



## CHALLENGES FACED BY SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS IN CLASSROOM: A CASE STUDY OF PSL LEARNERS BY USING MAXQDA

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### **Abstract**

*This study highlights the challenges faced by sign language interpreters while handling hearing impaired Pakistan Sign Language learners in classroom. Sign language interpreters facilitate the communication between hearing impaired individuals and course instructors in classroom. According to Linguistic Society of America (2002), It is highly required for interpreters to have linguistic experience as well as certain knowledge of content they are interpreting. It also emphasizes that they have enough time to analyze handouts before meeting hearing impaired students. They need to pay close attention to conveying meaning while taking into account both linguistic and cultural variations (Ackroyd & Wright, 2018). They need to be professionally trained in adjusting their interpreting style to meet the individual needs of each student and they must have knowledge of social, cultural and linguistic nuances in this context (Hameed & Sulman, 2023). This study incorporates qualitative case study design while using MAXQDA. MAXQDA as a tool is used to analyze data collected from observations and interviews of sign language interpreters. Findings suggest that interpreters face challenges of emotional and cultural sensitivity, complex academic content as they are not subject specialists. The presence of different varieties of PSL in classroom is the main difficulty for interpreters while facilitating effective communication between hearing impaired PSL learners and course instructors. Thoutenhoofd (2005) argued that The Policy of educational inclusion and Language of curriculum turn out to be a huge barrier for interpreters. This study is benefited in dual dimensions, that is sign language interpreters and hearing-impaired Pakistan Sign Language learners at graduate level. It confirms that interpreters adapt different strategies for ensuring effective quality of education for PSL learners from different areas of Pakistan in classroom.*

**Keywords:** Pakistan Sign Language (PSL), PSL-learners, interpreters, cultural-sensitivity

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background**

According to Linguistic Society of America (2002), Sign language interpreters play a crucial role in communication between hearing persons and hearing-impaired persons. Their participation can affect the learning of hearing impaired learners in class rooms. They must guarantee the safeguarding cultural and linguistic nuances of hearing impaired learners. For facilitating hearing



impaired students, they are expected to establish partnership with teachers. The responsibility of interpreters in intersubjective discourse is significant. Their stability in handling such intricate relations and equilibrium in their roles surely imparts the learning of the students who are hearing impaired in educational institutes (Janzen & Shaffer, 2015).

There is existence of potential problems to the nature of a classroom, which could prevent interpreters from being able to maintain precision and respond to varied learning requirements. Understanding classroom and school context and being flexible in using various strategies is important for the interpreters and it underscores the remarkable difficulties faced by hearing impaired learners (Marschark et al ., 2006).

The interpretation issues involve the maintenance of meaning, emotional and cognitive effort, and culture aspects. These concerns are not specifically characteristics of health care environments only, but are relevant to varied spheres including education (Ackroyd & Wright, 2018). The interpreters are the individuals who facilitate conversations, especially among those who are deaf and the others. It's essential for of interpreters to be skilled professionals and emphasize the fact that the interpreter must be a well-educated and experienced person not only in sign language but also have specialized training to work in this field as they will have to deal with complex academic concepts and specialized vocabulary (Abulhab & Pinto, 2022). Interpreter's function both as authority figures while also attempting to be neutral facilitators, these different relational dynamics that play out in the classroom can create complications when it comes to maintaining objectivity and ensuring effective communication (Thoutenhoofd, 2005). In many countries, interpreter training, testing, and accreditation are dealt with at different levels, which creates disparity in capability of interpreters and appropriateness of education provided to hearing impaired students (Napier, 2004).

Cultural sensitivity is crucial for interpreters interacting with learners from different backgrounds, particularly hearing-impaired children in educational settings. Interpreters may experience challenges when handling hearing-impaired learners such as misunderstandings due to lack of cultural awareness (Jones, 2020). Sign language interpreters interpret communication between deaf and hearing individuals and the psychosocial impacts of such mediation, including what is known as the "loss of self" experienced by deaf individuals. Similar to that can be taken to the classroom where, without meaning to, interpreters could introduce a sense of separation, and that it would negatively affect the learning experience of hearing-impaired students (Young et al., 2019). All mentioned studies highlight the contribution of interpreters in facilitating hearing impaired learners.

