
Interpreting for students in educational settings: A National study

Research Guide

Commissioned by the Australian Sign Language Interpreters and Translators Association (ASLITA)

In collaboration with Deakin University, research partner

Funded by the Leonie Jackson Memorial Fund administered by DeafConnect

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Introduction

This work was commissioned in 2024 by ASLITA, the Australian Sign Language Interpreters and Translators Association. The research guide describes articles, books and reports relating to educational interpreting, Auslan, sign language in schools and bilingualism. The ASLITA Interpreting in Educational Settings committee was granted funding from the Leonie Jackson Memorial Fund, administered by DeafConnect. We acknowledge Leonie's work, and legacy, and celebrate the essential contribution of all deaf educators.

Amie O'Shea and Tamara Pearce

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the unceded lands and waterways on which Deakin University does business. We pay our deep respect to the Ancestors and Elders of Wadawurrung Country, Eastern Maar Country and Wurundjeri Country where our physical campuses are located. We also acknowledge all First Nations Peoples that make contributions to our learning communities.

How to use this guide

This research guide is intended as a reference guide for published peer reviewed academic work related to Auslan and educational interpreting in primary and secondary education. It represents a snapshot in time and is by no means an exhaustive list. The contents have been curated as part of the Deakin University and ASLITA partnership research project: *Interpreting for students in educational settings: A National study*. Deaf people and interpreters have contributed to the identification of the themes and articles included here, with the intention of presenting a wide and pertinent coverage of relevant academic work. We particularly acknowledge the work of Jen Blyth and her initiation and contributions to this guide and the wider project.

There is a focus on peer reviewed journal articles, the majority being empirical evidence, alongside useful summaries, reviews, reports and position papers. Material referenced here has been primarily authored in the past 10 years, with the high number of international contributions reflecting the paucity of Australian research. Article access is provided where possible. Some articles will however only be available as part of a paid subscription. In this case, we suggest you reach out to the authors, ASLITA or an interpreter colleague who is working or studying at a university who may be able to access the article for you both.

This guide is comprised of two sections. Annotated References are of high relevance to educational interpreting, language development or interpreting. In the subsequent section, we provide a list of general references related to the field that offer context and insight. Each annotated reference provides a summary of each article's focus, and any relevant study findings or recommendations.

Tags have been used to highlight the main relevant topics within each reference:

Deaf culture, bilingualism, good practice, language access, mental health, deaf education, explicit instruction, collaborative relationships, inclusive education, Auslan, classroom techniques, language deprivation, educational interpreting, interpreting accuracy, interpreting role, interpreting quality, student perspective, feedback, sign language access, language development, neuroscience, parent of a deaf child, sign language acquisition, Theory of Mind.

While the compilation of this document is the work of this authorship team, we acknowledge the work of individuals and teams involved in each publication cited and have not provided any additional commentary or interpretation. Our intention is to provide a guide, not a critique.

We hope this resource is useful for ASLITA, deaf students and their families, Auslan interpreters, teachers and education support staff working in the school environment.

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Annotated References

Deaf education and bilingualism

Age-Expected Language and Academic Outcomes for Deaf Children with Hearing Caregivers.

Finton, E., Hall, C., Berke, M., Bye, R., Ikeda, S., & Caselli, N. (2025). *Age-expected language and academic outcomes for deaf children with hearing caregivers*. *Journal of Special Education*, 58(4), 232–243. [Link here](#)

Tags: Deaf culture, bilingualism, good practice

This four-year study sought to assess the academic outcomes of deaf children with hearing caregivers participating in an American bilingual program. The California School for the Deaf tested all 797 students across four years. Deaf children with hearing caregivers who entered the bilingual immersive program before age three demonstrated comparable academic outcomes to deaf children of deaf parents. This study focused on just one school, where the conditions included teachers fluent in ASL and trained in ASL/English bilingual education, and where an asset-based view of deafness and Deaf culture was held. This study supports the assertion that deaf children exposed to ASL can achieve equitable outcomes compared with deaf children from deaf parents. It also suggests further research to investigate whether these conditions impact other long-term outcomes (e.g., socio-emotional well-being, and career success).

