



Interpreting for students in educational settings: A national study

Amie O'Shea, Tamara Pearce, Jennifer David



INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH
TRANSFORMATION



DEAKIN
UNIVERSITY

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This independent research report was commissioned by the Australian Sign Language Interpreters and Translators Association (ASLITA) and funded by the Leonie Jackson Memorial Fund, administered by Deaf Connect.

This report presents independent research undertaken by researchers at Deakin University.

The findings and recommendations are those of the authors.



Deakin University acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of all the unceded lands, skies and waterways on which our students and staff come together.

We pay our deep respect to the Elders and Ancestors who have cared for Country from which education, innovation, and knowledge transfer have taken place for many thousands of years.



Report designed by
Defxroma / Alisha Blackhall
2026

Contents

Background	Auslan, interpreting and the education landscape	4
	Deaf education models and the shift toward 'inclusion'	5
	Challenges in educational interpreting practice	6
	Workforce gaps and study rationale	7
	<i>Study rationale</i>	8
Methods	Participants	9
	Recruitment	9
	Data collection	10
	Data analysis	10
Results	<i>Survey participants</i>	11
	<i>Interpreter Certification</i>	11
	Interpreter roles, function and confidence	12
	<i>Interpreter Tasks</i>	12
	<i>Task Clarity</i>	12
	<i>Interpreter Training</i>	13
	Staff training on interpreter roles	14
	Deaf Student Instruction and Preferences	14
	Desired Educational Interpreting Training	15
	Student expectations of the Educational Interpreter	16
	Focus group and interview participants	16
	Role clarity	16
	Feedback	18
	Interpreter skills	19
	Good practice	20
Key Insights	Role clarity and role delineation	21
	Preparation pathways and interpreter capability in educational settings	21
	Deaf students' agency, workload, and conditions for equitable access	22
	System-level implications	22
Recommendations	1. Establish clear and consistent Educational Interpreter role definitions	23
	2. Strengthen qualification requirements and education-specific training pathways	
	3. Improve school-wide understanding of Educational Interpreting	
	4. Strengthen deaf student voice and agency	
	5. Advocate for coordinated policy and system-level reform	
Conclusion		24
References		25
Appendices	Appendix 1 List of survey respondent reported job titles	27
	Appendix 2 Reported NAATI certification by deaf participants	27
	Appendix 3 Reported NAATI certification by hearing and hard of hearing participants	27
	Appendix 4 Tasks completed by the Interpreter	28
	Appendix 5 Task clarity reported by interpreters in the classroom	29
	Appendix 6 Management understanding of interpreter tasks	29
	Appendix 7 Reported completion of the Diploma of Interpreting by hearing participants	29
	Appendix 8 Diploma of Interpreting training and preparation for working with deaf children	29
	Appendix 9 Diploma of Interpreting training and preparation for working in an educational setting	30
	Appendix 10 Interpreter self-rating against Professional Standards	30
	Appendix 11 School staff training on the roles of interpreters	30
	Appendix 12 Deaf student instructions	31
	Appendix 13 Interpreter skills identified by deaf students	31



Background

Auslan, interpreting and the education landscape

Auslan (Australian Sign Language) is recognised as a community language in Australia and is used by deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing and DeafDisabled people¹. Auslan is a unique language with its own grammar, syntax and structure (Johnston & Schembri, 2007). To facilitate communication with those who do not use Auslan, the community relies on Auslan interpreters.

Compulsory and post-compulsory education is one of the largest employment areas for Auslan interpreters (Napier et al., 2018). Interpreters working in this setting are commonly referred to as Educational Interpreters (see for example VDEI, 2021). The inconsistency of both the language for, and the roles and functions of, an Educational Interpreter are discussed in this report, for which purposes we use to collectively refer to people whose professional role primarily

includes interpreting between Auslan and English in a formal learning setting, with a focus on student-staff communication in a bilingual education environment.

Although Auslan-English interpreting is central to bilingual deaf students' access in mainstream primary and secondary educational settings, there is no national minimum qualification or education-specific certification. Australia's National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) oversee the certification of Auslan-English interpreters, although this is not a requirement for all educational interpreting roles. NAATI also provides specialist certification in legal, health, and conference interpreting; however, it does not offer certification specifically for educational interpreting (National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters, 2024).

Interpreter skills and backgrounds vary widely, and many enter classrooms without proficient Auslan skills, or training in child development, bilingual language acquisition, or the pedagogical

¹ For the purposes of this report, the term *deaf* is used to refer collectively to all people with hearing loss, noting the focus of the report is on deaf people who use Auslan.

demands of schooling. The assumption that an Educational Interpreter alone guarantees equitable access has been repeatedly disproven (Caselli et al., 2020; Langer & Crume, 2024), because interpreted education is not equivalent to direct instruction.

Deaf education models and the shift toward ‘inclusion’

Models for deaf education in Australia vary, shaped by differences across education jurisdiction and sector practices. Curriculum access, while important, is only one factor in the choice of education model facing parents of deaf children, who must also weigh its impact on their child’s social identity and inclusion, in addition to academic access (Andersson & Adams Lyngbäck, 2022).

The World Federation of the Deaf recommends a bilingual bicultural model of deaf education, where deaf students are educated directly in sign language, via access to deaf teachers and deaf peers with a bilingual curriculum (World Federation of the Deaf, 2018). In this context, direct instruction occurs via unmediated teacher-student interaction in Auslan, compared with language discordant communication requiring an Educational Interpreter to ensure mutual access between the hearing, non-signing faculty, and the deaf signing student.



While schools exclusively for deaf students may be viewed as ‘segregated’ or ‘specialist’ schooling, for deaf people it is paradoxically experienced as inclusion: a fully accessible and engaging environment.

- (P. Waters personal communication, August 6, 2024)



The research on language concordant health-care indicates several positive outcomes including improved trust, engagement and learning (Lopez Vera et al., 2023). Information and care providers – in this case teachers – who

share their students’ language can provide clearer and more culturally responsive education (Ogbuefi et al., 2025).

Recent policy directions are reshaping the educational landscape. Australia’s Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (2023) presents contrasting recommendations on segregated/special education settings – in this case, where deaf students are educated together either in a school for the deaf, or as part of a unit within a wider mainstream school.

The Commission recommends the phase out of segregated educational settings, to be complete by 2051, with no new special/segregated classes or units being included within schools from 2025 (Australian Government, 2023). This is based on the perception that educating students with shared disability/access needs is a structural form of discrimination which contradicts the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability. From this perspective, Deaf children are best educated in geographically located ‘inclusive’ environments with hearing peers and teachers. In this case their learning experiences will likely be mediated through Auslan-English Educational Interpreters.

Scholars and activists have critiqued this response, including Iacono (2024) who argues that the recommendations: “...failed to consider in greater depth prior research and current positive practices of authentic inclusive education. ... the Commission missed the opportunity to draw on research based on models of supports, shared understanding of inclusion, and making use of professionals beyond educators to provide complementary expertise”. (Iacono, 2024 p. 160)

Varying education support models are used for deaf students who use Auslan and English to access the curriculum. Among the different approaches, the most significant is direct instruction (education direct to the student in Auslan) versus mediated instruction (through an interpreter).

While acknowledging its many limitations and evidence supporting other models of education, this report explores Educational Interpreters in primary and secondary mainstream classrooms.

This report examines current practices in Australian classrooms and outlines the practitioners, knowledge, and skills needed to ensure deaf students achieve both academic and social success.

Challenges in educational interpreting practice

Research highlights persistent challenges in educational interpreting. Educational Interpreters are too frequently underprepared and under supported to work in these settings and play roles that are outside the scope of a normal definition of an interpreter (Berge & Thomassen, 2016; Caselli et al., 2020; Prinzi, 2023). In Australia there is a paucity of research that has explored how Educational Interpreters are trained for, and perform in, primary and secondary education, with a similar gap in knowledge around how deaf students experience an interpreted education. There is also a significant question around how the interpreting process impacts the message received by the deaf student. Regardless of the interpreter's skill and experience, deaf student access is too often subpar to their hearing peers (Langer & Crume, 2024).

