# NEPALI SIGN LANGUAGE AND DEAF EDUCATION PEDAGOGY IN NEPAL: ISSUES AND WAY FORWARDS

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*This paper explores the enduring issues and challenges in Deaf education and its pedagogical aspects in Nepal. The paper is based on the research that draws on primary data from interviews with native Nepali Sign Language (NSL) users, teachers, and parents, as well as Focus Group Discussions. Secondary sources include dictionaries, textual materials, videos, and research papers on NSL and other sign languages. The thematic approach was adopted to develop the paper from where various issues have been discovered. Issues such as the role of educational institutions, knowledge about Deaf language and culture, teacher recruitment, monitoring system and the physical facilities etc. are more pertinent than other basic issues. For this, the paper proposes various evidence-based strategies that implement bi/multilingual framework in order to highlight the critical role of introducing NSL from early childhood stage. Further, the paper recommends some policy issues related to sign language education in Nepal.*

*Keywords:* Sign language, language policies, parental involvement, bilingual education, inclusion.

## 1. Introduction

Deaf education (DE) refers to the specialized field of education dedicated to providing instruction and support to students who are deaf or hard of hearing. The primary goal of DE is to help these students for lifelong education in the school and societies which involves a variety of individually tailored teaching methods, materials, and interventions. Historically DE was informally implemented but in the late 20th century, there was a resurgence of interest in bilingual-bicultural education. Research on language acquisition in deaf children and growing recognition of Deaf culture have led to a more balanced and individualized approach to deaf education. Virtual learning communities could improve the training of new teachers for deaf and hard-of-hearing students by (a) basing the training on effective teaching strategies used by experienced educators, and (b) offering extra-professional development chances for current teachers (Johnson, 2004). In the context of Nepal, DE has been conceptualized after the development of Nepali Sign Language.

NSL is a natural language, recognized as the primary and most accessible linguistic vehicle for the deaf community in Nepal (Gautam & Sapkota, 2024). Its emergence represents a critical assertion of linguistic identity, serving to dismantle communication barriers within a predominantly Nepali-speaking society. There is discrepancy in population data with the National Federation of the Deaf Nepal estimating 500,000 deaf individuals where 2021 national census records only 51,373 deaf people in Nepal having 1,784 as NSL primary language users (NSO, 2023). The linguistic landscape of signing in Nepal is characterized by a dichotomy between a natural sign language and a manual code. Natural Nepali Sign Language (NSL), used primarily by culturally deaf individuals, possesses its own unique grammar, which is notably different from spoken Nepali. This form is not a natural language but a transliteration of spoken Nepali

into signs, preserving the syntactic order of the spoken language and thus lacking the distinct grammatical evolution of NSL. A central issue is the failure of educational institutions to acknowledge Deaf culture, language, and specific needs, often due to a limited understanding of linguistic rights. The Deaf/deaf community in Nepal faces marginalization by the hearing majority and is dominated by both hearing and deaf individuals who hold linguistic rights, thereby restricting access to quality education and opportunities. This paper highlights the various issues and way forwards in deaf education pedagogy in Nepal.

## 2. Methodology

This paper employed a qualitative method, utilizing narratives, focus group discussions (FGD), and semi-structured interviews for data collection and thematic analysis. Informants, including teachers (both Deaf and deaf), Deaf students, and their parents, were purposively selected from three Deaf schools of Jhapa district. The selected informants were questioned about the issues and difficulties they encounter in their everyday activities at school and home. Furthermore, six FGDs were conducted during the field visit, with at least two FGDs held at each school. Participants in each FGD were interviewed regarding the issues and potential solutions within Deaf education pedagogy. Altogether, six individual interviews were conducted and recorded from teachers, Deaf students, and parents. Informants were selected from various age groups based on their role and experience in Deaf education pedagogy. Pseudonyms have been used throughout to ensure anonymity and protect privacy.

## 3. Analysis and discussion

This section classifies and describes the main findings of this research based on data analyzed through the lenses of Linguistic Human Rights (LHRs) and Social Justice. The findings are contextualized with related literature to address the various issues and difficulties faced by Deaf students in the classroom and to present the recommendations suggested for enhancing Deaf education pedagogy based on existing educational system.

### 3.1 Issues in Deaf education

Nepal experiences various issues and challenges in deaf education system. This seems to be a confluence of critical issues like shortage of qualified teachers in Nepali Sign Language (NSL), a lack of teaching-learning materials, and the social exclusion of Deaf students. The most pressing issues driving this crisis are detailed below.