Deaf children need language, not (just) speech

Hall, M. L., Hall, W. C., & Caselli, N. K. (2019). Deaf children need language, not (just) speech. *First Language*, 39(4), 367-395.

Tags: Bilingualism, language access

This article argues that deaf and hard-of-hearing (DHH) children need full access to at least one natural language—spoken or signed—to develop cognitively, socially, and academically. It critiques research and clinical practices that encourage families to avoid sign language, especially the influential Geers et al. (2017) study, which claimed that signing harms spoken-language outcomes. The authors demonstrate that such claims are methodologically flawed and that spoken-language-only approaches leave many DHH children without age-appropriate mastery of any language, placing them at high risk of language deprivation and its lifelong consequences.

The authors review theoretical arguments often used to discourage sign language—such as “visual takeover” or the “auditory scaffolding” hypothesis—and show that none are supported by empirical evidence. Instead, research consistently indicates that early

access to a natural sign language supports healthy development, does not impede spoken-language learning, and may even enhance cognitive and social-emotional outcomes. They emphasize that the critical period for language acquisition applies equally to signed and spoken languages, meaning that delaying sign language exposure can permanently limit a child's linguistic potential.

Finally, the article addresses practical barriers that lead families and professionals to avoid sign language, such as concerns about input quantity, parental proficiency, or resource availability. The authors argue that these are solvable structural issues—not reasons to withhold sign language from children. They call for systemic investment in sign-language-rich early intervention, better assessment tools, and evidence-based guidance for families. Their central message is unequivocal: providing DHH children with early, accessible exposure to a natural sign language is the safest and most reliable way to ensure they achieve full language mastery and avoid the harms of language deprivation.

The association between early life access to communication and perceived mental health in a cross-sectional study of deaf Australian adults.

McRae, R., Zorbas, C., O'Shea, A., Adam, R., & Backholer, K. (2025). The association between early life access to communication and perceived mental health in a cross-sectional study of deaf Australian adults. *Critical Public Health*, 35(1). [Link here](#)

Tags: Mental health, language access

The article investigates how early life access to communication—within families, schools, and deaf community spaces—relates to mental health outcomes among deaf Australian adults. Drawing on survey data from 340 participants who became deaf before age five, the authors highlight the broader context: deaf people experience significantly higher rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation than the general population. They situate this within longstanding issues of language deprivation, limited early exposure to sign language, and the challenges hearing parents face in providing accessible communication during the critical early years of development.

The study's findings show strong associations between poor communication access in childhood and adverse mental health outcomes in adulthood. Attending mainstream primary schools—especially those without deaf facilities—was linked to markedly higher odds of suicidal ideation and, in some cases, depression and poor general mental health. Feeling excluded from family conversations was associated with higher anxiety and poorer overall mental health, while lack of access to deaf spaces during childhood also correlated with worse outcomes. Although the age at which participants learned Auslan

did not show a significant association, current fluency in Auslan was linked to lower odds of suicidal ideation, underscoring the protective role of robust language skills.

In discussing implications, the authors argue that educational and health systems must prioritise early, accessible communication for deaf children, including sign language exposure, culturally safe deaf spaces, and support from deaf professionals. They critique assumptions that mainstreaming is universally beneficial, noting evidence of isolation and communication barriers in such settings. The article calls for policy reforms, greater investment in bilingual education, consistent funding for Auslan learning, and stronger inclusion of deaf-led expertise. While acknowledging limitations such as volunteer bias and a predominantly signing sample, the authors emphasise that their findings reinforce the urgent need to address communication inequities to support the long-term mental well-being of deaf individuals.

It's not enough to move your hands beautifully': teaching and learning at a school for deaf students in Mexico.