Access to education extends beyond classroom instruction. Educational success is predicated on access to the entire environment – instruction in the classroom, the lab, the oval, the principal's office, the library, and educational camps and excursions. The assumption is that the cultural, educational, and policy environment will promote equal access to learning, safety and development for all students. The vast majority of students enrolled in Australian education experience this level of access directly. However, signing deaf students in mainstream education are a unique language discordant cohort who access their education in mediated ways, via (and reliant on) individual school staff. While this is most commonly the Educational Interpreter, it may also include staff in other education support roles, language support, Teachers of the Deaf, visiting teachers and other specialists. There is evidence of positive outcomes through collaborative relationships where the Educational Interpreter, classroom teacher and school collaborate to support student success (Berge & Ytterhus, 2015; Prinzi, 2024; Scott & Kasun, 2021).

While the Educational Interpreter is central to, but not the whole of, ensuring an accessible education experience, the literature describes how their presence also impacts student autonomy.

Prinzi (2024) makes a number of key suggestions which inform this report: firstly, that the positioning of an Educational Interpreter, specifically how their role is viewed in the classroom, is crucial to a deaf student's autonomy and educational success.



Secondly, deaf students do not always know or receive training on what an interpreter is supposed to do in a classroom. Thirdly, that Educational Interpreters who engage in student behaviour management may distort their role. Finally, that deaf students can be unaware of the opportunity, or hesitant to engage in feedback on language or communication preferences with their Educational Interpreter/s without the tools or resources to resolve interpreting issues within the staff-student power dynamic students may also fear reprisal (Prinzi, 2023). In response, a partnership model of interpreting (Prinzi, 2024; Winston & Fitzmaurice, 2021) emphasises the importance of Educational Interpreters working with a thorough understanding of the educational context and

the needs of the deaf children they support. Traditional interpreting models such as the 'helper', 'conduit' or 'communication facilitator' do not consider the contextual demands of a classroom learning environment (Winston & Fitzmaurice, 2021). Such approaches have for some time been understood to emphasise interpreter impartiality while bridging linguistic and cultural gaps between speakers to facilitate communication (Roy, 2000).

However, these models, which are often applied to adult interactions, may not be suitable for educational settings and may not address the needs of deaf children (Winston & Fitzmaurice, 2021), particularly where young children must then rely on Educational Interpreters as their primary language models (Caselli et al., 2020; Schick et al., 2006). School expectations of an Educational Interpreter vary and are not always compatible with the traditional interpreter role or its remuneration and conditions (Fitzmaurice, 2021; Silva & Oliveira, 2016). This can lead to role ambiguity and inconsistent expectations, which minimises accountability, and increases dissatisfaction in the interpreter's own work (Prinzi, 2024; Winston & Fitzmaurice, 2021).

Workforce gaps and study rationale

National workforce data remains limited and inconsistent. The Australian Sign Language Interpreters and Translators Association (ASLITA) have provided professional development and ongoing support to Educational Interpreters for many years. ASLITA understand the need for more clarity on the Educational Interpreter's role, from which best practice and improvements can be built. However, little is known and there are significant barriers to accurate data generation on the Australian Educational Interpreter workforce, their roles and functions.

Challenges to collecting comprehensive data include variability across state-based and system-led data, the inconsistent understanding of language acquisition, the Educational Interpreter role and the complexities of supporting students with multiple disabilities, combined with the varying role titles and job descriptions provided to Educational Interpreters. These challenges result in significant gaps in our knowledge about the Australian Educational Interpreter workforce.

The only national effort to describe deaf education and access is a report produced by the Consortium for Outcomes in Deaf Education (CODE) (2023). Their purpose is to collect and report data on the number of deaf children and young people receiving education services in Australia. While the data presented is an incomplete picture, the vision to grow the representation into the future remains (CODE, 2023).

Some jurisdictions have begun to articulate clearer expectations. The Victorian Department of Education has endorsed an evidence-based professional standards framework that identifies standards, knowledge and competencies required by Educational Interpreters in primary and secondary schools. Developed by the Victorian Deaf Education Institute (VDEI) the 2021 framework lists standards across three domains, Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice and Professional Engagement.



Study rationale

ASLITA, recognising the lack of clarity and consistency surrounding the Educational Interpreter role, initiated this research project partnership with Deakin University. The variability with classroom support for bilingual deaf students is multifactorial, complicated by the varying state-based and systemic approaches to engaging Educational Interpreters or support roles, their capacity, training and professional development, remuneration and workload, and the specificities of an educational environment.

In summary, deaf students in mainstream settings are receiving crucial access support from Educational Interpreters whose preparation, skills, roles and working conditions differ widely.

These gaps in qualification, role clarity and student experience directly shaped the data collection design and research methodology. Accordingly, this report set out to establish some foundational information on the current educational interpreting experience as told by Educational Interpreters, school staff and deaf students. We examined the roles and confidence of Educational Interpreters and explored how they could be better prepared for educational settings.

We were guided by three research questions, co-developed with ASLITA:

- 1** What roles and functions do Educational Interpreters conduct, and what is their level of confidence in these areas?
- 2** How could interpreters be prepared for their work in educational settings?
- 3** What expectations do the students have for the Educational Interpreter's role and responsibilities?



Method

A mixed methods approach was used including an online survey (to address research questions 1 and 2), followed by interviews and focus groups (to address research questions 1 and 3). The combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection allowed for an in-depth exploration of the contemporary Australian Educational Interpreting landscape.

Participants

The survey was open to any persons whose role included supporting a deaf student in the classroom, including Educational Interpreters, staff in education support roles, language support, Teachers of the Deaf, Visiting Teachers and other specialists. Survey questions were in part informed by the Professional Standards for Educational Interpreting framework domains of Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice and Professional Engagement (Victorian Deaf Education Institute, 2021). Interview or focus group participants were aged 16 to 30 and were current or former students who accessed their education, at least in part, via interpretation in Australia.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling (Patton, 2014), convenience sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015), and network-based (snowball) sampling methods (Ting et al., 2025). For the survey, purposive sampling targeted ASLITA members and industry partners through direct email, newsletters, and organisational mailing lists. Convenience sampling occurred through social media promotion using existing ASLITA channels, while network-based recruitment was supported by the ASLITA Interpreting in Educational Settings committee via their established professional and government contacts.

Recruitment (continued)

Interviews and focus groups were recruited through convenience sampling on social media and community-based purposive recruitment in partnership with Deaf Australia and Deaf Youth Australia. All those recruited for the focus groups or interviews had experienced interpreting in the classroom for at least part of their education. The project was also promoted at the 2024 ASLITA National Conference in Adelaide.

Data Collection

The survey was developed by deaf researcher Jen Blyth and included a pathway for deaf, hard of hearing and hearing education staff, reflecting the diversity of roles in deaf education. Every effort was taken to represent the function of interpreting in the classroom, regardless of role title. Survey data was collected using Qualtrics (through Deakin University), with Auslan translations of English output provided.

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were led by the research team, including deaf researchers. During the interviews and focus groups, demographic or schooling data was not systematically collected due to variations in educational approach, funding systems, and multiple school attendance across primary and secondary years.

Participants discussed the role of Educational Interpreters and education support, and their overall educational experience. The interviews and focus groups were conducted and analysed in Auslan, with English translations produced for illustrative quotes provided in this report. Human research ethics approval was granted by Deakin University Faculty of Health Human Research Ethics Committee 2024/HE000272.

Data Analysis

Survey responses were reviewed in Qualtrics before export into IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) (SPSS version 31) for analysis. A data cleaning protocol was developed to assess responses, identify duplicates or potential AI-generated responses. Only those

survey responses which at least two authors agreed appeared irregular or implausible were excluded prior to analysis. The survey underwent descriptive analysis using SPSS. Without a defined population size, statistical significance cannot be meaningfully calculated, and significance testing would not provide meaningful insights. Instead, a descriptive analysis is reported.

Interview and focus group data were analysed by authors TP and AO initially by drawing on initial, reflective debriefs with deaf researchers immediately following data collection. Using a hybrid reflective memoing approach we addressed each of Birks et al. (2008) functions of analytical, theoretical, methodological and operational matters through open discussion and shared reflection. Conducting this early stage of analysis live and in Auslan prompted a culturally inclusive, iterative approach to data collection.

Subsequent qualitative analysis stages followed a multi-cycle thematic analysis approach. Each author independently coded an initial subset of transcripts using a hybrid deductive–inductive approach aligned with thematic analysis. Pre-identified codes were used to commence analysis, with emergent or additional themes identified and confirmed through discussion. We met to compare coding decisions, resolve discrepancies through discussion, and refine the codebook. TP then coded the remaining data using the agreed framework.