### **Research Problem**

Sign language interpreters are essential in facilitating the communication between hearing impaired individuals and hearing individuals. However, they face hurdles when it comes to hearing impaired PSL learners in classroom. Challenges arise among hearing impaired learners



due to their different linguistic and socioeconomic background Interpreter also faces challenges in building relationship between hearing impaired learners and classroom instructor. As they are not subject specialist so they encounter problems in handling of course content which is crucial for hearing impaired PSL learners? Research study by (Liu et al .,2023) highlights the significant services of interpreters in promoting education for Taiwan hearing impaired learners Although ,their research emphasizes the remarkable role of interpreters but challenges specific to handling of hearing impaired Pakistan Sign Language learners in classroom is still unexplored.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study addresses the challenges of sign language interpreter while handling PSL learners and how they overcome these challenges to facilitate hearing impaired PSL learners. It also highlights that how to improve the service of interpreting and therefore improve the quality of the education. Recognizing these obstacles can aid in making classrooms more accessible and inclusive. This study establishes support from previous research that indicates the communication breakdowns and cultural barriers as more generic challenges interpreters face in educational settings (Young et al., 2019).

The interpreters do not merely need to master the sign language; they also need an embedded understanding of the cultural and contextual backgrounds of the learners which is a prerequisite for a successful interaction and learning (Jones, 2020). My research work might also inform how interpreting services can be most effectively integrated into classrooms more broadly, and perhaps detail the ways in which interpreters can be more intentionally and adequately supported in this endeavor. Previous research study by (Luckner & Munir ,2001) regarding the involvement of interpreters in classroom and how they impact the learning experience for hearing- impaired students provides insight to future explore the difficulties that interpreters face while handling hearing impaired PSL learners.

### **Research Questions**

1. What challenges are faced by sign language interpreters while handling hearing impaired PSL learners in classroom?
2. How do interpretations adapt their interpretation strategies to enhance communication and learning of hearing impaired PSL learners in classroom?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Sign languages are different from spoken languages with their own lexicons and grammars. Deaf individuals contact with each other in deaf communities. Educational institutions are the most common context for communication among deaf individuals. However, the Use of sign language varies across the world and even within one country. Deaf educators use teaching methods of other countries which can impact the national sign language of a country. Deaf students are unable to achieve appropriate levels of proficiency in sign language .This proficiency demands interpreters to bridge the gap between deaf and hearing individuals. However, Interpreters face



systematic challenges in the usage and acceptance of sign language. Applied linguistics need to address issues like interpreters training and educational policies for deaf communities (Woll, 2019).

Interpreters must have some knowledge of content which they have to interpret. Instructor of class should have to provide handouts regarding lecture to interpreter .He is required to slow down his speed in order to facilitate interpreter. Communication gaps between instructor and interpreter can be challenging for hearing impaired students in classrooms (Linguistic Society of America, 2002).

There is a need to explore challenges faced by interpreters while handling hearing impaired students and how they overcome these challenges to facilitate students.

Interpreters play a significant role in establishing intersubjectivity to facilitate communication in educational institutes. They face challenges in preserving the speaker's intention. However, they bridge the linguistic gaps between teachers and impaired students in classroom settings. They convey speaker's message, intention and tone while managing classroom discourse. There is a need for training programs to facilitate interpreters for handling classroom interactions of hearing impaired students (Janzen & Shaffer, 2015). Sign language interpreters have great contribution in inclusive education. They enable students to participate in classroom discussions and encourage them to interact with their peers. They make classroom content accessible but still they are unable to address educational and emotional needs of hearing impaired students. (Thoutenhoofd, 2005).

Interpreters maintain linguistic register while translating complex discourse in classroom settings. However, there is no specialized training for interpreters which can impact their ability to make effective communication (Napier, 2004). Studies highlight that interpreters can face many challenges while handling subject specific concepts in classrooms of hearing impaired students.

Practitioners should understand complexities such as cultural nuances when they perform dual responsibility as interpreters and social service provider. Therefore, It's essential to expand practitioner's knowledge of language and culture. Deaf community faces marginalization and cultural sensitivity. In order to fulfill this gap, it's essential to add sign language interpretation in social work curriculum. Experimental methods should be used to develop understanding of practitioners especially when they work with hearing impaired students. Thus, Ethical considerations should be taken when providing social services to deaf individuals (Abulhab & Pinto, 2022).

