Deaf Education in Algeria: Is it a Sustainable Approach?

تعليم الصم في الجزائر: هل هو نهج مُستدام؟

Hicham Abdelouafi[1]

[1]Universitat Internacional de Catalunya (Spain), hicham@uic.es

Abstract:

Special education (SE) provides learning opportunities for Deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) learners based on their needs. They can be taught in a bilingual education, using both national sign language of the country (Algerian Sign Language, or Algerian Sign Language) and the official spoken language (e.g., Arabic). This paper sheds light on the challenges of SE for DHH in Algeria. The researcher follows a qualitative methodology by conducting depth interviews with the teachers of the DHH. Results showed that DHH learners receive a low-quality of education. Consequently, we recommend education bodies to improve the quality of SE; the teachers need more sufficient training on sign language and classroom management. Also, the curriculum must be redesigned to meet the diverse learning needs of DHH children in Algeria.

Keywords: Algerian Sign Language; Special Education; Deafness.

ملخص: تتيح التربية الخاصة للصم وضعاف السمع فرص التعلم وفق قدراتهم واحتياجاتهم، أين يمكن الاعتماد على لغة الإشارة الوطنية المستخدمة قي البلاد (لغة الإشارة الجزائرية)، و/أو اللغة المنطوقة الرسمية (اللغة العربية مثلا). تسلط هذه الورقة الضوء على تعليم ذوي الإعاقة السمعية في دولة الجزائر. ولأجل جمع المعلومات اللازمة، استخدم الباحث أداة المقابلة بينه وبين معلمي الصم وضعاف السمع، واعتمد على المنهج الوصفي التحليلي في هذه الدراسة. أشارت النتائج إلى أن الصم وضعاف السمع يتلقون تعليما ضعيف الجودة. ولأجل تحسين جودة تعليم الصم بالمدرسة، يحتاج المعلمون مزيدا من الدورات التدريبية حول لغة الإشارة وإدارة القسم. أيضا، يجب أن تتم إعادة النظر في البرنامج المعتمدة داخل المدرسة، فلابد أن تتم إعادة تصميمه بما يتوافق ويلبي حاجيات الصم وضعاف السمع المختلفة.

كلمات مفتاحية: لغة الإشارة الجزائرية، التربية الخاصة، الصمم، الإعاقة السمعية.

Hicham Abdelouafi[1], hicham@uic.es

1. INTRODUCTION

Research studies (e.g., McIlroy & Storbeck, 2011 and Shakespeare, 2002) revealed that there is no qualitative difference between persons with hearing disability and their counterparts; they can perform equality as any other hearing person regarding cognitive capacity and coding as well. However, DHH learners still receive low-quality of education in Algeria.

Therefore, I started conducting research on deaf education and Algerian Sign Language since my MA studies at the African University of Adrar- Algeria. Besides, I am currently working on a PhD research project on the same field at Universitat Internacional de Catalunya (UIC Barcelona) in Spain, to contribute to the deaf community in Algeria as well as to understand what the situation really is.

2. Methodology

The researcher used the descriptive research design in this study. The objective was to find out barriers faced by the teachers of deaf in a deaf educational setting in Algeria. The researcher could not target all teachers working at school because some of them were absent and things were hectic in lockdown, Therefore, the total number of participants who co-operated with us were 13 teachers, 1 therapist, and 1 pedagogical adviser (n=15). We used interviews: both closed questions (yes or no) and open-ended ones (where participants could illustrate, comment, give their opening, or add extra pieces of information).

The field study was conducted at a school of the deaf and hard-of-hearing children; it is a residential school based in the province of Adrar, South Algeria. There are eight classrooms, and the total number of teachers is 19. Also, there is one therapist and one pedagogical adviser. Most of the teachers at that school obtained a bachelor's or master's degree in Arabic and literature, psychology, sociology, French and literature, history, etc. Some of them are full time teachers (7 males and 4 females). The other teachers are trainees (5 females and 3 males).