We employed a two-cycle coding process following Saldaña's (2025) framework. In the first cycle, we used deductive structural coding to organise data according to the study's research questions and process coding to capture actions and sequences relevant to participant experiences. This provided a structured foundation aligned with our analytic framework. In the second cycle, we applied pattern coding to group first-cycle codes into broader categories and identify emergent themes. This iterative approach allowed us to move from descriptive coding to interpretive analysis, ensuring both theoretical alignment and openness to new insights. Not all themes were captured in the final list.

Results

The results are presented in alignment with the three research questions. First, we report on the roles, functions and confidence of those performing an educational interpreting role in schools (RQ1). We then examine how interpreters could be better prepared for educational settings, drawing on survey responses about training, qualifications and workplace support (RQ2). Finally, we present the perspectives of deaf students, on the Educational Interpreters' role, the conditions to support effective access, and their experiences of interpreted education (RQ3).

A total of 363 surveys were returned, after data cleaning 354 surveys were included in the final analysis (97.5%)². The optional nature of the survey questions and those for which multiple answers could be provided, means that at times the data report below does not sum to 100%.

Survey Participants

Of the participants who provided their demographic information (Table 1) most (37.5%) were in Queensland whilst Tasmania had the least number of respondents (1.9%). A further nine (2.5%) participants did not report their location. Most of the participants resided in urban centres (n=269 74.1%) while 6 (1.7%) were in a remote area. While there was variance in participant age and gender, the most frequently reported gender was female (n=304 83.7%) and aged between 35-44 years (27.5%). More than three quarters of participants (77.1%) were hearing, followed by deaf (15.2%) and hard of hearing (5.2%). Interpreter (34.7%) and Education Support (24.8%) were the most commonly reported job categories while Teacher Management (2.8%) was the least reported - A full list of reported job titles can be found in Appendix 1.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Demographic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
State	Queensland	136	37.5
	New South Wales	38	10.5
	Western Australia	60	16.5
	Victoria	54	14.9
	South Australia	28	7.7
	Tasmania	7	1.9
	Australian Capital Territory	19	5.2
	Northern Territory	12	3.3
Geographic location	Urban	269	74.1
	Rural	79	21.8
	Remote	6	1.7
Gender	Female	304	83.7
	Male	34	9.4
	Non-binary/Third gender	13	3.6
	Prefer not to say	3	0.8
Age group	18-24	26	7.2
	25-34	67	18.5
	35-44	100	27.5
	45-54	94	25.9
	55-64	52	14.3
	65-74	15	4.1
Hearing status	Hearing	280	77.1
	Deaf	55	15.2
	Hard of Hearing ³	19	5.2
Job Category ⁴	Interpreter	126	34.7
	Education support	90	24.8
	Auslan Language Support	26	7.2
	Teacher	18	5.0
	Teacher of the Deaf	36	9.9
	Teacher Management	10	2.8

² The optional nature of the survey questions, and those for which multiple answers could be provided, means that the data does not consistently sum to 100 percent.

³ Beyond the demographic data hearing and hard of hearing respondents were grouped together.

⁴ An extensive variety of role titles were reported. The 'interpreter' category includes any role that explicitly stated interpreter in the title. 'Auslan Language Support' is a role focused on support with and through Auslan, typically undertaken by deaf people. 'Education Support' is a general description for all roles that describe providing support in the classroom, (which may or may not include the function of interpreting).



Interpreter Certification

All survey participants were asked whether they had a NAATI certification. Across all categories (hearing, hard of hearing, deaf) most respondents reported no NAATI qualifications (hearing/hard of hearing n=158 54.5%), (deaf n=40 66.7%) (Appendix 2 and 3). The most reported certification among deaf participants was certified provisional deaf interpreter (n=9 15%) and certified provisional interpreter (hearing and hard of hearing participants) (n=95 32.8%).

Interpreter roles, function and confidence

The first research question sought to understand the various roles and functions conducted by Educational Interpreters and their confidence in undertaking these duties.

Interpreter Tasks

All survey respondents were asked to identify the tasks undertaken by interpreters as part of their duties in a school setting. Respondents could select multiple tasks out of a list of 32 possible options. Of the respondents who answered this question most commonly reported tasks including interpreting from English to Auslan (n=23 6.3%), requesting accessibility e.g. captioning (n=22 6.1%) and interpreting from Auslan to English (n=19 5.2%), the least frequently requested task was delivering Deaf awareness training (n=4 1.1%) - see Appendix 4 for a full list of tasks and frequencies.

Task Clarity

Respondents to this survey were asked about task clarity, both in relation to tasks they perform as part of their role and whether they believed the school/management understood the tasks and demands of interpreting in the classroom. For both questions, most respondents indicated that while they had some clarity as to their role (n=57 46.7%) (Figure 1), they felt that school/management was 'not knowledgeable at all' (n=39 32%) (Figure 2) – see Appendix 5-6 for a full breakdown of response types.

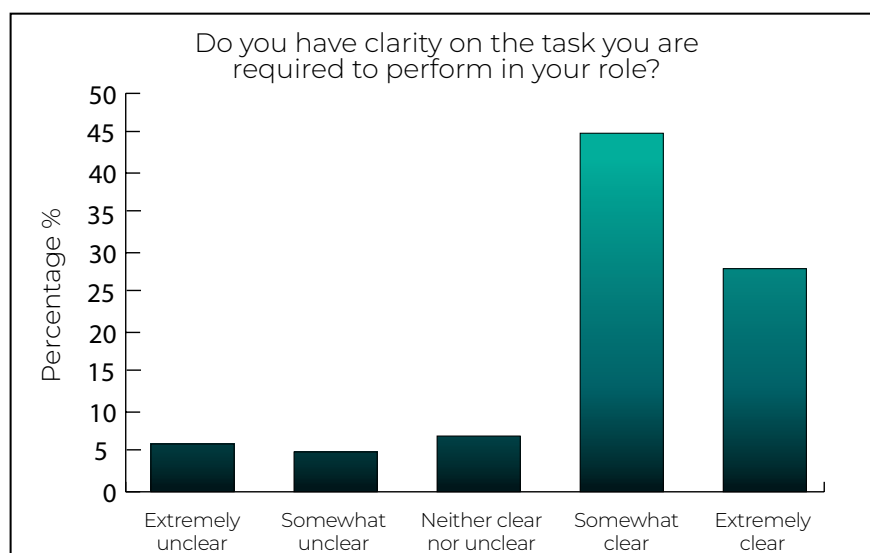


Figure 1: Task clarity

Interpreter Training

Almost half (n=94 48.5%) of respondents who reported that their main task in the classroom was interpreting had completed the Diploma of Interpreting (Appendix 7) with fifty percent of this group (n=52) reporting that the Diploma had 'somewhat' prepared them for their work with deaf children (Appendix 8) or as preparation for working in an educational setting (n=49 47.1%) (Appendix 9).

Furthermore, survey respondents were asked to self-rate their level of proficiency and confidence in respect of the tasks outlined in the Professional Standards for Educational Interpreters. These results can be seen in detail in Appendix 10. Those respondents with a Diploma of Interpreting (Auslan-English) consistently reported greater levels of confidence across all standards compared to those with lower or no formal qualifications. Respondents with Auslan Certificate II, III, or IV qualifications showed mixed levels of confidence, often clustering around the "Emerging" and "Proficient" categories but rarely reaching "Highly Proficient." Those with no formal Auslan training or training that only consisted of short courses predominantly rated themselves as "Basic" or "Emerging" indicating limited confidence in meeting the professional standards. This variability in interpreter qualifications, job titles and role expectations across States and systems highlights the absence of national standards or consistent policy guidance for educational interpreting.