### 3.1.1 Lack of Deaf teachers/educators

The scarcity of Deaf teachers in Deaf education has profound implications for language development, cultural identity, and overall academic success among Deaf students. Deaf teachers serve as vital linguistic role models, providing exposure to fluent, natural sign language. They share lived experiences with Deaf students, fostering a strong Deaf identity and sense of belonging. The presence of successful Deaf professionals in educational roles is crucial for student aspiration and motivation. The absence of Deaf teachers may limit students' aspirations. Anil Rajbanshi, and Dipak Ghimire, Deaf students say, "*Mostly we have hearing and deaf teachers. They use signs quite different from the signs we use. For example, they use full sentence and grammar which we feel bored to watch and sometimes we don't understand. It seems they don't understand the Deaf culture and don't sign perfectly.*" Furthermore, Deaf teachers understand the unique challenges faced by Deaf students and can effectively advocate for inclusive policies, accessible materials, and sign language-friendly environments. Without them, students may lack crucial support, leading to inconsistent language input, which adversely affects their language development and comprehension skills, and potentially weakens their connection to Deaf culture.A significant barrier to equitable representation persists within Nepali deaf policy-making spheres. To date, positions on committees concerning Deaf individuals are predominantly occupied by deaf educators who utilize a signed form of spoken Nepali, often referred to as Signed Nepali. This system is a manual code for the dominant spoken language, distinct from Nepali Sign Language (NSL), the natural and linguistically rich language

that has evolved within the Deaf community. This dynamic creates a representation paradox, as highlighted by Deaf activist Yasoda Prasain (personal communication). She argues that while these deaf representatives advocate against hearing domination over the Deaf community, they frequently fail to address internal hierarchies. Specifically, they do not advocate for culturally Deaf individuals, those for whom NSL is a primary language and who identify with Deaf culture, who are themselves marginalized within these spaces by a subset of deaf and hard of hearing people. Prasain clarifies this distinction by noting that the delegates in question often have strong oral skills, identifying primarily with the hearing world, and view their deafness as an audiological condition rather than a cultural identity. Consequently, they may remain indifferent to the unique linguistic and cultural challenges faced by the broader Deaf community, particularly the discrimination stemming from the prioritization of oralism and signed spoken languages over NSL. This failure to challenge intra-community discrimination ultimately renders them unable to offer genuine representation for the diverse needs of the Nepali Deaf community. Although both sign and spoken languages follow similar developmental patterns when acquired from birth (Mayberry, 2010). However, most of the deaf individuals are introduced to sign language later, often after infancy.Consequently, Deaf children often demonstrate less interest in learning, as this form does not fully align with their linguistic preferences and cultural identity. Standard Nepali Sign Language (NSL) possesses its own unique grammatical structure, independent of spoken Nepali. It does not use case markers, instead conveying meaning through facial expressions, body language, and spatial grammar. It also lacks explicit tense markers, utilizing time adverbs (e.g., yesterday, tomorrow) to indicate temporal context. Crucially, its syntax places the modified element before the modifier, a structure opposite to that of spoken Nepali. For example: i) boy + bad (meaning "bad boy"), ii) houses many (meaning "many houses")

This structural authenticity makes NSL more natural and intuitive for Deaf individuals.

Therefore, pedagogical approaches must align with Standard NSL to ensure Deaf children receive a linguistically rich and culturally relevant education, rather than a restrictive direct translation of spoken Nepali.

### 3.1.2 Teachers without Nepali sign language skills

Teachers without fluency in NSL struggle to communicate effectively with Deaf students that lead to misunderstandings, limited classroom engagement, and reduced academic achievement. The most immediate impact is a breakdown in communication, hindering students' understanding of instructions and academic content, resulting in isolation and frustration. The historical suppression of sign language in deaf education represents one of the most flagrant examples of linguistic oppression in the history of pedagogy (Reagan, 2011). This language barrier impedes students' language acquisition by depriving them of rich linguistic input, causing delays in language development that impact literacy, writing skills, and general cognitive abilities. It also limits opportunities for peer collaboration and social learning, compromising socio-emotional development and self-esteem. Without an inherent understanding of Deaf culture, hearing teachers may employ methods misaligned with students' needs and values, potentially reinforcing stigmas. This disparity in representation directly impacts educational experiences on the ground. The privileging of oralist methods, which emphasize speech and lip-reading over sign language, within policy is reflected in classroom instruction, often to the detriment of Deaf students. Nabin Nepal, a Deaf student, underscores this practical consequence, stating that most hearing instructors rely on oralist teaching methods, which are profoundly inaccessible. He reports, "*They cannot use Nepali Sign Language (NSL), so they often teach us by speaking. We never understand what they are teaching.*" This student's testimony illustrates the critical gap between policy decisions which is often influenced by those who prioritize assimilation, and the lived reality of students who depend on visual language. The use of oralism by teachers who lack proficiency in NSL creates a significant barrier to education, effectively denying students meaningful access to the curriculum and reinforcing their exclusion.