3. Literature Review
3.1 The Sustainable Development Goals

Before the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the previous agenda's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were first formulated in 2000 to achieve 08 goals by the year 2015 (Gabay, 2015). Unlike MDG, the SDG, which was launched on 1 January 2016 as a new ambitious agenda, increased the number of goals from eight to seventeen, with 179 targets, to be achieved by 2030 (UN, 2000):

- ✓ **SDG1**: to eradicate poverty;
- ✓ **SDG2:** to end hunger;
- ✓ **SDG3:** to ensure health and well-being for all;
- ✓ **SDG4**: to ensure quality education for all;
- ✓ **SDG5:** to achieve gender equality;
- ✓ **SDG6:** to ensure clean water and sanitation;
- ✓ **SDG7**: to ensure affordable and clean energy;
- ✓ **SDG8:** to promote decent work and sustainable economic growth;
- ✓ **SDG9:** to build resilient and sustainable industry, innovation and infrastructure;
- ✓ **SDG10:** to reduce inequalities;
- ✓ **SDG11:** to build sustainable cities and communities;
- ✓ **SDG12**: to ensure sustainable consumption and production;
- ✓ **SDG13:** to take climate action;
- ✓ **SDG14:** to protect life below water;
- ✓ **SDG15:** to protect life on land;
- ✓ **SDG16:** to promote peace, justice and inclusive institutions; and
- ✓ **SDG17:** to strengthen the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

The Millennium Development Goals targeted the developing countries only, whereas the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals targeted all countries cross the world. In this paper, the researcher focuses on SDG4 in particular.

We believe that "making SDG 4 a reality will transform lives around the globe. Education is so central to the achievement of a sustainable, prosperous and equitable planet that failure to achieve this particular SDG

puts at risk the achievement of the 17 SDGs as a whole" (OECD, 2017: 27). Though SDG4 contains 10 specific targets, we will tackle mainly 3 of them, which are related to our research:

- **Target 4.2** By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education

- **Target 4.5** By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

- **Target 4.7** By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development

3.2 Sign Language in Algeria

Algerian Sign Language descended from French Sign Language (Langue des Signes Française, LSF). Algerian Sign Language has a number of varieties such as, but not limited to:

- **Algerian Jewish Sign Language, AJSL** or **Ghardaia Sign Language** since it was mainly developed and used in the village of Ghardaia by the Algerian Jewish individuals at that time (Lanesman & Meir, 2012a; Lanesman & Meir, 2012b; Lanesman, 2013);

- **Algerian Sign Language of Laghouat**, which is used by many Deaf people in Laghouat province and other cities (or villages) around it (Djama, 2016);

- **Algerian Sign Language of Oran**, it is used by the Deaf in the North of Algeria, particularly in the city of Oran (Mansour, 2007); and

- **Algerian Sign Language of Adrar**, which is used by the Algerian

Deaf community in Adrar, in the South of Algeria (Abdelouafi, 2018).

Ye, it seems that almost every Algerian Deaf community living in a different province or village in Algeria is likely to develop its own dialect of Algerian Sign Language. Probably, different Algerian Sign Languages are being used as many Deaf communities are in Algeria, at least in some big cities, regardless of their similarities and/or differences. These Algerian Sign Languages could be developed mainly in some villages and used by the Algerian Deaf individuals, and perhaps, some of their family members, relatives, friends, or the ones who work/Deal with them in general.

3.3 Deaf Education

Individuals with hearing impairment are the most vulnerable groups in society. Often, they are excluded from opportunities available to their hearing counterparts (UNICEF, 2013). In Algeria, since there are not enough specialists in Algerian Sign Language (e.g., trained teachers and SL interpreters), Deaf children are denied access to education in LSA, for example. Alternatively, they are taught in Signed or Written Arabic merely (Abdelouafi, 2019). This, unfortunately, does not guarantee full access to information. It does not improve high-quality of education for Deaf youngsters either, especially because they know that LSA interpreting service itself is not available in classrooms. Fuentes and Tolchinsky (2004) stated that sign languages play a vital role in deaf educational settings. It is the Deaf's right to educated in the national sign language (Haualand and Allen, 2009).

In contrast, we can find that Deaf individuals in Catalonia, for example, are taught to read and write oral languages (Catalan and Spanish), of course, along with LSC (Plaza-Pust & Morales-López, 2008). Regrettably, a study proved that Deaf children in Algeria have problems even in written language acquisition (e.g., Arabic and French) and pinned down the causes of their failure (see Boutaleb, 1987).