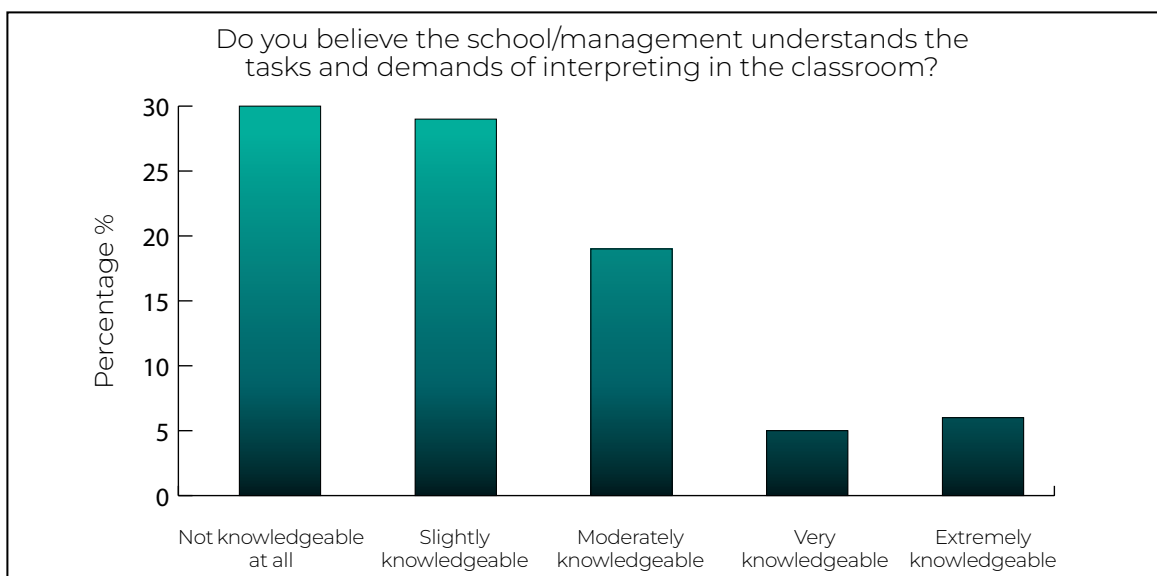


Figure 2: Management understanding of interpreter tasks

Preparing for work in educational settings

Research question two explored how Educational Interpreters could be better prepared for their work in educational settings.

Staff training on interpreter roles

Respondents were asked about whether training was provided to school staff (teaching and administrative) regarding the role of Educational Interpreter's and the needs of deaf students in their school setting. Most respondents (n=101 27.8%) reported that there was no training offered to teaching or administrative staff (Appendix 11). In schools where formal training did occur it was largely provided by Teachers of the Deaf. A mixture of other practitioners had also delivered training, including the Principal Advisor (Auslan), Educational Interpreters, Auslan Language Models, deaf staff and interpreter coordinators. A lack of recognition of Educational Interpreters as professionals, both systemically and attitudinally, within school environments was also noted.

Deaf student instruction and preferences

Respondents were asked whether deaf students in their schools provided instructions and preferences regarding how they would like the Educational Interpreter to perform their role and who they provided this feedback to. Respondents reported that deaf students rarely provided detailed feedback directly to the Educational Interpreter. Students who did provide feedback either spoke to the Educational Interpreter directly (n=15 4.1%) or to other staff and caregivers (n=10 2.8%) (Appendix 12). The perceived barriers for students to

provide instruction as described by education staff included their lack of awareness of the Educational Interpreter role, the young age of the deaf students, minimal language skills, and the absence of structured discussions to support the feedback process.

Desired Educational Interpreting Training

Respondents who had either completed or were currently studying the Diploma of Interpreting were asked to describe their experience of the Diploma of Auslan-English interpreting. They identified five key themes including the need for content covering:

- Child language and cognitive development and language deprivation
- Placement opportunities in schools under qualified mentors
- Education-specific vocabulary and curriculum content
- Managing boundaries and ethics in classrooms
- Strategies for working with language-deprived or Deaf+ students.

Respondents who had either completed or were currently studying the Diploma of Interpreting felt the training was important for developing the skills of a community interpreter⁵; however they noted that it was missing important elements specific to educational interpreting. For example:

"Educational settings are completely different to community interpreting and need their own module or course - the hierarchy of staff, personal "soft" skills and negotiation, boundaries, how students learn, language development to name a few"

5 A 'community interpreter' is a common descriptor for a certified NAATI interpreter who works with adults in the community. This is far reaching, and includes the domains of health, employment, government services, housing, tertiary education and social participation.

Also missing from the Diploma of Interpreting was specific detail around the compulsory education environment, the roles and responsibilities of the professionals working with deaf students, including clarity on their own role. Language deprivation was mentioned frequently, along with the complexity of working with children learning two languages. The responsibility of working with children, beyond the task of conveying classroom dialogue, is captured here as a suggested additional learning element:

“the ethical and emotional challenge of working with children who have limited parental communication, leaving the [Educational Interpreter] as the richest communication connection in their sphere.”

While training was identified as a factor that could help retain currently working Educational Interpreters, survey respondents were explicitly asked about their longer-term intentions when it came to working as an interpreter (Figure 3).

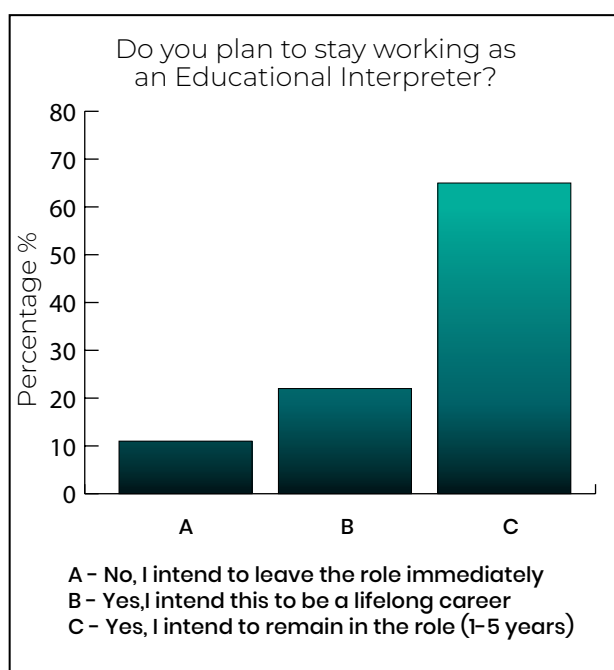


Figure 3: Intention to remain in role

Importantly, of the responses only 27 (23%) of current Educational Interpreters were planning for it as a long-term career, with 79 (66%) indicating they only planned on continuing in this role of the next 1-5 years.

There were compelling reasons for leaving Educational Interpreting work reported by many survey respondents. For some, skills were an issue:

“I am not equipped with the skills for children’s signing even though I am an interpreter. My skills can be used better elsewhere.”

Work demands and insufficient remuneration were also mentioned:

“Work is too demanding for what it pays. It should be where we send our best and brightest but instead it’s where we send graduates or students to cut their teeth before moving into community interpreting. It should be the other way around and Deaf students will continue to suffer as long as this paradigm remains in place.”

Educational Interpreters also reported concerning experiences around workplace health and safety:

“When issues of WHS were raised, being told to ‘think about the poor Deaf student’ and nothing done to solve the issues.”

Mentoring and paid upskilling opportunities were identified as potential motivators to return to educational work, however the overwhelming strongest motivators were an increase in pay, employment conditions and role clarity.

“Job acknowledgment for the skills that is required, correct job description, increase of wages with a permanent position and the school needs to undertake mandatory Deaf Awareness Training.”

Student expectations of the Educational Interpreter

Research question three explored students' expectations of an Educational Interpreter.

Focus group and interview participants

Ten deaf students⁶ who had experienced mediated instruction through Educational Interpreters either currently or in the past 10 years participated in individual interviews or focus groups. Students reflected on school experiences which occurred in a variety of different school environments and with a range of educational supports. This included settings where they were the only deaf student, or as one of a small number of deaf students, in regional and metropolitan areas, with access to a Visiting Teacher or Teacher of the Deaf, Educational Interpreters, Deaf Auslan Language or Role Models. They also experienced schools or programs with deaf units, and facilities and schools with extensive bilingual and bicultural school-wide programs.

Analysis identified three main themes:

- (1) the Educational Interpreter role – clarity and functions;
- (2) interpreting skills; and
- (3) examples of good practice.



Role Clarity

Educational Interpreter roles and function

Students described the key support roles present in their education which included the classroom teacher, Teacher of the Deaf or Visiting Teacher, education support and Educational Interpreter. There were mixed reports around the clarity of roles in the broader education team.

“A resounding ‘no’ to clarity of roles between the Teacher of the Deaf, education support staff and interpreter.”
(Participant 4, former student)

“The education support roles were very clear. The interpreter interpreted, the teacher instructed, and if I struggled to understand the classroom content, the deaf role model was able to translate the material and support my understanding.”
(Participant 3, former student)

The task of educational interpreting was most often performed by a person employed in an education support role. In this instance, interpreting would occur when the teacher provided instruction and at other times this person would assist the deaf student, and in some cases hearing students to complete learning activities.