Interpreters need to develop strong discourse competence. Discourse competence means interpreting not simply at the level of words but of the entirety of communication in the classroom, given that interpreting for hearing-impaired students is significantly oriented around making sense of structure and patterns. Specifically, the process is framed as dynamic and interactive, since the interpreter must use it to mediate needs of the learners and the classroom at



the same time. The linguistic and cultural distinction between sign languages and spoken languages can act as a barrier to become an interpreter in classes. There is a great need for training in particular discourse strategies, rather than goal, is the main determinant of coursework. This implies that interpreting training should be heavily weighted towards coursework that prepares them for real-world classes. Because of this, the study relies heavily why interpreters must manage multiple loads – linguistic and contextual – in teaching. This would inevitably be the case with interpreters for hearing-impaired students, who must navigate through school environment, classroom dynamic, subject matter, and language all at the same time. (Napier, 2006).

Sociolinguistic context of the signed language interpreting field, indicating a need for understanding the cultural and linguistic aspects affecting the role of the interpreter in educational environment. Interpreters play different roles during the encounter including language facilitator, communicator, and cultural mediator interpreters can influence the education experience of hearing impaired students. Interpreters have a direct impact on students' academic performance, social integration, and emotional well-being (Roy & Metzger, 2014). Interpreters must have cultural competence particularly when working with hearing impaired students from different backgrounds in the class room. However, they have to remain neutral during classroom while dealing with emotional needs of hearing impaired students (MJ Jones, 2020). Studies provide insights to investigate difficulties that interpreters encounter when assisting in communication between hearing-impaired students and teachers.

The history of interpreting is not very old, literally. It was started in mid-20th century when international association of conference interpreter's foundation was laid. The perception that deaf people are passive receivers has been changed and now they are seen as part and parcel of society. However, interpreting is not simply a matter of converting from one language modality to another, but is necessary for closing the gaps of sign language and spoken language due to its nature. Interpreters serve as a bridge and provide access through mediating communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries in classrooms of hearing-impaired students (Marschark et al., 2006). Interpreters have great responsibility of interpreting languages in different contexts. They focus on transferring speaker's intention along with the meaning.

There are various models of interpretation such as “helper model” where an interpreter plays a role of advocate for the deaf person. Another model is “communication facilitator” model as its name indicates that it focuses on the need of cultural and linguistic awareness of deaf community. Interpreters manage to avoid misunderstanding as a mediator between hearing and hearing-impaired communities. (Ackroyd & Wright 2018). Studies indicate that interpreters are great facilitators in mediating communication between deaf and hearing individuals

How hearing individuals perceive deaf professionals when the communication is facilitated by sign language interpreters. It highlights the phenomenon called loss of self, which occurs when deaf people feel that their autonomy and self-image is eroded. Deaf professionals felt unable to



communicate freely, leading to stereotypes and imbalances of power in workplace relationships. Therefore, Sign language Interpreters could be professionally trained and have more cultural awareness in order to create Inclusive workplaces and equitable interactions (Young, Oram, & Napier, 2019). Regional variations of sign languages also create a lack of worldwide standardization of international sign language. In various settings, interpreters have to be extremely adaptable to facilitate effective communication, presenting an additional hurdle for users. In order to even correctly communicate complex ideas they need to know layman terms specific to those respective fields. Interpreters need specialized training and skills, in addition to continuing education, to navigate the array of language and culture contexts (de Wit, Crasborn, & Napier, 2021)

Interpreters ensure that communication is unbiased, translated correctly, and in various formats, which includes visual and tactual forms. Interpreting has a long history, but it evolved as a profession in the mid-20th century. Proper trainings are required for sign language interpreters as they have to maintain linguistic and cultural nuances of deaf community (Arssi & Taibi, 2018). Studies demonstrate the importance and role of sign language interpreters in process of interpretation. Sign language interpreters provide students equal access of course content to hearing impaired students in classroom. Relationship between class room instructor and sign language interpreter promote learning outcomes of deaf students. (Liu, 2024). All mentioned research studies are supporting my own research study of challenges that interpreters face while handling hearing impaired students in classroom.

### **Research Gap**

The interpreters perform vital role for hearing impaired learners within the lens of interactional dynamics of sign language interpreting (Jazen & Shaffer, 2015). Although, their study focuses on theoretical and general practices of interpreters but research gap still exists which can be covered in my research study by exploring the practical challenges that interpreters face while handling hearing impaired learners in class room. (Arssi & Taibi, 2018) discuss the general challenges that interpreters face but their research work don't highlight the challenges specific to inclusive education. My study provides insight to the challenges which sign language interpreters face while managing the classroom of hearing impaired PSL learners.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Philosophy**

This study is based on constructivist theory which suggests that people construct knowledge through experience and interaction. PSL interpreters must develop their understanding and meaning about concepts rather than just translating each word into sign language. Constructivist approach is appropriate in this aspect which helps interpreters how they can act as facilitators for active learning of hearing impaired PSL learners in the classroom. This enables the study not only to investigate language barriers faced by sign language interpreters in PSL classrooms but also to explore the cognitive and communicative barriers to be eliminated.