That is, they fail to learn spoken languages. It is a problem that Deaf children and youngsters in Algeria do not have real access to education either in a monolingual model (where Algerian Sign Language is the means of instruction) or in a bilingual model (where both LSA and Arabic or

Berber are used to teach deaf children). Thus, in such case, education fails. Eventually, as a consequence of this Algerian Deaf people are doubtlessly driven to substantial poverty, limited social services and an insufficient education rate. More importantly, they are marginalized as they lack communication with others in society, exactly as reported by the World Federation of the Deaf (2007).

4. Results

### 4.1 Teachers' experience in teaching deaf and hard of hearing children

Table 1. Teachers' experience at school

Years of experience	Number of teachers
1-8	10
9+	5

We asked this question to get information about teacher's experience in teaching the deaf and hard of hearing children at that school. The results revealed that 10 teachers have between 1 to 8 years of experience; whereas, only 5 teachers have more than 9 years of experience in teaching the deaf and hard of hearing children.

4.2 Teachers' training

Fig.1. Teachers' attitudes towards the training they received
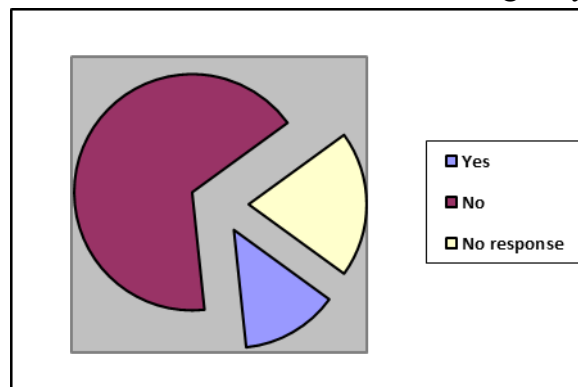
The researcher wanted to know whether or not the training was comprehensive. Out of 15 teachers, only 3 of them said they received a comprehensive training. 10 teachers, however, admitted that they have not received a comprehensive training yet, while 2 other teachers preferred not to comment about it.

3.3. Types of training offered to the teachers

The teachers received two types of training:

A. **Pre-service training:** all teachers revealed that when they passed the contest, and before they enter into service as teachers of deaf, they were offered a pre-service training in Algiers. It was a very short period, 15 days only. The training was about acquiring sign language Alphabets. Unfortunately, teachers where not trained on how to deal with deaf children (e.g., classroom management) neither they were given strategies and approaches to teach them.

B. **In-service training:** only 3 teachers claimed that they received learning opportunities as practicing teachers. Those teachers were trained by well experienced French teachers (some of them were deaf teachers). The objectives of the in-service training were to help the 3 teachers improve their sign language skills as well as learning some innovative pedagogies to teach deaf children.

1.4. Teachers' comments on the training

Analysis from the interview data revealed the teachers' comments on the training they revived (pre-service training in particular) and some arguments to illustrate:

> *"...I obtained a BA degree in Arabic literature and I have never thought to become a teacher for deaf children. I am good at teaching Arabic to hearing children. Teaching deaf children is a challenge for me and I wish if we can receive extensive in-service training. The pre-service training we received was not enough. The period was*

very short; the 15 days were not enough to acquire the sing language alphabets though!!" (Fatima, interview extract)

"... The training program was poor. I expected to acquire sign language, to be given piece of information about hearing loss to better understand deaf children, and to learn some strategies and effective methods to teach them. Unfortunately, I was disappointed the first day of the training. Let alone that the training was not mandatory; many trainees were absent" (Ali, interview extract)

"... The courses I had at university are completely different from my current carrier. Being a teacher for a deaf child is not an easy task. Most of teachers working at our school luck training. No one can be a good teacher after receiving a training in 15 days. We need more training opportunities to improve our teaching skills and be proficient in sign language." (Nora, interview extract)

1.5. Teachers' sources

Lack of training pushed the teachers to rely on different sources and look for some other alternative solutions to improve. They stated:

"... I always get back to an experienced teacher here at school. She has developed a "knowledge-base" experience over many years in teaching deaf and hard of hearing children. My expertise in deaf education is limited, I have only 3 years of experience and I really find myself, many times, lost during class. Therefore, I used to discuss all the difficulties I encounter with that teacher. She never hesitates to help." (Hala, interview extract)

"...I rely on electronic sources very much. Recently, I have been taking courses on Coursera offered by different universities (e.g., Cape Town University). The coursers are very insightful. I learned about several methods used to teach the deaf and how to manage the classroom. Usually, I discuss the piece of information I learned with

my colleagues and try to apply them in our classes. Unfortunately, these courses are not free; I could benefit only from very few courses offered by Coursera in response to Covid-19 pandemic. Yet I am happy I could attend them anyway." (Hamza, interview extract)

"... I always interact with my deaf learners outside the class. At first, it was really hard for me to understand them; however, after spending time with them, I could chat with them easily. This helped me improve my communication skills during class. I am happy they are able to understand my lessons and participate." (Omar, interview extract)

3.6. Language of instruction

Table 2. Means of instruction used at school

Option	Number
Arabic	13
Sign language	2

The table shows that the majority of teachers (n=13) use Arabic as a medium of instruction in classroom. Nevertheless, 2 teachers said that they use sign language instead. Arabic is the language of instruction mostly used at school. Though 2 teachers claimed that they are using sing language, its use is not frequent. They use it to facilitate lessons and to communicate with the deaf learners sometimes. Lessons are provided in Arabic. Deaf children rely on lipreading, and if they could not understand, teachers write on the board or use some singes and body language to explain (referred to as total communication approach)

3.7. Teaching sign language as a subject

Table 3. Teaching SL as a subject in class

Option	Number
Arabic	15
Sign language	0

The table indicates that no teacher at that school teaches sign language as a subject in class. Ali and Fatima illustrated why sign language is not taught as a subject in the following extract:

"... I cannot teach something which is not even scheduled as taught subject in the timetable. Unfortunately, no session is provided to teach sign language to deaf learners at school." (Fatima, interview extract)

3.7. The curriculum

Participants were asked about the curriculum used to teach the deaf and hard of hearing at that school. All teachers complained about the curriculum. It is the same curriculum used to teach hearing learners at regular schools. The following extracts illustrate some of the opinions shared by the teachers regarding the curriculum:

"... we use the exact curriculum used to teach hearing learners at mainstream schools. This curriculum doesn't meet deaf children's needs at all. We are unable to use it in class; deaf children must have their own curriculum." (Aisha, interview extract)

"... teachers are unable to sign, neither there are sign language interpreters to assist us in classroom. It is really difficult to design a lesson plan in such a case. The curriculum doesn't serve deaf learners at school; both teachers and learners are facing difficulties and challenges during lessons. I wish if we can design a curriculum based on our deaf learners' needs, but we don't have enough experience. Our ministry of education should consider this issue; otherwise, the deaf learners will never receive a good-quality of education in the country." (Rahma, interview extract)

2. CONCLUSION

The finding of this study revealed that the deaf children at that school receive low-quality of education for many reasons. First, because teachers for the deaf and hard of hearing children complained that they have not received comprehensive training, both pre-service and in-service. Second, they are not proficient in using sign language and they lack communication with their deaf learners. In addition, sign language is not taught as subject neither it is used as a language of instruction. Instead, most of the teachers use Arabic, only, in classroom, which makes it difficult for the deaf learners to understand the lessons. Third, the curriculum used to teach at that school doesn't meet the deaf children needs. Teachers claimed that they face difficulties to make a lesson plan. Also, there are no sign language interpreters to co-operate with the teachers during lessons. Sign language interpretation service is not provided at school, unfortunately.

