

Comparative Education Policy Analysis: Inclusive Education for Deaf Students in the Context of Official Sign Language Recognition and CRPD Mandates (UAE, Canada, Brazil)

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Abstract- The paper explains how legislative affirmation of national sign languages and mandatory implementation of CRPD-mandated inclusive education policy frame deaf learners' academic success. Comparing Canada, Brazil, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) through comparative analysis, the study establishes how the enabling/disabling nature of sign language policy enables/disables substantive inclusion. Canada and Brazil, with official status for their national sign languages, illustrate stronger institutionalisation, enhanced teacher training, and better academic success for deaf learners. The UAE, with no official recognition of Arabic Sign Language, still faces systemic exclusion and limited scholarly development. Based on a qualitative content analysis of secondary data from research studies, government reports, and CRPD implementation reviews, the study identifies both improvements and lingering hindrances. The study points out the importance of legal affirmation but equally emphasizes the need for follow-up practical measures such as teachers' training, provision of interpreters, as well as community mobilization in order to attain substantive inclusiveness as well as linguistic equity in education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has been endorsed internationally as a pillar of equitable and justice-oriented societies. Inclusive education is guaranteed in key international human rights treaties, first among them the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) adopted in 2006. Article 24 of the CRPD specifically mandates that all persons with disabilities, including those who are deaf, are to be offered inclusive, quality, and free education at all levels on the same conditions as other persons in their communities (Calicchio, 2019). The Convention does not go beyond physical integration in the mainstream

education setting, but also mandates the application of reasonable accommodations, personal assistance, and the use of instruments like sign languages, for persons to participate on an equal footing. Despite global commitments to such universal ambitions, significant differences persist in the learning experiences and achievements of deaf students across countries. According to Alborn (2013), these differences are typically guided by a range of policy levers, including legal and regulatory environments, country-level educational infrastructures, teacher training, course development, and, in particular, the recognition and incorporation of national sign languages into the formal education system (Fleming, 2019). Language access for deaf students is not primarily an avenue of communication, but rather a key to accessing learning and living well. The level to which the nation recognises and legitimises sign language as an official educational instrument significantly contributes to the success and well-being of its students who are deaf.

When sign language is made official and integrated into educational policy and classroom approaches, deaf students are more likely to achieve better educational outcomes, enhanced language development, and improved emotional and social development. The contrary is where sign language is non-official, marginalized, and deficit-oriented; deaf students are most likely to experience significant obstacles to education (De Beco et al., 2019). These obstacles might include an inaccessible curriculum, inexperienced sign language interpreters, untrained teachers, and systematic exclusion from the broader education system. This article employs a comparative analysis of policies to examine the extent to which countries apply inclusive education to deaf students in

accordance with CRPD imperatives, with a focus on the role played by the status of official sign language. It asks and answers the question through an examination and comparison of the experiences of deaf students in Canada and Brazil, countries where sign languages are official, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where no sign language law exists (Schuelka, 2010).

Canada has formally established American Sign Language (ASL), Langue des Signes Québécoise (LSQ), and Indigenous sign languages as official sign languages in the provinces, and Brazil has made Brazilian Sign Language (LIBRAS) legal since 2002. Both nations have sought to incorporate sign language into their educational systems through teacher training, curriculum development, and the provision of interpreter services. Alborno (2013) comments that the UAE, while having ratified the CRPD and being constructively positive about the statements of policy and advocacy for inclusive education, has failed to formally recognize Arabic Sign Language (ArSL) and has no coordinated deaf education plan in place. Based on a critical analysis of policy files, implementation schemes, and education outcomes, this study aims to determine the extent to which inclusive education policies for deaf students have been implemented at the classroom level. The study aims to document best practices, identify key barriers, and provide recommendations for enhancing the inclusivity, accessibility, and cultural sensitivity of educational systems for deaf students globally.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The CRPD and the Rights to Education

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), adopted in 2006, is a global milestone commitment towards inclusivity of people with disabilities in all aspects of life, with education holding its rightful premier position (Societies, 2013). Article 24 of the CRPD discusses the right of people with disabilities to access inclusive, quality, and free education on an equal basis with all other individuals. The provision categorically states the obligation of the states to facilitate "reasonable accommodation," "individualised support measures,"

and access to "inclusive, quality education" through interventions such as the utilisation of Braille, alternate formats, and sign languages.

