachers sign to one another constantly while team teaching, it has been observed that this creates a pleasant teaching and learning environment. Because they could observe the regular interactions between their teachers, this helps Deaf learners develop their social skills and work with their peers. This promoted their verbal growth. Children that are Deaf need to acquire their language from the living examples of Sign Language (Gale et al. 2021) which Deaf teachers provide them as language role models (Storbeck 2009). Until they are of school age, these kids do not acquire proficiency in any language. However, when they start school, they generally already lag behind peers with normal

hearing in crucial domains like linguistic competence, world factual knowledge and socio-emotional adjustment (Van Naarden, Braun, Christensen, Doerberg, Schieve, Rise, Wiggins, Schendel & Yeargin-Allsopp 2015). The authors argue that because these children are brought up in poor linguistic environments, Deaf role models can play a vital role in the development of their knowledge, language skills and perceptions.

Having Deaf language role models (Deaf teaching assistants) in schools is necessary since it appears that the school is the first and only location where Deaf children of hearing parents have access to Sign Language (Gaile et al. 2021; Magongwa 2010). In this regard, the authors argued that the role model should emphasise both academic and social benefits to children who are Deaf. These role models have a protective influence on Deaf individuals, as they navigate barriers to full access at school. Nonetheless, the participants expressed their worry about Deaf teaching assistants who were hired based on SASL fluency rather than subject-matter knowledge. They do have an understanding of the challenges Deaf individuals face and knowledge gained from their experiences (Hoffmeister & Cadwell 2014; Hrastinksi & Wilbur 2016) but they have limited knowledge on matters related to curriculum (Magongwa 2010; Giaouri et al. 2022). For the fact that Deaf adults have a better understanding of the Deaf world and SL, which is significant for teaching language, they should be provided with formal training for professional development (Gaouri et al 2022). Participants shared their expectations for their Deaf partners' teaching styles. One of the most significant benefits of having a team of two teachers, one Deaf and one hearing, was that they were on an equal footing. The learners were exposed to a setting where diversity was valued and acknowledged rather than belittled.

Everyone who took part agreed that it was essential for Deaf pupils to observe two adults in equal roles in the classroom. As stated by the participants, hearing adults' perceptions of deafness were altered by the presence of a Deaf adult in the classroom. The teachers in the teams appeared to expect more of them than the teachers who operate separately in a remote setting, which created a pleasant learning environment for the Deaf pupils. Nevertheless, they frequently lack the methods to set up a visually-oriented learning environment and the use of sign language. On the other hand, hearing teachers at this school have a practical understanding of what children are capable of at a specific stage of development. In this instance, team teaching encourages an environment where the knowledge and skills of both teachers are merged.

Students in this study received the same standard academic programme as their hearing peers. Their teachers supported this by designing demanding lesson presentations, giving students chances to apply their knowledge and utilising instructional strategies that encouraged language use among students. The issue, though, was the absence of examination papers that had been amended.

The use of modified question papers

Participants disclosed that the department's test materials were not adjusted for Deaf students. Also, the vocabulary employed in the question papers was too challenging for their Deaf students, and teachers of the Deaf were excluded in the process of designing the question papers. They thought that hearing persons were considered when setting the examination questions. Participants suggested that teachers of the Deaf be involved in the setting of question papers. This is supported by Hlattywayo, Ncube and Mwale (2014) who argue that teachers of the Deaf are key stakeholders in the education of the Deaf and should be involved in the development of examinations for Deaf learners. They further argue that the poor academic performance of Deaf learners is a result of the unsystematic way examinations are administered. Test questions should be more accessible to Deaf students, as the goal is for the students to demonstrate their understanding of the curriculum as effectively as possible (DBE 2016).

An unmodified curriculum that gives erroneous assessments of the Deaf learner's knowledge and language skills hinders development and is very limited (Marschark 2001;

Moonga 2014; Storbeck 2009). A study conducted by Storbeck (1998) in South Africa revealed that most teachers of the Deaf are unable to adapt curriculum because they had not been trained in Deaf education. Glaser and van Pletzen (2012) endorse the same argument, as they indicated that only 14% of teachers of the Deaf are proficient in SASL. The Education White Paper 6 further states that all students should receive the required help depending on their learning difficulties and that education is learner-paced and based. Given that Deaf children do not naturally have access to the first language, which hinders their ability to learn English, it is advised to utilise a modified question paper, an interpreter and extra time. Since all of their examination question papers are written in English, translation in the form of an interpreter is necessary (Landsberg 2005). In support of these findings, Moonga (2014) suggests the use of pictorial representation as a form of adaptation. The author emphasises that every child has unique characteristics, therefore, these should be taken into consideration when setting examination papers for all children. It takes time for candidates to process information as they are expected to write in a language they are not familiar with (Moonga 2014).