This approach, whereby the education support person provides both interpreting and assistance with classroom tasks occurred more commonly in primary school and was described by one deaf student as ‘that’s what I needed at the time...’. This dual function of interpreting and classroom support also occurred in secondary school. At this point there were mixed reports about the role clarity of the broader education team and the student. In higher year levels (usually year 9 and above) students reported it became more common to have an Educational Interpreter whose singular role was to interpret in the classroom.

⁶ We are collectively referring to ‘students’ for clarity, noting that while approximately half of participants were school leavers, they were reflecting on their time as students.

All students who experienced both types of support roles expressed a preference for these functions to be in two separate roles. A person in a singular interpreting role was more often described as being capable and skilled, qualified or trained, with skills and competence reported as significantly higher. When provided with classroom support from someone whose sole focus was interpreting students reported being more able to engage with the work, be more confident and focus on their learning. Students reported varying access to the Educational Interpreters they preferred (saw as more skilled), and higher grades were given priority:

“As younger students we missed out on more experienced interpreters.”
(Participant 4, former student)

“In primary school I had a SLSO⁷ but they operated as – and I viewed them as – an interpreter. When they provided education support it felt intrusive. In secondary school, it was much clearer, the SLSO just interpreted. I had the teacher to ask for educational support and the roles were very clear...after a lot of advocacy, I was finally allocated a proper qualified interpreter in Year 11. This was the best thing, the quality of my work improved, my confidence increased and I was able to communicate with the teachers better.”
(Participant 7, current student)

Former students reflected on the role of the Educational Interpreter in school compared to their experience as adults working with interpreters in their workplace, tertiary education and community settings. The Educational Interpreter focusing on interpreting, and not providing education support, was described as an important preparation for adulthood:

“I would prefer one or the other or one of each...this is the future model I need to understand as a deaf adult”
(Participant 8, former student).

Behaviour management was seen as an appropriate part of the classroom teacher's role:

“If interpreters overstep their role boundary, they then take on the role of a teacher. They should just interpret information from English to Auslan, not discipline the kids.”
(Participant 8, former student)

Student roles and functions

Students reflected on their own role in the classroom, including times where they were unsure of their own role or opportunities for agency. Multiple students raised the importance of the physical placement of the Educational Interpreter in the classroom, for visual access to communication.

“Two great interpreters I had, checked in with me, they provided information on the dynamics of what was happening for example, ‘everyone is taking their seat now’. Interpreter with spatial awareness to sight lines, especially in group work. Height differences of students in class is a consideration, this is not considered enough.”
(Participant 3, former student)

Educational Interpreter placement impacted relationships with peers when working in groups, with students describing the time it took their peers to overcome the feeling that the Educational Interpreter was ‘spying’ on their conversation. Some students reported that being given a choice as to where the Educational Interpreter stood was important. Others felt that the Educational Interpreter was a trained expert and hence should be able to make an informed assessment on placement based on sight lines, session purpose, lighting and other considerations.

“The first time an interpreter asked me if I wanted them to sit or stand, I didn’t understand why they were asking. It took me a while to realise it was about sightlines. Interpreters have a lot of training; they are coming from a place of knowledge that the deaf student does not have.”
(Participant 4, former student).

⁷ SLSO – School Learning Support Officer. This role provides support for students with a disability in classrooms. They work under the direction of the teacher. A job category used in the NSW education system (Department of Education, 2025).

Visual access was not confined to the location of the Educational Interpreter; teacher placement and movement was also critical.

"The number one problem for visibility in the classroom was the teacher. The teacher walking in front of the interpreter while speaking to the class, very frustrating!"

(Participants 1 & 5 in agreement, former students)

Feedback

Students were asked if they provided feedback to Educational Interpreter/s about their language or communication needs. For the most part, students reported that if they provided feedback, it was typically happily accepted. Students' main feedback focused on placement and sign lexicon preferences. Student confidence to initiate and provide feedback, or even that feedback was an option, was mixed.

Some students reported feeling uncomfortable and hesitant – they did not want to appear 'mean' or jeopardise an important relationship. A further student did not understand that providing feedback was an option until they were beyond the school environment.

"Whenever I have given the interpreter feedback, they are always very appreciative and accepting, it's just me, I'm scared to do it."

(Participant 8, former student)

Feedback was also provided to the school about the Educational Interpreter. Students acknowledged that sometimes an Educational Interpreter was not the right 'fit' and they passed this on to the administration. Some schools were able to accommodate requests to work with specific Educational Interpreters or change staffing if requested.

"We could provide feedback if the interpreter was not a good fit. This could be their signing, attitude and some interpreters are just not suited to education work."

(Participant 3, former student)

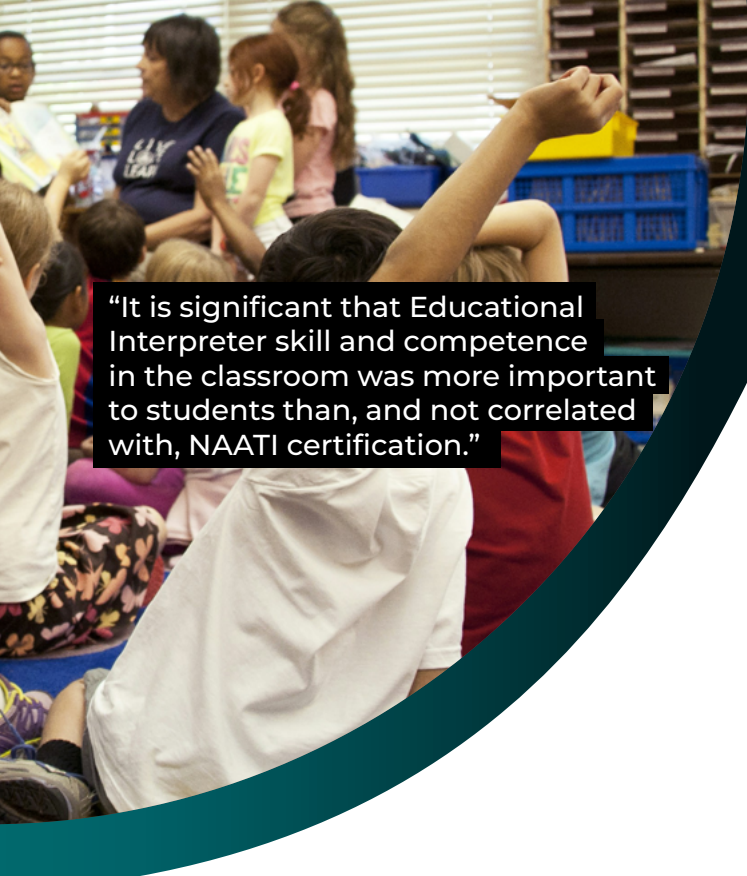


Interpreter Training

Through a range of questions students frequently mentioned the skills required of an Educational Interpreter. Their collective priority was content (subject) knowledge, and Auslan proficiency. Subject knowledge became an increasingly important skill as students moved through their education and into more complex content. While Educational Interpreters consulted with students to determine the appropriate Auslan signs for English terminology, students also reported being asked to explain concepts to their Educational Interpreters so that classroom content could be interpreted successfully:

"Being deaf from a deaf family, I sometimes felt used by the interpreters, like I was their language consultant and helped to polish their skills. I gave a lot of feedback about their signing because I felt an investment in them was an investment in me. If the interpreter struggled with the language, that's difficult for me as the receiver of that message. More effort. If they sign how I like it, with the right context then I can relax, and access the information.... I'm very happy to give subject specific terminology, but to teach them Auslan, that's the ALMs [Auslan Language Model] job, not mine."

(Participant 1, former student)



"It is significant that Educational Interpreter skill and competence in the classroom was more important to students than, and not correlated with, NAATI certification."

Both current and former students reported feeling burdened at times by Educational Interpreters requiring support from the student to understand a topic or content, preferring the interpreter to lean on the teacher for direct support.

"Interpreters need to be familiar with the content and topics. I have often been asked directly what the topic in the class is, or what sign to use for a concept. Interpreters need to be empowered to rely on the education team and use the staff room as a resource. Book 10 minutes with the teacher or jump into their regular team meetings. It is not fair to rely on the deaf student."

(Participant 4, former student)

Interpreting from Auslan to English was frequently raised during data collection. When students contributed in a classroom, those who could use spoken English chose to do so, rather than signing in Auslan, in almost every instance they had the opportunity. This communication preference was regularly informed by their lack of confidence in Educational Interpreter skills.