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher tries to seek solutions for this problem by suggesting the following:

- ✓ Teachers of the deaf must receive focused pre-service and in-service training;
- ✓ They must be aware of what is meant by hearing disability and be able to deal with the deaf and hard of hearing children;
- ✓ They have to collaborate with other teachers of the deaf in other provinces to share knowledge and experience
- ✓ Teachers of the deaf must be proficient in Algerian Sign Language;
- ✓ Deaf education should be bilingual, where both Algerian Sign Language and Arabic are used as mediums of instruction in classroom;
- ✓ There must be well-qualified sign language interpreters in class to assist teachers, or to provide sign language interpretation for deaf learners during the lesson, especially if the teacher has low knowledge of sign language
- ✓ The curriculum must be designed to meet the diverse learning needs of the deaf and hard of hearing children
- ✓ The families of deaf children, audiologists, psychologists, teachers, and educators must all be involved in the process of education

3. Bibliography List

Abdelouafi, H., (2019). *Teaching sign language to the deaf children in Adrar, Algeria. LAP* LAMBERT: Academic Publishing.

Abdelouafi, H., (2018). *Teaching sign language to the deaf children in Adrar, Algeria.* [Master's thesis, University of Ahmed Draia Adrar]

Boutaleb, Djamila., (1987). Les enfants sourds en Algérie : Problèmes d'acquisition de la langue écrite. (PhD), Université Sorbonne Paris. 408pp.

Djama, Amal. (2016). Les points communs entre la Algerian Sign Language (LSA) - dialecte de Laghouat, Sud de l'Algérie - et la Langue des Signes Française (LSF). Dossier, licence SCL « Acquisition et dysfonctionnement » (SCL F14), Licence 3, AMU, Faculté ALLSHS d'Aix-en-Provence. 5pp.

Fernández-Viader, M.P. and Fuentes, M. (2004). Education of deaf students in Spain: Legal and educational politics development. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education 9:* 327–32.

Fuentes, M., & Tolchinsky, L. (2004). The subsystem of numerals in Catalan Sign Language: Description and examples from a psycholinguistic study. *Sign Language Studies 5*(1), 94-117. https://doi:10.1353/sls.2004.0022.

Gabay, C. (2015). Special forum on the millennium development goals: Introduction. *Globalizations,12*(4), 576–580.

Guiroub, M. (2010). La Algerian Sign Language est une revendication des sourds. El Watan.

Haualand, Hilde & Allen, Colin. (2009). Deaf people and human rights. Report of the World Federation of the Deaf. Available at http://www.wfdeaf.org/wp-content/uplpads/2011/06/Deaf-People-and-Human-Rights-Report.pdf

Lanesman, S. (2013). Algerian Jewish Sign language: Its emergence and survival (Master). Ishara Press. https://doi.org/10.26530/OAPEN_588714

Lanesman, S., & Meir, I. (2012a). Algerian Jewish Sign Language: A sociolinguistic sketch. In U. Zeshan & C. de Vos (Eds.), *Sign*

Languages in Village Communities (pp. 361–364). Berlin, Boston: DE GRUYTER.

Lanesman, S., & Meir, I. (2012b). The survival of Algerian Jewish Sign Language alongside Israeli Sign Language in Israel. *Anthropological and linguistic insights*. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/10678229/The_survival_of_Algerian_Jewish_Sign_Language_alongside_Israeli_Sign_Language_in_Israel

Mansour, M. S. (2007). Langage et surdité, descriptive de la langue des signes des sourds Oranais (Magistère), Université d'Oran Es-Sénia. 124pp.

McIlroy, G., & Storbeck, C. (2011). Development of deaf identity: An ethnographic study. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education, 16*(4), 494–511.

OECD. (2017). *Education at a glance: OECD indicators*. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2017-en

Palmer, E. (2015). Introduction: The sustainable development goals forum. *Journal of Global Ethics,11*(1), 3–9.

Plaza-Pust, Carolina; Morales-López, Esperanza (2008). Sign Bilingualism: Language development, interaction, and maintenance in sign language contact situations. ISBN 9789027290427.

Shakespeare, Tom. (2002). The social model of disability: An outdated ideology? *Research in Social Sciences and Disability 2*, pp. 9-28.

UN (United Nations). (2000). *United Nations millennium declaration.* A/RES/55/2. New York: United Nations. Retrieved February 27, 2019, from http://www.un-documents.net/a55r2.htm

World Federation of the Deaf. (2007). Education rights for deaf children. http://www.wfdeaf.org/wpcontent/uploads/2011/03/EducationRightsforDeafChildren_July-2007.pdf