Scott, J. A. and G. S. Kasun (2021). *It's not enough to move your hands beautifully': teaching and learning at a school for deaf students in Mexico. International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 24(8), 1128-1146. [Link here](#)

Tags: bilingualism, deaf education, deaf culture, explicit instruction, collaborative relationships

This article presents an example of best-practice bilingual deaf education in Mexico: a bilingual school (Mexican Sign Language LSM and Spanish) that primarily uses the natural sign language of that country and actively incorporates the deaf cultural identity in its teaching. Researchers took a case-study approach, spent time shadowing educators and students, conducting semi-structured interviews with the teaching staff and focus groups with students.

The authors identified three essential elements of best practice: recognising deafness as central to education; effective instructional (teaching) practices; and collaboration between educators, administrators and students. Connection to deaf culture and deaf community was central to the school's approach. The instructional practices of scaffolding, explicit instruction, and building a knowledge base were identified as best practice teaching methods. Best practice in collaboration referred to both learning as a social activity (collaboration between students) and collaboration between the teaching staff and administration (educators).

Preservice teachers' motivations and perceived benefits of undertaking an introductory course in Auslan

Sempowicz, T., Burtenshaw, R., Devi, A., & Grainger, P. (2025). Preservice teachers' motivations and perceived benefits of undertaking an introductory course in Auslan. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1–16. [Link here](#)

Tags: Inclusive education, Auslan

This article explores the motivations and perceived benefits of learning Auslan, from 15 pre-service teachers who participated one of two introductory Auslan classes run over six or seven weeks, for two hours weekly. The study sought to identify teachers' motivations for learning Auslan and the perceived benefits of doing so. The findings are presented within five themes; the significance of a native Auslan instructor in learning about culture and personal experience as well as language; participants were challenged to think about new ways to communicate; Auslan was put into practice in multiple ways; Auslan was integrated into the classroom for routine activities and finally many participants indicated a desire to continue learning. The researchers recommend ongoing implementation of introductory Auslan courses and the development of programs for pre-service teachers to apply their learning in their future teaching practice.

Educational Interpreting

Visual access in interpreter-mediated learning situations for deaf and hard-of-hearing high school students where an artifact is in use.

Berge, S. S., & Thomassen, G. (2015). Visual access in interpreter-mediated learning situations for deaf and hard-of-hearing high school students where an artifact is in use. *The Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 21(2), 187-199.

Tags: Educational interpreting, classroom techniques, collaborative relationships

This study from Norway looks at the use of visual artefacts in teaching and describes the challenges of attending concurrently to the teachers use of gesture, the artefact and verbal references in an interpreter mediated learning environment. A deaf student can only visually attend to one source at a time. The research identifies the interpreter's mediation strategies in the classroom and the role of the interpreter and teacher in coordinating the mediated instruction to accommodate the student's visual orientation. The authors explore the skills and strategies an interpreter can use when visual teaching aids are used, but also the value of the relationship between the teacher and interpreter to work together in real time for the best outcome. Strategies used by the interpreter included changes to where the interpreter is placed, changes in the location of hands, pointing gestures and direct questions to the deaf students.

The article reviews the role of the interpreter out of the classroom (preparation strategies), collaboration strategies in the classroom with the teacher, and concludes by calling for more discussion on the professional practice and responsibilities of the interpreter and teacher to create an optimal learning environment.

Interpreters' use of environmentally coupled gestures to achieve mutual understanding of speaker identity in a deaf and hearing classroom.