This lack of NSL proficiency also hinders the implementation of specific visual teaching methods and accommodations, further hindering academic and personal growth and damaging teacher-student relationships.

### 3.1.3 Fluency in written Nepali and English languages

Proficiency in written Nepali and English is essential for accessing mainstream education and information in Nepal. Deaf students who lack fluency in these languages struggle to comprehend textbooks, academic instructions, and written texts, limiting critical thinking and problem-solving abilities and leading to lower academic performance. This language gap hinders effective interaction with hearing family members, teachers, and peers, fostering social isolation and frustration. Tika Ram Yadav, a parent argues, "*The NSL is not universally understood, Deaf children's primary educational objective should be achieving fluency in written Nepali and English. This skillset is presented as essential for enabling independent communication and ensuring survival in a predominantly hearing society without the need for interpreter services.*" Consequently, this position concludes that the paramount duty of educators is to focus their pedagogical efforts on developing students' written language fluency above all else. It also restricts access to the vast majority of educational materials, research, and global knowledge available in these languages, affecting their ability to participate in broader academic and professional communities. This lack of proficiency impedes social integration, making it difficult to build relationships outside the Deaf community and participate in mainstream activities. Furthermore, it creates barriers in accessing essential services from government agencies and healthcare professionals and poses significant challenges in transitioning to higher education and securing employment, as most universities and employers require communication in Nepali or English.

### 3.1.4 Teaching-learning materials

A critical shortage of accessible reading materials in Nepali Sign Language (NSL) severely impedes the Deaf community's fundamental right to access their cultural and historical heritage. This absence effectively deprives them of knowledge about their nation's culture, religion, geography, foundational scriptures, myths, legendary heroes, and the meanings behind major festivals and social structures. This systemic lack fosters a damaging misconception that Deaf individuals are indifferent to their origins, when in reality, this perceived apathy is a direct consequence of being excluded from the necessary tools for learning and connection. The barrier is not a lack of interest but a profound absence of appropriately designed educational resources. Durga Prasad Bhattari, Manju Gautam, and Radha Chalise, the parents desire for Deaf children to engage with foundational texts, scriptures, and history. However, this goal is thwarted by a severe lack of accessible formats. They further argue, "*The barrier is identified as the absence of learning materials designed for visual learners, such as those created in or translated into Nepali Sign Language (NSL) through video, or supplemented with rich visuals and clear text.*" Consequently, Deaf children are effectively denied access to this core cultural knowledge, not because of an inability to learn, but due to the institution's failure to accommodate their linguistic and learning needs. A significant challenge in inclusive classrooms is the communication gap. Deaf students struggle to follow lessons without adequate accommodations like sign language interpreters, captioning, or teachers proficient in NSL, leading to misunderstandings and reduced participation. The implementation of classroom inclusion policies has, in practice, often failed to achieve its intended outcomes for Deaf students. Radha Subedi, a Deaf student reports, "*…such policies were not working properly. The primary barriers identified were a widespread lack of understanding among both hearing peers and instructors regarding Deaf culture and the specific challenges faced by Deaf individuals. This deficit in cultural and communicative competence created a hostile learning environment, where students experienced bullying and social exclusion. Consequently, the negative social experience, rather than the academic challenge itself, became a significant deterrent, leading to an unwillingness to attend school and severely undermining the educational goals of*

*inclusion.*" Teachers often lack the necessary NSL skills or knowledge of Deaf culture to implement effective, engaging methods. This over-reliance on interpreters can disrupt lesson flow and hinder student independence. Some stakeholders express reservations about the full inclusion model based on pragmatic concerns regarding pedagogical efficiency. Ram Bahadur Limbu, a parent, articulates this perspective, arguing that segregated classrooms are more effective due to the distinct learning needs of Deaf students. He argues, "*Deaf individuals should not sit with hearing students inside the same class because it takes time to teach Deaf students comparing to the hearing students. The teaching method is different where teachers should spend more time and use lots of examples to teach the Deaf student that is not similar to the hearing students.*" Furthermore, Deaf students may face social stigma, bullying, or discrimination from hearing peers who lack understanding of Deaf culture, resulting in social exclusion, marginalization, and negative impacts on self-esteem and cultural identity.