### **Approach**

Qualitative research approach has been adopted because it offers a deeper understanding of the live experiences of PSL classrooms. This study highlights the role of interpreters in handling hearing impaired PSL learners in the classroom. PSL learners adopt different strategies for effective learning of hearing impaired learners. Qualitative methods allow us to observe how interpreters and PSL hearing impaired learners interact in real time context. It helps in interpretation of challenges faced by hearing impaired PSL learners.

### **Research Design**

This qualitative case study provides detailed understanding of sign language interpretation in hearing impaired classrooms. Interpreters role go beyond that of language interpreter to include detailed understanding of content provided by classroom instructors and have need for their own strategies for handling them in the classroom. It also examines how PSL interpreters scaffold learning and create opportunities for social interaction.

### **Population and Sampling**

This research engages PSL hearing impaired students who are instructed through interpreted class. It also engages sign language interpreters who enable them to communicate. By engaging both the learners and the interpreters, this research makes sure that the data is equal and therefore whether difficulties arise from the learners, the interpreters. This study follows purposive sampling. Individuals who interpret Pakistan sign language and their direct hearing impaired PSL learners were selected. Only interpreters and PSL learners were included in the study so data collected represents the real classroom life of hearing impaired PSL learners.

### **Research Method**

This study implies the method of observing a classroom without participation in PSL class rooms. PSL interpreters validated the observation data. Interviews were also conducted from three sign language interpreters to understand their experiences of PSL classrooms. Data was collected from observing classrooms for different interpreters with different course instructors in each class for four times. Four classroom observations focus on:

Communication problems between hearing impaired PSL learners and interpreters due to variations in PSL as students from different sociolinguistics backgrounds. Interviews conducted from interpreters validated that data. This study employs triangulation as it includes both non participant observation as well as interviews from interpreters to interpret their lived experiences in the classroom of hearing impaired PSL learners.

### **Data analysis strategy**

Thematic analysis was employed in this research. It assists in the identification of challenges encountered by sign language interpreters in PSL classrooms and management of challenges by embracing various strategies Familiarization with the Data gathered from interviews as well as observations.



**Theme identification:** Categorizing data into key themes by adhering to constructivist theory. It encompasses:

- Collaborative knowledge construction (Interpreters as facilitators facilitate learning)
- Scaffolding and Support (modifying content and offering explanation)
- Social interaction and active learning (Peer collaboration, engagement strategies)

MAXQDA was used for data analysis and visualization of data by applying constructivist theory. It was used to identify themes and patterns in the study. It highlights that Interpreters are engaged as guides rather than just translating spoken language into sign language and vice versa

The mechanics of scaffolding provide relief for overloaded cognitive systems. By applying constructivist theory; this study will provide complete understanding of challenges faced by hearing impaired PSL learners in classroom and strategies adopted by interpreters for handling of challenges to make effective learning of PSL learners. In order to examine the issues encountered by sign language interpreters in dealing with hearing-impaired PSL learners, MAXQDA were used for qualitative thematic analysis. The research involved classroom observation and expert interpreter interviews, which are in line with a constructivist orientation.

The analysis proceeded in the following steps:

#### **Step 1: Data Organization and Import into MAXQDA**

Following the collection of qualitative data from field notes on classroom observation and semi-structured interviews with interpreters, all transcripts and observation notes were organized into a structured format. The data was imported into MAXQDA for systematic coding.

#### **Step 2: Initial Coding and Categorization**

Using an inductive approach, initial codes were generated to reflect recurring themes in the data. These codes were categorized based on recurring patterns observed in the interpreters' experiences and classroom dynamics. MAXQDA's coding feature was used to assign meaningful segments of text to specific themes.