Slettebakk Berge, S. (2023). Interpreters' use of environmentally coupled gestures to achieve mutual understanding of speaker identity in a deaf and hearing classroom. *Lingua*, 284, Article 103486. [Link here](#)

Tags: Educational interpreting, classroom techniques, collaborative relationships

This study focuses on turn-taking between deaf and hearing students in a classroom. Through observations, interviews, and video-recorded data from a case study situated in a Norwegian mainstream, upper secondary school, methods of speaker identification are described. A hearing student identifies the speaker by the voice and location of the speaker, whereas a deaf student is focused in one direction (the interpreter) and relies on cues to understand who is speaking. The study identified numerous cues that indicated who was speaking, including environmentally coupled gestures like pointing, shifts in body positions, shifts in gaze orientations, and shifts in facial gestures. The author explores links between language, meaning making and participation and acknowledges active participation in dialogues and learning activities is foundational for academic learning. Navigating turn-taking is therefore critical. The interpreter must use their professional experience to analyse and act according to the dialogue, the context and the purpose of the interaction. The article concludes by calling for interpreters and teachers to work collaboratively to create more inclusive learning environments.

American Sign Language interpreters in public schools: An illusion of inclusion that perpetuates language deprivation

Caselli, N. K., Hall, W. C., & Henner, J. (2020). American Sign Language interpreters in public schools: An illusion of inclusion that perpetuates language deprivation. *Maternal & Child Health Journal*, 24(11), 1323-1329.

Tags: Language deprivation, educational interpreting

This article proposes some key differences between the educational profiles of deaf and language deprived students. Language deprived students require direct language instruction, which is not in the training or role of the interpreter. They argue that therefore an interpreter alone cannot meet the needs of language deprived students. In fact, only

providing interpreters without the additional complex supports and instruction required for this group may further exacerbate their language deprivation.

The authors recommend that deaf children be evaluated for language deprivation, and supports are provided for their specific needs. Given the current absence of validated language deprivation assessment, they describe some of the potential needs around accessible and rich educational environments, direct peer exchanges and staff with expertise in language deprivation. They state that interpreters should provide information about language deprivation and help challenge the idea that educational interpreting is sufficient to meet the needs of most deaf students.

Interpreters: Facilitating Communication or Facilitating Education?¹

Fitzmaurice, S. B. (2021). *Educational interpreters: Facilitating communication or facilitating education?* In E. A. Winston & S. B. Fitzmaurice (Eds.), *Advances in educational interpreting* (pp. 245–265). Gallaudet University Press.

Tags: Interpreting accuracy, educational interpreting, interpreting role

The authors conducted a study involving a deep analysis of a secondary biology class taught by a science teacher and a special education teacher. Five consecutive sessions were video recorded and semi-structured interviews were conducted with the interpreter, teachers and deaf student. The interpreter held a bachelor degree in educational interpreting and had four years experience; the teachers and deaf student had no training on how to work together. This left the interpreter to make real-time decisions about what the deaf student and interpreter needed. The interpreter focused on foundational concepts, often continuing with a concept until she felt the student understood, even if the class had moved on.

The study found that the educational interpreter spent more time acting as a direct instructor than as an interpreter, which significantly reduced the deaf student's access to classroom discourse. Across nearly four hours of instruction, only 36% of classroom communication was interpreted, and 56% of all spoken discourse was not interpreted at all. Lecture and discussion were interpreted more often, but still inconsistently, while independent work time resulted in the greatest loss of access. These patterns show that when interpreters take on multiple roles—especially tutoring—communication access declines, limiting the deaf student's exposure to academic, social, and incidental learning opportunities. A decision must be made if the interpreter is to facilitate communication or facilitate education.

The realistic role metaphor for educational interpreters

Fitzmaurice, S. B. (2021). The realistic role metaphor for educational interpreters. In E. A. Winston & S. B. Fitzmaurice (Eds.), *Advances in educational interpreting* (pp. 285–302). Gallaudet University Press.

Tags: Interpreting role, educational interpreting

This book chapter provides a history of the types of role an interpreter has undertaken across time, describing the behaviours typically demonstrated by interpreters in each role. These include the Helper, Conduit and Communication Facilitator. The author discusses role confusion regarding the educational interpreter from the perspective of administrators, teachers, interpreters and the deaf student. Different role assumptions lead to confusion.