### 3.1.5 NSL knowledge to parents

The widespread reluctance of parents of Deaf children in Nepal to learn NSL creates a profound communication barrier within the home, severely impacting the child's development. The systemic neglect of Nepali Sign Language (NSL) instruction for hearing families has profound consequences, creating barriers within the most fundamental unit of society and the family. A Deaf student Ayush Ghimire says, "*I often feel profound sense of isolation and sadness stemming from the inability to communicate with my parents, who lack proficiency in NSL.*" This testimony highlights a critical outcome where Deaf individuals become linguistic minorities within their own homes, leading to emotional distress and a feeling of alienation from their primary support network. This issue extends beyond educational policy into the realm of social and emotional well-being. It reveals a failure to provide families with the necessary resources and support to acquire NSL, thereby perpetuating cycles of exclusion that begin in the domestic sphere. This situation positions the responsibility for communication on the Deaf child, who must navigate a world without a shared native language with their parents, rather than on a supportive system that equips families for bilingual communication. Deaf children are unable to share daily experiences or seek academic help, depriving them of essential guidance and emotional support. Parents remain unaware of their child's educational progress, social interactions, and school quality. Over time, this isolation fosters disconnection and frustration in the child, leading to diminished educational engagement and a significantly increased risk of school dropout, perpetuating a cycle of educational inequality and limited future opportunities.

### 3.1.6 Insufficient institutions for higher education

The centralization of specialized Deaf education in Nepal within Kathmandu presents a formidable barrier for students from outside the valley. This limits job and other opportunities for the Deaf community that leads to financial dependence on families. The high cost of living in Kathmandu, paired with the absence of a comprehensive government scholarship policy for higher education, creates an insurmountable obstacle. Geeta Rai's testimony underscores the profound geographical and economic disparities in accessible higher education for Deaf students in Nepal. She articulates a common dilemma faced by families outside the capital, stating:
 "*I want my daughter to enroll in a bachelor's program here in Jhapa. However, there are no colleges that provide accessible education for Deaf individuals without relying on interpreters. This is the reason I feel compelled to send her to Kathmandu for her higher studies. Yet, the cost of living and studying in Kathmandu is prohibitively high, and we also cannot manage the additional expense of interpreters there. This situation is very difficult for our family.*"This account highlights a critical systemic failure such as accommodations, interpreter services in major urban centers like Kathmandu. This policy gap effectively creates a two-tiered system, where Deaf students from peripheral regions are forced to migrate Kathmandu for higher education and other opportunities like other people (Gautam and Poudel, 2022). The statement reveals that the primary barrier is not a lack of academic potential

but a deficit in institutional capacity and equitable resource distribution, which places the onus of accessibility on individual families rather than on the educational system itself. This situation perpetuates inequities by making higher education inaccessible for Deaf students from low-income and rural backgrounds. Consequently, many Deaf students abandon their academic pursuits prematurely to enter the job market for survival, ending their education due to financial and infrastructural constraints rather than a lack of ability.

A significant systemic barrier in higher education is the absence of accessible pathways into mainstream graduate programs for Deaf individuals. Consequently, students are frequently compelled to choose from a limited selection of courses at specialized institutions rather than pursuing their chosen fields of study at the university of their choice. This forced channeling, which disregards individual aptitudes, interests, and the right to self-determination, is profoundly demotivating. While many Deaf individuals aspire to pursue M.A., M.Phil., and Ph.D. degrees, these ambitions are systematically thwarted by institutional inaccessibility. Key barriers include a fundamental lack of awareness about Deaf culture and linguistic identity, a trust deficit that refuses to acknowledge Deaf individuals as capable competitors in all academic fields, and a critical absence of professional sign language interpreter services.An entrenched culture of low expectations remains a significant barrier to equitable education for Deaf students. Cawthon (2001;2011) observes, the "pervasive... 'soft bigotry of low expectations'" often leads educators to prioritize a student's hearing status over their intellectual potential. This bias fosters a presumption of incapacity, curtailing academic and professional opportunities before they can be meaningfully pursued. The case of Sangita Sharma, a Deaf Nepali woman holding a bachelor's degree in education, exemplifies the systemic barriers that exclude qualified Deaf individuals from advanced academic and professional pathways. Her experience underscores a critical institutional failure, as she reports: "*Despite my qualifications, I was repeatedly denied admission to Master's*