"I'd rather voice for myself. I don't trust them enough and I want to use specific terminology. Out of maybe 15 interpreters, I trust only 3 or 4 to voice for me."

(Participant 1, former student)

Where students communicated in Auslan rather than spoken English, they reported lipreading their Educational Interpreter to ensure correct and faithful interpretation and to provide clarification or correction where possible. A number of strategies were used to ensure accurate English interpretation, as students reported adapting their Auslan production to follow English structure, fingerspelling key words, writing notes directly to the teacher or even relying on fellow deaf students with comprehensible speech to 'interpret' for them. Students who communicated through Auslan exclusively took additional steps to prepare their Educational Interpreter, including providing oral presentations to the interpreter in advance and briefing them beforehand:

"I made sure if I was presenting, to email the interpreter the presentation beforehand and talk with them. I relied on the interpreter to ensure I was represented in the right way and so the teacher knew I had done my research and studied. I used my residual hearing to make sure the interpreter and I were keeping the right pace, that it was smooth."

(Participant 5, former student)

While widely regarded as evidence of acceptable Auslan proficiency for interpreting work, students had variable knowledge of their Educational Interpreter's NAATI status, with some providing examples of Educational Interpreters who they believed were suitable, despite not being NAATI certified. See Appendix 13 for a full list of preferred interpreter skills.

"For me it's not about qualification but about skill. Working with children is a completely independent skill. Knowing how to adjust your language to fit the child is critical. The best way to do this is through practical learning. Have an experienced interpreter model this with new interpreters. They can work in tandem and the more experienced interpreter can provide feedback to the newer interpreter."

(Participant 1, former student)

It is significant that Educational Interpreter skill and competence in the classroom was more important to students than, and not correlated with, NAATI certification.

Good practice

Students were asked a direct question “when everything was working well in the classroom – why? What enables success?” Common among responses were the absence of additional labour to participate, social connection with peers, the presence of the right supports and excellent working relationships were highlighted:

“A perfect day for me is one where I don't need to ask for anything or advocate, access is just there and I can just be a student.”

(Participant 6, current student)

Two students spoke highly of their educational experience and of the need for a national education standard. Whilst being educated in very different school settings, they highlighted key conditions that were shared. They were educated in different states, one was a school leaver and one a current student, one at a school with a large deaf program and the other a regional mainstream school. Both attended different data collection sessions.

The common factors described included attending a school with multiple deaf students with strong social connection to their peer cohort, staff across the school had a deep knowledge of deaf education and interpreting, Educational Interpreters were in every class, with captioning and educational support available. They described an experience shared with their peers and were connected to their local deaf community through visiting deaf speakers and engagement with community events.

“I recognise the enormous privilege I have in the education and access I have at my school... My experience should be standard across Australia. But I know it is not. We need national standards throughout Australia.”

(Participant 6, current student)



A positive classroom experience was attributed to strong relationships. The primary relationship being between the student and Educational Interpreter, and then also the Educational Interpreter and the teacher. Students reported that good interpreting went beyond message transference, it included a strong working relationship. The student-Educational Interpreter relationship was seen as a key element to classroom success; students desired a good ‘fit’. This included attitude, skills and capability for the work. Educational Interpreter consistency was also reported as important in supporting the relationship.

“I now work with some of my Education Interpreters as an adult. The relationships that are fostered in school may be life-long. Meaning they (the relationships between deaf student and interpreter) are important to establish correctly (in school).”

(Participant 3, former student)

When key education conditions are present such as interpreting skills, strong working relationships between the student and interpreter and interpreter and teacher, then the student is best situated for inclusion and access:

“Good interpreting meant I could switch off, relax and engage with the material.”

(Participant 4, former student)

Key Insights

This national mixed-methods study highlights significant variability in how educational interpreting is understood, implemented, and experienced in Australian schools. Across survey responses and deaf student accounts, three consistent findings emerge:

- ① **the role and scope of educational interpreting are often unclear and inconsistently enacted;**
- ② **current interpreter training pathways do not adequately prepare practitioners for the linguistic, pedagogical, and ethical demands of schooling; and**
- ③ **deaf students frequently perform additional cognitive and emotional labour to manage access when interpreting quality, preparation, or collaboration is insufficient.**

These findings demonstrate that the presence of an interpreter alone does not guarantee equitable access. Instead, educational outcomes depend on clear role delineation, specialised preparation, strong collaboration within education teams, and meaningful opportunities for student independence and feedback.

Role clarity and role delineation

The findings demonstrate substantial variation in how the function of educational interpreting is enacted across participants' reported roles and workplaces. The wide range of job titles reported in Appendix 1 speak to this variation and add to the complexity surrounding research and practice in this area. Survey respondents described undertaking a wide range of tasks alongside interpreting, and deaf students reported experiences where interpreting occurred both as a clearly delineated role and as part of broader education support or behaviour management functions. This variability reflects the role ambiguity identified earlier in the report and is reinforced by the diversity of job titles, responsibilities, and expectations reported by participants.

Both survey and interview data indicate that unclear role boundaries have practical implications for access and learning. Respondents reported mixed levels of clarity about their own role, and many perceived limited understanding of the interpreting task by school leadership or management. Deaf students, particularly at secondary levels, consistently reported a preference for a clearly defined interpreting role, distinct from education support. Deaf students associated clearer role delineation with higher interpreter skill, improved access to classroom discourse, and better preparation for post-school environments.

These findings reinforce the importance of establishing clear and consistent role definitions for educational interpreting. The implications are practical and systemic: without shared understanding of responsibilities, educational interpreters may be required to perform tasks outside their training, accountability can be limited, and students can experience variable access depending on individual staffing arrangements rather than individual need.

Preparation pathways and interpreter capability in educational settings

These findings have direct implications for training design. They indicate the need for educational-specific content that goes beyond language proficiency to include child language development, language deprivation, curriculum knowledge, classroom discourse, and professional boundaries. They also suggest that educational interpreters cannot reasonably acquire these skills through qualifications alone. Structured workplace learning, mentoring, and supported preparation opportunities are necessary to consolidate training and translate knowledge into practice.

Deaf students' agency, workload and conditions for equitable access

Deaf students' perspectives provide critical insight into the lived experience and consequences of variability in role clarity and interpreter preparation. Students described performing additional cognitive, emotional, and interactional labour to manage their access, including monitoring interpreter accuracy, adapting their own language production, managing interpreter placement, and at times compensating for gaps in interpreter content knowledge. These experiences were not framed as isolated incidents, but as more regular occurrences in interpreted education.

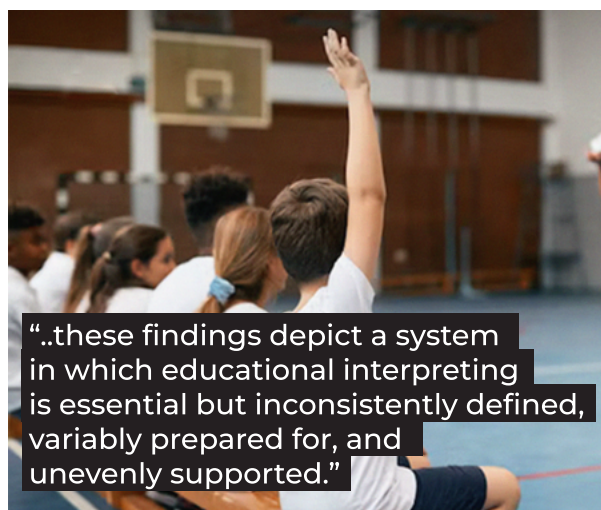
Students consistently described improved access and reduced burden when educational interpreters were well prepared, collaborated directly with teachers, and demonstrated confidence with subject matter and classroom routines. Conversely, reliance on students to supply terminology or explain content was experienced as inequitable and distracting from learning. These findings highlight that equitable access is not achieved solely through educational interpreter presence, but through the quality of interpreting, preparation practices, and collaboration within the education team.

Feedback emerged as a key mechanism for improving access, yet many students reported uncertainty, discomfort, or lack of awareness about their ability to provide feedback to educational interpreters. When feedback was explicitly welcomed, students described stronger relationships and improved interpreting outcomes. This highlights an important implication for schools: student independence in interpreted education does not occur by default and must be actively supported through structured, safe, and age-appropriate mechanisms.