Unpacking mediated education and the evolving roles and functions of educational interpreters introduces further roles, including a Facilitator and Quasi-Teacher. The author describes previous work which details the roles and functions of an educational interpreter in the American system. The Partners in Education role metaphor is introduced, with its five points: interpreting, consulting, assisting, instructing and advocating. The interpreter moves fluidly between these roles at different times. This role is proposed as the first step in minimizing role ambiguity and role conflict in education.

Professional Issues in the Interpreted Education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students

Guynes, K., & Wood, C. (2024). Professional Issues in the Interpreted Education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 169(3), 262-283. [Link here](#)

Tags: Educational interpreting, inclusive education, interpreter role, collaborative relationship

This American study examined the views of seven Teachers of the Deaf who are d/Deaf and hard of hearing working in inclusive education environments, specifically their reflections on the practice of educational interpreters. They were chosen because of their responsibility to oversee interpreted education in a public school setting. The perceptions of the teachers were sought around inclusive and interpreted education and three central themes were identified: unsupported mainstream placements, schools lacking adequate supports, qualified professionals, and the expertise needed to ensure students have the linguistic and cognitive skills required to access interpreted education; language and communication-modality mismatches, including professionals who lack the language proficiency to work effectively with students, demonstrate bias, disregard students' preferences and needs, and continue to violate educational and legal mandates; and

finally inadequate standards for interpreted education, including the employment of less-skilled interpreters in educational settings.

Classroom discourse: What is conveyed through educational interpretation.

Langer, E. C., & Crume, P. K. (2024). Classroom discourse: What is conveyed through educational interpretation. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 29(1), 40-59.

Tags: Educational interpreting, Interpreting quality, Interpreting accuracy, inclusive education

The authors seek to measure and understand the quality of interpreting in the classroom, and how the interpreting process impacts the original message. They analysed the video recording of the expressive (voice to sign) component of the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment for 40 educational interpreters across the United States and Canada. The study explored seven elements of classroom discourse. These included: (1) stating main ideas, (2) providing instructions for class projects, (3) eliciting student participation, (4) engaging in metacognitive discussion, and *situating learning* through: (6) orienting commentary, (5) relevance strategies, and (7) cues for semantic organization. The authors found that clear and complete interpretation across all seven areas occurred one-to-two thirds (Mean = 48.6%) of the time. One element, statements of main ideas was clearly and completely conveyed 59% of the time. Many interpretations omitted significant portions of the utterances and provided additions or substitutions that altered the original intents and meaning of the teachers' utterances. The study concludes that deaf students accessing learning through an interpreter are disadvantaged.

This study is significant because it highlights that regardless of the interpreter's skill and experience, the access a deaf student receives is not equivalent to their hearing peers. The authors recommend systemic change, starting with awareness on the part of students, teachers, parents, interpreters and administrators that simultaneous interpretation is inherently fallible. The study recommends initial and continued training for open communication and preparation between the teacher, interpreter and student; providing supplemental support; and finally establishing ongoing monitoring of the process. Training for classroom teachers to monitor the pace of the classroom would assist, along with understanding that the interpreting process is fallible and the need for supplemental support such as preparation time to consider the teaching materials and teacher goals are important.

The interpreter's role and deaf students' autonomy in mainstream classrooms.

Prinzi, L. M. (2024). The interpreter's role and deaf students' autonomy in mainstream classrooms. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 29(3), 412–423. [Link here](#)

Tags: Educational interpreting, interpreting role, student perspective, collaborative relationships

This American study explores the views of interpreters and deaf students on the role of the educational interpreter in a mainstream environment. This study is significant because it discusses the role of the interpreter in the classroom, interactional dynamics and explores what makes an effective interpreter in education as identified by interpreters and deaf signing students. The author interviewed 41 deaf former students of mainstream education. Deaf signing students reported interpreters were responsible for communication and access, and that teachers were responsible for learning and behaviour. Students reported negative experiences when interpreters were positioned akin to classroom teachers. Interpreters taking on a disciplinary role can result in deaf students feeling prevented from being autonomous and equal classroom participants. Findings indicated that the greatest student autonomy occurred when interpreters and students collaborated, where the interpreter was perceived as an 'educational partner'. However, the study found that the role of the education team members including interpreters was not explicitly communicated to deaf students, leading to confusion. There is a need to educate and clarify the role of the interpreter with deaf students, mainstream classroom faculty and interpreters themselves.