Gascon-Ramos (2008) argues that the adaptation of curriculum and common examinations is the responsibility of the specialist teacher. The issue of support in assessment on examinations is a concern for many educators of Deaf children (Storbeck 2009).
Findings revealed the school lacks qualified interpreters to help with examinations. Teachers presumptively believe that students signed answers when taking examinations. Literature support presenting tests in SL is a justifiable strategy for removing language barriers resulting from low English fluency (Qi & Mitchell 2011). The authors, however, emphasise that this strategy is only likely to benefit Deaf learners who use SL inside and outside the classroom. The feasibility of using SL examination papers is proven in studies conducted by Mainhff, Bosso, Zhang, Fischgrund, Carlson and Carlson (2000) and Tidal (2006). Both studies revealed that Deaf learners using SL video-taped examinations where learners' mathematics answers were translated into SL scored better and that they understood concepts better; they were able to go back and forth to reconsider their answers.

Teachers raised another concern about how impartially the interpreter would act if a sign language teacher was doing the job. Also, it is against policy for teachers to supervise their subjects during examinations (Invigilation Procedure Manual 2022). Nobody is sure that there are no biases during examinations because the teachers are not certified interpreters. Similarly, it was disclosed that the school employs a Deaf assistant teacher. How would these Deaf assistant teachers sign for a candidate if they could not pass the test themselves at that level? Such a signing would probably harm candidates due to their lack of content knowledge and insufficient vocabulary relevant to the subject. This might disadvantage learners in terms of test scores. Literature states that interpreters should bridge the communication gap in examinations by translating examination printed questions into SL (Lozanova 2018). Therefore, they are expected to be competent in signing the specific subject content (DBE 2016).

Another difficulty is the pace of the interpreter who may go too slowly or quickly. Signing questions one at a time delays faster learners, while signing chunks at a time hurries the slower ones. Examination papers that have previously been signed are advised by the literature. According to the UCLan Declaration Assessment Processes and BSL (2012), deaf students should have the same freedom to move their question sheets back and forth as hearing candidates do when selecting which questions to answer or trying to better comprehend a question. For each candidate who is Deaf, they advise presenting the examination questions via video.

Recommendations

The researcher made the following recommendations: Department of Education to employ Deaf qualified teachers to team teach with hearing teachers who lack proficiency in SASL. Department of Education to modify the curriculum of children who are Deaf, including

modification of exam question papers. Department of Education to employ licensed interpreters to assist during examinations. Department of Education to consider alternative formats of presenting question papers to learners who are Deaf, for example, the use of video-taped question papers. Department of Education should involve teachers of the Deaf when setting examination papers.

Study Limitations

This study has certain limitations. The study represents a small scale, four teachers of learners who are Deaf which limit the generalisation of the results. Another limitation was that the study was conducted in the last term of the school academic year, when many teachers were preparing their learners for examinations. As a result, the researcher was faced with recruiting teacher participants. The findings of the study were not generalised because the qualitative research design was used to understand the phenomenon rather than the generalisation of results. Including a more diverse sample might have yielded different findings.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative study was conducted with four Foundation Phase female teachers in one school for the Deaf. The use of focus group and individual interviews, classroom observations, document analysis and field notes provided rich information for this study. This study revealed the need to extend curriculum support in schools for children who are Deaf. Such support is minimal at the present moment (Ngobeni & Maimane 2022). Several studies emphasise the importance of the multidisciplinary team (Gascon-Ramos 2008:64; Johnson 2004; Mapepa & Magano 2018; Reagan 2008). Professional support includes language pathologists, audiologists, social workers, education specialists and counsellors (Gallagher & Anastasiow 1997). There is also a concern with the modification of examination papers; common examinations from the district are not modified. Deaf learners should write deaf-friendly examinations and enjoy the same status as their hearing peers (Mapepa & Magano 2018). The Department of Education should ensure that all the teaching and learning materials for children who are Deaf are modified to address their barriers to learning. Furthermore, teachers encouraged the use of team teaching. However, they request that they be teamed with qualified Deaf teachers because the ones they work with were employed based on their language proficiency not subject matter. They lack vocabulary knowledge of other subjects like Natural Sciences and English, to mention a few. The teachers mentioned the need for team teaching; this is due to their limited SL knowledge, which results in poor academic performance of their learners. The study by Ngobeni and Maimane (2020) emphasise in-service training in SASL to curb the low pass rate of Deaf learners.

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