System-level implications

These findings depict a system in which educational interpreting is essential but inconsistently defined, variably prepared for, and unevenly supported. Deaf students' access depends heavily on individual interpreter skill and local school-based practices rather than consistent, system-wide standards. The combination of survey and deaf student data across all research questions indicates that without clearer role definitions, minimum training expectations, specialised preparation pathways, and structured collaboration and feedback processes, interpreted education cannot reliably provide equitable access.

The implications extend beyond individual educators. They point to the need for co-ordinated action across training providers, employers, education systems, and professional bodies. Aligning role expectations, strengthening training pathways, supporting student voice, and improving workforce data collection are necessary steps toward more consistent and equitable educational outcomes for deaf students.



Recommendations

The following recommendations are derived directly from the findings of this study and are intended to provide practical, evidence-based actions to strengthen the quality, consistency, and sustainability of educational interpreting and access for deaf students.

1 Establish clear and consistent Educational Interpreter role definitions

School employers should implement standardised role descriptions and job titles for Educational Interpreters that clearly distinguish interpreting responsibilities from education support tasks. Clear role delineation supports consistent practice across schools, reduces role confusion, and ensures interpreters can focus on language access. Dedicated Educational Interpreter roles should be prioritised, particularly in secondary school settings where curriculum complexity and access demands increase.

2 Strengthen qualification requirements and education-specific training pathways

Minimum requirements for Educational Interpreters should include Auslan fluency at Diploma level, with Educational Interpreters whose primary function is interpreting, being supported to obtain the Diploma of Interpreting and undertake ongoing professional learning. Interpreter training and professional development should incorporate education-specific content, including child language development, language deprivation, curriculum knowledge, and interpreting in classroom contexts. Structured school placements with trained mentors should be embedded to support the transition from training to practice.

3 Improve school-wide understanding of Educational Interpreting

Schools should implement structured training for teachers, leaders, and support staff to build understanding of the Educational Interpreter role and effective collaboration practices. Training should address mediated communication, interpreter preparation, classroom positioning, subject-specific collaboration, and the interpreter's role within the educational team. Improved staff awareness supports more effective use of interpreters and better learning conditions for deaf students.

4 Strengthen deaf student voice and agency

Schools should establish safe, structured mechanisms for deaf students to provide feedback on interpreting and support arrangements. Students should also be supported through resources and workshops that help them understand the interpreter role, navigate classroom communication, and recognise when adjustments are needed. These measures reduce the burden on students to self-advocate informally and promote more equitable access.

5 Advocate for coordinated policy and system level reform

Qualifying and certification bodies should advocate for funding, policy, and workforce frameworks that support the employment of qualified Educational Interpreters across all year levels. Efforts should be directed toward developing nationally recognised professional standards for educational interpreting, in collaboration with relevant bodies such as NAATI, ASLITA, deaf organisations, and education departments. Improved national data collection on bilingual deaf students and interpreter workforce capacity is essential to inform sustainable planning.



Conclusion

This study demonstrates that educational interpreting is a critical yet inconsistently supported component of deaf students' access to schooling in Australia.

While educational interpreters play an essential role in mediating communication, the findings show that variable role definitions, uneven preparation pathways, and limited school-level understanding significantly affect the quality of access students receive. Deaf students' experiences make clear that interpreter presence alone is insufficient; effective access depends on interpreter skill, preparation, collaboration with teachers, and clarity of professional boundaries.

The evidence across this study points to the need for coordinated, system-level change. Clear role delineation, specialised training for educational settings, structured opportunities for collaboration, and supported avenues for student feedback are necessary conditions for equitable participation. Without these foundations, responsibility for access is too often shifted onto deaf students themselves.

The recommendations outlined above provide practical actions for strengthening educational interpreting and ensuring that deaf students' right to meaningful, consistent educational access is realised across Australian schools.



References

- Andersson, S., & Adams Lyngbäck, L. (2022). 'But I feel more at home in the Deaf world even if I can talk': D/deaf adolescents' experiences of transitioning from a mainstream school to a Deaf school in Sweden. *Deafness & Education International*, 24*(3), 249–266. doi:10.1080/14643154.2021.1970086
- Berge, S. S., & Thomassen, G. (2016). 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. doi:10.1093/deafed/env057
- Berge, S. S., & Ytterhus, B. (2015). Deaf and hearing high-school students' expectations for the role of educational sign-language interpreter. *Society, Health & Vulnerability*, 6*(1), 28969. doi:10.3402/shv.v6.28969
- Birks, M. J., Chapman, Y. B., & Francis, K. L. (2008). Memoing in qualitative research: Probing data and processes. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 13*(1), 68–75. doi:10.1177/1744987107081254
- 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. doi:10.1007/s10995-020-02975-7
- Consortium for Outcomes in Deaf Education (CODE). (2023). *Consortium for Outcomes in Deaf Education (CODE) report 2023**. Retrieved from <https://www.deafnessforum.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/CODE-Report-2023-FINAL.pdf>
- Fitzmaurice, S. B. (2021). *The role of the educational interpreter: Perceptions of administrators and teachers**. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Iacono, T. (2024). A critique of the Disability Royal Commission's approach and recommendations for educational inclusion in schools. *Research and Practice in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 11*(2), 160–175. doi:10.1080/23297018.2024.2377993
- Johnston, T., & Schembri, A. (2007). *Australian Sign Language (Auslan): An introduction to sign language linguistics**. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Langer, E. C., & Crume, P. K. (2024). Classroom discourse: What is conveyed through educational interpretation. *The Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 29*(1), 40–59. doi:10.1093/deafed/enad021
- Lopez Vera, A., Thomas, K., Trinh, C., & Nausheen, F. (2023). A case study of the impact of language concordance on patient care, satisfaction, and comfort with sharing sensitive information during medical care. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*, 25*(6), 1261–1269. doi:10.1007/s10903-023-01463-8
- Napier, J., McKee, R., & Goswell, D. (2018). *Sign language interpreting: Theory and practice** (3rd ed.). Leichhardt, NSW: Federation Press.
- National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters. (n.d.). *NAATI Certification System**. Retrieved from <https://www.naati.com.au/certification/>
- Ogbuefi, N., Forauer, A., Kovalchuk, M., Gonzalez, J., Luna, C. G., Niu, Y., Gany, F., & Diamond, L. C. (2025). Language-concordant health care: Implementation of a bilingual competency program. *The Joint Commission Journal on Quality and Patient Safety*, 51*(9), 526–533. doi:10.1016/j.jcjq.2025.06.004
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42*(5), 533–544. doi:10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y

- Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice** (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Prinzi, L. M. (2023). Deaf student–interpreter relationships and feedback practices in K-12 mainstream deaf education. *The Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 28*(1), 68–83. doi:10.1093/deafed/enac026
- Prinzi, L. M. (2024). The interpreter’s role and deaf students’ autonomy in mainstream classrooms. *The Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 29*(3), 412–423. doi:10.1093/deafed/enae009
- Roy, C. B. (2000). *Interpreting as a discourse process**. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (2023). *Final report: Volume 7, inclusive education, employment and housing**. Retrieved from <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report-volume-7-inclusive-education-employment-and-housing>
- Saldaña, J. (2025). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers** (5th ed.). London, England: Sage.
- Schick, B., Williams, K., & Kupermintz, H. (2006). Look who’s being left behind: Educational interpreters and access to education for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. *The Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 11*(1), 3–20. doi:10.1093/deafed/enj007
- Scott, J. A., & Kasun, G. S. (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. doi:10.1080/13670050.2018.1545744
- Silva, K. S. X., & Oliveira, I. M. de. (2016). O trabalho do intérprete de Libras na escola: Um estudo de caso. *Educação & Realidade*, 41*(3), 695–712. doi:10.1590/2175-623661085
- Ting, H., Memon, M. A., Thurasamy, R., & Cheah, J.-H. (2025). Snowball sampling: A review and guidelines for survey research. *Asian Journal of Business Research*, 15*(1), 1–15. doi:10.14707/ajbr.250186
- Victorian Deaf Education Institute. (2021). *Professional standards for educational interpreters**. Retrieved from <https://www.deafeducation.vic.edu.au/professional-standards-educational-interpreters>
- Winston, E. A., & Fitzmaurice, S. B. (Eds.). (2021). *Advances in educational interpreting**. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- World Federation of the Deaf. (2018). *Position paper on inclusive education**. Retrieved from <https://wfdeaf.org/resources/wfd-position-paper-on-inclusive-education>