To deaf students specifically, the applicability of Article 24 holds special importance, as it not only provides assurance of their right to education but also recognises sign language as a valid and indispensable instrument of communication. Singh (2025), the CRPD does not consider deafness as a medical defect, but rather as a cultural one and an aspect of a person's linguistic identity. The application of sign language in education is, therefore, a support service but also an integral part of linguistic human rights and inclusive education.

Nevertheless, the achievement of Article 24 is its uneven distribution across national realities. According to Banes et al. (2019), as ratified by over 180 states, most governments lack the political will, infrastructure capacity, and legal frameworks necessary to achieve inclusive education. Structural discrimination through inaccessible schools, untrained professionals working in schools, and overall misunderstanding of inclusive education as the simple integration of students with disabilities into the regular classroom arrangement without support still prevail. Obeid (2024), this is compounded by national education systems that remain entrenched in segregated systems where students with disabilities, and specifically students who are deaf, remain streamed into segregated schools or special programmes where they do not get language-rich educational environments conducive to learning. These situations erode the CRPD ideal of full inclusion and participation, resulting in tokenistic rather than transformational learning experiences for deaf learners (Singh, 2025).

2.2 Official Sign Language Status and Its Effect on Learning Achievements

National legislative recognition of sign languages is increasingly becoming accepted as an essential policy means for promoting the educational achievement and social progress of deaf students. Sign language as a full-fledged natural language is not only required for communication, but also for cognitive development,

identity, and social integration of deaf students. Dyliaeva et al. (2024) describe how nations where sign language has official status fare better in ensuring educational rights for deaf students, as legal status typically translates into increased public spending on deaf education, sign language instruction, interpreter services, and teacher preparation. Legal status would also legitimise the cultural-linguistic identity of the deaf community, enabling them to engage in educational change and the policy-making process.

Conversely, countries that do not have official acceptance of their deaf populations tend to exclude deaf students both symbolically and practically. Lacking a legislative framework, the application of sign language instruction can be irregular, the availability of interpreters can be sparse, and educational funding can be largely geared towards hearing students. Dyliaeva et al. (2024) note that these results highlight the dominance of oralist approaches, which focus on speech and lip-reading instead of sign language, historically associated with negative educational outcomes and language deprivation for deaf children. Second, the absence of positive acknowledgment sends a more general social message about sign language and deaf culture as lesser or secondary, thereby supporting ableism and exclusion. Obeid (2024) notes that, even in states that have ratified the CRPD, the absence of legal recognition for sign language often results in the ineffective implementation of inclusive education policies and a failure of accountability on the part of the state.

2.3 Country case studies: UAE, Canada, Brazil

Canada has advanced deaf education through the legal and institutional acceptance of American Sign Language (ASL) and Langue des Signes Québécoise (LSQ), as well as initiatives aimed at preserving Indigenous sign languages (Parisot and Rinfret, 2012). While provincial-based acceptance is typical, provinces such as Ontario and British Columbia have incorporated sign language rights into their education legislation, accessibility policies, and teacher education curricula. SAUNDeRS (2016) suggests that deaf students in Canada are better served with opportunities for bilingual-bicultural education, where sign language and/or written or oral language are used

as the languages of instruction. Programmes at the institutions are specifically designed for the education of deaf teachers, with curricula focused on American Sign Language (ASL) proficiency and orientation to deaf culture.

Brazil offers another progressive example of sign language policy. Brazilian Sign Language (LIBRAS) was codified in 2002 by Law No. 10,436 and supported by subsequent regulation (Decree No. 5,626/2005), mandating LIBRAS training for all teachers and its use as a language of instruction for deaf students (Brito and Prieto, 2018). Brazilian universities incorporate LIBRAS into their teacher training courses, and public schools are committed to providing interpreter services and adapting their curricula. Although these policies form a robust legal framework, their application varies significantly between metropolitan and rural areas. Reagan (2019) notes that urban areas, particularly in the south and southeast parts of the country, have easier access to professional interpreters and LIBRAS-trained teachers. In poorer and remote areas, these facilities remain irregular or non-existent to this day, reflecting regional disparities within the same national context.