The article recommends more opportunities for interpreters and students to discuss the interpreter role, and to revisit, renegotiate, or revise as needed. More education and training for education staff on the role of the interpreter and working with deaf students are needed.

Deaf Student–Interpreter Relationships and Feedback Practices in K-12 Mainstream Deaf Education

Prinzi, L. M. (2023). Deaf Student–Interpreter Relationships and Feedback Practices in K-12 Mainstream Deaf Education, *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, Volume 28, Issue 1, January 2023, Pages 68–83. [Link here](#)

Tags: Educational interpreting, feedback, student experience

This study explored perceptions of former deaf students (K-12) and interpreters working in those settings. The authors report that deaf students do not always know that they can engage in feedback conversations with interpreters, nor are they given the tools or resources to resolve interpreting issues. The students may also fear reprisal. Students were more likely to approach a third-party to pass on feedback. Interpreters preferred a direct feedback relationship, rather than through a third-party. Interpreters felt the feedback should go both ways, and viewed the relationship with the student as one of a partnership. The study emphasises the importance of the interpreter-student

relationship, which can impact the deaf students self-perception as either ‘empowered and engaged’ or ‘powerless and disengaged’. The authors also conclude by highlighting the gaps in support for both students and interpreters, including orientation for students on how to work with interpreters.

Tapping into the interpreting process: Using participant reports to inform the interpreting process in educational settings.

Russell, D., & Winston, B. (2014). Tapping into the interpreting process: Using participant reports to inform the interpreting process in educational settings. *Translation & Interpreting: The International Journal of Translation and Interpreting Research*, 6(1), 102–127. [Link here](#)

Tags: Interpreting skills, educational interpreting

This Canadian study sought to understand the cognitive strategies and decisions made by interpreters in the classroom. The study simulated educational classroom content across the early middle and higher years and collected and analysed two types of reporting processes, Think-Aloud Protocol and Stimulated Recalls. The results showed that those interpreters who demonstrated higher order cognitive thinking skills and attended to teacher intent and student language preferences provided more effective interpreting than the interpreters who focused primarily on linguistic choices and interpreting decisions. The use of reporting processes can assist with preparation and lead to refined higher order thinking, prompting consideration for these tools to be taught to educational interpreters or even used as a form of assessment.

Preparation Strategies Used by Interpreters in Educational Settings: An Intervention Study

Russell, D., Williamson, A., Hayes, J., & Nelson-Julander, A. (2021). Preparation Strategies Used by Interpreters in Educational Settings: An Intervention Study. In E. A. Winston & S. B. Fitzmaurice (Eds.), *Advances in Educational Interpreting* (pp. 147–174). Gallaudet University Press. [Link here](#)

Tags: Interpreting skills, educational interpreting

This study sought to determine whether instructing interpreters on teacher discourse and engagement, as well as active preparation strategies would enhance their interpretation. Thirty-six American and Canadian interpreters working across K-12 educational environments participated. Participants were invited to view a self-paced webinar and then join a group discussion, implement new strategies, journal about applying the strategies, produce a sample of recorded interpretation and a final conversation group to

discuss which strategies were most effective. The interpreters most significant learning came from the webinar content describing teacher discourse and engagement strategies. This had not been previously taught in their interpreter programs. Other positive preparation strategies included using mind maps, brainstorming, reviewing curriculum guides, video recording sample interpretations for review. Interpreters reported building an effective relationship with the teacher was an important part of the preparation in addition to deliberate practice.