#### **Step 3: Thematic Development**

Emerged themes were then developed into higher-level categories representing the core challenges and strategies observed. MAXQDA's interactive visualization tools assisted the author in conceptualizing relationships between different themes. Some of the major themes identified are as under;

- Emotional Sensitivity and Psychological Impact
- Complex Concept Interpretation Challenges
- Attention and Participation Management
- Variability in Sign Language and Classroom Disruptions
- Interpreter as a Facilitator in Constructivist Learning Environments
- Collaborative Knowledge Construction through Social Interaction

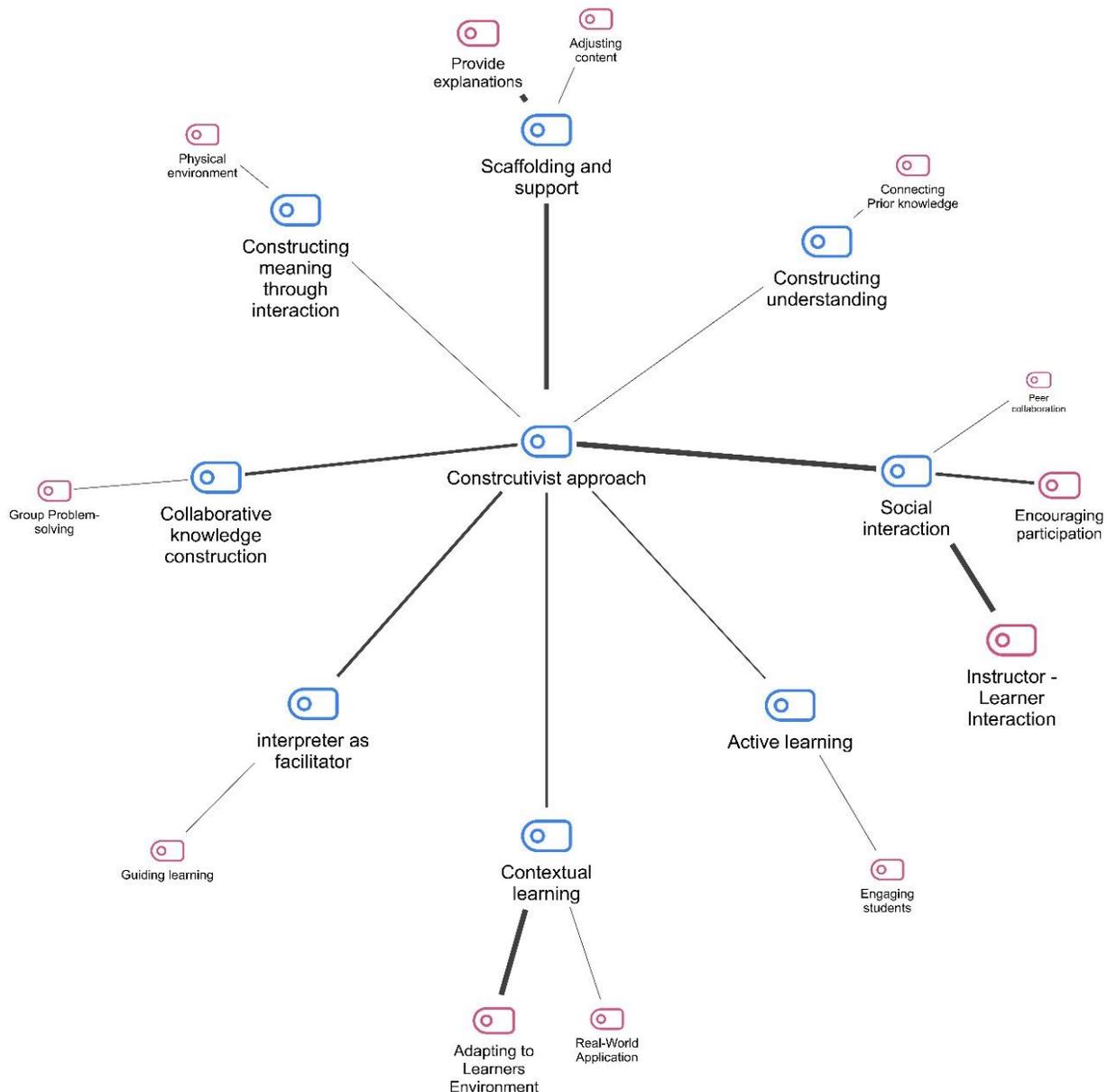
#### **Step 4: Theme Validation and Inter-Coder Reliability**

To ensure reliability, the identified themes were validated through expert discussions with sign language interpreters. Their feedback was used to refine the final categorization and confirm alignment with real-world experiences.