Despite this, the UAE has ratified the CRPD and demonstrated an official commitment to inclusive education through policies such as the “School for All” policy. However, the UAE does not have an official status for Arabic Sign Language (ArSL) as a language and lacks a national law to facilitate its incorporation into the education system. Official non-recognition leads to patchy and fragmented sign language service provision. The UAE has the majority of its deaf students scattered in special schools of education or integrated into regular classrooms without support. According to Dyliaeva et al. (2024), teachers are not provided with training in deaf education and have minimal awareness of the cultural-linguistic model of deafness. Rather than the cultural-linguistic model, a medical or rehabilitative model prevails where deafness is viewed as a disability to be addressed and not as a cultural identity to be fostered. According to De Meulder (2016), although the UAE has made attempts to address this issue, such as creating sign language dictionaries and training interpreters, these initiatives remain ad hoc and lack the necessary legal support and funding to enable the system to change.

From this, the deaf students face linguistic deprivation and educational failure as well as early leaving from school.

3.METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative comparative policy analysis to examine the interpretation and implementation of inclusive education policies for deaf students in various national contexts (Sherif, 2018). Three countries, including Canada, Brazil, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), are featured, each with a distinct policy context regarding the official status of national sign languages. The intention is to compare the effect of the presence versus the lack of official status of sign languages on the implementation of Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which aims for inclusive and equal education for every student with a disability, including deaf students (Cheong et al. 2023).

It is entirely reliant upon secondary sources of data. They are policy briefs, government reports, CRPD compliance reports, NGO reports and international agency reports, peer-reviewed journal articles, and academic books. A literature search was conducted using academic websites such as JSTOR, Scopus, Google Scholar, and ERIC to explore deaf education, inclusive policymaking, sign language legislation and enforcement, and human rights compliance activities (Ruggiano and Perry, 2019). The relevance of the source to the research question and its genuineness were considered in the selection.

To analyse data collected, the research employs content analysis as its primary research strategy. Content analysis is a popular qualitative approach used to find representative themes, trends, and meanings within text-based data (Sherif, 2018). It is used here to systematically look for overarching themes in inclusive education of deaf pupils across policy documents, academic studies, and implementation reports. Specific indicators to be tested were derived from the CRPD and included the legal recognition of sign language, the availability of interpreters, the incorporation of sign language into teacher training, curriculum accessibility, community engagement in

policy-making, and measurable education outcomes in terms of graduation and literacy rates (Heaton, 2008). Both manifest content (implied textual statements) and latent content (unexpressed assumptions and inferences underlying the text) were examined to facilitate a general comparison between the three case study countries.

The qualitative comparative approach has several strengths. It provides a rich, context-based look at the functioning of inclusive education policies in reality, specifically how they function in a specialist group such as deaf children. According to Johnston (2014), an appropriate approach to cross-national comparison when undertaking fieldwork is to base one's conclusions on a diverse range of authoritative sources. The study is grounded in universally agreed-upon norms on human rights, utilising the CRPD as a framework for analysis, which provides normative traction for comparisons and enables conclusions to be relevant to globalised policy discussions (Sherif, 2018),

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Comparing Sign Language Policy Levers

Policy recognition and legal acknowledgment of sign languages are determining factors in the educational experience and pathways of deaf students. Official recognition in Canada of American Sign Language (ASL) and Langue des Signes Québécoise (LSQ) through provincial legislation is one example of the rights-based model of deaf education (Fleming, 2019). Although there is no federal statute granting national status to these languages, provinces such as Ontario and British Columbia have included American Sign Language (ASL) and Langue des Signes Québécoise (LSQ) in their accessibility and education policies (De Meulder et al. 2019). Ontario's Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005) defines communication accommodations in public institutions, including schools. As a consequence, there has been growing use of interpreters at all educational levels, and bilingual-bicultural models of education, where written/spoken language as well as sign language are used, appear more prominently in some school boards.

Brazil also shows an evolving legal context for deaf education. Brazilian Sign Language (LIBRAS) was formally recognised by Federal Law No. 10,436 in 2002 and implemented by Federal Decree No. 5,626 in 2005 (Fleming, 2019). It requires the inclusion of LIBRAS in teacher education and the provision of interpreters in schools and universities. LIBRAS is not just a system of communication but is also an accepted form of teaching. In large urban centres, this has resulted in more structured deaf education programs and increased visibility of sign language in schools and the public sector (Toledo, 2018). Benefits are not evenly distributed. Rural and impoverished regions continue to lag in access to trained interpreters and qualified teachers, highlighting geographic disparities in policy implementation.