Language development and acquisition

Deaf Children of Hearing Parents Have Age-Level Vocabulary Growth When Exposed to American Sign Language by 6 Months of Age.

Caselli, N., Pyers, J., & Lieberman, A. M. (2021). Deaf Children of Hearing Parents Have Age-Level Vocabulary Growth When Exposed to American Sign Language by 6 Months of Age. *The Journal of Pediatrics*, 232, 229-236. [Link here](#)

Tags: Sign language access, language development

This American study examined whether children who are deaf or hard of hearing with hearing parents can develop age-level vocabulary skills when they have early exposure to sign language. 78 children between 8 to 68 months of age with hearing parents were compared to a reference sample of 104 children with parents who are deaf and use sign language. The study acknowledges that deaf children born to deaf parents have unfettered access to natural language, and that limited language exposure during childhood often significantly harms deaf and hard of hearing children's development. The results indicated that children exposed to ASL prior to 6 months of age largely develop strong vocabularies at the same rate as native-signing children, and that exposing children to ASL during infancy leads to the development of healthy vocabularies.

Effects of early language deprivation on brain connectivity: Language pathways in deaf native and late first-language learners of American Sign Language

Cheng, Q., Roth, A., Halgren, E., & Mayberry, R. I. (2019). Effects of early language deprivation on brain connectivity: Language pathways in deaf native and late first-language learners of American Sign Language. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 13, Article 320. [Link here](#)

Tags: Language development, neuroscience

This American study analysed the brain specifically the ventral and dorsal white matter tracts which are critical to language processing. Two groups of signers were involved, deaf native signers and hearing native signers whose second language was sign. Additionally, three case studies of individuals with language deprivation were also analysed. The study concluded when language acquisition begins in infancy, connectivity between major language regions is not impacted irrespective of the language mode. However, the three case studies where language deprivation was confirmed revealed altered white matter microstructure. In conclusion, signed or spoken language exposure early in life leads to typical development of language processing in the brain.

Age-Expected Language and Academic Outcomes for Deaf Children with Hearing Caregivers

Finton, E., Hall, W. C., Berke, M., Bye, R., Ikeda, S., & Caselli, N. (2025). Age-Expected Language and Academic Outcomes for Deaf Children with Hearing Caregivers. *Journal of Special Education*, 58(4), 232-243. [Link here](#)

Tags: Language development, deaf education

This study seeks to understand the impact of early access to American Sign Language (ASL) and its long-term impact on academic outcomes for deaf children with hearing caregivers. It compares deaf native signers to deaf children of hearing caregivers to determine if early entry to a bilingual education program reliably results in age-expected academic achievement as well as examining the correlation between ASL proficiency and academic achievement. Early entry students to the program demonstrated comparable ASL scores to native signers for children entering the program up to the age of 3. Children who entered the program after the age of 3 had highly variable patterns of ASL proficiency. A similar inconsistent result was seen in their academic achievement which was tracked through to high school. Children with stronger ASL skills had higher academic achievement in all subject areas relative to those with weaker ASL skills. The study concludes that deaf children of hearing caregivers who enter a bilingual program prior to age three demonstrate comparable academic achievement to native signers. Children with hearing caregivers can consistently achieve age-level academic outcomes when they attend a bilingual educational environment.

Australian families of deaf and hard of hearing children: Are they using sign?

Howell, T., Sung, V., Smith, L., & Dettman, S. (2024). Australian families of deaf and hard of hearing children: Are they using sign? *International Journal of Pediatric Otorhinolaryngology*, 179, 111930. [Link here](#)

Tags: Auslan, bi-lingualism

This study aimed to determine the number of Australian families using Auslan with their deaf children, and to explore the relationship between the type of loss, devices and family factors with the use of Auslan. The Australian hearing loss databank was used to analyse data between 2012 and 2021. A total of 997 families were examined. Of these, 8.7% of families reported using Auslan with their child, and 2.6% used Auslan as the primary language. Factors associated with Auslan use included the type of hearing loss (profound degree of hearing loss, device use: hearing aid/cochlear implant), family history of deafness, and attendance at early intervention programs. The study found no association between Auslan use and the maternal level of education or socio-economic disadvantage.