*programs, with institutions citing the absence of faculty proficient in Nepali Sign Language (NSL) and inadequate funding for qualified interpreters.*" In the absence of such fundamental accommodations, Deaf students are effectively barred from participation in higher education. This exclusion is not merely a logistical over sight, it represents a profound loss of intellectual capital. The continued marginalization of Deaf individuals in academia reflects institutional neglect rather than any deficiency in ability, perpetuating their underrepresentation in scholarly and professional domains.

### 3.1.7 Interpreters and specialized signs

A critical barrier is the shortage of qualified sign language interpreters, especially in specialized academic and professional fields. This scarcity severely restricts educational and career opportunities, depriving Deaf individuals of pursuing desired subjects like software engineering or hotel management. Available interpreters often lack the necessary technical vocabulary and expert knowledge in these areas, making effective communication and learning impossible. The current cohort of sign language interpreters remains critically insufficient in both numerical and specialized capacity, thereby constraining equitable access for the Deaf community across multiple domains.

Dipesh Shreshtha, a Deaf individual states, "*The scarcity of interpreters creates significant geographical disparities in service provision, with rural areas experiencing acute shortages. Furthermore, the lack of interpreters possessing domain-specific expertise in professional and academic fields, such as science, technology, law, and humanities, systematically excludes Deaf individuals from advanced educational opportunities and specialized career paths.*" This structural inadequacy not only limits individual academic pursuit but also perpetuates broader socio-economic marginalization by restricting professional advancement within specialized sectors of the economy. Consequently, institutions frequently reject Deaf applicants due to an inability to provide accessibility, not the student's capability. This systemic failure excludes Deaf individuals from passionate career paths,

perpetuating cycles of inequality and unemployment.

## 3.2 Suggestions for deaf education in Nepal

From the previous study, we have realized that the pedagogical landscape of Deaf education in Nepal is very complex. For this, a proactive, targeted approach is essential to enhance educational quality. Such study should involve the Deaf community in identifying key research areas that focus on health disparities and wellbeing for the Deaf community (McKee et al., 2013). Through comprehensive field visits and in-depth consultations with stakeholders including teachers, Deaf students, parents, and community advocates, few collective insights and measures have been discussed.

### 3.2.1 Produce deaf teachers or teachers proficient in deaf culture

It is essential to cultivate Deaf teachers and culturally competent hearing teachers to enhance pedagogy. The government must create specialized teacher training programs for Deaf individuals and those dedicated to Deaf education. These programs should emphasize: advanced proficiency in NSL, including its pure form; a deep understanding of Deaf history, values, and culture; pedagogical methodologies tailored for Deaf learners, including classroom management; and active collaboration with the Deaf community to ensure curricula reflect authentic needs. Umesh Karki, a Deaf individual, identifies a critical flaw in current hiring practices and its detrimental impact on educational outcomes. He argues, "*Due to the lack of Deaf teachers, the government recruits hearing teachers with insufficient knowledge of Nepali Sign Language (NSL). This is the reason Deaf children show less interest in studies and ultimately result in school dropout. Therefore, to enhance Deaf education and empower them, the number of Deaf teachers must increase. For that, regular training and refresher courses for Deaf teachers should be organized and planned.*"

### 3.2.2 Recruit teachers with proper NSL knowledge

Recruiting teachers with proficient NSL knowledge is crucial. It enhances communication, drastically reducing misunderstandings and educational setbacks. It promotes the linguistic and cognitive development of Deaf students by improving their vocabulary, grammar, and expression in their native language. Teachers proficient in NSL can provide better emotional support, making students feel connected and supported. A group of Deaf students, Roshan Jha, Usha Lingden, and Radhika Shakya, emphasize the critical importance of government-led initiatives to recruit educators who possess not only proficiency in NSL but also a foundational understanding and respect for Deaf culture. They argue that "*the government should recruit teachers who are proficient in NSL and who know the Deaf culture and respect that. That very practice increases the interest of deaf children to go to school and study diligently. It also helps in improving the educational quality of Deaf students.*" By ensuring educators are qualified to deliver instruction in the students' primary language and through a culturally responsive framework, the pedagogical experience for a Deaf student is substantially improved. This method not only elevates academic outcomes but also actively supports students' psychosocial well-being, contributing to a more equitable and effective educational environment. As a result, learners exhibit increased engagement, heightened motivation, greater sense of empowerment, and strengthened self-confidence, all of which cultivate a sustained and intrinsic desire to learn.