In comparison to its regional neighbours and the rest of the Arab countries, the UAE lacks an official legal status for Arabic Sign Language (ArSL). While the UAE has ratified the CRPD, the government has launched schemes, such as the “School for All” initiative, without enacting the integration of ArSL into the education system through legislation (Fleming, 2019). Education is encouraged to include deaf students on an overall level; however, deaf students are often left out due to a deficiency in deaf-focused policies. Interpreters are provided for a few government and private schools, but on an ad-hoc basis, and are still low in terms of standardisation. Deaf children remain in special schools or drop out of school prematurely due to the absence of linguistic accessibility and support. The predominant medical model in the UAE tends to view deafness as an impairment to be corrected, as opposed to a cultural orientation that emphasises accommodation through language (McKnight, 2021). The comparison demonstrates the extent to which the legal status or lack of sign language profoundly impacts the structure, its implementation, and outcome of inclusive education of deaf students. While Canada and Brazil have established relatively positive legislative frameworks, the UAE continues to be hampered by the lack of binding legal requirements in favour of the linguistic rights of deaf students.

4.2 Classroom Practices and Training of Teachers

Legislation alone is not enough to create inclusive education; its effectiveness depends on support at the classroom level through pedagogy and teacher training. In Canada, teacher training for deaf education is more comprehensive in provinces that have solidly established ASL or LSQ programs. University and college deaf education programs, particularly those affiliated with renowned institutions like the world-famous Gallaudet University, offer degrees in deaf education, equipping teachers with skills in sign language and knowledge of deaf culture. Calicchio (2019) notes that, despite these strengths, the underlying challenge remains a shortage of interpreters, particularly in rural and Francophone communities where resources for LSQ are scarce. This shortage is evident through inconsistency and quality of inclusive practice, sometimes resulting in reliance on underqualified support or mainstream teachers with minimal exposure to sign language.

Brazil mandates LIBRAS instruction to all pre-service teacher students as a national curriculum policy matter. Although the legislated requirement contributed to an enhanced awareness and attitude towards sign language in general, it cannot guarantee fluency or teaching proficiency. The majority of mainstream teachers, especially those teaching general education classes, indicate uncertainty or discomfort in teaching deaf students, even after completing basic LIBRAS instruction (McKnight, 2021). Furthermore, classroom communication invariably falls upon interpreters rather than teachers themselves, resulting in a gap between teaching material and student engagement. There is a growing demand in the Brazilian academy for integrating more bilingual education strategies and deaf-led training programs to enhance the existing situation.

The UAE example illustrates the consequences of failing to incorporate sign language into teacher education. There are no national requirements for mainstream teachers to receive training in the ArSL or to employ it in the classroom. Consequently, most inclusive classroom teachers are unable to meet the needs of the deaf students. When inclusion does occur, it is typically through individual schools making an

effort or the efforts of committed parents who seek help from outside sources (Al-Fityani and Padden, 2008). Without formal training programs or curriculum upgrades, classroom teaching is inaccessible to the deaf students and exclusion and disengagement prevail. While a few UAE universities now include optional sign language or inclusive education in their curricula, these initiatives are neither mandatory nor comprehensive.

4.3 Student Outcomes and Systemic Challenges

Legal inconsistencies and classroom implementation of sign language have a direct impact on student achievement outcomes. Deaf students within Canada have relatively more system support, especially in provinces where bilingual-bicultural programs have been implemented in schools. National statistics and UNESCO literature show Canadian deaf students are more likely to graduate from secondary school and pursue post-secondary studies than their deaf counterparts in non-sign-recognising countries (McKnight, 2021). Challenges remain, nonetheless. Indigenous and rural groups have few opportunities for access to good-quality deaf education services, and interpreter shortages continue to compromise education equity. In Brazil, the formal inclusion of LIBRAS in the national curriculum has had a positive impact on the literacy and overall academic achievement of deaf students, particularly in urban areas. Calicchio (2019), shows that students educated through the use of LIBRAS score better than students educated through the use of oralist methods exclusively in the acquisition of language as well as in standardised tests.

Inequalities in education remain glaring along socio-economic lines. Rural and poor areas face severe infrastructural and personnel shortages, which translate into uneven realisation of inclusive education policy. Stigma, as well as low aspirations of teachers or communities, remain key hindrances to the academic progress of deaf students (McKnight, 2021). The UAE provides the most troubling example. Without the national law recognising ArSL or mandating its usage in schools, deaf students often have no access to the curriculum in the language they know best. Attrition is a common experience for deaf

students, and those who remain in schools tend to underachieve daily compared to their hearing peers. Poorly prepared teachers, a lack of interpreter support availability, and the dominance of the medical model of disability are a few of the factors responsible for such negative outcomes (Singh, 2025). Psychosocial consequences of isolation, self-esteem deficits, and decreased social integration in the community are commonly reported in Emirati deaf teenagers. While pilot efforts and public campaigns have been encouraging, they have yet to translate into large-scale solutions.

