



The Status of Mexican Sign Language in Mexican Policy: A Case Report

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Overview

On June 10, Mexico celebrated the National Day of Mexican Sign Language (LSM), underscoring its official recognition as a national language and a key element of the country's linguistic heritage. This recognition is enshrined in Article 2 of the General Law for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities (Ley General de Inclusión para las Personas con Discapacidad, May 6, 2024). Article 2 defines Sign Language as a linguistic system used by the Deaf community, composed of "a series of gestural signs articulated with the hands and accompanied by facial expressions, intentional gaze, and body movement, endowed with linguistic function."

Linguistic Rights and Sign Language

Within this framework, linguistic rights are an essential aspect of human rights, advocating for linguistic equity for minority languages, including Sign Language. Cedillo [1], a Deaf educator from Catalonia, highlights the diversity within the deaf community, shaped by various personal and social factors. This community is a linguistic and sociocultural minority, with Sign Language serving as a vital unifying element. According to Cedillo [1], Sign Language emerges from the interplay between biology and culture, representing a creative adaptation to sensory limitations and transforming existing resources into a rich means of communication. For deaf individuals, bilingualism entails using both their native Sign Language and the oral language of the hearing community, particularly in its written form. Thus,

bilingual education involves instruction in at least two languages, one of which is the student's primary language [2,3].

The Condition of Deaf Education in Mexico

Despite significant advances and initiatives aimed at enhancing social guarantees, challenges such as value judgments, ignorance, and discrimination against Sign Language and deaf individuals persist (Morales, 2020). Within the Mexican education system, the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) currently offers three primary types of educational services for deaf students: (1) Centro de Atención Múltiple (CAM), which provides primary education for students with various disabilities; (2) regular schools, where deaf children attend classes alongside hearing students; and (3) the National Institute for Adult Education (INAES), which offers educational services for adults.

The Mexican educational system has made progress in supporting Deaf students, particularly through the recognition of their bilingual and bicultural status and their natural language, Sign Language. For instance, the State of Jalisco has shown notable advancements in bilingual education in Sign Language, improving job prospects for Deaf individuals. Research on labor training for Deaf students in Jalisco reveals that over 164 Deaf students are completing high school with support such as Sign Language interpreters and Deaf tutors [4]. The SEP (2015) advocates for a bilingual-bicultural framework in Deaf education, emphasizing the teaching of Sign Language followed by written Spanish.

Challenges and Comparisons

Article 41 of the General Education Law [5] mandates that special education be adapted to each student's needs. However, current educational outcomes for Deaf children in Mexico highlight significant challenges in their learning development. Cruz-Aldrete [6] argues that using Sign Language-whether Mayan or Mexican-in deaf education is crucial for cognitive, social, and emotional development. Unfortunately, deaf students are often deprived of this right, as their mother tongue is excluded from their education.

Fernández-Viader [2,7] discusses Spain's experience with deaf education over the past two decades, noting that inclusive policies sometimes led to adverse outcomes, limiting deaf individuals' access to equal opportunities. Fernández-Viader et al. [2] criticize the indiscriminate placement of Deaf students in regular schools, highlighting the lack of consideration for visual communication needs and the importance of Sign Language for accessing the curriculum. Successful bilingual projects in Spain demonstrate that well-planned bilingual education, with qualified educators and appropriate resources, can lead to better outcomes for deaf students.

Statistics and Inequities

Globally, approximately 10% of the population, or about 650 million people, live with some form of disability (World Health Organization [WHO], [8]). Notably, 80% of these individuals reside in developing countries (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d. [9,10]). In Latin America, the link between disability and poverty is especially pronounced, with individuals with disabilities often among the most impoverished (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean [ECLAC], [11]). National statistics show that deafness accounts for 12.1% of all disabilities. Moreover, data from the National Institute of Geography and History (2017) reveals that Deaf students experience significantly lower educational access compared to other disability groups, with notably higher dropout rates than those seen among hard-of-hearing and motor-disabled students (National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy [CONEVAL], 2018). Within this context, the situation for deafblind individuals in Mexico remains largely unaddressed and poorly understood. Efforts at educational inclusion have largely fallen short, resulting in social invisibility, abuse, violence, discrimination, and poverty [12,13].

Research Proposal

This proposal aims to explore how to provide more effective and comprehensive education for Deaf and Deafblind students by drawing on various sources, including Skliar [14,15]. Key documents that inform this proposal include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations General Assembly, [16]), the report of Disability and Health of the World Federation

of the Deaf (2023), and the commitment to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, particularly Goal 4, which focuses on ensuring inclusive, equitable, and quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities.

Legal Framework and Educational Response

Mexican legislation, such as the General Law on Persons with Disabilities (2005), recognizes Mexican Sign Language (LSM) and supports bilingual education. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007) reinforces these rights.

Towards Optimized Education for deaf Citizens in Mexico

Many deaf individuals born into hearing families have limited access to Sign Language during early childhood, which impedes their cognitive, social, and emotional development. Early Sign Language instruction is crucial for cognitive functions like representation, creativity, and planning [17]. Successful pedagogical strategies from countries with more advanced education systems for the deaf emphasize the role of Deaf teacher models and early Sign Language education [18]. Educational needs for deaf and deafblind students should include bilingual-bicultural frameworks and universal access to knowledge. Research by Escobedo and Moreno highlights the importance of specialized resources, such as Deaf teachers and advanced video technology, in enhancing educational outcomes for deaf students [3,4,19].

Final Reflections

Empowering deaf individuals through education and human rights is essential for their full participation in society. To achieve equality and inclusivity, it is necessary to strengthen educational systems and foster collaboration with international experts. These efforts align with the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which emphasizes the need for enhanced support of bilingual-bicultural frameworks and educational technologies tailored to Deaf individuals [20]. While progress is being made in Mexico, significant challenges remain [21-26].

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