### Step 5: Visualization and Interpretation

MAXQDA's concept mapping and visualization tools were employed to generate graphical representations of thematic relationships. The approach of constructivist has been marked as the most important key concept whereas scaffolding, social interaction, and active learning as important sub-themes.





## **Findings and Discussion**

This reflection focuses on the findings in connection with the research questions and the prior literature. This study sought to find out how sign language interpreters manage obstacles within PSL classrooms and assess how well their coping strategies are effective. Among the findings, the most striking was the emotional burden experienced by the sign language interpreters. Their job is to make sure that the students join the class, and for that, they need to put in so much effort and sensitivity. As Thoutenhoofd (2005) remarks, interpreters are often emotional mediators rather than mere language processors. The research uncovered instances where students expressed anger because of their inability to grasp some phenomena and that added to the burden of the interpreters. This confirms Young, Oram, Napier (2019) who identified the emotionally loaded tasks constructed for interpreters within the context of their work. The study results do suggest that there is a need for some mental health support systems for interpreters to address these emotional concerns.

One of the crucial challenges remains the ability to interpret abstract and complex ideas. Interpreters reported difficulties in expressing phrases, jargon, and even culture-bound expressions. Marschark et al. (2006) point out that sign language interpretation is not an equivalent transformation of a given text into a target language, but requires integrated thinking to the environment in which the sign language is used. The study found that interpreters often simplify complex concepts or provide additional explanations through gestures and facial expressions, supporting Napier's (2006) argument on the importance of discourse adaptability to teaching to interpreters. Constructivist education expands active negotiation of meaning by offering co-construction opportunities on the side of interpreters with students.

Maintaining learners' attention is significant to PSL lessons. This study reveals that there are various ways in which the interpreter maintains learner engagement, including exaggerated facial expressions, role-shifting, and repeated signing. According to Woll (2019), interpreter-mediated communication always relates to a change in the dynamics of the classroom, where teaching styles are modified. Additionally, the role of peer collaboration emerged as a crucial factor in facilitating participation. The Linguistic Society of America (2002) emphasizes the importance of group interaction in sign language learning. The results indicate that learning environments where students help each other achieve the common goal lessen the strain on interpreters and improve understanding.

This study revealed some significant differences in the students' use of sign language that made it more difficult to interpret. The presence of different PSL regional dialects and personalized signs made it rather complex for the interpreters to handle. A sociolinguistic variation is always a given for any language, and as Roy and Metzger (2014) pointed out, it also serves as a bounty within the sign-language world for interpreters.

In addition, so-called soft disruptions, such as noise, visual interruptions, and even technology, were identified as obstructing effective interpretation. Ackroyd and Wright (2018) address the same issues for those working in mental health, where the patient's attention is diverted from the communication at hand, thus making it less productive. This illustrates the need to put some



order into pedagogy classes so that both students and interpreters can be free from disruptions of various nature. Interpretation in a PSL classroom is not just an encoding and decoding of verbal communication; the interpreter is a participant in the learning process. It was shown that there are many cases when an interpreter changes the teacher's instructions to help the students with better understanding, confirming the findings of Arssi and Taibi (2018), who pointed out the particularity of sign language interpreters as teachers.

MAXQDA analysis showed that scaffolding by interpreters often involved content simplification and adding explanatory details. This scaffolding approach confirms Vygotsky's (1978) constructivist theory which assumes that learning takes place through interactions performed within a social context. The findings suggest that skilled interpreters are actively engaged as co-constructors of knowledge by enabling students to engage. Social interaction was identified as another important variable impacting learning results. The research noted that interpreters promoted discussions among students so that they could help reinforce one another's understanding. Napier (2004) advocates that the teaching of the interpreter should include discourse management that can help cultivate collaborative environments. The study provides evidence that classrooms with considerable amounts of peer interaction were shown to lead to higher comprehension and lower cognitive effort required of interpreters. This situation exemplifies the constructivist theory of learning which emphasizes the active participation of learners in the generation of knowledge rather than its passive reception.

### Conclusion

Insights regarding the problems encountered by interpreters in sign language were obtained using MAXQDA software and from the records of thematic analysis. The study showed that interpreters perform roles that go beyond those of a language bridge or facilitator, since they construct the learning experience. Emotional sensitivity, conceptual integration, attention management, language change, and social engagement were recognized to be the most important themes within the interpretation process.

The outcomes of this study reinforce previous findings, and this highlights the importance of specialized training programs for interpreters with pedagogical skills. The study also focuses on the need for more inclusive classroom policies that regard interpreters as essential participants in the educational process.

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