### 3.2.3 Implement bi/multilingual education

A bilingual/multilingual educational approach offers significant benefits by allowing Deaf students to develop proficiency in both their first language (NSL) and written languages (Nepali/English).

A group of Deaf students, including Kamal Rana, Uma Limbu, Rita Chaudhary, and Shailesh Jha, advocates for a multilingual approach to education that empowers them to navigate both Deaf and hearing worlds (Gautam, 2021). They assert: "*We Deaf students should be proficient in NSL along with written Nepali and English so that we can communicate and interact with hearing individuals without interpreters*." This equips them to navigate both Deaf and hearing

worlds, participate fully in mainstream society, and develop strong literacy skills in languages, thereby improving academic performance and widening career opportunities by the mainstream politics towards powerful and global languages (Gautam, 2025). It also fosters cultural awareness and a strong Deaf identity.

### 3.2.4 Conduct frequent and mandatory monitoring of deaf schools

Frequent and mandatory monitoring ensures educational standards are met effectively. It allows for the timely identification and intervention of issues like language barriers, curricular gaps, or insufficient resources. Monitoring assesses the quality of teaching, the use of NSL as the primary communication mode, and compliance with policies, contributing to accountability. A coalition of parents, including Ram Sharma, Upendra Limbu, Devika Dahal, and Lila Nepal, advocate for enhanced governmental oversight as a critical mechanism for improving educational outcomes for Deaf students. They argue that "*The government must monitor the schools regularly. This monitoring should be mandatory so that all teachers are held accountable, and student attendance becomes regular. That practice will help in improving Deaf education.*" It provides valuable feedback for teacher professional development and creates a cycle of continuous improvement, leading to better academic outcomes, emotional well-being, and long-term student success.

### 3.2.5 Promote inclusive schools instead of inclusive classrooms

A Deaf person is seen as a distinct sociolinguistic being whose first language is signing language, a visual-spatial language that requires a different approach to education (Rincón Infante, 2022). This perspective, known as the socio-cultural vision, views deafness not as a disability but as a culture, and the Deaf community as a linguistic minority (Salazar-Clemeña, 2006). This viewpoint helps to foster genuine inclusion as a form of interaction between the deaf and hearing worlds (Salazar Durango, 2018).An inclusive school model offers a more comprehensive environment than mere classroom integration. It extends inclusivity to all aspects of school life,

extracurricular activities, events, and social interactions, ensuring Deaf students have equal access. Allowing Deaf students to learn together in the classroom with Deaf peers and teachers facilitates natural communication and enjoyment of learning. Ritika Rajbanshi, a Deaf student, advocates for a systemic shift in educational philosophy, arguing that true inclusivity is achieved at the institutional level rather than merely within individual classrooms. She posits, "*An inclusive school, rather than just an inclusive classroom, encourages Deaf individuals to learn and read in a stress-free environment so that they easily understand their teachers and improve their education.*" Rajbanshi contends that only this whole school approach can reduce the cognitive and social stress associated with communication barriers, thereby creating the conditions necessary for Deaf students to fully comprehend instruction and achieve meaningful educational outcomes. Her perspective challenges superficial inclusion policies, emphasizing that authentic access requires a deep, institutional commitment to linguistic and cultural inclusivity. This model promotes awareness of Deaf culture among all students, fostering empathy and reducing prejudice. It helps Deaf students develop self-confidence, strong relationships, and better educational outcomes, thereby preparing them for fuller integration into society.

### 3.2.6 Increase the number of institutions for higher education

A significant number of Deaf individuals aspire to pursue higher education; however, their academic progression is often hindered by a critical shortage of accessible institutions. This systemic lack of support frequently compels them to discontinue their formal education or relinquish their ambitions for advanced study. Consequently, there is a pressing need for the government to establish more dedicated educational facilities across various regions of the nation to effectively educate and empower this community.This challenge is addressed by Geeta Rai, a parent of a deaf student, who stated: "*We want our daughter to enroll in a bachelor's program in Jhapa, but there is no local college for the Deaf. She would need to relocate to Kathmandu, which causes us apprehension as she has no acquaintances there.*

*Therefore, I urge the government to establish colleges that provide education in sign language for Deaf individuals.*" This account highlights the dual barriers of geographical isolation and the absence of localized, accessible learning environments, reinforcing the imperative for strategic governmental intervention.