Appendices

Appendix 1 | List of survey respondent reported job titles

- Education Assistant Auslan
- Freelance Interpreter
- Student Learning Support Officer
- Education Assistant Auslan
- Interpreter
- Education Support
- Teacher Aide: Educational Interpreter
- Educational Interpreter
- School Officer
- Teacher of the deaf
- School Learning Support Officer
- Sign Language Interpreter/SLSO
- SLSO
- Bilingual SLSO
- EA (Auslan)
- Educational Interpreter Auslan
- Bilingual Student Support Officer
- Casual Relief Teacher
- No confirmed job title
- Teacher
- Onsite interpreter
- Itinerant Support Teacher - Hearing
- Deputy Principal

Appendix 2 | Reported NAATI certification by deaf participants

NAATI Certification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
No certification	40	66.7
Certified provisional deaf interpreter	9	15.0
Certified practicing deaf interpreter	5	8.3
Certified practicing translator	4	6.7
Certified provisional interpreter	0	0.0
Certified interpreter	0	0.0
Other	2	3.3
Total	60	100

Appendix 3 | Reported NAATI certification by hearing and hard of hearing participants

NAATI Certification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
None	158	54.5
Certified practicing translator	1	0.3
Certified provisional interpreter	95	32.8
Certified interpreter	23	7.9
Certified specialist health interpreter	2	0.7
Certified specialist legal interpreter	1	0.3
Certified specialist conference interpreter	2	0.7
Other	8	2.8
Total	290	100

Appendix 4 | Tasks completed by the Interpreter

Classroom and school tasks identified as being undertaken by the interpreter (All survey respondents) in order of most to least reported.

Tasks	Frequency Count	Percentage (%)
1. Interpret from English into Auslan (general)	23	6.3
2. Interpret from Auslan into English (general)	19	5.2
3. Direct student's attention	18	5.0
4. Translate written English into Auslan	17	4.7
5. Translate Auslan into written English	17	4.7
6. Adjust physical environment in the classroom for ease of communication, e.g., sight lines	12	3.3
7. Preparing mainstream or specialist teaching team to work with an interpreter	12	3.3
8. Providing training on how to effectively work with an Educational Interpreter	8	2.2
9. Deliver Deaf Awareness Training	4	1.1
10. Advise on making classroom discourse and activities accessible	16	4.4
11. Liaise with teaching staff to comment on deaf student's academic progress	12	3.3
12. Liaise with teaching staff to comment on deaf student's interpersonal progress	14	3.9
13. Liaise with teaching staff to comment on deaf student's language use	13	3.6
14. Assist the teacher with non-interpreting related tasks	14	3.9
15. Assist in making general classroom materials	17	4.7
16. Assist non-deaf students with their classwork	12	3.3
17. Yard duty	9	2.5
18. Tutoring the deaf student in the classroom	18	5.0
19. Tutoring the deaf student outside the classroom	15	4.1
20. Pre-teaching vocabulary	16	4.4
21. Teaching concepts	15	4.1
22. Revising content material in or out of the classroom	17	4.7
23. Coaching deaf student on social skills	16	4.4
24. Supporting social connections with deaf student and their peers	18	5.0
25. Answer academic questions from deaf student without interpreting the question to the teacher	17	4.7
26. Advocate on behalf of deaf student	19	5.2
27. Advocate with deaf student	16	4.4
28. Negotiating strategies for accommodation	10	2.8
29. Requesting accessibility (e.g., captions)	22	6.0
30. Producing captions to make video content accessible	11	3.0
31. Utilising technology for the student (e.g. Rogers, FM, etc.)	12	3.3
32. Notetaking for deaf student	15	4.1

Appendix 5 | Task clarity reported by interpreters in the classroom

'Do you have clarity on the tasks you are required to perform in your role'	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Extremely unclear	9	7.4
Somewhat unclear	8	6.6
Neither clear nor unclear	11	9.0
Somewhat clear	57	46.7
Extremely clear	37	30.4
Total	122	100

Appendix 6 | Management understanding of interpreter tasks

'Do you believe the school/management understands the tasks and demands of interpreting in the classroom'	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Not knowledgeable at all	39	32.0
Slightly knowledgeable	38	31.1
Moderately knowledgeable	26	21.3
Very knowledgeable	9	7.4
Extremely knowledgeable	10	8.2
Total	122	100

Appendix 7 | Reported completion of the Diploma of Interpreting by hearing participants

Completion rates Diploma of Interpreting (Auslan-English)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	94	48.5
Currently studying	16	8.2
No	84	43.3
Total	194	100

Appendix 8 | Diploma of Interpreting training and preparation for working with deaf children

Prepared for working with deaf children	Frequency	Percentage (%)
No	41	39.4
Somewhat	52	50
Yes	11	10.6
Total	104	100

Appendix 9 | Diploma of Interpreting training and preparation for working in an educational setting

Preparedness for work in educational setting	Frequency	Percentage (%)
No	41	39.4
Somewhat	49	47.1
Yes	14	13.5
Total	104	100

Appendix 10 | Interpreter self-rating against Professional Standards

Respondents whose main task in the classroom is interpreting - Self rating across 12 of 21 standards in the Professional Standards for Educational Interpreters (VDEI, 2021).

#	Professional Standard	Basic	Emerging	Proficient	Highly Proficient
1	Knowledge of how children learn (focus on DHH students)	8 (6.7%)	40 (33.6%)	57 (47.9%)	14 (11.8%)
2	Knowledge of working with students from diverse linguistic & cultural backgrounds	8 (6.7%)	34 (28.6%)	58 (49.6%)	18 (15.1%)
3	Knowledge of relevant National & State curricula	20 (16.8%)	47 (39.5%)	43 (36.1%)	9 (7.6%)
4	Knowledge of how classroom teachers deliver content through language & interaction	13 (10.9%)	37 (31.1%)	48 (40.3%)	21 (17.6%)
5	Knowledge of roles and functions of interpreter	2 (1.7%)	17 (14.3%)	52 (43.7%)	48 (40.3%)
6	Knowledge of interpreting practices in educational settings	4 (3.4%)	26 (21.8%)	51 (42.9%)	38 (31.9%)
7	Ability to prepare for classroom interpreting	6 (5.0%)	25 (21.0%)	56 (47.1%)	32 (26.9%)
8	Knowledge of modes of interpreting	11 (9.2%)	25 (21.0%)	56 (47.1%)	27 (22.7%)
9	Knowledge of co-construction principles	37 (31.1%)	44 (37.0%)	31 (26.1%)	7 (5.9%)
10	Knowledge of safe interpreting work practices	12 (10.1%)	23 (19.3%)	56 (47.1%)	28 (23.5%)
11	Engagement with professional interpreter & education networks	19 (16.0%)	37 (31.1%)	37 (31.1%)	26 (21.8%)
12	Engagement with deaf & hard of hearing community, networks & organisations	9 (7.6%)	28 (23.5%)	49 (41.2%)	33 (27.7%)

Appendix 11 | School staff training on the roles of interpreters

Staff training on interpreter roles	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	49	13.5
No	101	27.8
N/A	213	58.7
Total	363	100

Appendix 12 | Deaf student instructions

Do deaf students provide specific instructions or preferences on how they would like the interpreter to provide instructions?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes - to me (Educational Interpreter)	15	4.1
Yes - to Auslan Language Model	10	2.8
Yes - to interpreter	9	2.5
Yes - to other people in the school	4	1.1
Yes - to caregivers	1	0.3
No	11	3

Appendix 13 | Interpreter skills identified by deaf students

Interpreter skills identified by the deaf student participants, a complete list.

- Translating written English into Auslan
- Producing English structure with Auslan lexicon
- Adapting to, and demonstrating the language register of the teacher
- Conveying paralinguistic information – tone, register
- Relaying contextual information about what is happening in the classroom
- Preparation – reading in breaks ahead of the class
- Blending in with the school environment
- Interjection for clarification
- Knowing when not to interject, and disrupt the classroom flow
- Using knowledge of child language development to adjust language production
- Preparation – collaborating with the teacher
- Adjusting to the physical space, gym, theatre, classroom etc.
- Preparation – planning for concepts and agreeing on signs ahead of time
- Confident voicing (Auslan to English)
- Time lag between hearing the message and formulating the Auslan production
- Content knowledge
- Relationship building
- Knowledge of regional deaf children
- Auslan production skills
- Knowledge of children from hearing families
- Knowledge of children from deaf families
- Strategies for working with children
- Confidence
- Fluency
- Language adjustment to suit the child's needs
- Knowledge of teaching methods
- Requesting feedback from the student