5.DISCUSSION

The comparative analysis highlights the pivotal enabling role of official recognition of sign language as a central tool for implementing the CRPD's principles of inclusive education. Those countries, including Canada and Brazil, which have enacted laws to recognise their national sign languages, American Sign Language, Langue des Signes Québécoise, and Brazilian Sign Language, have more developed systems of support for deaf education in place. Such official recognition has the twin benefits of legitimising the cultural and linguistic identity of the deaf, as well as paving the way for the introduction of sign language into teacher training, curriculum development, and the provision of public services (McKnight, 2021). The result is enhanced educational outcomes for deaf students in those countries on average, as well as increased access to interpreters and higher levels of inclusion within the general population.

On the other hand, the UAE's lack of formal recognition of Arabic Sign Language (ArSL) is a significant barrier to meaningful educational inclusion for deaf pupils. Without a legislative imperative, ArSL is relegated to the periphery of school, and inclusive education policy tends to reinforce a general or medicalised understanding of disability. This serves to maintain a deficit model of deafness, one that excludes sign language as a remedial intervention and not a genuine and necessary language resource (Fleming, 2019). Systematic change is therefore precluded, and the educational attainment of deaf pupils in the UAE is lower than that of deaf pupils in areas with more robust policy agendas. Despite the presence of sign language recognition by itself, full CRPD compliance

and equal access to education cannot be guaranteed. Canada and Brazil, despite their positive legislation, both suffer from persistent implementation problems (Singh, 2025). Canada has nationwide deficits of highly skilled interpreters, and their availability is limited in rural and Indigenous environments, which hinders the extent and frequency of inclusive education. Brazil, despite its requirement to include LIBRAS training as part of the education of educators, still experiences regional implementation inconsistencies and shortages of bilingual teachers who are both LIBRAS-trained and proficient in the official language, which is Portuguese.

These limitations demonstrate that legislative structures must be complemented by significant investment in the training of teachers, interpreters, and accessible educational resources. Furthermore, the active inclusion of deaf-led organisations in shaping policies and the governance of education must be established to ensure that policies are not only inclusive in nature but also effective in implementation (Schuelka, 2010). The CRPD vision is beyond access to the physical space of the classroom; equal participation, linguistic justice, and cultural identification are called for. This can be achieved through a transition from symbolic identification to a change in structure, especially in cases like the UAE, where tokenistic approaches must be abandoned in favour of system-wide, rights-based inclusion grounded in linguistic justice.

6.CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the legal status of national sign languages is an essential first step toward inclusive education for deaf students, but it is insufficient in and of itself to ensure full compliance with the CRPD or improved learning outcomes. Rigorous implementation plans, including teacher training, access to interpreters, curricular adjustments, and system accountability, must accompany legal status (McKnight, 2021). The Canadian, Brazilian, and UAE case studies illustrate that the presence of inclusive education policy or CRPD ratification is not necessarily followed by deaf students' access to meaningful education opportunities but rather by the quality and substance of such policies specifically the

status of sign language as a language and cultural right that mediate their impact.

Canada and Brazil demonstrate how legalised sign languages, with infrastructure in place, enable deaf students to excel academically and socially. Both countries demonstrate a growing awareness that inclusive education should not be limited to the physical inclusion of students at the classroom level, but also needs to ensure access to language, identity, and full participation (Fleming, 2019). Both countries continue to grapple with issues such as training interpreters, rural equity, and policy implementation. The UAE, however, illustrates how the lack of official status for Arabic Sign Language still hinders system-wide inclusion and perpetuates the deficit model of deafness.

To solve these problems, several key recommendations emerge. Firstly, the UAE must legalise Arabic Sign Language and include it in teacher training programs and within the schools. Secondly, Canada and Brazil must invest additional public resources in the training of interpreters and the provision of inclusive education in disadvantaged regions. Thirdly, all countries must include deaf-led organisations in the planning and implementation of education policies to ensure cultural sensitivity and accountability (Calicchio, 2019). Lastly, international organisations such as the United Nations must collect and provide disaggregated data on deaf education to measure global progress and inform evidence-based policymaking.

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