Hearing parents learning American Sign Language with their deaf children

Pontecorvo, E., Mitchiner, J., & Lieberman, A. M. (2025). *Hearing parents as sign language learners: Describing and evaluating the ASL skills of parents learning ASL with their deaf children*. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 46(10), 3695–3712. [Link here](#)

Tags: Parent of a deaf child, sign language acquisition

The article examines the American Sign Language (ASL) skills of hearing parents who are learning to sign to communicate with their deaf children—a population that has been largely overlooked in research. The authors situate these parents within the broader field of adult second-language acquisition, noting that they face unique challenges as L2M2 learners (learning a second language in a new modality). Unlike typical ASL students, parents often learn outside formal classroom settings, rely on varied resources, and must acquire communicative skills urgently to support their child’s early development. The study aims to provide a systematic description of both receptive and expressive ASL skills among these parents.

Using a combination of standardized testing and expressive samples, and detailed linguistic analysis, the researchers found that parents’ ASL skills ranged from beginner to intermediate levels. Receptive and expressive skills were positively correlated, and parents demonstrated meaningful use of ASL linguistic features—including classifier constructions, fingerspelling, and moderately diverse vocabularies. Interestingly, the length of time parents had been learning ASL did not predict their skill level; only the child’s age showed a modest association with expressive skills. Parents produced relatively few errors, most of which were phonological, aligning with typical patterns in adult second-language learning.

The authors argue that these findings challenge assumptions that hearing parents cannot learn ASL well enough to support their children’s language development. Many parents in

the sample reached a fluency level that suggested they can function as independent communicators in ASL. The study highlights the need for better-designed instructional supports tailored to parents' communicative needs and calls for future research that links parent proficiency with child language outcomes. Overall, the article positions hearing parents as capable L2 learners whose ASL development can meaningfully contribute to accessible communication and healthy language environments for deaf children.

Deaf and hearing children's development of theory of mind, peer popularity, and leadership during middle childhood

Peterson, C. C., O'Reilly, K., & Wellman, H. M. (2016). Deaf and hearing children's development of theory of mind, peer popularity, and leadership during middle childhood. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 149, 146-158. [Link here](#)

Tags: Theory of mind

This Australian study investigated Theory of Mind as it relates to deaf children in middle childhood. It compared deaf children to hearing children in relation to Theory of Mind understanding, peer group popularity, social isolation and peer leadership. Auslan language ability was tested to rule out any language delay for deaf participants.

A strong link was found between Theory of Mind understanding in deaf children and their status as either popular in the social group or socially isolated. Given evidence that social isolation and low popularity during childhood are linked to poor emotional wellbeing and reduced academic achievement this is significant. The study calls for interventions for deaf children who are socially isolated or unpopular. Theory of Mind instruction may increase understanding and address current outcomes.

General References

This section compiles references of note and specific interest. They are not annotated. Links are provided where possible.

Deaf education

Enns, C., Henner, J., & McQuarrie, L. (2021). *Discussing bilingualism in deaf children: Essays in honor of Robert Hoffmeister*. Taylor & Francis. [Link here](#)

Guardino, C., Cannon, J. E. & Paul, P. V. (eds.) 2022, *Deaf and Hard of Hearing Multilingual Learners: Foundations, Strategies, and Resources*, Routledge, New York.

Othman, A. (2024). Sign Language Acquisition and Education. In: Sign Language Processing. Springer, Cham. [Link here](#)

Silvestri, J. A., & Hartman, M. C. (2022). Inclusion and Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students: Finding Asylum in the LRE. *Education Sciences*, 12(11), 773. [Link here](#)

Deaf+

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