### 3.2.7 Access to universities and diverse courses

A significant number of deaf individuals in Nepal face systemic barriers to pursuing higher education after completing their undergraduate degrees. Despite their qualifications and aspirations, universities frequently deny or hesitate to admit them, often perceiving their enrollment as a potential burden due to communication barriers. This issue is exemplified by the experience of Sangita Sharma, a Deaf individual who holds a bachelor's degree in education. She reported, "*After completing my bachelor's in education, I wanted to join a Master's program. I approached many universities in Nepal, but I was consistently rejected. The institutions cited a lack of teachers proficient in Nepali Sign Language (NSL) and insufficient budget to provide qualified interpreters as reasons for my inadmissibility.*" She advocates for government intervention, stating*, "The government should mandate the provision of NSL interpreters in universities to facilitate our admission and access."*

This barrier prevents Deaf individuals from accessing a wide range of academic and professional fields, including hotel management, computer engineering, and electrical engineering. Admission is frequently contingent upon the prospective student independently arranging and funding their own interpreter services, creating an inequitable system. Regarding a solution, Anush Subedi, another Deaf individual, emphasizes the need for institutional reform: "*I want to study computer engineering. I request all colleges and universities to design and revise their courses to be Deaf-friendly so that people like us can benefit.*" This call to action highlights the necessity for educational institutions to proactively adapt their policies and curricula to be more inclusive and accessible, rather than placing the responsibility solely on the Deaf student.

### 3.2.8 Increase specialized interpreters and signs

It is evident that the pervasive shortage of qualified sign language interpreters constitutes a significant barrier to higher education for Deaf individuals, effectively denying them access to their desired fields of study. Educational institutions frequently cite this lack of interpreter support as a primary reason for denying admission. To address this systemic issue, a concerted effort is required from both Deaf associations and educational institutions to prioritize the training and development of a robust corps of interpreters. This initiative should include strategies to incentivize individuals from diverse academic backgrounds to enter the interpreting profession through the development of attractive schemes, such as guaranteed job placements, competitive remuneration, and opportunities for national and international professional development. This need is emphasized by Roshan Tamang, a Deaf individual, who states, "*Deaf associations should produce NSL interpreters from various fields such as science, commerce, and computer backgrounds, and offer them good salaries and opportunities so that we can understand their interpretations in class.*"

Furthermore, to ensure academic rigor and conceptual clarity, there is a critical parallel need for the ongoing development and standardization of specialized terminology in Nepali Sign Language (NSL), particularly for technical fields such as science, engineering, and fine arts. Government bodies and Deaf associations must therefore collaborate on policy initiatives aimed at both interpreter production and lexical expansion. As highlighted by Geeta Shreshtha, a Deaf teacher, "*NSL signs are insufficient to date. Signs from different backgrounds should be invented so that we can easily teach Deaf students and they can easily understand the lesson.*" Such comprehensive policy measures are indispensable for empowering Deaf individuals to pursue and succeed in a wide array of academic and professional disciplines.

### 4. Conclusion and implications

Deaf education policy constitutes the foundational framework designed to secure equitable

educational provision, directly governing pedagogical methodologies, curricular content, and the official recognition of sign languages. Globally, while access to schooling has expanded, a pervasive crisis persists: the chasm between mere enrollment and the receipt of a qualitatively meaningful education that empowers rather than marginalizes. This paper highlighted many critical issues, including a shortage of Deaf teachers, a lack of proficiency for NSL and various other issues and the way forwards towards deaf education pedagogy. Moreover, the paper has proposed several significant solutions such as training and employing Deaf teachers having proficiency in Deaf culture and strong NSL skills, implementing bi/multilingual education, instituting rigorous school monitoring; and advocating for genuinely inclusive schooling models. Though the research was limited within three deaf schools in Jhapa, it provides valuable insights for policymakers, educators, students, and researchers invested in NSL and equitable education. The implications underscore the urgent need for policy and practice that center deaf agency, language, and culture to achieve genuine educational equity.

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